

Current Communal Comments

By "Hamabit"

Secretary

the 13th of next month a well-known congregational official, Mr. Herman Baranov, will have completed twenty-five years of service as Secretary of the United Hebrew Congregation of Johannesburg. He became Secretary of the former Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation just two years before its amalgamation with the Transvaal Old Hebrew Congregation, which was established forty-eight years

ago. When the two congregations were merged, there was a total membership of four hundred and twenty. The United Hebrew Congregation has a membership of 1,574, including, of course, the wives of members.

During his labours, Mr. Baranov has been associated all this time with Herbert Krauss in the joint secretaryship of the enlarged congregation. Previous to undertaking his duties with the congregation, Mr. Baranov was in the municipal service. He has proved himself to be a most efficient and capable official, whose ability is recognised by every member of the congregation and by the Jewish community in Johannesburg in general. There is no aspect of communal work with which Mr. Baranov is not intimately acquainted. His post is undoubtedly one of the most onerous and responsible in the community.

It is good to hear that Max Delfiner, the distinguished patron of Hebrew literature and life-long friend of the late Chaim Nachman Bialik, has managed to liquidate his interests in the country just a few weeks before the coup and flee the country. It is well-known that on every one of his visits to Austria, the poet would constantly nag at Delfiner and urge him to go to Palestine. At one time, Delfiner had started a big silk industry in Palestine, but owing to the policy of the British administration to protect his industry from foreign competition, he was obliged to abandon the enterprise.

There are a number of distinguished Hebrew writers who are being freed in Nazi Austria and will be freed at all costs. Chief among these is perhaps Gershon Shofman, who is generally regarded as the finest Hebrew novelist of our day, who lives in Graz near Vienna with his family. His life is a convert to Judaism, and his account, life in an Austrian town must be pretty well intolerable for both of them.

Dr. A. Kaminka, Dr. S. Kraus and Dr. Aptovitzer, who live in Vienna, have made great contributions to Hebrew scholarship for many years before the Hitler upheaval in Germany. Jewish writers, who wrote in German, fared worse than those who were in German. The latter had international reputations and they were saved, but not so the Hebrew writers. There is, for instance, the

case of Dr. Simeon Bernfeld, the octogenarian Hebrew historian, who is totally blind and is still languishing in Berlin.

The freeing of such people from Nazi rule should be the first task of the organisations concerned with helping the refugees.

Einstein

I SEE that Professor Einstein's name is again being featured in the Jewish press of America. He was the chief speaker recently at a big banquet arranged by the Zionist Labour Movement in New York.

For some time past, efforts have been made to free the professor from the bother of publicity and speech-making. Einstein is a simple and an all too hospitable man. He always has had time for everyone. In America, however, given full rein, American reporters will worry a celebrity to death with interviews on any subject under the sun.

I remember a story which was told me by a man who was in close contact with Professor Einstein on his first visit to America in the interests of the Keren Hayesod. On his arrival at New York, the professor, accompanied by a host of reporters, publicity-hunters and other hangers-on, was brought to a hotel, shown his suite of rooms and asked whether there was anything else he required. The professor asked for a piano. Within half an hour, a luxurious grand-piano appeared in his rooms. Einstein was charmed by the speed with which it was delivered, asked for the name of the firm and wrote a note of thanks. The next day, a reproduction of the note was flashed across the front-page advertisements of all New York newspapers, with bold headlines declaring that "Professor Einstein uses only X pianos."

After a few years' stay in America, Einstein has grown a little wiser. His name does not appear in the Princeton telephone directory, and the inhabitants of the town have been taught to respect his privacy. Nevertheless he is the most popular figure in the town, and young and old know him and greet him in the street.

Polygamy

IT must have come as a surprise to many people in and outside of Palestine to learn that polygamy is still not considered a crime in the Holy Land. Recently a Polish Jew was brought before a Palestine Court

on a charge of having married three wives. To the surprise of everyone, he was acquitted, and the judge remarked that a man who in these days can take upon himself a yoke of three women, has probably lost his senses. The case aroused a great storm in Palestine, and expert evidence was given in court by Dr. Amiel, Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv and Dr. Aisenstadt, the great jurist. Scores of Talmudic authorities were quoted in court and the Judge listened to a

fine piece of *milpul* between the Rabbi and the jurist, both of whom based their arguments on Talmudic law.

The prohibition to marry more than one wife was issued in the 10th century by Rabbi Gerschom only for a limited period, and did not apply to Palestine. Nevertheless, it became an established and firm law which has never been broken by Ashkenazi Jews.

The Professor

THE Professor is 65 years of age.

In the good old days he held a distinguished post in a German university. He was well known, honoured and respected. In the club rooms of the B'nai Brith — a stronghold of assimilated Jews — the Professor was a popular figure.

Then came the upheaval and the usual story: dismissal, concentration camp and refugee-existence abroad. Now he stands in the labour bureau of Tel-Aviv talking to the director. He does not mind any kind of work, even physical work, as long as he can make ten pounds a month.

The two look at each other. Have they ever met before? In an instant a picture flashes into both minds. A picture of the good old days. Zionist Labourites had met in conference in the hall of the Professor's club. As usual with these people they sat up late. The Professor had just got up from a game of cards. Passing by the conference room, he had remarked: "The jabberers are still conferring." The director, who was then a delegate, happened to overhear the remark and had remonstrated with the Professor.

The director is careful not to mention the incident now, but the Professor cannot free himself from embarrassment.

The Labour man passes through a conflict of conscience which he describes afterwards in a Palestine paper. Is one to be so ethical as to help those who jeered at you in the struggling old days and fought you whenever they could? And in the end, of course, one helps them!

Gratitude!

AN orthodox Jew in a dictator country was teaching his son how to behave. He also told him that during his prayers, he should in future add:—

"Thank God and the dictator!"

"And suppose the dictator dies?" asked the boy.

"Then you say—'Thank God!'"

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