



# The High Art of Modern Chazonuth

Special Interview

with

Cantor Berele Chagy

THE arrival in South Africa of a cantor with a world wide reputation is a matter of considerable interest. There can be no doubt that the engagement of Cantor Berele Chagy by an important synagogue in the Golden City is likely to have the effect of improving the general standard of *Chazonuth* in this country.

In the course of a conversation with a representative of the *Zionist Record*, Mr. Chagy demonstrated a very deep interest in his life-work as a cantor.

"All the great world-*chazonim* are concentrated to-day in America," he said. "They are Rosenblatt, Hirschmann, Kwartin, Rooitman and Steinberg (of Odessa). These *Chazonim* do not only conduct synagogue services, but give periodic concerts in various parts of the country and attract enormous audiences."

It was interesting to learn from Mr. Chagy that Cantors Kwartin and Steinberg were men of sixty years of age; Rosenblatt was fifty-three; Rooitman fifty-two and Hirschman about forty-seven years of age. There was no great evidence at present of younger men with fine voices arriving to take the place of the older cantors.

AN interesting programme of a remarkable concert of *Chazonuth* and folk songs was shown by Mr. Chagy to our representative. The occasion was the thirtieth celebration of the anniversary of the Cantor's Association of America. The function was held a few months ago at the Madison Square Garden at New York and attracted no less than 22,000 people, who filled the vast auditorium. Many thousands were turned away. At this concert, Berele Chagy took a

prominent part with the other world renowned *Chazonim*.

"The art of *Chazonuth*," said Mr. Chagy, "has reached a very high standard in America. It is no exaggeration to say that it is the highest of any previous generation."

MR. CHAGY expressed the opinion that whilst it is true that a cantor is a minister of the congregation which employs him, he is also an artist and must be appreciated as such. It was because he was an artist, that the modern cantor gave concerts of traditional and folk music, which were greatly appreciated. There was a certain prejudice against cantors singing operatic songs, but surely there could be no opposition—and none existed in America—against cantors interpreting Jewish and Hebrew music.

"These concerts in America are proving of great benefit in encouraging Jewish composers," said Mr. Chagy. "The latter are expressing in music the poetry of the modern Yiddish and Hebrew poets. It is the cantor's privilege to interpret them to the masses. Thus we see a combination of the poet, composer and singer—all assisting in the development of a national music. It is a mistake to think that every cantor in America gives concerts. This is quite untrue. Only a few world-renowned *Chazonim* give concerts of this nature, as they are able to attract vast audiences."

THE new cantor has occupied a post for the last ten years with the *Adas Yisroel* congregation in Newark. This is the largest orthodox congregation in the state of New Jersey.

Mr. Chagy is a strong advocate of orthodoxy and states that if the orthodox movement in the United States was to fail then Judaism in that country would be entirely lost. There was a healthy orthodox activity in almost every centre throughout America. It was regrettable that immigrants to that country from Eastern Europe had considerably diminished, leading to a stoppage of the continuous flow of inspiration from the older countries. Mr. Chagy believed, nevertheless, that orthodox Judaism in America was established on a sufficiently sound basis to come through with success in the present crisis.

Mr. Chagy has arrived in this country with his wife and two of his children. Mrs. Chagy is a charming lady who takes a keen interest in Zionist and Jewish affairs and is looking forward to assist in local communal work.

When asked what attracted him to come to the distant community of South Africa, Mr. Chagy replied:

"I and my wife had been leading a very strenuous and busy life for many years in America. Lately we had been seriously considering going to a more quiet country for a few years. At first we intended going to Palestine. It was whilst in this mood that we received the cable offer to come to South Africa."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Chagy are deeply interested in the new country in which they now find themselves. The cantor is due to conduct his first service at the *Beth Hamedrash Hadogel* in Saratoga Avenue, Doornfontein, on Saturday morning.

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