

Folk Songs in Palestine.

By MENASHE RABINOVITZ.

Perhaps the symbol of Young Palestine, is the song and dance of its Chalutzim, the joy in work and in the very existence of the Jewish people in Eretz Israel rebuilding its National Home. In this article the rise of new-old Jewish folk-songs in the Hebrew language is described.—Ed.

All folk songs are the outgrowth of the activity and environment of the place in which they are composed and first sung, and they reflect the emotional life and experience, transmuted into music, of the people who sing them. In the course of time, as the songs spread from one vicinity to another, they gradually change their character, adapting themselves to the individuality of each new locality, and thus we have the development of variations of the same song, changing with the differences in the natural surroundings and in the pursuits of the people in each region.

So greatly are folk songs influenced by the changes of time that music-lovers are hard put to discover the original air, as it emerges from the modifications, additions and alterations that have grown around it from generation to generation, and from place to place.

In Jewish life to penetrate to the origin of folk songs is a particularly difficult undertaking. Not only have Jewish folk songs wandered from one country to another with the migration of the Jews, but large sections of the population have come into intimate contact with other peoples, each of whom have exercised a strong influence. The original song undergoes a change, it is enriched by new elements, it is sung by strange peoples in the new surroundings. But the gain is only apparent. In reality our folk songs have become impoverished, for they have lost their originality and force of character, and have become a medley of different motifs.

We ought not to lose our attachment to our folk songs, which are so essential a part of Jewish music, and so important an element in our general culture. In Palestine the position is plain. Jews have come from all countries to the Land of Israel, and are building for themselves a home. And in this home they sing, for the sensation of having returned to the cradle of their motherland is strong within them, and their feeling of freedom, happiness and security can find expression only in song. Their music may not be gay, for emotional reactions in critical times more often find an outlet in mournful refrains. But it has a distinctive character of its own, in marked contrast to the songs of foreign countries. In the home "zemiroth" (religious songs), songs of labour, love songs, are heard. In the streets the hora is danced to a chant heard nowhere else but in Palestine. There is no interference or interruption. In no other country do the Jews sing because they must, because only in song can the realisations of the hopes and fears of generations find an outlet.

Every Jew has his own folk songs. The Jew from Central Russia brings songs that differ from those of the Polish Jew. The Chassid and the Matnagid have their own songs. The German Jew has his distinctive airs, and the Sephardi from Spain and the

Jew from Italy sing the songs they have heard in their own country. The Yemenite is master of the sweet melodies of Yemen in Arabia. And the American Jew (who, we have heard it whispered, is a recent arrival from Russia) already has formed his own folk songs, tempered by the influence of the American foxtrot.

These conflicting motifs destroy the unity of music. Nature, an important factor in the cultural and emotional life of the people, protests against this inharmonious multitude of forms and types of song. The melancholy strains of Russo-Jewish music are unsuited to the brilliant sun and crystal-clear atmosphere of Palestine. Nor is rapid American jazz fitting to the agricultural settlements in which life is natural and free. It appears that all foreign forms are unsuited to Palestine where life differs in nearly all aspects in life from other countries. Genuine Jewish forms must therefore be renewed.

It is important to realise that we are not alone in Palestine. We have a neighbour, the Arab. And our neighbour has his songs, which sound wild and strange in our ears, accustomed as we are to occidental music. But the songs of the Arab have a distinct beauty of their own, arising from their originality and barbarity. By slow degrees the Jews are becoming accustomed to their strange music, and are discovering its hidden beauty and becoming influenced by it.

To Jewish folk music the element of nature has been added, the stark beauty of the Palestinian landscape, and the mellowing effect of the tropic sun.

It may be argued that our position is similar to that of other peoples. The Germans, too, have their distinct folk songs. Russian songs differ from Ukrainian melodies. They change not only from country to country, but from province to province. The differences are due to the climatic and natural conditions of each locality.

But we in Palestine sing different songs in the same locality, which is not the normal condition, and which should be changed. The change must come about in such a way that the most important elements, harmonising not only with the natural surroundings but also with the spirit of the new life of the country, are retained. To effect this is a slow and painstaking process, requiring patience and understanding, to the end that the Hebraic culture, evolving and developing in Palestine, may embrace that significant part of a people's cultural inheritance, the folk song.

In this connection two institutions are applying themselves to the development and spread of the Jewish folk song. These are the institution of "Oneg Shabath" (Delight of the Sabbath) and the School.

"Oneg Shabath" is an ancient traditional practice which has been revived in Palestine. In Tel-Aviv the leader and the inspiration of "Oneg Shabath" is Bialik, the

national poet, who devotes a good part of his time and energy to this institution. Individuals from all classes of the community foregather in the decline of the Sabbath afternoon, and sing in unison.

At present the songs which are sung at "Oneg Shabath" are songs of the Diaspora, learned in exile. For the Jews in Palestine are not yet a generation removed from the land of the Diaspora, to which they are still connected by the ties of many associations. These songs are the echoes of their childhood, remote from Palestine, and still dear for old time's sake. Nevertheless a number of Yemenite refrains have already become a part of Palestinian folk music, and it is to be hoped that in time forms of folk song characteristic of our country will be developed.

In the schools and in the kindergarten the situation is much more promising. Children require music, and delight in learning new songs. Instinctively they select the songs which are suited to their capacity and understanding. They are hampered neither by tradition nor by sentiment. A unit in himself, a product of the country, the child demands music which is expressive of himself. Time has shown that very few of the Diaspora songs have an appeal for Palestinian children. Most of their songs are the creation of Palestinian composers, the outcome of the eagerness and enthusiasm which have gone into the formation of the youthful "Yishuv."

But even less than the songs of the Diaspora do the children care for the German songs, popularly sung in Hebrew translation. The first music teachers in the schools, who were not music specialists, attempted to translate foreign songs into Hebrew, hoping that with the translation of the language they would be able to Hebraise the spirit of the songs. But music is a language in itself, eloquent without words, and expressive of the people who create it and the people who sing it. It is not subject to translation. The children felt this by instinct, and demanded new songs, and new songs had to be written. Krisevsky, the teacher, who taught for many years in the Herzlia Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv, and Kipnis, a kindergarten instructor, have provided many songs for children. But their work was largely an imitation of foreign songs. Others who wrote songs of the same type were Greenshpon, Nardi, Edel, and Rabinovitz. It is only recently that new songs, in which a strong Palestinian and Hebraic influence can be felt, have begun to appear. Garahav, Zeira, Mattathyah, and Weiner, have composed songs with a distinctive Palestinian motif. They are young people, in and of the country, singing of their love for their homeland. "Baskets on our Shoulders," "Beginning the Shearing," "Yohanan and Gabriel," and other songs are being sung by the children in the schools.

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The Editor,

S.A. Jewish Chronicle.

Sir,—It is the general consensus of opinion that the position of our brethren in Germany is, to say the least, disastrous in the extreme. Despite the officially sponsored, reassuring statements, news has reached us from all quarters that the position of German Jewry is growing worse from day to day. The ugly and unabashed anti-Semitism preached by Hitler, Goebbels and company is now assuming concrete shape. Not only are the Jews there being denied the elementary rights of citizenship but they are rapidly being driven back. "The German Citizens of the Jewish Faith" included, into the narrow limits of the Ghetto of the middle ages. The sanctity of life and property of the Jewish inhabitants is being violated wholesale, and they are, judging from all reports and reliable information to hand, in a state of panic and terror and in danger of their very lives.

What, however, is even more tragic than this, is that at a time when the whole Jewish world is up in arms against this semi-barbaric menace and taking active steps to combat it, not a single voice of protest has been heard from the Jewish community of this country. Not a single protest meeting has been held throughout the length and breadth of this sub-continent. One wonders where are our representative organs, the Board of Deputies, Zionist Federation, our Crowned leaders and spokesmen? Will even the wails and woes of a ruthlessly persecuted and suffering Jewish community not wake them?

However that might be, I think it is high time that the Jewish masses of this country raised their voice in protest and expressed their indignation against this semi-barbaric movement with its centre in Germany and its circumference everywhere. The repercussions of this violent outburst of naked Jew hatred are sooner or later bound to be felt in every corner of the globe where our people are scattered. Let us therefore take heed lest we be too late. Let us join in the world-wide Jewish boycott of German goods and shatter this new menace of Hitlerism just as the war time blockade broke Prussianism and all it stood for.

It is essential that we form ourselves into a Boycott Committee whose primary object should be to organise a band of our nationally conscious youth of this city to boycott not merely German goods but those weaker minded of our brethren who import and distribute it and who belong to that class who are ready at any time and at all time to sell our national honour and pride for a few shillings.

It behoves us to act and act at once to vindicate our national honour and to show our brethren in Germany and the world at large that the Jewish heart still beats within us.—I am, etc.,

E. KLUK,

Relief Committee for the Declassed Jews in Russia.

S.A. Jewish Chronicle.

To the Editor,

Sir,—Kindly publish this enclosed letter from Mr. Goldbloom, Chairman of the Zionist Organisation in London re the above appeal.—I am, etc.,

B. CHIDECKEL.
Secretary.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

7, St. Agnes Terrace.
South Hackney, E.9.
London.

Rabbi Solowitzick, from Vilna, who has been sent by the Great Rabbis, the Chofetz Chayyim of Raden and Rabbi Ch. Grodzinski, of Vilna, on a special mission to secure practical help is well known to me, as descended from great Rabbis, and I have known him personally since his first arrival in England as a most trustworthy person.

I appeal to our brothers and sisters in South Africa to co-operate with Rabbi Solowitzick in his great mission and to give him every possible assistance.

(Signed) J. K. GOLDBLOOM.
ay/c.

Answer to Correspondent.

B. Cohen, Cape Town.—No good purpose will be served by the publication of your letter.—Editor.

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THE FOLK SONG.

(Continued from Previous Page).

to-day, and through them by the community at large. For the Palestinian child, particularly the child in the kindergarten, is most closely associated with the new life of Palestine. Every mother listens to the lisping notes of her boy and girl, and joins merrily in the refrain. Every member of the family shares the melodies the child learns in school. For every new festival and holiday a new song and game is prepared, and long before the arrival of the holiday the whole family knows the song by heart. The central office of the kindergartens provides the songs and distributes them among the schools.

Mention should be made of the splendid work of the youthful singers, Hannah Kipnes and Braha Zepirah, who by their appealing folk song recitals and children's concerts, have brought the songs of Palestine to the people, and inspired their affection for their own music through their beautiful interpretations.

All this is a stimulus to young composers and spur to further creation. Thus a musical element is slowly evolving as part of the Hebraic culture of Palestine, forming another link between the Jewish community in Palestine and Jews abroad, to whom a Hebrew song from Palestine is like a sweet breath of Palestinian air. The songs are a reflection of our pleasure and pains, our struggles and achievements in the forging of the Homeland. They waken an added interest in the life of the growing and ripening community of Palestine, towards the establishment of which generations of Jews have been looking.

The few songs listed below serve as an illustration of the foregoing remarks:—

- The Yemenite song "Eshala Elohim" (I shall ask of God), is the passionate outpouring of a typical Orthodox Jew from Yemen expressing his unutterable longing for Palestine, the land of his fathers.
- "Sing to Me," a Yemenite love song, wherein Israel is the lover and Zion is the beloved.
- A nature song "Beginning of the Shearing," the composition of a halutz of Beth Alpha, following the calling of a shepherd. It is simple in musical structure, but forceful in feeling—a beautiful pastoral romance.
- A humorous song by the same shepherd, mentioned above, of which the main theme is the love of the settlers for the children, who are the pride of every settlement, and who hold a promise of a more hopeful future for the country.

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