

A Yiddish Book by a South African Author*

A. SHABAN'S "HEIMLOZE TEG"

THE story purports to be the chronicle of a Jewish child who went through the Great War with all its trials and tribulations.

The hero tells his own story in the form of reminiscences. These go back to the pre-War days in a Lithuanian village where life flowed quietly, even idyllically.

At the age of seven or eight, the hero's life was violently shaken up by the catastrophe of 1914. He was exiled together with his mother and brothers (his father having been arrested in the meantime for alleged spying for the Germans), to a village in the Ukraine, whence the family again wandered to some far off city on the Volga. There the years of war, want, revolution, and civil strife passed over him until he finally returned to his war-ridden, ruined home village without finding improvement of his lot.

Taken as a novel or an autobiography, whether real or imaginary, the book is hardly a success. For it lacks all inner connection, development or flow. Instead of putting up one structure, the author has attempted several without completing one. The book even lacks a general viewpoint from which the author saw all the happenings as he wrote them down. This lack of integration and wholeness is evidenced in the inappropriateness of the title "Homeless Days," as the author does not succeed in bringing out any idea of homelessness. True, the child lived amid want and miserable surroundings, but a home he did have all the time. Indeed nothing is brought out as clearly as the fact that the child always found himself in the warm and sheltering presence of his mother.

As we read the book, we find ourselves more or less interested in the experiences and adventures of the hero, but we never get to know him as a distinct person. In spite of the intimate details of his life that he relates to us, he never emerges a full character, whom we recognise and feel with.

Somebody once said "Few people are worth listening to but everyone is worth looking at." In this book, too, whenever the author says to us "Look, this is what I saw, this is what I felt," one may follow the author profitably. But whenever he says "Listen to my conclusions or summary of events" one listens, but remains unmoved and unconvinced.

For all that, "Homeless Days" is a book that well repays reading. The style is fresh and vigorous, the approach—modern, forceful and frank, the language—juicy and pleasant-flowing. Many of the incidents depicted clearly show the author's flair for truthfulness and reality.

In this respect "Homeless Days" definitely breaks new ground as far as Yiddish literature in South Africa is concerned. So far everything attempted in Yiddish in this

(Concluded in next column.)

An Interprovincial Tennis Tournament

JEWISH GUILD INVITES COUNTRY TEAMS

An unique event in Jewish sporting circles is the forthcoming inter-provincial tennis tournament which takes place on Sunday and Monday next, the 16th and 17th inst. The tournament will be held at the courts of the Jewish Guild in Doornfontein, and teams will be competing from Durban, Bloemfontein, Pretoria and Krugersdorp. Play is due to commence at 10 a.m.

All arrangements have been made for an active social programme for the entertainment of the visitors. A special luncheon in honour of the players from the various centres will be given on Monday, the 17th inst., at the Jewish Guild, by Mr. J. H. Barnett, the President.

The tennis committee of the Jewish Guild extend an invitation to all who wish to watch the progress of the tournament.

Chanukah in Boksburg

A special Chanukah service was held at the Boksburg Synagogue on Wednesday, the 5th inst. *Maariv* was conducted by Rev. M. D. Klaff, who performed the ceremony of kindling the Chanukah candles, assisted by a choir of pupils of the Hebrew School. Various Hebrew and Yiddish songs were rendered and were appreciated by a large congregation. Masters Issy Wainer and Louis Levinsohn rendered recitations.

An inspiring address was delivered by Mr. Leon Kirsh, of Johannesburg. Mr. S. Mendelsohn, president of the Boksburg Hebrew Congregation, thanked Mr. Kirsh for his speech and appealed to parents to take a more serious interest in the Hebrew education of their children. He paid tribute to Rev. Klaff for his fine work in the Cheder.

Prizes were awarded to Sidney Selbst, Maurice Jaffe, Meir Louis, Miriam Friedman and Sheine Louis, for best attendance at classes.

(Concluded from previous column.)

country has depended largely on its "social" appeal, as it has invariably dealt with some sociological problem or another. "Homeless Days," however, is concerned almost solely with the individual-human aspect of what a child saw, felt and desired. Moreover, whereas most of the Yiddish writing hitherto was cast in the older and classical style, "Homeless Days" is modelled decidedly on the lines of the modern, plastic school.

* "HEIMLOZE TEG" (HOMELESS DAYS). By A. Shaban. Published by *Bicher Weld, Warsaw*. Sold in South Africa by *Dominion Press, Ltd., Stemens Buildings, President Street, Johannesburg*. Price, 3/6 (unbound) and 5/6 (bound).

Guild Players in "Cock Robin"

AN ENTERTAINING MELODRAMA

POURING rain in Johannesburg on Sunday evening last kept many people away from the Jewish Guild Dramatic Section's performance of "Cock Robin," which was a pity, because the show merited a larger audience than it had. The play is a melodrama, built around a murder. It is by no means a brilliant show—nowhere near the standard of Edgar Wallace—but it holds the interest and makes fair entertainment. It has the additional advantage of not calling for any great acting ability—a fact which simplifies matters for amateur players.

The title role was well played by Theo Chadwick, while Harold Fridjohn portrayed competently the part of the murderer who is not discovered till the end (though the astute spectator will guess the guilty party long before then). Muriel Engelstein was responsible for some good work as Carlotta Maxwell, while Judith Hurwitz gave a commendable interpretation of Maria Scott, the girl who "kodaks everything as she goes." The other women in the cast, Ida Maltz as Helen Maxwell, and Vera Posner as Alice Montgomery, were not quite as good as these two. Ralph Berman gave a good performance as Clarke Torrence, one of the suspects after the murder; Louis Ashberg was rather over-dramatic as Richard Lane; Louis Ostrowiak made a fair Julian Cleveland and Ual Myers a similar Dr. Grace. Marcel Ginsberg played John Jessup, a character whose part in the play seems to be entirely ornamental. This is no reflection on Mr. Ginsberg's performance, which was quite good, but rather on the playwright who introduced so completely irrelevant a character. The best performance of the evening was offered in a minor part—that of Lawrence Shulman as Henry Briggs, the stage assistant.

As for the production, it was very conventional, and could have been considerably better. There were moments of tension when the figures were grouped with obvious theatricality, and spoiled the dramatic effect in times of climax.

I made an offhand comparison near the beginning between this play and the work of Edgar Wallace. Since melodrama seems to be so great a favourite with the Guild players, one wonders when they are going to "discover" Edgar Wallace—a master of melodrama whose best work was described by Hugh Ross Williamson, in the "Bookman," as being technically among the finest of our time. One "On the Spot" or "Ringer" provides more acting opportunities, more production possibilities and more genuine interest than a hundred "Cock Robins."

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