

FROM THE JEWISH PRESS

The Jews of Venice

FOR over a thousand years, says a Jewish traveller in the *Haint* (Warsaw), a cultured Jewish community has been in existence in the internationally famous city of Venice. In the Middle Ages, Jewish merchants spread the trade of the city to countries of the Orient and the Occident. The ancient synagogues of the city bear witness to a great religious past. Lately, however, there are signs of deterioration.

Only about two thousand Jewish souls live in the Venice of to-day. The ancient Ghetto is the only reminder of Jewish life. Here one sees Jewish children, ragged and barefoot, playing with their Italian friends in the narrow lanes. The Jews — even the older men — know very little of their Judaism. On Friday nights a bare Minyan attends the service at the synagogue. As they enter the House of Prayer, the Italian Jews walk up to the Ark and give the Fascist salute to the Sefer Torahs . . . , after which they kiss the fingertips of the right hand that had just been outstretched in Mussolini-fashion.

The most widely observed Jewish custom in Italy is that of the Yizkor-ceremony. Yizkor-services are held in the Synagogue every Monday and Thursday. In olden times a Rabbi had to possess great qualifications of scholarship and character. To-day a membership-card of the Fascist Party is the best recommendation . . . There are twenty-six Rabbis in Italy and only a few of them are worthy of the sacred calling. The rest are active members of the Fascist organisations.

The United Synagogues Of America

IN connection with the recently held Silver Jubilee Convention of the United Synagogues of America, Mr. Jacob Fishman writes in the *Morning Journal* (New York):

The United Synagogue is known in America by the name "conservative" which is somewhat inapt. In reality this movement stands midway between the old Orthodox schools and the Reform Temple. Founded by Solomon Schechter it has a great influence on the young generation of America who find the old Synagogue a little cumbersome and the Reform Temple too far removed from Judaism. It comprises 250 congregations all over America, and about a thousand sisterhoods, men-clubs and youth societies. The membership of the sisterhood alone is over 90,000.

The movement has been subjected to much criticism. Nevertheless it must be remembered that the conservatives are much nearer to traditional Judaism than the Reform Jews.

Throughout its existence the United Synagogue has been a pillar of strength to the Zionist movement, and all its activities are characterised by a staunch national policy, whereas the Reform temples have sometimes been nests of anti-nationalism.

Items and Comments of Particular Interest

Ancient Synagogue In Damascus

A CORRESPONDENT of the *Haint* (Warsaw) describes his impressions of an ancient Synagogue which has recently been excavated near Damascus by archaeologists of the Yale University.

The Synagogue, says the writer, was excavated three years ago in the Desert of Mesopotamia on the shores of the river Euphrates. It has been opened to the general public for the past year or so, and has aroused the greatest attention amongst scientists, tourists and travellers of the Near East. The main building must have existed in the days of the Second Temple. One hundred and fifty years after the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Samuel Hacoheh, who was the *Nassi* of the community arranged for a thorough renovation. Being under Hellenist influence he introduced the painting of pictures on the wall of the Synagogue.

The renovated Synagogue existed for only eleven years. It was attacked by desert tribes and the vandals filled the rooms of the Synagogue with stones, bricks and rubble, thus preventing its future use. Later the building was covered by sand dunes, and hidden from the face of the earth.

The recent excavations took two years. The ground was cleared around the Synagogue and the stones were removed from within.

It is now the property of the Syrian Government and consists of three departments; a home for the Kohanim and Levites, a House for Prayer and a big inner court surrounded by marble columns. The Ark is on the west side and thus faces Jerusalem. Next to it there is a seven branched candle stick. There is no *Bimah*. The Torah had been read from the steps. The pictures on the walls are still quite clear. They depict various incidents of biblical times such as the anointing of David, Moses and the Ten Commandments, Aaron and the Sacrifice and Ezekiel by the Rivers of Babylon.

The Effects of Anti-Semitism

"IN addition to undermining our prestige in the eyes of the non-Jewish world, anti-Semitism may have the effect of destroying our own self-respect. Jewish education has, therefore, the double task of combating anti-Semitism from outside and of protecting the Jewish spirit from its harmful influence."

The above statement which was made by a prominent speaker at a Conference of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New-York is discussed by a writer in the *Jewish Morning Journal*.

"I have met many Jews in America, says the writer, who are Jew-conscious, but not Judaism-conscious. Mention of the word "Jew" drives fear into their hearts. Some of them have been moved by the terrible happenings in Jewish life. There is at least some awakening, and a return, albeit shy, to our religion and to the ancient founts of Judaism. But these groups are small.

"Large masses of our people are still indifferent and backward Jews. Had they known something of Jewish history, they might have found comfort in the fact that the Jewish people have passed through many tragedies in the past. Being ignorant these voluntary marranos know not where to turn. A return to our people would not only have saved their souls but would also have prevented them from being drawn into pernicious movements. The task of bringing back these

drybones to Judaism is one that confronts not only a Teachers' Seminary. All sections of Jewry should unite in a movement towards the spiritual amelioration of the great masses who are steeped in ignorance.

The General Elections In South Africa

COMMENTING editorially on the results of the elections to the Union House of Assembly, the *Haaretz* (Tel-Aviv) says:

The main struggle in the elections was between the traditional South African democracy and the various Fascist tendencies which attempted to find their way into the Union by methods only too well known. The results of the elections are of great importance to the welfare and future of South Africa's population in general and all other considerations must needs take a secondary place. Nevertheless, it is but natural for us to find it necessary to review the situation in relation to the position of the Jews in that country.

The Jewish community rightly saw fit to refrain from being dragged into the election campaign. As a rule it refrained from entering into public discussion with the enemies of Israel. It rightly saw no purpose either in apologising to the anti-Semites or in attacking them. The Board of Deputies emphasised that the Jews were not connected with any particular party and that every Jewish individual had full liberty of opinion and action. This is indeed a praiseworthy policy and one which will prevent the identification of the Jewish community with any particular political movement.

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