

# CURRENT

# COMMUNAL

By "Hamabit"

# COMMENT

## A Veteran

**F**LYING to Palestine this week from this country is an old Zionist worker who, I think, is known to many people here. He is Bernard Weinronk, who has been a soldier of Zion for some forty years and has loyally devoted himself to the work in South Africa for three decades. He was one of the founders of the first Zionist group to be established in Johannesburg thirty-five years ago.

This seventy-year-old veteran, who became interested in the national movement when, as a young man, he met Theodor Herzl, now finds the call of Eretz Israel irresistible. After several short visits to Palestine, he has decided to settle in that country and devote the rest of his years to absorbing the spirit and life of the Yishuv and to playing his part in the struggle that lies ahead.

I am sure that the good wishes of all co-workers throughout the country will accompany Bernard Weinronk on his setting out on his "great adventure."

## Wagner's Ancestry

**T**HE question of Richard Wagner's ancestry has always been a controversial issue. It has frequently been alleged that he came of Jewish stock, but such assertions have always been denied by the descendants of the family of the famous composer. Now I see that the question has been revived again, this time by Mr. Ernest Newman, the English musical critic. In an appendix which he has added to the third volume of the American edition of his life of Wagner, Mr. Newman says there is now overwhelming evidence in support of the theory that Ludwig Geyer, a noted German-Jewish actor, was the father of the great composer.

Wagner was born in Leipzig in 1813, and six months later his mother was left a widow. The following year she married Ludwig Geyer, who was a friend of her first husband, Carl Friedrich Wagner, police actuary of Leipzig. Mr. Newman recalls that Wagner, in a letter written to his sister, Cecellie, on 14th January, 1870, said that it seemed to him that "our father Geyer" by his "sacrifice for the whole family" (in marrying the widow and taking on himself the heavy burden of her many young children—Mr. Newman's note) "believed he was atoning for a guilt."

Ernest Newman is the doyen of musical critics in Great Britain and the fact that he believes in Wagner's Jewish ancestry is of considerable importance.

In view of the controversy regarding Wagner's paternity which has raged in musical circles for many decades, I find, as many people do, considerable irony in the fact that Adolf Hitler and his satellites have hailed Richard Wagner and his music as the particular ornaments of German National Socialism and that the festival theatre of Baireuth, which Wagner built for the presentation of his works, has become something of a Nazi shrine.

## Herschman

**C**ANTOR Mordecai Herschman, whose death at the age of fifty-two is reported from New York, was one of the leading chazanim of our time. Just before the outbreak of the last war, he arrived in Vilna as an unknown young man, and was given a trial at the Great Synagogue. So greatly did he impress the large congregation that he was immediately appointed to the post of Chief Chazan in Vilna, which was at that time regarded as the leading chazanic post in the world.

Some twenty years ago he went to America and achieved great fame there. Many of his compositions and performances were recorded, and are to be found in Jewish homes in this country. On several occasions it was stated that Cantor Herschman intended to visit South Africa, but owing to his failing health these plans never materialised.

## From Greek to Hebrew

**T**CHERNICHOVSKY, the leading Hebrew poet in Palestine, has recently been busily engaged in translating Homer's *Odyssey* into Hebrew.

This work is due to be published very shortly and its appearance is eagerly awaited in Palestine.

Since the war, Palestine writers have remarked upon the fact that today there is a complete rapprochement between the Greeks and the Jews, who in ancient times were cultural rivals. Palestinian Jews and Greek Jews are now fighting in large numbers on the Albanian battle-front. In Palestine there has been a magnificent response towards an appeal for the Greek War Fund, and Greeks have written to the Hebrew press thanking Jews for the interest shown in the plight of their country. The appearance of a Hebrew translation of Greece's greatest classic will, therefore, be of some political importance too.

"Haaretz," by the way, reported recently that Sir Ronald Storrs, who

is an authority on the Greek classic, has written to Tchernichovsky asking him for some details regarding the translation of the *Odyssey*. He stated that he reads this work at least once a year, and was greatly interested in the announcement that it would be translated into Hebrew.

Tchernichovsky, by the way, was recently the recipient of the Bialik Prize for literature, which is awarded annually by the Tel-Aviv Municipality.

## Training Communal Workers

**I** HEARD the other day of an interesting scheme which is being advocated in Washington in rabbinical and other circles. The project is no less than a University of Jewish Studies to train all who engage in professional Jewish activities. Such a university would consist of various colleges which would train students for the rabbinate, social work, education, etc., and only graduates of the university would be engaged or supported in the communities where they would be called upon to function.

I understand that the sponsor of this project is Rabbi David Polish, director of the B'nei B'rith Hillel Foundation at the Cornell University. This rabbinical leader declares that all too often Jewish social workers, teachers, journalists and other communal officials not only lack an adequate Jewish background, but also fall far below professional standards in their particular fields of activity. The goal of the proposed university would be "the creation of a united, American Jewry, led by men and women whose training would be a pledge for positive and creative Jewish life in America."

The training of men and women to take up positions in Jewish communal work here has never yet been considered. Most of the appointments—with, of course, a few exceptions—are made in a haphazard manner. Generally, the idea of creating a communal civil service has never even been thought of, but the day is not far distant when this problem will have to be faced.

## Consideration

**A**N anxious Jewish mother in Johannesburg, in a letter to her son in the army up North wrote:

"Darling, I hope you are rising punctually every morning and not keeping the regiment waiting for breakfast!"

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