

AN AGE OF SPLENDOUR, WHEN IBERIA WAS THE FOUNT-HEAD OF JEWISH CULTURE

THAT beautiful page of Jewish history, written during the five centuries of domicile in the Spanish Peninsula, should be set to music. The stately rhythm of a wedding march, through which runs a thread of joy. The joy of living creativeness second only to their great spiritual creativeness in the old Homeland in Judaea, greater than the other, if we do not reckon the spiritual messages of the Prophets and the Psalmists.

The physical charms of Spain are those of an Eastern land, in spite of the fact that to the Greeks it was Hesperia, Land of the West. Canaanite wanderers, fifteen centuries before the Christian era had given it the more appropriate Hebrew name, Hispania. The dazzling white light of the Orient is here, even as there, transformed every day to flaming tones of gold under a fiery sky. You cross the Pyrenees and feel you are in a world that belongs to the Sons of the East. It is not surprising that here the exiles from Judaea felt at home.

This land, which made the Jew welcome, recalled the well-loved beauties of his old Homeland. The great white sun of Judaea. The mystery-laden sky of Galilee. The encompassing mountains of Jerusalem. The magic of moon-bathed nights, and star-crowded, low-lying heavens. Terraces overlooking valleys drenched in silver mist, when Nature becomes Master of mystical revelation. The natural phenomena which greeted the Jewish arrivals in Spain were the same to which they had bidden a reluctant farewell on leaving Judaea. And the fruits and the wines, and "the seven things for which the Land of Israel was praised as a good land," were also to be found here. With the minimum of difficult adjustments of body and of spirit the Jew from Judaea found himself at home.

And the Jew who visits the Peninsula to-day feels something of that elegaic spirit of desolation that has been stalking through the Land of Israel during the centuries of his exile from it. For this was a land that he understood better than anyone else. An East melted and transformed in the crucible of the West. Here many cultures had met and been blended together. Here Orient and Occident have lived together, worked together, and meditated on the eternal mysteries under the same blue sky. Here they created the eternal values born of the different cultures which they brought with them, and which were here fused together and harmonized into a distinctive whole.

Cordova, Granada, Seville, Toledo, Barcelona—all are haunted by the ghosts of their splendid past. Toledo bears humbly to-day the royal seal of the memorable meeting of East and West. You feel, rather than see, the legendary Toledo, for which it is claimed that "God created His beloved city of Toledo before he created the world. He created the sun and set it first as a crown over the city. He made Adam its first King." Also that, "Toledo was founded by Jews

The Spain that Was Judaea

By DR. ARIEL BENSON

WHEN the last of the Bourbons yielded to democracy in Spain a few years ago, the return of the Jews who had been expelled during the Inquisition became a lively issue of discussion. Soon after its establishment, the Republic nullified the ban against Jews and, though the economic instability of the Peninsula made the admission of many of them unlikely, Jews everywhere permitted their imaginations to call forth visions of the rebirth of the glory of Spanish Jewry in the Middle Ages. In this article, Dr. Benson, himself a descendant of a famous Barcelona family of the twelfth century, describes the golden period of Jewish life in the Iberian peninsula.

after the destruction of the First Temple at Jerusalem. That Jews came there together with the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and gave the city the Hebrew name Toledot, which means generations." A spiritual atmosphere hangs over Toledo that is reminiscent of Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Spanish Jewry at its Height.

SPAIN became the repository of the message once come forth from Judaea, and Cordova and Toledo took the place of Jerusalem. The spiritual centre in Babylon, looked to for guidance after the exile from Judaea, had disappeared. The great authorities in religious and Talmudic matters were the Spanish Jews. But they were something more. Their religious leadership, as authoritative as that of Babylon was richer in breadth of vision, in poetry and in beauty. Stimulated by finding itself under the best social, political and economic conditions, Jewish genius flowered and rose to the highest achievement of which it was capable. From the garden of its blooming came forth values, both holy and profane, both temporary and eternal, that served Israel and humanity. Creations of religion, poetry and philosophy. Creations of style in the language of the Prophets. Forms of art: epic, lyric, satiric, humoristic. Religion and philosophy walked hand in hand. Science pursued its enquiring way, unmolested. Music was heard once again: the cymbals, the lyre and the stringed instruments, silent since the exile from Zion.

In contrast to the rest of Europe of the period, Iberia honoured her poets more than her heroes and raised the leaders in science and in art to the highest places in the land. This contrast is best illustrated in the spiritual centres of Cordova and Carbona. Spanish Jewry had already

stepped out of the abysmal ignorance of the time. At the court of Alfonso III—a patron of the arts—were to be found the outstanding figures in world Jewry. Frederick II of Germany sought the scientific and cultural opinion of the Jews of Toledo in a long correspondence. In Italian Jewry there was some cultural progress, but France and Germany were poor in great Jews, their communities being made up of manual labourers and petty traders, getting what freedom from persecution they could bargain for.

The great centres of learning set up by Spanish Jews in Cordova, Granada, Seville, Losina, Toledo, Barcelona, became the guide for the Jewish world. Each community had its great diplomatic figure in the service of the ruling Prince, who might, at the same time, be high in the world of letters and as much admired for his literary and spiritual talents as for his skill in diplomacy. Through Solomon ben Adreth the spiritual tone of the community of Barcelona was raised to such a height that it came to be regarded as an authority on spiritual matters even in Palestine, and was known as the Community of Princes. And Sheshat Benveniste, poet, philosopher and diplomat, adviser of King Alfonso, had the title of Prince conferred on him.

Toledo.

BUT it was in Toledo that the centre of Jewish life was focussed and whence went forth the authoritative word to the Jews of the whole world. Spiritual leadership came from there. For, although the High Schools of Babylon were still in existence in the eleventh century, and the first germ of science and religious philosophy had already made its appearance, yet

(Concluded on page 22.)

The Werfel-Reinhardt Bible Play

A SHORT time ago a report was published in this paper to the effect that Frans Werfel had written a "Bible Play." We now hear that the title of this work is "The Way of Promise—a Bible Play." The author himself says that the sub-title indicates that only the words of the Bible are used. Apart from the necessary emphasis in the dialogue, he had not added any words of his own.

The play consists of two dramas. There is the real drama of a Jewish community which escapes from persecution into the temple, and whose Rabbi starts to read from the bible in order to strengthen their courage. Out of this reading the second drama unfolds, the visionary play of the Bible.

The play is divided into four parts. The first shows the story of the Patriarchs from Abraham to Joseph and his brethren; the second part tells the story of Moses from his birth to his death; the third gives the story of the early kings, with a prelude from the book of Ruth to the construction of Solomon's temple; and the fourth depicts the world of the prophet Isaiah, and the tragedy of Jeremiah up to the destruction of the temple. The play ends with the appearance of the Messiah.

For the performance of the play the Anglo-American Company has been formed, which, after the first performance of the play in New York, will stage the work in a special auditorium erected for the purpose. Max Reinhardt, who will act as director, declares of this auditorium: "It will



Max Reinhardt

be a tent whose stage will measure about 130 feet, and which will be able to accommodate five thousand spectators. This great tent will go on a journey through the desert of materialist civilisation in order to bear witness to the eternal value of the biblical word."

The construction of the tent has been entrusted to the stage architect Oskar Strand. The music of the play will be written by Kurt Weill, the well-known composer of jazz music. Since there might be people who tend to doubt his ability to compose music such as required for the Bible play, it should be pointed out that Weill is the son of a pious cantor and that in his early days he fully acquainted himself with Synagogal music. The English translation will probably be done by Louis Untermeyer.

GLIMPSES OF ERETZ ISRAEL.

(Concluded from page 9.)

it is only the lines on the court, the net and the familiar racquet and balls which give you a clue to the identity of the game. But the standard is improving, and no doubt we shall yet have some really good players. Meanwhile in spite of the lowly standard all the excitement of Wimbledon and Auteuil are already here, and the honour of champions is accorded to the leading players. The "Palestine Post" publishes the results of the tournaments played for the Dizengoff Cup, for instance, under the title of "Tennis—Home and Abroad." First are given the results of the Davis Cup, or of the Worlds Covered Courts championship, and then the latest stage of the local contests are recorded. Such expressions as "brilliant form," "flashing shots," "wonderful display" are freely used, and really the local stars cannot complain of lack of encouragement.

And the public too, in blissful ignorance of how, say, even the best player of the Jewish Guild, Johannesburg, would walk over all the local heroes and put them in his pocket, gather in goodish crowds to cheer and admire the contests. The street in front of the Rehavia Club is a favourite

promenade on Friday afternoons and especially on Saturdays after afternoon tea. The glare of the sun makes it necessary to use coloured balls, and the red and blue look attractive against the grey of the asphalt of the court's surface. To most of the people who have their noses pressed against the wires, the game is quite a new one, and they are greatly intrigued at the antics of the players. There is generally someone who undertakes to explain everything in a loud voice, but as the players are themselves inclined to converse a great deal this does not disturb them. The coloured balls are irresistible to the children, and they attempt quite frankly to fish for them through the wires. One hits out a ball at one's peril.

"Give the child a ball," a woman pleaded with me the other day. "You only use one at a time so why do you need six 'davkah' especially as they are all exactly the same." Meanwhile her offspring seeing that my attention was diverted, sneaked in through the gate and made off with a ball firmly clutched in his fist. I gave chase and cornered him in the Rehavia Cafe. The people looked decidedly hostile when I took the ball from him, and I am sure that if it had been in Tel-Aviv, they would have come to the rescue of the weak, and sent me about my business.

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THE SPAIN THAT WAS JUDAEA.

(Concluded from page 17.)

was their influence on the wane. Those who succeeded to the spiritual leadership after the death of Hai Gaon, and the disappearance of his followers, were persecuted and obliged to fly to Spain, bringing with them both their spiritual heritage and the family glory.

A new type of Jew was he of the Peninsula. A light, graceful figure, charming, elegant, tactful. With pleasing manners and that suave politeness that distinguishes his fellow-countrymen. Different from those brethren who, stubborn and stiff-necked, had set up the hard stone walls of ritual and ceremonial in Babylon. Different, too, from his contemporary in Eastern Europe; the furtive, cringing ghetto type.

Judaism had already established itself in a position of classical importance in the Peninsula when mysticism made its startling appearance from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. A period of life and creation. After more than a thousand years of seeming silence, Jews again took up the broken thread of that high visionary poetry, torn asunder with the uprooting of the nation from Judaea. The broken ends of the thread were knotted together, linked up and continued—even as musical expression is linked up and continued—so as to give the impression of an unbroken line. Both the holy and the profane poetry found its connection and continuation. And its forms of expression were those in which both country and city Prophets had first given it to the world from Zion. Philosophy, which had been in a state of decadence, again raised its head. All that was fine and high in Jewish thinking, all that liberates human thought and is the basis of the development of the human spirit, bloomed once again. The Rabbinic and Talmudic treasures, which the sons of Judaea and of Babylon brought with them to this new home, were developed, broadened and deepened.

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