

# Carnival Time in Tel-Aviv

*"This is our land, this is our home!"—This it is that is danced, that is sung, that is everywhere felt.*

By ERICH GOTTGETREU.

ON the thirteenth day of Adar, in the Year of the Creation 5694, the police authorities of Jerusalem, knowing that it was the fixed custom of the Jews of the city to spend Purim at Tel-Aviv, warned them to lock their doors and windows tightly against burglars before leaving. Since the Tel-Aviv Purim has become world famous, how is it possible for a Jew living in Jerusalem, a bare two hours' distance by autobus, to remain passively crouched beside his petroleum stove, while carnival is rampant so near him?

On the eve of Purim, or, more exactly, on the morning of the previous day, hundreds of Jerusalem folk forced their way into the "Eged" garage, whence, at three-minute intervals, heavily-laden "boats" snorted off on their journey. Jolting and rocking from side to side, they whizzed around curve after curve, through the mountains of Judea, now greening in the Palestinian spring-time, towards the fast-spreading metropolis beside the blue Mediterranean, to land their passengers in the thick of Tel-Aviv's gayest, most uproarious festival.

Yes, into the thick of it! Our "boat" halts suddenly, in the sea of light that is Tel-Aviv. The chauffeur sounds his horn far more frantically than ever he did on the camel-trodden highroad from Jerusalem. Suddenly he seems possessed by all the imps of pandemonium. For every hoot of his horn there come reports from hundreds, from thousands, of toy pistol barrels.

### Haman through the Microphone.

All this hullabaloo is dedicated to the late unlamented Haman, the hero-villain of the day. The command to shoot off pistols and to sound horns comes from loud-speakers installed in the trees and connected with the Great Synagogue for the reading of the "Megillah," the Book of Esther. In this "Megillah" it is related how the designs of Haman, the Jew-baiter, were frustrated by the feminine wit of Esther and the courage of her kinsman, Mordecai. Even in the synagogue the pistol shots ring out whenever Haman's name is read from the "Megillah," and he is felled over and over again: "Haman!" Bing-bang! "Haman!" "Cr-r-ack! . . . . Everyone takes a pot-shot at the miscreant, may-his-name-be-blotted-out! This is the "Megillah," a great paean of triumph among the many songs of sorrow of a tenacious people—of the thousands who listen to the reading of the "Megillah" through loud-speakers in the streets of Tel-Aviv, and who greet Haman's name with pistol shots and curses. And among them is our chauffeur, whom the occasion suddenly inspires to break into triumphal song with his raucous



The Procession passing through the streets of Tel-Aviv.

hooting. "Make way, make way there for the young Jew!" "Haman!" Bing ban-n-g! "Haman!" Cr-r-a-ck! Cr-r-a-ck!

Barely is the synagogue service over when a group of actors from the "Ohel," the workers' theatre, step out upon the stage. This is no ordinary stage, but a great and splendid structure opposite the Opera House, expressly erected under the open sky for this day's uses. "Queen Esther's stage" is wide as the street, high as a house, vividly Oriental, arranged on several levels, fantastically illuminated, and topped with an enormous figure of the queen of the day. The artists portray two scenes from the Book of Esther. On the boards, for a few moments of time, a fragment of the Jewish past lives again. Below them, in the street, that is the parquet of their theatre, and in the balconies that now serve as boxes, are thousands and still more thousands of celebrants. The boxes sing, the parquet dances. The ring-around "Hora" dance grips the city like a fever.

### Revelry at Night.

In the streets below, however, it is the Jewish present that lives, singing and rejoicing through the night. "This is our land, this is our home!" This it is that is danced, that is sung, that is felt at the feet of Queen Esther, under the great archways adorned with humorous paintings, under the glare and gleam of the ten thousand electric bulbs festooned over the thoroughfares. From the open square the mass drifts up the

Allenby Road. Wherever the crowds are densest, there the rings of dancers form and re-form over and over again, singing, leaping, rejoicing; frenzied rings, wanton with the joy of youth. "Adloyeda!" "Adloyeda!" "Until one knows nothing more. . . ." Until time and space are as though they were not. . . .

And so they go on till dawn. A slight breeze ripples the surface of the sea, the breath of the morning stirs the fronds of the palm trees. Only now do the Tel-Avivians, the visitors from Jerusalem and from Haifa, from all Palestine, drop off to sleep.

### The Children's Celebrations.

The children are the first to be up in the morning. This Purim morning is theirs, theirs alone. Who would think of putting on a "proper" dress to-day? Not they. A hundred pretty Queen Esthers run about the opera square, swishing in silks, or in crinolines, or in period costumes, with golden crowns resting on their hair. As for the boys, they are robbers, policemen, generals. Or else they are ships' captains, or harlequins, or imaginary characters. Those whose parents have no money are the most inventive. Fathers' trousers and mothers' headcloth still have power to enchant any child. Each admires the costumes of the others until . . . all eyes are drawn by the doings on Queen Esther's stage. Choirs sing, dancers display their art. A fanfare of trumpets is heard in the distance. Every balcony and every window shows its full quota of heads, the roofs are garlanded with holiday crowds, from the branches of the trees boys hang down like clusters of grapes.

Few go away when the stage performance is over; for very soon the participants in the great carnival procession will assemble in the Opera Square. An expectant assembly of tens of thousands lines the curbs of the streets through which the procession will pass, looks out of every window, straddles every available branch, fills every inch of the reviewing stands, the balconies, the rooftops. The face of the city is gay with pennants and masques. All eyes drink in the colourfulness of the sights, all ears absorb the music of the loud-speakers that comes from unseen sources.

### The Purim Procession.

At the head of the procession rides, according to custom that has become a tradition, Meir Dizengoff, the seventy-year-old Mayor of Tel-Aviv, one of the founders of the city, and its ablest propagandist. Beside him, also on horseback, rides one of the oldest wine-growers of the New Palestine. The onlookers exult in the youthfulness of these elders.

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### CARNIVAL TIME IN TEL-AVIV

(Continued from previous page.)

Driven by curiosity and pushed on by the crowds behind, the first row of spectators is continually swaying forward into the middle of the roadway. The police—the brown-caps of Tel-Aviv and the blue-caps of Jerusalem, who have been detailed for special carnival duty—have difficulty in keeping the road clear for the advancing procession. However exacting their task, these police smile, and they keep on smiling. Yithak Levy, of the Machne Jehudah police station in Jerusalem, smiles now as he watches a Yemenite woman in the front row of spectators nursing her baby with the utmost tranquility, unmindful both of the ten thousand curious ones shoving behind her and of the prancing carnival procession in front.

The mayor and the farmer are followed by a pageant from this Jewish history which has far more frequently seen processions of exiles and mourners than festive parades. The twelve tribes pass with their

symbols. Behind tents that gleam like gold come high priests and soldiers. The sacrificial ram is not forgotten, but among the train are also cattle, sheep and camels. Characters out of the Book of Esther, recalling the historic significance of the day, appear and reappear in the procession. Our own times are represented by a series of floats bearing tableaux of Jewish life in various countries, with explanations of their symbols in huge Hebrew block letters. Here are Russian Jews grouped about a synagogue that is no longer a house of worship, but a Soviet clubhouse. Needy Polish Jews hold out letters of appeal for help to their relatives in America. The letters are received—next float—by an America that is in the depths of an economic crisis. And now comes the great "But" of the procession—Palestine, the Land of Israel. Witty criticism is not lacking: A Tower of Babel symbolizes the multitudinous languages of the "ingathered exiles," the evils of the housing shortage are satirized. "Palestine as the British would have it" takes the form of an enormous cow, which is milked incessantly and allows her stream of milk to flow directly into the Government Treasury. The variegated Yishuv is exhibited in its contrasting types: The Orthodox Jew beside the Socialist labourer, the captain of industry beside the pioneer woman from a Kvutzah. And here is the future Yishuv: A wagonload of pretty children, all born in Palestine, bears the legend that this is the "Inner Immigration," against which even the strictest immigration officials are powerless, for love knows no law.

Music! Is the procession at an end? Curtailed? There are no more floats. . . . The waves of pleasure break over the city once more. The

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whole city sings! The whole city dances! A pickpocket is caught. Gloom prevails—until it is discovered that he is (thank God) not a Jew, but a Turk. Now bedtime may safely be postponed for many an hour. . . .

A beggar lapses into the cosy Yiddish of the old home. "Haint is Purim, morgen is ois, git mir a groschen, un warft mir arois!" "To-day's Purim, to-morrow it's not! Give me a penny and throw me out!" . . . The crowd shouts, laughs, plays, sings, dances. On the beach the flames of a bonfire leap high. At the Purim balls swallowtails and Russian blouses, Paris models and overalls whirl around one another. Costumes flit through the streets, Haman is roundly cursed. "Adloyeda!" "Until one knows no more!" Does not tradition demand that on Purim a Jew must drink until he knows no distinction between "Blessed be Mordecai!" and "Accursed be Haman!" . . .

Yet the Jews, lucky people, can achieve inebriety without the assistance of a drop of alcohol!

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