

Report by the Director of Jewish Education in the Cape.

The following report submitted by the Director of Jewish Education in the Cape, Dr. A. Sternbaum, to the Chairman, will be presented to the Sixth Biennial Conference to be held at the Zionist Hall on Sunday, 27th February, 1944:—

PROGRESS.

In spite of the most untoward circumstances and war conditions the bulk of the Hebrew schools in our area showed no sign of decline but maintained their standard of progress and achievement. In fact, the leading school under supervision has even succeeded in extending its activities by attaching a Std. IX to its regular classes and by opening evening continuation classes for higher studies, the latter being attended twice weekly by a large number of post-graduate students. It is to be hoped that soon a regular Std. X will be constituted with Talmud, Hebrew literature and present day Jewish themes as the main subjects of tuition. In addition some other schools, particularly the larger ones, have enhanced their educational level and succeeded in lowering the average age of entrance as well as raising that of school leaving. On the other hand, some of the smaller schools have been showing signs of deterioration both regarding number of students and quality of tuition.

SCARCITY OF TEACHERS.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs is due to the frequent shifting of Jewish families to the larger centres (a tendency which is based on socio-economic reasons and which is peculiar to this country), which in turn causes continuous fluctuation in the numbers of pupils in the schools, there is yet another factor that has to be considered. The main cause for the notable deterioration in some of the smaller schools and generally in the level of achievement of private tuition, is a most serious lack of qualified teachers. The larger schools are certainly better off since their financial position enables them to engage the services of experienced teachers. But even there the scarcity is gradually becoming felt. This state of affairs cannot continue any longer and steps to alleviate the position must be taken at the earliest possible opportunity; for lately even the larger schools had to curtail the tuition hours of their individual classes for lack of teachers. We have thus reached a most paradoxical state, i.e., we are not in a position to satisfy the genuinely minimal cultural demands of our communities, whereas our main task should have been to stimulate the demand for the "community" we are in a position to offer. I feel it my solemn duty to issue this grave warning to the leaders of our community, that unless we are enabled to introduce a number of suitable teachers from abroad we shall be faced with a steady deterioration in our entire educational system.

PUBLIC INTEREST.

That the demand for a thorough knowledge of our Jewish history and culture has increased in recent years is an undoubted fact. Jewish education has at last been put on the map, and the Jewish national institutions of this country, as well as individuals, show a keener interest in the Jewish educational system of our growing generation than ever before. Thus the Board might certainly feel some satisfaction that its efforts in arousing public interest in our educational institutions have shown appreciable results. This has become manifest not only by the launching of the Education Campaign but also by the most satisfactory results it showed, particularly by the frequent discussions in the columns of the Jewish press as well as from public platforms on matters directly or indirectly connected with Jewish education.

SYLLABUS.

I am pleased to be able to report that the syllabus introduced by the Board in 1939/40 has proved most suitable and successful in all but one respect in regard to which some alterations had to be made. If the period of tuition could be increased, say by one hour per week, I should most earnestly suggest that "current events" should be taught in our schools. This would include not only problems directly concerning our own people but also such issues connected with the social and

ethical structure of all nations. It is amazing how little the youth of South Africa know of the ideological concepts that occupy the minds and interest of the intellectuals of the world at the present juncture. Owing to the peculiar position of Jewry as a scattered people amongst nations with different economic, social, moral and political structures, it is most urgent for Jewish Youth to acquaint themselves, at least elementarily, with those cardinal problems. The time factor, however, is the most decisive one. As long as our parents do not agree to emulate the example of many communities in America and England who send their children to "cheder" for 8-12 hours weekly, we shall not be in a position to add to the subjects taught in our schools.

SCHOOL TERMS AND SCHOOL COURSES.

Despite the efforts of the Board there is still no fixed time for the enrolment of new pupils in some schools, and students are being accepted at any time throughout the year. Parents bring their children for registration whenever they please without considering the disturbance this must of necessity cause to the normal graduation of school classes. School committees are earnestly requested to impress upon parents the urgent necessity for enrolling their children at the beginning of the school year (July) or at the half-year term (January). This will obviate the confusion and superfluous multiplicity of classes prevailing in various schools.

While a considerable number of parents have gradually reconciled themselves to the idea of a "school course" in the sense that a scholar must not leave school before he or she has completed the course set out by the curriculum, the bulk of our parents are still in the habit of withdrawing their children from school whenever they so desire. The scholars thus do not graduate from the school but simply desert it. Here too the public must be enlightened continuously. They must learn to realise that the syllabus drawn up by us is the bare minimum needed for the upholding of our national and religious traditions and that our intention has never been to make "rabonim" or "rebetzens" of their sons and daughters.

ATTENDANCE.

The regularity in the attendance of scholars enrolled in our schools shows a most gratifying improvement. The average attendance now is 82 per cent., an increase of 8 per cent. as compared with the previous period. Of course, in this connection as well as in regard to the question of early enrolment, there is generally a notable difference between the "richer" and "poorer" areas, in favour of the latter.

METHODS OF TEACHING.

The argument about the two main methods of language instruction, the direct and the translation method, which had been decided long ago in favour of the former, has recently been engaging the interest of many a layman who in his leisure time occupies himself with Talmud Torah problems. It would be inappropriate in this report to enter into a scientific analysis of the problem. I merely want to stress that the question must be left to the professional authorities who alone are able, in the light of scientifically collected data, to come to objective and unbiased conclusions. It may not, however, be amiss to state that apart from its other advantages, from the point of view of time economy the direct method is preferable to that of translation which makes the lesson a mere mechanical process and whereby the vernacular takes the active and the Hebrew the passive role.

At this point I feel that a few general remarks as to the propriety of interference of members of school committees and other laymen in matters, the professional nature of which is patent, are necessary. While the aim and object, the so-called "endziel," of our educational institutions should

certainly be defined and designed by the community as a whole and its leaders as represented by the various committees, the formulation of the detailed syllabus as well as the methods of tuition for each and every subject must of necessity be left in the hands of experts. Only such experts are qualified to determine what is an adequate syllabus (consonant with the broad aims adopted by the community) and what is the appropriate methodology. Thus if laymen try to influence the method of tuition they actually encroach upon a field that is not theirs. Such laymen may deserve well of the institutions concerned, but the less they interfere in matters of a purely professional nature, the more they will serve the institutions they have at heart. This axiom is cogent and valid when dealing with any educational institution, secular or otherwise, but it becomes a "conditio sine qua non" for the success of our special schools where even the best of the professional educators are faced with a hard problem, i.e., how to achieve the set aim in the little time at our disposal.

SINGING.

In one direction our schools certainly transgress against a well-established pedagogical principle. I refer to singing. Both in the tuition of the native and the (living) foreign languages, the song has long been recognised as one of the best means of attracting the child. In our schools this has been almost completely neglected as something puerile, a kind of "ma'asei yalduth." This is mainly due to the fact that very few of our teachers are "singers," though inertia of tradition may also contribute to this state of affairs. It might be advisable for the Board to engage a special itinerant music teacher who will teach singing for one or two hours per week in each of the schools of the Peninsula. Thus at least a number of schools in our area will have the benefit of singing lessons.

EXCHANGE VISITS.

While on this subject of method of instruction I feel that exchange visits of teachers to various schools would be of great value for teachers and scholars alike. The teacher would become acquainted with the organisation of other schools and the methods of his colleagues and thus augment his own knowledge and experience. That the schools would greatly benefit by these visits need hardly be stressed. If congregations and school committees agree to co-operate in this matter, I intend introducing visits of this kind for, at any rate, the Peninsula as soon as possible.

MORNING CLASSES.

I am sorry indeed to have to report that in spite of all the efforts of the Committee of the United Hebrew Schools, Cape Town, their experiment in the establishment of Morning Classes, i.e., a secular day school where Hebrew and other Jewish subjects are a part of the ordinary curriculum, did not prove a complete success. The number of scholars in this school year, the fourth year of its existence, is 52. This is very disappointing. For even those who emphatically oppose the establishment of a "parochial" school, seeing in it a "dangerous step towards segregation," should realise that for children of a tender age it is essential to have all their tuition in the morning hours and be free to play in the afternoons. That the attendance of the first few standards of the primary school can be termed "segregation," no objectively thinking person could seriously maintain. From our point of view it is clear that the gain that these children of the most receptive and impressionable age could have from a thorough Jewish environment and atmosphere is incalculable. It should, however, be admitted that the fact that the Jewish population is so widely scattered and tends to move further away from the vicinity of the school building, is at least a contributory cause for the smallness of the number of scholars. Under normal conditions the distance factor could be overcome by arranging for a special school bus which would fetch the children in the mornings and deliver them home after the tuition hours.

PRIVATE TUITION.

The number of private pupils seems to have considerably increased during the period under con-

sideration. There are, however, sufficient signs that the quality of the private tuition has definitely declined. Cases where parents seem satisfied that they were fully discharging their duties towards Jewry by having their children taught "Hebrew" once a week, are quite frequent. Only the introduction of an adequate supervision over the private pupils can improve matters. For this the co-operation of parents and teachers alike must be enlisted. I must here express my deepest regret that up till now the teachers, the pillars of our entire cultural structure, have shown little inclination for collaboration in this direction.

KINDERGARTENS.

The projected establishment of a network of Hebrew Kindergartens in all suitable centres could not be executed for lack of trained kindergarten teachers. In fact, the existing kindergartens in the whole Union are frequently advertising for teachers without receiving any applications. Should we succeed in our endeavours to obtain an adequate number of Kindergarten teachers from Palestine, we could immediately proceed with the opening of such schools, the necessity for which has by now become obvious to anyone who takes an interest in educational matters.

BARMITZVAH CERTIFICATES.

I am indeed pleased to be able to report that these certificates have become "fashionable" and many a parent actually insists upon the teacher (school or private) preparing his child for the Barmitzvah examination. There are still a few teachers (mostly private) who, for reasons best known to themselves, are reluctant to present their students for examination. It is, however, to be hoped that public opinion will soon succeed in convincing them of the advisability of falling in with the desires and demands of the community. The issue of an enlarged and augmented edition of the set syllabus for Barmitzvah candidates, particularly in the section "Laws and Customs," is in preparation.

BNOTH MITZVAH.

Through the initiative of Professor Rabbi Israel Abrahams, examinations for Dedication Classes for girls (B'noth Mitzvah) were inaugurated. A suitable syllabus has been prepared for this purpose. The Great Synagogue arranges annually a ceremony for the successful candidates followed by a reception when Certificates of Merit issued by the Board and presents from the Congregation are handed to them. This institution though well known in many other countries, particularly in England, has not taken root in our community and the idea has not yet acquired the popularity it merits. Those who were present at the few ceremonies at the Great Synagogue and at the receptions which followed will have noticed how impressed the girls were. This impression is likely to last and inspire the graduates in their future life with feelings of devotion to, and love for, their heritage.

CENSUS.

Even the layman will appreciate the importance of having full statistical data concerning all Jewish children of school going age with regard to their Hebrew tuition. Some ten years ago the Board instituted such a census in the Cape, which supplied most valuable data. Now, however, for obvious reasons, these data are not of much use. We have, therefore, at the end of last year, conducted a more detailed and extensive census with the kind permission and assistance of the Superintendent-General of Education in the Cape. The information thus collected will be most valuable and provide us with a scientific background for our future activities. I sincerely regret that as yet it has not been possible for me adequately to exploit the informative material gained by the

census. I am, therefore, not in a position to discuss the results of same and the conclusions to be deducted therefrom.

SEMINARY.

It is with the greatest regret that I have to report that with regard to the Teachers' Training Courses, which were long ago contemplated by the Board, little could be done. In spite of the most attractive offers made by the Board in its advertisements in the press, the response was very meagre. It seems quite clear that only a complete change in the attitude of the community towards the Hebrew teacher by granting him an adequate status both economically and socially, will attract local youth to the profession and induce parents to have their children trained for that career. A start, however, with such an institution is being made and refresher courses will be opened at the beginning of March for students who have occupied positions as teachers or ministers and who are now prepared to devote a year or two to further studies.

HEBREW MOVEMENT.

Little has been done in this direction for the last few years. This is to a large extent due to the fact that the reservoir which supplied us with new forces brought up in a Jewish atmosphere and equipped with a thorough knowledge of Hebrew, has been completely closed during the period under consideration. The little, however, that did take place in this field—a Grand Concert, many Hebrew lectures, Memorial Evenings in honour of Hebrew writers, some Hebrew classes for adults, etc.—was either directly arranged by the Board or inspired by it. In the future it will be necessary to concentrate more on cultural work amongst adults. For besides the fact that adult education, traditionally a salient item in Jewish communal activities, must range as one of the tasks of the Board, cultural activities amongst the older generation will prove most beneficial to our entire educational system. Parents who themselves enjoy a Jewish cultural atmosphere will feel encouraged and induced to see that at least some of that traditional fire that once burned so glowingly in the hearts of our ancestors should be handed over to their children.

BOOKS.

Some time after the outbreak of war we realised we then ordered the necessary books both from that a shortage of school books was imminent. Palestine and the United States of America and are now in the happy position of being able to supply schools under our supervision with all school books as prescribed by our syllabus. Even other centres are not infrequently supplied by us with urgently needed books.

In the dissemination of the Hebrew book generally we were also quite active. An average of about £100 worth of books per annum were sold by us. In the course of these activities it has been found that though not as eager and zealous as many of us were in the "old home" there is still a large number of Hebrew readers in this country who harbour a latent urge for the Hebrew book that could easily be awakened and intensified. Most pleasing is of course the fact that even young men and women born in this country are gradually beginning to appear on the Hebrew market as eager consumers. However, owing to war conditions it was not possible to make full use of this most gratifying "discovery."

In this connection I wish to express our sincerest thanks to Mr. H. Lourie, the great champion of Hebrew culture, who since his arrival in the United States has served as our "agent" and spared neither time nor energy in order to procure for us the necessary school books on the most reasonable conditions.

Special thanks are also due to the Head Office of the Brith Ivrit Olamith which tirelessly and

uninterruptedly showed great interest in our requirements and whenever possible acquired books very much needed for our educational institution.

HOLIDAY CAMP.

In many holiday resorts in the United States of America, Jewish educational institutions established Holiday Camps for Talmud Torah scholars. In those camps large numbers of Jewish children are spending their holidays in a Jewish atmosphere where our religious-national customs are being kept, games symbolising Jewish history played, lecturettes on Jewish topics held, "Hebrew hours" when all conversation must be conducted in Hebrew are observed. I submit that the Board this scheme for emulation. A Hebrew Home should be built in Muizenberg which should be open during the season and be run by a committee of teachers. Any Jewish child in the Union receiving Hebrew tuition should be admitted to the Home. I am convinced that parents knowing that their children are spending their holidays under Jewish supervision, will gladly pay the fees necessary to cover the expenses involved.

In conclusion I should like to say that though I know very well that it will not be possible immediately to realise and bring to life most of the suggestions and recommendations contained in this report, I nevertheless feel that they should be given immediate aim and goal towards which our endeavours have to be directed. The development and upbuilding of any educational system is a gradual process which by the nature of things can never reach completion but has always to be continued. Let all of us, congregations, committees, teachers and the Board, do our share in this edifice which will be edifying to each and every member of our community.

OUTGOING COMMITTEE.

The following are the outgoing Committee of the Board: Dr. C. Resnekov (Chairman), Dr. H. Hurwitz (Vice-chairman), Mr. J. Gitlin (Treasurer), Mr. E. Zion (Financial Secretary), Mr. M. Morgenstern, Messrs. J. M. Heneck, A. H. H. man, M. A. Aronson and M. N. Marks, Mr. M. Heneck, Rev. M. J. Cohen, Miss F. H.owitz, Mrs. M. Aronson, Messrs. I. Bitan, E. Levite (resigned) representing the Hebrew Teachers' Association. Miss T. Gassner has been serving as secretary since October, 1941.

AGENDA FOR THE CONFERENCE.

1. Reading of greetings and messages.
2. Chairman's address.
3. Financial Report by Treasurer.
4. Report by Director of Education.
5. Discussions on reports.
6. Luncheon for delegates.
7. Resolutions on Constitution.
8. Nominations and Elections.
9. Resolutions.

Bible Reading in Jewish Home

The Chapters to be read during the week commencing Saturday, 26th February (17th Adar) are Deuteronomy, Chapters 18 to 21.

שבת

The BETH DIN announces that Sabbath commences on February 25th at 8.9 p.m. and ends on February 26th at 8.54 p.m.

COMING!

The Mightiest Show in the history of the Western Province

A Great National War Fund Project

7 days... 25th March — 1st April 1944

LIBERTY CAVALCADE

93 ACRES - - - 70 to 80 SECTIONS

★ Biggest Defence Exhibit ever seen in South Africa

★ Huge Railways and Harbours Section

★ Over 20 National Villages Etc. Etc. Etc.

SPACE DONATED BY JOHN HAIG & CO., LTD.