

A Ladies' Choir

A FURTHER attempt to abolish the mixed choir at the Yeoville Synagogue was frustrated at the annual meeting of the United Hebrew Congregation on Sunday last. The final decision has been left to the management committee of the synagogue itself.

I feel it would be a pity to dispose of this choir. The blending of male and female voices in the chanting of synagogue melodies is pleasant to congregants and visitors alike. This particular mixed choir has become an institution on the Rand. It was originally formed in the old President Street Synagogue, even before the time when Dr. Hertz became the rabbi of the congregation.

The choir continued until the amalgamation of the two congregations. When the Yeoville Synagogue was opened, the idea of a mixed choir was again welcomed and it has continued since that period. The blending of the girls', men's, and boys' voices has enhanced the services at the Yeoville Synagogue considerably. It would be a pity to disband such an institution at a period when every effort is being made to brighten synagogue services and attract more worshippers.

Marionettes

SOME years ago during a visit to Europe I spent a few days in Warsaw. I attended a function of a famous "Literarische Club" there, and was greatly entertained by the performances of Yiddish-speaking marionettes. These dolls were dressed to represent well-known leaders of Polish Jewry, and their movements convulsed the audience with merriment. It was a vivid and delightful entertainment.

I was sorry to hear, therefore, that Josef Kotler, one of the founders of the marionette movement—a painter and marionette maker and producer—was killed recently in a motor car accident in America.

His stage dolls were remarkable pieces of artistic work. I remember that his miniature "make-up" of Sholom Ash, the famous Jewish novelist and dramatist, whom I had met a few days previously, was a lifelike representation.

Marionette making is an art that is new in Jewish life. I had hoped that Kotler would one day have come to South Africa with his portmanteau of marionettes of Jewish world leaders. The unique entertainment would have pleased everyone.

Kotler was born in 1896 in Volhynia. He was at first a sign painter and later attended an art school. His first short story appeared in 1922 in a Yiddish magazine conducted by Abraham Reisen. He followed this up with a large number of poems, short stories and particularly children's verses and children's tales. He was one of the founders of the first marionette theatre, which aroused great interest in artistic circles.

Palestinian-Born

AN interesting gathering took place in mail week at Nathania, in Palestine. It was a conference of B'nai Benjamin, the organisation of sons of the old Palestine colonists. These consist of Jewish farmers

Current Communal Comments

By

"Hamabit"

born in Palestine, and sons of the earliest pioneers of the first colonisation period. I notice that Oved Ben Avi—one of the sons of the late Eleazer Ben Yehuda, the great lexicographer—opened the conference.

The founder of the B'nai Benjamin was Captain Alex Aaronson, D.S.O. He often complained that the newer efforts in Palestine tended to overshadow "the work of generations of sons who consecrated their Jewish claim on Palestine with their sweat and tears and blood." It was these pioneers who resurrected Palestine long before the Zionist Basle programme was enunciated. It was this type of pioneer which helped the British troops to liberate Palestine and who looked upon the Balfour Declaration as the reward to them for services rendered.

It will be recollected that the sister of Captain Aaronson was Sarah Aaronson. She has been called the Joan of Arc of Palestine and was the head of the Jewish Intelligence Service during the war. She killed herself when she was captured in 1917 by the Turks. She did this rather than give information of military importance. When dying, she used the same phrase on her lips which was afterwards used by Trumpeldor: "It is good to die for one's country."

Swaying

WHILST participating in synagogue service the other day, I noticed that a number of the elderly worshippers were swaying their bodies whilst in prayer. I wondered lazily at the time how it was that this habit came about. Later the thought intrigued me, and I made some research and discovered that many reasons are given for the swaying of worshippers in synagogues.

It appears that in the olden days books were scarce and expensive, and not everyone could afford the luxury of owning even a prayer book. While in synagogue most Jews were therefore not provided with individual prayer books. Under such circumstances many Jews indulged in the unconscious practice of craning their necks to look into the same book. It is to this practice that the habit of some Jews to sway their bodies in prayer has been assigned, not without a measure of plausibility.

Judah Ha-Levi in his "Kitab al-Cuzari," endeavours to explain the custom and to indicate the reason for its origin.

The question is asked of the rabbi as to why Jews move to and fro when reading the Bible.

To this the rabbi explains that as many persons read at the same time, it was possible that ten or more read from one volume. This is the reason why "our books are so large." Each of them was obliged to

bend down in his turn in order to read a passage, and to turn back again. "This resulted in a continual bending and sitting up, the book lying on the ground. This was one reason. Then it became a habit through constant seeing, observing and imitating, which is in man's nature. Other people read each out of his own book, either bringing it near to his eyes, or, if he pleases, bending down to it without inconveniencing his neighbour. There is, therefore, no necessity of bending and sitting up."

A Private Secretary

LAYING down the burden of the Premiership will undoubtedly mean the beginning of comparative political exile for Mr. Ramsay Macdonald. It is of interest to learn that his faithful secretary, Miss Rosenberg, is going into exile with him. This lady has held this important post continuously for the past fourteen years. She was with Mr. Macdonald at the Foreign Office during the Labour Government's first term of office in 1924 and has since been with him at 10 Downing Street.

At the age of seventeen, Miss Rosenberg was somewhat of an important journalist in Fleet Street. Parliamentary work, however, fascinated her and she joined the staff of the Labour Party. It will be recollected that it was a Labour Government that saw the appointment for the first time of a woman Cabinet Minister. It was a period when recognition came to brilliant women in the political world and Miss Rosenberg's appointment as private secretary to Mr. Macdonald was a gesture of confidence by a great man in the ability of a capable woman worker.

The Test

MRS. GELDENSTEIN was worried because her husband always refused to talk over his business troubles with her. She felt that she was the kind of wife who ought to participate in the interests of her husband and was hurt because he would not let her. She sought advice on the matter from a friend.

"How," she asked, "can I get my husband to discuss his business affairs with me?"

"Ask him," the friend replied promptly, "to buy you a new motor car."

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