

The patriarch of Nahalal

by Emanuel Litvinoff

BOOKS on Zionism abound, but it is relatively rare to find in English literature one by one of the early settlers in Palestine who translated the Utopian dream of a Viennese journalist into the practical reality of Israel. Shmuel Dayan's *The Promised Land* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 25s), introduced, edited, and arranged by his novelist granddaughter Yael Dayan, is therefore a document of considerable interest.

Mr Dayan came to Palestine from the Ukraine in 1908 and was a founder of Degania, one of the early *Kibbutzim* where Jewish tailors, cobblers, intellectuals, and petty tradesmen drained swamps, fought malaria and Arab marauders, established agricultural communes, and became expert farmers all within the space of a few years. Later he helped to found the co-operative village of Nahalal, in the valley of Jezreel, where he lives to this day; and since Israel became an independent State he has been a Mapai member of Parliament and an expert in the problem of settling new immigrants on the land. Unpretentious and hard-working, a farmer to the marrow, Shmuel Dayan is nevertheless one of Israel's aristocrats. His son, Moshe, hero of the young generation, was the victor of Sinai and is now a leading young politician often tipped as a future Prime Minister, perhaps the next but one. His daughter-in-law Ruth taught immigrant women from India, Persia, the Yemen, and Morocco to establish cottage industries in their native

crafts. The third generation is already making its mark, and the editor of the book, a young writer and something of an international personality, is herself a symbol of the distance that the Israeli young have travelled from the austere idealism that bound their grandparents to the harsh soil of "the Promised Land."

Indeed, the problem of the third generation is one that passionately concerns old settlers like Ben-Gurion and Dayan. "But Israel's youth has not been fulfilling its principal duty—to people the country's waste lands," Dayan complains. "Our youth must leave the cities and forswear amusements and diversions, for the desert fields of Israel call!" If he speaks with a hint of Old Testament severity it is because he feels that the achievements of his own generation are threatened not only by the pleasure-loving young but by the reluctance of new immigrants to settle on the land, where "whole villages stand empty" because newcomers expect modern housing and urban diversions without labouring for them. Shmuel Dayan is, nevertheless, an optimist. He hopes that Israel will attract large numbers of American Jews and attain a population of at least five millions. One of a heroic generation, a revolutionary uncorrupted by the triumph of his cause, his optimism is contagious. *Kibbutz Degania* and *Nahalal* were successful experiments, not least in that they established a pioneering tradition which deeply influences Israel today and makes it one of the few examples of a positive society within the Western tradition.