

Book Review.

A Centenary History of the Capetown Hebrew (Tikvath Israel) Congregation.

A hundred years ago, when Sir Charles Napier was Governor of the Cape Colony, and Capetown, still largely surrounded by gardens, was a smaller and more leisurely centre of civilisation than it is to-day; when consignments of merchandise arrived from Early Victorian England by slow and uncertain sailing ship, and the good merchants were accustomed to close their doors above the high stoeps of their business houses in St. George's Street, for rest and refreshment, in the middle of the day; when ox-wagon teams outspanned in Greenmarket Square, and the Heerengracht had not yet become Adderley Street; when the older inhabitants could still recall the rule of the Netherlands East India Company; when the entire European population of the town numbered nine thousand three hundred and fifty-nine, and the somewhat more numerous coloured population had as yet tasted but a few years of freedom from slavery; in the same year that the Groote Kerk in the Heerengracht, a Hebrew congregation, the first that ever assembled in South Africa, met for Divine Service in Capetown.

We have read this small volume, of which the foregoing is the opening page, with much pleasure. It reaches a standard which, in our opinion, the history of every large and truly important community in Israel should attain. It is well thought out and well designed. The story, interesting as it is from many points of view, loses nothing in the telling.

The author of the work is Dr. Louis Herrman, M.A., and there is an introduction by C. Graham Botha, Chief Archivist of the Union of South Africa, and a dedication to the Very Reverend the Chief Rabbi, Dr. J. H. Hertz, M.A., Ph.D., the pioneer historian of South African Jewry. The author acknowledges, in a short notice, the helpful suggestions of several members of the Centenary Sub-Committee, and in particular those of Mr. I. M. Goodman, a South African member of this Society. Mr. Goodman is since deceased.

The history has several features which we think are admirable. Deliberately, the record is one that is made and can rank as a part of—and not something apart from

—the general history of the Union of South Africa. A reader, knowing nothing of such history—the early trading depressions, the clashes between Britain and Boer, the frenzy of the gold rushes and diamond fields—will acquire a general outline of it from a perusal of these pages. This essential is sometimes overlooked when a congregational history is attempted by its committee. The members are too close up to their subject. At times they are apt to be overshadowed by it, and a loss of proper outlook is the result.

Dr. Herrman, on the other hand, is a trained historian of established reputation, and with a craftsman's pride in his work. He is skilled in the sifting of large masses of detail and the weighing of evidence. He has time and patience for unhurried research. He has achieved and maintained throughout the detachment from the community and its leaders which is necessary to a proper fulfilment of an historian's duty. "He writes," says C. Graham Botha, "without evasion or equivocation, of the petty squabbles and the small things concerning the early days of the congregation as well as of the big and important facts."

The very first use to which the new Synagogue was put was the observance of Mayoral Sunday. Four days after he had performed the opening ceremony, on Sunday, 11th September, 1905, Hyman Liberman, as newly re-elected Mayor of Capetown, attended Divine Service in the Great Synagogue. "His Worship the Mayor," says a contemporary newspaper, "accompanied by his brother Councillors and the Town Clerk, whilst the Mace of the City was borne before him by his macebearer, proceeded to the new Synagogue in the Gardens. A detachment of mounted and foot police, a detachment of the City fire brigade in full uniform, and the brass and fife bands of the Capetown Highlanders escorted the procession." The Synagogue was filled. There was a short but impressive service, a fitting sermon preached by the Rev. Mr. Bender, and a substantial collection for the benefit of City charities.

The *Centenary History* has a hard cloth cover, and is of the small pocket edition size, seven and a half inches by five. It is thus suitable for reading either at length or by a chapter at a time, or for filing as a reference book among other similarly sized volumes on the private book shelf in the home. Our local precedents are generally not so favoured. They are better adapted for filing as

public records in the national libraries. Their size (we have two before us each larger than eleven inches by nine) is awkward and now outmoded. Their appearance is against their being retained in the home of a congregant except as an "official" record.

In the history there is not one table of statistics—those indigestible adjuncts of most community records. Each chapter, in this respect, is self-contained, the statistical detail being incorporated as part of the ordinary text. The volume is well illustrated with many excellent plates, those of the Great Synagogue being particularly attractive. In the text are some interesting Australian references, including a photograph and record of Rev. F. G. Ornstein, who from 1866 to 1874 was Minister of the Melbourne Hebrew congregation.

Dr. Herrman brings many qualifications to his work. The record, as a result, is eminently readable and enjoyable. It approximates towards a piece of literature. It could be read with as much interest by a non-Jew as by a Jew. It has agreeable variety of light and shade. As a token of the writer's happier mood, and as a type of communal "frustration," we commend the following :—

It was not the first time he had tendered his resignation. He was accustomed to do so periodically. But before this date the Committee had never taken him at his word but had appeased his discontents with a slight increase to his stipend and overlooked his faults and pacified the members of the Congregation, who were always complaining that he had omitted to carry out properly one or other of his multifarious duties. He was the Synagogue's problem servant. He had to be reprimanded for taking snuff with the members of the Congregation during services. He had to be bidden attend the Synagogue in more respectable attire. His duties at the butchers' were not satisfactorily carried out. Now he pleased the butchers and dissatisfied the customers. Then he infuriated the butchers and got the sympathy of the members of the Congregation. The Committee spent a great deal of its time discussing his demeanours and misdemeanours. A mighty effort was made to make him thoroughly respectable, at least outwardly, when the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, and all the principal dignitaries of Church and State were about to visit the Synagogue on the occasion of the consecration after the reconstruction. It was then "Resolved that, while in attendance at the Synagogue, Mr. Barnadsky, the Beadle, wear a silk hat, white tie, and Vergers' cloak, and that these articles be bought for him." But under this glory lived the unregenerate Barnadsky, who continued to afford modified satisfaction to his employers for another year and then made way for

Mr. Mizrahi, the new Beadle and Ritual slaughterer. Despite the change, the conduct of the Beadle still occupied a goodly portion of the Committee's deliberations.

The records of Jewry in the Empire will be enhanced as well as enriched in material by Dr. Herrman's work. Our copy comes to us by courtesy of the President of the Congregation, and is printed by the Mercantile-Atlas Printing Co. Pty. Limited, Capetown.

Obituary.

The Society records with deep regret the passing of two of its members :—

MR. HARRY L. BROWN, of 67 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. Mr. Brown was a well known solicitor and a foundation member of the Society.

MR. GERALD S. BENJAMIN, of Double Bay, New South Wales. Mr. Benjamin was a son of Sir Benjamin Benjamin, a former Mayor of the City of Melbourne. For many years he was an ardent worker in the field of Jewish education in Sydney. An only son, Major David J. Benjamin, is abroad with the forces.

The sympathy of the Society has in each case been conveyed to the relatives.

NEW MEMBERS.

Sydney :

Harris, Alfred.
Havard, W. L.
Kellerman, M. H., B.Ec.
Kessler, Mrs. T.
Levy, Miss Helena.

Robb, Mrs. A. D.
Raphael-Rosenthal, Mrs. E.

Winnipeg, Canada :

Rosenberg, Leon.