

Palestine Players Conquer the Theatrical World

Fine Impression Made by Ohel Company in London

By

Harry Zimmerman

THERE is a void in theatrical art. The "Ohel" have left us. This phenomenally talented company produced such an extraordinary impression that it excited a craving to see them again and yet again. These artists have made us realise that hitherto players were "mere theatre." The "Ohel" performances were so superbly realistic that we could hardly credit actors with being capable of affecting an audience so deeply by their powerful artistry.

As a result of their successful appearance in European theatres they should be induced to return. Unostentatiously they appeared and triumphed in quite exceptional style. They have now left the London they loved and the Londoners they entertained, to fulfil further contracts, conquer anew, and charm other audiences by their creative art. With them they take a rich store of experience and memories. London will discuss for some time to come the "Ohel," critics will remember them with gratitude, and lovers of the drama will eagerly await their reappearance.

The lay Press awarded the "Ohel" Palestine Players an ovation unknown in the history of theatrical journalism. The eulogistic notices which the dramatic critics accorded them were enthusiastic, without exception. Here was something unique which England had not yet seen. A new artistry had appeared. Not a word of the Hebrew language was understood by the majority of the critics, yet they were "carried away." No other play or players have effected this. Were these "Ohel" performers super-human that they succeeded in softening the acerbity of our vituperative dramatic critics? What was their charm? What kind of people were they? The critics enjoined upon us to go and see the "Ohel," disregarding the sweltering heat and the fact that we might not understand a word of the language. They would be disgruntled if we missed seeing the "Ohel" perform.

WE looked, we wondered, we gasped; words could hardly convey what we experienced. This was something extraordinary, penetrating to the depths of our souls, moving us to tears and laughter, entralling us. Their unusual make-up, quaint costumes, the original settings and lighting effects, dances and music,

were different from the customary atmosphere of the theatre. The critics were right. The true art of the theatre was with us.

Would it be possible to penetrate the art of these players, fathom their mystery? Surely they were human beings, the same as ourselves?

I was privileged in meeting M. Halevy, the brilliant director and founder of the "Ohel," his talented wife, the beautiful L. Deganith; and the members of the cast. Here was the opportunity for investigation.

Unpretentious, living for their art alone, they were happy to hear they were pleasing London, anxious to be successful, ready to listen to suggestions, willing to be guided like docile children if it meant pleasing their audiences. Tremendous enthusiasm was aroused wherever they performed: in Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and France; and London enhanced their reputation. This has not in the least rendered this young and enthusiastic group conceited. Instead, they visualised showing the different plays and operas in their vast repertoire on their return visit.

They told me that Palestine is a country where much is expected by the intellectual element visiting the theatres. Therefore, only the very best is good enough. The "Ohel" tour Palestine throughout the year, but need their own theatre, which they might possess, but art has been their goal, not commercialism. They hope to realise their dream of an "Ohel" Theatre in Palestine in the near future.

THE "Ohel" naturally received invitations to a number of receptions, and they tried to attend all of them. Miss L. Deganith told me of a reception to which she was invited, a number of prominent people being there. This was in honour of the "Ohel." She was specially asked to sing and recite. Always willing to please, she gave a selection of her repertoire which met with keen approval. She gave encore after encore. Although exhausted from the emotional strain of the pieces, she carried on with the encores, thunderous applause evincing the gratification of her hearers. The next morning she read in a newspaper

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Character Studies of some of the roles played by the artists of the Ohel Company. The characters here depicted are (left to right) bottom row: Kenaz; and Rachel ("Jacob and Rachel") a Tartar ("The Lower Depths"), and King Zedekiah ("Jeremiah"). Top row are all characters in Gorky's "The Lower Depths," the old man being the masterly study of "Lucas."

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PALESTINE PLAYERS

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that at that reception Lady — was wearing—well whatever she was wearing—but not a word appeared about the lady who sang and recited. Miss Deganith mentioned this to some English friends and she was informed, "Oh, that is characteristic of the English people and the newspapers who are more interested in describing what Lady — wore than in rendering justice to the artist who charmed those present!"

The brilliance of the "Ohel" is evidenced by the fact that although a member of the company may take alternate roles in two distinct plays, one does not institute comparisons. They merge their whole being into the character they portray, bringing out the idiosyncrasies, adapting the voice and mannerisms to such an extent that the role is individual. This is the supreme test of a great actor, and one of the secrets why the "Ohel" have been able to achieve their successes.

Each member of the cast is so filled with the team spirit that although a leading role may be allotted to him in one play, he will perform a walking-on part in another without a sense of injured dignity.

THE play as a whole and not the feeling of any particular artist is considered by M. Halevy. His direction is so inspiring, the air is so electrified at rehearsals, that the players themselves are absorbed by his brilliant direction. M. Halevy's theatrical mentors were the famous Stanislavsky and Wachtangoff. Rehearsals to the players are as important as actual performances.

Besides aiming at a classic Hebrew pronunciation, the "Ohel" spend months studying the lives, ways of living and atmosphere of the characters depicted. Hence they dwell in the desert with the Bedouins, observing every detail, and absorbing their music in order to give the presentation of native life essential for their plays.

On a European stage each "Ohel" player would be accorded "star" parts only. Miss Deganith was amazed at the long runs certain plays have in this country. She saw "Escape Me Never," and also an open-air performance at Regent's Park, and has made some gramophone records. She conversed with Elizabeth Bergner and Sybil Thorndike and thinks very highly of them. Many well-known actors and personalities, Jewish and non-Jewish alike in the literary, political, musical and scientific worlds witnessed their performances and showered congratulations on them.

Despite the fact that they played in London at the wrong time of the year—midsummer—they love London and the English, finding a sincerity and charm in the people. London fascinates these artists to such an extent that they are looking forward to a return at the first opportunity.

The "Ohel" Palestine Theatre has aroused a keen interest in the theatrical world in Europe, conveying something of the beauty of the Hebrew language and its culture to the shores of England. "Ohel," we salute you, wish you God-speed and await your return with open arms to captivate us again.

BETH HAMEDRASH HAGODEL.

On the 10th inst. the annual meeting of the Beth Hamedrash Hagodel was held in the hall of the synagogue in Saratoga Avenue.

The election of honorary officers for the ensuing year resulted as follows: Chairman, Mr. I. Kuper; vice-chairmen, Messrs. S. Swirsky and J. Rabinowitz; hon. life vice-president, Mr. M. Gordon; treasurer, Mr. S. Kuper; hon. secretary, Mr. J. Kaplan; committee, Messrs. Ch. P. Goodman, M. Barsel, S. Finger, S. Herman, Ch. Joffe, B. Kaplan, N. Nankin, S. Kroomer, H. Lurie, T. Fleischer, L. Flekser, J. Rabinowitz, M. Rabinowitz and J. Tollman.

UNITED ZIONIST SOCIALIST PARTY.

A lecture on the subject, "After the Verdict in the Arlosroff Murder Trial" was delivered by Mr. J. Batnitzky at a meeting of the United Zionist Socialist Party (Zeire Zion—Poale Zion). After the lecture, a lively discussion ensued.