

Tenenbaum Views Death of Polish Jews' Civilization

By ROBERT S. MARCUS, Director, Political Department, World Jewish Congress

"The Warsaw ghetto is no more," I wrote SS General Stroop in May, 1943. "The large-scale action was terminated on 16 May 1943 with the blowing up of the Warsaw synagogue at 2015 hours." I drove through the ghetto one day last summer and stood at the imposing monument built in memory of the ghetto fighters. For blocks around there was nothing but heaps of rubble where the Germans had demolished every house. And as I stood on one of the heaps of shattered rock, under which lie the crushed bones of the ghetto dwellers, I could not help but feel that the world had already forgotten them; that the significance of their struggle, their agony and their dying had already been dimmed — if, in fact, it had ever been adequately understood. I say this because although 550,000 Jews died in the ghetto of Warsaw, the democracies of the world have done almost nothing to destroy the Fascist germ which carried the pestilence of death.

The tragedy of Polish Jewry's destruction at the hands of the Nazis and their accessories to murder is vividly described in a scholarly, yet readable book, "In Search of a Lost People — The Old and the New Poland," by Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum (Beechurst Press, New York, 1948, 312 pp.).

Dr. Tenenbaum is among the few remaining Jewish leaders who constitute a link between the past and the present centres of Jewish life. A member of the executive of the World Jewish Congress and president of the World Federation of Polish Jews, he has made, during the past thirty years, many signal contributions to the Jewish cause in Europe and in the United States. I know of no one who did more to create and implement the philosophy of the anti-Nazis boycott.

Never Forgotten
Tenenbaum came to the Paris Peace Conference immediately after having participated in the leadership and defense of his fellow Jews in his home town of Lwow, capital of Galicia, during a pogrom which marked the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the struggle for power between the Poles and Ukrainians in that territory. Although he left shortly afterwards for the United States, it is obvious that he has never forgotten the 45,000 Jews made destitute by the pogrom which his eyes had witnessed. This bitter experience has enabled him to become one of the most impressive chroniclers of Jewish suffering.

Shortly after the end of hostilities — in the spring of 1946 — and at a time when such an understanding was still dangerous, he revisited Poland, graveyard of European Jewry, to learn at first hand of the fate of its Jewish community, to see what remained of this former bulwark of creative Jewish existence.

Without losing sight of the historical aspects of Jewish life in Poland, Dr. Tenenbaum interprets in admirable fashion, the deep loyalty of the Polish Jew to his country in spite of centuries of almost unintermitted persecution and humiliation, which is traced for the reader from the very beginning of the Jewish community to the mass murder of surviving Jews in the liberated Poland of 1946. An expert on the domestic and foreign policies of the independent state which came into being at the Paris Peace Conference, he analyzes in great detail the motivations for the anti-Jewish practices of nearly every Polish

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Catholic Influence
Tenenbaum is aware of the tremendous influence which the Catholic church until quite recently wielded over the Polish masses, pointing out that after the partition of Poland in the 18th Century "the Polish people under the foreign yoke with alien rulers and creeds... saw in the Catholic church a visible symbol of unity." As everywhere else in Eastern and Central Europe, the lower clergy joined the ranks of the most extreme and chauvinistic nationalists. Whereas the higher landed dignitaries of other countries more or less retained an officially correct attitude towards anti-Jewish activities, in Poland these activities were traditionally encouraged at even the highest level of the Catholic hierarchy. This

attitude was brazenly displayed by the late Primate of Poland, Cardinal Hlond, with whom Tenenbaum had a remarkable audience on June 3, 1946, on the eve of the pogrom wave of that summer. His experience with Cardinal Hlond induced Tenenbaum to approach the Holy See directly on behalf of the surviving Polish Jews. However, all that followed was a terse acknowledgment of receipt of his message by the Apostolic Delegate in Washington.

The author is high in his praise of the present government's efforts to rehabilitate the surviving remnants of Polish Jewry. I had an opportunity of confirming his views on my recent visit to that country.

"Returning Home"
The book concludes with an illuminating and touching chapter titled, "Death of a Civilization," which deals with the cultural

achievements of Polish Jewry through the centuries. In spite of the vigorous and intelligent efforts of the survivors to adapt themselves to the new situation, it is Tenenbaum's contention that this Jewish civilization has been completely destroyed. His thesis is contained in the following lines: "A great creative centre of Jewish learning, poetry, fiction, art and material welfare has been lost to humanity. Yet the chain of existence of the Jewish people has not been broken completely. A new sun is rising. Jewish youth from Poland, former partisans, concentration camp victims and ghetto fighters who have survived the Nazi slaughter are now fighting in and for Israel. The historic cycle has been completed. The great creative centre in Poland with its thousand years of history has been destroyed

by Hitler. The Eternal People, zealous, are returning Home — the broken, shattered, decimated, yet People of Israel to the Land of alive with hope and imbued with Israel." —The New Palestine.

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