

LETTER FROM PALESTINE

HARRY LEVIN
discusses

THE TOSCANINI "FEVER"—ARRIVAL OF TECHNICAL COMMISSION—POLICE DOGS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Jerusalem, May 1st.

Melancholy Springtide.

Season of Passover in Palestine, which is the season of the Christian Easter. Jerusalem Nebi Musa, is now at the apex of the springtide. The skies are radiantly blue, the wild flowers cover the land in dazzling abundance, the Sharon is a mass of orange blossoms. Nature repeats the initial Song of Songs whose words were captured by the poet's genius and set down immortally. This season was other than that of this year. The weather is cheerless, as though overshadowed by the Yishuv the tragic anniversary of the outbreak of violence and terrorism; a note of alarm, always in the air in the conjuncture of the Holy Easter and Nebi Musa, emphasised through carelessly fostered political agitation the calamity of the Jewish situation abroad seemed more poignant than ever at this annual festival of Jewish joy; the economic situation and the continued uncertainty of the political future make things worse. And as we complete the tale of the calamity, the Moslems, because they lack the leadership required in internecine strife, blamed their Nebi Musa pilgrimage, while the Christians are obliged to abandon their ceremonies in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre because of its sudden collapse on account of structural weakness. It was a very depressing day. It was by no means a holy unrelieved. For that the genius of Eretz Israel, the land that, however deep the gloom, makes its people feel completely unafraid and unafraid although everywhere else the steadily closing in of fear grows daily.

So, even at this depression, we celebrated the establishment of two new settlements, the acquisition by the Jewish land in Galilee, the arrival of new contingents of youth immigrants and immigrants from different parts. We held a highly successful Maccabiah sports festival and sent a "test" team to

Egypt; we attended art exhibitions, observed the Barmitzva of the Hebrew University, welcomed the Ohel Dramatic Troupe back from its tour of the Near East and prepared to welcome back the Habimah from Europe, celebrated the consignment of the millionth case of oranges from the Tel-Aviv port, and created new undertakings or took stock in several other directions.

Toscanini.

WE also welcomed to our midst once more that great man and great artist, Arturo Toscanini. For months the Toscanini "fever" had been rising. Days before each of the seven concerts he conducted in the three principal cities there was hardly a seat to be had. As last year, the Symphony Orchestra rose to unforgettable heights under the baton of this marvel of artistic perfection and perpetual youth; and as last year, the audiences applauded with a depth of feeling that can never have been exceeded; they applauded both the world's greatest conductor and a noble Gentle who voluntarily offers sympathy and friendship to the Jews when so much of the rest of the world is treating them with hatred and contumely.

Toscanini's stay was shorter than that of last year, but he left promising to return again next spring. In the meantime the next guest conductor has arrived, an "old" friend, Dr. Malcolm Sargent, of London, and with him the next guest soloist, Ignaz Friedman, the distinguished pianist.

The Technical Commission.

THE long awaited arrival of the British Government's

Technical, or Partition Commission has materialised, and this week has seen its members travelling through the country gaining first-hand knowledge of it. Recollecting the anxiety with which its coming was so long contemplated, it is remarkable how little stir it has created in the country. Apart from the revival of the partition versus anti-partition controversy in the press to which its coming has given rise, there is little outward evidence of its momentous presence. Careful observers have noticed that it is scrupulously respecting the tri-communal character of the land, engaging for each section of its staff—chauffeurs, secretaries, messengers, etc.—one representative of each of the Jewish, Moslem and Christian populations. Nothing, however, appears to be known about its real functions or instructions. (Its terms of reference are accompanied by so many reservations that they tell little). That, probably, is the reason for the apparent absence of interest with which it is regarded.

Among the well-informed, the impression is current that the Mandatory's ultimate intentions are as uncertain and opportunist as ever, that it is merely playing for time before taking a definite decision of any kind, and that in all probability the purpose of the present Commission is to provide the British Government with the instrument to continue hedging.

Canine South Africans.

PALESTINE'S most spectacularly successful police are not human; they are dogs. And they hail from South Africa. At the police training depot on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, nine of these Doberman-Pinschers are guarded by day and by night behind high-tension wires by sentries instructed to shoot at sight of any suspicious movement. In many parts of the country policemen have to share damp, cold rooms in old Turkish barracks or temporary hutments. But each of these dogs has a dry, comfortable kennel with a private run enclosed by wire-netting, besides the common exercise paddock in which they learn to climb ladders, leap stone walls and tackle every kind of ob-

stacle. In course of construction at the moment are special kennels for these dogs and quarters for their two British dog-masters, at a cost of £4,500.

These nine dogs have more than justified the trouble and expense to which they have put the Palestine Government. (Besides their initial cost and the cost of guarding them against terrorist "reprisals," the two dog-masters had to be sent to South Africa to learn the necessary vocabulary of about 80 Afrikaans words and the methods of handling them). They are the police force's real Intelligence Service, and one shudders to think of what the police would do without them. They follow scent not on the ground alone, but also in the air, for instance, across a stream. One of them picked up a four-day-old scent recently and followed it until it "got its man," a terrorist wanted for ambushing a Jewish workman in the Sharon. In the Courts the "evidence" of these dogs is accepted as corroboration.

I have watched two of these dogs in action on one remarkable occasion, when, after pursuing a scent to a successful finish for over 30 hours, one of them suddenly died of heart failure. It was on this occasion, too, that one of the dog-masters had all his front teeth knocked out by a dog which he unwittingly irritated. Their entire bodies a-quiver with excitement, there is no holding the animals back once they have a scent. Should they suddenly lose it, or feel unsure of themselves, they retrace their steps until reaching the last point of which they are certain; then they continue more slowly. Once they reach their man, they do not attack him, but gently place their front paws on his shoulders from behind.

So great is the Arabs' fear of these dogs, that it is readily understood why they refer to the Government as "Ha'auemet el-Kelab"—i.e., the Government of Dogs. And it can readily be understood also why Sir Charles Tegart, the police force reorganiser sent out last year by the Colonial Office, replied drily when asked by a friend his opinion of the Palestine Police: "The dogs are magnificent!"

PICARDIE BRANDY
FOR AGE, QUALITY
AND FLAVOUR

