

CANTOR REPLIES TO CRITICISM OF SERVICES

The Editor, "Zionist Record."

Sir,—In the last three issues of the "Zionist Record" there appeared reports and letters criticising Chazanim and Chazonuth. I am sure that every honest Jew, when reading those baseless accusations against an institution, which is as old as the Jewish nation, could only have been very upset and disappointed.

Opposition to Chazonuth is in effect opposition to Jewish music. To abolish Chazonuth in the Synagogues means nothing less than to abolish Judaism and help the people to turn to the Reform Movement, to the beginning of conversion under a Jewish mask. The Chazan was always the magnetic figure at every ceremony, in happiness and in sorrow—at marriage ceremonies, circumcisions and funerals; the Chazan was present at every ceremony from cradle to grave. There is but one Jewish ceremony which takes place without the Chazan. This is when a husband divorces his wife and then according to Jewish tradition even the Angels in heaven cry.

One need not be a Prophet to foretell that if the Chazonuth with all its improvisations and variations were abolished, the Jewish people would be divorced from their Synagogue. Must I remind these so-called critics, that according to the Cabbala, music was created simultaneously with the creation of the world. The Bible, which the whole world reveres, found it necessary to mention in the first chapter of Genesis the name of the founder of music, of pipe and harp, and it is for this reason that our sages introduced music, the language of God into our prayers. Thus we have prayed through the medium of song for thousands of years. The author of the book of Chronicles tells us that King David appointed a Choir-Master to conduct his Choir and Orchestra, to beautify his Psalms and Poems. His son King Solomon, was not ashamed to tell the Jewish people in his first sermon in the newly-built temple, that it was erected only for the purpose of prayer and song. *lishmoa el harina v'el hat-filah.* The "Chasid" says that "music stands above letters," which means that the Chasidic songs are higher than the Rabbi's Torah. A famous German-Jewish poet who favoured assimilation, when he heard for the first time a record of Yosele Rosenblatt's "*Mloch Al Kol Haolam,*" exclaimed that "one song of this kind will suffice to save the whole generation from conversion—a generation that remembers these religious songs from their youth.

The enchantment of our religious melodies which brings happiness through tears, joy through the songs of human tragedy is world famous, and still some of our people would like to abolish Chazonuth. He who speaks of Chazonuth must first of all have a real Jewish heart, to feel the sorrows of the Jewish nation and also to be a Jewish musician, not influenced by jazz music or even by opera, but to know the history of Jewish music and the history of the Jewish people and also be a Hebrew scholar. Then he would not criticise sarcastically the Chazan with his "beautiful Lyric-Tenor." He would know that the Jewish Law says that the Chazan must possess a pleasant voice and must sing nicely. It is therefore very regrettable that such criticism of the Chazanim and Chazonuth was uttered at a public meeting of the United Congregation, which has always engaged the greatest and most capable Cantors from Europe in order to make their Synagogue the most attractive and exemplary of all the Synagogues of this country.

It is possible that there are among Chazanim some who are not worthy

of occupying the Pulpit, but it is wrong to insult all Chazanim who are devoting their days and years to study and service, because of a few exceptions. These so-called critics would like the Chazan to shorten the prayers, to cut out a great part from the Machzor. But it is interesting to note that these criticisms come from those who usually arrive late. Those who do come in good time derive great spiritual satisfaction from the services conducted in our orthodox Synagogues.

The question is, whom shall the Chazan please? Those who do not appreciate Chazonuth and do not know how to read Hebrew, or the other section? The Chazan throughout generations has never sung for the aristocrat who sits at the Eastern walls but for the masses, or, as the late Jabotinsky called them, the "*Sheaino Yodea Lishol*" who do not ask questions but contribute to everything and carry the burden of Judaism on their shoulders. I fully sympathise with those who do not wish to be entertained by music at such a tragic time when millions of Jews are being slaughtered, butchered and crippled for life, when millions of Jews are dying of starvation when it is necessary to provide Tachrichim for the dead and supply bread for the needy. I would, however, advise them to deprive themselves of bioscope, jazz music, ballet, dances and night-clubs, from wedding and Barmitzvah parties, but not to depart from Jewish prayers and Jewish songs.

The Jewish Laws provide that mourners are not allowed to go to places of amusement. The whole of the Jewish people are to-day mourners. We are standing with broken hearts before the millions of new graves of our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, but the Jewish Law does not prohibit the mourner from attending a Synagogue and listening to a good Cantor and choir. It is no doubt a shame if a Cantor defies the Sabbath openly, as was mentioned in a letter in a recent issue. Should I know of such a case I would be the first to inform his Congregation or the Beth Din, but would not state it publicly in the press which is read throughout the country. Such a Msiroh does not give us glory but assists the Reform Movement which is already a grave menace to our traditional ways, to our sorrow.

I would therefore appeal to congregants to assist us in beautifying the services and enhancing Chazonuth.

Yours, etc.,
O. ALTSHULER,

Cantor and Minister, Sydenham-Highlands North Hebrew Congregation.

(The subject will be dealt with editorially next week.—Ed., "Z.R.")

"OSTENTATIOUS SERVICES"

The Editor, "Zionist Record,"

Sir,—I found the discussion about so-called "ostentatious" services most interesting. May I make the following points:

(1) The suggestion that services during the High Festivals should be curtailed so as to conclude in good time for lunch or dinner, is preposterous. The older folk who attend Synagogue regularly are not those who grumble. As for the young people, it is shameful that a service which they attend three times a year should be rushed and the sermon curtailed in order not to interfere with the "regular meal."

(2) Congregational prayer could well be enhanced through joint congregational singing rather than performances by the choir of complicated compositions. Thus our cantors would do well to introduce simple traditional tunes and arrange for the choir to lead the congrega-

tion in singing them. This would be much more appreciated and would raise the standard of devotion.

I am told that this is actually being enforced lately by the Conservative Synagogue of America. The choir would in such a case perform the function of an organ in a non-Jewish house of worship. Younger people whose Hebrew is not very good would easily be able to join in and there would be a more general and active participation in the service.

Yours, etc.,
P. ANLER.

THE REFORM MOVEMENT

The Editor, "Zionist Record,"

Sir,—I feel that the adherents of Reform have hardly enhanced the reputation of their Congregation by their comments made in recent issues of the "Zionist Record" regarding Rabbi Shrock's alleged change of face from Reform to Orthodoxy. It appears fairly obvious that both these gentlemen have deliberately selected passages from a sermon made by Rabbi Shrock which cited out of their context completely misrepresent the message which the Rabbi wished to convey. This distortion of the truth by presenting only a particular selection of the statements made, is worthy of the worst sort of communal trouble-brewers.

The whole purport of Rabbi Shrock's sermon was to condemn what is known as Reform Judaism, as an abridged and convenient watering down of Judaism, which discards much of what is most valuable in it, and assumes an alien and assimilated character. Ignoring this basic premise of Rabbi Shrock's sermon, Mr. Cohen and Mr. Freundlich triumphantly point to his statements expressing the hope that Judaism would be interpreted in an intelligent and wholesome manner in order that our youth should gain a true appreciation of its range and depth. He did not for a moment suggest that Judaism should be limited and rendered shallow for the sake of anyone's comfort. Every generation of orthodox Jews has had to adapt its interpretation of traditional religion to a certain degree, but it has done so within a framework which must remain, if the fabric of Judaism is to retain its significant character. There is a vast difference between this reform and the Reform movement. People like Mr. Cohen and Mr. Freundlich, however, are unwilling, for various reasons, to recognise this difference, and in order to blind others to the true facts they attempt to distort them. This is not the spirit of Judaism!

Yours, etc.,
K. GRANGER.

Johannesburg.

OUTLAWING ANTI-SEMITISM

The Editor, "Zionist Record."

Sir,—In last week's issue of the "Zionist Record" much prominence is given to a report of a Board of Deputies meeting, under the caption "Deputies Again Discuss Anti-Semitism." The Jewish public, however grateful to the Board for its well-meaning efforts, is getting a little tired of these everlasting discussions on the local manifestations of anti-Semitism and the rather petty suggestions how to counteract them. These are all very interesting and

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very important points; but there can be no permanent values in dealing with minor issues, unless a vigorous attempt is made to get to the root of the trouble, and to keep in mind the fundamental and psychological aspects of the fight against anti-Semitism.

In England and Canada an attempt has been made to face the problem squarely. Last week's "Zionist Record" reports that the British Board of Deputies have made extensive enquiries about the advisability of seeking to promote legislation against community libel. The negative decision reached by the committee of investigation disappointed many members of the Board and the Jewish public, who will probably not allow the matter to drop. It was pointed out that a Gentile body, a panel of lawyers appointed by the National Council for Civil Liberties, had come to an opposite conclusion.

I feel that our own Board, in discussing the fight against anti-Semitism, might well take heed of the words of Mr. Israel Cohen, of the British Board of Deputies. He pointed out that a distinction must be made between passive and active anti-Semites. The passive ones can be cured by education; but active anti-Semites have made it their business to spread their vicious propoganda under all circumstances. They can be fought only through appropriate legislation.

Yours, etc.,
D. LEVIN.

Joel Rd, Berea.

FEDERATION OF SYNAGOGUES

The Editor, "Zionist Record."

Sir,—It is an established practice for communal institutions to make a public statement in reply to criticism in the press. For several weeks past, the local Yiddish and English press published many letters criticising the inactivity as well as the "activities" of the Federation of Synagogues. Yet the latter has not replied by any public statement.

Is this not lack of respect to the public, and to the Johannesburg Synagogue which the Federation represents? Or is it that the Federation has no answer to make and that their silence signifies an acknowledgment of guilt?

Yours, etc.,
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