

CURRENT

COMMUNAL

By "Hamabit"

COMMENT

Paarl Jewry

SOME fifty years ago, a handful of Jewish families living in Paarl ceased to come together at a private residence in Van der Lingen Street to hold religious services. The leader of that small community was Mr. Albert Hertz, who presented it with its first Torah.

Curiously enough, it was the younger people among these few Jewish families who agitated for the establishment of a congregation. Their elders counselled patience, saying that their numbers were too small for them to undertake so ambitious a project. The younger people had their way, however, and the idea took root. Finally, amid great enthusiasm, the congregation was established with Mr. M. S. Hurwitz as its first minister.

The foundation stone of its first "shul" was laid in 1904 by the Rev. Bender. On the completion of the building a year later, Mr. Max Langerman, of Johannesburg, was invited to perform the opening ceremony and Rev. Bender pronounced the blessing.

The Paarl Jewish community has grown and flourished since the days of its small beginnings. To-day it numbers between 500 and 600 souls. Its best-known minister, Rev. H. Strelitz, at present emeritus minister of the congregation, served it for a period of twenty-five years. In 1927, a beautiful new, modern synagogue was built, after the old one had been destroyed by fire.

Four weeks ago the Paarl Hebrew congregation celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The occasion was a memorable one. This congregation is among the few communal bodies which can claim fifty years of existence. It is also one of our most important country communities in South Africa.

Paarl Jewry, I learn, has an interesting history, and a monograph on this subject would be welcomed. The Jewish community has played no little part in the life of the district generally. A history of Paarl Jewry would also remind us that an effort should be made now to present a detailed account of the part the Jews played, as pioneers of trade and industry, in opening up the less-frequented spots of the Cape Province in the early days.

W.E.V.D.

ONE of the remarkable achievements of the "Forwaerts," the leading Yiddish newspaper in America, has been the establishment of its own radio station, known as W.E.V.D. The station recently

celebrated an anniversary with a special programme in which Dorothy Thompson, Jan Masaryk, Eugene Lyons, Elmer Davies, Paul Muni, Tallulah Bankhead and other notable American intellectuals and artists took part.

The station W.E.V.D. has gained for itself the reputation of being a "University of the Air." Progressive leaders and writers have often spoken into its microphone, and it is not unusual to find among the contributors to its programmes such distinguished men as Sir Norman Angell and Dr. Albert Brandt. In its Jewish programmes the station has maintained a very high standard. In addition to Jewish music and songs, the station has presented dramatisations of Schneur's and Singer's novels, as well as talks in Yiddish on Jewish news of the day and on general Jewish affairs.

W.E.V.D. started its career on the roof of the Broadway Hotel. To-day the station occupies its own three-storey building and has achieved for itself the reputation of being one of the better class radio transmitting stations in the United States.

A Controversy

WAGNER was an anti-Semite. His music has inspired Hitler. Hauptmann, the German playwright, has become a Nazi and Knut Hamsun, the Scandinavian novelist, is a devout adherent of Hitler and of his evil deeds. Shall we, therefore, shut our ears to the music of Wagner, refuse to read Hamsun or stage the plays of Hauptmann?

This question has become the subject of a controversy in which some of the leading lights in American Yiddish literature are heatedly taking part. H. Levik, sensitive poet and famous author of the "Golem," calls for a complete and unconditional ban. We should, he says, have Hamsun and Wagner "torn out of our hearts." Asked why we should deny ourselves the pleasure and joy of Wagner's music or of Hamsun's prose, he retorts: "Where was it written that you must have all the pleasures of life?"

Zivion, the columnist of "Forwaerts," thinks otherwise. "Shall we," he asks, "emulate the Nazis? When they discovered that Thomas Mann was an enemy of their cause, they committed his books to the flames. Shall we copy their manners, their weapons, their tactics, and behave in the same way as the Nazis to people who have sinned against us?"

"No," says Levik, "we are not behaving in the same way. We harm nobody when we agree to do without works written or composed by Nazi writers. We merely deprive ourselves of the pleasure of their genius."

S. Niger, the literary critic, invokes the history of all literature to show that some of the greatest literary minds have been morally corrupt. Gogol sympathised with the landowners who flogged the serfs. Fet, the poet, had himself been guilty of flogging the peasants. Milton was something of a tyrant. Shall we use a moral yardstick to measure the conduct of writers before we read and enjoy their books?

This is the gist of the argument. I shall be glad to hear from those of my readers who might wish to add something to this interesting controversy.

A Play of Words

WHAT you can do in Yiddish you sometimes cannot do in English. The juicy Yiddishisms are often untranslatable, and a study in contrasts is most entertaining.

Take for instance the saying: "Wos wet zein der sof?" You can translate it figuratively, as: "How will it all end?"

Isidore Sobeloff, the Executive Director of the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit, disregarding the existence of the Hebrew *sof*, meaning end, points out that since the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet is *sof*, the *aleph* can be considered the beginning of things and the *sof* the end.

Therefore, Sobeloff says, what's effective in Yiddish is impossible in English. Says he: "You never hear anyone say, 'what will be the Z,' do you?"

That's a nice play on words—and Yiddish still has the edge.

Noise

NACHMALSON and Yudelowitzky were both energetic workers on the dorp Synagogue committee. At times, however, they got on each other's nerves. At the last meeting an important decision had to be taken, and Nachmalson held the floor. Yudelowitzky kept shaking his head and Nachmalson became angry.

"Isn't my argument then sound?" he appealed to the chairman.

"Yes," answered Yudelowitzky, "but is there anything else in it?"

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