

CANTOR ISRAEL ALTER

Impressive Recital in Wolmarans Street Synagogue

THE interest aroused in the arrival of Cantor Israel Alter to conduct a recital of synagogue prayers was well illustrated in the crowded nature of the gathering at the great synagogue in Wolmarans Street on Wednesday evening. Not only was every seat in the auditorium filled, but all the aisles and passages were crowded with people who had arrived well in time to listen to the opening notes of a cantor who had come here with a great reputation from overseas. There was also present a large body of local ministers and cantors from other congregations.

The recital was unique. In this country we have never had anything but services in a synagogue. Before the cantor proceeded with the various items on his programme, announcements were made of them by the secretary of the congregation. There was, nevertheless, a reverential spirit prevailing throughout the recital. Towards the end, however, the large congregation was carried away by its appreciation of the talent of the *chazan* and applause was heard—probably for the first time in any synagogue in this country during the recital of prayers.

A Fine Voice.

CANTOR ALTER proved to be the possessor of a powerful operatic tenor of unusual range. He can take notes soft and sweet, almost bird-like, and, in contrast thereto, is able to descend almost to baritone. His diction is exceptionally clear throughout: in the softest or the deepest notes the words of the Hebrew prayers he sings are always well defined.

Cantor Alter began with the *Ma Tovu* prayer before the Holy Ark, impressive in its majesty. This was followed by the pronouncement of the Blessing of the Priests from the *Bimah*, and thereafter a magnificent rendering of *Ribono Shel Olom*. In this prayer the rich texture of the cantor's voice was well evidenced. The interpretation, too, was finely done, words being given in sound their diverse shades of meaning.

But it was in the *Tal* prayer, the traditional prayer for dew which is recited every Passover, that the range and ability of Cantor Alter's *Chazanoth* was perhaps best exemplified. All who are acquainted with this magnificent poem of a people asking for their land to be blessed with the precious nectar of dew, will know what scope it holds for interpretation. It is a prayer that can be given its full meaning only by a singer of great talent, and, in addition to that, great feeling. For the feeling of a suppliant people must linger in some intangible manner in every cadence. Cantor Alter intoned it most impressively, in cadences filled now with a soft, sad beauty, and now with a regal splendour. Especially appealing was the change from the rounded, robust tone of the deeper notes to the sweet soft tone, rising to a touching cadence, of the passage *Zimrah Nanim*; this passage in its turn slowly broadening, slowly surging to a loftier tone. The conclusion of the prayer was sung in brilliant dramatic style in a bold ringing voice.

(Continued in next column.)

TREES IN PALESTINE

Transforming Desolate Hillsides to Shady Slopes and Glades.



Chalutzim Enjoying the Shade of the Trees Which They have Planted.

"WE perceived the slopes of the hills in all their wild savagery; it was a landscape where desolation overawed us. Fantastic rocks rose on high amid thorns and bone-dry flints. Here and there could be seen the black gaping mouth of a cave, open as though about to fling some ravening beast of prey upon us. Drought; heat; everything was yellow, sapless and faded.

"So savage and desolate were the surroundings that we felt sure snakes must be coiled under every stone. The place was pathless and trackless, as though no human foot had ever trodden upon it. Walking was very hard, and we sat down to rest, weary and perspiring.

"This wilderness had to be transformed into a forest; this desolation had to be changed into fresh, healthy greenwood . . . the audacity!"

Thus writes a Chalutz who was one of a party which was entrusted with the work of afforestation, which is undertaken by

the Keren Kayemeth. It is, therefore, wonderful to think of the effect of Jewish energy and Jewish courage on many desolate hillsides which have been completely transformed although the task appeared almost superhuman. To-day Chalutzim often have the pleasure of sitting in the shade of the trees which they have planted and nursed into being. Looking at the accompanying picture, it is difficult to conceive that this spot was once desolate, dry and naked as are many of the hills in Eretz Israel, which are still suffering from the neglect of ages.

There is no doubt that Zionists reaise the great importance of the re-afforestation of Palestine out of which has arisen the custom of contributing trees to Eretz Israel on suitable occasions. This year as in all other years Zionist Societies will commemorate Dr. Herzl's Yahrzeit and will take advantage of this occasion to keep the memory of the founder of Zionism green by the planting of trees in Eretz Israel.

Among other pieces intoned were the *Ki Keshimecha* and the *Umipnei Chatoenu*. Both prayers were intoned with great feeling; and it is difficult to designate among them one as better than the other. Yet perhaps each individual who heard will have his own particular preference, and ours was the *Umipnei Chatoenu*. The solemn connotations of this portion of the *Musaph* service of the *Yomin Hanoroim* were admirably brought to mind by the manner of Cantor Alter's interpretation. In this piece, too, he adhered perhaps more closely to traditional *chazanoth* than in the other prayers, where he occasionally permitted himself operatic variations on the

central themes. It was a moving and memorable rendering, and one which was deeply appreciated by all present.

AFTER the recital, the huge congregation slowly dispersed. There was a great murmur of comment, for indeed is not every Jew a *maivin* of *chazanoth*?

Cantor Alter is due to conduct the ordinary Sabbath services to-night and tomorrow morning. On Sunday morning there is to be a meeting of the committee of the congregation, when a decision will be taken as to whether he is to be appointed as Reader of the Wolmarans Street Synagogue.

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