

A NATION SINGS.

Some Notes by Ben Yonah.

The Italians are known throughout the world as a nation of music and song. Tourists relate with enthusiasm their impression of Genoa and Venice where they heard throughout the day and evening the strains of the guitar or the melodious voice of the troubadour. South African Jews, or for that matter the Jewish community in the British Empire, living as they do in a less musical environment and in exile at that, do not realise that the Jewish people can easily approach the Italians in ranking as a nation of song and music. In Eastern Europe before the catastrophe overtook them, the Jewish ghetto and villages where Jews lived resounded with Yiddish and Hebrew song and to-day, too, the ancient hills and valleys of Judea again echo with Hebrew melodies of the Chasidim.

From references in the Bible it may be clearly seen that song and music were used on occasions of joy or woe from the earliest times. The song of Deborah, the dancing and singing after King David's victory or the numerous allusions to music and song in the psalms is surely sufficient proof that ancient Israel was a musical nation indeed. In spite of the many travails and massacres and the long exiles of the Jewish people this musicality has remained ingrained in the make up of the Jewish Nation. The suffering has only infused a tone of sadness even in the joyous melodies. The Chasidic mystic songs of the 18th and 19th century shows this blending of joy and sorrow. It is this quality of the Chasidic song that endeared itself to the Jewish people.

There are no records of actual songs in Talmudic times, though singing must have been prevalent both among the Jews in Alexandria and Babylonia. One of the earliest melodies which is still popular to-day, is the well-known "Eliyahu Hanavi," which was already well known in the 11th century. Spanish Jewry has contributed a vast volume of popular songs, and the middle ages in general have left a heritage of religious songs and piyutim (poetic paragraphs in the synagogue liturgy). "Maoz Tzur"; "Lecha dodi"; "Yah Ribbon Olam," all date back to the middle ages. Some of these songs were modelled on melodies borrowed from German, Spanish, French and especially the Slavonic peoples. The Chasidim in particular borrowed from the latter.

The Yiddish theatre popularised many a song which was based on folk-motives. Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1905) was responsible for this popularisation. Such songs as "In den Beth Hamedrash, in a Winkel Cheder," "Mein shtetele Belz," "Die Grine Kusine," and many others have become popular on the stage.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHASIDIM.

Israel Baal Shemtov (founder of Chasidism) is said to have perceived words out of tones of a melody. He was also able to follow the thoughts of the singer. Shneier Zalman, popularly known as "Rav," the Lithuanian Chasidic leader, was of the opinion that melody is the outpouring of the soul, but that words interrupt the stream of their emotion: "For the songs of the souls—at the time they are swaying in the high regions to drink from the well of the Almighty King—consist of tones only, dismantled of words." This attitude of the Chasidim was responsible for placing singing on a par with prayer. Most of the Chasidic tunes were sung without words and the Chasidic Synagogues are well known for their melody during services. Lively Chasidic tunes borrowed mainly from Slavonic songs accompanied the dances of the Chasidim. The masses of Eastern Jews who were oppressed by the burden of exile, breathed anew when

the Chasidim introduced into these communities a spirit of joy, of dancing and singing. This trend was based on the Chasidic belief that we must serve the Lord through joy and not through sadness.

The Chasidic communities were divided into a number of "courts" each with its own Zadik (leader of Chasidim). Each of these "courts" had its own peculiar tunes which were composed there, often by a special court troubadour. In time the Chasidic mode of song captured Eastern Europe and the folk-songs that were in sway during the 19th and early 20th centuries represent a considerable Chasidic influence. Chasidic songs were also later transplanted to the soil of Eretz Israel and the early chalutzim were much indebted to the Chasidim for their Hebrew songs, especially those accompanying the Horah. Here I should also mention the song "Ani Maamin," which was sung by the martyrs on their death route to the gas-chambers. The melody is based on the tune of the Chasidic Rabbi of Moscisk and the words on the Principles of Faith of Maimonides.

Before discussing the development of the folk-song in Eretz Israel let us divert our attention for a moment to the influence of the Yiddish songs on those of other nations, especially in modern jazz. This influence is, in particular, felt in the U.S.A. Amongst the tunes that have become popularised over the radio and through records

are "Kol Nidre," as well as many adaptations from this tune. "Azoi neit a shneider," "Yosel Yosel," "Bei mir bist du shein," "Der Rebbi Eli-meilich." "Sha sha die Rebetsen," was made popular by the Andrew Sisters. Thus we see how Jews borrowed their melodies from surrounding nations in Eastern Europe and presented them in a newer form to the peoples of the 20th century.

NEW FOLK-SONGS.

In Europe Zionist songs were sung for many centuries. They were songs that glorified the past and expressed burning hope for the future. The Chalutzim brought these songs out with them to Palestine and invented many new ones. Songs that express the joy of creation and aspirations of the rising generation in Eretz Israel. Songs of the fields and rivers, songs of work. These Chalutzic tunes were based on Chasidic, Yemenite and other Jewish folk-songs, and also on Arabic melodies whose desert lilt was more in the spirit of the land of Israel. The Synagogue songs also played an important part in creating or rather evolving a new folk-song. Invented, as they were, during work or during the leisure hours by these pioneers who often had no technical knowledge of music, these songs are truly of the people and full of that naive beauty that is characteristic of such songs. The modern Hebrew songs are well known in Zionist youth ranks in South Africa. Let us but mention the older ones, such as "Yerushalayim," "Nes Ziona," "Atzra Alinu," "Hava Nagila," "Am Yisroel Chai," "Chevraya" and numerous others. The great Hebrew poets, such as Bialik and Tchernikovsky, contributed many poems that became popu-

lar as songs amongst the youth of Palestine. "El Hazipor," "Lo Vayom" and "Sachaki" are examples of such songs.

With the growth of the Zionist movement and Zionist consciousness throughout the Jewish world, especially amongst the Jewish youth, the new Palestinian songs that arose on the native soil of the Holy Land is sung throughout the Jewish world. In our own South Africa the Zionist youth movement has in the past two or three years become more song conscious, and singing plays an important role in the activities of the Zionist youth, especially among the Chalutz groups. The arrival of Palestinians and the return of the post-matriculants renews the repertoire of song and dances of the Zionist youth of South Africa.

Successful Zionist Socialist Rally at Worcester.

A record gathering of Zionist Socialist Youth participated in a rally which took place at Worcester during the long week-end beginning 18th April. In spite of transport difficulties about forty made the grade by various methods, including hitch-hiking, rail and bicycles.

The rally was officially opened on Saturday evening when an impromptu camp-fire was held. Interesting contacts were made between the Worcester youth and the visitors, who were made to feel thoroughly welcome. The evening concluded with the reception at the home of Chaverim Archie and Gandhi Bloch, the success of which was sealed by enthusiastic community singing.

On Sunday morning informal meetings took place at the Zionist Hall and the Bloch residence. In the afternoon the chaverim went by lorry to Brandvlei Dam, the Hot Springs and Goudini Baths. This successful and most enjoyable outing was organised by Chaver Max Peisach.

The highlight of the rally was a public meeting at the Zionist Hall on Sunday night. Chaver Barney Singer presided, and introduced Chaver Sam Rubinstein who has just returned from Eretz Israel. Chaver Rubinstein, who paid a special visit to the rally, addressed the gathering on "Agricultural Settlements in Aretz." During the evening items were given by Chaverot Bilah Berret, Sheila Goldin and Cecilia Chiat; humorous interludes by Chaver Robert Isaacson and Okkie Rabinowitz and the now famous Zionist Socialist man orchestra under the baton of Max Peisach. Chaver Archie Bloch proposed the vote of thanks to the speaker. On Monday morning the rally was concluded by another sight-seeing tour of Worcester and environs.

Goodwill Week—1947.

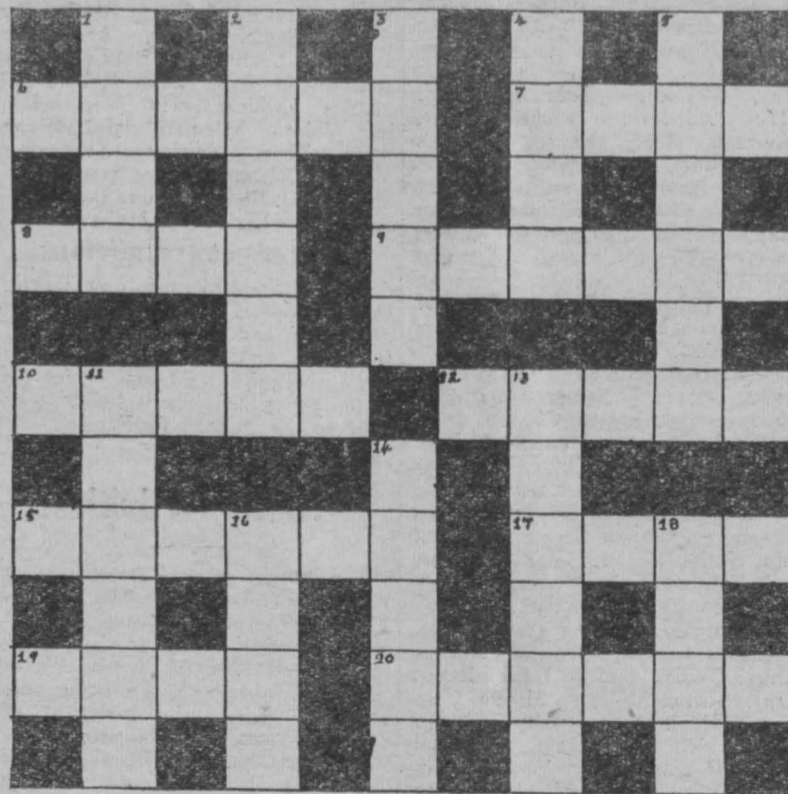
MAY 16th to 23rd.

Thousands of schoolchildren throughout South Africa, English and Afrikaans-speaking, will have the idea of goodwill towards all sections and all peoples specially emphasised for them during Goodwill Week from May 16 to May 23.

The Goodwill Council has sent out special lessons for the observance of the week for all age groups and on many subjects.

Goodwill Week is also the occasion of an exchange of goodwill messages by schoolchildren of different countries. In 1920 the schoolchildren of Wales broadcast the first goodwill message to children in other parts of the world and this broadcast from Wales has become an annual event. South African children will reply to the Welsh broadcast on May 16, 1947.

Lanoar Crossword Puzzle — No. 2.



Across.

6. Flexion plus preposition (4, 2).
7. Worn by women in the Victorian era (4).
8. Also joined onto Europe (4).
9. Make affectionate (6).
10. Priestly garment (5).
12. Contract (5).
15. Most famous work in Hebrew literature (6).
17. You hum it (4).
19. She arose (in Palestine) (4).
20. Banished (6).

Down.

1. Semites (4).
2. His earth (Heb.) (6).
3. Aaron's office (5).
4. Cause to flow (4).
5. Allies of the Maccabees, but Bar Cochba fought against them (6).
11. Biblical ruler connected with a Jewish Festival (6).
13. Makes necessary (6).
14. Supplemented (5).
16. Descendants of Lot (4).
18. Requirement (4).

SOLUTION TO LAST CROSSWORD PUZZLE (No. 1).

(Note.—The editor regrets the two mistakes that were found in the crossword.)

Down: 1, Lass; 2, Mosaic; 3, Ukase; 4, Laws; 5, Sforno; 11, Unousa; 13, Indian; 14, Masha; 16, Arum; 18, Year.

Across: 6, Farouk; 7, Alfa; 8, Asia;

9, Sisera; 10, Ruach; 12, Rokach; 17, Onyx; 19, Esau; 20, A Haman. (No. 15, Missing, and No. 17, Onyx, were incorrect.)

PRIZE OFFERED.

A book prize is offered for the first correct solution. (Solutions should be posted to P.O. Box 1588, Cape Town.)