

Glimpses of ERETZ ISRAEL

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By HARRY LEVIN

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RARELY has the Yishuv greeted any man with more warmth and enthusiasm than it has Arturo Toscanini, the greatest living conductor of music, who arrived in Palestine last week to launch the newly-formed Palestine Symphony Orchestra on its auspicious career. To some this enthusiasm has seemed strange. A prominent public man remarked to me that it was extraordinary; "suddenly the whole Yishuv of 400,000 people have become *klesmerim!*" Others have doubted the wisdom of saddling this small and by no means rich country with an orchestra of 70 players, declaring that while Toscanini can evoke for it unparalleled enthusiasm, the economic realities of this undertaking must prove its downfall when the initial excitement of its inauguration by the great master dies down. Whatever the soundness of this prediction, the birth of this orchestra of leading Jewish musicians gathered together from all parts of the world, but particularly from the two countries that have made the lot of Jews unbearable, Germany and Poland, has proved an unforgettable occasion. No one left the concerts already held without feeling deeply moved. The joyous beauty of the music moved them, so did the inner significance of this new creation, symbolic of the whole Jewish undertaking in Palestine. But what moved them most was the noble gesture of one of the greatest artists in the world.

There was nothing in Palestine to attract to it a man of the calibre of Toscanini. Economically it is considerably poorer than many another land that he has not yet chosen to visit; but this in fact weighed nothing with him, since he is accepting no fee at all for his services. Moreover, our musical development is still in its beginnings, and neither his reputation nor his musical knowledge could be extended by a visit to Palestine. There is, in brief, nothing at all that we could offer him, except our gratitude. But for all that, he did not find it unbecoming to visit Palestine and give us of his best. It is that great gesture that has brought Toscanini close to the heart of every Jew in Palestine, however remote he might be from musical appreciation. And when the audiences at his concerts applauded as they have seldom applauded before, it was not only for his magic music that they wished to thank him.

Perhaps the best expression of this sentiment was voiced by Dr. Weizmann at the reception to Toscanini and Bronislaw Huberman, the famous Jewish violinist who conceived

the idea of the new orchestra and invited Toscanini to be its first conductor. It was the second time in 18 years, he said, that visitors had come to Palestine to demonstrate that what is highest and best in the non-Jewish world has sympathy and understanding for what was being done in Palestine. The first time was when Lord Balfour came to open the Hebrew University. And when Dr. Weizmann saw Toscanini at his first concert in Tel-Aviv, he said, he remembered that other scene on Mount Scopus in 1925.

At this hour of profound distress of world Jewry, and anxiety for the Yishuv, this demonstration of friendship and sympathy by Arturo Toscanini gives encouragement and inspiration to us all.

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WHOEVER first remarked on half the world's ignorance of the other half's way of living would have been able to carry his point much further had he lived in Palestine. For most residents of Palestine the doings of far more than half of their own little world is a closed book. It is sometimes said of some man or other that he "knows almost everybody in Palestine." Tested, "knowing everybody" is usually found to consist of being acquainted with most of the members of his own particular "set" and with a few conspicuous people outside it. The very fact that this is called "knowing everybody" proves how unusual even such a limited acquaintance is.

In recent years a certain social classification has developed which encourages not only the perpetuation of imported standards of life, but also severely limits the range of acquaintance of its members. The immigration of German Jews has something to do with this growth, but they are by no means alone at fault. No less responsible are many of the English-speaking Jews, who, in fact, are the earlier sinners. They brought with them their adopted insularity, refusing to mix with any not of similar origin, or at least in command of the English language, refusing to learn more Hebrew than essential for their barest needs, and maintaining as intact as possible the outward

forms of life familiar to them in their former homes. In effect, they were as foreign in Palestine as any passing sojourner. It is perhaps no wonder that English-speaking Jews, with the exception of South Africans, who are generally liked, are not always popular with the mass of Palestinian Jews.

Most foreign, of course, certainly to Jewish Palestine, is the majority of the mass of non-Jewish Englishmen, whether officials, businessmen, or professionals. They have long ago acquired the knack of ignoring everything that does not directly concern them, and display a lack of curiosity in the doings and feelings of everyone not of their own circle that is sometimes quite incomprehensible even to other Englishmen. They surround themselves with an English atmosphere impenetrably thick through which can enter no perception of ways of life and modes of thought different from their own. When occasionally they do meet Jews on common social ground, it is interesting to watch how, almost inevitably, they drift into a corner with such members of their own "set" who happen to be present. Again and again I have watched attempts made to bring Englishmen and Jews together socially, and most of them have failed, not perhaps surprisingly. The Jew is preoccupied with the political and economic problems of the country. The Englishmen here fight shy of discussion of either, preferring instead, as subjects, the weather, golf, the sporting club, Arab servants, the English countryside, and cognate subjects, to discuss any of which few Jews in Palestine are capable.

The problem of relations between Jew and Britisher in Palestine is a deep one, and, as matters stand at present, not easy of solution. But the problem of the relations between Jews and Jews in Palestine, while less important—because it is one that will solve itself in a generation or two, when the present "desert generation" passes, and there remain not English, German, Polish or Roumanian Jews, but Palestinian Jews, born and brought up in the country—should also be easier to overcome. The new Culture Depart-

ment of the Vaad Leumi which aims at spreading the Hebrew language among all elements of the Yishuv can be a potent factor towards the end. But there must also be an adequate desire on the part of every section of the community.

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THERE will shortly be opened in Jerusalem an exhibition of a novel kind, designed to make more widely known the activities of the Botanical Museum of the Hebrew University. The object of this museum, of which the curator is Dr. Ha-reubeni, who is assisted by his wife, is to trace and preserve specimens of flowers and plants mentioned in the Bible. The beginnings of the museum were established by the present curator nearly 30 years ago, and in the intervening years he has assembled a magnificent collection.

DR. Ha-reubeni follows up any reference, however vague, in the Old Testament or the New, in the Talmud or the Midrash, to flora and fauna, and can hardly rest until he has identified the flower or plant, pressed it or preserved it and added it to his unique collection. One of Mrs. Ha-reubeni's achievements is the discovery of a method of mummifying a flower in the same way as ancient Egyptians were mummified. Nowhere else in the world, it is claimed by the proud discoverer, can one see a rose or a violet standing in a vase with its natural sheen upon it, years after it was picked in the field.

The history of each plant in the Museum is described on a neat notice in the three official languages. The anthropologist can find here what part a particular flower plays in native customs, superstitions and mysterious rites; the historian can find evidence of continuity over thousands of years. Other scientists, including several Christians have recently begun to study the plants referred to in ancient Jewish literature. But the major authorities are still this enthusiastic Jewish couple.

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