

# Current Communal Comments

By "HAMABBIT."

## "The Incurable Optimist."

I have been informed on good authority that when Mr. B. P. Marks gave his address at Sunday morning's conference of the local governing bodies of the United Hebrew Schools, as reported elsewhere in this issue, a large number of the teachers employed by that institution had not yet been paid their June salaries—in other words, that almost in the middle of the third month they had not received their wages for the two previous months. Yet in spite of that terrible fact at the back of his mind he permitted himself to give utterance to that optimistic speech wherein he minimised the financial difficulties of the Institution and referred to the raising of £1,000 a month for that institution in the heading to this note. I leave the Institution to reconcile the statement that it is the easiest thing in the world. Mr. Marks therefore certainly deserves the description of him given in the heading to this note. I leave it to him to reconcile the statement that it is the easiest thing in the world to collect £1,000 a month from Johannesburg Jewry with the fact that the United Hebrew Schools evidently failed to do so, and must strongly deplore the fact that the teachers have had to go so long without their well-earned wages upon which they and those dependent on them rely for supplying their absolute necessities.

## A Strange Coincidence.

It is certainly a strange coincidence that both the *Zionist Record* in Johannesburg, and the *S.A. Jewish Chronicle* in Capetown—a thousand miles from each other—should have published on the same day an attack on the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, from different angles, it is true. Both are known as strong exponents of the Zionist cause in this country. The relations between the Zionist Federation and the Board of Deputies have now for many years been of the most cordial and friendly nature, on many occasions both acting jointly and harmoniously in matters affecting Jewry in general and South African Jewry in particular. The Board's Executive has nearly always included one or more members of the Zionist Federation, and as a matter of fact at the present time the President of the Federation and another prominent member thereof are on the Executive of the Board. It therefore cannot well be said—as is being said by some—that criticism of the Board have been prompted by unworthy motives, and it is to be hoped that whatever may be the outcome of this most strange coincidence it will not result in an estrangement between the two South African Jewish organisations.

## "Where is the Rav?"

Information of a very meagre character is forthcoming in connection with the project for bringing out a Rav to cater for the religious and ecclesiastical needs of the more orthodox section of Jewry in Johannesburg. It will be remembered that a prominent Polish rabbi was to have been appointed to take up this work, and it is known that arrangements were definitely made for his journey to this country.

For various family reasons, the rabbi found it necessary to postpone his journey on a few occasions, and since then complications have occurred, which make the possibility of his arrival here more than doubtful. These complications have to do with the dispute between the Federation of Synagogues and the United Hebrew Congregation of Johannesburg. One of the objects for the joining of the orthodox synagogues into the Federation was that the latter body assist in the payment towards the cost of the Rav's salary. The second complication is the passing, in the meanwhile, of the Quota Bill, which means that the Rav will have to come under the immigration limitation; and even if he decides finally to come, there will be an enormous delay before he actually lands in this country.

I learn meanwhile that there is a sincere attempt being made at a "rapprochement" between the Federation and the "United." It is to be hoped that "peace" will finally result from these negotiations, for a union of congregational effort is sorely needed in the Golden City.

## Miss Ben Jacob.

An interesting personality is quietly permeating the Hebrew educational atmosphere in Johannesburg. Some months ago there arrived in the Golden City from Palestine an unassuming little lady, filled with a desire to inculcate in the Jewish youth a knowledge of the national tongue. She approached certain organisations to assist her, but found that the machinery of these bodies did not permit them widening their activities in the direction desired. In many quarters also she was discouraged, it being pointed out to her that the position was fairly hopeless and that the parents of the children were quite disinterested.

Nothing daunted, this lady—Miss Ben Jacob by name—went along quietly from home to home and gradually aroused inspiration amongst a number of Jewish parents. As a result, she has established groups of children's Hebrew circles in various parts of Johannesburg. Her method of tuition is so unique that very quickly these youngsters begin to have a knowledge of Hebrew and even use it in a vernacular form. This is surprising in view of the non-Hebrew atmosphere in which Jews live here. Miss Ben Jacob's work is not only that of teacher but that of a real friend of the youngsters and of the parents. As a result, each children's circle becomes a social group, inspired by a leader who is filled with the fire of national enthusiasm.

The work which Miss Ben Jacob is doing in her modest and unassuming way is one of the finest examples of social and educational service ever rendered by an individual to the Jewish community here.

## Support of Talent.

There was an enthusiastic audience at the Selborne Hall, Johannesburg, on the occasion of the farewell concert given by Victor Chenkin, the master interpreter of international folk-songs. The artist must have felt the warmth of the reception accorded to him, for he reached the highest form of his art in the singing of a programme consisting of approximately forty songs. His Yiddish folk-songs were deeply appreciated, and I was pleased to observe that these fine characterisations were as keenly appreciated by the non-Jews as the Jews in the audience.

The visit of Victor Chenkin surely demonstrates that there is a public in South Africa ready to acclaim a genuine artist when he comes in our midst.

Congratulations are due to Mr. Alex Cherniavsky for having the courage to bring here an artist of world repute. This gentleman can be assured that—in spite of a few minor exceptions—the Jews in this country will rally round him in their support of performers of genius and talent.

## A New Violinist.

The concert of the Johannesburg Musical Society on Tuesday evening was made notable by the first public appearance here of Madame Minna Tomchinsky, who passed the test of a critical audience. She is undoubtedly a distinguished player of the violin.

Born at Nikolieff on the Black Sea, Madame Tomchinsky studied with Professor Auer and with Dr. Hubay at Budapest. On their advice she appeared, at an early age, at Brussels, Ostend, London, Paris and Berlin, and was everywhere regarded as a violinist of great promise.

The Russian violinist's earlier career was interrupted by the Great War, during which she was interned in Austria. From 1922 to 1925 she played under Sir Henry Wood and Sir Hamilton Harty at the Queen's Hall and the Albert Hall. The advent of this violinist will be welcomed in musical circles throughout South Africa.

Madame Tomchinsky is a member of a Zionist family, her father having been an associate of the late Dr. Max Nordau and many other Zionists of note in the early days of the movement.

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