

Interview with Mr. B. Gering and Mr. S. M. Kuper.

VIEWS ON PALESTINE COMMISSION.

South African Jewry's evidence before the Inquiry Commission, as well as various other aspects of the hearings, were discussed by Mr. B. Gering, Vice-Chairman of the S.A. Zionist Federation, and Mr. S. M. Kuper, Chairman of the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, in the course of a press interview last week. Mr. Gering and Mr. Kuper returned recently from Palestine, where, with Major Comay, they presented the memoranda of their respective organisations. "I think on the whole it was a very good thing that South Africa was represented," said Mr. Gering. "My feeling is that the Commission was impressed by the fact that we had come all the way especially for that purpose." "And," added Mr. Kuper, "I think the Palestine Jewish Community was pleased that South Africa has taken this step. Incidentally we were the only Dominion which has taken action regarding the Commission."

SUSPICIONS DISPELLED.

Since their return to South Africa, said Mr. Kuper, they had gained the impression that there existed certain suspicions that they had been treated discourteously by the Commission. He wished unhesitatingly to dispel those suspicions. They had been unavoidably delayed on their journey to Palestine and arrived there when the Commission had already commenced its work. Owing to the heavy programmes which had been planned for the members of the Commission to tour the country during the limited period of their stay, it was impossible for a full session to be held to hear the South African evidence. But a special session had been arranged for this and four members of the Commission were present. They had expressed their deep regret at the unavoidable absence of the other members.

As for the criticism that the members of the Jewish Agency had not attended the session devoted to hearing the South African representatives, they had not for a moment regarded this as a slight. It was impossible to conceive how busy the members of the Jewish Agency were, particularly in connection with the Commission's presence in Palestine. The Jewish Agency treated them extremely well and had gone out of their way to help them and give them all the information and assistance they wanted.

COMMISSION'S REPORT.

Asked what line the Commission's report would probably take, Mr. Kuper stated that as a matter of policy the members had decided not to have a round table discussion whilst in Palestine but to postpone this until they got to Switzerland. They had mingled freely with the community in Palestine and had often expressed their own individual viewpoints. But the views of the Commission as a whole were, purely a matter of guess work. "I could say, for example," said Mr. Kuper, "that some of the members, particularly the Americans, were very favourably inclined towards the Jewish case and will probably continue to be so till the end. But it is the desire of the Commission as a whole to present a unanimous report and if this involved conflict with the views of the Americans in question they might consider it advisable to compromise on certain points rather than present a minority report."

Mr. Gering said that the general feeling in Palestine was that the report would not recommend the granting of either a Jewish State or an Arab State. It was generally anticipated that the demand for admission of 100,000 Jews would be granted, although again it was impossible to say what period would be laid down for the entry of the full number. The Yishuv would certainly strain every nerve to bring them in within one year. "Generally," said Mr. Gering, "I feel too much stress has been laid on the admission of 100,000. Many more than that number will have to come in."

The Commission seemed to be very much concerned whether Palestine could absorb this number of people. Mr. Gering was certain that Palestine could absorb them. In this connection he mentioned the fact that most of the inmates of the camps were young people and a large number of those had already come to Palestine and gone on to the land. There might, in the process of absorption, be a certain amount of discomfort, but whatever the position, "Palestine was still better than life in the camps or in any other place." As for the possibility of partition, all that could be

(Continued in Second Column).

Sighs of the Harp.

.. By ..

SAUL TCHERNICHOWSKY.

*By Babylon's rivers in majesty sweeping,
We sat, we were silent, we wept;
On willows by brooks, that enwrapt were in
mourning,
Our harps and our cymbals we kept . . .
For joy hapless exiles may not have yearning,
Nor dare the harp waken that slept;
They did touch the chords—these spirits that
died,
At touch of sweet pleasure they silently sighed.*

*The strains we yet hear . . . and in latter days,
Through mists of the centuries ranging,
The harp waketh only to sorrowful lays,
We change into dirges our singing;
Millennial years flow like water-ways,
Yet still the sons only keep mourning.
Wake we but glad lyrics, e'en melodies tender,
Then heavy hearts answer with querulous
murmur.*

*The end of the vision—who's able to tell me?
In vain, ah, I hoped for the answer,
In vain, too, my eye in the books I did weary,
In vain, ah, I mused and did ponder.
I dream a fair dream—I averred: "It misleads
me,"
And evil I shunned—did engender;
In vain to interpret the vision I sought,
I was inextricably snared by my thought.*

*O who shall at last bring this song to its
ending?
Shall ears its close ever hear?
Perchance, with the banished to Zion return-
ing
This dolorous song will expire—
A paean arise, that will proudly go ringing,
With tabor and cymbals to answer?
Or in end of days, with tragic outcry,
The song of lament will be cut off—for aye . . .*

Translated by Rabbi Israel Abrahams.

(Continued from First Column).

said at this stage was that it was probably in the minds of some members of the Commission.

"The Arabs," said Mr. Gering, "if they had a case, spoil it by exaggeration and by statements which did not conform to the facts." On the whole they did not make a good impression. But, he added, "the question is, will the ultimate decision be given on the basis of merit or expediency; if merit, then I think we have a hundred per cent. case."

THE YISHUV.

Speaking of the atmosphere in the Yishuv generally, Mr. Gering said the people were feeling very bitter. The question was put time and again: Why further Commissions?—can't they see we are entitled to a home and what we have done to achieve it? They were at the same time determined to carry on with their work and bring in all the people who could possibly be brought in and let practical facts decide the issue.

As for the British soldiers in Palestine, they were beginning to feel very unhappy. Some of them were asking themselves why Jews were being hunted down and shot at. In spite of the deep feeling in the Yishuv the Jewish services clubs were still carrying on as during the war and all the soldiers were entertained and given hospitality at them. Mr. Gering mentioned that the Jewish services club in Tel Aviv had given hospitality to over two million soldiers during the war. And he concluded by saying: "One must see Palestine to realise how much we have achieved in spite of all obstacles. Only after one has toured the country, going from one point of Jewish settlement to another, does one begin to minimise the political difficulties."

Jerusalem.

On 21st March a ceremony was held at Kfar Ruppim communal settlement in the Beisan Valley to inaugurate the first wing of "Ruppim House," which is eventually to comprise several study rooms devoted to social science, a lecture hall, and the library of the late Dr. Ruppim.

Cape Jewish Orphanage.

APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPAL AND MATRON.

On Tuesday evening of last week the Committee of the Orphanage attended at the Home to welcome Major and Mrs. J. Potashnik as their newly-appointed Principal and Matron.

Mr. B. A. Crasnow presided and he was supported at the tea table by all the Past Presidents, Mr. J. Kadish, the Hon. Life President, Mrs. H. J. Stodel, the Hon. Life Chairlady, Mrs. A. V. Jacob, the Chairlady, and the full Executive and most members of the Committee.

The Chairman in a short speech said that Major and Mrs. Potashnik took over the practical work of the Home on Sunday last and it was already evident that the children had at last found a real father and mother and that these good people were fitting admirably into their new sphere of life work. On behalf of the Committee he cordially welcomed them and hoped that their work would bring happiness to the children and honour and happiness to themselves.

Mrs. A. V. Jacob, Chairlady, Mr. J. Kadish, Hon. Life President, and Mr. H. Stodel, Past President, also voiced their pleasure at having at last been able to appoint a couple who would be real parents for the children.

Major Potashnik in responding for his wife and himself to the splendid welcome accorded them, spoke feelingly and thoughtfully on their aspirations in undertaking this important new work. He had taught Hebrew and religion for two decades and had always had a feeling that the theoretical teaching had been something apart from practical Jewishness. He and his wife hoped, now that they had a family of children for 24 hours each day instead of just the five hours of theoretical teaching, to be able to combine theory with practice. They looked forward to seeing for themselves and showing to the community the practical results of their labours.

Before tea was served Mrs. A. V. Jacob and Mr. J. Kadish warmly expressed the Committee's gratitude to the Secretary, Mr. E. H. Kloot, for his work in the Home itself during the months of the past year when the Home had had no Principal and Matron.

Mr. Kloot suitably responded, assuring the Committee and the new Principal and Matron that he would be happy to co-operate with them in their work for the children and the Home.

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Major Potashnik was educated in the Kneset Beth Yitzhak Rabbinical College and was trained as a teacher in the Mizrahi Seminary of Vilna. He came to South Africa in 1926 and served as minister for four years. He then settled in Cape Town as Hebrew teacher and was in charge of the Wynberg Hebrew Schools where he did valuable work from 1935 until the outbreak of the war, when he joined up as a private for active service. He was appointed Army Chaplain in May, 1941, and was posted to the Northern Command. In October of that year he was sent to the Middle East and was stationed with the U.D.F. Admin. H.Q. in M.E.F. He was promoted to the rank of Major in recognition of his able services in February, 1943, and became the Senior Jewish Chaplain to the U.D.F. in M.E.F. In February, 1945, he was granted war substantive rank as Major.

Mrs. Potashnik was educated and trained as a Hebrew teacher in Palestine. She came to the Union in 1931 and has been Hebrew kindergarten teacher for the Bnoth Zion Kindergarten in Cape Town, also in Woodstock, and from 1936 until 1945 she has been in charge of the Wynberg Hebrew Kindergarten.

Czechoslovakian Jewry thanks the Jewish War Appeal.

The S.A. Jewish War Appeal has received a letter from the Council of Jewish Communities in Prague expressing its thanks for the shipment despatched from South Africa on the s.s. "Queda" on the 10th January, to be distributed among the Jews of Czechoslovakia. It consisted of 225 cases of grapefruit marmalade, 700 cases of jam and 1,440 cases of raisins and sultanas.

Jerusalem.

Eighteen operas and musical comedies, attended by over 150,000 listeners, have been staged by the Palestine Folk Opera during the first five years of its existence, it was disclosed by Dr. Rosenbaum, chairman of the "Friends of the Hebrew Opera," at a gathering held in Tel Aviv.