

Boys or Girls?

JEWISH residents in the district of Yeoville in Johannesburg—at least those of the synagogue-going variety—are much perturbed as to whether the introduction of ladies into the Yeoville choir during the recent *Yom Tovim* is to become a permanent feature of local synagogue life. It is admitted that ladies' voices are a considerable improvement over those of boys'. As a result the choir of the Yeoville Synagogue is undoubtedly the finest in Johannesburg at the present moment. The blending of male and female voices must have an effect of sweet harmony which cannot be secured entirely by a choir of mere males.

There appears, however, to be a number of old die-hards in the congregation, who refuse to be comforted by the perfection of the choir. The old idea that female voices in a synagogue detract from the spiritual atmosphere is dominant in their minds. There is, therefore, a conflict between those who desire to modernise the services in the orthodox synagogue and those who are afraid that the slightest change may lead to the possible entry of reform.

It is strange that the addition of a few female voices in a choir should be fraught with so much controversy. A final decision as to "boys or girls in the choir" is to be taken at the next meeting of the Council of the United Hebrew Congregation. I wonder if the die-hards will have sufficient discipline to abide by any decision made against them, but in the genuine interest of the congregation?

"Agunoths."

It was well that Advocate Bertha Solomon lectured recently on Jewish Divorce Laws to an audience of Jewish ladies in Johannesburg. The constantly expanding scope of women's activity is having its effect upon the status of Jewish women also. It is desirable to call attention to the fact that Jewish women enjoy, or suffer, a most peculiar condition. According to the strict letter of the Law, the rights and privileges are so few that it may be considered truly Oriental in their complete subjugation. According to actual practice and life, they have more privileges than their husbands. A case in point can readily be discerned: The average woman has far more legal rights, yet she knows next to nothing of her husband's business; the Jewish woman may have few legal rights, yet in many, if not most, instances, she is the dominating influence in every phase of her husband's and her family's life.

Despite this being true, as a whole, the present Jewish divorce laws can stand a ready revision with profit to all concerned. As the World Organisation of Jewish Women recently pointed out, the plight of the thousands of Jewish

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By
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women whose husbands disappeared during the world war, and who are to-day "Agunoths," should be rectified.

There is a strong movement on foot that women should be placed on a footing of perfect equality with men as regards marriage and divorce. It is also desired that the thousands of Jewish women, who through the loss of their husbands in the late world war, from whom they have not heard and who presumably are dead, should be considered as released from their technical condition of "Agunoths" and should be considered as free, and legally entitled to re-marry.

Enlightened Jewish women are also demanding that the non-performance of *Chalitzah* (which a childless widow must, according to orthodox law, receive from her late husband's brother she is allowed to re-marry), because of the abuses which have grown up in connection with this ceremony and which have cruelly impaired the rights of women and have imposed unfair hardship upon them, should no longer be an impediment to her re-marriage.

Aliens.

The closing of the doors of all countries to immigrants indicates the prejudice existing against aliens. It has always been a cry that "our aliens are responsible for our crime," and that was the attitude in America which resulted in the election of quota walls against arrivals from all countries. This attitude always bolstered up the native American's self-esteem and threw the burden on an individual, who had the most difficulty in defending himself.

It is, therefore, of interest to learn that in the Wickersham report on crime, just issued in the United States, it has been shown definitely that the foreign-born was not the predominant element in the crime situation. The report indicates that the prevalence of crime amongst foreign-born was found to be hardly half as great as amongst the native population, the exception being crimes of personal violence, in which the alien almost equals the natives. The latter is also declared to be more adept in the crimes of thieving and swindling. A further aspect of interest, bearing on a topic frequently discussed amongst

Jews is whether the second generation—the native-born of foreign parentage—is the heart of the crime problem. Here again the report shatters a well-established myth, for the facts reveal that there is no basis for believing that the second generation is abnormal in its crime record as compared with its more completely native population.

The significance of the findings in favour of the foreign-born in the United States must be further appraised in the light of fact that they represent a study of actual convictions and incarcerations. It is notorious that the foreigners are so much more likely to be railroaded through a conviction, than the native offender, who knows the legal ropes.

In London it was proved some years ago that certain definitely criminal neighbourhoods were entirely cleansed of all crime by the inrush of alien immigration. The Wickersham report in the United States should once and for all, explode the idea that the alien, as such, is a danger to the country to which he emigrates.

"Parity."

The statement reported to have been made by Dr. Chaim Arlosoroff, a member of the newly-elected World Zionist Executive, has aroused considerable controversy amongst Zionists. This gentleman is reported to have said that he would strive to bring about an Arab-Jewish understanding on the basis of parity, as laid down in the Coalition programme of the Executive elected at the last Congress. The whole point, of course, is what is really meant by parity and in discussing the matter with a number of people, I find that no two opinions quite agree.

A rather clever quip was recently uttered at a meeting of Zionist Revisionists in Johannesburg, when a speaker described Dr. Arlosoroff's policy as "faith, hope and parity."

The intensive discussion proceeding at present on the Gold Standard was injected into a Jewish meeting recently, when the serious position of Zionist finances was being discussed. Doubt was being expressed as to whether the budget of the Jewish Agency would ever be met, and one speaker said: "The time has arrived when we shall have to get off the Shekel standard."

"Bovril."

A recently arrived immigrant in England was asked by his relations what he thought of the country.

"It is a very fine land," he said. "But it is rather strange; every station is called *Bovril*."