

Sacred Compositions.

INTERESTING WORK BY REV. S. STEINBERG.

The sing-song-like rhythm of the cantillation which to Western ears sometimes sounds strange, is still to-day adopted for the recitation of sacred scripts in public. Among Jews the desire to read scriptures in this manner has from time immemorial resulted in the use of some kind of musical declamation, but for centuries no attempt was made, apart from small indications on the texts themselves, to record in any way traditional renderings, and until the seventeenth century they were preserved by word or mouth.

After the seventeenth century, various efforts were made to record these musical declamations, but it was not until the nineteenth century, when the Jewish renaissance occurred, that they were placed on anything like a proper basis. For the most part, these melodies and declamations have adhered more or less to the strictly traditional renderings. But, like most other arts of the Jews, have been influenced by varying tonal surroundings of many lands, and have in process of time gradually assumed the vocal, melodic and harmonic structure in which the whole of the traditional services are nowadays presented.

The many attempts that have been made to harmonise these ancient chants and cantillations have resulted in rather crude efforts, amateurish, to say the least, and were due primarily to the lack of musical training displayed by most of the would-be compilers.

It is, therefore, gratifying to find, in the volume of "Zimrath Kodesh" under review, that Rev. Steinberg, the well-known South African cantor, has proved himself to be a fine all-round musician, and has harmonised his parts in what might be termed a modern manner. What is still more gratifying is that, although Rev. Steinberg has adhered to traditional standards in form and substance, his compositions are nevertheless original and are certainly a decided improvement on most of the ancient works.

He has a fine melodic sense, and both his solo and ensemble compositions are particularly pleasing, even to that type of Western mind that finds these chromatic vocalisations difficult to follow. The love of chromatic intervals is a survival of the Jew's contact with the Oriental, and even among Western cantors, trained amid music as we know it and having a strong contrapuntal basis, there still exists a simple propensity for introducing the interval of the augmented second. In his works Rev. Steinberg has not escaped the general tendency, but has considerably enhanced it by his intelligent treatment.

The writer has had the pleasure of hearing many of these sung, both solo and chorus, and can vouch for their tunefulness, their rhythmic balance, and the able manner in which they have been treated. One number in particular, "Mogen Ovov," has more than the germ of beauty about it, and stands well in the running of becoming a folk song of no mean order.

The various cantillations have been placed on a more or less definite metrical basis, and the collaratura recitatives



Cantor Steinberg.

instead of being the usual haphazard vocal contortions, now confined to artistic limits, and are certainly far more interesting and much more agreeable to listen to. There is a strong suggestion of the operatic in many of the solos, and one cannot help but wonder how Rev. Steinberg would have shaped as an operatic musician.

Apart from all this, there is yet another pleasing aspect about this work and that is, it is, I understand, the first time such a publication has been attempted and issued in South Africa. Although Rev. Steinberg, according to a short biographical note in the volume, received his training in Europe, he has spent many years in this country and considers himself a South African by adoption. We must, therefore, look upon this work as a South African publication, more so in view of the fact that it is so excellently printed by the Cape Times.

It is issued at a most opportune moment and just when cantors throughout the country are beginning to look ahead to the preparations for the New Year and other festivals, and I should imagine that they are going to find the volume extremely useful and most helpful.

There are several testimonials from various well-wishers, including an inspiring letter from Professor Dr. J. L. Landau, and a helpful note from Professor R. Kirby. I have no hesitation in recommending this volume to all who are directly interested in synagogue music and to the student of "comparative music."

J. G. K.

"Zimrath Kodesh." By Chief Cantor S. Steinberg. Sole agent, L. Rubin, 37, Simmonds Street, Johannesburg.

A MENCKEN WORK.

"Treatise on the Gods," by H. L. Mencken (Knopf, New York.)

This volume is a discussion and evaluation of all the better-known religions. Beginning with prehistoric man, Mencken traces the growth of religion and points out as he goes on that the common denominator of all religion is fear coupled with the desire for power by the priests. He spares neither Jew, nor Gentile in his slashing attack on the irrationalism of religious beliefs. Admitting that man's curiosity about his beginning is unanswerable, he refuses to accept the explanations given to mankind by the great religious teachers. The book is exceedingly well documented and is ingenious to say the least.

Mencken deals a rather back-handed compliment to the Jews when he calls them a most unpleasant race and marvels at their ability to produce the beautiful poetry that is contained in the Old Testament. His remarks at this point are rather pointless because they have no real relation to the rest of the book.

It is rather unfortunate that such an entertaining book should have been marred by a few silly passages. For if the Jews are really as unappreciative of poetry as he says they are, how on earth could they have had the judgment to evolve such a work of high poetical standard as the Old Testament? F.B.

ANOTHER ARAB DELEGATION.

For Dutch Indies.

Jerusalem, April 26th.

Another Arab delegation is proceeding to Java and the Dutch Indies, where there is a big Moslem population. This brings up to four the number of Palestine Arab delegations which have gone abroad to conduct propaganda for the Palestine Arab claims—the delegation in London, another in America and the third in the Hedjaz.

The Zionists gain considerably as a result of their various delegations sent to the Jewries all over the world, *El Jamea el Arabia*, the organ of the Moslem Supreme Council writes. The Arab delegations will take a leaf out of the book of the Jews, it says, and will call upon the Islamic world as a whole to rally in support of the case which the Arab delegation in London is putting to the British Government.

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