

# A Musical Trip to the Dead Sea

By ERICH GOTTGETREU

THE afternoon motor-bus rolls 1,200 metres down the road with its unending succession of curves from Jerusalem to the strange shores of the Dead Sea. The copper-coloured autumnal landscape becomes more and more bare, more and more desert-like; low mounds and little crater-like formations are the ornaments of the gigantic depression in this most low-lying of plains, caused by an earthquake millions of years ago. To-day man is no longer moved by purely scientific aspirations; utilitarianism rules the day. He sets industrial life going in the Dead Sea itself where no fish, brought down by the Jordan waters, can exist alive; he diverts the water into evaporating basins to extract potash and other chemical products therefrom. Even on the southern banks—the hottest and most lifeless part of the sea—where once stood Sodom and Gomora, and where Lot's wife was turned to salt—a group of young Jewish Chalutzim are working to-day, courageously and happily.

A last rapid spurt along the level road through the plain and the car comes to a stand; we are in Kallia. A few tourists get out to drink in the peace of this out-of-the-way spot and to bathe in the thick, oily waters of the magic sea which buoys up their bodies, and finally, to enjoy the wonderful panorama that spreads out before their eyes when the setting sun casts its purple veil of mourning leave-taking over the Transjordan mountains.

## A Lady with a Gramophone

Besides the tourists, a certain lady with a portable gramophone gets out of the motor-bus. What disturber of the peace may this be? Two young men welcome the lady and her gramophone with the greatest respect. They conduct their visitor past peculiar, narrow stone buildings and a number of huts where the Jewish workmen live, some with and some without families, to the "reception hall" of this most low lying settlement in all the world; all residents near the Dead Sea are assembled here. There is something peculiar about this wooden hall, the like of which one will not easily find; it has no windows but only window spaces to entice every slightest breath of air. A short time is spent in merry conversation; meanwhile night sets in and the stars of the East begin to gleam and flicker in the firmament.

THE evening's entertainment opens with a song in Spaniolish, played on the gramophone. The theme, reproduced in word and music, is the same as that of a kind of folksong which has, in the course of centuries, become incorporated in the Jewish, and especially in the Sephardic liturgy. The lecturer of the evening is an expert on this subject. She tells the audience that these "pijutim" are composed in part by authors who are mostly unknown, and in part by Chasanim. From the point of view of the history of music, the interesting fact about them is that they are strongly swayed by Arabic rhythms and betray on the other hand, an equally strong Moorish influence. The Jewish communities flourished in Spain for many centuries and the cordial relations between Jew and Arab bore rich fruit.

## "Pijutim" from Everywhere

The lecturer illustrates her point by means of records which she has brought with her. There follow "pijutim" from all parts of the world, Bokhara, Baghdad, Eastern Europe, and one by Jossele Rosenblatt himself where American influence is clearly traceable. One realises the tendency of "pijutim" to lose their folksong character and to become more and more virtuoso productions. This is how Frau Alice Jacob-Loewenson—it is time I introduced her—teaches the history of music in Palestine. The audience acquires valuable information and is entertained at the same time; that is the kind of instruction most welcome after a long day's hard work in the atmosphere of the Dead Sea, amidst the salt fumes and the noise of machines, in the scorching wind of a sand-storm such as blew to-day in this accursed spot.

## A Busy Worker

THE Histadruth—the Jewish Workers' Association in Palestine—often sends Frau Jacob-Loewenson through the country and especially to the Kewuzoth of the Keren Hayesod, in order to meet the high cultural aspirations of its members to the best of its ability. To-day she is lecturing at the Dead Sea, to-morrow at Ain Harod and the next day in Daganiah. On Jewish national soil there flourishes not only the fruit that nourishes the body, but also the fruit of the

spirit, bringing sustenance and delight to the settlers. Frau Jacob-Loewenson has been teaching in this musical way for a long time. She taught formerly in the "School for Jewish Youth" in Berlin; she collaborated with Franz W. Beidler, a grandson of Richard Wagner in work for the Kestenberg Archives of German Musical Organisations; she is the author of the musical supplement of the Juedische Rundschau; she has broadcast many addresses and has liberally dispensed the treasure of her great knowledge from many a European platform, affording pleasure and welcome instruction to thousands of listeners. To-day, Jews in Palestine can learn from her the musical history of their people about which they are for the most part ignorant. Frau Jacob-Loewenson is not only capable of playing any number of variations on the same theme, but also of illustrating it with about five hundred Jewish and Oriental records which she possesses, constituting undoubtedly one of the biggest existing collections of this type. We can imagine her concern when on her arrival in Palestine about two years ago, the case with the 500 records had not arrived; they had disappeared somewhere between Trieste and Jaffa and were only discovered four months later in store in Beyrout as unclaimed goods. This rich store of music is now carefully housed and protected in one of the pretty apartments in a Jerusalem workers' quarter. Here we have a nucleus for a central and systematic collection of Jewish music such as Frau Jacob-Loewenson aims at establishing in Jerusalem as the given place.

## Creating a Musical Understanding

BUT the artist's interest in her subject is not purely theoretical. She aims in general at creating an understanding for music among the young people in Palestine, and of educating them to be intelligent listeners. There is already much singing in Palestine especially on the land; the Russian or East European type of music which predominated hitherto appears to be merging gradually with the Oriental type prevalent in the new country. The many compositions written by non-professional musicians and inspired by the new spirit of work, testify to the growth of a new musical understanding among the Jews. In the "Land of Promise," the film of the Keren Hayesod, we witnessed, in a fine series of pictures, the birth of one such song first sung by one man and then taken up by the whole group, wandering from one Kvutza to the other, symbol of a common striving and a common happiness.

## JOSEPH LIDDLE (PTY.) LTD.

Managing Director - - - A. H. LIDDLE.

**FIRE, ACCIDENT, LIFE, MOTOR CAR, MARINE  
& WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION**

Corner House, Commissioner Street,  
JOHANNESBURG.

P.O. Box 128. Phone 33-4555. Telegrams: "Norwich."

General Managers for South Africa:  
Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society, Ltd.  
The Union Marine and General Insurance Coy., Ltd.

Chief Representatives for Transvaal, Natal, Rhodesia,  
Damaraland, Portuguese East and West Africa:  
The Employers' Liability Assurance Corporation, Ltd.  
The Merchants Marine Insurance Coy., Ltd.

AGENTS FOR BROKERS AT LLOYDS.