

West Africa

ONE hears little about West Africa in this part of the world, and any news respecting Jewish contact with that portion of the Continent is always welcome. I hear with considerable interest that Mrs. Oscar Straus, widow of the Secretary of Commerce during the Theodore Roosevelt Administration (and an aunt of the Ambassador to France, Jesse Isidor Straus), has just joined an American Field Museum expedition in West Africa. She will accompany the party for two months.

Mrs. Straus, who is 74 years of age, is a remarkable type of Jewess and is certainly not afraid of the rougher or more hazardous side of life. This is not the first time that she has undertaken such an adventurous trip. In 1929 she financed and headed another expedition of the American Museum to East Africa.

Incidentally, she is not the first person of the Jewish faith to be associated with West Africa. As long ago as the 1790's a Montefiore was interested in the commercial development of that region of the continent, and, a little later, the famous Jewish adventurer and pioneer of Natal, Nathaniel Isaacs, ended his days there.

There are few who appear to know the example of a French Jew—Captain Louis Gustave Binger—who also did some valuable work in that vicinity. Binger ranks high in the roll of explorers, and his book, "Du Niger au golfe de Guinée," issued in 1892, is well worth perusal. Binger's great feat was in traversing the whole region between the coast and the Niger, signing protectorate treaties with the native chiefs on behalf of France. This happened during the years 1887 and 1889. Again, in 1892, Binger made further explorations in the interior of the Ivory Coast, and in 1893 he was appointed the first Governor of the Colony on its becoming an administration distinct from that of Senegal.

Montague Glass

THERE are many who will remember the appearance some fifteen years ago on the South African stage of two fine actors, in the persons of H. J. Amschewitz and Michael Sherbrooke, in the first series of "Potash and Perlmutter" plays. The latter were full of homely humour, and the strange characteristics of the two Jewish partners created happy amusement for large audiences.

I was grieved to learn that the author of these "Potash and Perlmutter" plays has just passed away in New York. It may not be generally known that Glass was born in England, but went to America when he was thirteen years old. He was destined for the legal profession, but on his leaving college he began a series of short sketches depicting good-natured types of Ghetto Jews, who had come into the glare of American Jewish life and who performed

Current Communal Comments

By
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strange antics in an endeavour to become quickly acclimatised. These sketches were later worked up into plays and "caught on" throughout the English-speaking world.

Whilst the "Potash and Perlmutter" productions did not show the finer and more intimate life of the Jew, they did bring to mixed audiences an idea of the simplicity and good nature of the average Jewish merchant. The plays were particularly popular with the Gentiles, who, sitting at a "Potash and Perlmutter" performance, were able to laugh *with*—rather than *at*—the Jew.

To-day these plays "date" considerably, but Montague Glass will long be remembered as a writer whose works created much amusement for playgoers. At the same time, it was these plays which made people realise that the spirit of hearty fun and good nature did fill the lives of many a Jew.

Melodies

THE development of synagogue music is a fascinating subject. I feel that more attention should be given to it by congregations in South Africa. There can be no doubt that the rendition of the latest compositions in Jewish sacred music would help to attract larger numbers to the synagogue.

In this connection, it is interesting to learn that Ernest Bloch—who is to-day probably the finest distinctly Jewish composer—has lately been devoting himself to the writing of sacred music. His set of compositions is called "Avodath Hakodesh" (Sacred Service). The tone of the work is radiant throughout and it is tinged with the glow and vigour of biblical music. The musical balance, the light and shadow of its tones, rests upon two elements. One is the gentle, pastoral refrain of the "Vay'hi Bimei Achashverosh," or the "Shir Hashirim" of King Solomon. The other is the tremendous, torrential outpouring of the prophets.

Among the loveliest passages in Bloch's "Avodath Hakodesh" are the delicately glowing recitatives "Ma tovu oholechoh, Yaakov," and the Adoration. His "Ma tovu" is reckoned the most beautiful musical rendering of this enchanting synagogal poem that has yet been composed.

The fact that a composer of the high calibre of Ernest Bloch should consecrate his talent to the composition of purely Jewish music is a welcome sign of the present times. It is an indication of the return to Jewry of some of our great artists.

It is to be hoped that shortly some of our leading congregations will import to

this country the score of Bloch's "Avodath Hakodesh" and that we shall be hearing here some of these fine melodies in our synagogue services.

Haber

ONE of the men sent out from their country by Hitler was Professor Fritz Haber, who passed away a few days ago in Switzerland. This great scientist and inventor was the leading chemist of Germany in the present generation. He was Professor of Chemistry at the Berlin University and Head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physical Chemistry.

Apart from the invention of poison gas, he invented what was even more important to Germany. He it was who discovered the process of extracting synthetic ammonia from the nitrogen of the air. It will be recollected that this rendered Germany independent of external supplies of ammonia during the War and enabled her to prolong her resistance to the blockade of the Allies.

The late Professor was born a Jew, but some few years ago embraced Christianity. Neither this conversion, however, nor his great services to Germany, aided him when the Hitler regime set in. Haber—the Jew—was drummed out of Germany and died in exile.

A Young Champion

I AM sure that the Jewish youth of this country will be interested in the remarkable achievement of a twenty-year-old Jewish lad in the East End of London. I am referring to Harry Mizler, who recently won the lightweight boxing championship of England. Mizler is still a member of one of the Jewish lads' clubs in Whitechapel. Since the days of the "father" of British boxers—the late Daniel Mendoza—the record of our people in this particular sport has been a long and honourable one and Jews have produced boxing champions of many countries.

Young Harry Mizler gained his championship honours in a fight at the Royal Albert Hall in London before an audience of ten thousand. The struggle was an epic in fighting cleanliness. Before entering the professional field, Mizler was the ex-amateur champion of England at three weights, which he secured in three successive years.

In view of the great interest taken in this country in amateur and professional boxing, it may be possible that this young Jewish fighter will be brought here. It is in the realm of physical prowess that genuine respect for the Jew is created in certain quarters.

A Good Jewish Name.

I HEARD the other day of a Jew who had a long Slavonic name ending in -ski, and who had decided to have it changed.

He did not, however, wish to take an altogether *goyische* name, he told his lawyer, and had decided to take a nice Jewish name like "Reading."