

UNITED S.A. JEWISH WAR APPEAL.

Inaugurated in Cape Town.

Reception in Honour of the Hon. Mr. Justice Greenberg.

The United South African Jewish War Appeal was inaugurated in Cape Town on Sunday night at a Reception at the Zionist Hall in honour of the Hon. Mr. Justice L. Greenberg, Judge-President of the Supreme Court, Transvaal, and Mrs. Greenberg. There was a large and representative gathering present and the Appeal met with a good response.

Mr. M. ALEXANDER, K.C., M.P., was in the chair and read a telegram wishing the campaign success from the National Committee of the United Appeal in Johannesburg, and a letter from Mr. Leon Segal, Chairman of the Cape Committee, who had left for the U.S.A. the previous day. He extended a cordial welcome to Mr. Justice Greenberg, whose career had shed lustre on South African Jewry, and to Mrs. Greenberg.

Mr. WOOLF HARRIS said he had watched the career of Mr. Justice Greenberg from his early youth and it had more than justified the highest expectations. He hoped he would be spared for many years to occupy his high office. He had much pleasure in welcoming him and Mrs. Greenberg.

Touching on the objects of the Appeal, Mr. Harris said that the time had arrived for us to give our brethren in distress something more than the crumbs from our table.

Mr. JUSTICE GREENBERG, on behalf of Mrs. Greenberg and himself, expressed deep appreciation of the cordial welcome. He outlined the objects of the Appeal in which the S.A. Board of Deputies and Zionist Federation had united. Millions of Jews in Europe had been rendered homeless and destitute and while it was impossible at present to aid a large proportion of these, the demands after the war would be very great in order to help them to rebuild their shattered lives; it was therefore important to have funds in reserve for any emergency. At the same time there were enormous numbers of Jews in various countries who were in great need and who could be assisted now, and it was up to South African Jewry to help to alleviate their distress.

As regards Palestine, continued Mr. Greenberg, though the great victories in the Western Desert had altered the position materially, the danger to that country was by no means over. Palestine might become the focal point of offence; the course of ordinary life would then be disturbed and new financial needs created. The Jews knew from past experience that they could expect little from the Government; in war as in peace they had to depend on themselves and Jews who lived in free and democratic countries must help to the utmost of their ability.

He was well aware, said Mr. Greenberg, that in Cape Town as elsewhere, Jews con-

tributed generously to general funds. But what was now asked was a contribution in addition to and not in substitution of other contributions. Our clear duty as citizens was not to lag behind in shouldering our burdens. But as Jews we must shoulder an extra burden—an obligation to which indeed Jews were accustomed. The difference is: our lot compared with that of our brethren overseas was not due to any particular merit on our part, but to the fact that our parents or grandparents had been prompted to come to this country. Our thankfulness for this good fortune could be shown by contributing generously to the Appeal.

RABBI I. ABRAHAMS said that in order to feel with our distressed brethren we must properly realise the facts of the situation. He drew a graphic picture of the plight of Jewry in Europe to-day, and declared that it was our solemn duty to save those that we could now and be prepared to help all the victims after the war.

In Palestine, continued Rabbi Abrahams, there had been no peace for three years before the outbreak of war, and now the county was in the danger zone. Palestine was our lodestar, the source of our hope, and peace for the Jews as a nation would be won only in Eretz Israel. Jews who could do so must assist in winning that peace by helping the Yishub to defend itself

and all that had been built up with so much toil and sacrifice.

As regards the third object of the Appeal, continued the Rabbi, it was the duty of Jews in South Africa to assist their own heroes. Many who had joined up would be disabled after the war and would have to be supported, others would have to be integrated into the economic life of the country, while widows and orphans would have to be assisted.

We stand to-day, said Rabbi Abrahams, at one of the greatest crises in history. It was our privilege here to give and to help bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness and the dawn of a new and better order.

Mr. H. M. BLOCH said the Appeal launched elsewhere in South Africa had met with success according to certain standards, but the response was hardly commensurate with the great and urgent needs. Jews had entered on the eighth year of war declared on them by Germany; it was a war of extermination and we as a people had already suffered more casualties than any other people. 250,000 Jews had been killed, and we had lost by reduction to destitution a half of the Jewish population of the world. There were 8,000,000 Jews living under the shadow of the swastika; the vast majority could not be helped until their shackles



Left to Right: Rabbi I. Abrahams, Mr. Justice Greenberg (speaking), Mr. M. Alexander, K.C., M.P., Mrs. L. Greenberg, Mr. Woolf Harris.

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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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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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