

The Ancient Wisdom of the Soil

LIFE AND CULTURE IN THE EMEK

A FUNDAMENTAL problem in the re-settlement of Palestine is the adaptation of the Diaspora Jew, innocent of a rural breeding, with the town in his very bones, to an agricultural task of the greatest difficulty. The danger, of course, is that he may lose all the cultural gains of his long city tradition and sink to be a mere labourer. This problem is being brilliantly solved in Emek Jezreel.

The basic economic task itself is chiefly cultural. Civilisation is to be measured, first of all, in terms of real achievement. Culture, in the narrower sense of the word, depends upon the standard of life of the community. From this point of view there is little doubt that Jewish civilisation was rooted itself deeply and successfully in the Emek. The evidence lies wide-spread on every hand: here a deep well; there a kitchen fitted with the most modern of technical devices; irrigation systems; smiling fields of growing corn; blooming orchards; roads; houses—the whole material basis of civilised life.

A Cultured Countryside

All this has meant arduous and exhausting labour. It might easily have resulted in a disappearance of what is usually spoken of as "the higher cultural values." That it has not had this result is of the greatest significance. A cultured countryside is the dream of every statesman who has any conception of the fundamental role the farm plays in a national economy.

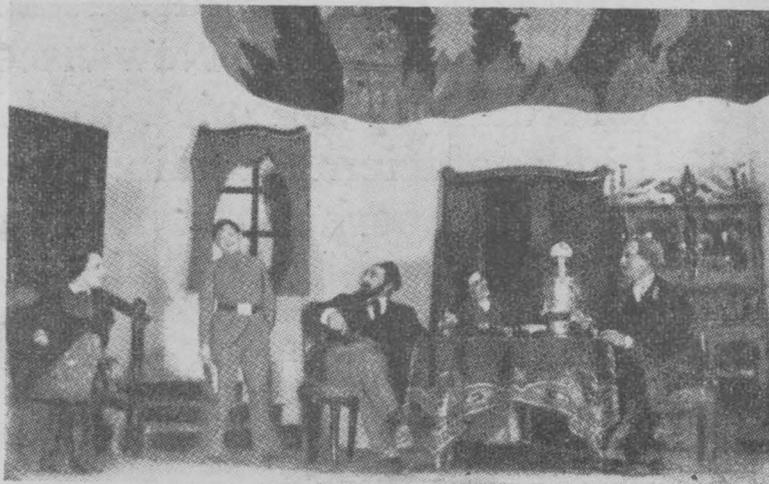
The amount and quality of writing, for example, is astonishing. In many of the settlements there are writers of sufficient ability to make noteworthy contributions to the daily press and the technical journals. But much more important is that most of the settlements issue their own daily bulletin. These bulletins deal with every development in the work of the settlement and provide an open forum for discussion and criticism. The significance of the work they are doing and a feeling that they share in the direction of that work elevates the necessary toil into the sphere of creative labour and assures that its cultural value is savoured to the full. In several of

the settlements even more ambitious periodicals like the comprehensive "Hashomer Hatzair" appear and set a standard for the others to aim at. At Ain Harod a complete printing press is in operation and, apart from accepting orders from the general public, publishes the output of the Kibbutz Hameuhad movement.

Art in the Colonies

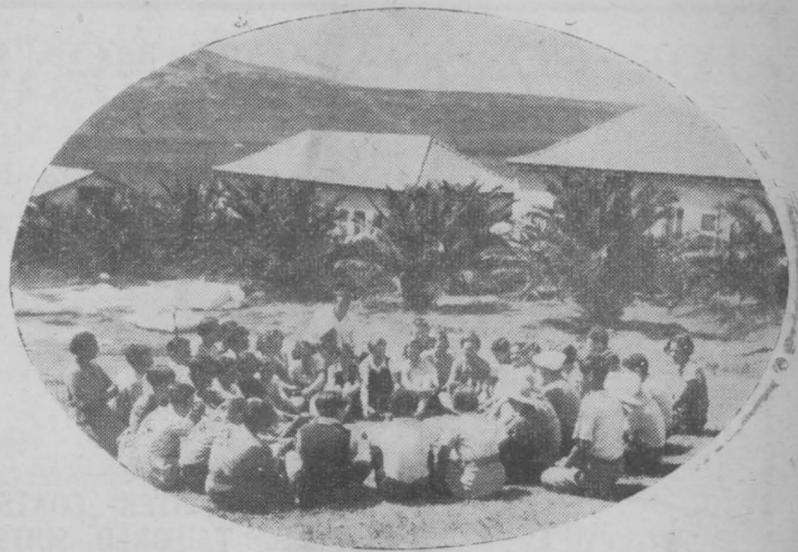
Nor is there any lack of music in the Emek. Every large group has its piano and concerts by local players or visitors from elsewhere, and they are frequent and well-attended. The Emek has its staunch musical friends, such, for example, as the 70-year-old Professor David Shor, who visits the villages at regular intervals giving concerts free of charge. In some of the larger places, choirs or small orchestras have been organised and add much to the amenities of such areas. The Tel Joseph orchestra is a typical example. This wind combination has had a successful career of ten years.

The remaining arts are by no means neglected. There are several highly talented plastic artists in the Emek. Some of these form a special unit within the Hashomer Hatzair movement. Naturally, in the beginning the urgent practical problems facing the settlement had to have precedence, but recently a significant development has taken place. Ain Harod has given two of its most promising artists permission to work in the fields during part of the day.



DRAMATIC ART IN THE COLONIES.

The theatrical groups of the Yishuv, particularly Habimah, make seasonal tours of the colonies. The photograph shows the Habimah Players in a Sholem Aleichem play at Rishon-le-Zion.



EDUCATION IN THE SETTLEMENTS.
An open air class conducted in ideal surroundings.

For the rest they are at liberty to devote themselves to the perfection of their talents. This union of hard work and high artistic endeavour must have unique results in an added sense of reality in their productions.

In view of this living thirst for art, it is not surprising that every visit of the Palestinian Theatre troupes, Ohel and Habimah, are awaited with the keenest anticipation and their work meets with the fullest appreciation. In all the larger settlements communal halls are an essential part of the village. The two large settlements, Tel Joseph and Ain Harod, have co-operated in the construction of a fine open air theatre, where performances may be given during the greater part of the year.

A Noble Monument

This sense of the communal value of art finds expression in many other ways. When recently Herschel Pinsky, a valued member of the Gevat settlement, lost his life in tragic circumstances, the most fitting monument was felt to be a communal hall designed to serve all the villages in the neighbourhood of Nahalal as a cultural centre. Everywhere there are reading rooms where members of the village communities can keep in touch through the daily press and the radio with the outside world. The intensity and care with which all important publications, whether tech-

nical or literary, are read would be astonishing even in places where the material conditions of life are easier. Here, where reading can only be indulged in after long and exhausting toil, it is evidence of an almost unique thirst for knowledge and culture.

Conferences play an important part in the life of these village communities. Teachers, horticulturalists, viticulturalists, and other specialised Emek workers gather from the various settlements and exchange experiences and evolve plans for co-operation, with rich results.

An even more striking example of a developing communal cultural life is the appearance of fresh ceremonial and festivals. The traditional festivals are, of course, celebrated and invested with all the joyous vigour of a community in the process of regeneration. But, in addition, the budding life of the community is flowing into fresh ceremonial. A new festival, the anniversary of the foundation of the settlement, is celebrated in memory of the day when its pioneers set out its long quiescent land into new life and fertility. Such a creation of cultural values is clear evidence of the healthy growth of communal life.

Art and the Soil

Brief and fragmentary as this review must be, the cultural aspects of life in the Emek emerges clearly. In a way this is what might have been expected. Real art grows from and is nourished by close contact with the realities of life. A people divorced from the soil may produce an art of a kind, but it is nearly always decadent and thin-blooded. For great art spiritual health is the prime essential, and no people can be spiritually healthy if it is cut off from its native soil and lives an alien life in the city. The intense life of the Emek must in course of time produce vital contributions in art and literature. I believe that a careful eye can already see the budding of a new artistic tradition nurtured in the ancient wisdom of the soil.