Palestine Creates a New Folk Song

By A. W. Binder

In the face of all difficulties, expressed in a folk song that begins thus:

Yesh Banu Koah There is power in us
V'hi emunatenu. And that is our faith.

She-kulana yahad That all of us together
Nivneh et artenu. Will build our land
Or as in Havu L'Vemim (Give us Bricks) where they sing:

Bim Korn Emet In place of yesterday
Bim yam to morrow.

A very interesting phenomenon manifests itself in the shepherd's songs which are to-day sung in the Holy Land. It is interesting to note that some of our people are returning to the ancient profession of the patriarchs, namely, shepherding. For in many of the songs the little lamb, the little goat, the well, and the shade, are the favourite subjects. Particularly beautiful is the song Seh U'Gdih, which is the composition of the gifted Matthias Weiser, a shepherd in the colony of Beth Alpha, in Emek Jeruel. His style is simple, and the spirit of his songs is beautifully naïve. His originality lies rather in his poetry than in his music.

Gifted Young Men.

For a time there was a vogue for Chasidic songs, used mainly for dances. There was also a period when a great many liturgical songs were sung, songs consisting of synagogue melodies adapted to excerpts from the prayers. Such songs as Ashre Nu, Avinu Malkenu, Tziboneh, etc., are popular examples of this type of song.

Some composers took, however, the combination of all these three elements to strike what may to-day be called the beginning of the new Palestinian folk-song. The old synagogue mode, the Yemenite and Arabic elements, had to be fused into the song, which the Chalutz and Chalutzah are to-day happy to sing, and call their own.

And who are the composers of songs such as Ashre Ha-Isf, Seh U'Gdi, Gamel Gawall, Pakad Adoney, and other similar songs? The composers living in Palestine? No! The makers of these songs are just Chalutzim, young men who worked on the soil in Palestine, and whose souls are filled with the spirit of the land. They are musically gifted young men without the knowledge of musical technique, and it is for this reason that they have been able to plant into their songs the naive beauty which one finds in their creations. It is for this reason that their songs sung with a longing spirit not only in Palestine, but also in the Diaspora.

Virility in Song.

These songs, in a great many cases, have a certain virility which one does not find in the Palestinian song of the past; virility in the music, as well as in the poetry. As, for example, in the song Ashre Ha-Isf, the refrain says:

Clear away all Saul, Saul, et stumbling blocks ham'selah
Awake the redeemed Uru hub'ilim
And enter into the Uvo-u bash'arim.

Then again, we find a strong faith and determination to go on with the work, in the presence of all difficulties, expressed in a folk song that begins thus: