

A LETTER FROM PALESTINE

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discusses

THE NEW COMMISSION — FILMING ERETZ
ISRAEL — THE END OF A TERRORIST

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The Commission Moves.

LIKE the new High Commissioner, who has impressed us so far chiefly by his retiring ways in public as well as in private life, the Technical or Partition Commission has hitherto revealed little of itself or its calibre. It is still travelling about the country to the accompaniment of minimal fuss and publicity. In the settlements it has visited, it has not impressed the settlers with any undue perspicacity or profundity of understanding. Which probably, of course, means nothing at all.

In Jerusalem, meanwhile, preparations are being made for the appearance before it of witnesses. In a few days the Arab National Defence Party, led by Ragheb Nashashibi, will probably issue a statement declaring its intention of boycotting the Commission and reiterating the demands formerly made by the Arab Higher Committee and the Mufti, namely, abolition of the Mandate, a sovereign Arab Palestine, with minority rights for the Jews, etc. It is common knowledge that Ragheb Bey would gladly have partition forced on him. But valuing his life (against which terrorists have made more than one attempt in the past two years), he will doubtless do as the Mufti would have him do, that is, publicly reject partition. But privately he will no doubt find a way of bringing his real feelings to the notice of the Commission.

Among Jewish official circles there is a keen debate as to procedure to be adopted before the Commission. The pro-partitionists in the Jewish Agency would like to see the number of anti-partitionist witnesses reduced to a minimum, and are opposing the latter's suggestion that three witnesses of each side appear. Besides the official or semi-official witnesses, however, there will doubtless be a host of non-official or private spokesmen, who will find it hard to believe that the exposition of their plans and panaceas can remain unuttered without harm to the Jewish future.

The End of the Music Season.

WITH the Tenth Subscription Concert in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa this week, the second season of the Palestine Orchestra has come to an end. Besides its visits to Egypt and Syria, the Or-

chestra has given 55 concerts in Palestine during the winter months. But its year's activity does not end with that, for this year, as last, a summer season is being planned.

Dr. Malcolm Sargent's conducting of the last two concerts of the season—given without fee, as also were Toscanini's services—was as much appreciated as last year. Like Hubermann and Toscanini, Sargent has come to be regarded by the Yishuv as an old friend. The great Italian master is known to us as *Toscanenu*—"Our Toscanini." Attempts to give a similarly affectionate Hebrew twist to Sargent's name have so far failed. But then, English is so much less flexible than Italian. Hubermann, again, is—Hubermann. He is even more than a friend; he is a brother, "one of us." The feeling of the Yishuv for Hubermann was never more touchingly expressed than when a pious old Jew tried to persuade him never again to travel by aeroplane.

A Much-Filmed Land.

FOR all the falling-off of interest in the Palestine disturbances on the part of the international press, the country and its affairs still command considerable "news value." Great newspapers still send Special Correspondents to "cover" it, publishers still commission authors to survey its problems, and film companies still despatch their cameramen to it. During the past month three new films have been "shot" of the country, one by the famous American "March of Time" concern, another by a British educational film company and a third on behalf of a Church of England mission society.

Besides these visiting cameramen, we have our own film companies,

three of them, of which only one, however, makes any claim to more than sporadic activity. That one is the Carmel News-Reel Company, which produces weekly news films that are usually mediocre, but sometimes extraordinarily good. Its owner, cameraman, director, producer, editor, technical adviser and business manager is Nathan Axelrod, who, in each of these capacities is a "self-made man."

His career started in a chemist shop in a provincial town of Russia. The chemist became optician, the optician, photographer, and the photographer, film-operator. When he arrived in Palestine in 1926 it was with a primitive home-made camera, the fervour of a fanatic, and no funds. He still has no funds, his headquarters still consist of two primitive wooden huts on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, his equipment is still outmoded and inadequate, except for a first-rate pair of cameras which he acquired on credit, and he still is not quite certain where next month's bread is coming from. But he continues to persevere, the quality of his films is improving, and he has the satisfaction of knowing that he is piloting an important pioneer industry through its most difficult period.

The Death of a Terrorist.

FOR two years the Palestine police have "wanted" Eissa Haj Suliman el Battat, escaped convict and daring terrorist leader; a few days ago, they got him, dead. His career had all the elements of a criminal yarn, for every week or so the country woke up in the morning to read of another and very real outrage perpetrated by him and his gang of 140 men. Most of his victims were Arabs, whose villages he raided; but occasional Jewish travellers, soldiers, police and the British archaeologist, J. L. Starkey, were among his victims.

His prowess was almost uncanny, and even high British officials spoke of him with awe. Among the Arab villages of Judea his name was a terrible legend. On at least four occasions he was within an ace of capture, but extricated himself with amazing cunning. Immediately after the murder of Mr. Starkey, his trail was led to a village beyond Hebron, which a strong force of troops and police surrounded a few hours before dawn. But despite

their stockinged feet, Battat, shot his way out of them, with a machine-gun, and later he returned to the village he had set up as guards, the rest of the village £20 having warned him of the Government's force.

Still under 40 when he died at last, Battat came out of stock. He was born and bred in Hebron, and knew intimately only most of the villages of the district, but most of the numerous caves with which this region is honeycombed. It was this knowledge that helped him so fully to evade the authorities over two years.

From early youth he was out of prison for long. Escaped in 1936, he was sentenced to a 10-year term for murder, but held little interest for him. Life of a terrorist did, and escaped he made his way to the headquarters of Fawzi al-Khaja, the former terrorist leader. When the latter fell, most of his Syrian and Iraqi adherents at the end of 1936, who had himself become a terrorist leader under British tutelage, organised a gang to operate between Hebron and Jerusalem.

His death was less daring than his life. For over three years the police had been hot on his heels. He had been wounded in a battle with troops last month, holding up and burning a train. Leaving his band he set out accompanied by a small group of followers, to recuperate in a lone cave of the Judean hills. But they gave him no rest. Almost immediately he was on the move, until he believed he had succeeded in eluding them. Then a follower betrayed the police of his whereabouts, and a £200 price that had long been offered for his head. The posse of police sent to capture him had no chances. They found him in a cave, which they lit up with light. Before he could see them, they shot at him, and he fell dead, with half-a-dozen bullets through his head.

PICARDIE BRANDY
FOR AGE, QUALITY
AND FLAVOUR

