

A Melody.

The atmosphere of the Day of Atonement vibrates with a melody. On the eve of that solemn day we hear in the synagogue a plaintive Oriental song, and under the spell of that pervasive Eastern melody we remain throughout the day. So important is this melody that it has given its name to the entire service of the eve of *Yom Kippur*. Yet *Kol Nidre* has really no important meaning itself; it is just a remembrance of rashly-made vows, but its melody touches the Jewish heart, and its association is precious.

The beauty of *Kol Nidre* is acknowledged not only by Jews, but by music-lovers of all creeds and races. The saintly Russian novelist and mystic—Leo Tolstoi—once said, "The *Kol Nidre* is of all melodies the saddest and yet the most uplifting." The tune is one of those rare creations of the human spirit which has caught something of eternity and infinity. It cannot be traced to any one composer at any one time at any one place, and appears to be the spontaneous utterance of the Jewish soul.

Yet, what can it signify—this prayer that all vows or promises which we have made during the year shall be void and of no effect? The mystery of *Kol Nidre* can only be solved by a true study of history. It can be solved by the story of the persecution of our ancestors: of the secret worshipping of a forbidden faith, when our people prayed to the God of light in places of darkness and secrecy. It was probably due to their desire to avail themselves of some legal remedy for their pathetic situation in the law of the Bible that they wrote down and recited this verbally exact and legally accurate formula, which we now know as the *Kol Nidre*. To us it may seem a translation of a document; to them the dead words meant life and hope, and when they recited the prayer they accompanied the words with many a sob and a sigh. It was gradually throughout the centuries that the tears and tremblings and the exultations fashioned themselves into a great and beautiful melody.

Fire.

A solitary Yiddish book had graced the shelves of the library of the University of Riga. To-day it is nothing but a small heap of ashes, as the result of the anti-Yiddish bias of the university's student council. At a meeting of the council it was decided that the offending volume should be burned, but instead of doing the burning themselves, the students turned the book over to the University porter and told him to use it instead of firewood.

Current Communal Comments

By
'Hamabit'

The Yiddish book that aroused the students' ire was a publication of the Latvian Press Office for propaganda among the Jews. It had been sent by the press office to the University of Riga so that it might be circulated among the Jewish students.

The practice of burning Jewish books, the Talmud, the Hebrew Bible and other sacred Jewish works, has been a sport of anti-Semites for many centuries. When, in 1244, twenty-four wagon-loads of Hebrew books were fed to fires in a public burning of sacred tomes in Paris, a French rabbi wrote to Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg: "I have no book for study. The persecutor has taken from us our treasures." Rabbi Meir, who was called "Light of the Exile," was also a poet. One of his best known poems is the dirge on the burning of the books in Paris. In this poem he lamented:

Ask, is it well, O thou consumed of fire,
With those that mourn for thee,
That yearn to tread thy court, that sore desire
Thy sanctuary,

That, panting for thy land's sweet dust, sore
grieved,
And sorrow in their souls,
And by the flames of wasting life bereaved,
Mourn for thy scrolls,

That grope in shadow of unbroken night,
Waiting the day to see
Which o'er them yet shall cast a radiance
bright,
And over thee?

The above was written in the middle of the thirteenth century. I am rather afraid that it is equally applicable to-day when supposedly enlightened university students are scared of a Yiddish book and use it for fuel.

Cardozo.

At a time when the judicial system in America is under fire and the undercurrent of corruption in that country appears to have aroused, at last, the indignation of right-minded citizens, it is pleasant to learn that the Chief Judge, Benjamin Cardozo, of the Court of Appeals of the State of New York, has been chosen to receive the Roosevelt Medal for distinguished services during 1931.

Cardozo is recognised as one of the world's keenest and ablest jurists. It is known that he would to-day be on the United States Supreme Court bench were not another Jew, Justice Louis

Brandeis, a member thereof. When in 1927 President Coolidge invited Cardozo to succeed Oscar Straus on the Hague Tribunal, he declined because he believed that no judge should hold any other office. Since his elevation to the highest judicial post in the State of New York, his judicial opinions have been a model and inspiration as cited authorities throughout the country. He possesses every qualification consonant with the highest judicial

ideals, the very embodiment of impartiality, fairness and justice. He has shown that human sympathy is not incompatible with judicial integrity, and has revealed an amazing ability to adjust legally judicial conceptions with progressive social conditions.

Cortez.

The arrival of the "talkies" has meant silence for hundreds of old-time film stars. On the other hand, for a few others it has meant resurrection. The most notable comeback of the last few years has been that of Ricardo Cortez—the suave, slick-haired villain of the screen. He it was who gained fame in the silent film "Sorrows of Satan," produced by D. W. Griffith.

When the "talkies" began to dominate the film world, Cortez' light seemed to be eliminated until he was tried for the film part and immediately rose to the heights of success. I make mention of this because the film fans amongst my readers may not be aware of the fact that the original name of this great "talkie" artist is none other than Jacob Krantz, and that ten years ago he was still working in his father's Kosher butcher shop in the East Side of New York.

A Mistake.

A Jewish youth in a South African town became incensed at being continually called an *Am-Haaretz*. He, therefore, decided to rectify his ignorance. As a first step he began to take lessons in the Hebrew language, of which he proudly declared, after some time, he had quite a good knowledge.

A cablegram reached the youth's household from Lithuania, giving the information that an uncle had passed away. The young man immediately wanted to say the right thing in Hebrew, and cried out:

"*Sof Ganoff Litliyah.*"

The cry of his old father and mother was not only one of anguish at the receipt of the bad news, but was also tinged with anger.

It was only some days later that the South African-born youth realised that what he had meant to say was:

"*Baruch Dayan Emes.*"