

A Zionist Lecture Tour

By W. Rybko

The Community of Bethlehem



FIRST HEBREW CONGREGATION IN BETHLEHEM: Back, left to Right: Messrs. Addleson, Lazarus, Hirshon, Goldberg, Hurwitz (hon. sec.), Hurwitz, Ivorman, Yankelowitz, Selikson. Front, Left to Right: Messrs. Sher, Herr, Lazarus, Eisenstein (president), Rev. Moskowitz, Messrs. Israel and Selikson.

LIKE the Biblical term to which it owes its name, Bethlehem is situated in a fertile district and is described as the granary of South Africa and the hub of the Eastern Free State. Its population of 6,000 white people includes a Jewish community of some 40 families.

The community began immediately after the Boer War in 1902-3. Mr. Z. Jankelowitz, a pioneer of the community, told me that when he and his brother-in-law, Mr. Shear, came to the town in 1903, they found there only one Jewish gentleman by the name of Aizenstadt. Gradually more co-religionists arrived and in 1907 a congregation was formed and a shochet engaged. The formal consecration of the synagogue took place in 1927 and was carried out by the late Chief Rabbi Dr. J. L. Landau.

The Jewish communal register now contains 50 families comprising 165 souls. Ten of these families (comprising 33 souls) live in the district. Mr. N. W. Kaplan is president of the congregation and president of the Zionist Society. His youngest son, Mr. Isaac Kaplan, is chairman of the Zionist Youth Society. Mr. Philip Seligson is vice-president of the congregation. Mr. G. Tobias is president of the Chevra Kadisha, and Mrs. E. Tobias is president of the Union of Jewish Women.

Bethlehem has an active Benevolent Society of which Mrs. B. Rom is president and Mrs. L. Kaplan, secretary. A Jewish "landmark" in Bethlehem is the workshop of Mr. Benjamin

Munitz, local tailor. Here is a "kibbetzarnie" in grand style. Members of the community gather to get the latest news and to have a chat. During the war Mr. Munitz's workshop was referred to as "The War Office," because the war situation was always discussed there. Mr. Munitz is a popular figure in the whole district and people refer to him as "Lemech." He took the part of "Lemech" in a Yiddish play some years ago and his acting impressed itself so well on the audience that the name remained.

The community of Bethlehem includes 11 farmers, 2 tailors, 1 solicitor and 1 electrician. There is no minister for the community, and over 15 Jewish children receive no Jewish education. Many of the young people leave for the big cities when they grow up and a number of Jewish families have left the place in recent years.

PAUL ROUX

A Christian Lady Sings Jewish Songs

IN Paul Roux, 20 miles west of Bethlehem, there are six Jewish

LADIES' COMMITTEE OF THE HEBREW CONGREGATION (1927), BETHLEHEM: Standing, left to right: Miss A. Goodman, Mrs. D. Selikson, Miss M. Goldman and Mrs. S. Miller. Sitting, left to right: Mrs. T. Levenstein, Mrs. H. Goldbeg, (late) Mrs. S. C. Ackerman, Mrs. N. W. Kaplan and Mrs. S. Goldmann.



families engaged in commerce and farming. This small group of devoted Jews are generous contributors to all good causes, have never been in a position to maintain a minister and a congregation of their own. They are all members of the Bethlehem congregation.

In Paul Roux I met Mr. Harry Goodkind who told me some interesting experiences of his younger days in Liverpool.

Fifty years ago he was a member of the first Zionist Society in Liverpool. At that time Dr. Herzl visited England.

Mr. Goodkind stays with his brother-in-law, Mr. Kristal, the oldest Jewish resident in Paul Roux.

When the people of Paul Roux came to my lecture at Bethlehem they were accompanied by a non-Jewish lady who entertained the gathering with folk songs in Yiddish and Hebrew. She sang "Eli Eli" and was greatly applauded by the audience.

The Hebrew song was quite in accord with the Hebrew name of the town and the singer can be likened to the Ruth of Biblical Bethlehem.

Invitation to a Mock Wedding

All friends and well wishers of Youth Aliyah are invited to attend the "marriage" of Shirley Sheindel to Mendel Hendl at the North-Eastern Communal Hall, Pine Street (opposite Astra Theatre), Sydenham, on Wednesday, March 26, at 8 p.m.

In these days when most entertainments take a conventional turn it will be refreshing to witness a function of this nature.

The supporting cast is in character. The two leading characters have had professional experience and the producer is a well-known actor.

There will be a reception in which the toasts promise to be the highlight of the performance. In this will be included impersonations and other items by well-known artists.

The mock wedding will be followed by a dance to the accompaniment of Dockey's Masterkeys.

This function is arranged by the Highlands North and Berea Youth Aliyah committees.

Tickets, £1 5s. double. For table reservations please telephone Mrs. Q. Lieberman, 45-1386.

Popularity of Children's Fancy Dress Parties

Children's fancy dress parties are proving extremely popular. At the parties arranged by the Highlands North and Kensington branches of Youth Aliyah the children enjoyed themselves immensely.

The Observatory branch of Youth Aliyah is holding a children's fancy dress party and fete on Sunday, March 30. This function will be held at the home of Mrs. A. Feinstein, 75 Eckstein Street, Observatory Ext. There will be a number of prizes.

A variety of entertainment has been arranged.

Collected Pennies

Five-year-old Margot Jacobson, a pupil of the Sydenham-Highlands North Hebrew Nursery School, is determined to do her bit for Eretz Israel. Penny by penny, she managed to collect twelve shillings, which she sent in to the South African J.N.F. Headquarters in Johannesburg, with the request that two trees be planted in Eretz Israel on her behalf.

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