

The past five years have witnessed one of the most thrilling homecomings in human history. Israel has taken into its bosom the homeless people whose only possessions, in many cases, have been their stubborn faith and hope in adversity. The great Exodus of Biblical times is recalled as 100,000 displaced persons have come out of Germany, Austria and Italy; 40,000 from the prison camps of Cyprus; 50,000 from the Arab Kingdom of Yemen; another 120,000 from Iraq; and, during a brief lifting of the iron curtain, more than 100,000 from Roumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

The return of the Jews to their promised land must bring poignant memories of past glory. A sophisticated world has too easily forgotten the ancient greatness of Israel -- in civilization, in industry, in art, in literature -- long before Athens' Golden Age, when Rome was a word without meaning, and Britain's glory was still 3,000 years away.

It must be a strange yet encouraging sight for the home-comers to see this ancient land of holy places now dotted with tents, aluminum huts, hydro-power installations, new chemical factories and the severely functional buildings of modern industrial plants. But will all the trappings of the twentieth century, the Israelis are ever-mindful of their ancient tradition. Homecoming is the promise and fulfilment of ancient prophecy. To quote the final words of the autobiography, "Trial and Error", of the late great President of Israel, Dr. Chaim Weizmann:

"Then God will look down benignly on His children who after a long wandering have come to serve Him, with a psalm on their lips and a spade in their hands, reviving their old country and making it a centre of human civilization."

What a magnificent vision for the new Israel -- what a challenge to its people to struggle against all the human and physical difficulties to bring about a new era in Jewish history in which the hopes and longings of many ages can be fulfilled.

During the past five years, in which Israel has enjoyed independence, it has gone a long way towards establishing for itself a place of stature among the nations.

In human terms, through the adoption of the Law of the Return, Israel has saved the lives and the hopes of hundreds of thousands who would otherwise have known only despair. In economic terms, its people are far from being discouraged and they have managed, with the loyal support of co-religionists elsewhere in the world, to proceed with the basic development of their newly-regained homeland. The difficulties have been great -- imports heavily overbalance exports; inflation and high prices prevail; food is scarce and agricultural expansion not yet in proportion to need; and industrial production, while moving ahead steadily, has not been able to keep pace with population growth.

Israel is seeking to become economically self-supporting by extending agriculture, exploiting its natural resources and developing its basic industries. This means restoring life to desert lands by irrigation projects; it means developing hydro-electric power; it means building