

## OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

By Rozilda.

### From Sunset to Sunset.

#### THE CAPE TOWN SYNAGOGUES ON YOM KIPPUR.

The solemn twilight which ushered in the awe-inspiring grandeur of the Day of Atonement in Cape Town was still and mild. No breeze disturbed the serenity of the trees in the Avenue whose vivid young green gave promise of a season of rich fulfilment. A bird safely settled in its nest for the night uttered a last cheerful chirp as the steady and ever-increasing murmur of human voices and the sound of human footsteps walking up the Avenue gave a false sense of day-time busy-ness to the usual twilight calm.

Rapidly the Gardens Synagogue filled until there was not even standing room left. Even the topmost seats right under the ceiling were occupied.

A breathless hush of expectation hung on the air. Then loud and clear and with a haunting supplication in it the age-old yearning melody pierced the pregnant stillness . . . . "Kol Nidre . . . . all vows, obligations, anathemas, whether termed *Kunam*, *Kenoos* or any other expression by which we shall have vowed, sworn, devoted or bound ourselves to from this day of atonement until the next day of atonement (whose arrival we hope for in happiness) we repent beforehand of them all . . . . the vows shall not be reckoned vows, the obligations shall not be obligatory nor the oaths considered as oaths."

Three times the solemn words and the ancient tune rang out, varying in stress and tone.

In every Cape Town Synagogue large and small the same solemnity and the same atmosphere of reverence was maintained. The great unifying force of the most holy day of the year bound and held together every Jew and Jewess who possessed the smallest spark of racial consciousness.

The varied and sometimes conflicting elements of the Jewish population of the town, drawn from every corner of the globe, with every shade and divergence of opinion and outlook and religious feeling, all for this one day from sunset to sunset were one single unit, with a common emotion and uttering the same prayers.

Making a tour of all the Cape Town Synagogues on Yom Kippur we found that though they were alike in essentials, they vary considerably in external detail.

We give below a series of impressions of most of the places in Cape Town where service was held.

#### *The Gardens Synagogue.*

We arrived here early on Yom Kippur morning, and found the women's gallery about a third full. Those women who earnestly come to pray on the Day of Atonement were already in their seats for some time. The synagogue at this time was peaceful and full of quiet reverence. By 11.30 the back rows were crowded.

The children from all over the town behaved themselves with quite

unsurpassed decorum, they moved very quietly and many carried little white prayer books.

The Memorial Service for the Dead was a period of great solemnity and beauty, during which a reverential silence prevailed. So still was it, indeed, that Mr. Bender's quiet voice could be heard distinctly in the furthest corner of the Synagogue.

#### *The Old Synagogue.*

We went into the little Old Synagogue during Mussaph. Here in the oldest synagogue in town seemed to be gathered some of the oldest members of our congregation. A number of aged women occupied the front seats of the gallery. They read out of their thumbed and worn prayer-books, taking scant heed of the other people round them.

We were much stirred by the spectacle of a gentle old lady with a time-scarred, wrinkled face and bowed shoulders who sat still and isolated though there were people on either side of her. Her eyes were shut, but from their tightly pressed lids great tears fell silently upon her frail hands. Plainly she was living again, in her inward eye, scenes of a past day, reviving a time which, alas, could never return. Such deep and pathetic sadness was hers, such patient resignation that we wondered whether her thoughts were those of Ecclesiastes, "For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth in shadow."

#### *The Ponewiz Synagogue.*

We had never been to the little Synagogue in Van der Leur Street and consequently were all the more delighted with the great contrast between the noisy street outside and the peaceful homeliness of the little Ponewiz Synagogue. Ahappy intimacy, a pleasant atmosphere of family union and a general feeling of friendliness and good fellowship were here. The well kept little house of worship seemed to have a smiling, comfortable, personality of its own. The men below were on perfectly good terms with each other and apparently with the Almighty. Tiny children played quietly and freely among them and crept up the steps of the Ark and behind the curtain with the utmost confidence, imbibing from their infancy, it seemed, a love and affection for the House of God. On either side of the stately and patriarchal Chazan on the Bimah, and clinging to the pillar as if he were carved upon it, was a little boy like a little cherub gazing with devotion and admiration at the singer. A little girl sat with her father and her young brother. Intense pride shone on her little face for round her neck she wore that cherished symbol—a Talluth. She kissed it tenderly several times and smoothed it lovingly with her fingers taking intense joy in the silken texture. In the women's gallery the matronly and rosy-

cheeked mothers wore white shawls on their heads and took part in the service without the slightest self-consciousness.

#### *The Zionist Hall.*

It must be a source of great joy and pride, renewed on every festive occasion, to the Zionist worshippers at the New Zionist Hall who look round the beautiful and spacious new edifice and contrast it with the little hall in Hope Street which did faithful service for so many years.

Though there was a tremendous congregation present the hall did not in any way appear crowded—so spacious is it.

We could not help recalling the little old Zionist Hall in the days of its glory, when a few staunch supporters of a half-despised movement crowded it to its very doors, when the women were tightly packed in three rows of chairs behind a curtain on the platform and when the children played in the lane outside or asked riddles in the little reading room behind.

How triumphantly the voice of the Chazan rose in that little old hall. Small though the place was and shabby, and though there was nothing inspiring except the large portrait of Dr. Herzl, yet there was a sense of coming achievement and a strong consciousness of hope which would one day be realised.

The New Zionist Hall must indeed give local Zionists a greater incentive than ever to hope for the future.

#### *The Beth Hamedrash.*

The Beth Hamedrash in Constitution Street was enjoying a short interval when we arrived. Most of the seats were empty. A few men in slippers were walking round or standing in little groups exchanging remarks and snuff. We were surprised to note how strong a hold the modern smelling-bottle is getting on even the most orthodox and heavily bearded of Jews. Some sat quietly reading, and the women chattered, asking each other how they felt and describing at full length their ailments and the ailments of those near and dear to them. A little after four o'clock the Chazan gave the reading desk a smart blow with the flat of his hand and gradually the congregation filed in. A woman began to read from a large book to a number of other women. Her voice rose and fell with a loud realistic wailing. Occasionally she wet her thumb and turned the leaf with an important gesture. Downstairs a youth with a beautiful aesthetic face and the eyes of a dreamer sat deep engrossed in his *Machsor*. When the Ark was opened he rose and reverently kissed the Torah as it was borne past him. An old grandfather lifted his tiny grandson, and the child too kissed the holy Torah.

#### *The Chassidische Shool.*

Unfortunately for us the women are in an entirely separate room in

the little synagogue in Buitenkant Street, so that we were unable to obtain more than a fleeting impression of the service or its conduct. Although a kindly woman beckoned to us to be seated we felt like intruders in this tiny chamber crowded with some twelve women, all most concentrated in their worship and allowing neither their eyes nor their thoughts to stray from their prayers.

Through the aperture high up in the wall floated the quiet rhythmic murmur of the men, deeply engrossed in prayer. We felt out of place and after a while tip-toed out.

#### *Roeland Street Synagogue.*

The Roeland Street Congregation were quietly at their service when we entered. There is about this community an atmosphere of solidity and bourgeois comfort. The end of the day was near and the congregation had settled into a still and grave session of prayer. In this peaceful atmosphere it was pleasant to sit for a while. But the day was drawing to its end and we felt that it was time for us to return to our own seats in the Gardens.

#### *The Conclusion of the Service.*

The lights were lit when we returned to the Gardens Synagogue. Already women who had responsibilities at home had left their seats. Those who remained were deep and earnestly at prayers. The imminence of the end gave an intensity and a deeper significance to the dying day. The windows were open and showed a sky that was losing its brightness.

The choir seemed to have gained an added sweetness, the Chazan's voice a more ringing clarity. For the last time the "Sh'ma Yisroel" was intoned. Three times Chazan and choir sang "Blessed be the name of the Glory of His kingdom for ever and ever."

Seven times the Chazan proclaimed the affirmation of faith and the choir repeated it melodiously, rising by a semi-tone each time: "The Lord He is God."

Then proudly the Shofar rang out its clarion call.

And the same little bird which had been awakened the previous night woke again and echoed the words, "The Lord He is God."

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