

PROFESSOR VAMBERY'S 80th BIRTHDAY.

A WONDERFUL CAREER.

Last Tuesday, Professor Arminius Vámbéry celebrated his 80th birthday. While he is still active as a publicist, we may well regard his four-score years as an excuse for a review of his wonderful life. He has himself supplied the materials in "Struggles of My Life," while a column article on him in "The Times," of the 19th inst., tends to remind the general public of the extraordinary career of this Hungarian Jew. For stranger than fiction read the adventures of the Yiddish-speaking young Bamberger, who, at the age of 12, was a tailor's apprentice, who passed as a Dervish under the name of Rashid Effendi, and later on as the Magyarised Professor Arminius Vámbéry, became the confidant of the Sultan Abdul Hamid, and the honoured guest of Queen Victoria as well as a good friend of the British Empire, whom both King Edward VII. and King George V. delighted to honour.

In spite of his wonderful vicissitudes, Professor Vámbéry is no adventurer in the ordinary sense of the term. With a frankness which seems to have given him exceeding pleasure, he has related to the world how, from the very humblest beginnings he rose to be entertained at Windsor Castle, where, calling for water to wash, he had it brought to him in a bowl by no less illustrious a personage than the future King of England. His memory and imagination, which once gained him a livelihood by the recital of Turkish and Persian tales in the coffee-houses at the Golden Horn, revelled at the idea of the former "Jew boy" being thus feted and honoured. As a philologist, with his intimate knowledge of the Central Asiatic languages, he stands high in the learned world; as an adventurous traveller in those regions closely acquainted with the inner life of the inhabitants there, he was for a long time unequalled; as a political publicist on those subjects, he once held a dominant position in the English press, and his personal relations with affairs in Central Asia are still as active and influential as ever. His consistent advocacy of British interests in that part of the world have been of great service to England, and though the Anglo-Russian *Entente* has upset his calculations and hopes, he has remained a faithful friend of this country.

Not the least interesting is the Jewish record of Vámbéry, which badly needs illustration if we are to judge by the brilliant ignorance on the subject displayed by the Vienna correspondent of "The Times" in the eulogistic article referred to. Vámbéry's father belonged to the quite common Jewish type in Eastern Europe where the husband engages in study and the wife earns the living of the family. The boy was brought up on the same lines as his father before him, but, coming into contact with modern learning, passed, like many other young Jews before and after him, from the *Cheder* to the University *Katheder*. With a phenomenal avidity for learning, which is part of the ordinary outfit of a *Yeshibah Bachur*, for which Vámbéry was originally destined, and with that heroic disregard of worldly things in the pursuit of mere knowledge, which is so pronounced a feature of the despised Talmudist, he grappled with infinite difficulties until he became superior to them. With an adaptability and resourcefulness no less Jewish, Vámbéry lost himself in the Mohammedan life in the Near Orient, but in spite of his Magyar patriotism, he never seems to have found full recognition in his own country. It was necessary for the tolerant atmosphere of public opinion in England to win him recognition. In Hungary he has been put in a back-seat, and at the Budapest University, where he has been a Professor of Oriental languages since the year 1863, he never received the honours due to him. Not that Vámbéry, who never denied his Jewish descent, ever made too much of it. The common opinion that he had been baptised has, some time ago, however, been denied by him, while at the same time he made it plain that he would have considered it dishonourable to seek baptism for material ends. He is simply a freethinker, neither a Jew nor a Christian. His children, of course, have joined the great Christian majority as do the children of most Jewish freethinkers.

But even Vámbéry has not been entirely unaffected by the Jewish problem, which has roused so many Jews to self-consciousness during the last decade or two. It was Dr. Herzl who led him to interest himself sufficiently in the Zionist scheme in order that he may bring about an interview between the Zionist leader and the Sultan Abdul Hamid, with whom Vámbéry was then on confidential terms. The interview duly came about, Herzl being passed off among the Sultan's *entourage* as a representative of the "Neue Freie Presse," in order to take people off the scent. Since then Vámbéry has repeatedly expressed his willingness to assist the cause of the Jews, and Mr. Zangwill has also availed himself of Vámbéry's wide and peculiar influence in the Near East. It is only befitting that in such a life of variegated colour, the Jewish hue should not be entirely missing.

P. G.

FEINMAN YIDDISH PEOPLE'S THEATRE.

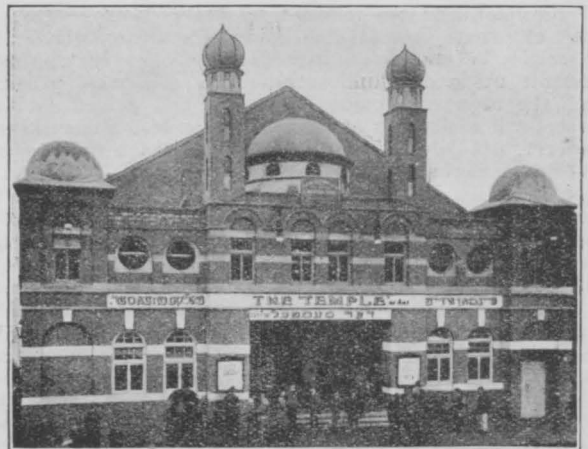
SUCCESSFUL OPENING PERFORMANCE.

Amidst the greatest enthusiasm the Feinman Yiddish People's Theatre was opened on Saturday evening last. The theatre, or "Temple," as it is called, is situated in Commercial Road, and is a handsome structure of Oriental appearance. The interior is beautifully decorated in a tasteful scheme of gold, cream, and blue.

Outside the theatre on the opening night a huge concourse of people assembled long before the performance was due to commence, and inside, although specially high prices ruled for this one evening, the building was packed. Soon after eight, the curtain rose to the playing of the National Anthem by the orchestra, and displayed on the stage, in front of a large marble bust of the late Sigmund Feinman (in whose honour the theatre has been erected), the gentlemen to whom the theatre owes its existence. In the centre stood Sir Francis Montefiore, and with him were Capt. B. J. Friend, Mr. A. Kennard, the managing director, Mr. Wright, the architect, and Mr. Kirk, the builder. When the applause had subsided, Mr. Kennard, handing Sir Francis a key, said that day, which witnessed the opening of the first Yiddish theatre in the world, was the happiest day of his life. Sir Francis Montefiore, in declaring the theatre open, said that at last their dream had been realised. He hoped that the theatre would become a centre of Jewish art and cultural life in all countries.

A number of telegrams, in English, Russian, French and German were read. Mrs. Diana Feinman, the widow of the great actor, who is now lying ill at Baltimore, said: "I wish success. Feeling better. Regards to my audience." Other telegrams were sent by Mr. Zangwill, Shalom Asch, and the Russian actor Kramskoi.

The opera, "King Ahaz," which was produced, is appropri-



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ately enough to the first Yiddish theatre, the first Yiddish opera that has ever been written. It is the work of Mr. S. Alman, the choirmaster of the Great Synagogue, who is his own librettist. The performance was a distinct success; the acting and singing were on a high level, the orchestra was efficient, and the audience were highly enthusiastic. Mr. Alman is to be congratulated for a thoroughly capable piece of work.

The scene of the opera is laid in ancient Palestine. The bizarre and somewhat savagely barbarian Orient was realistically represented by the highly-coloured scenery and costumes. The book is somewhat weak in construction. It is episodic in character and suffers from the fact that its central theme is not sufficiently strong in emotional interest, although many of the scenes were sufficiently powerful.

The score is considerably better than the libretto. It is well written, and displays a fine sense of melody. There are some very good songs, and some fine concerted numbers. The music frequently suggests very skilfully (though it does not reproduce) Yiddish folk tunes and synagogue melodies—the latter, particularly in the choruses.

Of the performers, the most striking success was undoubtedly achieved by Mr. Winogradoff, who comes from the Imperial Theatre, St. Petersburg, with a great reputation. His acting was fine, and in addition he possesses a splendid baritone voice, rich, full and resonant. Miss Zausmer (who has been with Mr. Hammerstein), Miss Davies and Mr. Kazinsky, all acted and sang well. Minor parts were capably taken by Miss Blecker, Mr. Katz, and Mr. Schachnoff. The choruses were good, but were inclined to harshness. The playing of the orchestra helped materially to render the success of the evening complete.

NORTH LONDON GROCERY RELIEF FUND.—At the distribution on the 14th inst. (19th distribution) 633 poor families received parcels of grocery.