



ROUND THE SYNAGOGUES

Rosh Hashonah Services in Johannesburg

THE shadows deepened on Sunday evening and the dusk became more intense. Another day had passed and in its passing, heralded the approach of a New Year and the end of 5697. Johannesburg Jewry, in common with Jewry throughout the world, forgot the monotony of every-day existence and prepared itself for a solemn welcome of Rosh Hashonah. Places of worship throughout the city were filled to capacity.—the stately precincts of the Great Synagogue, and the other larger places of worship, as well as the more humble halls, in which only the presence of an "oran kodesh" made the worshippers and onlookers realise they were in a "house of prayer."

WHILST evening was still approaching a steady stream of worshippers filed through the portals of the dignified Wolmarans Street Synagogue. The spacious auditorium was filled to capacity; many stood around the aisles eager to join in an atmosphere of contemplation and prayer.

The excellent tenor voice of Cantor I. Alter lent nobility to the prayers, and the liturgic responses by the choir conducted by Rev. G. Grosberg, were in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion. Chief Rabbi Dr. J. L. Landau stirred the assembly with a profound discourse in which he referred to the theme of the threatened partition of Palestine. The words of this scholar and leader made a deep impression upon the assembly of worshippers. His utterances took on a prophetic note and it seemed a pity that a larger audience, than that of the spacious auditorium of the Great Synagogue, could not have heard the words of wisdom coming from such scholarly lips.

BETH HAMEDRASH HAGODEL.

AN atmosphere of old traditional observance made itself felt on arriving at the Beth Hamedrash Hagodel in Saratoga Avenue. It was just before the commencement of the service on Rosh Hashonah eve and the visitor found himself attracted to a particular group in this large but simple house of prayer. Here was a body of elderly men who had gathered to study a *blat gemorrah*, to quench the age-long thirst of the Jew for traditional knowledge. These elderly gentlemen were spending the fleeting moments of the old year in the study of the laws and customs of ancient Israel.

The dusk descended and the synagogue was filled with an overflowing attendance of worshippers. Cantor B. Chesky's powerful tenor voice vibrated through the edifice, capturing instantaneously the complete attention of an earnest congregation. His renderings of famous sections of the Rosh Hashonah liturgy were unforgettable in their rare beauty of interpretation and musicianship. The choir under the direction of Mr. N. Ichilcik, gave the cantor fine assistance.

At this synagogue the presence of Rabbi I. Kossowsky was notable, and during the days of the Festival he preached eloquent sermons in Yiddish.

THE YEOVILLE SYNAGOGUE.

SPECIAL interest was lent to the Holy Festival services at this synagogue owing to a previous announcement having been made that a well-known *chazan* from America had engaged to lead the congregants in prayer.

The singer had built up for himself a great reputation and it was but natural that on the first night of Rosh Hashonah, the *shool* should not only be filled with seat-holders, but quite a few hundred strangers turned up in order to be the first to hear the American *chazan*.

Cantor Leib Glantz showed himself to be the possessor of a fine, though not a powerful, lyric tenor voice. He displayed keen understanding of the musical side of Hebrew liturgy. His rendering was perhaps more in the nature of a musical interpretation than that of *chazonuth* as we know it here.

The new cantor was assisted by an ably conducted choir under the direction of Mr. Eschwege. This is the only choir in a Johannesburg synagogue (outside that of the Reform Temple) which has ladies in it. There can be no doubt that the fine blending of the male and female voices in synagogue choral music adds to the special quality of the singers.

During the morning service on the first day of Rosh Hashonah, an eloquent sermon was delivered by the Rev. Dr. A. T. Shrock, B.A. This young minister has now become renowned for his eloquently worded and thought-provoking addresses.

THE GERMAN-JEWISH REFUGEE CONGREGATION EZ CHAYIM.

DRAWN from distant Germany, where for centuries Jews had worshipped in their beautiful and historic synagogues—now neglected and in many instances in ruins—some five hundred German-Jewish refugees gathered in the Jewish Guild Memorial Hall to pray for a brighter and more hopeful future.

The simple service was noteworthy for the intensity of feeling which characterised the proceedings. Mr. Halperin, with his able and willing co-workers, had succeeded in transforming the hall into a dignified place of worship. Covered in large black and white *tallithim*, and wearing spotlessly white *yarmelkas*, many of the men reminded one of the High Priests in our early history.

Mr. K. Hirsch capably acted as *chazan* throughout the service, and the congregation chanted responses showing a knowledge and understanding of the melodies of Jewish liturgy. Mr. Rosenthal delivered encouraging sermons, the main burden of which was an admonition to prepare for the new life before them, a life to be lived nobly and courageously as citizens of South Africa, and proud members of Israel. Mr. Infeld

also delivered an impressive sermon on the first day. Mr. H. Sachs ably carried out a number of important duties, which made for smooth organisation of the proceedings.

THE BEREIA SYNAGOGUE.

IN common with other synagogues, the Berea accommodated a remarkably large congregation, all room being taken up before the commencement of the service. That gifted *chazan*, our old friend Cantor S. Steinberg, officiated and his melodies (which in many instances were compositions of his own), were finely intoned and deeply appreciated. He was ably assisted by the choir, under the direction of Mr. Solly Steinberg.

The Minister of the Congregation, Rabbi I. M. Gervis, delivered suitable sermons during the Rosh Hashonah services.

THE REFORM SYNAGOGUE.

WHILST the orthodox synagogues throughout Johannesburg were filled with congregants and extra halls had to be taken to accommodate the worshippers, it was interesting to observe that the Temple Israel—a magnificent house of worship and the only Jewish Reform synagogue in South Africa—drew a large congregation to its services. Although the latter were not conducted according to the custom of the old prayer book, and there was much deviation and "contraction" in the prayers and the liturgy, the services took place in a solemn atmosphere. All the worshippers joined in the prayers and participated in the services, as is the custom among liberal and Reform Jews.

Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler delivered an eloquent sermon during the morning of the first day of Rosh Hashonah and the title of his address was "The Glory of the Imperfect."

The services at the Temple were made the more beautiful by the really splendid choir of male and female voices, under the direction of Mr. Jerry Idelson. There is no doubt of this gentleman's fine knowledge of Hebrew liturgy and his association with the Temple Israel is one which must be highly treasured by the members of that congregation.

SUBURBAN SERVICES.

THE synagogues in the suburbs of Johannesburg were well filled and services were impressively conducted throughout. The La Rochelle Synagogue was filled to capacity. Rev. Kaplan ably officiated. Rabbi

"May We Be
Granted Strength"

NEW YEAR MESSAGE

from

Eliezer Kaplan

and

Moshe Shertok

(Jerusalem).

THE following New Year message has been received by Mr. N. Kirschner, Chairman of the South African Zionist Federation from Eliezer Kaplan (Treasurer of the Executive of the Jewish Agency) and Moshe Shertok (Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency).

Jerusalem, Erev Rosh Hashonah.

"On the eve of this momentous year in the history of our people we send to all our Zionist friends in South Africa cordial greetings. May we all be granted strength to face the forthcoming trials and struggles with indomitable spirit."

Soloweitzik conducted the services in the Jeppe Synagogue, which was well supported by the community in that district. The Poswohl Hebrew Congregation in Mooi Street and the First Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation in Fox Street, had large congregations.

GENERAL.

THE New Year period this year brought in a large number of worshippers from various centres on the Reef and the Transvaal. There are many small places in the province where only one or two Jewish families reside. It has now become a custom for these people to travel into Johannesburg for Rosh Hashonah. Because of this influx extra places of worship have become necessary.

Some of the already existing synagogues are contemplating undertaking rebuilding operations during the year in order to meet the additional number of applications from would-be seat holders. It is known that the Yeoville Synagogue had refused a few hundred such applications and during the year the auditorium of the synagogue will be considerably enlarged.

It was generally gratifying to note the large congregations in all the synagogues. There can be no doubt that the solemn call of the Festival of Rosh Hashonah was answered earnestly by thousands of our co-religionists in the Transvaal and throughout the country.