

A Letter from Eretz Israel.

(From a Special Correspondent).

Music and Drama.

The controversy which has been raging in European countries for the last few years as to whether or not the cinema will oust the theatre from the position it has held so long in the dramatic world and eventually force it out of existence, certainly finds no echo in Palestine. The cinema, it is true, is exceedingly well patronised, and there are just as ardent film fans in Palestine as anywhere in the world. English, American and French pictures all find their way onto the Palestine screen and are the cause of as much discussion as they are wherever the public has become cinema-minded. But that does not mean that other theatrical and musical undertakings are neglected. On the contrary, one is constantly impressed by the excellent support which is given to them. A performance by the Habimah, or Ohel or Mattate or Palestine Opera Company seldom fails to draw a packed house, and appreciation of their efforts is shown in no uncertain manner.

I was struck by this fact last week when I attended a performance in Jerusalem by the Palestine Opera Company of "The Barber of Seville" (translated into Hebrew, of course). The hall was filled to capacity. The performance was little more than creditable, although it must be admitted that the conductor, M. Golinkin, did wonders considering his material and in spite of tremendous handicaps and limitations. But if the audience was critical, the manner of its reception was most sympathetic and must have been a source of very great encouragement to this grand old Maestro who has done so much to foster musical development in Eretz Israel. Golinkin, who was formerly conductor of the Imperial Opera, in St. Petersburg, has made tremendous efforts to establish his opera company in Palestine. His task was no easy one, both from the point of view of securing the right artists and the necessary financial means and although some years ago an opera company was got going, it had eventually to be given up. Now it has made its appearance again—this time, it is hoped, to stay.

Other performances are no less well supported. A fortnight ago I attended the production of two light operettas—"The Betrayer Betrayed" and "Dorothea"—by the Jerusalem Chamber Orchestra. Both were charmingly rendered, with all the zest and animation they required, and proved exceedingly popular. The conductor was Karl Salomon, a noted German musician who came to this country only recently and who has done some very fine work in musical directions here. Among his other achievements is the organisation of an orchestral society in Jerusalem.

Satirical Theatre.

The Mattate, in the world of the theatre, also never fails to draw a crowded house. This company, which writes its own words to its songs, its sketches and often the music itself, gives performances essentially original and humorous, in which every phase of Palestine life is reflected with a kindly and benevolent satire. Some two months ago Palestine was set talking by its perform-

ance "Prosperity," in which, with keen insight, it showed up some of the results of the so-called prosperous position of the Yishub, and if there was much in those results that gave cause for bitterness, the sharp edge to it was obliterated in laughter. Last week the Mattate gave a new performance, "Hakol Beseder"—light, clever and witty to a degree. With kindly humour they mimicked the German immigrant battling with the Hebrew language, in a short, brilliant sketch gave an example of the rapidity with which land prices are doubled and trebled in less time than it takes to tell, poked fun at the Tel-Aviv Municipality, and the bus services, at the judiciary, at the legal and medical professions—and, within only two days of their happening, already managed to introduce humorous references to the Tel-Aviv floods.

Popular, too, is the Ohel, the Palestine Labour Theatre which, from an amateur has developed into a professional company. The Ohel produces heavy drama—Biblical plays like "Jeremiah" and "Rachel at the Well," and, which I saw recently, Gorki's "In the Lowest Depths." The Ohel, in my opinion, are somewhat overrated. They are good as amateurs, but their styling themselves professionals and undertaking a London tour were both pretentious and premature. Their technique is defective, although it must be admitted that their performances all show sincerity if not originality.

Habimah.

But surpassing all these in popularity and appeal is the Habimah, the Palestine National Theatre. Enthusiasm for the Habimah is immense in Palestine, and no film star has ever had a more wholehearted following among her own people, has had so much love and hero-worship lavished upon her as Rovina, the leading lady. Recently Rovina underwent a serious illness, and it is not an exaggeration to state that the whole Yishub was concerned for her. At her first reappearance after her recovery she received as tremendous and as thrilling an ovation as any of the greatest who have come to Eretz Israel. Tall and lovely to look at, with a dark quiet beauty, an inscrutable serenity and memorable steel-blue eyes, she has, as it were, cast a spell over the Yishub. As Leah in "The Dybbuk" or as the Mother in "The Eternal Jew" she has won fame in Palestine.

The Habimah has a limited repertoire, its plays being mainly of a Biblical character. Most of those who have attended its performances have seen each of its productions at least more than once. Lately it has attempted to produce more modern plays but not with very great success. It would seem that its best medium is the play which deals with traditional Jewish life or with Biblical themes, in both of which its members give a finished, classical performance.

Palestine is often visited by artists and companies from Europe and their performances are always well attended. Mentally alert, the Palestine public seizes with alacrity upon any new cultural entertainment, and in this respect an excellent lead is given

by the High Commissioner, who has evinced very great interest in the artistic achievements of the Yishub and generally attends the Habimah performances in Jerusalem or those of the musical companies.

Palestine, with its local talent, has achieved a great deal, although that does not, of course, mean that it has not yet a long way to go. But the right spirit is there and there is very good ground for hoping that something will yet come out of this little country which will startle the theatrical and musical world.

Beauty Parlours.

An eloquent commentary on the changes that have taken place recently in Palestine was the remark by Mrs. Norman Bentwich this week in the course of an interview to "The Palestine Post" that there are more beauty parlours to the square mile in the towns of Palestine than in any other city she had visited.

Mrs. Bentwich may not be entirely accurate in her statement but she cannot be very far wrong. Beauty parlours there are in plenty and their establishment in most cases is of recent date. In most cases, too, they are very well patronised. Are we to regard it as a sign of progress or otherwise?

Nationalism Run Amuck.

The eagerness with which Palestinians insist on having Hebrew spoken in the National Home is understandable and finds an echo in the hearts of most lovers of Palestine. Nobody with a true and deep sentiment for Palestine would care to have anything but Hebrew spoken in Eretz Israel, but the fact remains that with a floating mobile population such as exists here, with people coming in every day from all parts of the world, it is as yet impossible to have this ideal state of affairs. It is, therefore, not demanding too much that a little patience and tolerance be exercised and that newcomers be permitted a few months, at any rate, before being expected to use the Hebrew tongue.

Unfortunately, nationalism often tends towards extremism and in Palestine no less so. The eager insistence of the lovers of Hebrew is often allowed to run amuck with results which are hardly creditable to those concerned nor to the Yishub as a whole. A glaring instance of this was given this week at the opening of the twelfth conferences of the Palestine Jewish Women's Organisation. The conference was the first since the organisation's amalgamation with the Wizo and Mrs. Chaim Weizmann, who is one of the founders of the Wizo, was asked to address the gathering. She did so, in English, and immediately there were murmurs in the hall and cries of "Ivrit." Despite her apologies and explanation that she had only been in Palestine for the last two months the agitation continued. Order was at length restored by the Chairlady but a half-checked disquiet reigned throughout the course of the address.

The language problem is undoubtedly a difficult one in Palestine and one can readily understand the anxiety which is felt in case a too great laxity be permitted to speakers of languages other than Hebrew. At the same time on occasions such as the above (there have been others similar) surely one might expect a finer spirit of understanding and hospitality? There is as much danger in being over-careful as in being too little.