

Palestine Creates a New Folk Song

By

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the early pioneers of 1885 came to Palestine they were faced with the task of selecting proper songs to sing, and wanted to sing, and had to sing every Jewish heart breaks into song beholding the beautiful land of theirs.

Songs of people cannot be created in a day, a month, or a year. It must be evolved. Our people had been rooted in the soil again. They became saturated with the atmosphere of Palestine, in order to be able to sing a representative type of song.

The poetry of these songs, the less difficult, for our people composing poetry about Palestine since they were exiled into the Diaspora. And so, when they came to sing new poetry blossomed, but there was no music to accompany the songs.

They began to sing, and so they took the songs which they had heard in the countries where they came, and adapted them to new poetry. They were, however, conscious of the fact that they were of the stranger; the Galuth. When they were singing one of the new songs of Palestine, it was always answered that these songs were derived from the Russian, German, and the like.

In 1917, when the Chalutzim moved to Palestine, the folk song held a place of honour. One could hear music everywhere; at work and at play. The Chalutzim, one always found him in terms of work and

coming of the Chalutzim to Palestine, there was a great increase as well as the development of the Palestine folk songs.

Melodies.

If the Chalutzim became more than ever of the inadequacy of the existing Palestinian song, for it was now close to the land. It was first to become rooted in Palestine, and it was, therefore, first to fathom the importance of creating a genuine Palestinian song. He was entirely dissatisfied with the songs which were being sung, for they did not express him. He could not express himself. They were out of heart throbs.

The Chalutzim, set about creating a new song. In some cases, they thought that doing what was done in the Diaspora, namely, songs from their neighbours, Consequently there came songs as *Yoh Hai Li Li*, *N'Har Prat*, and a great many others which were Arabic melodies to Hebrew poems. This seemed to fill the need, but not altogether.

They discovered that the Yemenites had many beautiful folk songs

which were Oriental in colour and which were very much akin to the spirit of the land. And so they began to sing songs, such as *Na-Aleh L'Armena*, *Rachel Am'Dah al Ha-Ayn*, which were in many cases genuine Yemenite folk songs, or new Hebrew texts set to Yemenite melodies. Both these elements, the Arabic and the Yemenite, seemed to fit in with the spirit of the soil and the atmosphere of the land, but even these songs were not representative. They did not express the spirit of modern Jewish Palestine.

Gifted Young Men.

FOR a time there was a vogue for Chassidic 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*, *Yiboneth*, etc., are popular examples of this type of song.

It 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 Chalutzim and Chalutzah are to-day happy to sing, and call their own.

And who are the composers of songs such as *Ashre Ha-Ish*, *Seh U'Gli*, *Gamel Gamall*, *Pakad Adonay*, 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 strike the imagination of the Yishuv in the Homeland and make these 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 Palestine song of the past; virility in the music, as well as in the poetry. As, for example, in the song *Ashre Ha-Ish*, the refrain says:

Clear away all Solu, Solu, et
stumbling blocks ham'silah
Awake the redeemed Uru hag'ulim
And enter into the Uvo-u bash'arim gates.

Then again, we find a strong faith and determination to go on with the work,

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-kulanu yahad That all of us together
Nivneh et artsenu. Will build our land
Or as in *Havu L'Venim* (Give us Bricks) where they sing:
Bim Kom Etmol In place of yesterday's sorrow
Yesh lanu mahar. We have a blissful 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 and the little goat, the well, and the shade, are the favourite subjects. Particularly beautiful is the song *Seh U'Gdi*, which is the composition of the gifted Matithyahu Weiner, a shepherd in the colony of Beth Alpha, in Emek Jezreel. His style is simple, and the spirit of his songs is beautifully naive. His originality lies rather in his poetry than in his music.

Originality.

QUITE different is Zahira. His melodies (he composes the tunes only) always have an original turn, and always something which he calls "eastern character." They are in most cases vigorous, as in *Sisu V'Simchu*, *Ashre Ha-Ish*, *Havu L'Venim*. Solomon Rosovsky, famous Jewish composer, now living in Palestine, has taken him under his wing. When Zahira acquires some musical knowledge of technique, we may expect from him some interesting musical compositions in the larger forms.

Yariv Ezrachi, a young violinist, born in Palestine, received his advanced musical education in Vienna. He is one of the very few musicians in Palestine who have had the advantage of being native born. His compositions, for this reason, which range from folk songs to art songs, have a distinctive Palestinian flavour. One may even detect something in the harmonies of his work, which is distinctly Jewish. For, after all, is not the supreme problem before the Jewish composer to-day the task of evolving a harmonic system which will reflect the spirit of our people and our land? Such a system will have to be unmistakably characteristic, certainly as characteristic as the music of the Frenchman Debussy, of the German Wagner, and the Russian Moussorgsky.

The only type of musical composition which is being created in Palestine to-day is the folk song. Many attempts to compose in this form, but only a few succeed.

It is, however, interesting to note that Palestine is the only place on the face of the globe to-day where a new Folk Song is being created.