

CURRENT COMMUNAL COMMENT

By "Hamabit"

Roth

I THINK that a happy choice has been made by the authorities at Oxford University in the appointment of Dr. Cecil Roth as Reader in Post Biblical Jewish studies for a period of seven years, starting from the beginning of this month. It will be recollected that this Chair was recently established through the generosity of a number of British Jews, headed by Mr. Harry Sacher, the well-known Zionist.

Dr. Roth has established for himself an enviable reputation for exact and careful scholarship and his works, written in a popular style, are well-known not only in England but also in this country. He has just retired from the presidency of the Jewish Historical Society of England, a position which he filled with dignity and grace for several years.

He is a prodigious worker and the books which he published thus far will fill a good-sized shelf. They deal mainly with the subject of Jewish history and are recognised as authoritative and used as text-books in schools and colleges.

I feel that Dr. Roth is the type of man who might well be invited to come to South Africa some time in order to deliver a series of cultural lectures. The idea was mooted some time ago, but nothing came of it. At this period of crisis, it is well for us to seek courage from knowledge of the treasures of Jewish learning.

"Sirota"-ga Avenue

A CANADIAN friend writes me that whilst in Winnipeg recently he had the pleasure of listening to Cantor Gersohn Sirota (still recognised as the king of the Cantorial world) conduct a Synagogue Service during his final tour of the American Continent.

I was surprised to hear that Sirota is still singing, for he must be a man of over seventy. In this connection there is that equally fine singer, Cantor Quartin, who has now settled in Palestine. He is older than Sirota and is still the possessor of a magnificent voice.

It will be recollected that Cantor Sirota visited South Africa some years ago and conducted services here, and also gave a number of recitals of Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs. A humorous story was current at the time which is worth repeating.

The representative of South African interests which desired Cantor Sirota to come to this country, found it difficult to persuade the great Cantor to leave Warsaw in order to make the trip. Financial advantages

did not appear to be a sufficient draw, so he told Sirota what a great name he had among Jews in South Africa.

"How do I know that?" asked the Cantor.

"My dear Cantor," replied the South African representative, "You can see how much they think of you. In Johannesburg they have even named a street after you."

The reference was to the well-known Saratoga Avenue in Doornfontein. This name the South African agent pronounced in such a way that the good cantor, believing it was really "Sirota"-ga Avenue, was deeply impressed and was finally persuaded to come to South Africa.

Satire

MATETE, Palestine's satirical theatre, is now celebrating the completion of ten years of activity. This is indeed a great *Yomtov* for the theatre-going public in Eretz Israel. Whilst on a visit to Tel Aviv some time ago, I attended a performance by the Matate and was struck by the remarkable cleverness of their little sketches, songs and ditties.

In English-speaking countries one seldom encounters performances of the type given by the Matate. They are not revues, although their programmes occasionally include an item of dancing. In the main they are made up of artistic and humorous comment on serious problems of the day which are at the moment engaging the attention of the public. In Palestine, where the population is politically-minded and party strife at times reaches a very high level, the Matate provides a pleasant diversion. It would be safe to say that during the ten years of its existence, there has hardly been one prominent figure or aspect of Jewish life which has not been caricatured on the Matate stage. Many well-known non-Jewish figures, especially those connected with Palestine, have found their way into its programmes and lately Chamberlain has been a great favourite. Many anomalies in the life of the Yishuv, such as speculation in land, the restrictions in immigration, the censorship, the attitude of British officials, have been subjected to scathing satire by this little theatre.

Since most of the subjects dealt with are topical, the sketches have to be expressly written for the Matate. A number of clever young writers are permanently engaged on this work. I often felt that some of the sketches I enjoyed so much, would be appreciated by English-speaking Jews and that I should like to see them translated for the benefit of our dramatic societies, which are always on the look-out for striking Jewish sketches.

A Composer

THE SIXTIETH birthday of Solomon Rozovsky, one of Palestine's leading composers, was, I hear, recently celebrated in Palestine. On this occasion the Jerusalem Radio devoted a full concert to his compositions and messages of congratulation were received by him from all parts of the world.

Rozovsky belongs to that small group of people who, at the beginning of this century, formed in Russia the now famous "Society for Jewish Folk-music." As a first effort to study the true sources of the Jewish folk-tune, it was treated with derision by the assimilationists. They questioned the very existence of Jewish music, and one writer asked "whether they intend to present in the guise of art the Yiddish tunes sung by the maidservants." Yet the little group of enthusiasts, which included Engel and Gnessin, persisted in their efforts and have since rendered yeoman service to Jewish music through research and composition.

Solomon Rozovsky, who is the son of a famous Riga Chazan, is reputed to be the first member of his profession to have graduated at a Conservatoire. His Synagogue compositions are sung all over the world. In his early youth Solomon imbibed the true spirit of Jewish music, and after graduating as a lawyer he devoted himself entirely to music. For the past fifteen years he has lived in Palestine and has published numerous compositions many of which are frequently performed. He has also written much incidental music for the plays of the Habimah and the Ohel.

Some Advice

It was market day—*Erev Shabbas*—in the little village in the old country. Chayim was getting a few things for the Sabbath meals. He came to a fish stall and took a great fancy to a long and juicy fish. He felt reluctant, however, to ask the price, and as the stall-holder's back was turned, he placed the precious fish in his *kapote*. The stall-holder, a few moments later, happened to notice the tail of the fish sticking out of the *kapote* of his prospective customer. As the latter walked quietly away, without paying, he called him back, and said:

"My dear Chayim, there are one of two things you ought to do. Either you get a larger *kapote* or you steal a shorter fish."

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