

*Dora Sowden writes*

## From A Window In - Europe Anglo-Jewish Life in the Provinces

IN spite of the many Jewish clubs, institutions and movements which have their headquarters in the metropolis, Anglo-Jewish life is by no means centralised in London. You realise that as soon as you meet any Jews from the provinces. They have no "inferiority complex" at all about London.

There is, for instance, the case of Louis Cohen of Liverpool to whom I spoke at the Anglo-Palestinian Club after he had given a lecture on his "musical experiences" in Palestine. By now you will have guessed that I am speaking of Louis Cohen, the conductor—"the famous Louis Cohen" as people have begun to call him in order to distinguish him from others of that rather usual name. He is small, stock, bushy-browed, and yet wholly charming in manner, with a disarming lack of self-importance which his unusual career could so fully have justified. For Louis Cohen is one of the few English Jews who has made his mark as a conductor.

### Played With Palestine Orchestra

He has had the distinction of being twice invited by the Palestine Orchestra to conduct for them—the second time was last season when he conducted a series of subscription concerts extending over four months. If you know how critical the audiences of Eretz Israel are and how "choosy" the orchestra is about its "guest" conductors, you will realise what a "privilege" (to use Louis Cohen's own word) it was.

So Louis Cohen's reputation extends far beyond the provinces. But his name will always be linked with the music of the Merseyside. He it was who in 1930 formed a Symphony Orchestra which became the



Louis Cohen

nucleus of the Liverpool Symphony Orchestra established in 1939 and now among the best orchestras in Britain. He may thus be said to have "created" his own position—not merely taken over from someone else. The concerts which the orchestra under his baton gave in the North of England throughout the war are so well known that even in Palestine he was greeted by men of the Forces with "Good Old Liverpool."

About the standard of musical appreciation in Palestine Mr. Cohen is enthusiastic. It is not that it is discriminating only—it is individual. He had been told: "the intelligent-sia don't applaud here. They merely discuss." But the reaction to new works was most stimulating. They listened in breathless silence to English music—Delius, Elgar and others that they were hearing for the first time. And they not only applauded. They cheered. "And all this," says Mr. Cohen, "in spite of the unfamiliar style of performance which British works demand."

Of the orchestra players he says: "Rather different—full of Jewish temperament but second to none. Some of them are also fine soloists." Of the younger performers, he chose Sigi Weissenberg for special mention. "There is a tremendous amount of talent among the young players—how great it is, it is as yet impossible to say." Mr. Cohen does not throw compliments about rashly.

Yet he became almost lyrical about his experiences in Tel Aviv. Workers had complained that they had been unable to obtain tickets for his concerts which had been sold out within a few hours. It was decided to give an extra one. But the difficulty lay in the concert hall. There is actually, he says, no good concert hall in Palestine. He does not blame the Yishuv for this. "It is not a feature limited to Palestine. In England, too, we have often to depend on cinemas." (And what about us in

South Africa?) He had given his first-concert in "Ohel" (Hall of Technology) and "it was a hell of a hall." The Habimah Theatre a magnificent but incomplete structure (two builders, he said, went bankrupt while working on it) was not available to the orchestra. The only place available, therefore, for the extra concert was an open air cinema—"large enough for a dozen brass bands and better suited for them than for an orchestra because of the passing traffic." But that day all traffic was diverted—"two thousand five hundred were inside, fifteen hundred outside, and hundreds more on the roofs and verandahs around." It was an unforgettable experience.

Mr. Cohen was very much interested in what I had to tell him of our "Friends of the Palestine Orchestra" in Johannesburg. When asked what chance there was of the orchestra touring Britain he hinted that it was likelier to come to South Africa!

Standing without self-consciousness before a West End gathering, Louis Cohen of Liverpool was able laughingly to confess that he had never heard of the Anglo-Palestinian Club until some few months previously—a bold thing for someone from the provinces to tell Londoners. But not one of that audience could have reversed the "compliment." And that is my point—Anglo-Jewish life is not centralised upon London.

### South Africa Should Invite Cohen

It occurred to me—now that "guest conductors" are in fashion—that South Africa could do worse than invite Louis Cohen to tour its orchestra towns. And this actually occurred to me, rather irrelevantly, after I had had a chat with Dr. Louis Shlom whom I met in the Reading Room of South Africa House with the uniform and insignia of his profession and UNRRA still upon him, and a copy of the "Zionist Record" in front of him.

### Afrikaaner Yid

Dr. Shlom was having a much-enjoyed holiday after his work with UNRRA in Hamburg. He was particularly enjoying London music—Gigli, the orchestras, opera. We discussed the rich programmes that South Africa had been having. "Something worth going home to," he said. He had visited Ireland and was just off to Wales, getting in as much sightseeing as possible in case he had the "good luck" to be home in South Africa for the year end. "Frankly, I'm longing to hear a bit of the Taal spoken again," he told me. "I sometimes go over to the clubs where I can meet men from Holland, because that is the nearest I can get here to Afrikaans." "Don't tell me you're an Afrikaaner Yid." "Can't you hear my accent? I even write letters home in Afrikaans. I'm a Jewish Boer."

I asked Dr. Shlom about his work with UNRRA, and about Displaced Persons. "It's an unsolved problem," he said. "And it is not only a Jewish problem. There are a million people—Balts, Poles and others who refuse to go back to their countries. We call it 'the hard core.'" "And what's to be done when UNRRA stops?" He shrugged his shoulders. "That's talking politics and I don't talk politics." I left him reading the European news in the "Zionist Record."

In London, another great Yiddish writer, Itzik Uanger, embodies the Jewish tragedy in a different form. Swept out of Poland before the war in the first waves of Fascist anti-Semitism—he is a Roumanian—he found himself in France where he lived until the outbreak of war. On the eve of French collapse, he tried to reach Palestine, was swindled, almost caught as an illegal immigrant and left stranded in Marseilles. There he met a captain through whose agency he and a few others made their way to England in 1942. "One cannot speak of these things," he said, "one must write them."

### Wild-Eyed Poet

Uanger is a tall, spare, tousle-headed and wild-eyed poet upon whose face suffering and ill-health have left deep, ineradicable marks. Sensitive as are all true artists, he alternates between the fever of composition and the subnormality of despair. Now, at the age of 45, he declares that his writing days are over. Yet he is preparing a new volume "commemorative of his father and brother" who were the victims of Nazism. And he told us a wonderful story, meant to form part of a series, which shows no diminution of his inventive or imaginative faculties, though he says he cannot finish it. He declares that the light of Yiddish has gone out with the uprooting of the East European communities.

But he clings to every tie with the past and treasures every spark of survival—showed us with tenderness a letter from Rachel Korn asking for a few warm, friendly words from him, grew enthusiastic about her writing ability.

He denounces present-day Western Jewry yet hopes, even longs, to get to the U.S.A. He claims no further interest in Jewish matters, but he talked far into the night about anti-Semitism and the acuteness of "Yiddish" understanding of a certain "Anglicised" Jew. He rails against the neglect which he personally has to endure and at the same time takes pride in the popularity of his work among the Jewish masses. I asked him for a photograph. "I have long forgotten that I have a face, he said. . . ."

Itzik Uanger represents a phase of Jewish genius which Jewry can allow to perish only at its own peril. He left me wondering what the answer of Jewry was going to be . . . to him.

### Lt.-Col. Nadich Guest of Sephardic Community

Lieut.-Col. Nadich and Mr. L. Feit addressed the Sephardic Hebrew community during their recent visit to Salisbury to inaugurate the J.W.A. campaign. Mr. I. R. Rosin presided, and a vote of thanks was proposed by Dr. M. Papo.

In Gatooma, where the J.W.A. campaign was launched on December 1, Col. Nadich and Mr. Feit were once more the guests of the Sephardic community. Mr. B. S. Leon, Mr. S. N. Alhadeff and Mr. B. Chimowitz were the speakers.

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