

Serious and Otherwise

* by ben dor *

Nostradamus

THAT famous sixteenth century soothsayer Nostradamus is, I note, again being quoted for some of the extraordinary happenings of our own times. A New York bookseller and crystal-gazer, Mr. Henry C. Roberts, has just claimed, following his interpretation of Nostradamus' work, that New York will be wiped out by an atomic bomb in 1999, and it will not be dropped by a foreign enemy, but will explode in a last-ditch fight between capital and labour. He also says that he—with the aid of Nostradamus—accurately predicted D-day in Europe.

I gather that many knowledgeable folk maintain that Nostradamus—his real name was Michel de Nostre Dame—was of Jewish origin, though this is as yet not definitely confirmed. One eighteenth century writer, Joseph Haitze, in his "la vie de Michael Nostradame," declares that the astrologer's grandfather, Abraham Solomon, of Saint Maximin, a personal physician to Rene of Anjou (1409-80), was baptised in 1469 and took the name Pierre de Notre Dame. The name of Nostradamus' father, Jaume de Nostre Dame, is to be found in a list of New Christians upon whom a special tax was imposed by Louis XII in 1512. A sixteenth century copy of this list is now in the possession of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

Incidentally, Nostradamus himself claimed descent from the tribe of Issachar, basing his contention on I Chronicles, 12:32, namely, that "the children of Issachar were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."

Nostradamus, who died at Salon-de-Creux, France, in 1566 at the age of 63, started life as a very successful physician, and particularly distinguished himself in combating the plague in various cities. But when he failed to save his own wife and children from the dread disease he solaced himself by studying astrology. He achieved fame as a soothsayer by predicting the accidental death of Henry II in 1559.

Between 1550 and 1566 he published astrological weather almanacs. It is interesting to observe that the almanac for 1562 was translated from Latin into Hebrew by Moses Botarel Ben Leon in the sixteenth century, while another was printed some centuries ago at Constantinople under the title of "En Mishpat."

His most famous work, however, is the "Centuries," rhymed prophecies for 400 years after 1555. Written in a crabbed, cryptic French, and full of vague allusions, these "prophecies" have interested people for centuries, especially since the outbreak of World War II.

The S.A. Public Library, Cape Town, by the way, owns one of the earliest editions of the "Centuries."

Byrnes's Aid

NOTICE that among those who played a significant role at the recent Conference of Foreign Ministers of "The Big Three" at Moscow is a brilliant American Jew, of whom, I am certain, more will be heard of in the future. He is Mr. Benjamin Cohen, Counsellor for the State Department, who is accompanying Mr. Byrnes, the United States Secretary of State.

Born in September, 1894, in Muncie, Indiana, he is the son of an ore dealer who had fled from Poland in 1868 and settled down in the Mid West. His youth was uneventful, and he is said to have been more keen on the writings of Descartes and Spencer than on marbles.

He had a brilliant scholastic career, and after graduating at the University of Chicago, where one Professor called him "the most brilliant student I ever taught," he studied at the Harvard Law School, where he came under the influence of Professor (now Judge) Felix Frankfurter. After acting as secretary to Judge Julian Mack, he was for two years, 1919 to 1921, counsel for the American Zionists negotiating the terms of the Palestine Mandate at the Peace Conference.

It was during the early 'twenties that he met in France John M. Keynes, the famous economist, who interested him in the theory that a national depression could be overcome by priming private industry through a public works programme.

Since 1933, when he was made general counsel to the Public Works Administration in charge of railroad loans, he has become more and more of a public figure. It is known by

many that he was in the very inner circle of the circle around Roosevelt, providing the President with the ideas, facts and figures for much of the latter's activities.

According to one distinguished American columnist, "whatever he does, Mr. Cohen's influence is certain to be great." In all likelihood, his slouching figure, his drawl, his habits of dressing like a tramp, gobbling food absentmindedly and sleeping in the office when work presses, will become as well known abroad as they have been for the eight years he spent as an official of the Roosevelt Administration in Washington.

Health Can be Told From the Tongue

A profound epigram was coined by the Hebrew poet, David Shimonowitz, in the course of an address to the trustees of the Hebrew Language Board of Eretz Israel. "A doctor can always tell the health of a patient by first looking at his tongue," Shimonowitz remarked. "Thus, the health of a nation can always be ascertained by first examining its tongue."

The revival of Hebrew as a modern language, the remarkable efflorescence of Hebrew letters, the development of a virile and widely-spoken tongue in only a full generation—all these testify to the profound wisdom of David Shimonowitz's remark.

"THE BARTERED BRIDE"

SCENES FROM THE OPERA

Top: Kacel argues with Janek
Bottom: Janek signs the "sales contract" in the presence of the villagers



The Palestine Folk Opera, now in its fifth year of existence, recently presented "The Bartered Bride." It was an outstanding production, the staging of which hardly fell short of European operatic performances.

"The Bartered Bride," by Smetana, is a "folk opera" in the best sense of the word. Grown out of the soil of Czech rural life and permeated with the hearty spirit of its people, the opera transcends the boundaries of the purely national.

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