

A SONG UNSUNG

(Concluded from previous page.)

corners, the flour barrels "behind which lay their brothers, husbands, lovers, peeping through the holes and saw the pure and quivering bodies in the embrace of brutes, and never stirred, and never moved, nor lost their reason." These are the grandsons of the Maccabees—"they ran like mice, they hid themselves like bed-bugs and died the death of dogs wherever found." The grief of such men is not worthy of sympathy, and even their prayers are rejected by God, whom Bialik makes scornfully exclaim:

"They beat their fists and cry Ashamnu.
They pray of me forgiveness for their sin.
Their sin? the sin of shadows on the wall,
The sin of broken pots, of bruised worms!"

and God, humiliated by the cowardice of His Chosen People, longs for their curses instead of their prayers, longs to see them rebel against Him, if they are too craven to rebel against mortal oppressors.

"What will they? why stretch out their hands to me?
Has none a fist? And where's a thunderbolt
To take revenge for all the generations,
To blast the world and tear the heavens asunder
And wreck the Universe, my throne of glory?"

THOUGH when judged by artistic and aesthetic standards the poem was certainly not his best, nevertheless, it automatically gave Bialik a premier place in the hearts and minds of his people. He was at once given the first place in modern Hebrew poetry. In fact, there are few examples of a work of poetry influencing a generation so deeply and directly. "The revival of the Maccabean tendencies in the Ghetto," says Jabotinsky, "dates from this poem; organisations for self-defence, which sprang up through Russia, and subsequently the Shomerim movement in Palestine, are all Bialik's children." For obvious reasons a poem like the "City of Slaughter," with over a hundred lines of heroic verse, cannot be given here, much as the writer would like to. The following is one of the shorter poems of the "Songs of Wrath."

"I know I shall fade like a star on some dark night,
No star will know my grave;
But my wrath shall still smoke on like the crater's mouth
When the flame has died away
And live among you when the tempest howls,
And waves on the ocean rage.
Ah! would that your great sorrow might be treasured
In the bosom of the world,
To moist the planes of heav'n and fields of earth
The grasses and the stars;

To live in them, inspire them, grow old
And young with them, to fade and flower again,
And nameless, formless, homeless,
stand till the end
A witness of your shame:
And with mute cry to Heaven and the grave
Gainsay that the world be saved.
Then, when false justice sheds its trustless light
At last upon your slain,
And over your murderers a banner of lies
Stained in your blood waves flauntingly at Heav'n,
And the forged seal of God impressed thereon
Assaults the radiant sun:
When proud-stepped dance and shout of treacherous feast
Shake up your martyred bones—
Then, tremulous, the azure firmament
Will darken for your grief,
The sun be scarlet as your guiltless blood,
With the brand of Cain on the forehead of the earth,
And badge of defeat for the broken arm of God:
Thus star to trembling star: "What tragedy!
What cruel treachery!"
And the God of vengeance wounded to the heart,
Will rise with a shout—go forth with His great sword."

(From L. V. Snowman's translations.)

NO attempt has been made here to give a full evaluation of Bialik and his works. This cannot be done in a single article. There has never been a poet so beloved during his lifetime by the whole of his people as Bialik, notwithstanding the fact that he eschewed fame and publicity. Thus, when some eleven years ago, his fiftieth anniversary was celebrated throughout the Jewish world, he refused to be present at any of the functions. His only answer to the flood of enthusiastic greetings from every corner of the globe was a short poem with the refrain:

"I am not a poet nor a prophet, I am a hewer of wood . . ."

The discrepancy between the renaissance phraseology and the actual wane of the race's vitality was the keynote of his latter poems. There was none who hated more and denounced more vigorously the phrasemongers in Jewish life than Bialik.

This was also the main burden in the striking poem he published in Basle in 1931 under the name of "I See You Once More in Your Impotence!" a poem which called forth a great deal of protest and indignation from many quarters. For Bialik, besides being a great poet was also a great worker. His activity as editor and publisher of classical and educational literature was remarkable. It was, perhaps, his preoccupation with the actual work of Revival that left him no time for the great Song of the Revival. For greater than his own writings and vastly transcending all his poetry was the man Bialik himself, the idol and inspirer of his people.

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Agricultural and Industrial Work Among S.A. Jews

The attention of those interested is called to the formation of an organisation, named "The Association for the Promotion of Agricultural and Industrial Pursuits among S.A. Jews."

The association will aim at encouraging Jewish people, and especially the Jewish youth, to take up industrial and agricultural work as their life occupations. Further particulars can be secured by writing to:—The Secretary, P.O. Box 5883, Johannesburg (not P.O. Box 5888, as previously published).

Chalutzim in Krugersdorp.

By special arrangement, the members of the South African Zionist Youth Chalutz Farm were present at a Herzl Yahrzeit, which was arranged by the combined Zionist Societies of Krugersdorp. Interesting addresses were delivered by Rev. Wolk, Mr. A. J. Gotsman, and Mr. Levy, who has just returned from Palestine and was able to bring an intimate "gerus" from our National Home. Mr. B. Altshuler then spoke on behalf of the Chalutzim. In addition, the Chalutzim staged three sketches and sang Hebrew songs appropriate to the occasion, which were greatly appreciated by everyone present.

Herzl Yahrzeit at Germiston

A large gathering of Zionists met at the Synagogue Hall on Tuesday evening, July 10th, to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Dr. Theodor Herzl's death. Mr. B. Cohen, president of the United Hebrew Institutions of Germiston, was in the chair, and four interesting addresses were delivered in English and Yiddish by Messrs. J. Zinn, I. Dunsky, Z. Hareven and J. Blumenthal. Cantor Rudy intoned the Hazkarah, and votes of thanks were delivered by Mrs. Ordman, chairman of the Women's Zionist League, and Mr. Colman, chairman of the Zionist Youth Organisation.

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