

FOLK SONGS OF PALESTINE.

By DR. HANS NATHAN.

The Jews have given prophets, philosophers, scientists, writers and musicians to the world, but only now a folk music. In a sense, we have reversed the normal cultural development of a people just as we have inverted the pyramid of our occupational distribution. Perhaps we were too "intellectual," too sophisticated for small things. Then again how could the Jews, without a land and world-scattered, living with others always, produce a genuine native folk lore?

During the early Palestine immigration before the outbreak of the World War, music appreciation, singing and dancing characterised the Palestine settlements: The close connection with their native country accounts for the fact that they clung in a large measure to Russian and old Jewish tunes. Fiery Russian tunes were translated into Hebrew; others served, together with Jewish East European melodies, as models for new songs. The production was not, on the whole, greatly original, but the great number of melodies which were in circulation was suggestive of the enthusiasm and the high spirits of the immigrants.

As Jewish life in Palestine advanced, more and more songs came into being. Many chalutzim, untutored musicians, like Seira, Matityahu, Sara Levi, Postolski and others and young poets gave expression to their philosophy and their stirred emotions. They created little works of art which can be compared with the most beautiful songs of all other countries—so earthy and perfect are they. The older generation in Palestine naturally had not yet been able to create new artistic media. Even Bialik, the great prophet of modern Palestinian literature, saw nature, as someone has said, "from the window"; but Rachel, this young woman, whose fragile soul broke so early, became the soft voice of the country. Joel Engel, one of the first European Jewish composers to make Palestine his home, still had the Russian ballet in mind while he composed little idylls for children, whereas Ravina, who is less sophisticated

and more intimately a part of Palestinian life, addresses delicate melodies to the "sabres" (cacti) and the songs of Seira have no audience but the open fields and the grazing sheep of the countryside.

Because of the way of life of these "composers and poets" their outlook is not different from that of the other chalutzim. That is why their songs have become the folk lore reflecting the common attitude of the country towards plough and plummet and the Palestine soil. The most striking Palestinian songs are those of the *shomrim*, the watchmen who guard the settlements during the night. In these songs the Palestine night is mirrored, the clear wonderful sky of the Mediterranean, the dark corn fields waving softly and the almost tangible stillness. Lake Kinnereth is the source of inspiration of many of the songs. Rachel's "Kinnereth shel li" expresses the deep longing felt by many poets for its glamour and rare beauty. Numerous little tunes have as their themes the young plants and the blossoming almond-trees, the melons and oranges, typical fruits of Palestine.

Most of the songs are for children and this reveals the important part the younger generation plays in the upbuilding of the country. There are, in addition, delightful little marches full of laughter and buoyancy. This shows the difference between the precocious and nervous type of children in Europe and the healthy little children growing up in the sun and the life of liberty.

It is significant that there are few love songs. This does not mean there is only toil and hardship, but only that there is little leisure to glorify it in poetry.

Most of the songs have moral and national appeal. The songs of the labourers, the bricklayers, the gleaners, impressively tell of the vigour and the will of the people to rebuild the country. *Horas*, the vigorous and joyful Palestinian dances, are also numerous and are danced after work and on festive occasions. The lyrics of the Palestinian folk songs distinctly reveal the change in outlook, the needs of the day, and the hopes for the future. Quotations

from the Bible appear frequently but they are always in reference to modern Palestine. One of the best songs has as its first line "*Ki tavu el haaretz*" ("When ye come to the land"), showing a strong national appeal. Bialik's "*Ali b'er*" ("Ascend My Well") introduces the modern idyll.

The impenetration of moral teaching in these nature songs is typical of Jewish tradition. To cite but two musical examples, there is the opening of the charming children's march derived from "*Trua Tekiya*" out of the flourishes of the shofar and the Passover canon developed out of the recitative melody of the *megillah Esther*.

As to the origin of the Palestinian songs, for a long time the songs of the *galut* served as models. Even to-day most of the *Hora* tunes are nothing but *chassidic nigunim* while original production began only recently.

The Orient has exerted its influence on the chalutzim and so it is natural to find Arab influences including those of Jewish Yemenite melodies in nature songs, and there is abundant evidence of German musical elements in the children's songs. However, in all these cases, we find the music moulded about the new life in Palestine and as a result, music of original character is being created which may well initiate a characteristically Jewish culture and perhaps become the basis of the Palestinian music to come.

Recently, 30 of the most beautiful folk songs have been published, with arrangements by the leading Jewish composers of our time. The generous reviews of music publications like "The Musical Times" indicate that the folk music of Palestine is capable of impressing those who examine it merely for its musical value. This collection is published by Nigun at 111, Fifth Avenue, New York City. There can be no doubt that with the passage of time more and more Palestine music will be accepted as an important contribution to the musical traditions of the world.

(By courtesy of "The New Palestine.")

Dewars



Whisky

IT NEVER VARIES.