

Wedding Bells at Naaneh.

By EREZ ISRAELI.

At Naaneh in the Shephela, the land of Samson, is the new home of a group of young people organised as Kvuzoth Noar Haoved—the Kvuza of Working Youth. Theirs were the wedding bells that rang, metaphorically; more literally, they were wedding cans and pots that clanged and tolled through the night to celebrate the double wedding with which the kvuza inaugurated its establishment on the national land allotted it. The youthful settlers are forty-odd in number, some, Hassidim barely out of *peoth*, some, Sephardim, and most of them Palestinian born. And these four who were opening the era, setting the seal of mature wisdom, as it were, on the settlement, were representatives of each of the elements that made up the colourful composition of the group.

From the whole land guests and their gifts streamed in to the wedding. A trainful of passengers came from Tel-Aviv and some from Jerusalem, lorries packed with workers from Tel-Aviv, Rehoboth, Rishon-le-Zion, Hedera, Petah Tikva; even the Emek and Galilee sent their representatives. From Ekron and Rehoboth some came on foot, and from the new kvuzoth about Rehoboth, Kvuzath Schiller, Kvuzath Gordonia, the Ain Harod Group and the others, the wagons and wains rolled in loaded with merry-faced

friends. From Rishon-le-Zion came casks of wine, and from other places hampers and sacks of fruit and preserves; the Arabs of Naaneh and the neighbouring villages sent figs and dates, and Beduin tribes of the vicinity brought of their choicest sheep.

Each group of arrivals surrounded the celebrants and muffled them with congratulations, and then scattered to meet old friends and exchange greetings and tiding from different parts of the land.

Soon the wine began to do its work; gaiety was rising. Some of the Arabs lit a bonfire and set a sheep to roast. The two couples were assembled and a grand procession began about the bonfire. The procession sang and danced in the firelight, casting weird shadows and weaving circles about the three new barracks that stood on the wide plain. The procession stopped, and one of the guests climbed on a wine barrel to toast the newly-wed. He was a big, rugged-faced fellow with small dancing eyes, a worker from Hedera. "May they people this empty plain," he said. "May their children see this whole expanse of barren land a green lake of trees."

Then an old Beduin Sheikh arose and speaking softly but proudly called blessings on their heads. One of the members of the

kvuza, a young lad who knew Arabic, rose up after him, and saluting him after the manner of the Beduins, returned his blessings tenfold. More Arabs spoke, more Jews—a competition in blessings, praise and hyperbole.

Suddenly the soft warm sound of a concertina was heard in the crowd. In a moment the tune was taken up and the sea of people broke into a whirl of dances like a shattered wave. The player of the concertina danced and twisted in and out of the circles, exciting the dancers to ever faster rhythm. The rhythmic steps of boots, the weaving melody of the concertina, the waving flare of flames, and the solemn circle of Beduins and Arabs sitting about the fire wrapt in their mantles

A group of Arabs rose and, standing shoulder to shoulder in a straight line, began to stamp their feet and clap hands to a groaning sound which rose through half-parted lips. As the dance progressed the body tension seemed to grow, the eyes of the dancers gleamed with excitement, but the movement and its tempo never changed.

Soon some of the halutzim joined the Arab dance, and then Arabs joined the *hora*. The night wore on and the wine barrel sounded hollower and hollower. Dance, laughter and good fellowship prevailed.

Just outside the fire-light the dark-looming shadow of two great tractors and the double-knived plough could be seen. They stood apart from all this festive scene. To-night, they seem to say, dance and be merry. But to-morrow is ours. The soil waits.

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"No. I avoid this by always coming here early in the morning, before the women, and then I may stay till noon. The air here is excellent and the breezes work beneficially upon me."

"From where do you come?"

"I am a native of Rumania. Six months ago I came from Karlsruhe, where in vain I sought alleviation for my sickness. However, since my arrival here, I am very much better, thanks to God."

We went on, the young invalid preceding us, explaining the nature of the buildings. We came to the slope of the mountain, behind the bathhouse, when we noticed a large opening in the ground. The noise of gushing water reached our ears. Surprised, I peeked inside the opening and saw a mighty stream of water, bubbling forth with great force and noisily falling down to the "Hot Springs." I essayed putting my hand in the hole, and was almost scalded by the seething water.

In awe I looked upon this mountain which contains in its interior this awful force, the force of boiling water. The mountain is awful in the magnitude of its extent, its wide plateaus, and crags and crannies. We walked the entire length of the slope and saw more black holes and openings, whence gushed forth boiling streams which fell into Kinnereth and heated the bank of its quiet strand!

"Would that our rich people would understand the wonderful treasures contained here," the young man said, "and then they would not permit these springs to waste away. Here could certainly be the most wonderful of watering places! Every morning when I walk from the city to the bath-house and see the beauty of Kinnereth and the boiling springs which flow the entire length of the mountain and descend into the sea without any benefit, an inner sadness de-

presses me, to see our lovely place in ruins, destitute and deserted!"

As he spoke, we climbed the hill and reached the second building.

"This is all the property we Jews have in Tiberiah," said the invalid as he pointed toward a low building. "This is the grave of Rabbi Meir 'Baal Ha-Nes' (the Miracle Worker!). To-day, however, you may see only half the sepulchre, because the other half is closed."

"Only a half? . . . Why? . . ." I asked in amazement.

"Yes, only a half. Do not be surprised. The Jews cannot unite in life or in death, neither in houses of learning nor in cemeteries. Ah, what contention there was in Tiberiah for this grave. The Sephardim wanted it only for their possession, and the Ashkenazim wanted it only for themselves. At last the grave was divided in two, and Rabbi Meir, after his death, became half Sephardic and half Ashkenazic!"

In amazement I listened to the tale of the invalid. I looked through the window in the Ashkenazic wall, and there I saw an inscription written in blue ink: "The mouth of the cave of Rabbi Meir, the Miracle Worker, may his righteousness protect us—Amen." Since the entrance to the cave was closed, I ascended the steps in the hillside to the "Sephardic half." There was a large room containing a Holy Ark and benches. In one corner, near the wall, above the grave stood something like a square tombstone, around which gleamed burning candles in a multitude of various candle-sticks. As he came into the room, the "Shamos" suggested that I buy a candle to light in memory of Rabbi Meir. I lit it and went out. I stood and gazed, looking now at the grave and the Sephardic caretaker and then at the sights before me: at Mt. Tiberiah, which emits a boiling stream of

water; at the peak of Hermon, covered with an eternal snow; at Kinnereth, which cheers the soul with the music of its waves; at the lambs which quaff deeply at its brink; at the blue mists which cover the heights of Kinnereth. I kept looking, and something like electrical current broke into every vein in my body; a stream of boiling blood suddenly heated my whole being!

As if by a mysterious power, my head was lowered toward the ground, and a gloomy sadness pressed my heart. The wells of my eyes were torn open, and hot, boiling tears flooded my cheeks, like a stream of the boiling waters of the mountain overflowing in force. The drops fell and rolled until they entered the Sea of Kinnereth! My heart quaked at the sight of two contrasts which so forcibly express the sadness of the Galuth and the endless historical tragedy of Israel! On the one hand—the lovely Kinnereth, with its treasures extending along its golden banks, which sparkles to-day with the Hebraic lustre of yore; whose breezes quicken the hearts of men, whose atmosphere arouses memories of Eretz Israel in its ancient glory; and the gigantic Hermon with the glitter of its cerulean colours, and the rays of light which gild its snows!

And on the other hand—the scene of the sepulchre of Rabbi Meir "Baal Ha-Nes," torn in twain, Rabbi Meir the Sephardic and Ashkenazic! . . . an emblem of the disunion of a people divided again itself, a symbol of the dispersion of Israel and its ruined soul.

Kinnereth and Rabbi Meir the Miracle Worker—Oh what a sad contrast!

"'Marom' and Kinnereth Thou hast tied with a bond, with Thy Jordan, O Lord!

But for our hearts—in Thy treasure hast Thou not found a cord?"