

# CURRENT COMMUNAL COMMENT

By "Hamabit"

## Country Communities

I HAVE been following with interest the successful pastoral tour which Rabbi Israel Abrahams, accompanied by his wife, has been conducting in the Cape. In a large country like South Africa where there are many small and scattered communities isolated from the main body of Jewish life, a tour such as that which Rabbi Abrahams has been making is of the greatest importance. It links up the small community with the South African community as a whole and gives to the former the outside stimulus which is sometimes so necessary if it is to maintain an interest in matters Jewish both here and abroad.

It is not often that an outlying community receives a visit from an official representative of the community in "the big city." When the representative—as is the case with Rabbi Abrahams—is also the spiritual head of an old and honoured congregation, the significance of the visit becomes even more pronounced, and must inevitably result in establishing a better understanding between all the communities in South Africa.

Rabbi Israel Abrahams and his wife are to be congratulated upon the deep impression they have made in all the various Cape centres so far visited by them. At the conclusion of this pastoral tour, I sincerely hope that other projects will be considered for keeping in touch with the progress and life of our far-flung little communities. It would be a pity if the pastoral tour marked the end, and not merely the beginning of our responsibility to our isolated communities.

## The Rebbe

THE Gerer Rebbe, the greatest Chassidic saint of our times, has managed to escape from Poland and reach Palestine.

A whole book will probably one day be written on the adventures of the Rebbe during his escape from Poland. On his journey from Warsaw to Cracow, the train-coach was guarded by a special guard of S.S. men! The secretary of the Rebbe refuses to say how it was arranged, but it is asserted that a German officer who helped the Rebbe and his court to escape was shot by the Nazis. Together with the Rebbe there were some twenty members of his family, and they all left the country safely!

The arrival of the Rebbe in Jerusalem was hailed with joy by Chassidim all over the world. The Rebbe has so far not spoken to representa-

tives of the press. It is stated, in fact, that he hardly speaks to anybody. Representatives of Palestine newspapers were allowed to the Rebbe's room for two minutes to shake hands. Even during their handshake the Rebbe muttered prayers. It is stated that prayers were his only occupation that day.

Newspapermen who had the chance of seeing him say that he looks like "a king in exile." He is almost deaf as a result of the bombardment of Warsaw. The house in which he stayed was bombed by the Nazis and his son-in-law, Reb Itshe Maeyer Alter, was killed by a splinter.

## Porters

I WELL remember the Jewish porters of Warsaw. Years ago when I visited the Polish capital I watched with amazement the Jewish porters doing their tasks in the business centre of Nalevki. They could be seen carrying heavy loads many times their own size and their own weight. Some of these fellows were frail in body and appearance, but they certainly had considerable stamina. They could lift and carry on their shoulders a fair-sized piano. The pay of the porters was very small, yet they were a most cheerful lot, happy in their physical strength and open air life.

It is well-known that on many occasions when Jews were attacked by Endek hooligans the porters came to the rescue. Now I hear that during the pogrom in Warsaw last Easter the porters again came to the fore. When hooligans broke into the Nowolipki Street the porters met them by force. Though heavily outnumbered they managed to repulse the attack and pay the rioters in their own coin. This report was brought to Palestine by a refugee from Poland. It is certainly a remarkable piece of news, and the incident represented probably the first occasion that Jews under Nazi rule were able to stand up and fight against assaults.

## A Father

SAUL ELMAN, father of the great violinist, Mischa Elman, whose death is reported from New York, was a popular figure in English and in American musical circles. He represented the true type of father of a Jewish prodigy. A passionate lover of music, he literally almost stood behind his gifted son from the day when he was brought as a child of six to play in the Imperial Court at St. Petersburg, until he achieved fame on

the concert-platforms of Western Europe.

Mischa Elman often remarked to newspapermen that whenever he plays, he imagines that his father is near him, admiring his talents, and urging him on to greater heights. The old man was also in the habit of including himself in his son's achievements. "Last night," he would say, "we played the Bruch concerto . . . we hope to play in a quartet during the coming winter."

Something of a scholar, he had a host of stories dealing with the life and habits of the Jewish Klezmer, the village musicians in old Russia. It is well known that he provided Sholem Aleichem with material for the story of "Stempeni," which describes the life of the Jewish musicians, wedding bards and minstrels in the Ghetto.

## Underground

NEWS comes that the Bund, the well-known Jewish Socialist Party of Poland, is now busy conducting underground activities under the very nose of the Gestapo. The *Forwaerts*, of New York, reported recently that the Bund is collaborating with the Polish Socialists and with the Polish Peasant Party in conducting anti-Nazi propaganda in the towns and villages of Poland. A manifesto issued on the occasion of the 1st of May was distributed in thousands of copies and was signed by the three organisations. The manifesto demanded, inter alia, that all nationalities living in Poland must be guaranteed full political, economic and cultural equality. Racial discrimination and anti-Semitism are to be removed from Polish public life.

The Bund was outlawed under the old Tzarist regime. Nevertheless, it managed to organise the workers and conduct propaganda on a wide scale. Its experience in the past should be of great help to the Bund under the present Nazi regime.

## Gently . . .

A CHELMER Jew passed away in a strange land. When the news reached the elders of Chelm, the *shammass* was instructed to break the news gently to the newly-bereaved wife.

That official knocked at the door and when the woman appeared, he asked:

"Does the widow Sarah live here?"

"I'm Sarah, but I am no widow."

"Well, let's have a bet about it!"

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