

CURRENT COMMUNAL COMMENT

By "Hamabit"

Forty Years Ago

THURSDAY next marks the anniversary of a notable local event which should be recalled with interest — the delivery of the first sermon in Johannesburg by Dr. J. H. Hertz, whose jubilee as Chief Rabbi of the British Empire was celebrated so auspiciously in London a few weeks ago. The sermon was delivered in connection with Dr. Hertz's induction as Minister to the now defunct Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation. It was on September 22nd, 1898, that the present Chief Rabbi delivered his first charge to members of the no-longer-existing President Street *Shul*.

Recently I came upon the address in question in an old Johannesburg journal. It was certainly a powerful, oratorical effort, revealing even then the strength of the earnest convictions of the speaker regarding the ideal of traditional Judaism. It is a pity that Dr. Hertz did not include this striking sermon in his lately published "Sermons, Studies and Addresses." Some of my older readers may still remember the deep impression which the particular oration made on those who were present.

Dr. Hertz had then arrived in this country as a young man from the U.S.A. He came at a time of sharp political turmoil, and remained in Johannesburg for over a decade. Many were attracted by his strong personality, as well as by his eloquent tongue. He left South Africa shortly before the outbreak of the World War, and after a brief period in America, accepted the call to his important post in London.

"Bei Mir . . ."

THAT popular little jazz-song "Bei Mir Bistu Shohn" is now gradually losing ground and giving way to newer hits. Yet in America the song is still a subject of great controversy. This is probably due to the fact that everything Jewish must inevitably be accompanied by a bit of *machloykes*.

The latest piece of litigation concerns Jacob Jacobs, popular comedian and director of the Parkway Theatre, New York. This gentleman was responsible for the text of the song and he is now suing Warner Brothers, who are preparing a talkie under the name of "Bei Mir Bistu Shohn." In the course of the preparation of the film, Warner Brothers had entered into an agreement with Sholem Sekunda, the composer of the tune, and quite forgot about Jacobs, who wrote the words. An American judge will now have to decide whether it was the Jewish folk-tune that had so caught on with the public, or the exotic Yiddish beginning, and text of the song.

In the meantime Yiddish songs have become fashionable in the jazz-

world and Broadway publishers are looking out for songs similar to "Bei Mir." Nelly Kessman, a Yiddish actress, has just sold to a jazz-publisher a song entitled "Yossel, Yossel," which promises to be a great success.

I hear incidentally that "Bei Mir Bistu Shohn" is played by jazz-orchestras throughout Nazi-Germany and the German public is given to understand that the song is purely Aryan!

"Voices on the Air"

NEW YORK has, for a change, a new synagogue, but this time there are no building-drives, no ambitious architectural structures, no sale of seats, and no elections of boards of directors and wardens. The new synagogue is built in the air — in a literal sense a house of prayer for *Luftmenschen*. It is entitled "The Synagogue of the Radio" and all prayers and sermons are transmitted from a tiny studio in between an hour of hot jazz and "firty minutes of the latest gossip." There is a *chazan* who recites the three daily prayers, reads the *kaddish* and even asks his hearers to repeat the night-prayer with him before they go to bed.

Opinion in America appears to be divided on the subject of the advisability of the new venture. Some think that it serves a most useful purpose. It brings prayer and meditation into millions of homes which can never be reached by the synagogue. In the hustle and bustle of American life, it is not always easy to attend the synagogue, and many people, particularly in outlying districts, will find spiritual comfort by simply switching on to the synagogue station.

On the other hand, orthodox Jews complain that it will drive people from the synagogue and even the proverbial *kaddish-sayer* will consider it sufficient to stay at home and read the prayer in front of the microphone, instead of the Ark.

Personally, I think that the alarm is a false one. It will be remembered that when radio became a popular feature in our homes, many folk entertained the fear that it would compete with the concert-hall and the newspaper. Experience has shown, however, that far from interfering with the established vehicles of culture, the radio has helped to encourage and stimulate an interest in music and in the press.

The same may happen with the radio-synagogue. People will not be satisfied with the voices on the air, but will be encouraged to return to the synagogue.

Goldberg

I WAS sorry to hear of the death of Dr. Isaac Goldberg, the well-known American-Jewish critic, author and lecturer.

Goldberg was a most versatile writer and his studies on music and literature have always attracted wide attention. He has written a most authoritative study of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas and some essays on the compositions of Gershwin. He was also considered an expert on Spanish prose and poetry.

Goldberg's contributions to Anglo-Jewish literature are of particular importance. In addition to his work as an essayist and columnist in the American-Jewish press, he was probably the first man to render Yiddish literature into English on a large scale. At a time when Asch, Pinski, Kobrin and Hirschbein were quite unknown outside Russia, Goldberg translated their works into English and made them popular by special articles in the American-Jewish press. He has also written a monograph of Major Noah, which was published by the Jewish Publication Society of America some two years ago and he has left behind him in manuscript a translation of Apatoshu's "Polish Woodlands."

Goldberg was an accomplished linguist and in addition to Yiddish, translated books from the French, German, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

A Moral?

A PORTLY gentleman was sitting in the lobby of a big hotel in one of our cities, smoking a large cigar. A guest noticing its size, entered into conversation with him.

"What a big cigar!" he exclaimed. "How much did it cost you?"

"Half-a-crown!"

"That's a lot of money. How many do you smoke a day?"

"About ten."

"That runs up to twenty-five shillings a day! An awful lot of money! How long have you been smoking?"

"About forty years."

"Good heavens! If you hadn't smoked, but had saved the money you spent on cigars, you could have owned this beautiful hotel to-day."

The portly gentleman removed his cigar and eyed his co-religionist curiously.

"Do you smoke cigars?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you own this hotel?"

"No."

"Well, I do."

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