

Palestine Creates a New Folk Song

By

A. W. BINDER

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

Folk songs of people cannot be created in a day, a month, or a year. They must be evolved. Our people had been rooted in the soil again. They were now saturated with the atmosphere of Palestine, in order to be able to create a representative type of song.

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

They had to sing, and so they took the folk songs which they had heard in the Diaspora, which they came, and adapted them to new poetry. They were, however, not conscious of the fact that they were of the stranger; they were of the Galuth. When they were singing one of the new songs of Palestine they always answered that these songs were derived from the Russian, Rumanian, and the like.

In 1917, when the Chalutz movement began, the folk song held a place of honor. One could hear music of Palestine; at work and at play. In a matter of fact, when one was in the Chalutz, one always answered him in terms of work and play.

The coming of the Chalutzim to Palestine meant a great increase as well as a new type of the Palestine folk songs.

Melodies.

When the Chalutz became more numerous 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, to saturate himself with the atmosphere of Palestine, and it was, therefore, first to fathom the imagination of creating a genuine Palestinian song. He was entirely dissatisfied with the folk songs which were being sung, for they were not in his soul; they were not his. He could not express himself. They were out of his heart throbs.

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

They discovered that the Yemenites had a great 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'Artena*, *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 Chasidic 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 Chalutz 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 Matityahu 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 today 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 today is the folk song. Many attempt to compose in this form, but only 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.