

JERUSALEM DIARY

By David Dainow



A Leader!

I JOINED a group of overseas newspapermen the other day in Jerusalem to listen to one of the most interesting personalities in the Yishuv. In a quiet manner, the speaker outlined the beginnings and present working of the ever-developing Labour movement in Eretz Israel. She herself—for it was Golda Meyerson who was speaking—is a tower of strength in the movement and has represented the Histadruth at six International Labour Conferences in England and the United States.

I heard her give evidence before the Anglo-American Inquiry Committee, and she was one of the most illuminating and clear-minded witnesses. Her public addresses are examples of the finest oratory. Her fiery expressions do not hide a thinking and instructive brain. It is no wonder that this outstanding woman has been chosen as Acting Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in the absence of Moshe Shertok, who is still detained at Latrun.

By sheer force of ability and character, Golda Meyerson has entered the circle of leadership in Eretz Israel. The dynamic energy of this woman is remarkable. She holds any number of important executive posts and carries out her duties with rare efficiency, without in any way neglecting her home, husband and children.

I remember seeing her resting quietly during her hunger strike with other Zionist leaders in Jerusalem a few months ago. She seemed radiant in spite of her then physically weakened condition.

"Carrying On!"

THE other morning, as I came to the Barclays Bank in Jerusalem, I stood gazing at the building opposite. Until a week ago, it had been used as a Y.M.C.A. hostel. In its main hall I had attended occasionally some of the weekly Rotary luncheons. Here distinguished visitors to this country were often entertained and delivered informative addresses. The Rotary functions were the only ones in Palestine in which Englishmen, Jews and Arabs sat down to a friendly meal together.

The place had been summarily requisitioned by the military authori-

ties, and the staff of the Jerusalem Municipality was moving in. The municipal offices had been requisitioned a few days earlier.

I wondered how many of the folk who passed unconcernedly as the moving-in operations were proceeding, considered for a moment the history of that old building. Erected sixty-six years ago, it was later leased to a Mr. Kaminitz, who established a hotel which became famous for decades. It was the Kaminitz Hotel at which Theodor Herzl stayed during his memorable visit to the Holy Land. A regular "client" was Baron Edmond de Rothschild on his frequent visits from France to the Jewish colonies he was then establishing.

The first world war ruined the business of the old Kaminitz Hotel. It was used later on as an Army Post Office, and after that entered a long career of many uses. The building was finally condemned to be demolished, but old Kaminitz must have turned in his grave, for on the outbreak of the second world war, the building began a new career of usefulness and is still "carrying on."

Sipping Coffee

IF one of the qualities of greatness is simplicity, it is well indicated in the behaviour of Shmuel Agnon, recognised as the premier Hebrew writer in the Yishuv.

The other day I saw him sipping coffee at a little T'nuvah restaurant in Jerusalem. I sat down and said "Shalom," to which he replied cordially; we had never personally met although I knew who he was. I did not let him know I was conscious of sipping coffee with a man of great fame in the Hebrew-speaking world. I had heard that Agnon disliked receiving any particular attention in this connection.

When his latest book—upon which he had worked for thirteen years—was recently published, there went up a paean of praise from all quarters. No one, however, had the temerity to propose to the author that he permit himself to receive some form of public recognition. It would have been fruitless.

A few days ago, however, I was present when the annual Ussishkin prize was being awarded by Professor Klausner before a Jerusalem gathering of specially invited guests. The latest work of Agnon had gained the prize. The author listened to praise of his genius with a twinkle in his eye. It seemed as if something was being said about someone else.

When he replied, he made no reference to the compliments or to the reading. He said Ussishkin had complained to him once about the neglect of contemporary and recent life in Eretz Israel by the best creative Hebrew writers of the day. It was his (Agnon's) aim to correct this. I had the feeling he was eager to get away from this official ceremony in order to divest himself of his collar, tie and coat, and wander quietly into the heart of the city and sip his coffee at the little T'nuvah cafe he visits daily and during which he does some considerable thinking.

Opera

AN air of expectancy prevailed the other evening in the large Edison Theatre in Jerusalem. The occasion was the first performance in Hebrew of "Rigoletto." The place was literally packed from floor to ceiling and great enthusiasm prevailed.

I could not help feeling that the Hebrew words further enhanced Verdi's fine work. The decorations were excellent and the ensemble satisfactory. There was an orchestra up to pitch and a "refugee" conductor who knew how to use his baton.

My Hebrew-singing "Rigoletto" was a dominating figure and the possessor of a powerfully tuned operatic voice. His acting was of a high quality. The performance of the character of Gilda drew attention to a young woman, who until recently was a member of the opera chorus. She is a coloratura soprano produced in Eretz Israel and possesses a truly beautiful voice.

Wanted "An Angel"

I HAD a talk later on with some of the opera performers and members of the management. Theirs is a great struggle. The Palestine Folk Opera has no permanent theatre building and it had to carry all its stage property into various parts of the country. There are no proper rehearsal facilities.

The production of each new opera involves an expenditure of thousands of pounds. There is no capital fund and the whole project lives from hand to mouth. Members of the ensemble work during the day, as they get a pittance for their stage work. Even some of the leading artists are forced to seek other means of livelihood in order to implement their meagre opera earnings. (For instance, two of the best tenors conduct synagogue services during the High Festival period.)

In spite of all these difficulties—to which must now be added the loss and inconvenience sustained by suddenly cancelled performances owing to enforced curfews—there is much enthusiasm and a growing operatic public.

Hearing that I was from overseas, the opera players gathered round me with their grease-paint still on their faces. Did I not know of some kind "angel" in England, America, Australia or South Africa, who would build in Tel Aviv a suitable opera house in which the Palestine Folk Opera's activities would be able to develop along Italian Scala Theatre lines?

Their eyes shone with a strange light as they spoke of the idea. As I left the stage by the side-entrance, I felt it needed a more powerful pen than mine to transfer a spark of that light into the heart of some overseas Jewish millionaire.

A "Turn-About"

THIS particular visitor to Eretz Israel is a grey-bearded Jew. He is enjoying everything he sees keenly indeed. For fifty years he has lived quietly in South Africa, yet he speaks an English with a foreign accent. So as we walk the streets of old Jerusalem, we chat in Yiddish.

I ask him what he thinks of the present political situation. The old chap says: "I never was a politician and I don't understand the position here. All I know is I love my brethren and I enjoy being with them for a while in my seventy-

fifth year. I am happy to see their accomplishments in the Homeland."

We noticed three British soldiers pass each with a gun held loaded and in readiness.

"You know," he continued, "in my early life when a boy in Russia, Poland and Lithuania, I remember that Jews used to meet the sight of a soldier or a policeman with terror. It was an evil omen when one of these gentry appeared. . . ."

He turns round and looks again at the passing armed soldiers.

"When I see those men protecting themselves against my people, I am a little amused."

"Is it not tragic?" I ask in surprise.

"Yes, but don't you see? Here the situation has turned. We feel safe but the uniformed fellow is afraid."

I came away a few moments later, having seen the visitor home to his temporary residence. That mild old man could not kill a fly, yet I feel he has given expression to a thought which in its ferocity frightened me as a law-abiding citizen of the Yishuv.

■ **LATEST BOOKS** ■
 THE LARGEST SELECTION OF
 MODERN YIDDISH BOOKS.
 DAILY AND FESTIVAL
 PRAYER BOOKS. TALEISIM,
 MAGAZINES, ETC.
A. DEMBO
 58 Beit Street, Doornfontein
 JOHANNESBURG
 P.O. Box 4270 — Phone 24-3147

P.O. BOX 1391
 Telephones 33-5811
 (5 Lines)
**Hygienic Kosher
 Polony and
 Delicacy Factory**
*The only firm under
 the supervision of
 the BETH DIN*
 Cor. Jeppe & West
 Streets,
 NEWTOWN,
 JOHANNESBURG

**IF IT'S EYES
 SEE
 RAPHAEL'S**
 The Progressive Opticians
 Phone for an Appointment
 189, Jeppe St. (opp. G.P.O.) 22-7496
 68, Joubert St. 22-2809
 118, Jeppe St. (Africans) 33-1520
 8, Third St., Springs 56-4632
 132, High St., Vryheid 217
 Established over 20 years
 Contractors to the Union Government