

A Jewish Woman in London

A CHAT WITH MRS. AMSHEWITZ

By Dora Sowden.

"The English Jewess of the upper classes moves freely and un-self-consciously in the society of Jews and non-Jews alike and she is as English as the English." So Mrs. Amshewitz, the wife of the celebrated artist, who is at present staying in Johannesburg, described for me what she thought to be the typical cultured Jewish English-woman.

ONE of the first things I noticed about Mrs. Amshewitz herself was her charming dress sense. This led her to speak of the English society women who, as a rule, wore appropriate but utterly unobtrusive clothes. "That is also characteristic of the Jewish Englishwomen," said Mrs. Amshewitz. "The simplicity of their clothes amounts almost to dowdiness, so that the wife of a poor artist as I am, at a distinguished society meeting or party, might be less expensively but often more conspicuously dressed. Unobtrusiveness is almost a fetish in English society and Jew and Christian alike shrink from any distinctiveness of attire."

I mentioned that Mrs. Rebecca Sieff, during her recent visit here, had impressed us womenfolk with her exquisite clothes. "Yes," said Mrs. Amshewitz, "she is one of the few women who move in really high social circles and dress smartly."

When I asked her whether she herself had taken any part in Zionist activities in England, Mrs. Amshewitz modestly shook her head.

"Though I have been a Zionist since girlhood," she said, "my life overseas gave me few opportunities for taking an active part. I sometimes went to Mrs. Marks' meetings. This lady is Mrs. Sieff's sister and also an active worker. But art is the centre of our existence and through my husband's work we made contact with people of all creeds and races. At one exhibition, my husband was showing, all at the same time, a por-

trait of the Minister of St. Swithin's Church, a portrait of a Minister of the Liberal Synagogue, one of Gandhi and one of the Editor of the "Free-Thinker." This will tell you more than anything how varied and wide were our contacts. And yet," she added, with a charming smile, "we remained ourselves."

MRS. AMSHEWITZ told me that great numbers of South African students came to see them while they were in London. "I hope I have always made them feel welcome," she said warmly.

They had had people of all sorts calling to visit them, from ambassadors to paupers—sometimes at the same time. Her contact with royalty had always been gratifying. She was especially struck with the marvellous memories possessed by many of the royal family. Princess Alice had once described to her a picture of her husband's which she had seen in Grahamstown six years previously. What distinguished English royalty from all others was the human, modest attitude which each member adopted. Prince George had said to her in reply to a question about his visit to South Africa: "Everyone was so kind to me." She thought that such modesty was unequalled in royal circles anywhere else.

I ASKED Mrs. Amshewitz whether Sir Oswald Mosley's creed was making much headway in England. Her answer was depressingly in the affirmative, but she pointed out that Jewish consciousness was also on the increase among Jews in all classes.

"At one time," said Mrs. Amshewitz, "Jewish society women lived in a sense of splendid security and ignorance. Even two or three years ago, when I attended a meeting called by Mrs. Arthur Montefiore to organise a Zionist bazaar, I was appalled by the ignorance of things Jewish among society girls, who knew only that they were Englishwomen of the Jewish persuasion and



[Photo by Elliott and Fry.]

Mrs. AMSHEWITZ.

undertook the work in the same spirit as they would the organisation of a charity function. To-day, this is changing."

Even Jewish artists were keeping more together and were exhibiting together. "While I believe that the Jewish artist can be as deeply English or French as the non-Jewish artist," said Mrs. Amshewitz, "I feel sure that race counts for something. That is undoubtedly the source of the oriental colour in Am's pictures" (so she affectionately calls her husband).

Mrs. Amshewitz mentioned the remarkable fact that there were many Christian Zionists to be found in England, apart from British Israelites. They were people who were convinced that the Jew ought to have Palestine. She herself had many friends, well-known and prominent members of social and artistic circles, who actively took up cudgels in defence of the Jewish cause.

"In any case," said Mrs. Amshewitz, "what happened in Germany can never really happen in England, for apart from the British sense of fair play, the doctrine of race purity is not feasible in England."

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A Grand Concert

On Wednesday, September 2, at the Jewish Guild a grand concert will be held in aid of a worthy Jewish family. It is hoped that the Jewish public will support this function. An array of prominent artists have kindly consented to appear. The chief of these are the Balalika Orchestra, Madam Helena Kantorowitz and Kantor Badash.

An interesting item on the programme will be the appearance of the three Josephson sisters who have recently returned from Italy. Also Leslie Arenband and Mrs. Hayman Miller. Tickets are obtainable from Miss P. Taitz, 127 Sievwright Avenue, Doornfontein.

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