

NATAL JEWRY IN 5691

By

"Ben Avi"

DURBAN JEWISH CLUB.

For the Jewish community of Durban, the year 5691 marks the dawn of a new era, for it is the year that saw the fruition of many years' untiring effort directed towards the establishment of a communal home. Last year saw the erection of the magnificent buildings which now house the Club, and the founding of the institution which is the pivot of all communal work in the town, and the central home of Durban Jewry.

The work during the latter stages in the realisation of this idea which was once little more than an ultra-enthusiastic dream, was carried out by a committee representative of every section of the community, but credit for the first conception of the scheme, its early fostering, and its subsequent more concrete treatment, falls to the Durban Jewish Circle.

In contemplating the splendid centralisation of the community's activities in this new body, it is fitting to pause a moment to record the part played by the Circle. In the Circle the idea was first germinated. The Circle, though superficially a society catering, from both the social and cultural point of view, for its own members only, was at all times productive in its activities of an influence which, especially during the last few years, permeated the life of the whole community. Beyond the primary duty to its own members, there was latterly a very marked striving for the prestige of the whole community. In the Circle there originated the first impetus for almost every undertaking sponsored by local Jewry, and in the Circle was born the germ of the Durban Jewish Club. The Circle has gone, swallowed up in the wider fields of the Club, but no more fitting monument could have been raised to its memory than the institution now founded.

The Club was opened in April, and although it may seem that a longer period is required for such a body to find its bearings as a club in the fullest sense of the word, it is yet possible at this stage to form some opinion of the manner in which it is fulfilling its functions. The tea-room and lounge, as evidenced by the crowds using them after evening's spent elsewhere, are definitely being recognised as the accepted place for gathering on such occasions. Visitors are entertained at the Club by members. Private parties are being held with a pleasing frequency, and for wedding receptions the Club Hall is in regular demand. The comfortable library, whose stock of books has grown considerably beyond the nucleus left by the Circle, is in constant use.

The sporting activities included in the objects forming the Club programme have not been neglected. Four tennis courts have been erected, and form a delightful addition to the general appearance of the Club grounds. With the cricket section, which is functioning with a great deal of success, and the recent inauguration of gymnasium classes, provision is made for an extension of sporting interests.

The functions arranged during the last few months have been of a very high standard, and the well-equipped stage, complete with modern devices, has made the work of the Dramatic Section an outstanding feature of the Club programme. Regular monthly dances have proved exceedingly popular, and special dances held during the season attracted a large number of visitors. The Culture Section provided a number of interesting debates and lectures, both by local speakers and by prominent visiting personalities. One function which may be singled out is the performance before the Club of the Durban Municipal Orchestra, under Mr. Dan Godfrey, Borough Director of Music, an unique evening attended by a large gathering. On this occasion Mr. Otto Siedle and Councillor Mrs. Siedle, together with numerous members of the Durban Symphony Concert Society, were entertained as special guests of the Club.

Arrangements are now pending for the granting of a liquor licence, and many other details in the hands of the watchful House Committee are receiving attention.

On the administrative side, the sterling work of the President of the Council, Mr. Cecil Lyons, and of the Chairman of the Executive, Mr. Max Wolpert, together with their respective committees, cannot be adequately praised, while in the

detailed attention required day by day, the manner in which Mr. and Mrs. Charles Myer and Miss Mimi Smo have carried out their duties is subject for extreme eulogy.

New life has been infused into the blood of the community. The social status of our people has grown, the prestige of Durban Jewry has been raised. But the work must continue. Much has been done and there is still much to do.

The seed has been well sown, the plant has taken root, blossoms have appeared, but the plant must still be tended, carefully, assiduously, unremittingly.

TALMUD TORAH.

It is not, however, to the Club alone that credit must be given for the recognition of this year as an outstanding landmark in the annals of our community's history. Another milestone has appeared on the long road—the Talmud Torah.

Until early this year the instruction of our children was a fast fading question, and the eyes of the community passed indifferently over the most important problem our people, here as everywhere else, have to face. Tuition of the children was left in the hands of the Congregations, and in the control of officials whose numerous other duties prevented the specialised attention that education of the young demands. Centralised organisation was absent, and the teaching of our children flowed on unheeded in its unsatisfactory course.

Interest was first aroused in the question with the establishment of the Hebrew Kindergarten, which in itself catered for but a limited aspect of the educational needs, but the successful results shown provided the necessary impetus for wider activities in this sphere.

November of last year saw the birth of the Durban Talmud Torah and the genesis of organised education for our boys and girls. A competent staff of teachers was engaged under an able Headmaster in Mr. Klatchko, and, combining with it the Hebrew Kindergarten, the new and long-needed institution commenced its work.

Public subscription provided the basis, and a function organised by the Circle added a further sum of £200 to the funds of the new body. The number of pupils has grown considerably, the results shown by the children have been excellent, and the Talmud Torah is fulfilling with eminent success the objects assigned to it.

The importance of the body which we have at last succeeded in founding is a well-worn topic, but too much cannot be said about the significance of the Talmud Torah to Durban Jewry. An ideal has become a fact, but here, too, the work has only begun. We have in the Talmud Torah the most urgent of our communal duties, and parents must never fail, amidst the welter of other communal activities, to pause frequently and carefully before the portals of an institution which means the training ground for our men and women of the future.

ZIONIST ASSOCIATION.

Activities in the cause of our National Movement have not been very prominent during the last year, nor has the work of the local Association been as much in the public eye as we might have wished. Publicity, however, may be a faulty criterion. The results shown by unpretentious collections, minor campaigns, and small canvasses are of immense value.

The regular duties of the local Society have been carried on during the past year, quietly, but steadily and methodically. Clearances of the National Fund Boxes have been undertaken, and the collection of Shekolim organised.

One important function to which reference may be made here, is the Herzl Memorial Meeting arranged jointly by the Association and the Agudath Sefateinu and held in the library of the Durban Jewish Club. Mr. Moss-Morris occupied the chair, and the meeting, which attracted a large attendance, was of special interest by reason of the presence of Rabbi Hirsch, who delivered an inspiring address. Other speakers of the evening were Dr. Broomberg and Messrs. Harris and Klatchko.

(Concluded on next page.)

NATAL JEWRY IN 5691*(Concluded from previous page.)***COMMUNAL COUNCIL.**

The year 5691 has yet another new flower to show in the garden of its communal activities. It is, too, a flower that is not only new to Durban, but one that is new to the communities of other large towns in South Africa—a Communal Council.

Many problems arise in every community, and have been known to arise with us in the past, which, while affecting the community as a whole, have yet not fallen within the province of any individual body. The result has been, although assistance on such occasions has always been called forth from various societies, that such problems have received, at the most, only a very desultory attention. The difficulty is that such problems have never received the specialised treatment that their importance warranted. They have had, perforce, to be limited in their treatment, by the aims and objects of the particular society concerned.

The existence of the Council means the organisation and the concentration of the forces required for the handling of such general questions. We have now an official body especially constituted to strike the deciding note in the consideration of problems, on which the various societies may have been in disagreement. Members are drawn from every section of the community, including the two Congregations, with the result that every shade of opinion is represented.

The Council is an important advance in the community and a valuable addition to the structure of Durban Jewry.

BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

The Benevolent Society has continued to carry on unobtrusively its splendid work in the relief and assistance of our less fortunate brethren. The full extent of the work done by this body is not fully appreciated by the public. During the past year many unfortunate men have received that support which has meant, in many cases, rescue from a tragic plight.

No case has been neglected, no difficulty passed by without investigation, no cry for aid gone unheard, and all this valuable work has been carried on confidentially and methodically day by day throughout the year.

A serious loss to the Society, as to Durban Jewry as a whole, was sustained in the death of Mr. Lou Barnett, for many years Treasurer, and his conscientious devotion to the work which he had made a life purpose will preserve him in our memory for many years.

YOUNG ISRAEL.

The unabating enthusiasm of the young people, who have done such excellent work during the past year, may be observed as an example to many of the senior societies of the town. Their objects, the very important objects, of providing for our boys and girls general instruction in matters Jewish, have been pursued with great success.

The opening of the Club has provided a valuable impetus to the Society. The special advantages granted by the Club has facilitated the work of the Young Israel Society, by removing the most serious difficulty encountered by them in the past, in the absence of suitable accommodation, and their activities during the past few months have been carried on with a renewed zeal.

It is fitting, in view of his impending resignation, to make reference to Mr. M. Goldberg, at present, and for a few years past, President of the Society. The name of this young man is intimately bound up with the development of Young Israel ideals in the town, and the present flourishing state of the Society is no doubt due, in great measure, to his devoted leadership and his unselfish work.

It is pleasing to note that a closer attention and a greater interest has been shown of late in the work of the Youth Movement by senior members of the community, and it is to be hoped that they will continue to offer our young people that encouragement that is of great value to the small body which contributes an important share towards the national and religious life of our community.

GENERAL.

Apart from the regular activities of local societies, many important features of our communal life during the past year remain to be recorded.

The Campaign for the Reconstruction of East European Jewry, led by an inspiring representative in Mr S. Y. Jacobi, met with great success. The July Ball again established its reputation as the most popular and successful affair of the Durban

Season. Many prominent visiting co-religionists were introduced to us through the medium of the Club Luncheon Club—the Rev. A. A. Green, of London; Mr. Ignaz Friedman, the world-renowned pianist, and Dr. Manfred Nathan.

The review of the past year is a pleasing one. Communal endeavours from every aspect show favourable results, and the year's work generally presents a satisfying appearance of success.

PIETERMARITZBURG.

The work of the local societies, limited though they are by the small community of the city, have nevertheless been carried on regularly throughout the year. The Young Israel Society has held numerous functions, and the Matthew Nathan Lodge of the H.O.D. has carried on its activities quite successfully.

The most important event to be recorded is the departure of the Rev. Jacob Levine, who left us a few months ago to take up his duties as Minister of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. Rev. Levine's departure is a serious loss to the small community he served faithfully for many years. His duties were carried out conscientiously and his charming personality made him a well-known figure in Jewish circles throughout Natal, from whom all good wishes are extended to Rev. Levine in his new sphere.

His successor in office is Rev. Massel, until recently Minister at Boksburg. Rev. Massel took up his duties two months ago.

VRYHEID.

Many attempts had been made during the two years to found a Young Israel Society in Vryheid, and to try thereby to provide the Jewish boys and girls of the town with interests of a specifically Jewish nature, but no success was achieved.

Three months ago a Society was formed and is now functioning with a great deal of success, and amidst much enthusiasm from all the young people of the town. The formation of the society was carried out under the National Young Israel Council.

Mr. Leslie Rubin, of Durban, addressed an enthusiastic and well-attended meeting of the whole community, young and old alike, in the Synagogue. Mr. Rubin spoke of the necessity of creating a Jewish atmosphere for the children and of the value of a body which would enable them to gather and discuss questions affecting our people. A resolution was moved forthwith that a society be formed, and a constitution was drawn up.

The Chairman of the Society is Mr. I. W. Schill, the Treasurer, Miss Lichtenstein, and the Secretary, Miss Saible.

The opening function, held at the Royal Hotel, was attended by a large gathering and proved an outstanding success.

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