

Letters to the Editor

The Board of Education and Rabbi Hirsch

From ADVOCATE M. FRANKS (Johannesburg).

To the Editor of the "Zionist Record."

Sir,—In your issue of the 9th February, 1934, you published a report of an interview with me in the course of which I was asked whether the South African Board of Jewish Education had been able to render real assistance to affiliated bodies, and in what manner this assistance had taken shape. In my reply I pointed out that it was sufficient to compare the Inspector's report on the educational attainments of most of the schools with which the Board was concerned in 1928 and 1929 with their attainments to-day in order to appreciate what a considerable distance the Board had traversed on the road leading to its goal. I went on to point out that while we were still far from that goal the efficiency of the schools had considerably increased, and that nearly all the schools throughout the sub-Continent were now following the same curriculum, and in so doing were using the text-books and employing the methods recommended by the Board.

In your issue of March 2nd, 1934, Rabbi Hirsch, who now assures me that he is not at all interested in the efficiency or inefficiency of my Board, endeavoured to show that these remarks of mine were unjustified. I find it difficult, in view of that assurance, to understand why he should have troubled to do so, since the interview had reference only to the activities of my Board. But be that as it may, his criticism of my remarks took the form of the argument that because the number of Jewish students writing Hebrew at public examinations in South Africa had decreased between 1927 and 1933 "it was idle to talk of progress and of a great advance in Jewish education." My reply to that contention, which was published in the same issue of the "Record," was that in view of the fact that the Board's activities were concerned with children who, in the vast majority of cases, did not continue their Hebrew studies after the Barmitzvah stage it was, on the face of it, illogical to test the success or failure of the Board's energies by the number of candidates who write Hebrew at public examinations at the age of from 15 to 17 years.

Rabbi Hirsch returns to the attack in your issue of March 23rd, 1934. So far as his letter consists of an elaboration of his original argument, in my view it takes the matter no further, because, as I stated in the interview, the basis for the statement which I made that the Board of Education had been able to render real assistance to affiliated bodies is contained in the Inspector's reports, and nothing in either of Rabbi Hirsch's letters constitutes an attempt to overthrow that basis or the conclusion drawn from it.

It is, however, with the second portion of the letter that my Board is more concerned. In that portion Rabbi Hirsch converts a camouflaged into an open attack upon the Board. I say this because I have no doubt from the contents of his latest letter and the spirit with which it is manifestly imbued that both letters have the same object. That object is now attempted to be carried out by showing that many institutions have broken away from my Board, to which they were once affiliated. Now, before I proceed to deal with the allegations of fact which are contained in his last letter, may I say that one is entitled to expect from a gentleman of the rabbi's cloth, that he would deem it due to his office, if not to the Board, to verify the facts upon which such allegations are founded, and when one finds, as one does, that this portion of his letter consists of a series of inaccurate statements one finds the gravest difficulty in accepting his assurance that he has no object in disparaging the Board's activities. Nor is this all. For Rabbi Hirsch goes on to say that "what the Board is after is to get control of the schools and to secure the affiliation fees," but that it cares very little for co-operation. Now I read with scant patience a statement of this description and I go as far as to say that from the knowledge which I have gained of my colleagues since my association with the Board, it is arrant nonsense to suggest that they are moved by a desire to obtain control of the schools and to secure the affiliation fees.

I have spoken of inaccurate statements; let me now set them out.

(1) **Capetown:** Rabbi Hirsch in dealing with the Capetown position clearly seeks to make the point that Capetown has broken away from my Board, and that there is now a separate Education Board there. While it is true that in August, 1933, the relationship between my Board and its Capetown Committee was placed on a different footing from that on which it had hitherto existed, it has, since that time, been made abundantly clear by the latter body that it has at no time been its desire to break away from my Board. The position to-day is that there is in existence in Capetown not a separate Education Board, as Rabbi Hirsch says, but still the Capetown Committee of the South African Board of Jewish Education, of which the honorary secretary on December 6th, 1933, wrote to Mr. B. S. Hersch in a letter confirming his appointment as its

delegate at my Board's Conference last December, and setting out the views which it desired him on behalf of the Committee to place before the Conference, "My committee do not desire to be an independent body. . . . This committee does not desire to arrogate to itself any powers or to separate from the head office." These views were placed before the bi-ennial Conference by Mr. Hersch on behalf of the Cape Committee, and are incorporated in the records of the Conference.

(2) **Port Elizabeth:** To say, as Rabbi Hirsch does, that Port Elizabeth was once affiliated to the Board and is not so now is to be guilty of a misleading statement. The truth is that the Port Elizabeth Hebrew Congregation, which was at one time affiliated to my Board, resigned from such affiliation. The Port Elizabeth Hebrew School has not only since such resignation become affiliated to my Board, but has recently, of its own accord, doubled its affiliation dues.

(3) **Durban:** Rabbi Hirsch says that Durban has not retained its former affiliation. This is entirely wrong, the truth being that the Durban United Talmud Torah is affiliated to my Board. In this connection it may be of interest to record that at the December, 1933 Conference, Durban's representative, Mr. C. Lyons, took the opportunity of expressing on behalf of the Durban United Talmud Torah, its appreciation of the services that had been rendered to that body by my Board, and expressed the hope that in the near future a representative of my Board would be sent to visit Durban in order to secure the affiliation of the Durban congregations.

(4) **Johannesburg:** While it is true that certain Talmud Torahs in Johannesburg are not affiliated to my Board, Rabbi Hirsch omits to mention that the body controlling the largest network of schools in Johannesburg, the United Hebrew Schools, is its very staunch supporter. It is inaccurate to say, as he does, that some of the Talmud Torahs in Johannesburg that were formerly connected with my Board have broken away from it. Not a single Johannesburg school which was affiliated to my Board has broken away from it.

Rabbi Hirsch speaks of non-affiliation by various congregations as proof of the Board's weakness and inadequacy. But does such non-affiliation show more than the strength of separatist tendencies in our midst? The very fact that in spite of these tendencies the Board has succeeded in unifying educationally one hundred and twenty of the leading institutions throughout South Africa shows the value of the work which it has accomplished.

It is unnecessary to pursue this aspect of the matter any further, but there is one point which I must touch upon in conclusion, which I conceive to be of considerable importance.

Rabbi Hirsch complains that his co-operation was never invited. Here his memory is seriously at fault. On a number of occasions his co-operation has been earnestly sought by members of my Board and comparatively recently our Inspector, Mr. Shacksnovis, on behalf of my Board, interviewed Rabbi Hirsch in Pretoria in an attempt to induce him to change his attitude towards the Board's activities. On this last occasion, as on previous ones, Rabbi Hirsch made it clear that he was not prepared to collaborate with the Board. And the reason for his refusal he, himself, discloses in the course of his letter when he says "That Pretoria, which is 50 miles away, is not in need of advice from Johannesburg as to how a Hebrew School should be run It does not seek the supreme advantage of being domineered by a Johannesburg Education Committee." Here he lets the cat out of the bag. He is not prepared to collaborate with an institution which has its origin in or operates from Johannesburg. Without ascertaining whether any valuable "advice" or "advantage" can come from that quarter it is enough that it is labelled "Johannesburg" to make it *treifa*.

Yours, etc.,

Maurice Franks,

President, South African Board of
Jewish Education, Johannesburg.

The Singing of *Hatikvah*

From Mr. M. Lichtenstein (N. Paarl).

To the Editor of the "Zionist Record."

Sir,—I have attended our local Jewish functions lately. These usually end up with an "attempt" to sing *Hatikvah*. I use the word advisedly, for it is surprising indeed to note how very few people know the words of our National Anthem. As a matter of fact I, too, do not know the words properly.

I consider that this is a matter that should be rectified.

Yours, etc.,

M. Lichtenstein.

[It is not really difficult to secure copies of the words and music of *Hatikvah*. These can be secured from the Book Department of the S.A. Zionist Federation or from any Jewish bookseller. It is certainly the duty of every Jewish community to secure printed copies of *Hatikvah*, and arrange for the words to be studied and known by every Jewish resident.—Ed.]