

CURRENT COMMUNAL

By "Hamabit"

COMMENT

interesting personality now in Johannesburg is Percy Kahn, Tauber's accompanist, who travelled with the famous tenor over the world during the last years. It will be remembered that Percy Kahn was the accompanist of Mischa Elman for a period of years, and many of the famous Elman records were made during this fine partnership.

I have heard in my early days of "Percy Kahn, the Boy Wonder." He had a remarkable voice, and sang some of the great musical compositions of the day in England. I remember, too, when the Liberal Movement started in London years ago and services were held in some of the West End hotels. Percy Kahn was the organist and conductor. As a boy he had a number of London synagogues. It is not generally known that he is the composer of a very fine melody which is sung in many of the synagogues in the British Empire.

When I was with him in Johannesburg one evening, I found him an excellent raconteur. References were made by somebody in the room to Kahn's composition "Ave Maria" which was so beautifully rendered by Caruso, with Mischa Elman as violinist, and Percy Kahn at the piano. This reminded me of Casartelli, the Italian violinist, who used to interview Italian singers when they came to London. One day Casartelli was in the room and heard Caruso sing. On the programme was "Ave Maria," by Percy Kahn.

Percy Kahn was favourably impressed with the composition. After the concert he went to the artist's room and said, "This 'Ave Maria' is a wonderful composition. The composer must be a Catholic."

"Not at all," replied Caruso, "just a Jew." The allusion was to the size of Percy Kahn, who, however, made a tall niche for himself in the musical life of his generation!

When I was rather belatedly in my room one evening, Sir Isaac Newton's autobiography, "Origines," I came across a remarkable description of Pinchas Rutenberg, the newly-appointed President of the Jewish Agency in Palestine. He had Leumi in Palestine. He was the Military Governor of

Jerusalem in 1920, and in that capacity often had occasion to meet Rutenberg, whom he describes as follows:

"Thick-set, powerful, dressed always in black; a head as strong as granite and an utterance low and menacing through clenched teeth. He is no politician—all he wants is 'wurrk,' and such is the grip of his 'r's' that your hands seem to close over an imaginary pick—or pen. He is no politician! He was with Keren-sky in the last pre-Soviet days; and had his advice, which was to shoot Soviet leaders quick, been taken, something other than Bolshevism might have reigned in Russia now. Now he has harnessed the Jordan to light, heat and energize Palestine. His Power Houses are like himself; the rugged Sphinx-like contour of Government House, Jerusalem, is said to be Rutenberg rendered in stone. No politician! If, in a time of trouble for Israel, he were to raise his hand, he would be followed by all the Jews of Palestine."

Well, Rutenberg has now raised his hand, and there can be no doubt that all the Jews of Palestine will follow him in the defence of their country and their rights.

A Sculptor

I LEARN that Josef Mendes da Costa, who won international fame as the greatest Dutch sculptor of modern times, recently passed away at Amsterdam in his 76th year. Da Costa, who was a conforming Jew and a member of an ancient Sephardic family in the Netherlands, was the creator of many monumental pieces of sculpture that adorn some of the principal institutions in Holland.

A pioneer of modern art in his native land, but educated on classical lines, da Costa revealed exceptional talent in all his work. Among others, he made busts of the philosopher Spinoza, and the artists Jan Steen and Vincent van Gogh, and the writer, Herman Heyermans. In 1914, the University of Groningen conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Biology upon him, and in 1925 Queen Wilhelmina appointed him an Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

South Africans will be interested to know that da Costa once made a bust of Christian de Wet, the famous Boer general. This particular piece of sculpture formed part of the famous Kroller-Muller collection at the Hague some years ago. The only other Jew, I believe, who has done a bust of de Wet is Moses Kottler, the well-known South African artist. Kottler's bust was done shortly after de Wet's release from prison, where he was confined for the part he played in the 1914 rebellion.

Loewe

PROFESSOR LOEWE, who is now celebrating his 70th birthday in Tel-Aviv, was one of the founders of the Zionist movement in Western Europe. As a young student, he joined the Chovevei Zion movement, and did much pioneering work in the German Zionist Organisation.

In 1889, he joined the Union of Russian Jewish Students, which was founded in Berlin. There he came in contact with a group of young Zionists, who were later to make their mark in the Jewish world. Shmarya Levin, Leo Motzkin and Nachman Syrkin were members of the group. They were all at the time studying in Berlin, and the fact that Loewe was born and bred in assimilated Germany did not prevent him from throwing himself heart and soul into the movement.

Loewe visited Palestine in 1896, and later returned to Berlin where he became the first editor of the "Juedische Rundschau." At a later stage in his career Loewe became librarian of the Berlin University Library. Whilst working in that capacity, he learned of the plans made by Dr. Chazanowitz to establish a Jewish National Library in Palestine, and to the realisation of this ideal Professor Loewe devoted much time.

To-day he has found a refuge in Palestine, and is in charge of Tel-Aviv's Municipal Library. His home has become a centre for the Zionist intelligentsia who hail from Germany.

Wartime!

MR. GOLDZWEIG was a lover of antiques and was always searching for unusual articles. Recently in Johannesburg he saw in an antique shop a beautiful table more than one hundred years old. The price was £100, so Goldzweig took a month to think it over. At the end of the period, he returned to the shop and asked to see the table again.

"The price is now £500," said the dealer complacently.

"What!" cried Mr. Goldzweig, "a few weeks ago it was only £100."

"Ah," answered the dealer, "since then the cost of material and labour has gone up tremendously!"

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