



OVERPOWERINGLY AND HAUNTINGLY BEAUTIFUL.

Not only the vastness of the stage which accommodated a cast of 6,200 who participated in the presentation of "The Romance of a People" at Soldier Field in Chicago recently, but the magical lighting effects used to heighten the dramatic incidents of the tremendous spectacle, were brought out in the gorgeous picture shown above. This was only one of the many eye-filling and heart-quickenings scenes that deeply moved the audience of 125,000.

Romance of the Jewish Past

*Impressions of the Gigantic Spectacle that Marked Jewish Day
at the Chicago Exhibition*

A Letter from Chicago

The following article describes the stupendous pageant that was performed recently before the largest Chicago audience that ever witnessed a Jewish event.

By

Meyer F. Steinglass

AFTER America had set up the Century of Progress Exhibition at Chicago as a shrine for its industrial and scientific achievements, more than 125,000 Jews, almost 75 per cent. of Canada's entire Jewish population, assembled at Soldiers' Field to present to the world not the products of mechanical or scientific labours, not the most modern Pullman car nor the most perfect steel furnace, but the essence of their culture, the secret of their survival down the ages—the Torah. When twelve men deposited a giant replica of the scrolls upon an illuminated altar near the centre of the world's largest open air stadium, when the stirring voice of an unseen narrator bade the mass of humanity dip into the Bible and there read forty centuries of Jewish history and destiny, there was unfurled a

pageant whose lofty sweep and majesty penetrated the very marrow of the Jewish soul and lifted the Jewish heart to new heights of faith and courage.

With an artistic excellence rarely equalled the gigantic spectacle of "The Romance of a People" depicted the story of the Jewish people—a story in which only now and then do celebrations and rejoicing disperse the darkness of despair and suffering. The scrolls lay on an altar of fire, facing the same sky, the same moon, under which their epic story was first enacted. Beyond the walls of Soldiers' Field, this enormous temple-for-a-day, stood the gaily coloured modernistic monuments to industry, to commerce, to science. They tell us that these are merely flimsy paste-board structures. How significant of the mad rush of progress, of the ever-

increasing complexity of things that demands new symbols, new implements daily. Progress destroys as it builds; builds as it destroys. The scrolls lay on an altar of fire. They lay there as they did many centuries ago in the temples of Israel—eternal symbols of man's baffling encounter with the cosmos, of man's endless search for the meaning of life. They lay there as the testament to the permanence of the Jewish contribution to civilization.

The largest audience that ever witnessed a Jewish event has assembled on this red letter day in American Jewish history. As the bell-like voice of the leading cantor declaims the opening words of the Bible, as he intones "Bereshis Boro Elokim" (In the beginning God created) a wave of awe engulfs the vast audience. On the stage we behold a remarkable dance representing creation. A mass of gray figures that only a moment ago lay motionless and lifeless has been infused with the breath of life. The *shofar* is sounded. Its compelling call brings

the gray figures to life. Almost two thousand arms and hands sway in a flood of light, producing the vivid picture of efflorescence—as if the earth were suddenly to give birth to vegetation. This is creation and with creation comes the first manifestation of the belief in monotheism, as cantors and chorus chant the words "God is one" in a sound-proof room behind the immense stage. A deep religious fervour grips the dancers and chorus. Again the *shofar* is heard. The orchestra reaches a crescendo and the prologue of the pageant is brought to a mighty climax with the repetition of the declaration by the Jews of their faith in one God.

The scrolls lie on an altar of fire. The narrator begins to roll them for us and we read a chronicle of a people that is more than a historical record, more than a procession of powerful scenes of suffering and joy, of piety and sinfulness, of triumph and defeat. To the many thousands of Jewish men, women, and children, who literally and figuratively turned their backs on the World Fair and the life and temper it embodied in order to relieve their tragic yet glorious past, the "Romance of a People" blazoned forth the miraculous endurance of the Jew in the face of the most severe threats to his survival. To them it brought hope of a new era, when the nations of the world would say enough to the trials and vicissitudes of the wandering Jew and help him re-establish himself in the Jewish Homeland—Palestine.

BUT quite apart from its nationalistic implications, and its historical allusions, the pageant is an unprecedented dramatic achievement. Nowhere has such grandeur of movement, such splendour of costume and lighting, such genius of direction met on common ground before. All the arts of the theatre have been forged into one huge, throbbing, spell-binding production. With what richness of colour and drama do we see unfurled before us the early history of the children of Israel. First, their ardent faith in God and the good fortune that blesses their early years. Then the rise of *Moloch* and their worship of false gods and images. Here a stupendous tableau portrays the bacchanalian revels, the religious frenzy of the multitude as a huge

statue of *Moloch* that spits fire and exhales smoke is brought on the stage by scores of slaves. When the idol-worshippers prepare to offer human sacrifice to the *Moloch*, we behold Abraham preparing to slay Isaac as the voice of God had commanded him to do. But now the voice of God is heard once again: "Abraham, lay not thy hand upon the lad, for I know thou art a God-fearing man . . ." The story of Israel in bondage follows; the chorus chants the prayer for deliverance from slavery in Egypt, as figures bent by unbearable toil and privation move across the stage. Liberation comes at last. The bondage of the Jews is at an end. Soon there appears a caravan of camels crossing the desert. The spirit of freedom and peace reigns supreme. The third episode of the mighty spectacle describes the glory of the Temple. Priests in flowing white robes march down the gigantic triple stage to bless the thousands that have gathered to observe a solemn holiday. Over the chant of the priests the rousing sound of the *shofar* can be heard. "The Lord bless thee and keep thee."

But now a great disaster overtakes the children of Israel. The Roman legions invade the city of Jerusalem and set fire to the Temple. Interrupting the solemn service, Roman centurions in armour and chariots enter to destroy the Temple, the symbol of Jewish unity and life. It is a formidable scene, sweeping, dynamic in its drama.

The destruction of the Temple marks a most decisive event in Jewish history, for it brings the dispersion and centuries of homelessness to the Jews. There is a moving pathos in the episode of the wandering of the exiles as they plod their weary way across the stage, stumbling, falling by the wayside. How vivid is this endless wandering to the thousands of Jews in the audience. Then for centuries the Jews live a vicarious, repressed cultural existence, until the Chassidic movement supplies an outlet for their religious emotions. We now behold a group of Chassidim dancing to an ecstatic chant . . . Chassidism has provided a new escape from the rigours and tribulations of the *Galuth*.

For many centuries the Jews have been without a home. To-day they are once more restored in

Palestine. To-day they are reborn. To-day they rejoice in the renaissance of their people. The final scene of the pageant is an amazing tableau of light and joy. The *shofar* is heard again, this time the signal for the return to Palestine. Thousands of youths swarm upon the stage dancing. Some bear palms, others Jewish and American flags. The enormous stage is drenched in sunlight, seething with the dance of the new-born Jewish youth. Thus the pageant ends, pointing to the destiny of the Jew of the future and the beginning of a new and more joyous pageant of history for the Jews of the world.

MONTHS of preparation, long days of labour, hours of planning went into the making of this great spectacle. More than six thousand persons, half the Jewish population of Winnipeg, were assembled in the cast. Hundreds of communal organisations were enlisted in the presentation. Yet it would be difficult to imagine the production of "The Romance of a People" without the directing and organising genius of Meyer W. Weisgal, Executive Director of Jewish Day, without the musical and dramatic talent of Isaac Van Grove, former conductor of the Chicago Civic Opera, and without the most modern lighting and sound facilities. The stage built for the pageant was the largest in the world and its floor was equipped with glass panels for special lighting effects. Underneath the stage in a sound-proof room, singers and orchestra performed unseen by the vast audience. Composed of four levels, the stage was designed to form the Star of David terminating at the topmost level at the doors of a Temple from whose dome shone the *Mogen David* in a red neon light. The *Chicago Tribune* states that the production cost was \$80,000. Zionists announced at their convention, held at the same time in Chicago, that the pageant raised more than \$50,000 for Palestine. Local organisations as well as those in other parts of the United States who co-operated in the pageant also benefited materially.

How noble and inspiring is this sublimated form of money raising in comparison to the emptiness and drudgery of Campaigns.

(*Jewish Standard*.)

JOHANNESBURG LEAGUE FOR THE WORKING PALESTINE.

A general meeting of the above will take place on Sunday, the 27th August, at 2.30 p.m., at the H.O.D. Hall. Agenda: Executive's reports, arrangements re forthcoming shilling day, election of executive. All members and sympathisers are invited to attend.

JEWISH GUILD (Johannesburg).

A most interesting lantern lecture will be delivered at the Jewish Guild on Sunday, 3rd September, by Mr. H. E. Wood, M.Sc., Union Astronomer, on "Travels Among the Stars." This is in connection with the series of lectures arranged by the Guild of Israel Section on "Travels in Many Lands." Mr. Wood is a well-known speaker, and the address promises to be most informative.

RABBI K. L. FRENKEL.

Rabbi K. L. Frenkel was invited to Port Elizabeth to address a Mizrachi gathering there. He will also visit Bloemfontein and Kopjes. Members of the Mizrachi of the near-by towns who wish to be visited by Rabbi Frenkel should apply to the following:—B. Weinronk, Esq., 57 Prince's Street, Port Elizabeth; O. Rosenberg, Esq., P.O. Box 668, Bloemfontein; Rev. M. B. Fisher, Kopjes, O.F.S.

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