

Editorials

Ambassador at Iraqi Club

IT WAS AN historic occasion for the Iraqi Jewish community in London when the Israel Ambassador Mr. Yehuda Avner and Mrs. Avner, together with other diplomats at the Israel Embassy in London, attended a special meeting and dinner on 18 September 1984, reported in the Jewish Chronicle a week later. Preceding the traditional Iraq Jewish dinner with all its delicacies was a meeting at which a major address on the ancient history of the community was given by Mr. N. E. Dangoor, President of the Club, to which the Ambassador responded, and in which Mr. Percy S. Gourgey was chairman. The speech read by Mr. Dangoor is given in full in this issue, with excerpts from the response by Mr. Avner, and Mr. Gourgey's introductory remarks. It may be recalled that the Club was founded in 1969 following the terrible public hangings of innocent Jews in Baghdad.

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Lebanese Jews

STRONG REPRESENTATIONS were made to the British Government to protest to the Lebanese Government about the brutal kidnapping and murder of Raoul Mizrahi, a wealthy Beirut Jew in July 1984, and a month later the kidnapping of Mr. Selim Jammous, the Secretary of the Beirut Jewish community. In a letter to Mr. Gourgey, Mr. Richard Luce, the Minister of State in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office stated in reply that "kidnapping has unfortunately become a feature of the Lebanese tragedy and this is one reason why we (the British Government) supports the efforts of the Lebanese Government to restore the country's independence, unity and stability." Continuous efforts are being made to secure the release of Mr. Jammous, and the safety of the community as far as this is possible.

Syrian Jewry Conference

AN IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL Conference for the Freedom of Jews in Syria was held in Paris on 18 November 1984. It was convened by Siona, a French Sephardi organisation, to which a message was sent by M. Alain Poher, the President of the French Senate, and also President of the Organisation for the Deliverance of Jews in the Middle East urging utmost, speedy action to secure the human rights of Syrian Jews who number 4500, including the right of emigration in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which Syria is a signatory. Other important international personalities who participated included Mme. Simone Veil, former President of the European Parliament who was herself an inmate of a Nazi concentration camp during the War, U.S. Senator Arlen Specter, U.S. Congressman Stephen Solarz who stressed the similarity in the plight of Soviet and Syrian Jewry, and the Secretary-General of President Mitterand's Socialist Party. A young Syrian Jew who recently escaped from Syria gave a dramatic presentation of their seriously deteriorating position when they feared a pogrom in Damascus where Syrian Jews are housed near Palestinian Arab refugees and could be the victims of their rage in the event of hostilities with Israel with which they have nothing to do whatever. The one bright news to emerge from the conference was that the family of Mrs. Lillian Abady who was murdered in Aleppo with her two small children in December 1983 had managed to leave Syria. This editor, as a delegate and Chairman of the Jews of Arab Lands Committee made an interesting suggestion which was well-received, namely, that the Conference should appoint its own delegation to see President Assad of Syria, and, should he refuse, it would then be evident to international public opinion that he had something to hide which was culpable. This notwithstanding President Mitterand's own visit to Damascus during which it was hoped he would raise the question of Syrian Jewry.

Bombay Synagogue Centenary

EARLY IN FEBRUARY 1985 it is expected that there will be held the celebrations of the Centenary of the Kenesseth Eliyahoo Synagogue in the Fort area of Bombay. These were to have taken place early in December 1984 but as the President of India, Mr. Zail Singh had accepted an invitation to attend the celebrations, they were postponed for security reasons in the aftermath of the tragic assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India.

The Synagogue was established in 1884 by Sir Jacob Sassoon, the editor's great-uncle, in memory of his father, Elias, a son of David Sassoon who founded the dynasty in India — as it later developed — in 1832, having fled as a refugee from Baghdad in 1828, then and until the First World War under Ottoman Turkish rule. Other members of the family attained great fame following their considerable achievements, but Elias founded the firm of E. D. Sassoon & Co., with extensive business interests in the Far East, Britain and the Middle East. This is not the place to record yet the fascinating history of this family which in one sense became even more notable in the person of Sir. Philip Sassoon, Bart., whose father was a Sassoon and mother was a Rothschild, and who was a junior Minister in the Conservative Government in Britain before the Second World War. Incidentally, as far back as 1935 he warned of the rise of Nazi air power and the dangers it posed — this in his capacity as Air Minister.

The Synagogue celebration would probably mark the final chapter of the story and achievements of Iraqi Jewish emigrants to India and the Far East including Burma, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Hongkong, China and Japan beginning in the latter part of the 18th century. Following the Second World War most members of these communities emigrated to Israel, Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

The text of Mr Dangoor's Address at the Iraqi Jewish Club, London, 18 September 1984

YOUR EXCELLENCY, Madame Avner, Reverend Gentlemen, Honoured Guests:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our Community Centre and to say how honoured we all are by your visit.

Beroukhim Habbaim ; Uberoukhim Hanimtsaim

Our generation has seen many tragic and momentous events touching world Jewry: the Holocaust, the rebirth of the State of Israel: the liquidation of Jewish communities in Arab countries. As our Community starts the second leg of our exile after 2500 years in Iraq it may be appropriate to summarise the long history of Babylonian Jewry — the oldest community of the Jewish Diaspora.

Hebrew associations with Iraq go back to the time of Abraham who left us for Canaan by divine command around 1800 BCE because of religious intolerance. Both Isaac and Jacob took wives from the old country and eleven of Jacob's twelve children were born in Iraq.

The Jews appear again on the scene when, twelve centuries later, in 597 BCE, King Zehoyachin and 18,000 of the leading citizens of Judah were brought captive to Babylon. The people of Judah had been in two minds regarding foreign policy. The hawks wanted to defend their country's independence. The doves, led by the prophet Jeremiah, wanted to come to terms with the moderate King Nebuchadnezzar. (A similar situation exists in Israel today where some Israelis feel they have to come to terms with the so-called moderate King Hussain).

Eleven years afterwards Nebuchadnezzar came and raised Jerusalem to the ground, killed or dispersed the 4m inhabitants and took back with him 100,000 able-bodied men to dredge the silting irrigation canals of Babylonia, which is southern Iraq. Northern Iraq, which depends on rainwater, is usually referred to as Mesopotamia. (The Jewish people have not recovered from that disaster).

Jeremiah had really very little interest in politics but he had a grand vision of establishing God's kingdom on earth. Nebuchadnezzar offered him safe passage to Babylon but he was not willing to face the bitter exiles. However, he sent them the following message which became in a way the charter of the Jewish Diaspora: these are the words of the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel: to all the exiles whom I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce; marry wives and beget sons and daughters ... and seek the welfare of the city to which I have carried you off and pray to the Lord for it, for in its peace you will have peace. In Babylon the Diaspora became a way of life.

(In time the Babylonians came to treat their exiles well and the latter gradually took the position rather of colonists than of captives. Lands were allotted to them and

they grew to love and own the soil they cultivated, some of which has remained in Jewish ownership until recent years).

In exile, the formula was — let us preserve the Torah so that the Torah will preserve us, a nation without a state of its own; and to hope that in time a Mashiyah will appear who will lead us back to the Promised Land. In 539 BCE the Persian King Koresh, Cyrus the Great, who is named in the Bible as Mashiyah, defeated Babylon and offered to repatriate the liberated Jews. But only 40,000 returned — the rest, about 80,000, encouraged by the Persians, stayed on to prosper in the rich land of the rivers, astride the main trade routes between east and west.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we decided to stay.

We also wept when we remembered Zion

The aim of the Persians was to create a buffer state in Babylon. This Jewish buffer state retained its importance on and off for over 1000 years. For example, in the year 363 CE, the Roman Emperor Julian who renounced Christianity, vainly tried to win over to his side the Babylonian and Mesopotamian Jewries in preparation of his contemplated invasion of Persia. He wrote to them, "When I have successfully concluded the war with Persia I will rebuild with my own efforts the sacred city of Jerusalem that you may glorify the most high God therein." But the community remained loyal to Persia. This loyalty had been a major factor in the disastrous Jewish war with Rome which ended with the destruction of the second temple.

2,500th Year

It is interesting to observe here that in 1971 Iran celebrated the 2500th anniversary, a jubilee of jubilees, of Cyrus's empire. As Israel was not going to be represented I offered to the Iranian Embassy to lead a delegation of Iraqi Jews to Persepolis to pay homage to the memory of Cyrus and his enlightened and tolerant rule. Teheran found it difficult to arrange this at short notice and we were invited instead to the reception at the Savoy which was attended by the diplomatic corps and other distinguished guests including Sir Alec Douglas Home, Foreign Secretary and former Prime Minister when Percy Gourgey and I and twenty members of the community delivered to the Ambassador an illuminated scroll to commemorate the occasion. The Shah later expressed his appreciation and thanks.

The Babylonian Ezra gave Judaism the decisive impulse that eventually produced the Pharisaic movement and the Rabbinical system. He changed the Hebrew alphabet, started the Synagogue and set himself to make the Torah the governing force in Jewish life. Mindful of what happened to

the ten lost Tribes, he gave top priority to the preservation of the Torah; second priority to the survival of the Jewish people and third priority to the re-establishment of a Jewish State. In virtue of this, Ezra was in a real sense the true founder of traditional Judaism from which also emerged Christianity and Islam. It is said of Ezra that if the Torah was not given to Moses, he would have been worthy to receive it. Centuries later, Hillel too went up from Babylon to Jerusalem. He was the first of the Tanna'im who established the oral Torah (Mishnah). His youngest and most famous disciple was Yohanan Ben Zakkai, the founder of the Yavneh Academy. This became the centre of Jewish life and thought after the national disaster and destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

At the beginning of the present era there were many conversions to Judaism all over the Middle East. In Northern Iraq, the royal family and many of the people of Adiabene became Jews. It is said that Jews at that time constituted 20 per-cent both of the Persian as well as the Roman empires. But after the fall of Jerusalem it was the Christians who made converts in the frontier territories of Mesopotamia. The earliest converts were Jews and a recent book tries to prove that St. Peter never went to Rome and that he spent his last years in Iraq. But wherever rabbinical influence was strong among the local community as in Babylonia, there Christianity (and later, Islam) made little progress among Jews.

Iraq remained within the Persian empire for 1000 years. Babylonia, covering central Iraq, became practically an autonomous Jewish state headed by a hereditary exilarch (Resh Galutha) descended from King Yehoyachin. The exilarch had his courts and prisons and collected taxes, half of which went to the central government.

At one time Babylonian Jewry numbered over 1 million and may have constituted the majority of the population. When the Temple was in existence they sent every year, about the time of Succoth, rich presents to Jerusalem in convoys sometimes consisting of 30,000 armed pilgrims. It was ruled at that time that the prayer for rain should not be recited until 15 days after the conclusion of Succoth, to allow the pilgrims to return. The Babylonian Diaspora retained its paramount importance from the 6th century BCE to the 13th century CE — a period of nearly 2000 years. Its communal constitution, which served as a model to the whole Jewish people, was largely maintained until recent times.

During our stay in Babylon we made ourselves thoroughly at home.

Father-land

Indeed Babylonia became practically the Jewish father-land. Here were established



▲ **left to right: Mrs Shashoua; Sami Shamoon; Mrs Baroukh; Mme Avner; Ambassador Avner; Mrs Dangoor; Rabbi Dr A. Levy; Naim Dangoor; William Shashoua**



▲ **left to right: Mr Sinai Rome; (Consul General); Mr Moshe Raviv (Minister Plenipotentiary); Percy Gourgey; Maurice Bekhor; Mrs Sinai Rome**

the famous vast academies of Nehardea, Sura and Pumbeditha which later served as prototypes for the first European universities of the 12th century. The Babylonian Talmud took 300 years to develop in complete freedom and was completed in 499. In its 2½ million words the Talmud touches on every aspect of life. For instance, it discusses whether a person who is walking on a moving platform that is going in the opposite direction would be breaking the Sabbath if his position relative to the earth remained the same. Einstein admits that this gave him the idea for his theory of relativity.

Baghdad Caliphs

Towards the end of Persian rule Mazdakite fanatics made life unbearable for the Jews who, in time, invited and gave decisive help to the Moslem conquest of Iraq and indeed of other parts of the Middle East.

Under the caliphs of Baghdad the Jews paid a head tax and enjoyed religious and communal freedom. These freedoms are similar to what Israel is willing to offer to the Palestinian Arabs. The authority of the exilarch extended, as in Persian times, to all parts of the empire and this office lasted till the 14th century. Thereafter the community was headed by a local Nasi who, until recent times, was also always of the Davidic line. He was assisted by a Haham. In 1849 both positions were united in a Haham Bashi.

With the fall of Sa'ad Addawla, the Jewish chancellor of the mogul empire, the Jews suffered terribly at the hands of the populace in the pogrom of 1291 and many were forced to embrace Islam, a process which was repeated on several occasions in Iraq and Persia.

Jewish fortunes started to improve after the Ottoman conquest of 1638, whose army included many Jewish officers and men. (Some sources say 10,000 Jewish officers and men).

After the Great War the Jews of Iraq were betrayed first by the allies who handed over the country to Arab rule and then by the Arabs who, in a short time, proceeded to discriminate against the other national groups — The Kurds, Jews, Assyrians, etc.

For centuries the treasury of Iraq was in Jewish hands. Under Ottoman rule the head of the community was ex-officio treasurer (sarraf bashi) of the country. This tradition was continued in the early years of modern Iraq when Sir Sasson Heskell held the finance ministry in several governments. In the 1920's and 30's over 50% of the trade and finance was in Jewish hands but by the 50's this had dropped to less than 10%. From 1820 Iraqi Jews spread out to India, Australia, The Far East and Europe. The Rashid Ali pogrom of 1941 decided the community that there was no future in Iraq. In the mass emigration of 1950/51 aliya Ezra and Nehemia and thereafter the majority left for Israel. But the better off went to Europe and America where there now are about 40,000, of whom about 7,000 are in the U.K., including our brethren from India who have faithfully kept to the Baghdadian tradition and who are so ably looked after by David Elias.

Refugee Exchange

The fact that our community was divided in this way does not relieve us of our responsibilities towards the needy who ended up mainly in Israel.

It is a pity that Israel does not make full use of the fact that thirty years ago there was an exchange of refugees — the 800,000 Palestinian Arabs who left Israel and the 800,000 Jews from Arab countries who came to Israel. While Israel absorbed its refugees, Arab countries deliberately kept theirs in camps to be used as a lever against Israel.

(In whatever manner the Jews left the Arab countries they arrived in Israel as refugees).

Rabbothay, for nearly 2000 years we have been praying and hoping for the return to Zion. Our generation has been privileged to witness the rebirth of Israel. I therefore often ask myself, what are we doing here? Why are we not back in Israel? The answer lies in the difference between religious Zionism and political Zionism. When King Feisal I paid a visit to the Jewish community in Baghdad in 1925 he asked my grandfather, who was then Chief Rabbi, if the Jews of Iraq were Zionists? The answer was, "We are all Zionists because three times a day we pray for the return to Zion." This is religious Zionism. But when a few months later a Zionist emissary came to Baghdad the community would not deal with him until he brought a recommendation from King Feisal, of all people. That was political Zionism.

From the early days of the Galuth Babylonian rabbis came to the conclusion that Israel needs a Mashiyah to make a radical change in its structure. It was no use reviving Israel with the old diseases that killed it on two previous occasions. Ezra's reforms made the galuth under the Torah self-sufficient and deferred 'Sine Die' the need for a Mashiyah. Jesus opposed the Pharisees and Mohammed, claiming that he came to revive the pure religion of Abraham, arose as a direct reaction to the spread of the Talmud. Jewish circles not within the Babylonian orbit widely opposed the Talmud and accepted Mohammed as a Goy Mashiyah, such as the Jews of Arabia and the Jewish exiles in Afghanistan and Kashmir (the Pathans). We heard from Sir Elly Kadourie that Afghan King Amanollah Khan had told him in Baghdad that he was of the Jewish tribe of Benjamin.

It is said that history repeats itself. In fact, like a good teacher, history only repeats itself when the lesson is not learned. So what are the problems that a Mashiyah has to solve? And where did we go wrong?

Firstly, that Eretz Israel by itself is too small as a viable homeland for the Jewish people. While Israel is our national home the whole Middle East is our home. The Talmud states that the Almighty exciled the Jews to Babylon of all places because just as a husband who is displeased with his spouse sends her back to her father's house, the Almighty sent us back to the land of our forefathers. Professor Kamal Salibi's new theory that Jewish history did not take place in Palestine but in Arabia cannot be taken seriously. But it is a fact however that

for a long time the Jews did occupy Hejaz and parts of the Yemen. The Hebrews came from Arabia in the fourth wave of migration. All this shows our historical connections with all parts of the region. Israel should aim for a kind of confederation, based on the communal autonomy that was applied by the Ottoman empire. In a sense Israel's strategic frontiers are on the borders of Iran and Turkey.

Secondly, that Israel must not be caught in super power politics. The defeats of 586 BCE and 70 CE were the outcome of involvement in the struggle between Egypt and Babylon and between Rome and Persia. Today, Israel's dependence on American Jewry which, in every way, is the modern counterpart of the Babylonian Diaspora could embroil the Jewish sate in the struggle between America and Russia.

Thirdly, economics. It is said that Israel is a nation of rich people in a poor country. The rich are the moneylenders and those who are fortunate to own land and property. But the Torah forbade usury, i.e. interest on money and forbade freehold titles in land — and land must not be sold in perpetuity — and commanded the jubilee system which means in modern terms, index-linked leasehold tenure with rent reviews every fifty years. The state income from this would cover all government expenditure and leave enough to pay a national dividend to all citizens. Moslem banking is an artificial way to get around usury. The correct way is that money be issued in the name of the consumer and not the moneylender. Have the prophets not denounced again and again the economic system whereby the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? As we see today, this is particularly dangerous in a country such as Israel.

Fourthly, relations with the Arabs.

Why did we weep then and why are we concerned today? Perhaps the next three words of the Psalm can give the answer —

"Al aravim betocha . . ."

What is the sense of offering full employment to Arabs in Israel or who come to Israel while neighbouring Arab countries import labour from India and Far East and while many Israeli Jews are forced to emigrate? While the policy of Kahane does not conform to Israeli thinking or Jewish teachings we do not have to apologise for his behaviour. Kahane is an Arab product. He is the direct result of Arab intransigence. They only have themselves to blame if someone wants to pay them in their own currency. Perhaps to their detriment, Jews never drove out natives from Israel. It was the Arabs who applied such a policy so that by massacres, conversions and forced emigration they made Arabia 100% free of Jews until now.

The Arabs accuse Israel of being expansionist but it is the Arabs themselves who have been expanding since the rise of Islam.

Fifthly, Aliyah. At the inauguration of the commonwealth Jewish council last year, Francis Pym who was Foreign Minister

Ambassador's Response

remarked in his speech that it was no longer true to say that the sun never sets on the British Empire. But that it is true to say that the sun never sets on the Jewish Diaspora. The Diaspora can be looked upon as Israel's empire. There is no need for Israel to swallow up the communities of the Diaspora one after another. In the absence of a Mashiyah Diaspora Jews want by and large to stay put. The Diaspora has no desire to liquidate itself. However, under proper conditions many more Jews would want to emigrate to Israel. In the meantime there is a case for encouraging half-Aliyah whereby Diaspora Jews can establish permanent second homes in the Holy Land.

Israel needs millions more people. But these can be produced from within and would cost Israel less than immigrants. The national dividend can be tailored to encourage large families.

Sixthly, a Messiah will give us a moral uplift and may also develop our religion to realise the vision of Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah when the whole world accepts and submits to God's rule.

But even in the absence of a Mashiyah we should do our utmost to facilitate his job.

Your Excellency, we were delighted to hear from you on Yom Yerushalayim that every Jew is a citizen of Jerusalem. It would be wonderful if this could be given some practical expression. It would be an ideal way to get all Jews involved even by allowing them to take part in some Jerusalem elections.

To honour your visit I pledge to the Exilarch's Foundation which I formed six years ago.

I take this opportunity to wish you all Shana Tova and Tizkoo Leshanim Rabboth.

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Are Jews really Arabs?

KEN LIVINGSTONE, the GLC leader has stated that the Jews are merely an Arab tribe who chose a different religion.

If this is meant as an insult, it must be an insult to the Arabs before it can be an insult to the Jews. In other words, that the Arabs are an inferior race, as they would see it. If it is meant as a statement of historical fact it is not exactly true. One is reminded of post-Darwin assertions that Man is descended from the monkeys, later corrected to that man and monkey had a common ancestry.

Likewise it is more correct to say that the Jews and the Arabs have a common ancestry. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that the Jews have as much a right as the Arabs to the entire Middle East which must be enjoyed by all the peoples of the region.

IN THE COURSE of an inspiring response, Mr. Yehuda Avner described Mr. Dangoor's speech as "eloquent and memorable." After describing Israel's position in the Middle East, "sovereign, independent and resolute", he painted a vivid picture in his mind's eye, at once striking and colourful.

"When was the last time we met (as Communities)," he asked. And he answered his own question: "It was on a hot summer's afternoon; flames were leaping high in the sky; the stench of burnt corpses was overpowering; the ruins were black with smoke; those alive were moving around bewildered, in a daze; all that was left of the Second Temple in Jerusalem were huge, jagged stones — and a Wall." "Never again", he declaimed. "This is the message of Israel Reborn. In 1948 was re-established the Jewish State — after the next greatest tragedy ever to befall the Jewish people, (or any people, he might have added) — the Nazi Holocaust of six million of our brethren." Mr. Avner then described in moving terms his visit the week before, with Rabbi Dr. Abraham Levy, to Gibraltar. "In a small corner of the Iberian Peninsula we recited the Mincha prayer — in the same terms and accents as did our ancestors before the destruction of the Second Temple. True, the Temple was destroyed but the Jewish People, under the guidance of the Almighty is indestructible, eternal." The Romans are no more — but we are here today, vibrant, powerful."

In reply specifically to a passage in Mr. Dangoor's speech, Mr. Avner said: "alright — if not full aliya, semi-aliya. Buy a flat in Israel, or start a business there." He was referring to the foremost plank in the Zionist platform — aliya to Israel to rebuild the Jewish State, and stressing the centrality of Israel in Jewish life today. He received a standing ovation.

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Chairman's Remarks

AT THE START of the meeting, Mr. Gourgey, who presided, said that this was "an historic" occasion for the Club — the first time an Israel Ambassador ever visited it. He used his phrase, "the Romance of being a Jew" — the enormous diversity of the Jewish

people, with differing backgrounds and cultures, and yet an underlying unity based on a common fate and faith making for the unity and continuity of the Jewish people. The sentence in the Psalms which Herzl had used as a clarion call to the Jewish people before the first Zionist congress in Basle in 1897, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, if I set thee not above my chiefest joy." This was first uttered by the Babylonian Exiles following the destruction of the First Temple in 587 BCE, of which the present Iraqi Jewish community is a direct lineal descendant. In moving a vote of thanks to both speakers, Mr. Gourgey recalled the three Jewish States in the Middle East region, outside of Israel, long before the advent of the Arabs who came from Saudi Arabia in the 7th century CE to carry the message of Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam. "We should stress to Western and world public opinion that, if anything, it is the Arabs who are the invaders in the Middle East, to counter the false propaganda of Jews as an alien element in the area." This was warmly applauded. He concluded with the traditional phrase preceding the New Year (5745) — "Leshana Tova Tikatebu."

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Dinner Party

AT A RECENT dinner party which was attended by the Haham and Mrs. Gaon, Mr. Dangoor presented prizes to the ladies who offered outstanding dishes.

First prize went to Claire S. for her excellent Tbeet. Other prizes were received by:-

Samira E. — for a fish masgouf with tamarind

Latifa F. — Salona

Dorette S. — Spring rolls with accompanying sauce

Berta D. — Ungriyye, one of her many specialities, nicely presented in individual pieces

Flora M. — Potato chops

Renée D. — Sambusak

Suhaila D. — Stuffed lamb, an increasingly popular dish

Stella R. — Rice with broad beans, an Iranian dish

Charlotte J. — Stew with raisins (secret recipe)

Dahlia G. — Baklava, artistically presented

Arlette Z. — Yule log

Violet S. — Perfumed apple jam, without water

Victoria H. — Chocolate cake

Berta F. — Apple pie

Book Review

by Percy Gourgey, M.B.E.

"The Board and Zion" Dr. S. Levenberg, (Rare Times, Ltd., Hull)

"WE ARE ALL Zionists now," is a claim made by most Jews, especially after the success of Zionism, the Jewish National Liberation Movement, in establishing the State of Israel in 1948.

The bitter struggles preceding the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which paved the way to the British Mandate in Palestine after the First World War, leading to their eventual withdrawal and the Declaration of Independence 30 years later, are told in a remarkable story by the author, himself a prominent Zionist, scholar and historian.

This book concerns the controversy raging in the Board of Deputies of British Jews before and after 1917, when the then leaders of Anglo-Jewry were wholly opposed to the idea of Jewish statehood. Almost incredibly, but the facts are beyond dispute, David Alexander KC, President of the Board of Deputies, and Claud Montefiore, President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, wrote a joint letter to The Times on 24 May 1917 strenuously opposing Zionism and the striving towards a Jewish state. They were given powerful support by Edwin Montagu, then Secretary of State for India in the War Cabinet, on the grounds that Zionism would call into question their utter loyalty to His Britannic Majesty! Fortunately, their views suffered defeat at the hands of other Deputies, and British Jewry came out in support of the Balfour Declaration, as did indeed the then Editor of The Times, Wickham Steed. But the initial opposition by the "assimilationist" Jews, the "wrong" Jews as the great Chaim Weizmann once described them, wrought incalculable damage to the cause of Zion and the otherwise harmonious transition to statehood. Leading the Zionist Deputies in 1917, was the late Elsley Zeitlin whom I met when I first joined the Board in 1960.

But again in 1943, the Board's leadership which had passed into non-Zionist hands, sought to oppose the Biltmore Programme for a Jewish State adopted in New York (at the Hotel Biltmore) in 1942. They were again defeated by the Zionist 'caucus' led by Barnett (Lord) Janner and Lavy Bakstansky, General Secretary of the Zionist Federation, and the Board was properly primed to oppose the anti-Zionist Ernest Bevin, Britain's post-

war Foreign Secretary (1945-51). I am glad I served under both these leaders as an honorary officer in the Zionist Federation.

We owe a debt of gratitude for the publication of this informative and valuable volume not only to the author himself, but also to the present Secretary of the Zionist Group in the Board, Walter Leaf, who "dreamt, slept, ate and lived the book" (as he told me) and Jack Lennard the publisher. But for their efforts we would not have been able to read about such exciting aspects of Zionist History.

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Spot an Ancestor

A FURTHER SELECTION from the register of military taxpayers of the Baghdad community of 1892.

Ezra Eliahou Bassa
Abraham Eliahou Bassa
Peres Elia Bassa
Bakhash Saleh Bakhash
Sasson Reuben Hayim Bakhash
Shaul Reuben Hayim Bakhash
Moshi Reuben Hayim Bakhash
Reuben Saleh Bekhish
Nissim Abraham Bekhish & Sons
Sasson Raphael Bwetha
Yizhaq Ezra Yosef Betousha
Abdulla David Basrawi
Yosef David Basrawi
Yizhaq Saleh Balas
Selinan Ezra Shoua Balas
Aboudic Hakham Eliahou Brakhel
Muallem Yehouda Brakhel
Heskel Ezra Brakhel
Hayyu Nissim Bershan
Shlomo Saleh Bershan
Shaul Saleh Bershan
Shaul Hayyu Bershan
Shlomo Yosef Bershan
Gabriel Yosef Bershan
Meir Matuq Yosef Bershan
Moshi Shimon Bashi
Eliahou Yosef Bashi
Aboudi Yosef Bashi
Shimon Yosef Bashi
Yacoub Yosef Bashi
Shimon Abraham Bashi
Yacoub Sasson Benyamin
Eliahou Benyamin Sasson Benyamin
Shlomo Meir Benyamin Sasson Benyamin
Shaul Abdulla David Benyamin
Abdulla Eliahou Benyamin
Ezra Yizhaq Basri
Saleh Yizhaq Basri
Menashe Yizhaq Basri
Shaul Yizhaq Basri
Aboudi Yizhaq Basri
Heskel Yizhaq Basri

The Beach

AS I LIE here on the beach, I find myself totally mesmerised by my surroundings:-

The immaculate golden sand, laundered by wave and wind, surrounds the sea like a vast antechamber. The exquisite appearance of the deep blue water as its white-sandalled feet creep onto the sand like a frightened girl seems to inveigle me to surrender myself to its herculean strength. But instead, I lie here and consume the large red drops of sun which one by one linger on the horizon and then drip over and disappear. They are soaked up by the homogeneous bathers, who are all lying down in their swimwear, determined not to miss a drop. They appear to portray an inherent want to follow the trend of getting brown. But there are those who are not so interested in the vagaries of fashion and venture out into the sea, to which they are adversaries as they battle their way against its peremptory waves, which ensure that they make but little progress. Everyone and everything appears to be at work. Even the electrical fans, which some of the bathers have brought are very busy looking this way and that.

In the distance, I can see people travelling in caravans, wandering like snails with their homes on their backs. I can see an ice-cream van with a tinkling bell and a comet's trail of children.

'Everyone to his work' I think as I roll over and sense a slow smile sending the wrinkles gliding over my face like a shoal of tiny fish.

BRENDA DANGOOR

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Just received:

"Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad — His Life and Writings" by Abraham Ben-Yaacob. Published in 1984 by Iraqi Jews Traditional Culture Center, 83 Hagana Street, P.O.B. 151, Or Yehuda 60251. It concerns one of the most distinguished of Baghdad Rabbis, who lived from 1834-1909, who loved the Torah, the Jewish People and Eretz Israel, which he visited in 1869. His famous work, **"Ben Ish Hai"** was widely admired. The book, **"Bekhor Shamayim"** was originally compiled and prepared by Haham Ezra Dangoor.

The Iraqi Center is establishing a Museum dedicated to the history and customs of the Jews in Iraq.

All who have material for the Museum, such as ceremonial and household objects, are invited to contact the Center (address above).