

# Success of Hagigat Habonim

## A Series of Week-end Functions

### 1,000 Children Participate

THE week-end in Johannesburg was marked by the holding of the third annual Hagigat Habonim. There were a number of functions, which included a conference of officers, a successful concert at the Orpheum Theatre, a most impressive investiture ceremony in the auditorium of the great synagogue in Wolmarans Street, and a sports event at the University grounds. It is interesting to record that the movement, which began three years ago with six members, has so developed that it has to-day a membership of 1,300, divided among 58 gedudim.

FRIDAY, March 30th, was devoted to the Conference of Habonim officers, of whom about 75 were present. Much serious business was dealt with. The constitution was altered, with the result that there now exists a union of the Habonim with all Jewish youth movements of South Africa. Habonim remains as a distinct branch of the whole, but are no longer a separate organisation working independently. There are, further, definite official negotiations pending with the South African Scout movement in regard to some fixed relationship. From the attitudes of speakers representative of all parts of the country, it was evident that it was felt that some close union with the South African Boy Scout Association would be most desirable.

Reports were submitted by the chairman, the treasurer, and by commissioners from all provinces of the Union and of Rhodesia. All testified, in glowing terms, to the phenomenal strides which had been made during the year under review.

Membership had grown, during that period, from 650 to 1,300 persons; there were 58 gedudim, and, perhaps most noteworthy, it appeared from the treasurer's report that cash receipts had amounted to the sum of £2,000, the balance sheet showing a surplus of £294. It was decided that a full-time organiser be employed.

#### The Concert.

ON Sunday night the concert—composed of items rendered by local artists and of the finals of the cultural competition—took place at the Orpheum Theatre. It was representative of only a small portion of the full cultural Hagigah. This comprised an essay competition, for which there were 250 entries; the *Levena* (brick) competition, for which there were 100 entries; and the curriculum competition, which included the presentation of a song (of Hebrew or Habonim interest); an

examination of Habonim cultural work (*hakdasha, madrega, shniya*, etc.); also plays of Jewish interest.

The winners of the full cultural Hagigah were Gdud Maccabee (bonim, of Johannesburg), and Gdud Deborah (bonot, also of Johannesburg). The prizes were presented by Mrs. Penry Roberts, Mayoress of Johannesburg.

#### The Investiture.

MONDAY morning witnessed what was, perhaps, the most characteristic, and without doubt the most impressive, feature of the gathering. From an early hour, troops of *Bonim* and *Bonot* could be seen gathering outside the Synagogue. Having been informed that their conduct must be seemly, and befitting a place of prayer, they were taken inside. On one side sat the *Bonim* and on the other the *Bonot*. Quietly, with only that minimum of chattering which is inevitable when 1,000 young people are collected together, they awaited the commencement of the function.

Precisely at a quarter to eleven (the scheduled hour) the choir gave voice to *Hatikvah*, and at the given signal a thousand young voices took up the refrain and heartily, lustily, sang it to its end. Then, again as one man, they sang their own particular Habonim song—the song of those who are “guiders for days yet to come.” There is something essentially moving in the singing of the young—an innocent vitality, a joyous desire to make as much noise as the moment justifies, and at the same time a painstaking effort to keep in tune, to form a useful unit of the whole. If in addition to this there is present the ceremonial of the synagogue, its impressiveness and its implications, then the result is unforgettable.

The children having done their part, cantor and choir proceeded with the time-

honoured, time-mellowed refrains of Israel—*Mah Tovu, Va-yehi Binsoah, S'u Sh'orim*. The listener climbed to a high emotional plain, envisioning a land of Israel in which those who had learnt their Judaism, and grown strong in it and proud of it, as would these children, would form the leaders of our people.

When the Torah, the scrolls of the law, had been replaced in the Ark, the Rev. Shrock mounted the pulpit and addressed his audience. Simply, in words comprehensible to them, he spoke of the significance there must be for them in the account of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. That exodus was made possible only because, sinking their differences, they agreed to act under the leadership of one man, Moses. They discovered the value of obedience; the children of to-day must learn the same lesson. They must realise that they were the leaders of the future. To be worthy of that leadership they must obey that discipline which was the root of their movement.

Nine men, from all quarters of the country, and seven women, lined up in the central aisle for the investiture. As their names were called they took the oath administered by the Rav Habonim, and so received their warrant of appointment. Each initiate lit his candle, until there were burning the sixteen lights, representing the sixteen young people who were to assist in the Jewish upbuilding of young South Africa. The ceremony, simple but extremely impressive, ended with a repetition of *Hatikvah* and of the National Anthem.

#### The Sports.

IN the afternoon the athletic sports took place at the University. There were over 400 entries, competitors coming from all parts of the sub-continent. The standard of performance was extremely high, several records being broken, and the whole was eloquent testimony of the prowess of our Jewish youth in the physical sphere as was the cultural Hagigah in the intellectual. There can be little doubt that, with time, this event will become one of the major annual athletic meetings of the country.

Thus ended a full week-end. There can be no doubt of the pleasure derived from it by the youthful participants. Of more importance, however, is the fact that these children are being rendered conscious of the value of their Jewishness, of the treasure of their history, and the worth of their aspirations. In addition, they are being trained in discipline, the virtue the want of which has been so keenly felt among our people.

The greatest credit is due to those young men and women, who have devoted and are prepared in the future to devote, so much of their time to this constructive movement.



Habonim Officers in Conference.