

AFTER 2,000 YEARS.

A REMARKABLE SERVICE.

There are occasions when even the non-conforming Jew in a not too religious age is attracted to the Synagogue. One of these events is the celebration of Chanukah. Never, however, was this more demonstrated than last Sunday afternoon at the Wolmarans Street Synagogue in Johannesburg.

A Chanukah service had been advertised with choral and orchestral accompaniment to which also Jews in the military units were invited. The writer, with many others, wended his way to the Synagogue anticipating the presence of a few hundred people. On his arrival, however, he found a huge concourse of expectant worshippers gradually filling the large building.

The service was timed to begin at five o'clock. Long before that time, the Synagogue was filled to its utmost capacity, and a few hundred people were forced to stand in the aisles in order to participate in the service. There must have been fully three thousand worshippers, and as these stood up to the tune of *Ma Tovo*—"How Goodly Are Thy Tents"—sung by Rev. N. Lopato and choir, the scene in the Synagogue was indeed one long to be remembered by those present.

It is a rare occasion when into the severe atmosphere of a Synagogue the sound of orchestral music penetrates. The happy nature of Chanukah, however, permits of this temporary innovation. Into the spacious vastness of the huge building, the musical strains of the orchestra band rang with fine effect. The strains of the instruments were accompanied by the voices of the well-organised choir under the direction of Mr. J. Kantor. All this, with the occasional musical interpolation of the Chazan rendered a fine sacred effect.

The vigorous musical voice of that talented singer, Mr. I. Mirwish, was heard to considerable advantage in *Nachnu Edim* and particular interest to the song was lent by the knowledge that the words were written by the Chief Rabbi, Dr. J. L. Landau. In solemn manner, the Chief Rabbi, who had ascended the pulpit, recited the prayer for the Royal Family, the whole audience standing in reverent attention.

In an expressive manner, the Chief Rabbi then delivered a sermon full of eloquence and beauty. He pointed out that throughout the last 2,000 years Jews had celebrated the victory of Judas Maccabeus. It was the victory of the descendants of the Hasmoneans which had made possible the continued existence of the Jewish people.

As the Chief Rabbi spoke in his sonorous and eloquent tones, one felt compelled to gaze at the huge congregation which had gathered in the Central Synagogue in Johannesburg two thousand years after the great Jewish event. The feeling was dominant that a people which could remember an historic occurrence after so many centuries had elapsed, were a people of great vitality who would yet accomplish great deeds.

It was also evident that the newer spirit of joy in the celebration of a great Jewish victory was filling the minds and souls of the worshippers.

Thoughts must have been concentrated upon the wonderful spirit of the new Maccabeans—the *Chalutzim*, who are now courageously reclaiming the marshes and swamps of our historic Homeland.

After Dr. Landau descended from the pulpit, Rev. N. Lopato impressively "Kindled the Lights." Mr. Lionel Lipkie distinguished himself with a truly beautiful rendition of *DeGel Jehudah*. The rendering of this song was particularly interesting; not only were these words also written by Dr. Landau, but the music was composed by Mr. Kantor. The item, therefore, was of a peculiarly South African interest. One felt it a pity that musical items of this nature are not more often heard by Johannesburg Jewry.

The famous song *Mo-uz Zur*, when rendered by the combined efforts of the orchestra, choir, *chazan* and congregation, was an inspiring event, and perhaps never in the lives of many of the congregants present, was the well-known tune uttered with such splendid affect. The singing of the *Hatikvah* and of the National Anthem truly ended a service of which Johannesburg Jewry can well be proud.

It is rather regrettable that the military representation was meagre. Invitations had been openly extended to Jewish members of the Union's forces to participate in the service, but only 100 uniformed persons, including Cadets, Scouts and members of the V.A.D. were present. It is to be hoped that at next year's Chanukah festival a larger representation from the forces will be present.

It was pleasant to note the crowded condition of the women's gallery—certainly a unique event in the Synagogue. In the forefront of the gallery was noticed a group of Jewish ladies of the V.A.D. (under the commandship of Mrs. Fagin), who made a brave show in their neat uniforms. An orthodox old gentleman sitting next to the writer admitted that he looked upon the young ladies with great pride, for were they not doing humane work? He muttered something further which the writer did not at first catch, but which finally amounted to this—that the red cross so prominently displayed on the uniforms of the ladies, might have been temporarily removed for the special sacred occasion. The writer records here the old gentleman's opinion, so that in future services of this kind the susceptibilities of the strictly orthodox might be further studied.

The immense concourse quietly emerged from the Synagogue. The writer was pleased to observe that among the military officers present, besides Lieut. Simon Abrahams, there were two other representatives of the Jewish Legion in Palestine. The attendance of these men lent a further interest to the occasion, but it is a pity the congregation was not aware of their presence.

The *Mincha* service was conducted by the Rev. E. D. Lyons, and that veteran demonstrated that in spite of his age he can render synagogue melodies very sweetly.

Indeed, it was a great service before a great congregation to commemorate a great event; and served as an excellent counter-demonstration to the unfortunate spreading of the influence of Christmas festivities in certain circles of our community.

D.

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