

The South African Jewish Chronicle.

ESTABLISHED 1902.

Head Office:

85, PLEIN STREET, CAPE TOWN.

FRIDAY, 4th APRIL, 1947.

Difference in Emphasis.

Every Jewish family looks forward year after year to the Pesach celebration. It is a great social occasion and one which invariably re-unites scattered relatives. To Jews living in free communities the observance of the festival presents no external difficulties and the only problem at issue is the intensity with which the celebration is to be marked. The Passover has, however, accompanied Jewish vicissitudes for thousands of years. And if Jewish history has been marked by repeated tragedy and persecution it should also be remembered that at the height of their spiritual and physical degradation Jews continued to remember Pesach and to celebrate it in traditional fashion with remarkable courage and ingenuity.

Pesach has always been the Festival of Freedom—the rejoicing over the liberation from Egyptian bondage and the beginnings of Jewish nationhood. But it is idle to imagine that Jews could commemorate an event belonging to the ancient past without linking it to their own surrounding circumstances. In fact the Hagadah enjoins us to interpret the Passover message in terms of current conditions. For this reason Pesach meant to so many not only the celebration of a freedom won in the past but more particularly a yearning for their own liberty which a cruel world denied them. Jews have thus inherently striven to remain in the forefront of the struggle for human liberty, not only for themselves but for all mankind.

BACK TO ORIGINAL.

Pesach is celebrated with a different emphasis in Eretz Israel. There the individual Jew is completely free. He lives in a normal Jewish environment unblemished by artificial means of expression. There is thus no hankering after individual freedom, and Pesach has recovered its original significance, stressing the great national redemption achieved some three thousand years ago. While, however, the message remains the same the interpretation and the presentation have characteristically altered. Religious observance is a matter of national experience. Those who thought that they could return to the Land of Israel without the spiritual wealth of the people of Israel have been proved wrong by life itself. Thus every kibbutz in Eretz Israel to-day makes a great occasion of the Festival of Freedom. It prepares its own Hagadah, adapting the traditional Hagadah to modern circumstances and applying the evergreen call of freedom to the circumstances of present-day affairs. It was no doubt in anticipation of such eventualities that the Talmud stressed that even when Jews were restored for the third time to national autonomy the exodus from Egypt would never be forgotten; for in that exodus lies a vivid illustration of the eternal groping of mankind for the fullest human freedom.

THE OLD AND THE NEW.

Of late there has been a new development in Palestine—a revival of the ancient "Omer" ceremony. To a community which abounds with Jewish farmers, Pesach is in a very real sense the festival of spring. And here, too, life's experience has induced the hardy pioneers of Eretz Israel to stress the agricultural significance of the festival and to re-introduce this picturesque ceremony into Jewish ceremonial life. In Galut we have to make do without the external inspiration which colours the life of the Yishuv. But they, as well as we, will ponder more profoundly this year than ever before over the tragic situation of the homeless remnant of the Jewish people. While we and they together celebrate in a greater or lesser degree of freedom our thoughts will be centred upon our brethren to whom liberty is all but completely denied. Our hopes and our prayers for the coming year will hence be the literal message of Pesach—that they, too, may be free men and women and may enter upon their national heritage.

Commemorating an Outstanding Chapter.

To the majority of the modern generation Zionist history does not go back further than to the date of Herzl. The story of the so-called "Fore-runners of Zionism" is thus scarcely known, and the history of the twenty years between Herzl's advent and the Balfour Declaration is also only superficially appreciated. For this reason we cordially welcome the news contained in a letter published on another page that a Palestinian writer is engaged upon the production of an "Album of Russian Zionism."

Our correspondent makes an appeal for material which will enable his publication to contain the fullest possible information and annotations. It has been the practice of the Zionist Movement to perpetuate outstanding events and personalities in its history, and hence the proposed album will serve a most vital purpose. The average Zionist of to-day may know vaguely of the existence of the "Hibbath Zion" Movement. Of the leaders who arose on the Russian scene, he may be aware of the giants such as Ussishkin and Tshlenow, but there are scores of others whose achievements are totally unknown. It is thus a solemn duty towards a historic cause as well as a tribute to those who played such a valiant part in shaping its ideology that this task should be undertaken and completed. We would thus endorse the appeal and ask all those who can assist to make a point of communicating with the writer.

FROM MY DESK.

Continued from Fourth column.

and the three strangers were left to amuse themselves in an uninviting hotel lounge. At conferences of the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation there is always a complaint that country communities are only visited for fund-raising and that they long in vain for so-called enlightenment meetings. Here was one case where the opportunity was not seized. I should hate to think that such is a general picture of the smaller places.

Heard This One?

To end this week I revert to the festival we are due to usher in this

evening. The Treasurer of a Congregation was collecting contributions for a matzo fund for the poor. A wealthy Jew, whom he approached, refused to give, saying "I have a poor brother." The very next day the poor brother called on the fund for some assistance. When the Treasurer reminded him of his rich brother he said that he never got any help from him.

The Treasurer was a determined man and went back to his wealthy congregant. The latter, however, was not moved and replied: "I did not say I was helping my brother. I only told you I had a poor brother. If I do not help even my own brother, how can you expect me to help strangers?"

From my Desk

By
HASOFER



Friendly Criticism.

I referred last week to the letters of welcome my column received. One correspondent was more effusive than the rest. After welcoming recent improvements in the Chronicle, he states that he is puzzled:—"At school I was taught that 'Hasofer' represents a male, yet in the sketch above your comments, which I take it represents you, you are in female garb and of a female facial appearance. Tell me—What are you?" He adds: "Your Afrikanerising (Bernardfontein) of Maayan Baruch grates on my spectacles. Bernard is not Afrikaans. I doubt whether Maayan is really 'fontein.' I have been through a great deal of Africa and always found that its 'fontaine' are characteristically dry. I, therefore, cannot approve of your translation."

On the latter point I am afraid I cannot yield. Thank Heavens the "fontaine" of Eretz Israel abound with life-giving water. As far as the first point is concerned the explanation is simple. I got my typiste to pose for the picture as the result would obviously have been more pleasing. Hence "Hasofer" violates no grammatical rule.

Man of Understanding.

Pesach is the time for family reunions and for jollity around the Seder table. It, nevertheless, behoves all of us to spare a thought for those of our community who are precluded from adequate celebration. Readers may remember the story of Rabbi Chaim of Valozin. On the eve of Passover a man came to him with a question. "Rabbi," he said, "I wish to know whether the four cups of wine which it is obligatory to drink on the Passover eve ceremony may be substituted by four glasses of milk."

"Why do you ask?" queried the Rabbi. "Are you ill, so that wine would disagree with you?"

"No," he replied. Rabbi Chaim thought a moment and answered, "Well, here are five rubles. Go and buy yourself wine." Rabbi Chaim's wife, who had observed all this, said to her husband, "Why did you give him five rubles? He could buy all the wine he needs for even less than two."

"From the fact that he asked to use milk for the seder when he is not ill I deduced that he did not expect to have meat for that occasion, since they may not be both partaken of at one meal. What he really needed was sufficient means to buy for his family meat and wine. That is why I gave him five rubles," replied the Rabbi.

The Right Spirit.

I can vouch for the truth of the following incident which took place in Cape Town last week:—

A certain Mr. Goldstein, of Maynard Street, practises the familiar calling of an old-clothes man and proceeds from door to door in order to seek stock. Coming to the house of a non-Jewish tram conductor, he bought an old jacket from him. When he got home he examined the garment to decide what repairs were necessary and found £22 10s. 0d. in the pocket. He immediately rushed back to the conductor's house and returned the money to him. A friend of his, hearing the story, ventured to compliment him on his honesty. Mr. Goldstein shrugged his shoulders and gave a typical reply: "I work hard for my

money and the other man probably does too". . . .

Negroes and Passover.

It would be hard to find (certainly without probing too deeply) any link between the American negro of to-day and a Seder celebration. However, I was let into a secret this week. Those responsible for Sunday night's Third Seder, to be held at the Zionist Hall, have secured a well-known Negro spiritual dealing with Pharaoh and the Exodus from Egypt. The American Negroes are great exponents of these wistful, semi-religious melodies. Possibly this strain in them can be attributed to their experiences in slavery which ended less than a century ago. Their physical hardships cannot be compared to those of the Children of Israel, but their spiritual degradation and inferiority must have been of the same kind. Anyhow, they have given the world a fine moving song which a small choir will present on Sunday evening. The first verse reads:—

*"When Israel was in Egypt land
Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand.
Let my people go!
Go down Moses! Way down in
Egypt land
Tell ol' Pharaoh
Let my people go!"*

I am told that the harmony of the chorus is in five parts and that some special verses have been composed locally to bring the story up-to-date. With other attractions in the programme the Hall ought to be filled to capacity.

One Up for Ex-General Marshall.

Only this week did I fully understand why the Jews in Palestine took the recent imposition of martial law so calmly. It will be recalled that this drastic measure was adopted not long after the appointment of the new Secretary of State for the U.S.A. Apparently with this diplomatic move at the back of his mind, one optimist in Palestine went round exclaiming: "Nothing could be worse than Berin Law. Perhaps under Marshall Law we may be better off!"

Hospitality.

Our country communities are noted for their hospitality and in the past it was always a pleasure to visit them. Many of them are declining in numbers, however, and in at least one of them this decline seems to have been accompanied by an apathy towards visitors. Recently three men, owing to a transport break-down, were obliged to spend the night in a country town which can boast of a few dozen Jewish families. All three are very well-known on the public platform and could certainly not have been strangers even at that distance from Cape Town. As soon as they arrived they made their presence known to some of the communal leaders and suggested that an informal meeting be arranged so that they could discuss current events. The local cinema was closed that evening and there was absolutely no counter-attraction. The meeting, however, did not take place

Continued in First column.