

Odessa as a Cultural and Economic Center
Between the Years 1881 - 1917

by

Eugene J. Lipsey

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Chapter I

THE HISTORY OF ODESSA UP TO THE YEAR 1860

a. General History

Although Odessa is comparatively a new city, the bay upon which it is located has a long history of occupancy. It is generally accepted that this modern metropolis was founded upon the site of an ancient Greek colony known as Odessos, which disappeared by the end of the fourth century of the Common Era. ⁽¹⁾

In spite of its favorable position between the estuaries of the Dniester and the Dnieper rivers, the area remained desolate until the fourteenth century when a Tartan chieftan, Khaji-Bey, founded a fortress which bore his name. ⁽²⁾

In the year 1396, this fortress was captured by Olgerd, Prince of Lithuania. For the next two centuries, possession of this large strip of land alternated between Lithuania and Poland. At the turn of the sixteenth century, the Tartars again captured the fortress only to lose it to the Turks. ⁽³⁾

By this time the site had become an important export center for the entire area. The Turks must have been anxious to hold on to the area, for they built a huge fortress overlooking the harbor. They
(4)
named the fortress Yeni-Dunia.

In the year 1774, during the Russo-Turkish War, the Russians captured the fortress. Later, in the Treaty of 1789, the large strip of land, now known as Novo-Russia, was given to Russia. At that time, the fortress was placed under the administration of a French officer by the name of De Ribas. Because he had taken an active part in the capture of the fortress, Catherine the Great entrusted this Frenchman with the task of planning a strong military and commercial port on the present sight of Odessa. De Ribas enlisted the aid of another Frenchman, an engineer, by the name of Volland. Together, they laid out a city which quickly replaced the former Turkish fortress. In the year 1794, the
(5)
name was officially changed to Odessa.

The Czars of Russia were quick to take advantage of the city's natural harbors. They instituted new

reforms which helped increase the productivity of the entire territory of Novo-Russia.

By 1803, Odessa became the chief city of a separate territory, and was placed under the administration of another Frenchman, Armand, duc de Richelieu.⁽⁶⁾

b. Early Jewish History

Most historians believe that there were Jews living on the Northwest shore of the Black Sea long before the area came under Russian control. However, the earliest known record of Jews living in Odessa dates from the year 1795 when they were granted a charter for a "חברה קדישא". That same year, they were granted permission to establish a Talmud Torah. Records show that there were 246 Jews in Odessa at that⁽⁷⁾ time.

Three years later a Kahal was formed, and the administrator granted them permission to establish a synagogue, which later became known as "The Great Synagogue", and which conducted daily services until⁽⁸⁾ the Bolsheviks forced the doors to be closed.

Records show also that there were two Jewish officials in Odessa in 1798. One, Tevil Lazarovitz, served on the city council; and a Meyer Elmanovitz was the first Jew of the city to serve as a magistrate. ⁽⁹⁾

In the year 1799, the Kahal was granted permission to erect an all Jewish hospital which could accomodate ⁽¹⁰⁾ six patients.

When Alexander I ascended the throne, he was faced with a shaky economic situation brought about by the ambitious campaigns of his father, Paul. In order to stimulate more industry and commerce in the empire, the Czar launched a very liberal policy toward the Jews. In 1804, he declared that Jews were eligible for one-third of all municipal posts. He permitted Jews to establish factories and granted them the right to attend all schools and universities. That same year, he de- ⁽¹¹⁾ creed that Odessa was to be made an open port.

This decree attracted many Jews to Odessa. As a further inducement, the local governor, Duc de Richelieu, granted many privileges to new Jewish immigrants. He exempted them from all taxes and municipal rebates, and

he offered the choicest locations to wealthy Jewish merchants. He even went so far as to subsidize these merchants until they became established.

In his notes on Odessa, Yoachim Tarnopol claims that the city rapidly became the busiest trading center of all Russia. What was more important, Odessa became the meeting place for the Jews from all nations. He points out that the Jewish section of the city had a unique metropolitan blend about it for Jews from Russia, Poland, Germany and Lithuania, each with his own dress and customs, met to transact business. (12)

Because of the fact that the Jewish population increased so rapidly, communal institutions were organized in a haphazard way. The first Rabbi to serve in Odessa was Rabbi Isaac from Benderi. He was elected as head of the Kahal in 1809. After his death in 1815, Rabbi David ben R. Meir Kahanah succeeded him. This rabbi served in Odessa until the year 1821, when he was killed in the first pogrom ever to take place in that city. (13)

Early in the 1820's, a large number of Galician Jews, most of them from the border city of Brody, migrated

to Odessa. These Brodians, as they were later called, were an enlightened people who were familiar with life in Western Europe. Many of them had close contact with large European mercantile houses; and they quickly established branch offices in Odessa.

In the year 1824, Odessa became the seat of the Government of Novo-Russia under the administration of Prince Worensoff. This governor was also very tolerant toward Jews. He seemed to favor the Brodians in particular for they impressed him with their industriousness and prominence. As Governor, he had the right to appoint directors over all the institutions chartered by the State; therefore, he appointed Brodians as curators of the hospital and as directors of the Jewish school
(14)
system.

c. Growth of Educational Facilities

Yoachim Tarnopol pointed out that the Jewish community often suffered because of lack of organization. The educational facilities were in the worst state of affairs. A large number of children received little or

no education simply because there were no qualified
 (15)
 teachers in the city.

By the time Prince Worensoff appointed a new director to head the Jewish school system, the Brodians were totally dissatisfied with the local school facilities. In the year 1826, sixty-one (61) Brodian Jews drew up a petition to the Governor for permission to open a new school. When permission was granted, these Brodians sent to the city of Tarnopol in order to hire
 (16)
 some followers of the well known Maskil, Joseph Perl.

This school was the first Russian-Jewish school to be established. The Brodians picked Zittenfeld, a student of Perl, as the first director. Zittenfeld was a forceful personality, who had enlightened ideas about education. When he arrived in Odessa, he found a great deal of resentment on the part of the Orthodox members of the Kahal, who opposed the establishment of this type of school. On the approval of the Rabbis, the Orthodox element protested to the Governor that the proposed curriculum of the school was in conflict with the Jewish religion. The governor silenced this protest

by maintaining that the school was to be supported by a five-thousand (5,000) ruble grant from the local Kahal. When the officials of the Kahal protested this added burden, he ordered the officers of the Kahal to raise (17) the money by levying a special tax on each Jew in Odessa.

In its first year, the school gave courses in Hebrew, the Bible with the Mendelssohn Translation, some Tractates of the Talmud, Hebrew composition, Russian, German, French, mathematics, physics, history, geography, (18) civil law and legal writing.

Three years later, at the death of Zittenfeld, Bazalel Stern became director of this school. Under his guidance this school became the pattern for the rest of Russian Jewry.

In 1836, a girls' department was added. When Czar Nicholas I visited Odessa in 1837, he inspected this model school. He found it in perfect order, and expressed his satisfaction by encouraging further progress. It is of interest to point out that this school was very instrumental in weakening the powerful hold Rabbinism

had over the entire Jewish community of Odessa, for it gave the youth of the city an opportunity to probe⁽¹⁹⁾ into the entire field of Judaism.

In 1838, the budget of the combined schools reached twenty-nine thousand (29,000) rubles. Tarnopol claims the teachers of this school received higher salaries⁽²⁰⁾ than did the teachers in the Richelieu Lyceum in Odessa.

Meanwhile the population of the city continued to increase. In the year 1831, the general population had increased to forty-one thousand seven-hundred (41,700) of which six-thousand, nine-hundred and fifty (6,950) were Jews. By the year 1841, the Jewish population had⁽²¹⁾ risen to eight-thousand (8,000).

Tarnopol points out that in the year 1854, in a Jewish population of seventeen-thousand (17,000), there were seven (7) Jews appointed to the first Guild, twenty-eight (28) in the second Guild and four-hundred and forty two (442) in the third. The city register also showed that there were twenty-nine (29) Jewish brokers on the grain exchange, six (6) notaries, four(4) attorneys, twelve (12) doctors, one (1) bank broker and one (1)

(22)
maritime broker.

d. Early Reforms

In the year 1840, the Brodians again caused a great stir in the city when they broke away from the "Great Synagogue" because the congregation refused to permit changes in the ritual. Once again they petitioned the Governor for permission to establish another synagogue in the city. Permission was granted and the famous Broder Synagogue was formed. It was in this synagogue that the first reforms were introduced into Russia. It may be interesting to note that the Broder Synagogue introduced an organ into its service in the year 1909. Later, in 1919, the heads of this synagogue voted to introduce the mixed choir into the service. This decision caused a great deal of commotion and part of the membership resigned. Among those who resigned were
(23)
Bialik and Ussishkin.

In the year 1841, Dr. Max Lilienthal visited Odessa for the first time. He noticed the high cultural level of the Jews of that city; for in his "Travels Through

Russia" he wrote, "In most families one can find a degree of refinement comparable to the best French salon."⁽²⁴⁾

This phenomenon is understandable when one remembers that Galician Jews, who came to Odessa, had already been influenced by the two leading Maskilim of their day, Nachman Krochmal and Joseph Perl. Because Odessa had no strong religious tradition, these Galicians felt free to adopt the customs of Western Europe. This explanation seems to substantiate the viewpoint of Mr. Ravalowitz, the editor of the "Odessa Herald" who boasted in the year 1841, "In all Russia, Odessa is the only place where Jews try to be complete Europeans in⁽²⁵⁾ their way of life."

The following year, Lillienthal again visited Odessa in order to inspect the Russian-Jewish school. At a public meeting, he urged the Jews of that city to appeal to the local authorities to do all in their power to further the civil rights of all Russian Jews.

In the year 1843, Dr. Lillienthal as the assistant to Count Uvarov, called a meeting of all Jewish communal

leaders in order to discuss the problems of education. At this meeting, Bazalel Stern, who represented the Odessa community, spoke on the progress made in the Russian-Jewish school which he directed. Although Stern and Lilienthal had their differences, it was decided to establish Jewish schools throughout Russia, which were (26)' to be modeled after the school in Odess.

In the year 1843, Lilienthal resigned his position with the Government and moved to Odessa where he was appointed Crown Rabbi. He held this position for two years. In the later half of the year 1845, Lilienthal (27) suddenly left Russia and emmigrated to the United States. There is no doubt that Lilienthal decided to leave Russia, when he discovered that the Russian government supported these reforms in order to promote conversion among the Jewish population.

Chapter II

The Spread of Haskalah in Odessa(1860 - 1881)

Organized in Germany by the followers of Moses Mendelssohn, the movement known as Haskalah reached Russia through Galicia. In Galicia, Haskalah became a movement directed toward an intellectual reformation of the ghetto Jew. Through the influence of Nachman Krochmal and Joseph Perl, Haskalah sought to overthrow the all-embracing hold which rabbinism enjoyed by creating a synthesis between the Jewish mode of life⁽¹⁾ and the modern world.

Although the first call to a modern way of life was made in Russia by the writer, Isaac Baer Levinsohn, who lived in Wilna, the Broder Jews of Odessa actually inaugurated the Haskalah movement in Russia when they founded the first Russian-Jewish school in the year 1826.

Even though both Rabbinism and Chassidism strongly opposed the Haskalah movement, by the middle of the

nineteenth century, there were many known cells of
 (2)
 Maskilim throughout Russia.

In 1855, after the accession of Alexander II to the throne, the Maskilim of Russia began to breath a sigh of relief. Strongly influenced by Western thought, and sobered by Russia's crushing defeat in the Crimean War, Alexander adopted a very liberal policy as compared to his predecessors.

Encouraged by the liberal attitude of the new Czar, and somewhat removed from the old centers of rabbinic power, the Jews of Odessa found themselves in a unique position. For, it seems as though the Maskilim in that city were encouraged by the superintendant of the Odessa school system, Nickolai Ivanovich Pirogov. This Russian deserves honorable mention in a study of the advancement of Haskalah because he conscientiously devoted his efforts toward alleviating the condition of the Jews. Furthermore, he was probably the most liberal pedagogue of his day. He repeatedly urged the Jews to accept the ideals of Haskalah. And he took the initiative in organizing modern Jewish schools.

When a Jewish labor society was organized in Odessa, in 1864, Pirogov encouraged the purpose of this organization. That same year this labor society under the name "Trud" established a school in order to teach useful trades to young Jewish men and women. This school became the model for the institutions of this sort in all Russia for it had the most modern equipment for instruct-
(3)
ing the manual trades.

In the late 1850's there was another large migration of Jews into Odessa. By that time, railroad communications were established with all parts of Russia and Rumania. These communications gave the city an added importance, for it helped triple its port activities. In 1858, Yoachim Tarnopol boasted that the Jews of Odessa were the first ones to adopt the ideas of
(4)
Western Europe.

As the years passed, the Russians referred to Odessa as their "Little Paris". However, the orthodox Jews firmly maintained that the city was heretical around which the "fires of Hell blazed for a radius
(5)
of seven miles".

Notwithstanding this charge by the representatives of Orthodox Judaism, less than a decade later, Odessa became one of the most important social and educational centers in Russia. Almost all the various currents of Jewish thought found support in Odessa; and because it was the center of a large mercantile system, each current of thought spread out into the hinterlands of Russia to influence the thoughts, the speech, and the habits of countless Jews. Almost overnight it became an important center for Haskalah movement, the Jewish socialist movement, the Chibbat Zion movement; and last, but not least, it became the home of a group of writers, thinkers, and poets, who took second place to no other center in Jewish history.

In the year 1856, Yoachim Tarnopol (1810-1900), writing in Odessa, advocated religious reforms which would be modeled after the Western European style.

Tarnopol was a wealthy merchant who wrote as a hobby. He represented a new element in Judaism which began to exert its influence after the mid-century. This new element was made up of rich and cultured Jews who began (6) to take a leading role in the struggle for Jewish rights.

In December of that same year, Tarnopol, together with the novelist Osip Rabinowich (1817-1869) submitted an application to the superintendant of the Odessa school district, Pirogov, for permission to publish a Russian-Jewish weekly, which was to be called "Razsvet" (Dawn). In their application, the writers expressed the hope that this new paper would be of great service to the Russian Jews by helping to raise their moral and (7) cultural levels.

Pirogov was very enthusiastic over this publication; for by this time Osip Rabinowich was recognized as a capable writer who championed the spread of Haskalah among Russian Jewry. However, although Pirogov urged his superiors to grant permission for this publication, the higher Russian officials pigeon-holed the application for four years. Finally, on May 27, 1860, "Razsvet"

(8)
made its first public appearance.

Although the editors of "Razsvet" hoped to blaze the way for civil emancipation, they soon met insurmountable difficulties. When Rabinowitz tried to publicly expose the inner failings of Jewish life, he encountered opposition from Tarnopol who was of the opinion that the paper should limit itself to the fight for equal rights. This fight was also hampered by the Russian censor, who claimed that articles dealing with this theme were incompatible with the interests of the Russian Government. After the 20th issue, Tarnopol resigned from the editorship.

To add to its difficulties, the paper encountered a very poor public response. After six months of publication, it had only 640 subscribers. Finally on May 19, 1861, E. Solveichek (1820 - 1892) and Leon Pinsker (1821 - 1891) announced that they would henceforth edit the paper, and issue it under the name of
(9)
"Zion".

The first issue of "Zion" appeared on July 7, 1861.

In order to avoid any conflicts with its censor and with the reading public, the new editors limited their journalistic activities to works of historic and scientific content. However, occasionally, the editors attempted to defend Judaism against the vicious attacks of anti-Semites. Because the censor prohibited articles of this sort, in the 43rd issue, the editors sadly announced that they regarded it their duty to terminate publication of the paper until they were granted permission to publish a newspaper which would be allowed to disprove the groundless accusations against the Jews. Such permission was not granted; and for seven years, there was no Jewish press in Russia in the Russian
(10)
language.

However, in the year 1860, a very popular Hebrew weekly began publication in Odessa under the title
(11)
"Ha-Melitz". Its editor, Alexander Zederbaum, was a very active communal worker. Although he was not a man of letters, Zederbaum possessed a keen sense of appreciation for journalistic values. Wisely, he invited all the leading figures of the literary world to write .

articles for his paper. Before long, the "Ha-Melitz" became the battleground for all the current issues of the day. However, the paper was never a great financial success. In 1863, Zederbaum reported that the paper had only 1000 subscribers. In order to stimulate new readers, he invited men like Judah L. Gordon and M. L. Lillienblum to contribute regularly. Still the public response was very disappointing. Finally, in 1873, "Ha-Melitz" ceased publication. Later, Zederbaum moved to St. Petersburg, where he once again began publication⁽¹²⁾ (in 1878).

While it was published in Odessa, the "Ha-Melitz", too, strongly reflected the views of the old Haskalah school. Generally, the main point discussed in its editorials was an urgent plea to the Jews to demonstrate their usefulness to the Russian State.

In the year 1863, a group of prominent and wealthy Russian Jews met in St. Petersburg in order to organize a society which was dedicated to facilitate the acquisition of civil rights for the Jews. Regardless of what later history has to say about this organization,

the members sincerely regarded their work as an important preparation to Jewish emancipation. This organization assumed the high task of educating the masses of Jewry in Russia through knowledge of the Russian language. They subsidized deserving Jewish students in the general schools and colleges; and they sponsored the publication (13) of books and useful knowledge.

Yoachim Tarnopol, who represented the Jewish community of Odessa at this meeting, returned to Odessa and organized a local branch of the society, which adopted as its slogan "the enlightenment of the Jews (14) through the Russian language and in the Russian spirit".

In the year 1869, the Odessa branch of the society sponsored a Russian-Jewish weekly which was called "Dyen". This publication was able to gather a large number of contributors from among the swelling ranks of the "intelligenza". In general, "Dyen" was much bolder in waving the banner of emancipation; and it went much further than its predecessors in championing Russification and assimilation. It advocated a complete fusion with the Russian masses. And it insisted that Jews

seek their education in the public schools with the rest of the population. The editors, *Yochim Tarnopol* and *I. G. Orshansky*,

looked upon the Jewish problem as a social and economic issue which could be solved by simply bestowing upon this section of the Russian people the same rights which
(15)
were enjoyed by the others.

I. G. Orshansky (1846-1875), one of the most brilliant writers of this period, wrote a series for "Dyen" in which he emphasized the importance of Russifying all foreign elements, thereby assuring complete absorption by the dominant culture. Later, Orshansky presented his findings in his book "Russian Legislation Concerning the Jews" which appeared in 1875. Here, the author blamed all the restrictive laws imposed upon the Jews on old Polish legislation which Russia inherited
(16)
when the mass of Jews came under her control.

Meanwhile more and more of the young writers joined the ranks of the Maskilim. Foremost among these young men was the writer, Moses Loeb Lilienblum (1843-1900) and the poet Judah Loeb Gordon (1830-1892). Although

these men did not live in Odessa, during this period, they both contributed to "Ha-Melitz".

Lilienblum acquired national fame as the author of "Orhot Ha-Talmud". In this book, he appealed to the rabbis to exercise their authority as interpreters of the Law in order to change those practices which encumbered modern Jewish life.

Because the rabbis failed to respond to his popular appeal, Lilienblum wrote a series of articles for "Ha-Melitz" which he called "Nosofot". In these articles, he assumed a more belligerent tone. He boldly ridiculed the rabbis for clinging to obsolete interpretations of the Law.

Judah Loeb Gordon, a native of Vilna, was considered one of the greatest poets in Hebrew literature. Strongly influenced by Schiller and Isaac Baer Levinsohn, he quickly developed into a Maskil who used his artistic genius in protesting against the intolerance of the rabbis and the corruption of the communal leaders. His maxim became "Be a Jew at home, and a man outside".

While the majority of writers of the period were looking forward to the day when Jews would be granted equality, one writer stood out alone against this trend toward assimilation. Peter Smolenskin was the first man to realize the dangers of this trend. ~~Smolenskin~~ Smolenskin was born in Russia, and spent his youth in Odessa where he attended the University.

While other writers urged their readers to strengthen their self-respect by emulating the ways of the other nations, Smolenskin insisted that there were many qualities in the Jew which could serve as a pattern for other nations.

Because he wanted to publish a Hebrew periodical in which he could freely express his ideas without censorship, Smolenskin left Odessa. He settled in Vienna where he founded the Hebrew Periodical "Ha-Shahar" in the year 1869. In this periodical, Smolenskin hammered away on the revival of Jewish nationalism.

In the late 1860's a serious economic depression gripped Europe; and because Odessa depended upon European markets for the stabilization of its wheat exchange, it

too, experienced a serious depression. Large numbers of workers were put out of work; and because their buying power was destroyed, factories and small businesses were affected. Gradually, the depression spread through all the cities and towns in Novo-Russia which depended upon the normal flow of grains to Odessa.⁽¹⁷⁾

This paralyzing depression started another large migration of Jews into the city of Odessa. In the year 1870, the newspaper "Dyen" noted that large numbers of Jews poured into the city with the hope of migrating to other countries.

During this trying period, the grain merchants of Odessa found it necessary to compete with each other on very narrow margins. As a result, a keen competitive spirit arose between the Jewish and Greek merchants. By Easter, the Greeks were so angry that they proceeded to organize a regular pogrom against the Jews, by spreading the rumor that the Jews planned to molest one of their churches, which happened to be located in the heart of the Jewish section of the city. Finally, on March 28th, fighting broke out. For three days, the

Greeks and Russians gave vent to their mob instincts. They robbed and burnt Jewish property, and beat Jews to unconsciousness wherever they encountered them. Only on the fourth day did the local authorities decide to step in and halt what threatened to become a regular
(18)
massacre.

Because the editors of "Dyen" were forbidden to mention anything about this pogrom in their paper, the editors decided to suspend publication of this newspaper on June 8, 1871. Even Alexander Zederbaum, the editor of "Ha-Melitz" became downhearted and disgusted with the turn of events in Odessa. He closed his office in Odessa and moved to St. Petersburg where he resumed publication.

After the pogroms, a reaction set in among the Maskilim in Russia. The next few years covered a period of silence in the Russian Jewish press. It seemed as though the leading writers and thinkers of the day were preparing to launch a new avenue of attack.

By this time Odessa had become the home of a large group of Jewish writers. The group included such prominent

writers as Moses Leib Lilienblum, A. M. Verbal, Israel Rall, Abraham Gottlober, Joseph Rabinowitz, Dr. Leon Pinsker, E. Solveichek, Menasha Margolith, Elias Orshanski, I. Wolfson, I. Horowitz, Yoachim Tarnopol, I. Levinson, Perez Smolenskin, Uri Kovner, and Moses Belinson.

There are many reasons why Odessa became a great literary center during this period. Firstly, it was included within the Pale of Settlement; and it was the only large city in the Pale which permitted Jews to attend its university in large numbers. Then, there was about the city, a liberal air which guaranteed a freer
(19)
expression of ideas.

The period of silence, which followed after the pogroms, proved to be a very healthy one. For it gave the literary intelligenzia time to question the direction Haskalah had taken. What they saw was very disappointing.

When Lilienblum moved to Odessa in 1870, he found that the youth of the city had forsaken all religious values in their efforts to become Russified. For the first time, he realized that prosperity and the slogans

of Haskalah merely served to undermine all Jewish idealism. In his autobiography which was published in 1876, he tells how discouraged he really became when he beheld the efforts of this movement. He seemingly wrote these confessions as a warning to the younger generation not to follow his path. (Hatath Ne'urim). Lastly, he points out that the "sins of his youth" are mere reflections upon the sins of the older generation who utterly failed to provide him with a useful education which would have better prepared him in the struggle of
(20)
life.

In 1878, Lilienblum submitted another article to the popular "Ha Zefirah", which he called "מה היה זה?". This article caused a great deal of excitement among the Maskilim, for in it, the writer completely repudiated the ideals of Haskalah. For the first time, a leading writer called upon the Maskilim to re-examine the sorry state of Hebrew literature. Finally the author concluded that the Jew would never be permitted to attain
(21)
equality in Russia.

By the beginning of 1879, a new literary force began

to exert influence in Russian-Jewish life. Under the leadership of such men as Lilienblum, Smolenskin, Ben Yehudah and Judah Loeb Gordon, the young intellectuals and professional men abandoned the ranks of Haskalah and began toying with the idea of a Jewish nationalism.

Although its membership reached its peak during the 1870's, and although its activities were completely overshadowed by Jewish nationalism, The Society for the Promotion of Haskalah continued to function in Russia (22) well into the 20th century.

Shochtman, in his essay on Odessa, mentions that this Society signed up 200 new members in the year 1900, and he points out that it sponsored a large Hebrew (23) Library in that city.

Chapter III

THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE JEWS
OF ODESSA

Since the Russians never bothered to develop the science of statistics until after the Revolution of 1917, any attempt to reconstruct the economic or cultural picture in Odessa during this earlier period can never be a complete one.

The following material has been gathered from the Bibliographical material at the end of the chapter; and although the writers described the city and its people, their works can never replace the lack of original sources.

From the very beginning of its history, Jews played a very active role in making Odessa the largest commercial port-city in all Russia. The development of the grain industry, which contributed largely to Odessa's economy, also served as the main source of Jewish revenue during the early period.

Up to the year 1881, the Jewish population of Odessa doubled itself three times; but even this tremendous growth was easily absorbed in the city's rapidly
(1)
expanding economy. Up until that year, Jews flocked to Odessa because they felt they could better their lot there.

However, after the pogroms of 1881, the reasons for their settling in Odessa were somewhat altered. Due to persecutions and expulsions, Jews flocked to this port-city because it was the only haven of refuge open to them. In 1896, Czar Nicholas II banned the Jews from the liquor industry. This act closed an important avenue of income for some
(2)
200,000 Jews. Robbed of their livelihood, tens of thousands of Jews flocked into Odessa, where they became the wards of the Jewish community.

Again in 1899 and 1900, a serious drought gripped Southern Russia. Since Odessa depended upon a normal flow of grains to its port, a serious economic depression took place. This drought not only paralyzed the city's economy, but it also drove

many thousands of destitute Jews into Odessa, where
 they appealed to the Jewish community for aid.⁽³⁾

Dubnow points out that the number of Jews who
 appealed for aid from the Jewish community in 1898
 reached the unheard of proportion of 40-50% of the
 total Jewish population.⁽⁴⁾ To substantiate this,
 S. Penn, in the Jewish Encyclopedia, claims that the
 Jewish community provided for 282,000 meals for
 destitute Jews during the year 1902; and that same
 year, the community spent 20,500 rubles to provide
 Passover baskets for needy Jewish families.⁽⁵⁾

According to Schochetman, there were over
 8000 Jewish registered artisans in Odessa in the
 year 1888. However, the writer claims that this
 figure was only a rough estimate, since there were
 many unregistered Jews in Odessa during this period
 who were awaiting embarkation to other countries.
 By 1892, the number of registered Jewish artisans
 had increased to over 35,000.⁽⁶⁾

According to S. Penn, the official register

listed 152,364 Jews in Odessa in 1904. In that year there were 820 Jewish firms in the city. Broken down this figure included 15 Banking houses, 105 manufacturing concerns, 560 commercial houses, and 140 export houses. This figure is also not too exact since there were many Jews who were shareholders in other incorporated banks and insurance firms.⁽⁷⁾

Despite this good showing, Penn also points out that Jews were not the wealthiest element in the city. The bulk of the wealth was still in the hands of the Greeks, Italians and Russians. For although the Jewish population made up one-third of the total, Jews owned less than one-fifth of the city's real estate.⁽⁸⁾

During the years of active persecutions, the Jewish community of Odessa established quite a fine record for itself in the way in which they were willing to overtax themselves in order to help their destitute brethren.⁽⁹⁾

In 1868, an agricultural school was established

outside the city limits. Later this school became part of an orphanage, and produced many skilled agricultural workers. After 1881, with the introduction of the May Laws, Jews were no longer permitted to own farms. After that year, the school geared its program to produce competent (10) farmers who would be willing to settle in Palestine. In later years, this orphanage grew to accomodate 250 trainees of both sexes. Still later it expanded its program of education to teach useful trades to the children placed in its care.

Although there is very little information available, Odessa had a large Home for the Aged and Infirm which sheltered 250 inmates. S. Penn points out that this institution was given 25,000 (11) rubles annually.

By 1904, the Jewish Hospital, which was established in 1800, had grown to include four large city blocks. This hospital also had a ward outside the city limits where cases of rheumatism and children's diseases were treated. It also had

a large dispensary. In 1902, this hospital treated
 4,575 patients, 16% of whom were Christians.⁽¹²⁾
 Klausner points out that this hospital cost the
 Jewish community 180,000 rubles annually.⁽¹³⁾

Schochetman points out that the greatest bulk
 of the money raised for the support of these necessary
 communal institutions came from the meat tax which
 rose from 27,000 rubles in 1854 to 300,000 rubles in
 1910.⁽¹⁴⁾

Odessa also had a cheap kitchen which distributed
 250,000 meals annually. There was a Day-Nursery
 which provided shelter for the children of parents
 who were forced to work. And finally, there was a
 House of Industry for Girls which taught trades to
 poor young women. This institution was founded on a
 "earn as you learn" basis.⁽¹⁵⁾

a. Religious Institutions

Jewish religious life in Odessa increased up to
 the end of the Czarist government. According to

Schochetman, there were eight large synagogues and
 over 49 houses of prayer in Odessa in the year 1918. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The Main Synagogue, which was the oldest and largest one in the city, was founded in 1798. The plot of land upon which this synagogue was built was given as a gift to the Jewish community by the city officials. Then there was the Artisans Synagogue, the Warm Synagogue, the Newmarket Synagogue, the Balkowskaya Synagogue, the Broder Synagogue, which was later called the Choral Synagogue, the New ⁽¹⁷⁾ Synagogue, and the Nachlass Eliezer Synagogue.

The New Synagogue, which was also called the Shalashney (in Russian means tent) Synagogue, was established in 1887. Two years later, the Nachlass Eliezer Synagogue was established. This synagogue was also called the Yavneh or Zionist Synagogue since it was founded by a group of Zionists who maintained a positive religious attitude toward Zionism. The writer E. Levinski served as the president of this synagogue until his death. It is interesting to note that this synagogue had a large courtyard in the

front of it where public debates were often held. Schochetman points out that these debates very often ended in fist fights since the members of this synagogue were ardent political zionists. (18)

The Broder Synagogue was probably the most reformed synagogue in all Russia. It prided itself in the fact that it had the world famous chazan, Nisin Blumenthal, who was called the "Belzer". After his retirement in 1891, the equally famous Pinkas Minkofsky served as chazan until 1921. The choir director of this synagogue was the composer of Jewish music, David Navakovski. (19)

The prayer houses which sprang up all over Odessa were generally organized by Jews who shared a common occupation. Thus, the butchers, the flour-dealers, the pedlers, the porters, the expressmen, the clerks, the cabmen, the bakers, etc. had their own smaller houses of prayer. (20)

The post of head rabbi for the Odessa community was filled by Dr. Swabacher from 1860 to 1888. (21)

Although Dr. Swabacher was originally invited only to serve as the rabbi of the Brody Synagogue, he was later chosen to serve as head rabbi over the entire Jewish community. Even though he preached in German only and advocated reforms in ritual, he had the full support of the community. It was through his insistence and excellent leadership that the community founded new charitable institutions and expanded the older ones.

Rabbi Chaim Gurland succeeded Dr. Swabacher in 1888. After his untimely death in 1890, the office of head rabbi was not filled, since the community and the local government were never able to agree on any one candidate. Between 1890 and 1903, Rabbi Eichenwald, Rabbi Pomerantz, Dr. Kreps and Dr. Avinovitsky were appointed as acting heads of the community. In 1903, the Odessa Jewish community was finally permitted to hold an election in order to choose a head rabbi. In that election, the Zionists won a decisive victory by nominating Rabbi Zeo Vladimer Temkin. His elected assistants were Dr. Avinovitsky,

Rabbi Chaim Chernovitz and the writer, S. Penn. However, the community's choice was not acceptable to the local government, who cancelled the results of the election and picked Dr. Kreps as the head rabbi. Later when Dr. Kreps was removed from office, the government installed the elected assistants as acting (23) rabbis.

b. Jewish Schools

Mention has been made of the two largest Jewish schools in Odessa, the Trud Technical Institute and the Broder School. In 1864, a modern Yeshivah was founded. This Yeshivah taught secular subjects along with the traditional courses of study. Dr. Joseph Klausner, a graduate of this Yeshivah, describes the (24) schools curriculum in his article on Odessa. Later, this Yeshivah became nothing more than an elementary school.

The old Talmud Torah, which was founded in 1795, was reorganized in 1857. By 1881, when Mendele Mocher

Sefarim was appointed its director, the school had 400 pupils, who were supported by the Jewish community. With rapid increase in population, two more schools (25) were opened which also accomodated about 400 children.

In 1903⁵, Rabbi Chaim Chernovitz opened a new Yeshivah in Odessa which prepared students for a rabbinical career. Two years later, Dr. Chernovitz extended the curriculum of this Yeshivah enabling it (26) to receive government recognition as a university.

By 1903, there were many so-called government schools. Actually, they were government schools in name only, since they received no funds from the government but had to rely for support upon private Jewish funds or upon the Jewish community. There were also 38 private schools which were either self-support- (27) ing or financed by the Jewish community.

Dr. Klausner also points out that there were several evening and Sabbath or Sunday schools where adults, who could not devote full time to their (28) studies, might receive further education.

In 1915, the Hebrew School for Gardening, which was under the supervision of Yechil Halpern, moved from Warsaw to Odessa. The following year, a teacher's seminary was formed in Odessa under the supervision of Joseph Mohillever. Schochetman points out that both these schools had an excellent (29) teaching staff.

There was also five schools for Jewish girls in Odessa, whose courses of study corresponded to (30) that of the American high school.

c. Jewish Libraries

There were several large Jewish libraries in Odessa. The earliest one was founded in 1874 by the Association of Commerce. This library had a large Jewish section which was catalogued in 1904 by a student named Kotler who worked under the supervision of Simon Dubnow and Achad Ha'am. He found that it (31) contained over 30,000 volumes written by 5000 authors.

In 1915, under the supervision of its new Chancellor, Rabbi Simcha Assaf, the Yeshivah developed a Jewish library which was named in honor of Bialik. By 1919, this library contained over
(32)
10,000 volumes.

There was also a fine library maintained by the "Society for the Mutual Aid of Hebrew Clerks." S. Penn claimed that this library had the largest and finest collection of Jewish and Hebrew books in all Russia. And, finally, there was a small library maintained by the "Society for the Promotion of
(33)
Haskalah among the Jews of Russia."

d. Jews in Public Life

There is not too much material available concerning the Jews who were elected to public office. However, S. Penn claims that the Jews of Odessa took a very active role in the management of municipal affairs up to the year 1892. After 1892, the right to vote was taken away from the Jews. But as early

as 1861, we find that Osip Rabinovich, the journalist, was invited to serve on the commission which framed the new city charter. From 1861 to 1892, the newly formed municipal council had many Jewish members. Foremost among them was M. G. Morgulis, who was also (34) the director of the Trud Technical Institute.

e. The Jewish Press

Since there is very little information available about the numerous publications published in Odessa, all that can be done is preserve this list which was (35) collected from many sources.

Jewish Publications Originating in Odessa

In Russian, Hebrew or Yiddish

1860-71	Ha Melitz	Heb. weekly	A. Zederbaum
1860-61	Razsvyet	Rus. weekly	O. Rabinowitz J. Tarnopol
1862-65	Alay Hadas	Heb. monthly	Moses Belinson
1863-71	Kol Mebasser	Yid. weekly	A. Zederbaum
1869	Posrednik	Rus. Irr.	A. Zederbaum
1869-71	Dyen	Rus. weekly	S. Ornstein

1871-81	Yagdil Torah	Heb.	Irr.	M. Belinson
1886-87	Mekiltah de-Rabanan	Heb.	Irr.	M. Belinson
1887	Der Yiddisher Werker	Yid.	Irr.	M.L. Lilienblum
1890	Kavereth	Heb.	Irr.	Ravnitski
1891-97	Keneseth Chachmay Yisroel	Heb.	Irr.	M. Belinson & A.J. Abelson
1892-96	Ha-Pardes	Heb.	Irr.	Ravnitski
1896- 1926	Ha-Shiloah	Heb.	Monthly	Achad Ha'am
1898	Sholamay Ahmunay Yisroel	Heb.	Irr.	M. Belinson
1905-07	Kadimah	Rus.	weekly	Jabotinsky, S. Saltzman & Sapier
1907, 1912-14	Ha-Olam	Heb.	weekly	N. Sokolow
1907-08	Ha-Yeshivah	Heb.	Irr.	C. Crovnick
1908	Ye-di-oth	Heb.	Irr.	Collection
1908-09	Kol Ha-moreh	Heb.	monthly	M. Shiffman
1910	Tal	Heb.	Irr.	collection
1910	Gut Morgen	Yid.	daily	
1911	Sholem Aleichem	Yid.	daily	
1913	Der Yid	Yid.	daily	
1913	Shachrith	Heb.	bi- weekly	S. Eisenstadt

1914	Ha-Eretz	Heb.	Irr.	Collection
1915	Kolosia	Rus.	Bi- Weekly	Juvintes
1917	Oh-lah-may-nu	Heb.	Irr.	Glickson
1917- 1925	Ha-ga-nah	Heb.	Monthly	J. Halperin
1917	Keneseth	Heb.	Irr.	C.N. Bialik
1918	Reh-shu-moth	Heb.	Irr.	Druyanow
1918	Masuoth	Heb.	Irr.	Glickson
1918	Eretz	Heb.	Irr.	Tzemach & Steinman

According to S. Penn the Jews also exerted a great deal of influence in the Russian press of Odessa. In 1903, two of the three leading dailies were owned
(36)
and operated by Jews.

Also, there is no way of knowing whether this list is a complete one, since the government at times refused to grant permission for publication.

f. Hebrew Publishing Houses

Here, too, there is very little information

available. Dr. Klausner mentions only two publishing firms which were located in Odessa in the Twentieth Century.

The Moriah Publishing House was founded in 1903 by Ravnitzki, Bialik, Levinski and Ben Zion. This company later moved its presses to Palestine where it continued operation.

Shortly before the First World War, the publishing house "Juvintes" began publication of the bi-weekly, "Kolosia" in Russian. This publication appealed to the Jewish youth. The Zionist Organization also went into the publishing business in Odessa. Dr. Sapier, the director of Keren Kayemeth, was in charge of the popular "Kopikeh Bibliotek". This "penny library" published many small brochures explaining the ideals of Zionism.

Although it falls in a later date, the publishing house "Dvir" also was founded in Odessa in 1919. (37)

g. The Management of Communal Institutions

Early in the development of the Odessa community, the institutions were generally managed by the more prominent members of the community, who could afford to give of their time and money. However, with the development of the field of social work, the Odessa community gradually replaced the old system with skilled workers who could devote full time toward the proper management of each institution. Under the new system, it became necessary for the community to organize a central committee, comprised of prominent citizens, who served as boards of directors or overseers to the institutions. This "Council of Prominent Jews" *"מועצת היהודים האמידים והקבוצים"*, as it was called, was later replaced by "The Council of Synagogue Presidents" *"מועצת אבאי הקהילות"* in 1905.

However, with the rapid growth in population, and probably because of some criticism from those prominent men who were not Synagogue Presidents, a new council was organized which was made up of the Synagogue Presidents and the well-to-do members of the

community. This council became known as "The Council
(38)
of the Twenty."

h. Jews in Institutes of Higher Learning in Odessa

Two years after the University of Novo-Russia was founded in Odessa, there were 20 Jews enrolled as students. By 1886, the number of Jewish students grew to 176, and they constituted 30% of the entire student body.

Although the quota for Jews was fixed by the government at 5% or no more than 10% in 1887, Schochetman points out that the quota in the University of Novo-Russia was always much higher. Furthermore, he claims that there were four Jewish assistant professors, who actually filled the vacant professor-
(39)
ship in each department.

There was also a modern Conservatory of Music in Odessa, which was under the supervision of the municipal government. This conservatory had an

unusually high percentage of Jewish students. And the teaching staff included many fine Jewish musicians. Dr. Jacob Weinberg, who is now a member of the faculty of Hunter College and New York College of Music, was professor of piano and theory at the State Conservatory of Odessa from 1915 to 1921. He also taught at the Hebrew Union School of Sacred Music.

1. Political Zionism in Odessa

Like almost every center of Russian Jewry, Odessa had large groups who flatly rejected political Zionism, in any form, as a detrimental movement which hampered their efforts to secure full emancipation. There was also a large group of Jews who fully supported Achad Ha'am's cultural program.

Nevertheless, many felt that Herzl's appeal was the only solution to the Jewish problem of survival. Schochetman points out that these various factions were often times so vehement in their stand that fist fights and riots ended public meetings and debates. (40)

Up to the year 1906, Russia was divided into

twelve Zionist districts. Each district was somewhat autonomous in its operation. And each district was permitted one delegate at the general conventions. However, after the Helsingfors convention, the twelve districts were abolished. In order to centralize the Russian Zionist program, delegates were appointed according to the number of Zionists in each country. This new policy proved to be advantageous for the Zionists of Russia, since they were apportioned many more delegates. And under this new plan, Odessa quickly became the center of Russian Zionism. The Odessa Committee soon became the policy-making organization for all of Russia. The main office of Keren Kayemeth was established there; and after Ussishkin became the president of the world Zionist movement, Odessa became the center for the entire (41) movement.

Most people are of the opinion that nationalism and Haskalah were antagonistic to each other. If this was the case in other cities, then Odessa was unique in that the leaders of both these groups were one and the same people. In 1900, Achad Ha'am, S. Dubnow,

and M. Diesengoff (later mayor of Tel Aviv) formed a committee whose purpose was to infuse nationalism into the Jewish educational institutions of Odessa. In 1902, this committee was presented a memorandum from the leaders of the Society for the Advancement of Haskalah. This memorandum gave full support to their proposed program, and it further suggested that the desired effect could be achieved by introducing more Hebrew and more Jewish history into the curricula of all schools under the supervision of the Odessa Jewish community.⁽⁴²⁾

For sixty years this city showed a continuous increase in Jewish population. Schochetman points out that the statistics of the years 1910-11 showed that Jews owned 43% of the factories in the city (155 out of 359). The Jews were well represented in the paper industry and the grain mills; 63% of all the small trade shops belonged to the Jews; 51% of the wholesalers were Jews; 46 of the 52 large export houses were Jewish owned; about 50% of the doctors and lawyers were Jews; out of the 39 members of the 1st

Guild, 29 were Jews; 374 of the 474 members of the 2nd Guild were Jews; 18 Banks were either managed or
(43)
controlled by Jews.

However, not withstanding this statistical report, the year 1904 marks the peak of Jewish activity in the city. During the Russo-Japanese war, the Dardanelles were closed to all ships headed for or leaving from Odessa. Once again the city was paralyzed by a serious economic crisis. To add to the hardships, the Czar pointed to Odessa as the "Jewish City" responsible for the threatened revolution. As punishment he sent reactionary anti-semitic administrators to Odessa, who continuously hampered the liberties which the Jews had
(44)
traditionally enjoyed.

Later, during the 1st World War the Dardanelles were again closed against Russian traffic. For three years contact was lost to the world; and this meant doom for the Russian Paris which one might say the Jews helped to build.

Chapter **IV**THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

Modern Jewish Nationalism had been in the making in Russia long before it appeared on the scene. By the end of the Seventies, it was ripe for emergence; but it needed external pressure to be crystallized into a movement. This pressure was provided by the pogroms of 1881. The fact that outside attacks were needed to pave the way for the principles of the Hebrew nationalists does not minimize the significance of their effort. As in the case of other peoples, Jewish national consciousness was fully awakened in the face of grave danger. And in 1881, war was declared against the Jewish people in Russia.

No better example could be brought forward to prove the circumstances which precipitated into a Jewish national movement than a study of the situation in the city of Odessa.

The various movements and schools of thought that

reshaped Jewish life in the 19th century all had their share of influence on that city. And Odessa certainly played a tremendous role in shaping the course of later actions. For, as the more conservative masses of the Pale of Settlement fought the exponents of enlightenment tooth and nail, Odessa became the island of freedom in a raging sea of hatred. Not only was internal spiritual oppression unknown in Odessa; also external tyranny toward the Jew was considerably relieved there. As pointed out in Chapter I, Imperial Russia was very much interested in the development of that city as its biggest commercial outlet on the Black Sea; and the Jews, as well as other trading elements, were considered best fitted to achieve this goal. During the reign of Nicholas I, the entire Pale groaned and smarted under the oppressive measures of this Czar.

But, strangely enough, Odessa was hardly affected by these measures. Free spirits can never survive under conditions of abject slavery; and nowhere else in Russia could these free spirits develop so fully as in the atmosphere of partial freedom which was so peculiar to Odessa. And it was this atmosphere which

gave the Jews of Odessa the impetus to demand emancipation, and later national independence.

Odessa rapidly became the center of the Jewish movement of enlightenment, and in the end the center of the struggle for nationalism.

Early in its history, Odessa attracted a large group of enlightened scholars. Schools which stressed the teaching of a modern Jewish education, sprang up all over the city. In these schools, German replaced Hebrew; for German was, for these enlightened men, the language of advanced studies and high culture. Russian was also taught in these schools, but mainly for official and utilitarian purposes.

Many of the graduates of these schools entered the Russian Gymnasium of Odessa where the Russian language, the new Russian literature, and Russian history was stressed. Thus it was that because of a liberal government policy, the youth of Odessa received a thorough and systematic Russian education.

It may be surprising to note that where the rest

of the Jews in the Pale were experiencing its darkest days, the Jews of Odessa enjoyed special privileges at the hands of the Czarist regime. Strangely enough, Hebrew writers and fighters for enlightenment could even count on financial support from the government. **Simcha** Pinsker, a distinguished Hebrew scholar and authority on the history of the Karaites, and the father of Leo Pinsker was among those who received government honors in recognition of his scholarly attainments. Thus it was, that the climate of opinion among most of the Jews of Odessa seemed to be that the government, after all, did not seem to be directed against the Jews, per se, for its attitude was harsh only toward the fanatic and ignorant elements.

Like the followers of enlightenment among the Jews elsewhere, the youth of Odessa must have been somewhat grateful to the Czarist regime for the educational possibilities it had made available to them. For after graduating from the Gymnasium, they were permitted to enter the Lycium of Richelieu in Odessa. Shochtman tells us that the percentage of

Jews in this university was higher than in any other university in all Russia.⁽¹⁾

However, after the pogroms of 1871, the Russo-Jewish intellectuals of Odessa were compelled to realize that any attempt on the part of the Jews to get closer to the Russians would yield no practical results as long as the mass of the Russian people were engrossed in ignorance. For the burning question which confronted them was based on the realization that the 1871 pogrom was the work of both the local Russian intelligentsia and the common man in the street. What point then, was there in the whole campaign of enlightenment if the Maskilim could not rely upon the more enlightened of the Russian people? A short survey of the pogroms in Odessa, the most enlightened of Russian cities, pointed out that there were Anti-Jewish riots in that city almost yearly. Furthermore, these riots assumed the proportions of mass attacks in 1821, 1849, 1859 and now in 1871.⁽²⁾

By 1881, it became clear to the local intelligentsia that riots against the Jews were not a passing occurrence,

but a chronic illness. All the phenomena that accompanied the 1881 pogrom in Odessa - the connivance of the authorities, the participation of the intelligentsia, the hostility of the masses, and the instigation of the press, forced the Jews to realize the ineffectiveness of their program for the solution of the Jewish question.

The Jewish nationalist movement could not have come into being merely by the will of a few individuals, however forceful and persistent they might have been. Had the men, who assumed the leadership in the Eighties, arisen in Russia earlier, in all probability, they would have been no better off than Moses Hess, who came forth with the national idea in Germany during that period.

Indeed, Jewish nationalism had to undergo a long process of growth, in which the movement for enlightenment had its share; and more exactly, it was the result of certain historic factors that appeared only at the beginning of the Eighties.

The advancements made by the Jews in Russia from 1855 to 1879 reflect the reign of Alexander II.

Although he never granted the Jews equality, Alexander II did introduce many reforms which helped alleviate their condition. Moved by the desire to merge the Jews with the general population, he instructed his "Jewish Commission" to revise existing restrictions which tended to impede this goal. In 1855, in his coronation address, the Czar announced that, henceforth, recruits for military service would be taken from the Jews on the same basis as from the rest of the population.⁽³⁾

In 1859, he granted permission for the Jews of the First Guild to settle in any part of the Empire. Later, he extended that right to all Jewish artisans; and in 1879, he granted the same privilege to all Jewish University graduates.

Because of the Czar's liberal attitude, it seemed only natural that the Jewish leaders and writers looked forward to a time in the near future when the Jews would be granted full equality. However, in the spring of 1881, Alexander II was assassinated by a group of

fanatics. The ascension of Alexander III to the throne marked an abrupt change in the Government's policy.

The new Czar was utterly opposed to any thought of progress. Under the influence of Constantine Petrovich Podyedonostzev, the head of the Holy Synod, Alexander III openly showed his reactionary tendencies. He appointed Nicholas Ignatiev as Minister of Interior; and his advisor was the rabid reactionary, Katkoff.⁽⁴⁾

With such men as these at the helm of the Government, there may have been some basis for the rumors that the new Czar actually authorized the pillage and slaughter of the Jews which followed his ascension to the throne.

The pogroms, which were lead by the infamous Black Hundreds, began in Odessa on May 3, 1881. By that time, the Jewish population of Odessa exceeded the one hundred thousand mark. And a pogrom, in a city of this size, might have assumed terrifying proportions had the authorities not stepped in to halt the massacres. However, for three days, the Black Hundreds swept through the Jewish section of the city, encountering

only a hastily organized resistance from a small group of Jewish university students.⁽⁵⁾

Not content with the massacres which raged through more than one hundred and sixty communities, Igantiev, the new Minister of Interior, instituted the notorious May Laws. These laws seemed designed to carry out Ignatiev's boast that he would clear Russia of her Jewish problem by forcing one-third of them into conversion, one-third to migrate, and one-third to die of starvation. In one broad sweep, they took away all the political advancements made during the reign of Alexander II. In accordance with its proposals, the Jews were driven back into the Pale, which had been greatly diminished. Then, in order to reduce the refugees to mere beggars, these laws further stipulated that the Jews would no longer be permitted to settle in the towns and villages of the Pale itself.

In order to further induce conversion, Jews who accepted Christianity were granted freedom from taxation for a period of five years. Later, the converts were even granted an immediate State Divorce, and were granted

the privilege of cancelling all debts owed to other Jews.

In the face of this clear cut program of extermination, it is little wonder that the Jewish writers of the day began a sincere search within Judaism for something which would insure its preservation.

However, with this disillusionment came also a reawakening. Instead of fulfilling the desire of Ignatiev to force the mass of Jewry into Christianity, the May Laws and the Pogroms caused many of most Russified Jews to return to the Jewish fold. There was, however, a notable change in the attitude of the returning Jews. The Haskalah Movement had done its work well. For religion played no leading role in this revival. Unknown even to themselves, the Maskilim, through their literary activities, paved the way for a new national spirit.

By 1881, the Odessa branch of the Haskalah movement included a large number of Hebrew writers. Foremost among them was M. L. Lilienblum.

The new pogroms convinced Lilienblum that Jews would always be considered strangers in all lands. In an article which appeared in "Rassvet", he pointed out that all attempts on the part of the Jew to live a normal life in the Diaspora by means of Haskalah, were mere illusions. In this article, Lilienblum claimed that the only possible way for the Jews to lead a normal existence was to rehabilitate Palestine.⁽⁶⁾

Here was the first clarion call to Jewish nationalism by a leading figure in Russian Jewry. Following this article, a small pamphlet appeared in German which bore the pen-name "Einer Russischer Yude." This pamphlet, called "Auto-Emancipation", caused a great stir among Russian Jewry, for it advocated the acquisition of land by Jews leading to a complete migration from Russia. The author of this pamphlet was Dr. Leon Pinsker, the son of the noted scholar and educator, Simchah Pinsker, and a native of Odessa.⁽⁷⁾

Educated in the dark days of the reign of Nicholas I, and having witnessed the improved conditions of the Jews by the reforms of Alexander II, Dr. Leon Pinsker

became a firm believer in emancipation and amalgamation. He took to writing as a hobby; and through the years, he contributed many articles to Russian periodicals in which he pleaded for an amelioration of the hardships imposed upon the Jews. During the Sixties, he became one of the co-editors of the Russian-Jewish weekly "Zion".

However, after the pogroms of 1881, he, too, saw the futility in believing that the Russian Jews would ever be granted full equality. Like all later Zionists, Dr. Pinsker arrived at his conclusions through a definite conviction that even the much desired equality would not improve the Jew's feeling of insecurity among the nations, unless the Jew secured a homeland of his own.⁽⁸⁾

The great value of Pinsker's doctrine was not that it was an original one. His conclusion was no new discovery in the true sense of the word. However, his contribution is that he was the first of the Russian Jews to treat the Jewish problem as a whole. Concisely and definitely, he claimed "Our greatest

misfortune is that we do not form a nation - we are merely Jews."⁽⁹⁾

When Pinsker wrote "Auto-Emancipation", he did not look upon Palestine as the only possible home of refuge. On the contrary, he even feared that the Jewish inborn love of Palestine would induce the Jews to settle there without considering that country's unfavorable conditions. He insisted that the preservation of the Jewish people was more important than any sentimental reclamation of Palestine.

Because his pamphlet caused so great a stir among his colleagues, Dr. Pinsker called a meeting at his home in order to discuss the possibilities of his pamphlet. At this meeting which was attended by Lilienblum, Levinsky, Ben Ami, Ravnitzki, A. Greenberg and Vassyl Berman, it was decided that this group would organize a Palestine Colonization Society. The group appointed Pinsker as President and Lilienblum as secretary.⁽¹⁰⁾

Practically overnight, the idea of Jewish

Nationalism crept into every strata of Russian-Jewish society. By 1884, small groups of "Lovers of Zion" societies sprang up throughout Russia.

In order to coordinate the aims and efforts of these groups, Pinsker called a conference of these various groups. Because the Government of Russia did not sanction the existence of the organization, the meeting was held in Kattowitz, East Prussia on November 6, 1884.⁽¹¹⁾

While he did not commit himself to Palestine as the possible location of this new center of Jewry, Pinsker yielded to the Chovive Ziyon groups which regarded Palestine as the only possible land for a national home.

During these infant years in the national revival, a noticeable change began to take form in the field of Hebrew literature. Up until this time, Hebrew was employed merely as a means of propagating the ideas of Haskalah. Although the Hebrew writers embraced every field of endeavor, they hardly ever regarded Hebrew as a

national literature. They looked upon Hebrew merely as a means of transmitting ideas to a people who understood no other language.

However, during the early Eighties, under the influence of the Chibbath Zion movement, the Jewish writers began to stress the idea that Jews were a single people with the obligation of establishing a homeland where Hebrew would be revived. The majority of writers even felt that only through a revival of Hebrew could the Zionist movement develop any vital sense of historicity.

In the late Eighties, the city of Odessa came to the forefront as a great center of Hebrew literary activity. Here lived M. L. Lilienblum, the converted fiery nationalist; Levinsky, the humorist, S. J. Abramovich, the novelist, S. M. Dubnow, the historian and chief of all, Asher Ginzberg.

Lilienblum became the foremost champion of nationalism. He knew full well that the rehabilitation of Palestine would be faced with grave difficulties

and obstacles and that the process of regeneration would take a long time. From the very beginning of his entrance into the Zionist movement, up to his dying hour, he was the very life and inspiration of all its activities. While it is true he originated no new ideas, he managed to give life and force to everything he touched. His simple diction, his clear logical mind, and his sincerety of purpose fired his contemporaries with an elemental force. He became so engrossed in the preservation of Judaism, he tactfully abandoned his former position that religious practices had to be reformed. Thus, he represented a strange and rare blend of realism and conservatism. As a sober and practical observer of persecution, he felt that the Jews must have a material basis and, therefore, must colonize Palestine. In his biography

" חילוק נצחית " he admits that Jewish unity is the only solution for Jewish survival. He wrote "Yes, we are aliens throughout all of Europe. We are mere way farers, never guests. In this period of rising nationalism, we are aliens because of our race."⁽²⁾

Because of this noticeable fact, Lillienblum concluded that Palestine must be developed into a homeland for the Jews. "We must cease being strangers; and this can only happen in the land of our forefathers."⁽¹³⁾

As time passed, and as the restrictions became more unbearable for the Russian Jew, Lillienblum became convinced that Statehood must be achieved at all costs. In his essay, "Israel in Its Own Land", he pointed out that all would be well for the Jews once statehood is achieved. Strangely enough, Lillienblum would have agreed to forsake Palestine as the new center of Jewry, if acquisition of that land proved to be impossible.

But his conservatism and his internal pride in all things Jewish also were expressed in his writings. In later life, he opposed the widening of the scope of Hebrew literature to include the humanistic tendencies; for he claimed that Israel, with its emphasis on ethics, must remain pure of European thought and expressions. When it became clear that a new

Hebrew was being developed, he wrote against the new innovations in the old language for he claimed, "that in the course of time, this despicable language will become the living tongue of our brothers in the Holy Land. And I doubt whether our children will be gracious toward this renaissance, simply because its newer words are no longer the expression of our people."⁽¹⁴⁾

And, furthermore, he never lost his intense pride in his Jewish heritage. Even when he insisted on the need of modifying Rabbinnics, his feelings ran much deeper than a mere negation of practices. To him, Israel's was the purest civilization on earth. In " *למה לא נשכח* " he wrote: "Israel's civilization is the fruit of its own spirit; whereas the civilization of the other nations are mixtures of Judaism and Hellenism."⁽¹⁵⁾

"Israel is far above the other nations, in its spirit, in its mind, and in its ways. That is the reason the other nations fear our increase. For what other reason do they chase us from every province in

Europe and Asia?"⁽¹⁶⁾

As he rationally observed the storms of persecution in his native land, he reached the conclusion "that there is no time to prepare the settlers in Palestine by offering them an intense training in other countries. He maintained that the first step toward alleviating existing conditions was to evacuate the Jews from the areas of persecution. He pointed out "that Statehood is not important, but the settlement of Jews in the land of the birth of our nation is the prime important step."⁽¹⁷⁾

Later on, he believed that the dormant national spirit would burst into renewed life and unite the Jews as the Galut never could.

This new spirit of nationalism even made him enthusiastic enough to overlook the cry for religious reforms. "For all the importance of this question, I cannot be concerned with it, since it is not a necessary prerequisite to a return to the land of Israel."⁽¹⁸⁾ "For we are a holy people, whether we are God-fearing or

heretical. And in the land of our fathers, there will only be sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (19)

Thus we see one strain of Zionist thought expressed in the writings of Lilienblum. This strain emphasized the saving of Jewish lives. It concentrated all its energies on political manipulations which would serve to alleviate the conditions of the Jews. Later, this large group of Jews followed the leadership of Theodor Herzl and became known as the Political Zionists.

The other strain in the revival of Jewish nationalism considered the immediate alleviation of the condition of the Jews as a mere step in a long range movement on the part of the Jew in attempting to answer questions about his Jewishness and his orientation to a new culture. This group centered its activities in creativity in the Galuth until Palestine could be gained as the vital center of the newly aroused Jewish nationalism. The leader of this movement was the writer known by the pen name of Achad Ha'am.

In 1885, Asher Ginsberg visited Odessa for the

first time. Like so many of his contemporaries, the Pogroms of 1881 served to convince him that Haskalah alone was no solution to the Jewish problem. Because of family conditions, Ginzberg was forced to leave the city and return home; however, in 1886, he returned to Odessa. By this time he was convinced that Zionism held the answer to his enslaved people.

By the time he settled permanently in Odessa, it had become the seat of the central committee of the Chovevi Zion movement. Ginzberg readily joined the movement; but he soon realized that the organization lacked something that could lift it above the menial task of collecting relatively trivial sums of money for the support of the new colonies in Palestine. For three years he sat by silently and watched colony after colony fall under the protection of the great philanthropist, Baron Edmond de Rothschild; and he came to the realization that a radical change was necessary if Chibbat Zion was to become the great movement for national revival which, in his conception, it was.

Presumably because he criticised these disheartening turns of events, Ginsberg was elected a member of the central committee. After listening to Ginsberg speak out against the existing policies of the movement, Alexander Zederbaum, also a member of the central committee urged him to prepare an article for Ha-Melitz which had become the literary arm for the movement.

Finally, in 1889, Ginsberg, submitted two articles which he called "Lo Zeh Ha Derech". In these short essays, he clearly set forth the evils of the Chovevi Zion Movement as he saw them. He pointed out that if the movement was to maintain its position as a national one, it must stop its over-emphases on the economic and political development of Palestine by Jews; and concentrate its energies toward making that land the center of Judaism, where Jewish culture, language and religion could be further advanced. Rather than persuade Jews to resettle Palestine for their own material gains, the movement should stand for Jewish nationalism, in its purest sense. He demanded quality above quantity. ⁽²⁰⁾

Three months later, his second essay appeared in Ha-Melitz. In this article he presented his program of "Spiritual Zionism". He pointed out that the colonization of Palestine would never solve the real problem of Jewish needs unless it carried with it a national sentiment endorsed by all the Jews throughout the world. (21)

The significance of a Jewish Palestine was, not that it would become the gathering-place for world Jewry; but rather that it would become the spiritual-cultural center from which all of world Jewry would benefit.

These two articles caused a great deal of resentment among the members of the Chovevi Zion Movement. For the majority of them looked upon the resettlement of Palestine as a panacea for all Jewish ills. However, there were also many who agreed with Ginzberg's criticism. Soon after his second article appeared, a secret society was formed in Odessa. This society adopted the name "B'ne Moshe" since its members

advocated "the revival of the ancient prophetic concept of the remnant of Israel." (22)

The motto of this organization was "Israel's Revival upon Israel's Soil," and although its purpose was the same as that of the Chovevi Zion Movement, its conception of how to fulfill its dedicated purpose differed widely from which was currently expressed in the practices of the parent organization. In the principles which Achad Ha'am drew up, he expressed his opinion that "the attainment of a national end demands a national effort in which the pick of the nation's resources must be held together by a moral bond of union. It demands the work of generations, who must carry out the plan carefully, gradually, patiently and according to fixed rules." (23)

This statement of principles for the B'ne Moshe Society also reflected the dedicated aim of its first president, Asher Ginsberg. For the author of this statement wisely understood that the Jewish people would never be able to become secure in Palestine

unless the collected heart and mind of the people became soaked in a regenerated love for Zion; and toward this goal he dedicated his literary career.

Although he entered the portals of Hebrew literature merely as Achad Ha'am, with no conscious claim to any dignity as a writer, and probably with little intention of beginning a literary career at thirty-three, his mode of thought and his style of expression was so unique and so commanding that, before long, he became the leading figure in Hebrew literary circles.

"Lo Zeh Haderech" were not the only articles of Achad Ha'am to rouse resentment against the author. Each article he subsequently published seemed to stir up a great deal of commotion. For Achad Ha'am viewed his task of writing very seriously. Throughout his life, he never wrote for the sake of writing. Often he would prefer to remain silent, notwithstanding the obvious eagerness with which the Hebrew readers awaited his words. Rather he preferred to wait until he felt

he had something definite to contribute toward a solution of some vital problem or toward an elucidation of some truth.

From the very first he commanded respect, not only from the very young, but even from the acknowledged leaders of Hebrew letters. Even his first two ventures in the field of literature were so unusually superior to the general output of his day, that he took the Hebrew reading public by surprise. They avidly awaited and absorbed every line that came from his pen. For they recognized that his deep thoughts and clear and fascinating style was a rare combination. To say that his style was new and artistically perfect is not enough. It was also noticeably free from the chains which unfortunately bound the then existing Hebrew literature. And to say that his ideas showed a deep and penetrating study is also an understatement. For each thought was so treated by his analytical mind that they became infused with a penetrating light which enabled the reader to see and understand in a way which had not been possible before.

There is not a sentence in all his writings that does not bear the same stamp of authority. Achad Ha'am never faltered nor wondered. If his mind was disturbed by the numerous problems he deals with, he never exposed these disturbances to his readers. Before he would present his final draft, he would remold each article until he had a cold, finished masterpiece which was perfect in form, ideal in outline, and beautiful in coloring. Thus, in each article we are left with a model essay - brief, polished and clear.

Chapter VThe Odessa School

The beginning of the Odessa School of Modern Hebrew Literature can be traced to Shalom Jacob Abramowitz. For with his translations of his earlier popular Yiddish novels into Hebrew, Abramowitz began a new epoch in Hebrew literature.

Under the pen name, Mendele Mocher Seforim, Abramowitz was the first modern writer to demonstrate the wealth of word-building potential and the tremendous possibilities of expression which lie dormant in the Hebrew language.

Up to his time, almost the entire field of Hebrew literature had been limited to the over-worked vocabulary, phraseology and style of the Bible. This flowery "Melizah" usage was actually a half imitation and a half distortion of the Biblical verse in order to suit the means of the numerous writers. And it was this "Melizah" style which dominated the Haskalah

Period in Jewish life.

As a realist, Mendele preferred to write about the life of the Jew during his own period. In the preface to his Yiddish play "Prizio", he tells, in his humorous way, the reason he was compelled to write about the old Ghetto life. ⁽¹⁾

"I was drawn to return to the home nest, like the wandering bird. Today Jewish life is covered with black clouds. Storms blow from all sides. Everywhere it is bleak and lonely.... Something seemed to draw me to that corner in Jewish life where I found old friends to whom I told these stories. And suddenly I had a strange desire to return to my people."

But in his Hebrew novels, the creation of a folk language constituted a serious problem. As a realist, he was compelled to write in the language of the people. However, in that day, Hebrew had lost contact with everyday life. It no longer expressed the concepts, the images and the ideals of the Jewish people. Thus, Mendele had to invent new styles, create new material and add new features to the Hebrew language.

In his article on the "Hebrew Style of Mendele

Mocher Seforim", which appeared in the magazine, "Ha-Omer", Ravnitski pointed out that "Mendele loved the Holy Hebrew language".⁽²⁾

As a trail-blazer, Mendele gave Hebrew a new and simple art of description. By using the simple and pure Hebrew of the Mishnah and the Midrash, he helped free it from much of its affectations. In his endeavor to make his style as colloquial as possible, he even had to introduce many Yiddishisms into the Hebrew language. And because the Biblical forms were too antiquated to express contemporary situations, he made free use of Talmudic expressions. Those who followed in his tradition copied his simple and exacting style of expression. In a letter to Ravnitzki, Mendele wrote:⁽³⁾

"The style of Hebrew in my novels is a new creation. It was my intent to create a style which would be alive and which would speak clearly and exactly as men do in our times. Its soul is Jewish; and through it, stories will be given to the Jews in Hebrew.

This was not an easy task; but with the help of God I made this new creation. And from that time on, the Jewish writers started using my style."

This style became one of the most important features which distinguished the Odessa School of modern Hebrew prose. The complete list of writers who belonged to this school of expression is a long one and beyond the scope of this chapter. But one need only turn to the writings of Judah Steinberg and S. Ben Zion (Guttmann) to fully feel the impact this style exerted on Hebrew letters.

Mendele's later disciples, such as Bialik and Berkowitz, further elaborated on his beginnings and brought about a synthesis between the Biblical and the Mishnaic styles. For they created a literature which possessed all the vigor and grandeur of the Bible and all the clarity and simplicity of the Mishnah.

In this chapter, I hope to analyse the writings of Mendele, Judah Steinberg and Ben Zion in order to determine those characteristics which they shared in common.

However, before we point out their similarities,

there is one glaring difference which must be understood. As it has already been pointed out, Mendele preferred to write about Jewish life in a small-town Russian ghetto. And this is the one feature that seemingly separated him from his disciples. All three of them were realists; however, Steinberg and Ben Zion choose their subject matter from a more contemporaneous Jewish life. And because of this, their writings reflected political and social problems which differed from the milieu in which Mendele delved.

In chapter IV, it was pointed out that there was a tremendous change in the thinking of the Jewish intellegentia following the pogroms of the Seventies and Eighties. For during that period, the Maskilim experienced a period of disillusionment; and Jewish nationalism became the popular plea to the masses. Because Mendele wrote about the life of the Jews during the early Haskalah Period, he was seemingly out of the realm of this conflict; for he preferred to use symbolic language instead of direct involvement. Thus, in his plea for social and religious reforms, he imitated the earlier Maskilim; and he was just as biting and satirical as they were in his portrayal of Jewish life.

As a Maskil, Mendele satirized all that was shabby and sterile in ghetto Judaism. He gave allegorical names to the three towns in Southern Russia which constituted the scenes of his novels; and the names forcibly suggested the realities of that life to the readers. His "Beggar's Town" ליצ'טאָן brought into sharp focus the precarious economics of Russian Jewry. His "Idlers' Town" פּוֹלֶצְק depicted the degeneracy of Jewish social consciousness. And his "Fool's Town" פּוֹלֶצְק brought out the wasted ideology of a fantasy-ridden Jewry.

And in this, Mendele is not alone. Although they wrote about a much later period, the writings of both Steinberg and Ben Zion contain the same type of social message. In his short story "Abraham Meir, the Malamed," Steinberg vividly described the miseries of ghetto life. However, he wrote about the economic changes which took place after the enactment of the May Laws, which greatly influenced Jewish life in a small town.

When Abraham, the Malamed, found out that his wife

was pregnant with a second child, panic seized him.

Steinberg put these thoughts in Abraham's mind:⁽⁴⁾

"I will soon be an unfortunate father of two children. And here I have but little money left of my dowry; and in a few months, even that will be gone. Then what will I do?"

But even as these thoughts ran through his mind, he knew that he had no other choice but to remain as a poor Malamed. For it was still a means of earning a living. And he thought, 'Although the gains were not large, I will never be able to lose too much. And after all, what is man? Does he need more than his daily bread?'"

Similarly, Ben Zion, in his "Man of the Kahal" pointed out the moral degeneracy which followed the governmental restrictions. And he very skillfully showed how these restrictions hampered the Jew in his struggle to earn a livelihood.

Faced with the possibility of spending a Sabbath without food, Rabbi Nisi, the town representative, lowered himself to cheat a poor widow out of three rubles!⁽⁵⁾

"He left the widow's house and turned homeward, groping with his cane and feeling the damp darkness surrounding him. His reward, the three rubles, was with him, a heavy burden in his pocket. He hurried as fast as he could. A shudder ran through

him; and a cold sweat rose on his face... All his bartering in the house of the widow projected itself before him in his wretchedness. He tried to express his feelings in words; and just as he reached the steps to his house, he muttered to himself, 'Descend, descend!'

Although the social message was one which the Odessa prose writers shared with the earlier Maskilim, their method of presentation was somewhat different. The writers of the Haskalah literature concentrated on revealing the baser sides of Jewish life in their most vulgar and grotesque aspects. However, the Odessa school emancipated themselves from this one-sidedness. They wrote about the whole of life, and not only its uglier aspects. In all three of these writers there was a strong tendency to allow penetrating glimpses of the finer aspects of their characters.

Thus, Mendele pointed out that the Jew could also appreciate the beauties of nature:⁽⁶⁾

"He (temptation) stood and opened one of my (Mendele's) eyes. And immediately a wonderful scene met my gaze: Fields sprinkled with buckwheat, as white as snow, intermingled with yellow rows of wheat, and tall green sunflowers, a beautiful green valley, bordered by forests of trees; and below, a pure, clear brook wound its course and

reflected the golden rays of the sun....; and finally, a pasturing herd of sheep and cattle looked like many dark, speckled spots from the distance."

And in his longest novel "In Those Days", Steinberg depicted the courageousness with which the Cantonist soldier served his ungrateful fatherland. During the heat of battle, Samuel, the Cantonist, saw a priest fall down wounded. He had every reason to run as did the others when they saw the priest fall. But Steinberg made Samuel think: (7)

"At that moment I felt as if I were made of three different men. Just think: Samuel, the man; Samuel, the soldier; and Samuel the Jew.

Says Samuel, the man: 'You have done enough; and it is all over now. Therefore, run for dear life.'

Says Samuel, the soldier: 'Shame on you. Where is your bravery? The regimental images (Icons) have fallen. Try, perhaps they can yet be saved.'

Says Samuel, the Jew: 'Certainly, save; for a Jew must do more than is expected of him.'

But Samuel, the man answers: 'Do you recall how many lashes you suffered on account of these same images?'.....Many such thoughts flashed through my brain. But it all took a moment. And in a moment I was by the priest's side. He was alive; he was wounded only in his hand. I raised

him to his feet, put the images into his hand, lifted them up, and supported them. 'This way, Russians!' I do not know who shouted those words. Perhaps I did; perhaps some other person; perhaps it was from Heaven. However, the victory was ours. But I did not remain on my feet long. A bullet struck me and I fell."

Another characteristic which these writers shared was their intense love for Jewish ritual. To the Maskil, the entire scope of ritual was regarded as something foreign to the higher aspirations of an enlightened Jew. And because of this fact, the Maskilim usually portrayed the emancipated Jew as an alienated, completely-Europeanized Jew. However, the Odessa writers regarded the use of ritual and ceremonial in a much more wholesome light. All of them agreed with Achad Ha'am that ritual was the means which helped preserve Jewish identity in the Diaspora. Thus, these authors very sympathetically gave their readers short glimpses about the ritual side of Jewish life.

In " *הזמן הזה* ", Mendele showed how eagerly the Jew looked forward to the Sabbath:

"The rag-picker is no longer a dog; today his soul is renewed. It is the Sabbath; and Shmulik

is the son of a king. He says the Kiddush over the wine, and sits down at the table. His wife is on his right; and his children are around him. They dip their spoons into the dish to take some soup, a piece of meat, a fragment of fish or other good things of which they hardly knew about during the week."

And Steinberg in his short story, "Lag B'Omer" shows how eagerly the young looked forward to the celebration:⁽⁹⁾

"Their father did not have to urge them to rise for school. For today was a holiday. It was Lag B'Omer, at which time the boys of the school went into the woods, where the birds sang sweetly, and the insects hummed. In the woods flowed a clear stream in whose mirror the trees reflected other trees as fair as they..... The boys had fun in the woods. The trees stood high, tempting brave boys to climb them. And that is what they did. They went up to the top; and their faces looked very pretty peeking out from the foliage, as if growing from it. The feeling a boy had, when he stood on the tree top above a flowing stream, was a fine one..... After a while the whole school was assembled. Then the teacher explained the significance of the day's celebration."

And in his short story, "The Day Which is Completely Rest", Ben Zion showed how carefully the Chassidim observed the Sabbath:⁽¹⁰⁾

"After saying 'Shalom Aleichem' as was the custom, father sits down near the table, opens his Siddur, and begins reciting 'תקנת אבות'; that beautiful combination of the Song of Songs and the Tractate 'אבות'. And how long this hour seemed to us. For father insisted that his household remain with him in the house; so that he could be the complete ruler....."

Comparison of Characters

It would be a super-human task to analyze all the characters that were introduced into Hebrew literature by Mendele and his disciples; for they portrayed the characters that made up the entire scope of Jewish existence, from the very old to the very young, and from the Maskil to the Chassid. And any comparison of character types, only prove how closely concerned this school was with the social problems which arose during the period in which they wrote. The portrayal of the Maskil can serve as an excellent example with which to illustrate this fact.

In Mendele's "Vale of Tears" the Maskil was the true hero of the story. He was the man who saved Hershele from the miseries of the ghetto. He was the one who won the maiden in the small sub-plot of the novel. And one can readily understand that Mendele looked toward the Maskil as the saving hope in Jewish life.

However, Steinberg, who wrote about a later period,

was not so kind to the Maskil. In his novel "Dr. Orlov", he portrayed a Jew who lost all his principles in the course of acquiring a secular education. His Maskil not only gave up his Jewish values, he even became a harsh materialist.

Ben Zion also depicted the Maskil as a maladjusted person who finds no comfort in escaping from Jewish life. In his short story, "Me-Eber le-Chayyim", the Maskil wastes away in a state of confusion and uncertainty.

Another character type which underwent a radical change from Mendele and Ben Zion was the Zionist.

Mendele was highly sceptical about the ideals of Zionism. Although he was a member of the Zionist Movement, he could not completely accept the idea that migration to Palestine was the only possible solution to the Jewish problem. In his short story, "In Evil Days" he viewed with suspicion those so-called idealists who migrated to Palestine in a fit of desperation. In this story he was not very sympathetic toward Zionism; but he satirized the situation in Russia which brought about

this migration.

However, in the novels of Steinberg and Ben Zion, the authors were much more sympathetic toward the Zionist. In "Neither for God nor for People", Steinberg picked as his hero the son of the enlightened father. Where the father was very indifferent toward the practices of Judaism, the son, an ardent Zionist, was sure of his convictions: ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

"Dan turned around, extinguished the candles of the Hasmoneans, and greeted the priest.
'Good evening, Vasil Stefanovitch!'
'Excuse me Dan for bothering you. Oh, what a peculiar odor I smell in your store. Is it a smell of vapor, or cooking oil, or do you still bother with the candles of the Maccabees?'
'Oh, no,' Dan said as he tried to hide the Menorrah with his body.
'That is why I am surprised! I knew you were above such foolishness. But, Dan, do me a favor; ask your servant to give me a good bottle of oil.'
'For eating, or for anointing?'
'Neither, I just would like to have some fine Palestinian oil.'
But Dan took the priest's words as a refined insult and an ugly hint about his Jewishness. He reddened; he lowered his eyes; then he raised them and said indignantly to his guest, 'There never was any Palestinian oil in my store!'
'Really? Too bad!'
Suddenly a voice resounded in the room:
Baruch atta Adonai, Elohaynu melech ha-olom, she-he-chi-yonu, ve-key-ma-nu, ve-hi-gi yonu lazman ha zeh.

Dan was shocked; he stepped backward, and looked; (in the next room) he saw the stubborn one (his son, the Zionist) bending over the Menorrah and lighting the extinguished lights."

Ben Zion also looked upon Zionism as the solution for the Jewish problem. In "The Other Side to Life", he pointed out that Jews could find a new will to live in Zionism. His heroes were the two young Zionists, who looked forward to the day when they could migrate to Palestine.

Probably the greatest contribution which these writers made to Hebrew literature was the manner in which they realistically portrayed the life of the Jewish child. In *Emek Ha-Bakah*, Mendele looked with horror upon a society which confined and restricted the Jewish child, Hershele. In, "Be-Seter Ra'am", he sympathetically depicted the life the children who grew up during the pogroms.

In "Nefesh Rezuzeh", Ben Zion pointed out all the inner conflicts with which the Jewish child was faced. In this story it was the child who rebelled against the authority which bound him to tradition.

Most of Steinberg's stories were written for children. But in his longer novel "In Those Days", he also pointed out the injustices perpetrated against the Jewish child:⁽¹²⁾

"Many of the former cantonists can still remember with horror the steambath they were forced to take. They called the bath 'the chamber of hell'. At first glance, it really seemed to have been an awful thing. They would pick out all the cantonists who had as much as a scratch on their bodies, or the smallest sign of a boil, paint the wounds with tar, and put the boys, stripped, on the top shelf in the steambath. And below was a row of attendants armed with birch-rods. The kettle boiled fiercely, the stones were red-hot, and the attendants emptied pails of boiling water on the stones without a stop. The steam rose, penetrating every pore of the skin and sting-sting. It entered into the very flesh. The pain was unbearable. It pricked and pricked; and there was no air to breath. It was simply choking. And if the boy rolled down, those below stood ready to meet him with the rods."

Plot Analysis

As a group, these writers did not make a noticeable effort to develop plots. Most of their stories were short sketches taken directly from life. And, therefore, their plots are incidental to the social motive about

which they wrote.

Mendele was so anxious to present a realistic picture of his social environment, he often entered the scene himself. As an observer, he captured the humanity and dignity of his characters; but he never developed a well-rounded central plot. In his "Vale of Tears" he unites his sketches by means of a minor plot, but he makes the reader feel that the plot is only incidental to the story.

Steinberg and Ben Zion also did not develop their plots along conventional lines. They, too, preferred to take small sketches out of life. And one can certainly find strong social motives in their stories.

In general all of these men wrote about the problems involved in the acquisition or the reaction to enlightenment. All of them made an earnest search for Jewish values which could preserve Judaism in a smothering and hostile society. All of them wrote about the horrible persecutions which were imposed upon the Jews.

And because they concentrated on motives rather than plots, they were directly concerned with the conditions of Jewish life in the period of which they wrote. Thus, Mendele wrote about a rapidly disappearing ghetto life; and he utilized only those solutions which were in existence during that period. Steinberg and Ben Zion on the other hand, wrote about a generation in which the problems of earning a livelihood were greatly intensified by the enactment of the May Laws. They pointed out the injustices directed against Judaism. And they pointed out the struggles which were involved in accepting the ideals of Zionism.

These are but three of a large number of writers who learned to use the Hebrew language with consummate skill, and who helped introduce a new Golden Era in the history of Hebrew literature. After these men came the poets, novelists and essayists who wrote with exquisite beauty and matchless diction. For such names as Bialik, Schneur, Tchernikowsky, Peretz, Berdichewski, Druyanov, Bershadski, and Klousner will live forever in the annals of Hebrew literature. And

we owe our undying gratitude to these literary pioneers who so successfully refurbished and put to modern use some of the words, expressions and idioms which have lived for centuries in an unchanging mental pattern of the Jewish people.

In conclusion, the Mendele tradition stood for a penetrating observation and minute description of the Jewish milieu, and was generally recognized by its thorough craftsmanship and classic robust style. This school's new realism gave to Hebrew prose a concentrated power, a precision and vividness which it lacked in previous days. In the wake of this realism, there was to follow a realism of the spirit which was based on the close observation of the inner world of the Jew. From Mendele's time on, Hebrew literature paid particular respect to the many manifestations and experiences of religious life. Jewish tradition, which had been the brunt of the Haskalaic writings, began to be examined from a less critical viewpoint. Even Chassidism, came into its own and began to exert a complimentary influence upon Hebrew literature.

Bialik, in his appreciation of Mendele's disciples, wrote: "Mendele was a great artist of small details. But one thing he lacked. There is no ecstasy in his writings, none of the sheer joy of life and its intoxication. But this is not true of his disciples in whose works there is a definite quality of that ecstasy, something of that intoxication and joy of living, in the sense of 'my heart and my flesh sing for joy'."

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