

Bas Mitzvah

WHILST in this country the *Bas Mitzvah* ceremony is faithfully carried out in connection with the thirteenth birthday of every Jewish boy, there is still a strange neglect of the Jewish girl. In other countries the confirmation of Jewish girls during their thirteenth year is regularly carried out and is found to be of great benefit. Just as we bring home to the Jewish boy that his *Bas Mitzvah* ceremony is a realisation that he has become an active member of an ancient people, so the ceremony of confirmation of a Jewish maiden impresses upon her the duties confronting her as a Jewish girl and as a prospective Jewish wife and mother. Such ceremonies should be the official means whereby the girl becomes a member of her people, ready to assume the responsibilities of a Jewish woman. A ceremony of this nature might be known as a *Bas Mitzvah*, corresponding to the *Bas Mitzvah* for boys.

Is it really entirely against the tenets of orthodox Judaism to introduce the idea of a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration in our synagogues?

A Chaplain

I WAS pleased to note that Rabbi D. I. Freedman, Minister of the Perth Hebrew Congregation in Western Australia, has been appointed by the Australian Government as its Delegate to the League of Nations Assembly, which is to be in session in September. At a time when the question of Germany is bound to arise, great importance must be attached to the appointment of a Jew as Delegate to the League from an influential Commonwealth.

Rabbi Freedman was chaplain to the Imperial Forces of Australia during the War, and is a member of the Senate of the University of Western Australia. He has also been President of the Returned Soldiers' League of Western Australia. It will be remembered that a few years ago a Jew was appointed Governor-General of Australia. It is evident from such appointments that there is a spirit of enlightenment pervading Australia — a spirit which might well be emulated in other countries within the British Empire.

Toscanini

THE refusal of the greatest of musical conductors to go to Bayreuth for the Wagner festival is a fine act. There is no musical event that quite compares to the Bayreuth festival and there is no conductor like Toscanini. The fact that he, though not a Jew, turned down this invitation as a protest against Hitlerism, is a gesture as beautiful in a way as his conducting is in another.

Toscanini sent his letter of declination to the daughter-in-law of Wagner, the musical genius who found no better use for some of his time than to sit down and write a book—*Des Judenthum in Musik*, attempting to prove that Jews had no musical ability. It is difficult to find a family that has done so much for what I might call cultural Jew-baiting as that of Wagner. It will be recalled

Current Communal Comments

By
'Hamabit'

that Wagner's son-in-law was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the man who wrote an exhaustive work, done in the highly documented, pseudo-scientific style of the Germans, damning the Jews from every angle, and giving it all the veneer of the purest science.

Wagner

Wagner's case is most peculiar because his step-father was said to have been Jewish, and Ernest Newman, Wagner's principal biographer, even speculates as to whether his father wasn't a Jew. The principal reason that is generally given for Wagner's venom against Jews is that as a young man—long before fame had come to him—a Jewish girl with whom he was in love, jilted him.

The very fact that a man of his type should have taken time to write an anti-Semitic book indicates the probability that there was something of a sharp, consuming prejudice of a personal nature at the bottom of it.

I might for instance consider that Czecho-Slovaks have no gift for music, but would I sit down to write a book to prove that they have not? Even if the Wagner charges were true, there was no sense of justification for the book. But Wagner had been offended by some Jew or Jewess, and that was his way of retaliation.

Friends

THE impressive meeting of protest against the treatment of Jews in Germany held in London recently by non-Jews, and the proclamation issued by one thousand Christian Churchmen in America—call attention to the fact that Jews are not entirely without friends.

Jewish history records in golden letters various kindnesses evinced towards our people by non-Jews during periods of crisis. The Talmud speaks of the "pious amongst the Gentiles." Since we were unable to repay them for their goodness in this world, a promise was held out to them of a share in the world to come. During the frenzy of the Crusades when practically the whole of Christendom was swept away by religious fanaticism, there are records of bishops and of princes, who at the risk of their lives, protected Jews from the fury of the mob. There were also several Popes who went out of their way to champion Jews, especially in connection with blood-libel charges.

It was the breaking down of the Ghetto walls, making contact between Jew and Gentile easier, which produced the monster of anti-Semitism. It also

produced, however, a number of friends and admirers who protested against the shameful treatment accorded to Jews by Christians of previous ages. A man whose outraged conscience compelled him to champion the case of the Jews was, in modern times, Emile Zola, and Anatole Leroy Beaulieu was moved to embrace the Jewish cause because of a high appreciation of the Jewish character and of Jewish culture.

Our Alphabet

I WAS interested to observe that the National Council of Jewish Education in America is in favour of Hebrew being written in English characters. The Latinisation of the Hebrew alphabet was a brain-wave on the part of Mr. Ittamar Ben Avi, who went to the extent of publishing a text book on the subject. In favour of this project are those who point to the gradual elimination of the Gothic characters from the German alphabet and the introduction of Latin characters in the Turkish alphabet.

I cannot quite understand the necessity for this revolutionary change. After all, the easiest thing about acquiring Hebrew is the alphabet. Modern teaching methods have made it possible to read Hebrew in a few lessons. Why, therefore, is there such a crying need to change an age-long system for something that has no place in the Hebrew cultural horizon?

An ironic side-light on the question is the fact that in Poland, where the *Tarbut* schools, impart sound Hebrew education, no attempt has been made at alphabetic modernisation. In America, however, where Hebrew as a live tongue is still a rarity, the greatest stumbling block appears to be the Hebrew alphabet.

Economy.

A STRANGER arriving in a small South African dorp asked to be guided to the rabbi's home. He found this to be a very dilapidated little place.

The rabbi told the stranger that owing to the depression his congregation could afford to give him very little indeed.

"How can you live on such a pittance!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Well," sighed the rabbi, "I am a pious man. I fast every Monday and Thursday."

"How awful!" cried the stranger.

"Awful," echoed the rabbi indignantly.

"Why, if it weren't for those two fast days, I would have starved to death long ago!"

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