

UNITED S.A. JEWISH WAR APPEAL.

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were broken, but hundreds of thousands in various countries could be helped now. There was no corner of the world in which there were not destitute and starving refugees. Palestine had taken more than any other country and this meant a great strain on the economy of the country.

The generosity of South African Jewry, said Mr. Bloch, was over-rated; the whole standard of giving must be changed; the time had arrived for the sharing of capital resources. It was the duty of Jews in free and democratic countries to help to rescue the millions of European Jews who were dying a terrible death. English Jewry with all their crushing burdens and in the height of the bombing attacks had asked for a delegation to come to England to conduct a Keren Hayesod campaign. That was a most warm-hearted and meritorious act and South African Jewry, who had not their burdens, must act in the same spirit to-day.

During the evening Cantor M. Katzin rendered several songs and Mr. Lionel Bowman piano solos, which were very much appreciated.

Cantor Mandel's Farewell Recital.

Cantor S. Mandel gave a farewell recital at the Zionist Hall on Tuesday night. He rendered Maariv, and several sacred melodies and Jewish songs. The programme was very much appreciated by the large audience present and Cantor Mandel received a fine ovation.

Mr. Sher and Mr. H. Rabinowitz were the accompanists; Mr. Rabinowitz also gave several pianoforte solos.

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Applications are invited for the post of SHAMMOS to the above Congregation.

Applications, stating full particulars of age and salary required; whether married or single, must be submitted not later than **Monday, 10th February**,

Applicants must be strictly Orthodox.

Applications must be addressed to:

THE SECRETARY,
P.O. Box 1792, CAPE TOWN.

Originality of Religious Customs.

A Reply to Josephus.

There is an old story told of a man who lived in the Middle Ages when every town was still surrounded by a big wall above which rose a high watchtower. He was the watchman of the city and would sit on the top of the tower and incessantly and indefatigably watch the horizon for anything unusual or foreign in the vicinity. When a long time passed and nothing happened, he became somewhat bored. When it is one's profession, perhaps hobby, to discover strange and unusual things which are not easily found, one begins to discover something strange and foreign in even the most familiar sights. This is exactly what happened to the man on the watchtower. He discovered things which did not actually exist and as time passed he himself came to believe in the strange things he found everywhere. What seemed to be familiar and intimate to everybody else, became odd and peculiar to him. He alarmed the town that was entrusted to him and caused confusion by his conduct.

We, too, are living to-day in very confused times. Not only are we confused on account of political events touching the fate of all nations and especially our own, but the age in which we are living is more confused generally because those spiritual foundations built thousands of years ago are tottering and seem to be on the verge of collapse. It is for this reason that ideas, laws and customs which for long were regarded as the expression of our own national genius, are now being described as accidentally borrowed from other peoples. Even sacred statutes, considered as divinely revealed, are being claimed to be poor crumbs left from the opulent table of a much earlier nature-religion.

It is quite true that, from the very beginning, the Jewish people tasted of many cultures, and that some of our Jewish customs are influenced by an early kind of nature-religion or by customs and conceptions of other peoples. (See e.g. Mishnah Taanith, 4, 8; the ceremony of Tashlich; the custom of Kapparoth; the beating of the willow-bundle on Hoshanah Rabba).

The results of research work in comparative history of religions, rites and folklore are only in their embryo-stage, but one thing is already clear the significance of which cannot be sufficiently stressed. We have not assimilated ourselves by taking over customs from other peoples. Rather is the opposite the case. We incorporated other people's customs, but we wove them into our lives and made them sacred by our own genius.

Why always belittle our own strength? Why always claim that we are unable to create the right expression of our own Jewish life by our own means? Apart from any Jewish-traditional views, it is regrettable to see how Jewish consciousness is weakened by statements such as that there

is no difference in principle between our Hanukkah-candles and the Christmas tree. Josephus sees the origins of both linked with the ancient deity of Tammuz, who rose annually with the birth of vegetation, and to complete the whole idea, he connects the death of Tammuz, who perished in the burning summer sun, with our fast day of the 17th of Tammuz.

Ezekiel (Chap. 8) denounced as a great abomination the act of women sitting in the House of the Lord weeping for Tammuz, i.e. Adonis, the Greek deity of beauty. Ezekiel found the Jewish people in Palestine, or rather that part of the Jewish people left there after Jehoiachin was carried captive to Babylon in 597 B.C., entirely corrupted. His hope lay with the exiles who had preserved their idealism and the monotheism of their ancestors, and he succeeded in gaining spiritual leadership in Babylon. When Nehemia came from Babylon to Jerusalem, about 140 years later, he brought with him all the true Jewish tradition taught by Ezekiel and his followers, and he carried with him the hate against any strange and foreign influence on Jewry. [See his grandiose recapitulation of Jewish history under the aspect of God's Kingdom (chap. 9) and the sealed covenant-amanah (chap. 10), whose practical consequences are described (chap. 13)].

It is, therefore obviously unlikely that, as "Josephus" believes, Nehemia brought the Tammuz or Nergal cult to Jerusalem. There cannot be any question of having "spiritualised" a heathen belief. To suggest that Nehemia who was himself responsible to a very large extent for many of our religious practices, "reclined upon every high hill and under every leafy tree" saying "to a tree, 'Thou art my father,' and to a stone, 'Thou hast brought us forth'" (Jerem., chap. 2) is a complete denial of our Jewish genius.

As regards Hanukkah, having in mind the teachings of our prophets which no one can deny since they are put before us in their books, it would be an historical untruth to despiritualise its meaning and to regard it as having only a militaristic significance, in keeping with the times. Besides, what are we going to gain by stressing its militaristic character, by stamping it is a festival of martial heroism? How can one explain to a Jewish child where the limits are to the deification of martial heroism? Deification of brute force and violence is quite common in many kinds of nature-religion. Are there also some traces of that Weltanschauung in our Jewish religion and culture?

Dr. H. ABT.

[The article by Josephus to which this is a reply was published in the S.A. Jewish Chronicle of 17th January.—Editor.]

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