

Current Communal Comments

By "Hamabit"

WAS recently a member of an audience at a Jewish play produced in Johannesburg on the boards of a famous old theatre. Being made tearful at the unfolding of a tragic story of Jewish family life, shed tears at the unhappy mass into which the Yiddish theatre in this country has fallen. In the last two decades some fine cultural and intellectual plays have had their appearance and being produced on the Yiddish stage in other countries. Altogether a new note has been struck! There has been development, as on the stages of all other countries, yet in South Africa whenever a Yiddish play is produced, it is of a similar type which held the boards some 40 years ago. The same melodrama, the same exaggeration of improbable incidents with the same twisted and tawdry plots, the same continuous tear-provoking situations interlarded with farcical interjections, in an attempt to provoke hilarious laughter and offset the tears.

It is strange that whilst old-fashioned melodrama has long disappeared from the theatre of all enlightened peoples, it still hangs on in South Africa with a fierce tenacity to the Yiddish stage. The peculiar part of it is that the producers and actors do not seem to realise that a new Yiddish public is eagerly awaiting the new class of play. The fairly large audiences during the recent season were surely an indication of this fact.

I am convinced that if some of the modern Yiddish plays were to be produced by an intelligent group of Yiddish players, there would be large audiences at the theatre. The plays, however, must be professional and the production in the hands of efficient artists.

The Symbol?

A RECENT writer in the "Haolam" has suggested in a scholarly article that the Menorah and not the Mogen Dovid should be regarded as the true symbol of Israel.

In this connection it may be remembered that Sholem Asch, the great writer, suggested some time ago that the Mogen Dovid had no place in the ancient tradition of Israel. There was no mention of it in the Bible or in Talmudic literature. The word first occurs in "Kol Hakofer"—a book published in the 12th century. The shield of Israel, a vessel of war, does not suggest anything that is symbolical of the true spirit of Israel.

On the other hand, the Menorah in every sense the true emblem of Israel. According to tradition, it was made after a model which was shown on Mount Sinai.

The conception of light has since shined through the whole tradition of

Israel. When the angel of God spoke to Zechariah and uttered the memorable words: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit," he showed him a seven-branched candle-stick. (These seven lights are described as the "seven eyes of God.") The figure seven, representing the seven lights, has also attained great significance in Jewish tradition; the seven days of creation; the holiness of the seventh day; the sabbatical year; the seven days of the wedding feast; the seventy years of man's ripe age, etc.

The Menorah was also the symbol of the Maccabees, and there was a picture of a candle-stick on the Hasmonean coins.

Halifax

I AM wondering whether, in receiving Lord Halifax recently in Berlin, the head of the German Reich realised that his distinguished English visitor was a dangerous man who had committed the "crime" of "rassenschande." Had Lord Halifax not been the Lord Privy Seal of England; if he had been just a plain and peaceful German citizen, he would have been outlawed for his shocking default.

It appears that about a year ago Lord Halifax was the "unterfuhrer" at the wedding of his son. The bride was a beautiful girl by the name of Ruth Primrose—the only daughter of the late Hon. Neil Primrose. It will be recollected that Neil Primrose was the beloved son of Lord Roseberry—England's famous Liberal Prime Minister—and Channan Rothschild, who had remained a pious Jewess throughout her life.

What would have added more to the crime of Lord Halifax in the eyes of the German Fuhrer is the fact that Neil Primrose, the late "mechuton" of Lord Halifax, met his death on the battlefield for the liberation of Palestine. Before he died, he is reported to have said that he was happy to give his life to the ancient land of his ancestors. During his lifetime and as a young boy, he had been drawn to the religion of his mother and had studied Hebrew.

At the time of the wedding last year the photograph of the bride was published in the society journals. I remember that there was not a single "Aryan" feature in the face of the beautiful girl, who was the image of her Jewish grandmother.

Feurtwangler

I HEAR that the quiet battle between Toscanini and Feurtwangler, the two great world conductors, has now come to a head in connection with the Salzburg Music Festivals. Toscanini issued an ultimatum to the management of the Festivals. It was to be either he or Feurtwangler! Toscanini was not going to appear on the same programme with the German conductor. The former won the battle and Feurtwangler has not been invited to Salzburg this year. His place will be taken by Bruno Walter—a German Jew.

The struggle between the two musicians has lasted ever since the Nazis dismissed Jewish performers from the German orchestras. Toscanini then demanded that Feurtwangler join him in protesting against the persecutions and in refusing to perform in Germany. Feurtwangler objected that "art has nothing to do with politics," and thereby roused against him the public opinion of the whole enlightened world. It was even said that Feurtwangler was a Nazi, though it is more likely that the man is a weakling and would not part with his comfortable job in Germany.

Lately, Toscanini discovered that Feurtwangler had actually consented to occupy a post which has been made vacant by a dismissed Jewish musician. This was too much for the temperamental Italian and on being invited to Salzburg, he refused to be associated on the same programme with the German conductor.

A Sad Affair

A COMMERCIAL traveller called upon a Jewish storekeeper in one of our dorps. The traveller began to introduce himself in the usual boisterous fashion.

"Sh!" interrupted the storekeeper, placing his finger on his lip, and adding in a whisper: "Don't speak so loudly!"

"What's the matter?" asked the "commercial" in great surprise.

"Business is very sick," replied the storekeeper sadly.

A few weeks later, the traveller called again. He found the storekeeper in a lackadaisical mood, leaning with his elbows on the central counter, with his chin resting in the palms of his hands.

"May I speak aloud to-day?" asked the "commercial."

"Oh, yes," replied the storekeeper. "You may, indeed. Business is now dead!"

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