

## An Astronomer

RECENTLY, one of the most famous astronomical institutions in the world—the Greenwich Observatory—found it worthwhile to copy a scientific instrument successfully used in Johannesburg since 1933. The instrument, which is described as a "measuring device to determine distances of stars," was invented by a well-known American Jewish astronomer, Dr. Frank Schlesinger, who came to this country in 1933 and was responsible for the first installation of the apparatus in question at the University Observatory at Milner Park, Johannesburg. Placed in a screened-off cubicle, hung with dark curtains, the machine allows the rapid study of star "angular diameters" or "parallaxes," by means of which their distances and movements can be determined. Thousands of stars have already been measured with its aid at Johannesburg. Enlarged images of photographic plates of various parts of the sky are projected on to a screen, where they can be compared with other pictures in order to determine minute divergencies with greater accuracy. Great savings of time are effected by the use of this instrument.

Dr. Schlesinger, who was born in New York, had a distinguished scientific career. Before he came to South Africa, he was in charge of the International Latitude Observatory, California, 1899-1903. There he was associated with other stellar bodies in the U.S.A. In 1920 he joined the staff of Yale. An unassuming personality, he is widely known in scholarly circles for the excellent work he has performed in his allotted vacation.

Dr. Schlesinger, who is now the head of the Observatory at the Yale University, was not accorded any honor by the local Jewish community when he lived here—due apparently to the fact that it was not generally known that he was of the Jewish persuasion.

## A Tribute

THE 70th anniversary of the death of Abraham Mapu has recently been observed in Kovno. In these Mapu's novels are, I understand, not widely read amongst the Jewish youth of Palestine, but at the end of last century his novels were widely perused in Russia and Poland. His first work, entitled, "Ahavath Yisrael," had an enormous influence on the Jewish youth of the period. The work was based on a Biblical theme and was full of love for the legendary Jewish world of ancient times.

Mapu described the fields of Judah and the forests of Lebanon with a certain deal of charm and—what seems remarkable—although he had never visited Palestine, there does not seem to be a single flaw in his descriptions of nature in the Ancient East. The book passed through two translations in English, one by Sholem Aleichem and the other by Shapiro.

## Current Communal Comments

By "Hamabit"

I heard an interesting remark from the late Nahum Sokolow concerning the Hebrew style of Mapu. In the days when Mapu wrote his novels, Hebrew was to all intents and purposes, a dead language. Mapu had used only Biblical words in his novels. Now, asked the late Mr. Sokolow, what was Mapu to do when he had to describe a collar or a tie of one of his heroes? These words do not occur in the Bible. The answer was—if he had to describe a collar or a tie, Mapu would leave out any mention of those articles and not describe them at all!

## Diamonds

I HEAR that the diamond cutters of Antwerp recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of their organization. Amongst the messages read at the banquet was one from King Leopold and amongst those present were the members of the Cabinet, Mayors of the leading towns of Belgium as well as our Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, of South Africa.

Generous tribute was paid to the initiators of the industry, which plays such an enormous part in the economic life of Belgium. Twenty thousand workers are engaged by the diamond work in Antwerp and five hundred million francs are paid annually in wages.

Tribute was also paid at the banquet to the part played by Jews in the development of the diamond industry. The president of the organization, Mr. Isidor Lipshitz, was particularly singled out for praise. Reference was made to the fact that the Belgian King recently awarded him a medal for his great services to the industry.

Amongst those at the celebration were a number of representatives of Germany. A journalist from that country declared later that he felt quite uncomfortable in listening to the enthusiastic praise showered upon the Jewish leaders of the diamond industry, to whom Belgium is so grateful.

## Maurois

I NOTE that a distinguished writer is at present on a visit to England, and is meeting with a warm welcome. He is André Maurois, the famous creator of "Colonel Bramble," and biographer of Disraeli.

Maurois is a frequent visitor to England, and has made many friends there. It is not generally known that this quiet Jewish aesthete served his country for a considerable time as liaison officer with the British Army.

It was during this period that he gained much of the experience he later worked into the various stories of "Colonel Bramble," one of the most successful portraits of an Englishman ever to be painted by a non-Britisher.

Indeed, since he wrote his novel, "Les Silences du Colonel Bramble," Maurois has been accepted among English writers as the recognised interpreter of England in France.

Maurois comes of an old Franco-Jewish family, and is proud of his lineage. He has for many years been interested in English life and customs, and among his best-known works are his biographies of three Britons—Byron, Shelley and Disraeli. Towards the close of last year he published a rather fine history of the English people.

## How To . . . !

HOW does a chazan become a chazan? I was asked this question the other day by a young school-boy, who, having listened to the fine singing of Cantor Chagy, "made up his mind" to become a chazan when he grew up.

I do not think there are colleges for cantors anywhere in the world. Most of the famous chazanim have acquired the knowledge of *chazanuth* by serving as choir-boys. A synagogue choir is probably the best school for a future cantor. In recent years there have been numerous cases of unemployed opera singers who became *chazonim*. The procedure is a simple one. The singer, if he is at all able to read Hebrew, attends synagogue for a while, goes over the intricacies of the *Yomim Noraim* services and applies for a vacant post. He is given a trial, and if his voice and intonation please the congregants—he gets the job. I have heard that there are a number of good *chazonim* in America who do not understand a word they are intoning.

Even in Eastern Europe, congregations are mainly interested in the vocal qualities of their cantors. In Vilna and Warsaw—two great centres of *chazanuth*—the cantor is expected to be a married man and to grow a beard. Both these qualifications are easily attainable, and if one is also blessed with a good voice, it is really quite easy to become a chazan.

## A Contribution

IN America there are Nazi and anti-Nazi meetings being held all over the country. A leading figure in connection with the latter is a certain Madame Irene Harand, a well-known Catholic and gifted public speaker.

In the midst of her speech in New York the other day, a stench bomb was thrown into the auditorium. Confusion and disorder followed and the meeting was threatened with failure. Madame Harand, however, held up her arms and called to the audience to remain calm.

"Everyone," she explained, "contributes what he can."

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