

## "At Home" With Local Societies

### 2: A "Siyum Torah" at Jeppe.

LET us turn aside to-night, my friend, from the urgent pressure of everyday, and in the luxury of living poetry let our souls recline. Come with me eastward, to a faery place of song and rejoicing, laughter and the glow of many lights. Eastward let us go with our people, the old-young People of the Book, to drink again of that fountain of tradition that is theirs, magic source of Jewishness that is at once their inspiration and their life.

It is to the Jeppetown Hebrew Congregation that we go: there they are to celebrate Mrs. Abrahamson's presentation of a new Sefer Torah, in memory of her late husband. Rev. A. M. Kaplan gives us hearty welcome, and introduces us to the honourable guests present. We meet Rabbi I. Kossowski and Rabbi J. Kahaneman and Cantor Steinberg; the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress of Johannesburg, Councillor and Mrs. M. Freeman; Mr. H. Kroomer, chairman of the congregation; Mr. I. Ginsberg, the vice-chairman; Mr. L. Radus, the treasurer. Into the *shool* we go together for *Maariv*, which Rabbi Kossowski conducts to-night, since it is his *Yahrzeit*; then we troop into the Communal Hall for the picturesque ceremony of the *Siyum*.

First there are speeches in honour of the event; and the members of the congregation and their many guests sit at the tables in eager anticipation of the evening's oratory. Here, into the one hall, is gathered a throng that is representative of all Israel; bearded men are here, men old and learned in the ways of their people; younger men, from the hustling world of business; youths who stand but now upon the threshold of their lives; and young children in whom the men of Israel shall rise anew. Women there are, too, and though we mention them but now, let it not be thought that they are any whit less important than the men; indeed, it is they who are responsible for the fine repast spread out upon the tables: women who are mothers in Israel, and whose whose time of mothering is still to come.

#### The Speeches.

MR. KROOMER welcomes the gathering, and thanks Mrs. Abrahamson for her generous gift, wishing her long life and happiness; and Mr. Radus tells of the binding power of the Torah in Israel: how in their moments of hardest trial it has held the Jews together.

Rabbi Kossowski, in a fine speech, describes the nature of the Torah, and remarks upon the manner in which such an occasion as this brings together the Jewish community and kindles afresh in their hearts the sure and certain realisation of their Jewishness. "Troubles enough we have in Israel to-day," he says, "but not all those troubles can detract from our regard for our Jewishness and our respect for and deep veneration of the Torah which makes and consolidates that Jewishness. The Torah has been our strength throughout our history: the Torah shall give us strength for countless generations to come."

Rev. Kaplan stresses the necessity for unity in Israel, likening the Hebrew folk to the pieces of parchment which go to make a Torah. And just as there is no Torah until all the separate pieces of parchment are bound together, he says, so also there is no healthy Jewish life until all Jews unite in harmony and peace.

Rabbi Kahaneman, in beautiful words and lingering tone, compares the evening's celebration to a wedding. "The Bride and Bridegroom are here," he says; "the Holy Ark in the Shool is the Bridegroom, and the Torah before us is the Bride; and when the Bride shall be given into the arms of her groom, then the ceremony will be complete. All the history of Israel is gathered into this wonderful marriage: all the history of Israel stands by to bless and hallow it.

"Other peoples have great poems," Rabbi Kahaneman continues, "and our people, too, have great poems; but surely this Torah is the greatest of them all. Surely this is the grandest song that mortal lips have sung, this the greatest paean that ever rose in the heart of man. We should take the youth, says Rabbi Kahaneman, and teach them this Torah: "teach them to love and cherish it as they might their mother: teach them such love that they might kiss its holy words and say, in boundless devotion, 'My Torah! My Torah!'"

#### The "Siyum" Ceremony.

THERE follows the inscription of names into the Torah, and now comes the most beautiful, the most picturesque part of all. The Bridal Canopy is opened as on a wedding day: Rabbi Kossowski takes up the Torah and stands beneath its hood; and to the accompaniment of joyous Hebrew songs the company march in reverent procession to the Shool.

There Cantor Steinberg awaits them; and as they come in he intones the *Siyum* service. His voice rises and falls in the old Hebraic cadences, filled with nobility and pride: the old Hebraic cadences that have been a people's living music for over two thousand years. The last note rings through the synagogue, the organ plays, the procession approaches the Holy Ark. The Rabbis are singing joyfully, the congregation join in, eyes are sparkling with delight. The Torah is placed in the Ark, Rev. Kaplan intones the grand lines of *uvinucho yomar*. Then the curtain is drawn to and the ceremony is done.

Now we return to the hall for the *Siyum* banquet. Toasts are proposed and tributes paid to our old friend, Mr. J. Rubik, editor of "Basad," who is to take up a position in the Jeppetown Talmud Torah shortly. Mr. Rubik replies in happy vein, and the evening proceeds in festivity. Late into the night the *Siyum* continues, till at last, pleased and satisfied, the guests and their hosts depart.

In a last glance back as we go on our way home, we see in the pallid light of moon and stars the vague outline of the synagogue silhouetted against the gentle background of the night: a dark, massed bulk, strong and firm as the rock of faith on which it stands.

E.B.

### Hebrew-English Kindergarten

THE first annual meeting of the Modern Hebrew-English Kindergarten for Berea-Yeoville was held at the Yeoville Synagogue, on Thursday, 22nd inst.

Before opening the meeting, the chairwoman, Mrs. J. Feitelberg, passed a vote of condolence in respect to the late Lady Oppenheimer, who had so generously contributed towards this institution.

Mrs. Feitelberg then stated that with the assistance of an able executive and committee the institution had made marked progress. The Kindergarten, which is run on the Montessori system, started with a handful of children who have increased greatly in number. It was to be hoped, she said, that the Kindergarten would grow to such an extent as to enable the institution to open a branch in Berea.

The committee extended its thanks to their hon. treasurer, Mrs. Trevor, who has done much for the institution, and to Mrs. A. Behrman and Mrs. B. Gordon, who had worked on the executive. Appreciation was also expressed for assistance rendered by the Chief Rabbi, Dr. J. L. Landau and Mrs. Landau, by the Rev. A. T. Shrock, the United Talmud Torahs and the United Hebrew Congregation. Their gratitude was also due to the Berea Hebrew Congregation for permission to use their premises when the Kindergarten was first inaugurated, to Mr. D. Meirovsky, Director of Jewish Education, to Mr. Shacksnovis, the Inspector, and to Mr. Rudaitzky for auditing their books.

Mrs. Trevor read the financial statement, which proved most satisfactory. The election of officers then took place and resulted as follows: Chairman, Mrs. J. Feitelberg; Treasurer, Mrs. Trevor; Hon. Secretary, Miss Rose Wittert. Mesdames A. Landau, A. Behrman and B. Gordon being away, Mesdames Shrock, Udwin and Ustiev were elected to carry on their work. A strong committee was also elected.

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