

"At Home" With Local Societies

1.—An Evening with the Palestine Club

THIS bright Saturday night we are invited to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Benzion S. Hersch, where the ninety-eighth meeting of the Palestine Club is to be held. Together let us go along, in anticipation of a happy evening, for the Palestine Club is a society of "good fellows"—all are friends there, and the visitor and the stranger are welcome in the general camaraderie.

There are lights and the sound of pleasant conversation as we approach the place of meeting, and, fearful lest we be late, we hasten our step along the garden path. Already many members of the Club have gathered, but our host, Mr. Hersch, tells us smilingly we are not late, it is merely that members look forward so eagerly to meetings.

Many of the members are old friends of ours; we meet them often in community life in Johannesburg. Sitting among them, we chat pleasantly about communal activities, hear of Sokolow's forthcoming visit, and the preparations afoot to ensure its success.

Our host introduces us to the Secretary, Mrs. Jacobson (wife of our old friend Dr. Daniel Jacobson) who tells us the history of the Club. The Palestine Club was founded by Dr. Immanuel Olsvanger some nine years ago, when that gifted orator and author was in this country.

It is an informal organisation, meeting at the homes of various members. The aims of the Club are Zionist, and its business is directed towards furthering, through friendly discussion, a deep interest in Palestine, the land, its people, and its culture. Usually some well-known figure is invited to address the meeting on some aspect of Jewish life and animated discussion follows his address.

The Speaker of the Evening.

THE speaker for this evening is the Rev. A. T. Shrock, B.A., who has chosen the subject of "Legends and Fables." Rev. Shrock is always an interesting speaker, and we settle comfortably in our chairs in anticipation of something good. Rev. Shrock tells of the origin of legends and fables, delving far back, down into the dawn of civilisation, when the sun and the moon and the wind and the rain were things of mystery and awe. And in those times men, sitting around the fire after the day had gone, told fantastic tales of the creatures of the earth, and their queer converse with each other. Mostly these fables were told to illustrate some moral teaching, to point out a path of goodness and justice in the dark forest of life.

Where the fables had first originated was a question to which there was still no conclusive reply. But from the researches of men who have studied the subject deeply—men like Jacobs, Frazer, Malinowski—it seems that from the far lands of the East—from India and China—and later from ancient Greece, the thing we know as the fable came. From such distant origins it comes to Israel, and men of Israel, realising the beauty and value of these old folk-tales, translated them into Hebrew, adding as they did so their own share of peculiarly Jewish fables to the general mass.

Rev. Shrock goes on to quote representative fables, tracing their path through time: how they change as one nation after another makes use of them: how each race adds to the original story its own distinctive flourish.

The Debate.

AFTERWARDS, over the delicious tea and cake which Mrs. Hersch provides, the members discuss Rev. Shrock's subject. To a person who knows not the Palestine Club, it may seem that there will be scant debate, for how much can a Zionist society converge upon such academic grounds? But the Palestine Club comprises no narrow group. Here are men and women who are well read, and possessed of a broad general knowledge, and they discuss the subject keenly and intelligently.

Mr. D. Mierowsky, whom we have met before in his capacity of Director of Hebrew Education, elaborates upon the Jew's own contribution to the legends and fables of the world, the rich mine of folk-lore which he has opened for men; and other members touch upon the researches on the subject conducted by eminent Jewish scientists. We do not hear Freud mentioned in the discussion: but probably this is nothing more than an oversight, for later, as we speak privately to one member, he remarks upon the great scientist's psychoanalytic studies of the legends and fables of men.

There is a general air of *bonhomie* throughout the evening. Pleasant banter passes from one to another: we hear members addressing each other intimately, by their first names; and we take it all as token of the fine fellowship prevailing.

Mr. I. J. Hersch, who is in the chair, is an admirable chairman for such an evening as this. He does not hold the reins too tightly, or make over-formal the character of the meeting. He permits good spirits to have their course, and helps to preserve the happy camaraderie.

Dr. D. Jacobson proposes a vote of thanks to the speaker; and Mr. J. Feitelberg, in whimsical vein, a similar vote to the host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Benzion Hersch.

"About the lecture itself," Mr. Feitelberg remarks, "I shan't say anything, for, as Motke Chabat says, *auf meissers vregt men kein kasches*."

And as we walk home in the night, it is good to think of these homely folk meeting in this fashion month after month, not for the ephemeral pleasures of "bluff" or "rummy," but for the broadening of their knowledge, their wisdom and their culture.

E.B.

(Concluded from next column.)

English, the instruction being under Miss Lurie.

Parents are invited to visit the Kindergarten, which is held in the classrooms of the Yeoville Synagogue, and to realise for themselves the happy atmosphere in which these children are imbued with a consciousness of their Judaism while, at the same time, they are being prepared for the English public schools.

Purim at a Hebrew Kindergarten

(From a Correspondent)

BEAMING faces crowned by gay paper hats, little hands stuffing Homantaschen and sweets into small mouths, a festive gathering presided over by King Ahasuerus, Queen Esther and Mordecai—such is the bright scene which is presented to me when I enter the Modern Hebrew-English Kindergarten at Yeoville to join in the Purim celebration.

The children are having a joyous time and the whole affair moves with a zest which can only be achieved at a community gathering such as this.

For we cannot deny that Purim is being observed less and less in private homes in the Diaspora. In this country, it is only in public celebrations that the significance of Purim is realised and the Carnival spirit displayed, as it still is in Palestine to-day.

Here, in this bright and attractively furnished Kindergarten, I listen to these children, whose ages range from three to six years, telling the story of the festival in Hebrew songs.

My heart is stirred when one little girl recounts by herself in Hebrew the events of those historic days. A Hebrew conversation then ensues between the teacher, Mrs. Blumenthal, and the child. From the latter's response to the questions, one knows that this has not been a parrotlike repetition of a lesson, but that the little pupil has understood every word of Hebrew that she has used.

I could not help wishing that Johannesburg parents of children of Kindergarten age could have been present at this informal function. It had been organised not as a public performance but solely for the edification and enjoyment of the little pupils. I felt that no finer testimony could have been given of the remarkable work that is being achieved in our midst by this Kindergarten. To these children their Jewish religion is a source of happiness and enjoyment, and their Hebrew tongue a natural, easy and joyous way of expressing themselves.

I may add that while these boys and girls are receiving a Jewish education in this unique and pleasurable manner, their secular training is not being neglected. They are divided into groups, and half their time is daily devoted to

(Concluded at foot of previous column.)

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