

The Second Annual Habonim Camp at Port Elizabeth

WITH the camp already fading into unreality it is a pleasant task to try to conjure up the visions of the past. All one remembers at first is the care-free life. Then gradually the picture completes itself. The songs are heard, the faces appear and for an all too brief moment the camp exists again. Only campers will understand what this means. For three weeks a hundred children have lived, played and worked together. These memories will not easily fade.

Look to Port Elizabeth for a moment. There dark clouds had gathered and events marched gloomily on. But these were forgotten when we came to the camp. Bonim and Bonoth wore blue and white scarves with pride. They unfurled their Habonim banner without fear. In the singing of their songs one felt the breath of new life and a different outlook. In this setting Habonim held its Second Annual Camp.

The more obvious attractions of Camp were pleasure and health. But if these were the only values one might be tempted to doubt the wisdom of those who made the Camp possible. This, happily, was not so. When one saw pampered children becoming self-reliant, unruly ones disciplined, one realised that Habonim was again building on a solid foundation.

During the first few days one heard the grumbling and grouching of those unaccustomed to discomfort. Some objected to the hardness of the ground; others found that to shift for oneself is more difficult than to have kindly parents tend to one's wants. But soon these complaints became fainter. For, by a kindly word and a helping-hand, every Boneh and Bonah soon came to like the feeling of being independent. And this showed itself in the cheerfulness that took possession of the Camp. Homesickness had disappeared and was replaced by a healthy enjoyment of the duties and pleasures of camp-life.

Hand in hand with this went the teaching of discipline. Here again, at the beginning, it seemed difficult. After all on holiday one was entitled to sleep a little longer, even if the rising bugle had been blown. Then there seemed to be over-scrupulousness in regard to cleanliness and kit inspection. Finally,

Impressions by a Camper



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at the time of night when one wanted to be up and doing "Lights Out" was heard. But this changed. The rules had to be obeyed and after a while the ordered existence had acquired a certain attractiveness. Not only in this way did discipline manifest itself. For although the Officers joined in the fun of the Camp yet when a word of command was given there was obedience. (One must add in parenthesis that the dreaded weapon of "Fatigue" could always be used). That discipline is an essential of a good camp cannot be denied. The appreciation of this contributed in no small measure to the smooth working of the Camp.

The day's work began with prayers. Then followed physical jerks and swimming. After breakfast Camp was cleaned, kit was inspected. Sometimes signalling, knot-tying, fire-making and other aspects of camp-craft were taught. At nights around the camp-fire one heard Hebrew songs, English Habonim songs, and naturally those songs which every South African child inevitably learns. One realised then that Jewishness and South Africanism (if one may use the expression) could be blended in the Jewish child. Other nights in the marquee one heard boys and girls talking on subjects of Jewish interest. Whether it was in song or speech, innocence and sincerity permeated all that was done.

Yet some events must be singled out. There was the Camp-fire sing-song, which Morris Alexander attended. It impressed him. And in return he stirred us. With a few well-chosen words he took us out of our night of pleasure. He made each Boneh and Bonah a responsible servant. We all became soldiers in the cause of Judaism. Few of us will forget the trip to the "Kenilworth Castle." This is not because we had never seen a ship before. Most of us had been over ships many times. But there seemed to be a peculiar invigorating tang in the air that morning. We marched with more than usual smartness. The climax was simple and yet thrilling. The ship's band played selections from Jewish music. And by chance it struck up "Hatikvah." At once the Bonim and Bonoth stood to attention and lusty voices sang "Hatikvah" as it should be sung—a song of Hope.

On the Sunday before we left we entertained Port Elizabeth to a Camp Concert. There again the balance was struck. The usual concert items were put on—pleasing to the audience of about five hundred. And then in the dim light one saw a Tiron initiated. As the meaning of the Hakdasha revealed itself, one felt that a responsive note had been struck in many hearts. That night means perhaps more to the Jews of Port Elizabeth than it did to the Camp itself.

And so the Habonim Camp ended. To speak of the spirit that existed would not reflect the reality of that spirit. In the innocent romances, in the friendships that were founded, in the contacts that were made there breathed a spirit of Jewish unity. Farewells on the station particularly at Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein, bear eloquent testimony to all this. One still sees the wistfulness of the faces as they say "Hazak." So a hundred Jewish children have learnt a little from each other. They have learnt a little of the joy of being together. And above all they learnt it as Jews. Dayenu.



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