

# CURRENT COMMUNAL COMMENT

By "Hamabit"

## The Book of Books

MY READERS will have noticed that one of the most prominent features in connection with the recent Voortrekker centenary celebrations was the public presentation of a number of old and fascinating Bibles to the leaders of the Trek at various places in the Union. In this connection I was particularly pleased to see that the gift of the English-speaking citizens of Johannesburg to the organisers of the Trek was a finely-bound eighteenth-century old Bible.

This recalls to mind that all those who so generously donated these Bibles, which will eventually be placed in some Voortrekker Museum, presented them to the leaders of the 1938 Trek in a spirit befitting the manner in which the Voortrekkers of the 1830's set out on their historic march through then unknown South Africa. It is well-known that men like Pieter Retief and Sarel Celliers were God-fearing folk and were devout students of the Word of God.

It is well to remember, too, that ever since the year 1652 the Bible has had its assured place of honour in the majority of homes throughout this country. In fact, both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries no Afrikaner home was without a copy of the Bible. Some of the more studious families also owned versions in Nederlands of Josephus's *History of the Jews*.

## Crime

THE BEST answer to the repeated Nazi assertions regarding the criminality of the Jew is provided by an official Government analysis of crime in Poland which has just been published. Poland, which has the biggest and poorest Jewish community in Europe has 68,841 inmates in its prisons. Of these only 4,406 are Jews, comprising about 6 per cent. of the total. At the same time the Jews form ten per cent. of Poland's population.

The Warsaw Jewish newspapers mention that these statistics bear out in full the conclusions arrived at by Professor Liebman Hersch of Geneva (who, by the way is a brother of the late Ben Zion Hersch of Johannesburg) in his work on criminality amongst Jews, which was published last year. At the time of its publication Prof. Liebman Hersch was attacked by the anti-Semitic press and, since official statistics were not then available, he was accused of deliberately building his conclusions on false premises and placing his fellow Jews in a favourable light as compared with the Christian Poles.

By way of contrast it is interesting to note that under the Nazi regime, which claims to have purified the German nation, criminality is increasing to an alarming degree. Recent

official statistics show that in 23 leading German towns, amongst juveniles between the ages of 14 to 18, crime has risen by 38 per cent. compared with 1934. In Berlin crime has risen by 36 per cent.; in Hamburg—by 52 per cent.; and in Nuremberg, the darling cradle-city of Nazidom and seat of all the party conferences, by a full one hundred per cent. In particular, crime is considerably on the increase amongst the female population—those very German women whose morals Hitler claims to have improved by driving them out of public life and sending them back to the kitchen!

## The Karaites.

THERE is something intensely pathetic in the position of the Karaite community in Jerusalem, as was revealed in a recent Palestine court case.

The Karaites, as is well known, are the only Jewish sect in existence. Some twelve hundred years ago Karaism originated as a protest against Talmudic authority. The movement based its beliefs on biblical authority only. For some time the movement made rapid strides, and attracted many intellectuals who refuted Rabbinic legislation, but soon there were signs of deterioration, and in modern times various small communities of Karaites have maintained only a precarious existence in different parts of the world, but chiefly in the Crimea.

Karaite law proved a bigger burden than Rabbinic law. The Karaites were expected to adhere literally to the injunctions of the Bible, and their ritual laws regarding cleanliness and the observance of the Sabbath are particularly severe.

Modern Jewish reference books give the number of Karaites all over the world as 14,000. This is the result of statistics compiled before the Great War. I doubt if there are half that number to-day. The Karaites in the Crimea have always had assimilationist tendencies, and under the present Soviet rule their numbers must have dwindled considerably. As for the Karaites in the East their position was revealed at the court case referred to above. It appears that the whole Karaite community in Jerusalem consists of a single family—two men, four women, five young girls and one male-child! This family now claims the ownership of the whole immovable property belonging to the Karaites. The claim which was contested by the Karaite Chacham of Cairo was not upheld by the court, and the Chacham will now be able to carry out his scheme to settle 20 families on the Karaite property. Whether he will thereby manage to save an interesting historical relic from extinction is somewhat doubtful,

## An Opera Star

THE DEATH of Alma Zimbalist, which is reported from New York, brings to memory the time when under the name of Alma Gluck she swept the boards of the Metropolitan Opera House and was one of the most popular figures in the musical world. Madame Gluck, whose maiden name was Firesohn, was born in Bucharest some fifty-three years ago, and began her career as a typist in a law office. In 1909 she became the sensation of the opera season and until about twelve years ago she figured in the world's leading opera performances, having sung with Caruso on many occasions.

Her first husband, Barney Gluck, was well known in musical and literary circles. He now leads a retired life in Paris. Her second husband, whom she married some twenty-five years ago, is E. Zimbalist, the well-known violinist, who is regarded as one of the great artists of to-day.

## A Veteran

DR. J. H. BUCHMIL, whose death took place in Jerusalem recently, belonged to the small circle of veterans of the first Zionist Congress whose numbers are now decreasing from year to year. As a student in Paris, some forty-two years ago, he organised the first French-speaking Youth Group of the Chovevei Zion. As soon as Herzl appeared on the scene Buchmil joined the ranks of the political Zionist Movement and toured Russia in connection with the organisation of the first Congress.

Dr. Buchmil figured prominently in the stormy Uganda controversy at the sixth Congress, and worked hand in hand with Dr. Weizmann and the late Leon Motzkin. After the Great War he engaged in propaganda for the Keren Hayesod in French speaking countries. His last years were spent in retirement and were devoted to literary activity. He died at the age of 69 and his sole possessions — a house in Talpioth and a voluminous library — he bequeathed to the Hebrew University.

## Legitimate

MR. COHEN, the wholesale merchant, was looking over the detailed expense sheet submitted by his new commercial traveller after the latter had taken his first country trip.

"I notice, Mr. Bernstein," he said, "that you have charged the firm with the purchase of a new hat."

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