

Simchath Torah: A Cameo.

By BERTHA FRIEDMAN.

It was the eve of Simchath Torah. The shul was packed. Downstairs the men swayed over their prayer-books. They paid far more attention to the service than their fashionable wives and daughters in the galleries above.

There the chatter went on happily, news was tossed from one to the other, feminine eyes were wide awake to new styles on smart neighbours. There was no awed silence, no humble submissiveness. The congregation was obviously on familiar terms with its Creator.

The warmth, the bright lights hanging in crystal chandeliers from the large domed roof, the massed harmonies of the choir, took us far from the prosaic routine of everyday life to the picturesque world of ceremony. A spirit of gaiety pervaded the synagogue and for a few short hours Jewry's lament was forgotten in a song of joy.

Suddenly there was a movement among the women. The front rows leaned over the balcony. Those behind stood tip-toe, faces bright with interest, peering over shoulders to see the ceremony below.

On the marble platform before the ark stood the cantor; a dignified figure in his black gown and long white prayer-shawl. His voice rang through the shul calling the names of those who were to have the honour of carrying the Scrolls of the Law round the synagogue. One by one they walked up, clasped the torahs in their arms

and stood waiting till the ark was emptied of its holy contents.

The choir sang beautifully as the procession of men carrying torahs followed the cantor seven times round the shul, commemorating the conclusion of the year's reading of the Torah.

For a few minutes these business men forgot their worries and became the dignified participants of ceremony. The cream-coloured covers of the torahs, richly embroidered and crowned with gold and silver bells tinkling merrily, the chanting of the cantor intoxicated the little boys grouped in the aisles. And they sprang forward merrily to kiss each torah as the procession passed.

The seventh circuit was completed. The men, led by the cantor, trooped onto the marble platform before the ark and stood massed together. Tinkling bells mixed with boyish sopranos as one by one the torahs were restored to the ark for another year.

The women returned to their seats. Divested of the picturesque Scrolls of the Law the men looked their ordinary selves once more. But for a short while at least they were touched with the beauty of a joyous tradition. In those few moments they sustained the link between past and present and displayed the spirit which has kept Jewry alive through all the vicissitudes of a tragic history.

Richard Tauber in "Land of Smiles."

"Land of Smiles," the delightful musical play which is being presented by Richard Tauber and a London company in Johannesburg and which is attracting crowded houses to the Empire, is due to open at the Alhambra Theatre, Cape Town, on Wednesday evening, the 11th October, and the booking plans are now open.

When this operetta had its premiere at Drury Lane Theatre, London, Tauber conquered his audience with the liquid gold of his marvellous voice and after he had sung the theme song "You are my Heart's Delight" the audience burst into thunders of applause. Indeed in Johannesburg, Tauber is compelled to sing this song five or six times each evening.

Franz Lehar wrote "Land of Smiles" for Tauber, and on the first night of its production in London he sent a message of affectionate greeting and promised him more beautiful melodies to sing.

Tauber's part in this play is that of a Chinese prince who wins the affections of a high-born Viennese girl, marries her, and takes her back with him to his own country. There she learns that native custom compels him to have four Manchu wives. Broken-hearted, she tries with the help of a young officer who had proposed to her before her marriage, to escape, but is prevented. More important than the story is the music that decorates it. The composer's accomplished craftsmanship is in evidence throughout. The lavish settings are said to be the most beautiful and exotic Oriental backgrounds ever seen in a play.

The prima donna of "Land of Smiles" is the beautiful Mara Losseff, whose fine singing and acting ability is said to make her worthy of partnering the famous tenor. Other members of the cast are: Hella Kurty, who combines a dainty personality with a lovely voice; Brian Buchell, a noted character actor, who has scored big successes in film and stage work; and Willy Stettner, a humorist with much musical comedy experience.

Music lovers in Cape Town will be interested to hear that Charles Manning, the well-known conductor from the Colosseum, Johannesburg, is returning for a season to Cape Town, and will conduct the specially augmented orchestra for "Land of Smiles."

"Common Sense."

VALUABLE PUBLICATION.

The current issue of "Common Sense," the monthly journal issued in Johannesburg by the Society of Jews and Christians is of a high standard and contains a number of interesting articles such as "The Position of Jewry To-day," by the Hon. J. H. Hofmeyr; "Some Historic Forgeries," by G. Saron; "Boomerang Propaganda," by Dr. H. Sonnabend; "Christian National Education," by Prof. R. F. A. Hoernle; "The Rising Tide," by the Rev. A. W. ("Tubby") Eaton and "Die Hugenote," by Adv. G. F. de Vos Hugo.

"Common Sense" is a most valuable publication and deserves wide support. Subscriptions are 3/- per annum for members of the Society of Jews and Christians, and 4/- for non-members and should be sent in to "Common Sense," P.O. Box 7791, Johannesburg.

BARMITZVAH.

GORDON.—Hyman, only son of Rev. and Mrs. Ch. Gordon, of Wynberg, will read a Portion of the Law at the Wynberg Synagogue on Saturday, 14th October, 1939. Broche at 11 a.m. at "Passeli," Benjamin Road, Wynberg. Owing to the war the reception to have been held has been cancelled.

"Old Mutual" Year.

CONTINUED PROGRESS REVEALED.

The ninety-fourth annual report of the directors of the South African Mutual Life Assurance Society, covering the financial year ended June 30 last, reflects continued substantial progress.

During the year 29,540 proposals were received for assurances amounting to £15,092,927 and 21,324 were completed and issued for £12,828,479, of which £51,800 were reassured. The premiums payable on the £12,776,679 retained by the society was £340,917, in addition to £93,625 received by way of single premiums.

Claims Paid.

The amount paid in claims since the society was established in 1845 is shown at £25,761,384, and the funds under administration at the close of the financial year totalled £33,068,949, compared with £31,020,128 a year ago.

The average nett rate of interest earned on the assurance fund during the year was £4 11s. 3d. per cent., compared with £4 12s. 6d. per cent. in 1937-38, and the total premium income rose by £219,528 to £3,016,588.

The working expenses for the year were 16.6 per cent. of the premium income, the same percentage as in 1937-38.



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