

Zionist Conversazione.

INTERESTING LECTURE BY Dr. A. BIRNBAUM.

The fortnightly Conversazione took place at the Zionist Hall on Tuesday night. Dr. S. E. Kark was in the chair.

Dr. A. Birnbaum delivered an interesting lecture on "Libels and Accusations in the Name of Religion." He dealt with the psychological origin of false accusations in general and the blood libel in particular. Civilisation, he said, began when human beings first realised that in order to live together the individual must be prepared to submit to rules and give up some of his liberty. Before the beginning of civilisation might was accepted as a fact; the idea that "might is right" came later and presupposes the existence of right and wrong, thus demanding some explanation for one's actions.

Religion, said the lecturer, is the basis of civilisation. The moment human beings began to feel the need for religion, civilisation came into existence. Pagan religions, however, did not discard the fact of might, but transferred this quality to their gods; but the moment they accepted religion they submitted to the limitation of human liberty by the gods. If the strong still wanted to assert his superiority he had to look for pretexts justifying his action. Among the individuals of one denomination this caused little difficulty. When it came to the relations between nations, however, a pretext for oppression had to be invented and this was found in the explanation that oppression was ordered by the gods. New reasons were given for punishing other nations, such as slandering their god or insulting the adherents of their god.

Blood Libel.

The Christians had to justify to themselves and to the world the tortures they inflicted on the Jews. Many accusations were made, the chief being the blood libel. This was not accidental, but due to the fact that blood was considered by all primitive people as the source of life. Dr. Birnbaum explained in detail three forms in which the blood libel appeared and showed that in each case there was a psychological need for the Christians on the one hand to debase the Jewish religion, and on the other to justify their own atrocities. There have been hundreds of trials in connection with the blood libel, but in all but three the Jews were acquitted, and even in these three the Jews were sentenced for common murder and not for ritual murder. The Popes, especially Pope Innocent IV and Benedict XIV always testified to the absurdity of the libel. The masses, however, continued to believe in it, as was seen in the Hilsner, Beilis and Tissa Esler trials. A special edition of the "Stuermer" in 1934 was devoted to the blood libel and called forth explanations and protest from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, and other prominent people.

Reaction to Libel.

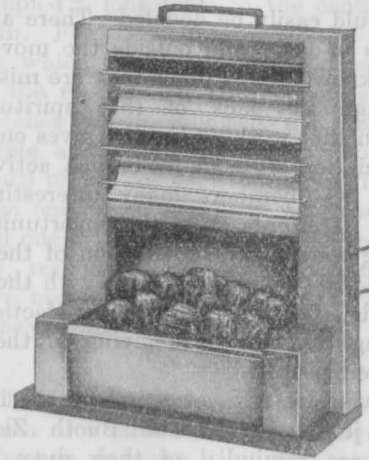
In conclusion, Dr. Birnbaum said he considered that our reaction to all kinds of libels should not be an apologetic one. The Jews should impress on non-Jews that whatever might happen to them, they would not allow their adversaries to besmirch

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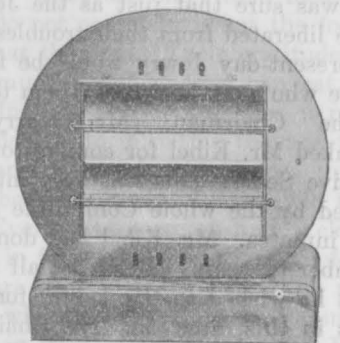
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their honour. The duty of Jewish representatives was to tell their enemies that they would never succeed in putting us morally on the defensive. All other methods of combating anti-semitism were of no avail.

Mr. B. L. Rubik and Mr. M. Arenson took part in the discussion.

Presentation.

During the course of the evening a certificate for ten trees was presented to Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Heneck, having been subscribed by the Dorshei Zion Committee on the occasion of the Barmitzvah of their son. Dr. Kark paid a tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Heneck for their devoted labours on

behalf of the national cause. Mr. Heneck suitably replied.

Mr. M. Natas gave a humorous reading in Yiddish and Miss S. Sopher rendered Hebrew songs which were very much appreciated.

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