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LEON GORDON,
(AN APPRECIATION)

GRADUATION THESIS.

ABRAHAM BENEDICT RHINE.

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE.

CINCINNATI.

1902.

mic 11/79

TO
MY FATHER

--MEYER RHINE --

WHOSE SCHOLARLY ATTAINMENTS AND LOVE FOR THE
HEBREW LANGUAGE AND ITS LITERATURE
MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIS SON TO
ENJOY AND APPRECIATE POETS LIKE
LEON GORDON
THIS FIRST ATTEMPT AT AUTHORSHIP
IS RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED.

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INTRODUCTION.

The struggle of the human mind to emancipate itself from the fetters of credulity and superstition, and to exercise its own God given powers of pure thinking and undimmed vision-- a struggle that dates its beginning from the dimmest antiquity when man first became conscious of his own existence and that of the universe about him -- is one of the most absorbing phenomena within the wide range of human experience.

The tremendous difference in the attitude of the European of today towards himself, his fellowmen, and nature, from that which characterized the ^aAsiatics of antiquity -- a difference which is commonly summed up in the single word Progress -- is it not the resultant of that struggle without which the change would have been impossible? Evolution is not brought about by leaps; development is gradual and slow. Man is loath to part with his darling thoughts which thus become prejudices; and therein lies the pathos of the history of human achievements. The grand sum total of human knowledge which pierces the heavens and fathoms the ocean was accumulated with laborious effort and

painful exertions by the labors of myriads of men of untold generations; and, for the most part, interwoven with their very heart and life blood. Like the builders of the Egyptian pyramids which still stand as the marvel of past ages and bear mute testimony to a life that was, the builders of the pyramids of intellect, with incessant endeavor, contributed each his mite towards the erection of the great monument which is to stand for all time. Some may have been mere hod carriers, mere day laborers; but without their labor the result would be an impossibility. How grateful then ought we to be to the great master-mind who conceived, planned, and executed the pyramids of human intellect! Yet, how little do we think of the price they paid for their achievements!

This struggle of the human mind, the loathness to part with effete beliefs, and the promptings of reason that they must be done away with, has been going on among the Jewish people as well as among other nations. Only in the case of the Jew it was keener, more accentuated; hence, more tragic. Ever since the loss of his national independence, and the beginning of the Diaspora, Israel was thrown upon his intellectual resources for his existence. The straightforward means of earning a livelihood he was

deprived of by prejudices and persecutions; hence, other, subtler means had to be found. The barriers had to be circumvented. Thus, under the distress of circumstances, and by ^a law of nature which develops in a complex organism that peculiar organ which is best adapted for the maintenance of life, the intellectual powers of the Jews developed and were strengthened above those of their neighbors. But, deprived as they were of any intercourse with the outside world, the activity of their mind displayed itself along lines in harmony with their own genius — along the lines of their religion. For this religion it was, this common Judaism, that held the scattered remnant of Israel together, and their Law their common inheritance; and since the active force of their intellect had to find an outlet for, in the words of Maimonides,

"The human spirit knows no bounds"

It naturally coupled itself with their religion, and the result was the stupendous literature of the Talmudim, Midrashim, with innumerable annotations, addenda, commentaries and Responsa.

The deeper the darkness of oppression that surrounded them, the more unbearable the hatred and disdain of the Christian world, the further did the Jews withdraw themselves within themselves, the prouder was their consciousness of their own intellectual supremacy, and the more fervently and passionately did they

cling to their religion. Not only did the Talmud become the bulwark of Judaism, but even the later Rabbinical writings assumed a sacredness and authority second only to that of the Bible and the Talmud. Why not? Was not their sacred literature their all in all? Was it not their arena where intellectual Giants met in determined though unbloody combat? Was it not their only refuge for comfort and consolation? Was it not the common tie that united them? It was their very life, their very existence. We can therefore easily understand their attitude towards any attempt at innovation or reforms in religious practices, and their persecution of their own brethren who dared advocate them. "Any one who is not with us is against us; anyone who has no sympathy with religious practices laid down by Rabbinical authorities is a traitor, and has sold ^{himself} ~~themselves~~ to the enemy". Of course, it was inevitable that in the course of time practices and beliefs--non-Jewish should creep in among them; in fact Judaism under the influence of the later Rabbis had assumed an aspect different from and more rigorous even than Talmudic Judaism. Still sanctioned as the body of outside beliefs and practices was by the Rabbis, and based as it was on the Talmud, it became part and parcel of Judaism and was observed with the same reverence given to the more essential ^{rites} ~~rites~~ of Judaism.

But "Nichts ist dauerend als der Ander". The apparent petrification of Rabbinical Judaism could not endure forever. Beneath the outer crust of obstinacy there was a heart palpitating with warmth and susceptibility to outside influences; and, like all living organisms subject to the Laws of life, the discarding and rejecting of dead matter, and the absorbing of life sustaining nutriment, Judaism had to undergo a change. Allready at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century the sect of Chassidim arose with their Doctrines of enthusiasm, cheerfulness~~and~~ joy as a protest against the cold, unattractive, intellectual Rabbinism. Even the Chassidim, however, did not dare infringe upon Rabbinical Judaism to any appreciable extent, beyond changing the prayer book, and giving prominence to the Zohr^a; and, in addition, they soon succumbed to a blind hero worship, in the persons of their several saints, tantamount to idolatry. But, towards the end of the Eighteenth Century, under the influence of French skepticism and ideals of human rights from without, and of Mendelssohn from within, a new movement was set on foot among German Jews—a movement which gathered momentum with the advance of the spirits of Democracy and Liberalism—known as the Haskalah, or culture. Rabbinical Judaism with its excrescences of superstition and credulity, must give way to a Judaism more

decorous, more polished, more in accordance with the spirit of the Age. This was the slogan of the Maskilim or culturists, and their ideals spread rapidly first into Galicia, then into Poland and Russia.

Of course, such ideals aiming at the destruction of all that was dear and sacred to the adherents of Orthodoxy, could not but be met with a violent opposition on their part—and the Jews were thus divided into two hostile camps; the young generation standing for culture, the old for the Talmud. In Germany, however, the struggle while bitter, was short and decisive. The preachers of culture carried the day; conditions were in their favor. The principles of the French Revolution infected the masses of Germany; Liberalism, though suppressed by the reaction, was still in the air. The German people itself became cultured to a remarkable extent, and the German Jews could not withstand the contagion. They were constantly in hopes of being enfranchised, and they had to prepare themselves for it. The enfranchisement which did^{come} in 1848 inclined the beam to the side of culture, and the movement was thus crowned with success. Not so in Russia. The population among whom the Jews dwelt was itself steeped in the deepest fanaticism and ignorance. Most of the natives were serfs; the nobles showed their superiority only in their arrogance and brutality. The Government was autocratic to the extreme. The thought of emancipation never even entered the minds either of

the Jews or of the Government. What good, then, could the Jews gain by culture? Was it not better for them to remain in their present condition than to change the old for a new which held out no prospects for better days? Hence the difficulty which beset the path of the few Russian pioneers of the Haskalah who had imbibed the German spirit, who beheld a new light, the light of European civilization, and were eager to spread it among them who walked in darkness.

The fight was a protracted one, and was waged with bitter determination on both sides. The older generation looked down with contempt upon the advocates of the new-fangled ideas; the younger generation worked with enthusiasm and resolution. Much did they suffer at the hands of the adherents of the old; much were they persecuted; but, as is always the case, persecution defeats its own ends, it only creates new champions for the ideals it endeavors to crush. The struggle is still going on today, but the Maskilim by dint of labor, determination and perseverance, succeeded in rearing up a new generation of Russian Jews combining European culture with Jewish learning, uniting the civilizations of the East and the West. And foremost in the ranks of those champions of civilization, in the second half of the nineteenth century, stands LEON GORDON, a scholar, a poet, a man of action, a presentation of whose time and works is attempted in the following pages.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIONEERS OF THE HASKALAH.

The condition of the Russian Jews in the first half of the nineteenth century was a most deplorable one. Alexander the First (1801-1825), fickle and vacillating, had begun his reign as a semi-liberal, and his Jewish subjects hoped for some amelioration of their condition at his hands. ^{Imbued} as he was at first with the Western spirit, and carried away by his admiration for Napoleon, he dreamed of curing his Empire from the chronic disease of Asiatic autocracy, and to establish a government along the line of freedom and justice. While under the influence of these dreams, he turned his attention to the Jewish Problem, and the rigor of the exceptional laws against them was somewhat relaxed. During the Napoleonic wars, and particularly at the period of the French invasion, the laws against them were allowed to lapse, and the Czar made a personal appeal to them for help against the French. With their characteristic patriotism, the Jews gave all the help in their power, and in return the Imperial promise was passed that they should be given equal rights with other Russian subjects*). In 1804 an Ukase was issued giving the Jewish

*)Harold Frederic: The New Exodus, P . 71

youth the privilege of attending Russian universities. The Czar also had hit upon the scheme of colonization as a solution of the Jewish problem. From 1807 to 1810 several thousands of Jews were transferred to the uninhabited Crown lands in the government of Kherson, and more were sent there in 1822-1823*). But by 1822 the Imperial pledge of giving the Jews equal rights had been so completely forgotten that the same Czar abolished most of the consistorial organizations, with their independent communal jurisdiction, which the Jews had enjoyed since the day of the Polish Kings**). Alexander had completely changed. No vestige was left of his dreams of a paternal government. The Bugaboo Napoleon was made harmless; and, while in the first flush of victory Alexander's heart went out to his Jewish subjects, his enthusiasm soon subsided, and he became a reckless, irresponsible tyrant. His colonization scheme also proved a failure. The Czar could not understand that ^Athe race of agriculturists cannot be created in one day. Besides, had ~~the~~ supervision of the scheme been entrusted to men qualified by knowledge and experience, the failure might not have been so complete. But, characteristic of Russia, methods the charge ^{of} supervising the Jewish colonies was given into the hands of unscrupulous, ignorant officials, retired generals

*) Prof. Leo Errara; The Russian Jew, P. 26.

**) Harold Frederic: The New Exodus, P. 71.

for the most part, who ruled the colonists with the utmost brutality. The money intended for the budding colonies was frittered away among the officials; neither houses nor the proper implements were provided for them as promised. To these obstacles other misfortunes were superadded,—bad harvests, epidemics, severity of the climate, and privations of every kind. "The Jewish Colonists", say the official reports of the time, "Are dying of hunger and cold in the midst of the steppes." Five thousand of their number, out a total of Ten Thousand, succumbed in a few years*). Thus terminated the charitable intentions of Alexander I.

The hopes for ameliorated conditions were thus blasted by the whim of the despot, and the Russian Jews had again to bend their neck beneath the yoke of hateful and inhuman laws. But, accustomed as the Jews are to disappointments and privations, it required all their powers of resistance, and all the strength of desperate determination to survive the reign of terror that was to follow Nicholas I. (1825-1855), or Haman II., an epithet given him in every Jewish mind, was determined upon the destruction of his Jewish subjects, by means of conversion. He was "a man of immense personal force, tireless energy, and original ideas which, from their very narrowness, ran deep and strong", **). An Autocrat in the fullest

*) Prof. Leo Errara: The Russian Jews, P. 160.
Arnold White; The Modern Jew, P. 20.

**) Harold Frederic, The New Exodus, P.73.

sense of the term, an extreme fanatic combining in himself all the prejudices transmitted to him by his Tartar ancestors, he began to execute his plans with the frankness and cruelty of a Zulu Indian. To form a correct notion of his policy and the execution thereof it will be best to give a digest of Mr. Harold Frederic's Fifth Chapter of "The New Exodus".

"Nicholas had an essentially military mind. He began his propaganda against Israel through martial channels. In April 1827 he issued an Ukase rendering Jews liable to military conscription like other subjects. Unlike other subjects, the Jewish recruit had to serve twenty five years without ever being eligible to promotion. But, though no instructions were committed to paper, it became speedily understood in the Army that the Czar desired heavy pressure to be put upon the Hebrew soldiers to win them over to baptism. This pressure became universal, and naturally took the shape of cruel torment to the obdurate.

"But this process was too slow. Accordingly Nicholas invented a scheme of military ^{colonies} or schools, to be planted in the remote South, to be devoted to the combined conversion and martial training of the Hebrew youth. This was an adaptation of the plan of settling regiments of the line about in the farm lands among the Crown Serfs,

which General Arakcheieff had proposed and carried out under the preceeding reign. Under this pretty plan, press gangs were now deputed to prowl about the Pale, and forcibly abduct Jewish Boys of from five to ten years of age. These were carried off to the Southern settlement camps, and, after a violent baptism, were trained ^{to} the use of arms and brought up as Soldiers. Jewish Boys are, however, extremely precocious in the matter of theological learning. Their religious education begins so early that at eight their convictions are quite as well grounded as those of their elders. Some of these Lads used to resist baptism, Then it was the commandant's thoughtful custom to put them in solitary confinement and feed them on salt herrings, without water ~~to~~ to drink until they consented to accept the baptismal rite.

"But it was not alone through the machinery of the army that the proselyting screws were put upon Israel. In every walk of life rewards were visibly dangled before the eyes of the Jews if they would forsake Judaism. The local officials, eagerly interpreting and putting into execution the desires of their master, did abominable and often ridiculous things. The only mode of Europeanizing the Czar's Jewish subjects that they could conceive of was, even so late as the days of the Crimean war, to station policemen at the corners of the streets leading to the Jewish quarters, their business being

to catch Jews as they passed and cut off with scissors their long earlocks or peies, and the skirts of their caftans.

"Nicholas II. made serious efforts to plant Jews upon the soil as agriculturists. The story of these attempts is one of the most melancholy in the whole unhappy records of the race—at once melancholy and grimly grotesque.....great colonies of Jews, sometimes numbering hundreds of families, were now gathered up promiscuously, transported across to the desolate prairie lands of Novorossisk, and dumped down upon the unbroken soil to thrive by agriculture. In any case their experiment could have promised scant success. As it was managed it became simply murderous. A staff of officials almost as numerous as the colonists themselves, was appointed to control things. Each family was supposed to be granted one hundred and fifty roubles, but of this the officials gave the family only Thirty. The rest purported to have been expended in buying land, farm machinery, building houses etc. But seven-eighths of it was really stolen, and such colonists as did not die on the road found only groups of shantys not fit for pigs, and implements which broke in their hands. Here under the control of brutal officials who knouted the incapable, but could not advise or instruct the industrious, these unhappy town Jews died of epidemics or starvation. The chief digging they did was digging of graves.

"The report of M. Stempel who was superintendant of the Ekaterinoslav settlements, made in 1847, and which was not especially sympathetic to the Jews, presents an almost incredible tale of suffering. Official documents picture the colonists as arriving at the beginning of winter, to find a cluster of wretched huts, damp, half opened, and too low for a man to stand upright in, prepared for them to inhabit. These cabins had, let it be borne in mind, cost the government enormous sums of money. The Jews begged to be allowed to reconstruct these shantys; ^{it} permission was refused by the officials. Stempel, the superintendant, then suggested that the Jews should be allowed to find shelter in neighboring villages until Spring. This also was refused, and they were peremptorily ordered to occupy the houses assigned to them. Those who had already sought refuge in the villages round about were driven back by the Cossacks, under ~~the~~ circumstances of the greatest barbarism. Epidemics of scurvy and small-pox broke out shortly after".

The discrimination against the Jewish colonists and Jews: in general is further shown by Prof. Leo Errara: "To German and Bulgarian colonists sixty dessiatines of land were given, which they were allowed to select, and new lots were granted to them as their families grew in numbers. They were also permitted to follow

some trade or business according to their liking. To the Jews, however, only thirty dessiatines of land were allotted which were selected by the administration; seven dessiatines were afterwards taken away. When the family increased their very inadequate tract of land was not augmented.....Jewish colonists were absolutely forbidden to obtain any supplementary income for themselves by following some occupation other than that of agriculture *). Nicholas I. still further diminished the Pale of settlement by excluding from its midst the towns of Kiev, Nicolaiev and Sebastopol, and he also renewed the law of his predecessor Alexander I. with regard to the fifty versts on the Eastern frontier, a radius within which it was forbidden to the Jews to erect their domicile**). Expulsion from cities was also resorted to, as in the good old times of the Middle Ages. In 1829 the Jews were banished from Nicolaiev, but were recalled in 1830 when it was recognized how great an injury it has caused the city***). In the same year the Karaim Jews of Trok, Wilna, obtained a decree of expulsion against the other Jews of the town****). The Christian guilds of Knyshin, in 1845 procured-

*) The Russian Jews, P. 161.

**) Ibid, Chapter 3.

***) Ibid P. 175.

****) Harold Frederic, The New Exodus. P. 85.

the expulsion of the Jews from their town; in 1858 we find them admitting that this has done injury to the place and begging that the order be revoked*). The "Milchcow theory" was in full vogue in Russia. And yet Prof. Leo Errara has the goodness to remark that "With these exceptions it would be unjust to ignore the comparative peace (?) which the Jews enjoyed in this reign; or to forget that the Czar allowed them to leave their own special districts in order to visit the great fairs",**) as if the great fairs could be successful without the help of Jewish merchants. The only redeeming feature in the reign of Nicholas was the exception made in Russian Laws in favor of the Jews who have graduated at the higher schools of the Empire, by which they were allowed liberty of residence throughout the realm. The facilities which he finally offered to the Jews in the matter of education were not, however, very generally improved during this reign. The Jews remembered his early devices of abducting and forcibly baptising their boys, and suspected some new scheme of conversion or perversion in this opening of the schools.

The result of such persecution was, in the words of Harold

*) Harold Frederic, The New Exodus, P. 84.

**) Leo Errara, The Russian Jews., P. 75.

Frederic, "To solidify the Jews into a dense, a hard baked, and endlessly resistant mass". The policy of conversion, aimed at their very life-blood, their religion, was opposed with all the determination of despair. They clung to the study of the Talmud; and all the minutiae of the Rabbinical laws were practiced and regarded as essentials of Judaism. Withdrawing deeper and deeper within themselves, and farther and farther away from the outside world, they gradually came to look upon anything that was not Jewish as against Judaism. They looked with hatred upon secular education as subversive of Judaism or, at best, as useless, and as a waste of time which should be devoted with better advantage to the Torah. Every Jewish Youth was taught the Bible and Talmud; but the study of the latter was considered even more important ^{than} that of the former, apparently because the latter was often the subject of attack and ridicule by the enemies of Judaism. The Shulhan Aruch was the code of law, and all its practical laws, together with the glosses of Isserles, were observed in all their details. Pilpulism in the study of Rabbinical writings was developed to the utmost degree. The great mass of the people, and particularly the Chassidim, was sunk in the deepest superstitions and fanaticism. Devils and Ghosts were believed in; miracles on the part of the Rabbis were reported and taken for undisputable facts. Talmudic fables were taken literally; charms

cameos, and Gilgulim were considered essentials of religion. The Rabbis, eager to protect Judaism from the pressure brought to bear against it by Nicholas, became very rigorous in their decisions of Rabbinical laws. Moreover, Nicholas placed a tremendous weapon in the hands of the elders and Orthodox leaders in every Jewish community by making the Kahal or Jewish consistories responsible for the furnishing of Quotas of Jewish recruits. The old people of the strict Talmudic sect had it in their power to deliver over to the bondage of the Army, at their own discretion and at any time, any young Jew who offended them, or whose opinions they regarded as dangerous because Heterodox.*). Nor did they hesitate to misuse their power in this way. The officials of the Jewish consistories were, for the most part, greedy, unscrupulous men who used their tremendous powers for their own gain. Poor boys were often substituted for those of the rich eligible to conscription, for a money consideration which the elders pocketed. This misrule resulted in a state of Anarchy. The abduction of small boys by the press gangs, many of whom were Jews, spread terror and desolation in most Jewish homes; the "Catchers" were particularly the objects of abhorrence, and often summary vengeance was heaped upon them. The children of the "Catchers" were often murdered

*) Harold Frederic, The New Exodus, P. 80. Instances of this kind or frequent in Hebrew fiction. See המחנה העברי המחנה העברי המחנה העברי

by the exasperated parents of the abducted children. Add to this the extreme poverty of the populace, for Jews were not allowed either to lease or own land, or to engage in commerce and manufacture, and the picture of horror is complete.

Under such circumstances it seems almost miraculous that, in spite of the inner and outer isolation of the Jews, the light of Western civilization succeeded in penetrating the darkness of the Pale. It did though, through the Haskalah movement, and gradually lighted up the Jewish horizon. It started in Königsberg, under the influence of Mendelssohn and Wessely. In 1783, a band of Jewish young men enthusiastic for the cause of introducing European culture among their brethren, founded a Hebrew periodical, the *godes*, Gatherer, as a medium of Propaganda. The contributors to this periodical, Euehel, Bresslau, Friedlander, Wolfshon, Fridrichsfeld, Satanow, and others, were mostly men who combined profound Hebrew knowledge with academic training, and were inspired with sincere desire to introduce reforms in Judaism, and to show to their brethren the necessity of a secular education in connection with their religious training. The literary productions of the Measeph have no enduring value; but they served their purpose at the time, and, unconsciously perhaps, they laid the foundation for a new Hebrew literature which was destined to become

a great factor in the uplifting of their people in Russia and Poland. The Measeph contained Biblical exegeses, occasional poems and biography, and did a great deal towards purifying the Hebrew language from the conceits and artificial diction of former writers. It brought about a revival in the Jewish national conscientiousness; it inspired a feeling of love for the people and its language, and the desire for the perpetuation of both. Their object was not assimilation and the destruction of Judaism. *) Judaism was then secure enough in the disciples of Ezekiel Landau and Raphael Cohen. What they worked for was to show to the Jews who were steeped in pilpulism that the outside world was also worth while noticing and that a secular education was a necessity **). They did not think the Haskalah subversive of Judaism. They had complete faith in the possibility of uniting Judaism with culture. Yet unconsciously their intentions were national; else, how account for their eagerness to resurrect the forsaken Hebrew tongue; for the purifying of the language, for their joy at every new apparition on the horizon of Hebrew literature? The writers of this period were men who had a message to their generation,

*) The allegation made by S. L. Citron (see *מאמרים על חז"ל* P. 479) That those writers who wrote scientific articles in German, purposely wrote poor ones in Hebrew, in order to prove that the Hebrew is unfit as a medium for useful and essential thought, is too far fetched. The critic forgets that the Hebrew reading public was altogether different from the German. Who could understand scientific articles in Hebrew at that time? --- **) J.A. Trivash, *מאמרים על חז"ל* VIII. P. 229

and their plain and impressive words were both new and useful to their readers.*).

The Measeph ceased publication in 1797; but the foundation thus laid by them of a new literature was finally established. The Measeph was succeeded in 1821 - 32 by the בנין organized by Solomon Cohen and conducted along the same lines. Its literature was not of a high order. It was filled either with reprints from the Measeph or with meaningless ~~ixxxx~~ Rhymes and with philosophyzing articles, the works of Tyros**). This was a period of Homonouli, of small idealists and small ideals; if they had any ideals at all they were negative: "That we might not believe in falsehood and not turn after false opinions", בנין (***). Literature was not confined to great writers, everybody wrote who only knew Hebrew. They wrote not with any special object in view, but for the sake of seeing their name in print, and as an exercise in Hebrew; above all -- because other nations wrote and what other nations do Jews must necessarily imitate. They wanted to destroy the old Judaism of the Talmud and the Ghetto. Their ideals were humanitarian and political and

*) Ibid, P. 233.

**) Dr. S. Bernfeld, Life of Rappoport, P. 32.

***) Dr. M. Ehrenpreis, Hashiloah, I. P. 494, and ff.

were simply a repetition of the Haskalah of the Measephim. With all that the Neo-Hebraic literature had made remarkable strides, especially in Galicia. Ereter wrote his innimtable satires on Chassidic life *הצופה לבית ישראל*; Krochmol was busying himself with theological philosophy in his *מורה נבוכי הדור*, and Rappoport was engaged in critical studies on the Bible and Jewish History. Jehudah Leb Ytles who succeeded Moses Landau as Editor of the *בנין* made the paper a real scientific one, and ^athe factor in Jewish life, and his work was continued by S. L. Goldenberg in the *קורא (1833)*. The Maskilim have now become a farce. Their slogan as was that of Rappoport was: "We have to educate our people in order to find favor with our neighbors. We are hated only because ~~we~~ lack culture"°). And the work of education went steadily on.

It was inevitable that the influence of the new movement should make itself felt in Russia and in ~~Russia~~ Poland; as a matter of fact the new movement have its adherents in Russia from its very incipienoy. Even Elijah Wilna, Pietiest and Talmudist that he was, had indirectly and unconsciously contributed towards the advance of the new ideas. He had introduced a new system in Rabbinical studies, discarding pilpulism; he studied Grammar,

°) Dr. S. Bernfeld, Life of Rappoport, P. 14.

(His Grammatical notes on some portions of Genesis are published in Rabinowitz's ספר כנסת ישראל Vol. I.), and encouraged his disciple R. Baruch of ^RSpilow to translate scientific works into Hebrew *). The Measeph at its first appearance had both Polish contributors in Benzev and Satanow and numerous subscribers in Poland and Russia. However, these were individual exceptions; they were not numerous and strong enough to form a class. The new ideas, however, gradually gained ground, and during the reign of Nicholas, the Haskalah in Russia assumed a form of its own, under the influence of Lebenshon, Fuen, H. A. Ginsburg, Slonimsky and I. B. Levenshon.

Isaac Beer ¹⁷⁹⁴⁻¹⁸⁶⁰ Levinshon was a man of remarkable erudition. Not only was he a Talmudic scholar of extraordinary ^aecumen, but he also possessed a knowledge of secular subjects and several European languages. Mastered by sincere love of his people, and by the desire to emancipate them from their intellectual isolation, he brought his great storehouse of Hebrew learning to bear upon this purpose. He realized that all Philosophy and logic could not convince the people that secular education was sanctioned by Judaism-- the only way to accomplish this ~~it~~ was to prove from the Rabbinical sources themselves that the very Rabbinical authorities and all shin-

*) I. H. Wise, אמנות ומעשר in רשימת עמית החשכלה I. P. 10-11

ing lights of Judaism were men who studied the sciences and other languages outside of Hebrew. For this purpose he wrote in 1828 the *תעודה בישראל*. In it he showed by incontrovertable proof from all Jewish sources, that the greatest Rabbis with a few exceptions all recognized the value of secular education, and that a knowledge of the sciences ^{is not} subversive of Judaism. The book was written in such a straightforward manner, free from all sophistry and unnecessary philosophy, and so thoroughly in a Jewish spirit, that even the most ultra-orthodox could find no fault with it, except, indeed, as Rabbi Abele of Wilna expressed it, "That it was not written by Elijah Wilna". Thus, by this book Levinshon removed at once the greatest obstacle to the spread of the Haskalah--the religious prejudice against it. He had convinced his people of the necessity of a knowledge of the vernacular, the sciences, and Hebrew Grammar. In the same year he completed his *בית יעקוב*, a history of Judaism and Jewish sects; and in 1837 he wrote his *אפס דמים* a refutation of the blood accusation charges which was translated into English by Dr. Löwi in 1840 at the instance of Moses Montefiore in connection with the Damascus affair. *)

*) On the life of Levinshon see Gottlober, *Memoires in הקיף*
P. 1 - 11, and I. H. Weiss *in ראשית צמחת הגשלה ברוססיה*
וממציב P. 9 - 16.

The influence which his works in behalf of the education of his people exerted, attracted the attention of the Minister of education and of Czar Nicholas. This favorable notice of the Government he used in founding Jewish schools all over the Empire. In this way Levinsohn, as no other man like him, prepared ^{the} a way for the Haskalah in Russia.

Samuel Joseph Fuen, also a product of the old generation, combined a thorough Talmudic scholarship with a knowledge of modern languages. He was not an original writer; he devoted himself mostly to useful translations into Hebrew which opened a new field for reflection for the thoughtful, among the more important of which were a Bible history after Zunz, (1847), and a Russian Grammar in Yiddish in the same year. He was a teacher in the Hebrew school of Wilna in 1841, and in the Seminary of Wilna which was opened by the Government in 1848. In 1856 he was appointed curator over all the Hebrew schools in the province of Wilna, and by his personal example he showed the possibility of uniting Judaism with culture. However, the greatest service he rendered Hebrew literature was the publication of the ~~may 1844~~, a journal modeled after the Measeph, of which only two volumes appeared, (1841, 1844), and the Karmel, a weekly, in 1859. He took an active part in communal affairs, was

kind and generous--in a word a true idealist. His very personality gained adherents for the cause of the Haskalah. *).

Mordecai Aaron Ginsburg (1796-1846) was, like Fuen, mostly a translator, but he possessed a pure, incisive style, which far surpassed that of his predecessors, and his ~~justly~~^{style} styled the father of Hebrew prose. While he did not create anything lasting, as far as matter is concerned, he taught the younger generation a new language free from the ~~considered~~^{cited} Rhetoric of his contemporaries, and his works ^{are} ~~of~~ even today important as models of style. He wrote several books on the Napoleonic wars in Russia; a history of the blood accusation of Damascus in 1860, and an account of Montefiore's travels in Russia in behalf of his brethren, (1860 **). Slonimsky succeeded to a great extent in popularizing mathematics among his people, by writing works on mathematics and Astronomy in Hebrew. Abraham Baer Lebensohn (1789-1878), a scholar, Grammarian, and Professor in the Wilna Seminary, had by his ^{שירי שפת קודש} gained ^a great reputation as a poet. As a matter of fact, his poetry is nothing but philosophical speculations in rhyme; there is neither depth nor deep feeling in his lines. But he was a great rhetorician,

*) See ^{דבר ודבר} in S.P. Rabinowitz's Kneseth Israel I.

**) See J.S. Taviov: ^{מבאר תפלות} II. P. 139

S.L. Citron, ^{מאמרים} Pardes I. P. 189-90.

a master of hebrew. His notes on Benzev's חמור לשון נבר gained a wide circulation, and thus he, too, like Ginsburg was instrumental in creating a correct literary Hebrew, modeled after European literatures. He also, together with the Bibliographer Ben-Jacob, published the Pentateuch with Mendelsohn's translation, and thus helped to spread a knowledge of German among the young Talmudic students.*).

But, outside of these men, the literature of that period had no relation whatever to the crying needs of the time. Mappu, a brilliant stylist, busied himself in portraying pictures of the past in his חמור לשון ; Kalman Shulman, a poet in prose, labored on translating Eugene Sue's Mysteries of Paris into Hebrew; and Mordecai Plungian, endeavored to explain away difficult passages in the Bible. There was a number of scholars in Russia, outside of those mentioned above, especially those men connected with the two Seminaries. In Wilna there were Shereshevsky, Zalkind, Klatzky, Bahak, and Katzenellenbogen; in Jitomir, Eichenbaum, Zweifel, Suchastover, Baksé, Politzinetzky, Gottlober and Lerner. However, they were all above the people, and were occupied either in scholarly works, or wrote on subjects which had nothing to do with Judaism and their own times.**).

*) See J. S. Taviot חמור לשון P. 94; S.L.Citron חמור לשון P. 189.

**) Ibid, P. 189-193.

None of them thought of finding any ways and means of improving the conditions of their people. "Literature was then one of panegyrics; every writer looked upon himself as a Socrates, a Huss, a Galileo—Martyrs to their ideals".^(*) But they have done nothing to help their people in a practical way.

With all that those men accomplished a great deal. They had created a class, a generation of men, that no longer looked askance at education and culture, and a sect of young men who were ready to sacrifice their all in order to get out of the intellectual Ghetto and to enter the infinite world of secular wisdom. They had transplanted ^{the} new Hebrew literature from Germany where, after all, it was an exotic into the more congenial Russian soil^(**); had gleaned, fenced it, strengthened and purified it. The two Seminaries, while not the success the Government and the early Maskilim hoped it to be, turned out men of education, Hebrew and secular, who helped to disseminate the seed of culture among the people. Of course, the older generation could not but see with

^{*}) Ibid.

^{**}). The Renaissance in the Hebrew language was the result of necessity. The Jews of the Slavic countries, always felt a strong kinship with each other, and felt the need of a common language. In Lithuania there was an additional reason with the destruction of the Polish nationality, the Polish language, also was almost completely forgotten and as no other language was substituted, (The Lithuanians having no written literature), they fell back upon the Hebrew which they enlarged and improved. See Wolf Jabez ^{אברהם בן} in Rabinowitz's Kneseth Israel I. P. 146.

alarm and consternation the spread of the new ideals. Nor did they
hesitate to do everything in their power, by means of ^{ex}communication
and the conscription, to ~~stop~~^{stem} the tide of the new ideas that
threatened to overwhelm them. But they were powerless. A new era
was coming; an era of peace and hope and civilization; an era of toler-
ance and of semi-emancipation; and ^athe new champion arose in Russian
Israel who was to do battle with both the extremists, the too
Europeanized Maskilim, and the too Asiatic Orthodox, in behalf of a
truer, broader, more tolerant Judaism. The new champion was Leon
Gordon.

CHAPTER II.

GORDON IN LITHUANIA.

The new era alluded to, was the reign of Alexander II. This Czar was a man of liberal ideas, and looked favorably upon the Jews. Not that even this liberal Czar ever thought that the Jews of Russia are to be placed on the level with other Russian subjects; but he felt that the restrictive laws of his Father were too cruel and barbarous. None of the exceptional laws of his predecessor was abrogated or blotted out of the statute books; they were merely allowed to lapse and to be connived at. The Czar was influenced by expediency rather than humanitarian motives. It was felt, especially after the disastrous Crimean War, that the country would go to ruin, if the vast resources of the vast Empire were to be neglected--and the Jews, patient, frugal and industrious were the only ones capable of accomplishing that rebuilding. The Czar therefore from 1857-65 gave to Jewish merchants of the First Guild, as well as to artisans, and men of higher education, the right of residence throughout the Empire. *). The number of merchants of the First Guild was very

*) The constitution of this privileged commercial class is a curious one. A Jewish merchant inside the Pale who has annually paid taxes amounting to 1000 Roubles for 5 consecutive years ~~made~~ them go and establish himself provisionally in a city of the interior. Here, for a further term of 10 years he must pay the same amount of taxes. Then his term of probation is over and he may hereafter live in any part of the Empire. A merchant who has been a member of the Guild for 25 years, obtains for himself and his direct descendants the title of Hereditary Citizen which assures to the posterity of its owner the right of residence in any part of the Empire. H. Frederic, The New Exodus P. 93 and Prof. Leo Bruna. The Russian Jews pp. 23-26.

small, but as the law allowed such privileged merchants to take with them as many Jewish clerks as they needed, considerable numbers of Hebrew clerks, book keepers, accountants and superior salesmen were brought into the Interior, under the obvious meaning of this permissive clause. Great numbers of skilled artisans also took advantage of the law in their favor, and migrated into the Interior. On the whole something less than one million Jews succeeded in gaining entrance into the interior during the reign of Alexander II.; and the Police authorities, scenting Liberalism in the air, did not molest even those Jews who obviously had no right of residence in the Interior, only satisfying themselves with as much blackmail money as they could conveniently obtain.

In nothing, however, was this beneficent effect more plainly exhibited than in the matter of education. The Jews have in every land and in every age been distinguished for the prominence they give to the education of the young. In Russia they now have the added incentive of securing the special privileges for their sons which still attach to the Jews of the higher education. "Every Father", says Harold Frederic, "who now could, by doubling his own labor and self denial, send his son to school did so." In the cases of bright and promising Jewish Boys whose parents were too poor, it

was a common thing for the neighbors of the village or quarter to raise a purse among themselves to send them to school". *). This is somewhat exaggerated, as will be seen from what follows; but a very great number did take advantage of the higher education.

"Before 1886," , says Prof. Leo. Errara (The Russian Jews, P. 25)

"When the number of Jews admissable to the Universities ^{was limited} to so many percent, there were forty eight Jewish pupils in the higher schools out of a population of ten thousand inhabitants against twenty two Christian pupils among the same number of inhabitants." Their natural inclination for learning coupled with the incentive of special privileges was not to be neglected.

This change for the better in their political and economic condition, could not but effect a change in the inner life of the Jews. The class of the Maskilim which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, began to flourish even in the unfavorable times of Nicholas, now, and encouraged by the Liberal government, began to assert themselves more and more. The Government is favorably inclined towards the Jews; the restrictive Laws are disregarded, special privileges are given to the educated; is it not probable that final emancipation will be granted the Russian Jews? The Czar

*) Harold Frederic, The New Exodus. P. 19. See The entire Chapter 6 for the above data.

had liberated the serfs; he has the welfare of his lowest subjects at heart; he recognizes the value of his Jewish subjects; his generosity will certainly not stop here; final emancipation is an assured fact. Hence, we must prepare ourselves for the golden future before us. We must therefore take advantage of the educational opportunities offered to us; we must get out of our shell; get a secular education. In a word, we must become Russians. In their eagerness at Russification, a great many of the Maskilim turned a cold shoulder to Judaism, violated Jewish customs and ridiculed and railed at the Orthodox who still clung tenaciously to the study of the Talmud, and refused obstinately to participate in the so-called emancipation movement. This conduct on the part of the Maskilim made them still more obnoxious to the Ultra-Orthodox, both Chassidim and Mithnagdim-- and the latter fought stubbornly against the innovations. Had the Maskilim taken a conciliatory attitude towards the Orthodox, the opposition of the latter had not been so pronounced. As it was, they were filled with hatred and contempt towards the "Berliners" as they nicknamed the Maskilim, and barricaded themselves behind the Talmud and the Yeshiboths, whither they sent their children to counteract the influence of the Maskilim.

The attitude of the Orthodox towards higher secular

education may be illustrated by the following anecdote from the life of Orshansky, a Talmudic student who had gone to Charkov to attend the University. "In one of the Winter nights in 1864, after the evening prayer, our teacher entered the Yeshiboh, crestfallen, sad and disconsolate. Restlessly he walked to and fro, and sighed continually. Never before have we seen our teacher so down-hearted and sad; but we did not dare ask him the cause of it. After a while he turned to us and said: "Have you heard the terrible misfortune that has happened?" "What has happened, and to whom," we all asked tremblingly. "To Elijah Orshansky!" "To Orshansky!" we all exclaimed jumping from our seats; "Has he died? Is he fatally sick?" "No", our teacher answered, "but he is taken from us forever; he is gone to Charkoff to the University, and thus the glory of Judaism is gone forever".*) From the Orthodox point of view, the attendance of a Jewish student at the University was a calamity.

Meanwhile, the struggling Hebrew literature assumed a new form. The Maskilim bent all their energies^{il} towards the enlightenment of the minds of their Orthodox brethren, and for Propaganda established a press. In 1857 the Hamagid was established by Silberman. In 1860 the Hakarmel began to appear in Wilna under

*) Dr. P. Jampolsky in S.P.Rabonowitz's Kneseth Israel Vol.I. P. 859.

the editorship of Samuel Joseph Fuen; in 1861 the Hamelitz began to be issued in Odessa by Alexander Cederbaum, and in 1862 the Hatzephirah by Slonimsky. The Hamagid at first was merely a Newspaper--the editor was a man of mediocrity, who could not even write Hebrew correctly, and aimed at nothing ^{higher} ~~harder~~ than telling the news of the world. All the contributors to this paper were nothing more than mere literary dilettanti who liked to see their names in print, and reported in grandiloquent style the petty occurrences in their respective towns^o). But the Karmel, the Hamelitz and the Hatzephirah were originally organized for the purpose of spreading the Haskalah among the people, and they not only surpassed the Hamagid in language and style, but also in matter. Yet, the Hamagid had accomplished one great good. It had created a class of readers. And now, when the new papers appeared the readers created by the Hamagid received them with ~~an~~ delight. Around these three papers gathered all the Hebrew writers who felt themselves called upon to speak to their people in behalf of the Haskalah. Foremost among these young writers, the (Lion in the company) ^{לֵאון שֶׁבַח בּוֹרֵךְ} was Leon or Jehudah Leeb Gordon.

The destined leader of the Haskalah was born in Wilna in

^o). S.L. Citron, ^{ספר} ^{המגיד} In Pardes Vol. I. P. 180-81.

1831. The son of a wellto do innkeeper, he spent his young days in plenty, even in opulence; and having shown good abilities his ambitious father intended him for a Rabbi, and gave him the usual Rabbinical education. As good luck would have it, his teacher R. Lippman was not of the ordinary run of Melamedim. He was, in his younger days, a disciple of Elijah Wilna, and later of R. Hayim of Valozin, and had imbibed their critical spirit and adopted their method of education. He taught his young pupil first the Pentateuch with a simple commentary, then the prophets in order, and gave him instruction also in grammar. Having mastered the Bible, his teacher introduced him to the Talmud which he had nearly completed at the age of 15'). "At this time," to use his own words, "my eyes were opened to realize that this (the study of the Talmud) was not the way to lead us to our goal. I realized that I was an Asiatic in the midst of enlightened Europe... Then I began to study Hebrew grammar, and the Russian, Polish, German and French languages and other branches of knowledge without the help of a teacher." (Vol. I. P. 82). He was moved to the new course by the spirit of the Haskalah which was very strong in Wilna, the metropolis of Jewish learning, and was perhaps indirectly influenced by his brother-in-law Michael Gordon, a Maskil and a judisch poet. Of his relations with the latter he says: His residence

'). For the Life of Gordon see: Jehudah Leb Gordon; Isaac Jacob Weissberg; I. I. Graber in *אורח חיים* P. 281-282 and Gordons Letters Vol. I. Letter 45.

among us, ipso facto, made me afterwards join the Maskilim who knew and used to visit him. But he, personally, on the contrary was jealous of me, and endeavored to dissuade me from my ambition of becoming a Hebrew poet'). About this time his father became poor, and the young Gordon was thrown on his own resources; and after a two years' preparation and study of Russian literature and other branches, he obtained in 1853 an appointment as teacher for Jewish children in the government school of Ponikvaz, Kevno, and was thus perforce thrown into the conflict between the Haskalah and Orthodoxy.

As was intimated above, the Jews looked with distrust upon everything undertaken by Nicholas I with reference to the Jews, and they looked with ~~as~~ special apprehension upon the numerous schools that Czar had established for Jewish children, aiming as Nicholas did at conversion. The teachers of these government schools were looked upon by the multitude as aiders and abettors in the conspiracy of conversion. Hence the very acceptance of Gordon as a teacher in a government school, was considered tantamount to a challenge of war - and Gordon did throw down the gauntlet. In the 19 years he taught school (1853-61 in Ponikvaz; 61-65 in Shavli, and 65-72 as curator, or school supervisor in Telz) he never flinched from his duty, though his very residence in the small towns was repugnant to him. In a letter written April 13, 1866 he says: "Both Pomievez and Telz are small towns, ^{min} near clusters of huts

where you can find neither writers nor scholars, nor even intelligent people. They are mostly given to business, and absorbed in superstition; all are sunk in a lethargy which no spirit of the time can awake. And should there chance among them a man with open eyes - he will find no rest there; the fanatic's embitter his life."'). Again, in a letter of March 16, 1867 he writes: "The Jews here as elsewhere may be divided into four classes: a) Learned idiots: oxen that lick the grass on one side of the mountain, not knowing that on the other side stretches a green, pleasant field; b) pious idiots who observe all ^{minute} ~~minimal~~ of the law without studying them; c) Intelligent idiots, who allow themselves a certain latitude in their religious life because they heard somebody else say it was permitted and d) plain idiots'). No wonder that such environments were not congenial to a man of Gordon's temperament. Moreover, the ducklings of Telz were not pleased with the conduct of his school, because he made the children speak Russian and opened a school for girls! They denounced him to the director, curator, governor and governor-general that he was spreading ^{atheism} ~~otherwise~~ among their children and similar charges. The fanatics: were desperate because they felt that they were powerless to cope with the Haskalah'). Gordon, however, persisted in his course, undaunted by the attacks of his enemies, and did succeed in lifting the load of superstition from the shoulders

'). Letters P.102 Vol.1.

'). Ibid P.105

'). Letters Vol.1. P.108

of the younger generation with whom he came in immediate contact.

But Gordon was not satisfied with this activity in his narrow sphere. He had a message to the whole people - and he threw himself heart and soul in the work before him. The press which had lately been organized, particularly the *Hakarmel* and the *Hamliz* raised the new literature at one bound from an indefinite lifeless mass into a living, compact organism. The new literature had a mission - to enlighten and improve the condition of their people. All the *Masklim* flocked about the two papers, and Gordon, in particular was welcomed with open arms. His fame was already spreading. His first poetic work, *"התורה והנביא"*, which appeared in 1857, had placed him at once at the head of the new literature. He was recognized at once as the great poet of whom the people was so much in need. His vast comprehensive store of knowledge of Hebrew literature of all times, marked him also as a scholar, and his keen, incisive style, and the purity and force of his diction, became at once a subject of comment and imitation. "The Polish Jews are exceedingly fond of lofty rhetoric, and elevated style, noble expressions and strong enthusiasm, for this reason the young generation, at the beginning of the 19th century, admired Schiller so much." '). Gordon possessed the above characteristics in an eminent degree. He was therefore,

'). Dr. S. Bermfeld; Life of Rappoport, P.6.

easily recognized as the leader of the new literature.

He aimed chiefly at purifying Judaism, and the lopping off of the mass of superstitious practices which clogged the development of Russian Jews along the line of progress, both materially and intellectually. "Our material improvement depends upon religious reform," he says. "Our people live on air; the new generation is brought up in the Heder under idiotic and ignorant teachers; the Rabbis busy themselves with hair-splitting studies that are absolutely worthless, paying no regard whatever to the needs of the people. Shall such conditions remain as they are? Need they no improvement?.... We must not stand idly by! It is the duty of every one who has the interests of his people at heart to fight against such conditions. All the "fences around the law" might have been necessary at the time they were instituted, but are superfluous today. I do not believe in destroying all memories of the past with which the life of our people is bound up, nor in giving up the hope for a future.... I seek the golden mean: To unite pure faith with reason and the needs of the time. Only by an orderly system of education, uniting secular knowledge with Judaism and the love for our people, can we prepare ourselves for better days." '). "Faith not based on understanding is worse than atheism. Every day you reiterate your belief in the coming of the Messiah; but both you who await

'). Letters Vol.1, P.148.

his miraculous arrival daily, and the German reformers who disregard that prayer, are alike ~~the~~ denying this great principle. Miracles do not happen every day. The recital of that prayer is merely mechanical; you don't think of what you say. Suppose the Messiah does come; what good can he expect from you? From the midst of the educated Jews he can appoint his officers, physicians, secretaries, etc. But what can you accomplish with your pilpulistic arguments, and the study of the Maharshoh? Will you become the law-givers, and reestablish the ארכאית ביהדות and other punishments for the least violation of the most insignificant ~~RUSSIAN~~ practices? Will not other nations rise against you and destroy you in one day?..... No, my friends, you must prepare the younger generation for the coming of the Messiah which, however, can happen only in a natural way. You must change your system of education. Give the intelligent that useful education of secular knowledge which a modern man must possess. Teach trades and occupations to those who are not capable of study. Teach our merchants to be scrupulously honest in their dealings both with Jews and Non-Jews; institute order in the conduct of your communal affairs; eradicate from the hearts of the youth the hatred towards other religions and their adherents; then the hope of Israel may be realized; then the world will see that we are not opposed to knowledge, and the freedom will be given us to develop along the lines of our own genius, and we will be able

to enrich all mankind by bringing into play the gifts of intellect with which God had endowed us. Only by good deeds may we gain the friendship of mankind." ').

Such were the sentiments and ideas of Gordon. Couched in the forcible and impressive style he was master of, they could not but ^{reach} ~~impose~~ his readers - and this note of conciliation and petition is characteristic of Gordon. With all that he was abused by his opponents, especially by a certain Moses David Wolfsohn, (supposed to be Zachariah Joseph Stern, Rabbi of Shavli) in the Lebanon, ^{what} ~~also~~ heaped upon him personally the most disgraceful epithets. Gordon scorned such method of criticism. "Let our writing but be based on absolute truth and we will succeed. Truth is the most dangerous weapon against falsehood." '). He ignored the slander of the critic. Then the enemies of the Haskalah issued a pamphlet ^{מלחמה בשלום}, directed against him and Lillienblum, to which they responded in another pamphlet ^{מלחמה בשלום} (1870). They denied the accusation that their main object ^{was} ~~is~~ to overthrow the Rabbinate, and thus destroy Judaism. No, all they want is to force reforms upon them, proving at the same time the crying need of reform in Rabbinical Judaism.

His attitude towards the Rabbis is one of bitter antagonism. He can never forgive them their indifference towards the needs of the time, and their obstinate refusal of any reforms

'). See ^{מלחמה בשלום} ~~מלחמה בשלום~~, בינה למה, Letters 88. Vol.1.

'). Letters 1. P.167.

whatever, and lays all the misfortune of the Jews and their ignorance of the world at the door of the Rabbis. In the heat of the war he made upon ignorance he uses the shafts of his sarcasm unsparingly against both Rabbis and Talmudic teachers - the product of the Rabbis. Thus, for instance in his satire *ברבינו אבות* he ridicules the tendencies of the Rabbis to interpret the ^{dis}der-tary laws in the most rigorous sense. A poor woman bought two turkeys in the winter, and pampered them up to the time of Pasach, and thought with delight of the good times she and her numerous family would have during Pasach week; how she would sell part of the meat to her rich neighbor, and therewith buy Matzes and wine for her family, and how she would use the unsold part for her children, and what a general good time they would have. The turkeys were slaughtered accordingly on Pasach eve. Unfortunately a red spot was found on the esophagus. Frightened she ran to the Rabbi. Although there was no blood nor any ^{er} perforation, the Rabbi declared it "Trefah," because "the esophagus may have been perforated and healed;" and thus the poor woman remained without food for the holidays. The poet consoles her in her misfortune caused by the "mercilessness of the Rabbis" by saying. "You must not despair poor woman: Jews are charitable; you can support yourself by going begging" ¹). Again he ridicules the Rabbis for their partiality in interpreting the laws in their own favor. Thus in *הנהגת חסידים* ²). he tells the following anecdote.

¹). Satire 9. *יהודה* שש"י גס אלה Vol.4.

²). Ibid, Satire 10.

"A crime had been committed by a Jewish young man - he violated the Sabbath by carrying a watch in his vest-pocket. The Rabbi was incensed at the transgressor, when he heard it. "A watch is is a vessel," he said, and must not be carried on Sabbath." He ordered to bring the culprit before him for punishment as a warning to other transgressors. When the culprit was brought before him, he recognized in him his own son. The Rabbi stroke his beard for some time, and then said: "Well, on the contrary, a watch is an ornament, and is therefore permitted to carry on Sabbath." The culprit was released. Again, in his novellette (שם). he tells of a Rabbi who on a certain Sabbath morning, declared all the meat as Trefah, at the instigation of his wife who did not succeed in getting a certain portion of calves meat which she liked. Exaggerated and ridiculous as the above quoted stories seem to be, there is certainly a great deal of truth in them. The Rabbis did insist upon the observance of all the most trifling minutiae of the law - and caused a great deal of inconvenience and discomfort by their rigorous decision. Still, Gordon's charges of partiality in judgment, and interpretation of the law for selfish ends are unjust. The Rabbis, narrow minded and unyielding with regard to the law, were the most scrupulous of men. Whatever may be said against them, they were sincere and honest. Of course, the satirist, for the purpose of showing to what absurd extent the stickling after the letter of the law will

lead if carried out to its full logic selected the most extreme and impossible cases; but they must not be taken as characteristic. Gordon is likewise unjust in holding the Rabbis responsible for the misfortune of the Jews. It is undoubtedly true that, had the Rabbis been men of a more practical turn of mind, and of a character that is ready to steer with the wind, Judaism would have been freed from some of its objectionable features, the result of isolation. But then the Rabbis themselves were the product of those historical forces which made Judaism what it is. They were the result rather than the cause of Jewish isolation. After all, what would have become of Judaism, during so many ages of persecution, had the Rabbis been more yielding and removed the "fences" from around the law? With the least breath of freedom, many Jews were ready to throw off the restraints Judaism placed upon them, and to become traitors to their brethren. Could the Rabbis have sanctioned such action? Gordon himself acknowledged it. In an undated letter he says: '). "After all, the complaints of the ultra-orthodox against the Haskalah and the Maskilim are not without ground, though not for the reasons assigned by them. To our sorrow we must realize, ^{that} the culture we are striving after will make us drink gall and produce thistles instead of flowers. We lament not because of the customs neglected, or the "fences" broken down, or the burden of practices and observances thrown off; but because the unruly waters have reached to the very soul of our religion; and a keen sword lies at the

1) Letters, 2. P. 438.

very throat of our faith and its existence. A true Haskalah like that of Saadgah, Maimonides, and Mendelssohn is very scarce among us; an imaginary, destructive Haskalah prevails. The Maskilim have taken the shell of civilization and dressed themselves in it for appearance's sake; but the kernel they have thrown away. They combine the unpleasant traits of the places they left and of those whither they came; they are not particular about religious commandments, and have no scruples in adopting even those practices which have given Israel such an unenviable reputation among the gentiles. The Maskilim of the better sort are truly educated men - but they are traitors and are ashamed of their own race." Were not the Rabbis justified in opposing a movement which tended to produce such a progeny?

Gordon, however, had a theory of his own, founded on a historical basis, with regard to the tendencies to extremes. He says; '). : "The struggle between the old and the new which is going on in our midst now is the result of a natural development. A person accustomed to a certain line of conduct, or given to one extreme, and desires to habituate ^{himself} to the mean, goes first to the opposite extreme, until the two extremes are united, and he returns to the golden mean (Maimonides). The tendency of the present generation towards the extreme of modern civilization is a natural result of the former tendency towards the extreme of

'). Letters, Vol.2., P.439.

religiousness, and there is hope that in the end the extremists will return and meet on common ground. Our religion even in its first, its Mosaic, form did not strike root in the hearts of our people in one generation. The Book and Sword were always wrapped together. Many generations and centuries passed, and not without wars and confusion, before Israel removed the strange gods from his midst. Many generations and centuries passed also after that, not without schisms and dissensions, until the Mosaic became the Jewish religion, and until the Rabbinic law spread and became an integral part of Judaism. We who ~~are~~ were born many ages after these struggles and revolutions, and try to lead a peaceful life, are disturbed when we see that the age of excommunication has returned, and the struggle has been renewed. The days of disorder may be prolonged; but the spirit of God which has been with us ever since the beginning of our history will finally produce out of these mixed elements a substance solid and perfect. The useless ingredients will disappear, and the solid and living matter will survive, and form the foundation of the new improved world." But in order to bring about the "golden mean" it was necessary first to combat superstition and ignorance, to remove the weeds which have grown all over the vineyard of the Lord, and which the Rabbis guarded as carefully as though they formed part and parcel of that vineyard. Hence his fight against the Rabbis. When the opposite tendency manifested itself, Gordon was again in the van to combat it, too, in order to prepare the way for the golden mean in the end.

Chapter 3.

Gordon in Petersburg.

The decade from 1860-70 was a momentous one in the development of the Haskalah, and its champions carried the day. The new liberal policy of the government with regards to the Jews, and the constant call of the Maskilim upon their brethren to rise from their long sleep, have, to a considerable extent, helped to Europeanize the Russian Jews. The spirit of the west was wafted even into the Yeshiboth; the hulwork of Rabbinism, and removed from there the best and most promising Talmudic students. The Hamelitz and the Hazephirah, through their columns teeming with the masterly feillentious of Gordon, and the more serious articles of his and those of his fellow champions, opened their eyes. It must be borne in mind, in order to understand the great influence these papers wielded, especially upon the Talmudic students, that any book outside of the regulation codes and folio volumes of the Talmud were strictly interdicted in the Yeshiboth. This interdict alone lent a certain charm to its violation. Stolen water tastes sweet. The above papers were secretly smuggled in in the Rabbinical schools, and their contents were eagerly absorbed. A new world was presented to them - a world of intellect pictured in the most glowing colors. Eager for knowledge as most of the Talmudic students were, this presentation of an unlimited sphere of knowledge outside of the Talmud inflamed their imagination - and they began to study secular subjects. In the dead of night, when all the students and the proctors retired to rest, the newly awakened spirits would steal into the woman's department of the synagogue, and there, for the flickering light of a wax candle

would pore over the Hamelitz and Hazephirah, Hebrew grammar, or a Russian and German book, till the footsteps of the early risers would warn them that dawn was near, and they would then retire to their beds on the benches of the synagogue, and rise with the others as if nothing had happened. The more choice spirits that could be trusted would communicate with each other, and secret societies of the Maskilim would thus be organized. In the day time, in order to avoid suspicion, they would rock diligently over their folio volumes, to the usual sing-song, thinking perhaps in the meantime of some poem or satire of Gordon's which appeared lately in one of the periodicals - and chuckle with secret satisfaction at the thought of the wry face the superintendent would make were he to know in what studies they indulged the previous night. Not^{it} frequently did the big folio volume serve as a receptacle for some interdicted little book in Russian or German which the student perused under the apparent cloak of Talmud study. This would be carried on for some time, until one fine day the Yeshiboh was startled by the announcement that the best and most diligent arm-Bachur had become a student of the Gymnasium. A search in all desks for dangerous books would then follow; some saved themselves by making away with any books in their possessions. Those who were discovered with anything that savored of the Haskalah would be expelled from the school, and were thus ipso facto, thrown, as it were, into the ranks of the Maskilim. (Persecution always defeats its own ends). Their eager perusal of the Hamelitz, taught them Hebrew, and not a few of

these exiled Talmudists became later on good writers and worked for the spread of the Haskalah.

In 1864 a new champion for the Haskalah appeared in the shape of the ~~Haskalah~~^{Hashahar}, a monthly by Peter Smolensky. Its editor was a man of pronounced literary abilities, a ready pen and incisive mind - above all, a fearless independent thinker. He aimed at making his magazine a purely literary one, in its European meaning. Smolensky possessed a winning personality, and succeeded in gathering around his magazine the most talented Hebrew writers. The literature of the Hashahar was full of dignity. It contained scientific articles that were full of interest and instruction. The contributors to its columns preached reforms in Judaism, and called upon their people¹ to leave the intellectual Ghetto to participate in the universal culture'). Its popularity was immense. Every new issue was anticipated with eagerness and impatience, and read and reread, until its contents were known almost by heart. This magazine also was circulated among the Talmudic students, and did even more effective work among them than the weeklies above mentioned. Gordon recognizing the beneficent influence of the Hashahar affiliated himself with it from its very beginning. He willingly, even eagerly, contributed his best and longest poems to its columns which only tended to make the Hashahar still more popular. His contributions were all gratis. He wrote in order to arouse his people to the reality of modern life, and the Hashahar was a worthy vehicle for his

¹). Dr. M. Ehrenpreis, Hashiloah 1. P.495.

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הוי מי יחוש בתי דות, מי דה יודיעני
אם לא האחרון בשוררי ציון הנני,
אם לא גם אתם הקוראים הארונים?

undertook to cope with the new danger. The efforts of both Smolensky and Gordon were directed towards bringing the young extreme Maskilim back into the fold; to unite Jewish feeling with European culture;'). or in the words of Gordon to unite a "Jewish heart with a human head." '). Smolensky writing Hebrew only, began to preach nationalism, an ideal which strongly appealed both to the old and the young generation. Gordon, on the other hand, when writing Hebrew never spared his people. "I think it harmful and dangerous to flatter my people when I write Hebrew," he said. He always called attention to faults and abuses, and bad practices. It may safely be said that the people like censure when skillfully and cleverly told. But Gordon, in order to reach the Russianized Jews who read Hebrew no more, wrote in Russian. But his policy was different. ~~Here~~ he tried to show the nobility of Judaism, and the purity of motive underlying it. He defended his people against all false allegations and accusations and upheld the dignity of the Jewish character. In a letter to Frishman (May 1885) he says: You know that outside of my Hebrew writings I wrote a great deal in Russian too. In these articles, whenever I touched upon the Jewish question I was very careful not to criticize my people in order not to give our enemies the least pretext. I look upon my quarrel with my own people as a family affair with which no outsider should interfere. On the other hand, in my Russian writings I always defend our people so as to

'). Mordecai Cohen: in ^{IV} Kheseth Israel 1. 258.

'). Letters Vol.1. P.183.

call upon myself the wrath of the antisemites, as in my polemic with Brafman in the "Colos" in 1876, and with the "Golas" itself in 1872. I even heard that many of the upper classes with whom I came in contact wondered whether I was really an enlightened man or a fanatic like others" '). Such a double policy may prove dangerous; by such duplicity a man may lose both sides. But Gordon's motives were too pure, too unselfish to be suspected. The orthodox were grateful to him for defending their cause, and he inspired his Russianized Jewish readers, by appealing to their pride, with feelings of love and loyalty to their brethren.

A new field of activity presented itself to Gordon, when in 1872, he was called to Petersburg to take the office of Secretary of the Jewish community, and the Society for the Propaganda of Haskalah. The Jewish community in Petersburg was one of the largest in the empire - but before Gordon's arrival, owing to its lack of organization, its affairs were in a state of confusion. The communal board had charge of all Jewish institutions, synagogues, schools, hospitals, and charities. Gordon, as a secretary, brought order in every department. He introduced decorum in the synagogues, and reforms in all other branches of the communal affairs. Of special importance was the influence he exercised upon the Society for the spread of the Haskalah of which he was the secretary too. The society was organized in 1861, for the purpose of agitating and spreading culture among Russian

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'). Letters 2. P. 159.

Jews. At the head of the movement stood Baron Morace Ginzburg, and to it belonged the richest and most cultured Jews from all over the empire. Elijah Haakavy and Leon Rosenthal were its leading spirits. The society established a stipendiary fund for indigent Jewish students, encouraged and supported Jewish writers of merit, and, in general, watched over the intellectual welfare of Russian Jewry. Through his connection with this society, Gordon came in daily contact with the most intellectual and influential Jews, and used his power in behalf of furthering the interests of the Hebrew literature. Hebrew authors turned to him with requests for support, and as soon as he recognized the value of a certain work he did not rest until the society took up its publication. He likewise helped a great many former Talmudic students who had come to Petersburg to get an education by obtaining for them a stipend from the funds of the society. Gordon was also instrumental in the publication of a Pentateuch translation in Russian by the Society, recognizing the unreliability of the former Christian translations (1874). In this way Gordon became the intermediary between the Jews of the Pale and those of the capital, and the mouthpiece of Russian Jewry in their communication with Jews of the other countries.

The seven years from 1872 to 1879 were the busiest of Gordon's life. The immense amount of work connected with his office was ¹ ~~sufficient to~~ furnished enough work for two men; but Gordon did it all alone in the most scrupulous and efficient manner. Busy though he was, he still managed to find time to continue his literary work, both in

Hebrew and in Russian. His contributions at that time were confined mostly to the Hashahar and the Hamelitz. For the Hashahar he wrote poems, and for the Hamelitz humorous sketches and Feuilletons under the heading of ^{הד} ~~הד~~ ^{הד} which ~~was~~ read with delight by the thousands of the readers of the Hamelitz. This activity must have been extremely congenial to him; he was a hard worker by nature. His daily contact with the elite of the capital ^ה must also have been very pleasant to him, especially by contrast with the ignorant and superstitious men and women in whose society he had spent the best nineteen years of his life. But his peace of mind, and the congenial activity ~~were~~ not to last long. He does not seem to have been ~~very~~ very popular with the young people of the capital. His strong, unyielding nature was not agreeable to them. They accused him of a desire for domineering and of catering to the rich'). His unpopularity was so marked that in 1874, when, at the request of the government, a conference of Jewish representations ^ה met at Petersburg to discuss the Jewish question, Gordon was not invited at the banquet given by the young men in honor of the delegates'). Soon a controversy broke out in the Jewish community with regard to the election of a Rabbi. Two candidates were in the field. Gordon sided with one; his opponents with the other. To get rid of Gordon's ~~opposition~~ opposition, some of the adherents of the other candidate, denounced Gordon to the government as a nihilist. At two in the morning, on the Sab-

'). See Mordecai Cohen ^ה ~~ה~~ ^ה in Ahiasaph Almanac
סוף P. 141-142.

'). Ibid P. 144

bath before Passover of the year 1879 (March 18) the police swooped down upon his house, serached all his papers, and carried him and his wife to the Lithuanian ^{new Citadel} ~~citadel~~ where they were kept in close ~~XXXXXXXX~~ confinement for six weeks. On the third of May he and his wife, accompanied by gendarmes were banished to Petrozavodsk in the province of Olonetz in N. W. Russia where they stopped 8 days and were then ordered to live in the suburb of Pudosh. Of course, the charges proved false, and they were allowed to return to Petersburg on August 11, 100 ~~ix~~ days after their exile. ')).

This ⁺outrage on Gordon caused a sensation throughout Russian Jewry, and especially so in the capitol. It seems though th at his former friends did nothing for him to bring about his release. ')). The latter years of Alexander the Second's reign were days of confusion and disturbance. The Nihilists were exceedingly active; the police suspected everybody of conspiracy. In fact no man trusted another. Brother suspected brother, and friend his friend. This ~~is~~ said in extenuation of the conduct of the Jewish prominent men. They may have feared that their exertions in behalf of one suspected of Nihilism might cast suspicions on themselves. Fortunately Gordon's own brother, and his son-in-law Max Kaplan were prominent lawyers of the capital, and they succeeded in bringing about his release. But the whole affair could not but cast a gloom over the usual optimistic Gordon. In a letter to Zeeb Kaplan, his life long friend, the father of his son-

in-law, written from exile he says with bitter sarcasm '). "Perhaps, after all, it was all for the best. In the course of my life success crowned my efforts.... From a low station in life I worked my way up to a high position, and sat in the councils of Jewish great men. I had some part of the "Crown of Torah," some part of the "Crown of Greatness," and through my son-in-law (a Cohen) also some part of the crown of priesthood..... I lacked only the Crown of Martyrdom.... and God gave me that too." In an article "Retrogression not Progress" as well as in another letter to Koplan,'). in which he concludes that the Jews are going backward instead of forward, he refers to his own affair as a case in point. "My latest experience," he says "is one of the proofs that we are retrogressing. Time was when the Haskalah made progress, truth sprouted from the earth, and superstition was hushed. Now it is the reverse. The blind crawl out of their holes, and presume to lead. The Rabbinical seminaries are closed because R. Samuel Mohilev requested the ministry to close them; the Rabbinical conference is busying itself with nonsense. Gordon is put out of the way, that his opponents might carry their point. The Maskilims are silent because it is an evil time." In the meanwhile his position had been given to another - and his means of support were thus withdrawn. This circumstance naturally added to his disappointment. But Gordon did not despair long. His forced absence had extinguished the hatred which ^{the} his younger men

'). Letters 158.

'). Letters P. 265 Vol.1.

felt against him; the Ginzburgs and Poliakoff~~as~~ assured him of their sympathy and aid; Hebrew writers all over the country congratulated him upon his freedom, and looked upon him as a martyr. His friends wanted him to occupy his former position as secretary, but he refused to take it. He supported himself by teaching the sons of Baron Ginzburg and by literary labors, chiefly in Russian, in the "Voskhod."

In the days of his gloom Gordon thought that he had been completely forgotten by his people, and that all his labors in the Hebrew literature were in vain. Under these gloomy impressions he writes to Kaplan (Nov. 13, 1879) "You say" Bestir yourself for the sake of thy love for our holy tongue, and for its history on whose pages thy name will sparkle like a star... Poor innocent! Do you really expect the names of our writers to shine like stars and not to vanish like meteors or will-of-the-wisps? Do you not see that a thick cloud hangs over the language and its writers to darken and destroy them? Where are those who are to write the history of our time, and to plant there new heavens and new ~~new~~ stars?..... Can't you foretell the future? Sadducees busying themselves with Hellenistic philosophy and Pharisees with useless nonsense. Such are the Jewish classes of the future. Who of them will point out the new stars you are speaking about? Why do you persuade yourself into the ~~new~~ false notions that my name will live forever!'). But he was soon to realize what hold he had upon the affection of the cultured classes of his people.

'). Letters Vol. 1. P. 269.

On October 8, 1881, 25 years were completed from the time Gordon's first poem ~~בְּיָמֵינוּ~~ appeared; and the Maskilim all over Russia determined to celebrate this occasion, and to show Gordon that he is understood and appreciated. The elite of Petersburg gave a grand banquet in his honor; he was presented with a golden pen and a loving cup; hundreds of telegrams from nearly every Jewish town in Russia arrived. Gordon awoke to a new reality, and the consciousness that his work so far had not been in vain, cheered him up, and urged him to continue his efforts at bringing enlightenment to his people, and at strengthening and building up the Hebrew literature. In 1880 he became the unofficial editor of the Hamelitz, and instituted beneficent reforms in its conduct for which he gained the gratitude of all Hebrew writers ¹). It must be borne in mind that while newspapers in other languages are not considered literary in the full sense of the word, and would not be taken as models of style, the Hebrew newspapers were the only school in which Jewish writers acquired their literary training. For an entire generation the Hamelitz was the only literary tribunal. Unfortunately, for many years its editorship was in incompetent ^{hands}. The editor, Alexander [~]Federbaum, looked upon the articles contributed to its columns as his private property. He took all liberties with them, distorted, shortened or lengthened them at pleasure. Often the writer could not at all recognize his own article. The editor sometimes inserted personal abuses against his enemies in articles contributed by their

¹). The relation of Gordon to the Hamelitz is derived largely from

friends, and simply changed their thoughts to suit himself. It must be acknowledged that Cederbaum sometimes published in the Hamelitz articles that were opposed to his own interests, and when the public good demanded it, he spared neither the rich nor the Rabbis to whom he usually catered. But it is also true that he used the paper for his own personal aggrandizement, and praised himself and his achievements ad nauseam.

Therefore the announcement that Gordon was to be its editor was hailed with delight by the host of Hebrew writers. Gordon set himself immediately to correct the abuses. The young writers looked up to him as the leader of the Hebrew literature, and the very fact that his name was connected with the paper inspired them with confidence. Therefore, when Gordon issued a circular to the Hebrew writers to work with him in the Hamelitz, every one responded cheerfully. When in 1885, he became official co-editor with Cederbaum with the permission of the government, one of the conditions he made with Cederbaum was that he given the right to invite any writer he pleases and pay him for his services - a condition which was quite new. The acquisition of good writers changed the literary aspect of the Hamelitz. The improvements were marked not only by what he did, but also by what he did not publish. He never allowed any personalities to stain the columns of his paper. He was very conscientious about manuscripts submitted to him; he either published or returned them - an unheard of thing before when correspondents waited for months to know the fate of their articles. He never took any liberties with the con-

tents of an article, and by personal appeal encouraged those in whom he discovered literary abilities. As the writer of the leaders, Gordon naturally had to deal with the great problems which confronted the Jews of Russia at that time. The most burning question was Zionism, or rather, Palestinian colonization. The accession of Alexander 3 in 1881, and the riots which followed upon the heels of that event, threw the Jews into a state of confusion. The dreams of final emancipation inspired by the liberality of Alexander 2, have become more indefinite in the latter years of his reign, when, on account of the activity of the nihilists, he was forced into reactionary measures. But Alexander 3, and the riots, crushed all Jewish hopes with one fell blow. Alexander 3, was a despot and a narrow minded fanatic and the Jews felt instinctively, even before his accession, that nothing was to be expected from him. The outrages upon the Jews in Yalta, Elizabethgrad and Nicolaiev only confirmed their suspicions. What was to be done? The Jews must emigrate. But whither? This was the burning question. America or Palestine? Palestine was the more ideal place of the two. Smolensky had constantly been advocating nationalism and Palestinian colonization; had clothed it in the most ideal garb, and stirred up public opinion on the subject. He became still more active in the movement after the riots of 1881 - and the Zionistic, colonizing, not political, movement was started. Gordon, as an editor, naturally had to deal with this all important question. In the Hamelitz he appeared as an outspoken nationalist and Zionist; but we must acknowledge

→ New paragraph

with Brainin, that Gordon added not a single a new thought to the question. The complexity of the movement bewildered him. He did not preceive the historic & political bearing of the movement. And because he did not have any comprehensive notions of the question, he wavered, hesitated and was swayed one way and the other. But it must likewise be acknowledged that Gordon had reason for his wavering. In their paroxysm of rage at the outrage perpetrated against their brethren, and in the first flush of their enthusiasm for Zionism, the two great advocates of the new movement, Smolensky and M. L. Lilienblum, had gone to the extreme of preaching a narrow nationalism and hatred of Europe and European culture. The Haskalah did no good for the Jews; Europe does not sympathize with them. The Jews therefore should return to Palestine, establish a government according to the Jewish spirit - a theocracy - and ignore European culture completely. Such were the sentiments of Smolensky and Lilienblum. Gordon could not possibly subscribe to such ideas. All his life long he had waged war against superstition and narrow mindedness; had advocated culture and religious reform; should he now, under the influence of disappointment, undo with one stroke what he had devoted a life time to accomplish? The choosing of the golden mean was characteristic of Gordon. He loved his people, he was a nationalist, but not to the extreme of despising every other nation with their culture. Moreover, Gordon, as every well informed man does, dreaded the idea of combining temporal with ecclesiastic authority, and his hatred of the Rabbis was too pronounced

for him
not to shudder at the thought of entrusting a government in their hands. "As long as the Rabbis have the upper hand it will be impossible for Jews to establish an independent government. Woe unto us if the government falls into the hands of R. Joshua Diskin and his wife (formerly of Brest Lit^{sk}ovsk and then Rabbi of Jerusalem) with the Shal^{he}han Aruch as the national constitution~~x~~ come into force again! Even when the political power is not vested in them, the Rabbis rule with an iron hand; how much the more so when Rabbi Lipele becomes a chief of police, and Rabbi Chatzkele a gendarme. Can we deny that Judaism, in its present state, is opposed to all culture? In my younger years I also dreamed of such a dream, but I realize now that *גלות ישראל* is worse than *גלות אבותינו*. It is not enough to look upon this question merely from its national side; the religious side, too, is of the utmost importance. Since it is impossible to move the rabbis to any religious reforms would to, ^{the} Lord that any temporal power does not fall in their hands." ¹⁾. His distrust of the rabbis he gives expression to in another letter also. "Had I believed that such a thing (colonization of Palestine by Jews) could be realized, I should have devoted my life to stir up our philanthropists to come to the assistance of Montefiore; for I see in this movement the corner stone of the rebuilding of our nation. A successful colony in Palestine, a family of Jews engaged in agriculture may be the beginning of a national resurrection. But I do not believe

¹⁾. Letter~~x~~ to Dolitzky, 2. P.10.

in such a persibility. I believe that the Samaritans of today will interrupt the work at the beginning, and the foxes which lie in those ruins will not allow to rebuild them, lest they be disturbed in their lairs."'). "The perpetuation of the nation, and the deliverance of Israel are sacred to me too, and perhaps more so than to those who make a great deal of noise. I will not destroy the inheritance of the Lord, and will not keep back the redemption. But I will not be retrograde. I will not call upon my brethern to give up the Haskalah, to return again to the Ghettoes, or to teach their children jargon as Lillianblum does."'''). Before we go to Palestine we must prepare ourselves in such a way that we redeem our minds before we redeem our bodies.''''). With such views as these, Gordon could not logically enter heart and soul into the movement, and had intended to keep silent. But in 1883, on a visit to his native town, Wilna, the "Lovers of Zion" there, with Levanda at their head, rebuked him for his silence by saying that silence on the part of a man like him meant oppositions, which was certainly not his intention, Gordon determined to agitate the movement. But since he was not fully convinced in his heart of the practicability of the movement his agitation could not but be vague and obscure.

Gordon, on the whole, did not evince any deep thinking; he

'''). Letters 2. P.440 '''). Letters 2. P.162. '''). See Hamelitz and *מאמרי חכמים*; *מאמרי חכמים*; Letters 392.

echoed the thoughts of others, floated with the current, thinking that he directs and controls it'). Moreover, he had no literary tact. He loved his people, but not having a deep comprehension of their situation, the most trifling event in their life moved him either to joy or despair. Nor was his style fit for journalistic work. His diction was a combination of Hebrew, Aramaic and Talmudic quotations; (one of his editorials, 1887, no. 150 was written in rimes); he often indulged in circumlocution and is often carried away by the currents of his verbosity, by his usage of biblical quotations and expressions, that the reader could hardly find out what he is driving at. His chief duty as editor appeared to him in the improvement of style. "The Hebrew paper is a school for language" was his motto. As a reviewer of books he criticized the style above any other thing. He never attempted to analyze the contents of the book, the personality of the writer and other literary traits. The best book was to him the one written in the most ^{graceful and} ~~peaceful~~ ^{but} correct language. But while Gordon's style was not adopted^{ed} for editorials, it was immitable². His feuilletons all sparkle^{with} wit and humor, arising not so much from the thought as from an ingenious, fanciful combination of language of which he was ~~THE~~ a master. He was not a story-teller; he could not analyze human feelings, but he had the gift of describing masterfully and humorously the funny side of the Ghetto life, as nobody else could. On the whole he appealed to the old

'). Brainin, Hashaloah 1. P. 426.

generation of which he himself was the product rather than to the new that had a distinct literary taste, and demanded a style simple and straightforward. Yet, it may be said with truth that Gordon created a good many writers. Whenever he recognized literary abilities in a young writer he would enter into correspondence with him, and endeavor to encourage him, by kind ~~xxx~~ criticisms, and suggestions. His immense knowledge of the old and modern Hebrew literatures, of modern languages and his Poetic Works placed a halo around his head in the eyes of the younger Hebrew writers (even those of European education); and to have received a personal letter from the "Great Gordon" was an honor for which they would have braved everything. He thus kept in the ranks some who, without his encouragements, would have devoted themselves to other literatures. His criticisms of books submitted to him was just and respectful, and set a strong contrast with the method of criticism prevalent before his time. Gordon thus became a Johnson, a literary dictator. The only weakness he had was that he liked to insert quotations from his own poems into articles sent to him. Brainin testifies that in ^a proof sheet of his article *על שירת הרמב"ם* sent to him by Gordon he found the remark. "If I wrote this I would say The poet says," and then follows a quotation from one of his own poems.

The relation between Gordon and Cederbaum was always strained, but Sept. 1, 1888, it became unendurable. Gordon severed all connactions with this paper, and for the few remaining years of

^{life}
his office, busied himself in writing from "left to right" and in arranging the publication of his prose works, the first volume of which under the name *אוריאל* was published by Rabintzky and Hornstein in 1889. His writings in Russia were devoted to a Russian edition of Brockhaus's Real-Encyclopedia, Gordon having charge of the department relating to subjects on Jews and Judaism.

Chapter 4.

Gordon's character.

"Gordon was by no means an ideal man. His heart and his mouth were not always alike. He liked to flatter and to be flattered. He showed the most abject ~~difference~~ ^{deference} for the rich, and fawned upon them in his letters, though he despised them in his heart. The poor in money or in talents, he ~~trusted~~ ^{ca} with pride and tyranny, and fell down and worshipped the title "Dr".

In the above quoted words Mr. Reuben Brainin, the Hebrew critic, summarizes the character of Gordon ('). While Gordon was living not one writer dared to criticize him or speak of him in disrespectful terms. If one did venture to do so, like Lilienblum, there was always a Frishman ready to defend him. But when the Lion was dead and could not defend himself, critics shot up like mushrooms, tore up his works into shreds, ^{re} ~~derived~~ him the name of "poet" called him rhyruster and what not. Among ^{Mr. Brainin. We forgive the eminent critic for dumping Gordon the title off for} them came also Mr. Reuben Brainin's conception of a poet is so profound and wonderful, that gauged by his definition there never lived a poet in this our sublanar world. Mr Brainin says: "A man who does not live with nature, who ~~was~~ not made a partner in creation, ~~and does not tremble on his whole~~ ^{and does not tremble on his whole} being before the infinite mystery; a man who has not strong proclivities (or ~~proclivities~~), profound ambition, and longings; whose pulse

does not beat in harmony with that of his time, and does not portray in vivid colors the secret passions of his contemporaries; the man who does not feel the breath of future generations, and whose eye does not ~~feel~~ ^{cast} from beginning of the generation to the end thereof; a man who does not see into our hearts and our souls, and all the secrets and recesses of our mind are not revealed to him; a man who does not create his people a new spiritual ~~norm~~ ^{new} and new ideals, such a man is not a poet'. According to this definition, Gordon was certainly no poet, but then he may have the melancholy consolation that he has company. Shakespeare was no poet, either, for we doubt very much whether he was a "partner in creation" or whether "he felt the breath of future generations" or whether his eyes roamed from beginning of generations to the end thereof, as Mr. Brainin demands of a poet. Verily, the ways of a critic ~~is~~ ^{are} justifiable. The following pages will be devoted to an attempt at giving the true character of Gordon without bias based on incontrovertible facts, and we shall see whether or not Mr. Brainin's characterization of Gordon were true.

The true character of a man is best revealed by his private correspondence written as letters are in an off hand, and certainly with no eye at posterity; they convey the moods the writer finds himself in, and thus his real self is revealed. If this be true there is no better reputation of Brainin's reflection of on Gordon's character than the 559 letters, collected and published by I. J. Weisberg which cover a period of more than 30 years, from 1858 to 1892. In them the devotion to his people, his love for the Hebrew literature, his faithfulness, uprightness and probity are seen on every page. Among the number of the recipients of the letters only three rich men may be found, - Horace Ginsburg, Visotsky and Kupernik - upon whom Gordon was supposed to have fawned. But no trace of abject deference ^{so to found them} is to be found. Moreover, they were his personal friends, and if complimentary ^{to} a friend who happens to be rich is to fawn upon him, Gordon does not unfavorably compare with Horace, who expressed his admiration for Macenas in the most glowing terms.

The strongest characteristic of Gordon is his fearlessness and independence. He was a fighter by nature. He was given to his people with all his heart and soul, and fought in their behalf in spite of all opposition and obstacles. Does it not require the courage of "a heart of a tripe oak", to combat almost single handed the whole host of conservatism, of darkness and

L 1). Leon Gordon; Renimscence, Hashuloah. Vol. I, P. 65.

o. are strange. But to slander the character of a great man without ground not even a great critic is justifiable.

superstition that was arrayed against him and his fellow Maskilim? There were desperate ^{the days} days of Nicholas and the ~~days~~ of Alex. I. The life of the cultured was embittered by the fanatics who persecuted, tormented and denounced them to the government as dangerous persons. ^{it} It is not a characteristic of fearlessness to throw down the gauntlet to such a class? What could have prevented Gordon from turning his back to his people and leave them in their fate? He was a master of the German and Russian languages, as is seen by his article in the Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums, and in numerous Russian magazines. He could easily have devoted himself to those literatures, and live a life of opulence and honor. But he loved his people, and he realized that the only way to reach them was by means of the

Hebrew language- and in Hebrew he wrote. He raised his mighty voice on behalf of culture to deaf ears. The crowd raised a howl of disapproval- denounced him, but he stood his ground. The polemics he was forced into, both with the Maskilim and their opponents, embittered his life; but he never flinched. "I maintain that every Jew of our time who has the ^{ability} ~~liberty~~ and opportunity to do something in behalf of his people, moral, intellectual and economic, and does not do so is guilty of the crime of treason" ('). Do not such sentiments bespeak the true unselfish patriot? Moreover, it must be ^{borne} ~~have~~ in mind that Gordon never wrote for money. His contributions to ^{the} Hashahar, the most valuable of his poems, were given gratis, because he thought that paper worthy of support.('). "The society for the Spread of Haskalah which has published his poetical works in 1884 had promised him a certain remuneration for his work" after the debt of publication is paid off". Gordon never pressed his claim upon them, and the debt was allowed to run on indefinitely... He even hated to associate with men who made Hebrew literature a business undertaking. In a letter to his friend I. J. Weisberg he says: "'') You keep on continually nudging at me 'Work in the sanctuary' ^{Don't}..... ^h Tough you will know that "the essence of my soul is coin" (I believe this was coined by Frishman) I would

('). Letters I, P. 167. (''). Mordecai Cohen Hashiloah I, P. 191.

(''). Letter 172.

o of our literature! are books and magazines published for money - making a sanctuary?

under no consideration associate with men who have no spirit, but that of business". "I feel that old age is coming on... My only hope is that my age will not put my youth to shame; and just as in my younger days I have managed to live in independence, so I endeavor to finish my life in labor, work and toil. The only ^{hour} ~~hour~~ I ask is that when I am dead it may be said of me that there was a writer in Israel who did not humiliate himself, who did not ask for charity, who did not throw himself upon the public, but earned his bread by his honest ^e toil" '). He gave up his position in the Hamnitz, which paid him 3000 roubles a year, (a considerable salary in Russia) because Cederbaum, the publisher, did not come up to his standard of honesty and probity in the conduct of his paper.

A man of such independence would not condescend to flattery. That he liked flattery may be true, but not in its sinister sense. He had devoted his life to the interests of the Hebrew literature, and he naturally felt gratified when the younger writers looked up to him as their dictator, and spoke of him in flattery ⁱⁿ terms. Still Gordon didn't make much of it. It always ^s ~~seemed~~ to him that his life's work was a failure, and the very compliments paid to him a mere irony. In reply to Brainin's statement that Gordon worshipped a "Dr", it may be said that Thackary worshipped

'). Ibid & P. 342.

a ^{and} "Lad" though he ridiculed the titled nobility in his books. With Gordon, however, like with all Russians, the respect for learned men is genuine.

The relation of Gordon to Smolensky is another indication of the former's nobility of character. Mordkhai Cohen, carried away by his excessive admiration for Smolensky, endeavors to extol him at the expense of Gordon. "Gordon"), he says, "was evidently jealous of Smolensky, because of the love manifested towards him by so many of the younger writers. Gordon had many admirers, but few friends." From Gordon's letters, however, we hear a different tale. "The Hqshahar pleases me very much. Its editor is a man of talents and good, common sense, and I send to him my contributions with pleasure." ('). I like the Hqshahar because of its frankness and because its editor removed the mask with which other Jewish editors disguise themselves. Not only is Smolensky personally more capable than his colleagues, but he invites every writer to speak his opinion freely..... If you (Kaplan) can do anything for him by getting new subscribers, do so at once for he deserves it; if not, send him your own contributions, poems or other articles" ('). From these letters written to Kaplan, Gordon's lifelong and most intimate friend from whom he would hide nothing, it is evident that Gordon bore no ill will against Smolensky personally, that on

('). Letters I, P. 166.

('). Atlasoph Almanac, Vol. 8, P. 138-39. ('). Ibid 237.

on the contrary, he tried to do for the Hashahar what he could. The coldness between these two great leaders in Israel was due to their different temperament. Smolensky was enthusiastic and impulsive; Gordon was cool and deliberate. Gordon did not sympathize with the extreme nationalism of Smolensky, as we have shown above. Only once Gordon evinced some bitterness towards Smolensky, which, however, was caused by the unpardonable negligence of the latter. When in 1882, the 25th anniversary of Gordon's activity in Hebrew literature was celebrated by the Maskilim all over Russia, Smolensky did not only ignore that fact in his Hashahar, but did not even write a few words of congratulation. He atoned for his negligence by writing a long, very complimentary criticism on Gordon's works in Hashahar. X 9. Gordon accepted this apology in good grace, though he could not refrain from expressing his chagrin to his friend, Dolisky: "Smolensky is angry at me, and did not even congratulate me on my jubilee. Though while he was in Petersburg in 1881, I did not begrudge five roubles for the banquet given in his honor (April 5, 1881) he doesn't care to spend five Kreutzers to write a few lines to me, because I cannot do for him now as much as I did before". The exceedingly touching poem which he wrote at the death of Smolensky, also goes to show his sincere regard for the lamented journalist. Even his criticism of Smolensky

1). Letters 2. P. 4,

is mild and just. He says: I knew Smolensky and realized his value. He was undoubtedly an excellent writer, and ~~as~~ a man of great abilities; and, had he lived longer '1) he would have accomplished a great deal of good. But he also had his shortcomings as a writer and as a man. His fault as a writer was his diffuseness and circumlocution. He repeated the same thought over and over again in different words, likely because he had to fill up his paper by himself, having but few contributors. His shortcoming as a man consisted ⁱⁿ that he considered himself a great man, an authority, which has the same effect upon a writer as beauty upon a girl who knows that she is pretty". '1)). In all this, there is certainty, no malice. Gordon, like any other man, ought to be entitled to his opinion.

The fairest estimate of Gordon's character is given by Mr. ⁿRobinsky in an article "Gordon ~~was~~ seen through his letters". '1)). The writer says; "From many of Gordon's letters, we recognize his modesty- a trait characteristic of truly great men. At the age of 27 he writes: I know well my own ⁱⁿsignificance and therefore vowed in my heart of hearts to strive to live up to the expectations of my friends who have highly complimented me on my work. (Letter 3). Such expressions are common

'1) Smolensky died at the age of 43.

'1) Letters 2, 265-6. '1)). Pades 3, 228-251.

in his letters (see 43, 46, 275, 529). Nor are these expressions of modesty feigned. We feel they are genuine and natural. He is not ashamed to acknowledge his errors, but he never passed over in silence any attack on his honor. He is even ready to suspect his critic of personal enmity, or other sinister motives. After Lilienblum's criticism appeared in קבץ חסידים in 1884 he says in a letter (281). "The truth is that Cederbaum hired Lilienblum to assault me" - though again and again Gordon speaks of Lilienblum in the highest terms of respect. In general, Gordon is not distinguished for ready forgiveness (חסידים). Illustrations of bad temper are seen frequently in his letters, especially so against Cederbaum. Gordon, undoubtedly had reasons to be bitter against him, but he goes beyond all bounds in his ridicule of the editor of the Hamelitz. In his letter (336) to Kaplam, asking him to urge the Maskilim of Riga to congratulate Cederbaum on his 70th anniversary he says: "He certainly deserves the honor, and we also have cause for congratulation. For what had we done, had this been ^{his} 30th or 40th instead of his 70th birthday?"

In money matters we see that just as he ^{was} had scrupulous with regard to other people's money, so he never cared to forego

In letter 281, Vol. 2, P. 98. Gordon says: You meant to frighten me by stating that (evidently referring to Lilienblum) is a criticism on my works. Well where is the cause for alarm?

any of his own, and his over punctiliousness in money matters often leads him to such detailed accounts, even to cents, that are really disgusting. Considering this trait of his close-handedness (?) and that he ~~can~~^{can} loan out money on interest, (On what authority this remark is based, I could not verify) it is the more surprising that in a letter to Siakin he says: We are friends, and need not be ashamed of each other. I have saved up a few hundred roubles, and laid them by ^a for rainy day. I am ready to lend you 200 roubles until your condition improves. The essence of Gordon's soul then was not coin. Many letters testify to his readiness and willingness to help his friends and to exert himself in their behalf.

A profound feeling of love for his family breathes from many of his letters. He does not speak much of his wife, nor of his son who left him because they could not agree, but of his two daughters and particularly of his grandson, Jacob, he speaks with the deepest affections. In a letter to Kaplan, the father of his son-in-law, he says: "I am sorry that you cannot see our grandson now, while he still looks like a cherub with the smile of innocence on his lips. You will see him after the Shechinah as departed from him." In many and many a letter to Kaplan he dwells with delight upon the development of their grandson.

Shall we shut peoples' mouth, or hide ourselves before criticism.² An author is a public man, and must expect to be criticized. Gordon was figured at Lillienblum's criticism because it was unfair and narrow. (See on Poems).

What games he plays, what he says, his childish questions and remarks. His whole heart is taken up with his little grandson. He endeavored to give him a Hebrew education, and it is with the greatest delight that he reports to Kaplan that their grandson signed his full name in Hebrew ^{with his} ~~upon his~~ favor upon the Hebrew studies, and great was his joy when he wrote, "I send you enclosed a three lined letter in Hebrew, written by Jacob. He looked upon it as a sacred duty: he never missed a day. His son-in-law, however must have looked ^{with his} ~~upon his~~ favor upon the Hebrew instruction his son received. Gordon complains to Kaplan that Maxim never allows him to prolong the lesson even one minute beyond the appointed hour; at times when he came to instruct his grandson, he would find him out, according to the instruction of his son-in-law, The lessons were thus neglected and it was almost with despair that he writes to Kaplan that his grandson had already forgotten to read Hebrew. Sush is the irony of fate, The Children of the two foremost writers of the day did not read their parents works- and the Hebrew language was a sealed book to them. The poet who hailed with delight any new appearance on the stage of Hebrew literature, especially so when he found a woman who could write Hebrew, a man who had devoted all his life to the Hebrew literature, had the misfortune not to be understood by his own children!

Gordon, as a truly Europeanized Jew, was naturally lax in observing the ^{genu}nimtiac law, but observed the essential practices of Judaism. He endeavored to obtain from School Director Fursow, the permission not to force Jewish children to write on the Sabbath day in the gymnasium, as such compulsion would keep many Jewish boys away from school. (Letters 1, P. 189). He opposed to the placing of a וְיָאֵל on the synagogue and wrote against it, both in Russian and Hebrew ')- because it was his opinion, ^{that} that symbol was connected with some superstitious practices of antiquity. He believed in a pure Judaism combined with true culture. Thus, for instance, in a speech which he made to a committee of Argentinian colonists who called on him before their departure from Petersburg, he dwelt upon the importance of combining Judaism with education and manual labor*. Outside of the duty which you take upon yourselves in improving the material condition of your brethren, a holy duty is incumbent upon you of keeping intact and pure the spirit of Israel, the spirit of God which enabled Israel to withstand all the

*). I came to the conclusion that the וְיָאֵל is the druid's foot which the witches used in antiquity. It is first mentioned in Hebrew literature in שְׁמִי 790. The druid's foot had only five points, and I cannot account how it was changed to six. (Vol 2. P. 37 Letter).

vicissitude of fortune in the course of two thousand years;
the holy spirit which strengthened his heart to persist in
his purity and in all the noble traits characteristic of Jews
which presented them from sinking to the level of ^{men} ~~serfs~~ from
whose face the image of God and of man almost ^{disappeared} ~~disappeared~~. Israel
is yet ready to show to the nations a phenomenon the like of
which has never been seen: a peasantry not given to drink; vint-
ners not indulging in wine to excess; laborers who are not given
to brawls. However, all this will be possible only when, while
taking care of the material needs of your brethren, you will
simultaneously take pains to care ^{for} ~~of~~ their souls, by erecting
schools for the young, synagogues for the old, that the youth
shall not grow wild, and the older ^{men} shall not have to spend their
leisure time after their hard labor in saloons. Hence, beside
the scientific man essential to a colony (physicians, ^{chemists} ~~colonists~~
and agriculturists) there must also be in every colony skilled
pedagogues to establish and conduct schools where should be
taught Judaism and secular knowledge- men who have ~~XXXXX~~ a
thorough knowledge of Judaism as well as of secular science and

who know how to walk with impunity between a path of fire on one side and of snow on the other" ').

Gordon then was a thoroughly Jewish patriot and a true man of the world- a faithful friend to his freinds, a good enemy to his enemies, a loving and loyal patar-familias. He spoke the truth fearlessly, and fought for it and suffered for it. What else can he said in praise of a man? He had some faults, to be sure; he was "jealous", "close-handed", if you will, but then, to use the ^{trite} metaphor ~~was~~, the sun also has spots. On the whole we may say with Hamlet, with a slight modification. He was a man, take him for all in all, we do not often meet his like.

').(Letters 2, P. 404-5).

CHAPTER V.

GORDON AS A POET.

The tribute paid to Oliver Goldsmith that there was not a department of literature he did not touch on, and that he touched nothing but improved it, may with justice be applied to Gordon also. Whatever he wrote bore the stamp of an originality so pronounced as to be recognized immediately as belonging to him; for imitation was travesty. His stories and sketches mirror the life he saw around him, and move us now to tears, now to smiles according to the fancy of the writer. But, neither his stories nor his sketches, humorous to the extreme, add anything to Gordon's fame. They only show his versatility. To another man these minor productions of Gordon, would have been sufficient to establish a literary reputation; but his reputation rests solely on his poetic works- to which we shall now direct our attention. A few introductory remarks as to the development of modern Hebrew poetry, will, we hope, be not superfluous.

Ever since the close of the golden period of Hebrew literature in Spain, the time of Jehudah Halevi, Gabirol and the Ibn Ezras, there was no great singer in Israel, no poet in the true ^{Time} significance of the word. Poetry was confined to Liturgical

compositions, prayers, praises, supplications and lamentations. Israel was constantly humbled and persecuted; and the afflictions of the exile found expression in an occasional hymn which sought to express Israel's eternal faith in God or an appeal to divine mercy to put an end to his tribulations. These were adapted in liturgy, and prove a source of consolation and strength to ^{the} unhappy children of oppression. The muse was confined to sacred subjects. How could they sing of love, of nature and beauty, when their life was a series of misery and tears? Even when brighter days dawned for Israel, the Hebrew muse that had slumbered so long was reluctant to awake. Moses Zacut (16th century) and Moses Hayim Luzzatto (17th century), wrote ^{moral} plays, but neither evinced true poetic gifts. Their subjects had no relation to life, and their language was not peculiarly poetic.

The period of the Measephim marks a new departure in Hebrew poetry. Hartwig Wessely, the poet of ~~XXX~~ the period, wrote an epic on Moses, which in form at least, surpassed all other poetic compositions. His language is purer and more forcible than that of his predecessors, and his metre is quite flowing and easy. But Wessely was no creator. The matter was given him. He added

nothing of his own, but merely adopted the biblical account of the Exodus, with that of the Midrashim, and composed them into a harmonious whole. His pictures do not excite our imagination, nor does his grandiloquence stir our hearts and our feelings as ^{does} ~~in~~ the ^eAeneid or the Iliad. In his original poems he is weak. Outside of the above mentioned epic, neither he nor his contemporaries wrote on Jewish Subjects. Most of the writers of the Measephim and the ~~שירים~~ ^{שירים} who tried their hands at verse, composed either occasional poems to friends, dukes and princes ^{or} and translated poems from other languages. The scope of Hebrew poetry was thus enlarged, verses were written on flowers, birds, on pastoral scenes and the like which had no relation to Jewish life whatever. Inspired as those writers were with the ideal of preaching culture to their people "they crowd ^e like cocks to rouse Israel from his slumber and to announce the dawn of a glorious morning." Of the considerable bulk of Hebrew poetry up to the second half of the 19th century there was very little that had true literary merit. Some wrote correct ^{ly} names, but not poetry; but others wrote in a sort of unintelligible jargon. Nearly all who wrote verse in Germany, Galicia and Italy, did not possess a complete mastery of the language.

Even S. D. Luzzatto wrote poetry but seldom and his diction was not always pure. Werbel wrote good Hebrew but his poetic powers were limited; Eichenbaum had more of poetic talent, but neither was a poet in the true sense of the word. Among them all there was not one whom we might justly compare with Gabi~~as~~^{el}; or Jehudah Halevi.

Abraham Beer Lebensohn was the first Hebrew writer of ~~the~~ verse that approaches the ideal of a poet. Unlike his predecessors, the themes of his compositions were not mere abstract notions, or stories from the past. He sang of the beauty of life and nature, of death, of human weal and woe, and poverty, of wealth and pity. His songs bore a practical relation to the life around him. His poems gave expressions to the ideals of his time. He endeavored to inculcate upon his readers the beauty of knowledge, and ^{the} possibility of harmonizing religion and science. Moreover, Lebensohn was a perfect master of the language. His diction ^{is} ~~was~~ pure and elevated; his style ^{is} ~~was~~ fine and elegant. He enriched the ^{the} language by coining new poetic terms based on biblical roots, and both his rhythms and ^{his} ~~rhymes~~ were finished.

He even rises occasionally to the height of true poetry and such lines show the latent possibilities of ^{the} man. But Lebensohn mistook the functions of the poet. Beauty of language is what he aimed at mostly- diction was the all in all to him. His main object was to write a model Hebrew for others to imitate. But he was not possessed of deep feelings. He philosophizes and preaches ⁱⁿ his poems, but his words fail to touch us. "His words came from the head, not from the heart", as Gordon expresses it. He was a grammarian and philosopher even in his poems. Besides, his poems, while treating of life, had no direct bearing upon Jewish life. The lamentable condition of his brethren under Alexander I. and Nicholas I. do not concern him. He was above the people. His sympathy goes out with humanity and his poems are Jewish in so far as they are human. Still he ~~had~~ added dignity to Hebrew poetry, ~~had~~ created a poetic style, and thus prepared the way for the two truly great poets that succeeded him: his own son Micah Joseph Lebensohn, and Leon Gordon ⁽¹⁾.

Micah Joseph Lebensohn was endowed with supreme poetic gifts a poet "von Gottes Gnaden". His ^{שירי יצחק} show him as a

⁽¹⁾. See P. Smolensky ^א ^{חזקת ליהודה} in Hashahar, Pp. 458- 460 and ^{אדם חזקת} ^{ביתר חזקת} by ^{אדם חזקת} in Hashahar, Vol. II, Pp. 42-48.

masterful interpreter of human passions and aspirations, with a profound touch of pathos, and a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature. His diction is poetic in the extreme- such, in fact as the author of the Song of Songs would claim as his own. His partial translations of the Aeneid betray sparks of epic possibilities which approach close to those of Virgil. Unfortunately his young life was nipped in ^{the} ~~its~~ bud- death claimed him before twenty-two, summers had hardly shown him the beauties of life. Had he lived, he would undoubtedly have developed into a great national poet. But it was not given to Hebrew poetry to be enriched by his talents. Happy Leon Gordon, the friend of his youth, remained to take his place, and he showed what beauties the Hebrew lyre was capable of when touched by the hands of the master.

Peter Smolensky^k thus pays his tribute to Gordon in his forcible Hebrew dictioⁿ and imagery: The spirit of poetry struck him with all its might. It created for him expressions which no body can equal; it opened his eyes to see and to understand and to ~~a~~ point in faithful colors all that his mind's eye saw. Gordon is a true poet in the fullest meaning of the word, and above all- a Hebrew poet. Poets in other languages, if they

do not ^{limit} ~~limit~~ themselves to the drama or narrative poems, sing of birds, of stars, of nature, of spring, of summer and autumn and cruel winter when the earth is dressed in shrouds; and through it all there runs an undercurrent of the sighs of the lover and the tears of the beloved, and one hears the piping of the shepherd and the lowing of the flocks. But all these are not fit theme for a Hebrew poet. His heart, influenced by the language of his fathers, is full of unrest. His spirit does not exult at the daily natural phenomena; the present is not for him; his language is not given for life, but is a relic of the dead past. The spirit of the poet wanders back in the wilderness, midst the cedars of the Lebanon and the ancient mountains; he sings dirges over the ruins of glorious cities, and he walks knee-deep in the streams of the blood of the murdered, and his feet stumble on the bones of skulls wherein lofty spirits once dwelt. A three-thousand-year-long cry rings out in his ear; the rustling of bones of human sacrifices disturbs his spirit, and his eyes move over a scroll written on both sides with blood and tears..... Can he sing of free birds? of happy rustics and amorous swains; of youth and maiden- that lack nothing but love? Gordon's poems show us what the eye of the prophet see- and who

^{like} can see him?'). Gordon was indeed a true Hebrew poet. He loved his people and the Hebrew language with all his heart and soul. He looked with reverence upon the past, and with hope and anticipation at the future. But the present was terrible, almost unbearable. As a true poet, he describes what he sees around him. The pictures are not at all pleasant, but, as he himself says:

אני איני בורא יש מאין
ציר אצלי דביטויי חרש;
את אשר אראת בין לבין
אולי אפתור על לים בצער.

(IV, כל שירי יג)

To understand and appreciate Gordon fully one must read and reread his poems in the original. However, we shall have endeavor to give a cursory review of his poetical works, with such a quotation here and there, which ^{might} tended to illustrate the subject, under review.

"כשאדם נעם אומר דברי שיר" says the Midrash, and Gordon, full of youthful enthusiasm and inspiration, took to writing a love poem, as most young poets will. But, as a Hebrew poet, he chose as his theme the biblical romance of David and Michael. In

lofty and impassioned lines he ~~portrays~~ the career of David, his persecution by Saul, his love for his daughter Michal; his wars with the Philistines; his subsequent rise to power, and the estrangement between him and Michal. The story as narrated in the Bible, contains all the elements of the epic, hence the poet's inventive genius was not called into play, though there was room for a poetic ~~display~~ display of description of nature, of emotion, of love. The majestic figures of Saul swayed by jealous-
career of David who, from a peasant son, by dint of superior power ies and hatred; the romantic, to the Throne of Israel, all these are ~~described~~ ^{script} by the poet vividly and forcibly in the twelve cantos of *המנוח*. The poem certainly has its weak points. Gordon is not an epic poet in ~~the~~ ^{the} classical sense. His powers of natural descriptions are weak; he cannot interpret the human passions fully; he does not enter into the secret souls of his heroes. His descriptions of nature are couched in biblical quotations which to a modern reader are vague and ^{un}impressive. He cannot describe a landscape in detail, not only because he lacks the expression but also because he lacks the concept. His language is indeed rich and picturesque and smooth and flowing like the brook of Shiloah; but his imagery is completely ^{Oriental} without the virtue of originality; it is copied from the bible. So are his

figures of speech. He uses them not because he feels that they represent his thoughts, exactly, like Moore's Oriental imagery in Lallah Rookh, but because they are ready made for him in the bible. Nor is there enough action in the poem to be worthy of the name of epic. The poet often digresses with apostrophes to Providence (canto II). Love (Canto IV). Jealously (Canto V), Happiness (Canto IX) Anger and Hope (Canto X) and Duty (Canto XI) which are mediaeval in their notions, and not strongly poetic in expression. His portrayal of Michal, in fact of all the beautiful woman creations of his fancy, are nothing but a rimed version of the Shepherdess in the Canticles. Gordon cannot tear himself away from his model, the Bible. The above criticism may equally be applied to his second poem on David *וְיָשׁוּב*, though in the two cantos of the latter, Gordon rises to the height of a true epic poet, especially in describing the heroic achievements of David's body guard- and it is more original. Still one cannot fail to recognize in several places of the two poems, a striking similarity to *אֲנִי הַיָּשׁוּב* by Lebensohn, the Younger! In fact, it seems as though Gordon had assimilated Lebensohn's poems to such an extent that he unconsciously borrowed some phrases and expressions from him- only

the imitation, ~~if~~^{if} we may so term it, was much weaker. Lebensohn the Younger by far surpasses Gordon in the painting of natural scenery, in describing ~~the~~^{and} analyzing emotions, and even in the beauty and brevity of diction. With all that, considering that these ^{are} were the first efforts of a youth of 22, it cannot be denied that it is the production of a gifted poet. Amidst the laxity of his expressions, numerous lines stand out concise, bold and strong, and show a wealth of feeling and force, and his diction is purely biblical throughout. He had shown as was his intention, that the Hebrew language, stiff and dead as it had been, was living enough and flexible enough to describe in its scenes which are dear to the heart of every Jew. After all, that subject, per se, had nothing in it to arouse his enthusiasm and to make ^{him} soar above the narrow circle which he had circumscribed for himself. Give him a subject which is nearer his heart, give him a theme which would allow his fancy free scope and he will display all his powers.

אברהם ביר זצ"ל is introduced by a dedicatory poem to Abraham Beer Lebesohn in which the young poet feeling ly acknowledges his indebtedness to the older man.

by

אברהם ביר זצ"ל

אל בית ספרך קח תמפיק לך
בנך אגיד - אדבי לא הולדתני
אבל אל בנך תמית אה תיית'....

also

יבדדתי ויבדדני נא
אתה תדוית לי כחל וצאן.

and he dedicates himself to the service of the Hebrew language
in the forcible

יבדד לעברית אנכי צד נא
לך כל חושי ב' לצמיתות מברתי.

A promise to which he remained faithful all his life.

His third Davidian poem וור וברוי is a pastoral, contrasting
the happiness of the peaceful, contented rustic life, with the
noisy, treacherous life of the palace. The poet describes the
rural retreat of ^{arvilai} ~~Brasilia~~, after his generous treatment of the
unhappy King David- and the description ~~savon~~ of the field and
the forest, and tells of the thoughts of faith they engender.

He sees the ^{al}anges of eve and morn,
Beholds the sun now dying now reborn,
The st^{ar}ry hosts that tacitly proclaim
The glories of Jehovah's awful name;

And in his heart he feels; there is a plan,
There is a refuge for the soul of man
And full of faith and full of hope divine,

He placid sees the wave of life decline (Vo. III P. 154)

David, broken in body in spirit finds him in his ~~retreat~~^{or}
and invites him to accompany him to the capital, there to share
with him his regal splendor. But ~~Brazil~~^{arzilai} delicately declines
on account of old age, and because,

Better is a poor, but peaceful life

Than a crown accompanied by strife. (Ibid 156).

The bitter truth strikes home, and the king weeps as he departs.

Another biblical poem, belonging to the same cycle ^{is} based on the story of Joseph and on the Talmudic legend, (Sotah, 13 b), that Potiphara Joseph's father-in-law is identical with Potéphara his former master. The poet describes feelingly, the history of Joseph up to his elevation, interwoven with the romance of Joseph's love to Osnath, his master's daughter who is his pupil and in whom a feeling of affection for Joseph develops during his sojourn in their house. The language of the poem is free from conceit, and is plain and straightforward. The lines are smooth, the versification perfect,

the action swift with a few touches of sympathy interspersed here and there. It is not a great poem, but the reader is carried away by the ease and grace with which the story is told. Osnath's dream and its interpretation by Joseph is a happy, but of invention which heightens the charm of the poem, adds to the action, and agrees perfectly with the biblical characterization of Joseph. The poem is charming because of its simplicity.

His last biblical poem *מִתְּחִלָּה בְּיָמֵינוּ*, "Zedekiah in Prison", is a monologue, intended to convey the feelings of this, the most unfortunate king of Judah. Zedekiah is made to denounce Jeremiah in the most bitter terms, and to ascribe to him his own misfortune and the downfall of the nation. His fate had come upon him because he disobeyed Jeremiah. What business had that priest to meddle in political affairs? Saul was punished by disobeying Samuel. Was it Saul's fault that Samuel did not keep his promise, and came too late? The same with Jeremiah. He demands that the people carry no burden on the Sabbath. Was this the time for observing holidays when the enemy was swarming about Jerusalem? Besides, in what way would the observance of the Sabbath prevent the impending catastrophe? In this way Zedekiah rails at Jeremiah, and complains of the injustice done to him. Gordon looks upon the struggle between Jeremiah and

and Zedekiah, as atype of the struggle between the ecclesiastical and temporal powers which has gone on in history from ^{time} ~~then~~ immemorial. Gordon makes Zedekiah say things which Gordon himself does not agree with, though he is in sympathy with ^{him} ~~us~~. The poem, it must be remembered, was written in 1879 in the Lithuanian prison where Gordon was confined, and the poetic prisoner used the loyal prisoner as a mouthpiece to voice his own grievances, for he too had suffered at the hands of fanatics - at any rate he could feel with Zedekiah ').

The story of the woman and her seven children who refused to worship Antioch^{us} is the theme of the poem אֲנִיכֵּי הַיָּמִין. The narration is full of pathos and sublimity, and the language corresponds to the thought. אֲנִיכֵּי הַיָּמִין, however, is a masterpiece that surpasses in vigor and pathos any other production of Gordon: "A Ship carrying Spanish exile leaves port. Among other passengers there is also found Pennah, the daughter

'). Lillienblum is indignant at Gordon for allowing Zedekiah to condemn Jeremiah, and tries to show that Jeremiah's political policy was better and that Zedekiah was a changeling and a coward.

He ends his criticism by saying that while one has a right to write anything he pleases, he has no right to publish everything.

He wrote, "I am carried away by his indignation Mr.

Lilienblum forgets that he is criticizing not a history, but a poem intending to convey Zedekiah's feeling- and Zedekiah could

of the Rabbi of Tortonah and her mother. The young woman who only a month ago saw her husband burnt at the stake is still so beautiful that she captivates the heart of the captain who gives her to understand that should she refuse to become his mistress he would carry all his Jewish passengers to some desert island and leave them there to their fate, as other captains ^{Animals promises to surrender himself to him after all the Jewish sailors are landed safely} have done in some port. After this was done the ship returns with ~~KAKKLEZAY~~ Peninah and her mother, and the captain is already anticipating with delight the pleasures of the next day. When ^{Penin} Peninah promised to yield to him. But early in the morning of the next day, both Peninah and her mother, to save themselves from shame, jumped overboard and were drowned in the ocean-
martyrs for their brethren:

The ocean saw and trembled at the sight
And round about the mighty ^{sea} breakers roared
While those pure souls- and purer far than gold-
A Martyred grave beneath the billows found,
And midst the oceans mountain peaks reposed.
Unseen, unwept, ~~un~~ beneath the deep they slept,
The ocean's rocks their tombstones and the stars.

not possibly have agreed with Mr. Lillienblum.

Their legend, and the heavenly blue their vault.
Alone they mourn in pity looked about;
Alone the earth the clouds mute gaze beheld,
the earth that sees a myriad tragedies
And never condescends to shed a tear(1).....(vol.III p20)

The last of his historical poems *מִצְרַיִם* is told
with strong dramatic effect, and with lofty poetic fervor. It is
an incident of the Jewish wars with the Romans: The enemy besieged
Jerusalem, and confusion and consternation reigned within the city.
Driven by despair, the defenders of Jerusalem determine not to sell
their country too cheaply, and prepare themselves for the final at-
tack. Simon, a young patriot, throws himself into the conflict; but
before his departure he bids ^{his} last farewell to his beloved Martha,
who encourages him to fight for his country to the bitter end:
Array thee Simon into battle array,
The moments are precious, haste away!
Our native land my dear calls thee!
Then care not thou what'er befalls me.
.....

mark
(1) The translation of these few lines is only a futile effort on
my part to give an idea of the poem the full strength of which can
be felt only in the original. I remember having seen an English
translation of this poem but I remember neither the name of the
translator nor where it was published.

The day is done; now fall the shades of night -

O hearken to the shouts of dread and might!

Grasp thy weapons, and with sword in hand

Fight for God and for thy native land!----- (vol. III p178)

Simon departs. The Jews are defeated; Simon is carried captive to Rome and Martha is sold as a slave to a Roman matron. The young hero ~~was~~ made to fight with a lion in the arena. Among the spectators is also found Martha who accompanied her mistress Agrippina to the amphitheater. Martha recognizes her lover, and with anguish in her soul, watches the outcome of the terrific conflict. At first, Simon succeeds in thrusting his sword into the side of the fierce Lybian lion; but his blade is broken, and he can no more defend himself. In despair he raises his eyes and recognizes his Martha in the multitude. He musters up all his courage, and attacks the lion bare-handed in the hope that, should he succeed in killing the lion, he might gain his own and Martha's freedom. But his strength fails him. The wounded lion jumps upon him, and tears him limb from limb. At this horrible sight a shout of delight rings out from the throats of the savage spectators, but Martha can bear it no longer. A shriek of anguish escapes her; she reels - and expires together with her lover.

The catastrophe that befell the Jewish nation the poet ascribes, as in so many other instances, to the Weltanschauung of

the Rabbis. For centuries they taught the Law, established schools where they instructed the people to ignore true understanding, to believe in superstitions, and to look upon this life as trivial. Instead of teaching handicrafts and the useful arts, instead of establishing military schools, and preparing weapons for the imminent conflict with the Romans, the Rabbis taught:

Within the walls to be immured

To row against life's vital stream;

Alive in heaven, dead on earth,

In dreams to talk - awake to dream. (vol. III pp. 175-6)

Again:

אין חלום לדבר - בלילה
אין חלום לדבר - בלילה
אין חלום לדבר - בלילה
אין חלום לדבר - בלילה
אין חלום לדבר - בלילה

Zeal and patriotism alone cannot avail under such leaders.

The poet bases his views that the Jews were not prepared for war with the Romans on Josephus (Jewish Wars II-6,3;7,3;11,5) His position was attacked by M. Pines in the Hamagid, and by Lilienblum(1) who defend the position of the Rabbis and roundly abuse Gordon for taking the testimony of the "Traitor Josephus". It seems however, that Gordon did not so much intend to criticize the ancient Rabbis as his contemporaries, of whom whatever he said was certainly true; but writing of an historical epoch he merely made use of the past to illustrate the conditions of the present. At any rate, Gordon has as much right to his view of Jewish history as his critics have to theirs.

Thus much for his historical poems. In *שירי חורבן* he has not yet emancipated himself from the influence of the elder Lebensohn(1) who had cared more for the purity and accuracy of diction than for the strength and poetic expression of the thought. In his later poems, however, he by far surpassed his master. "His diction is unsurpassable, pure like Lebensohn's, but freer and sweeter. Reading them we hear the voice of a Hebrew poet as we heard it in Spain."(2). But Gordon did not satisfy himself with singing of the past. He wanted to show his people the misery of the present in order to prepare them for a happier future. And it was in these "epics of the present" that he showed himself the supreme master of style, humor and sarcasm. Upon these poems he brought to bear the vast store of Talmudic knowledge and style he had at his command, and portrayed pictures of life the like of which cannot be found in any literature, not only because they are Jewish to the core, but also because no poet ever painted such pictures with the faithfulness and vividness of the life they describe. His chief aim in this cycle of poems (consisting of *אשקא, שוברת יבם, קוצו של יור* *והשמות בחגך, דר שם*) is to bring about religious reforms in Rabbinical Judaism.

The greatest poem of this cycle is *קוצו של יור* written in

(1) "Ever since I began to understand ~~the~~ a book, I could not find among living poets one greater than he (Lebensohn).... And I therefore endeavored to imitate him." (Letters, vol. I Let. 3.).

(2) Smolensky, Hashahar, vol. X p. 400.

1876. It is directed against the rigorous interpretation of the laws of divorce by the Rabbis(1). Bath-Shua was married at the age of seventeen to a certain Hillel, a Talmudic student; and after living with her three years her husband left her to seek his fortune abroad. At first she heard from her husband regularly; but after a few months he ceased corresponding, and nobody knew his whereabouts. Her father died too, and the poor woman, thus left destitute with two children, opened a small store to support her family with. Mean while there arrived in ^aAyolon a young man, Fabi, to superintend the railway constructions in the town. He fell in love with Bath-Shua and learned her story. Through a friend in Liverpool he learned that Hillel was peddling there, and that he would be willing to divorce his wife according to Jewish law, for a consideration of 500 roubles with which he intended to go to America. Fabi sent the money and the bill of divorce arrived in Ayolon and duly transmitted to the Rabbi. Fabi and Bath-Shua were to be married after the ceremony of the divorce was performed by the Rabbi. Unfortunately the Rabbi (2) discovered that the name Hillel in the Get was spelled without a Yod. He declared the Get invalid. Fabi left the city in disgust; and the poor woman was left a grass-widow all her

(1) In a letter written in 1879 Gordon says: "This poem is far superior to its predecessors; it is the best poem I have written so far" (Letters, vol. I p. 202).

(2) The ~~prototype~~ prototype of 'רבי שנין' is supposed to be רבי שנין (Stern) Rabbi of Shavli, in the government of Kovno.

life.

Such is the simple plot of the poem, but how vividly and to touchingly it is told! The whole sad life of the Jewish woman of that time is passed in panoramic views before us. The poet begins to describe the Jewish woman in the pathetic :

אך זי האבט געזיגט
מ'האט זי געזיגט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט (vol. IV p. 5)

For not only was she socially man's inferior, but:

זי האט געהייראט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט

She is given away in marriage without her consent, disregarding all feelings of love she may have, for:

זי האט געהייראט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט

and:

זי האט געהייראט און זי האט

The poet next describes Bath-Shua's beauty and accomplishments; her engagement to Hillel:

זי האט געהייראט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט

with which she must have been satisfied for she never said a word

זי האט געהייראט און זי האט
געהייראט און זי האט

her marriage and subsequent life with him; his departure for lands unknown; her acquaintance with Fabi; the divorce; Rabbi Hillel so called not because he was a descendant of Tatars but

זי האט געהייראט און זי האט

the tragic scene when the Get was declared invalid, and the subse-

quent misery of Bath-Shua who summarizes her misfortune in the phrase:

אני אשה צרה ורעה וכל ימי חיי אינני נשואה

The poem, while in many places sarcastic, is sympathetic and pathetic in the extreme. The heart of the poet goes out to his people who do not realize the full extent of their misery:

חובלן הדין אלפי שנים נכבד
 ונחשב למשפט וקשים לבנו
 ונחשב למשפט וקשים לבנו
 לא נשמע נאקת בנות אומות

(vol. IV. p. 18) (1)

Pity the poet who sees and describes such scenes!

The poem has its shortcomings too. The picture of Bath-Shua is on the one hand overdrawn, and on the other indefinite. Nor does the poet enter deeply into the inner psychology of his heroes and heroines. But on the whole, קצוץ וטוּר is the most realistic and impressive poem ever written in Hebrew.

שומרת צדק is less vigorous and realistic though pathetic and impressive. The avowed purpose of the poem is to hold up to scorn the institution of Levirate marriage which is a mere formality and yet practiced to the discomfort and often the ruin of the unhappy widow - and accidentally to ridicule the greedy "enlightened Rabbis" graduates of the Russian Rabbinical Seminaries. A young man who has lived happily with his wife for three years is

(1) Lilienblum who persists in interpreting Gordon literally remarks on the line אֲנִי אִשָּׁה צָרָה וְרָעָה: "In my opinion one who writes such a line is not a national poet." (פְּתִילֵי אֶשְׁרָה p. 27). Lilienblum evidently does not understand the difference between an exclamation of grief and a positive statement of indifference, or, he would have felt with Gordon.

lying on his death-bed - watched day and night by his faithful wife וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת הָרִאשׁוֹן.

The couple is childless - and, to aggravate the misery of the woman who is about to become a widow, a son was born to her mother-in-law a short time ago. To obviate the necessity of the young woman's waiting for the child to grow up in order to give her Halitzah, the dying husband is delicately requested by his mother to divorce his wife before his death. He consents. The "enlightened Rabbi" is sent for to perform the ceremony. He is a practical man; he knows that "two-hundred are more than one-hundred", and insists upon demanding two-hundred roubles for his services. The dying man's parents beg him to take one hundred, all their fortune having been spent in a vain effort to save their son. The Rabbi insists upon two-hundred; but, while they were haggling :

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת הָרִאשׁוֹן
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת הָרִאשׁוֹן
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת הָרִאשׁוֹן
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת הָרִאשׁוֹן

and the unhappy widow was left to wait for her infant brother-in-law's Halitzah. It

It must be acknowledged that the Rabbi pictured by the poet is not only unnatural, but impossible, and that the entire episode does not present a scene from real life. It is rather a criticism of the institution of Halitzah, carried to its extreme logical conclusion. The poet intends to show what havoc such an effete institution might cause under unfavorable circumstances. To avoid such

possibilities do away with the useless formality. After all, while the Rabbi is impossible many women were actually ruined in similar cases when the husband died without divorcing his wife - and against such actualities the poem was directed. The Rabbi might have been omitted without injuring the poem; on the contrary, such omission would have strengthened the impression. Possibly Gordon had a special so called "enlightened Rabbi" in view against whom he directed the last stanza. This poem was written in 1879 in St. Petersburg, after his return from exile. Does he refer to the Rabbi by whose partisans he was denounced and thrown into prison? The fact that he selected an "enlightened Rabbi" instead of an every day Orthodox one whom he usually criticizes, would lend color to such a supposition. (1).

תפוצת ארץ, written in 1867, is a tragic-comedy of the real Jewish life of his time; and, as in the poems referred to above, presents the Rabbi in an unfavorable light. Eliphelet, a coach man, sits down with his wife and children to the Seder, on the first

(1) Mr. Brainin criticizes this poem for its lack of psychological description. He says: (Hashiloah vol. I pp. 333-4) "We do not know the woman; we see only her shadow.... she does not say a word throughout the whole poem. What are her feelings? Gordon is silent about that." This is unjust. The poem is not intended as a psychological study in the first place. The woman as described by the poet, is overwhelmed with grief - and a person in such a state of mind is not given to much talking. Mr. Brainin is also unfair in saying that the poem was written only for the sarcasm against the Rabbi. Gordon has a higher object which is embodied in the line-

תפוצת ארץ, (vol. IV p. 47)

night of Pesach, and after skimming through the Hagadah, prepares himself for the sumptuous meal with pleasant anticipations. Suddenly a cry of anguish rings out from the kitchen, and Sarah his wife announces the terrible news that "a grain has been found in the soup!" She was making ready to go to the Rabbi but her husband threatened her with his fist and she desisted. He had worked so hard all winter in order to prepare for the Pesach, and now all his labor was to be destroyed in an instant! Sarah did not touch the food; her husband and the children ate it, but the joy of the holiday was gone. On the next day Sarah found another grain in the pot; she could no longer bear "the weight of two grains", and she hastened to consult the Rabbi who, by the single word "Leaven" ^{"Chametz"} destroyed all her hopes, and prohibited the use both of the food and the dishes. The poor woman was afraid to go home, thinking of the threats of violence made by her husband the night before. The Rabbi sent two public officers (1) to arrest Eliphelet and fined him. But henceforth the peace of the family was broken. Eliphelet mistreated his wife for a time and then divorced her.

Trivial and incomprehensible as such incidents may seem to men of modern days, they formed part of the tragedy of Russian Ghetto life in the days of Nicholas I. The poet does not tell

(1) The Jewish Consistories during the time of Nicholas I. and the early days of Alexander II. had police-powers given them within their own jurisdiction.

it in mock-heroic fashion; he describes it with all the feeling and pathos of a tragedy. Thinking of the Seder, and of the usual stereotyped answer in response to the "four questions" the poet reflects:

עבדים היינו ומה אבנו נהיה?
האם לא נהיה שנה שנה משה משה?
האם לא צד היום אחרנו בבבלים?
הקה חבלי שוא מוסר הבבלים?

And how vividly we see the Seder:

אך ברוך השם הכל נעשה יפה
יינו יתאדם מצותיו מצויה אפה
כל דומה הבית נרות וטהורות
נרות המצוה יאירו בטורות
ולרו לשלחן מסביב כשתלי זית
אשת טובת לב עומדת בירכתי הבית
והוא לבוש בדים צומק לבנים
לבב שמח אבצה לזאת פנים
יספר לילדיו נסי יציאת מצרים
אף ובטוחים כי חיש אלו יספיד
שילת אתם יין מר הגביע.

(p. 52)

What a picture, indeed, of Jewish idealism. Unfortunately everything was soon changed after the terrible discovery of the grain in the soup. Eliphelet did not finish the Hagadah and

לא ראה כי זו הכסתות מחקו
כי נגב מחתן האפיקורמן
על כתלי הבית הצללים נטין
מלאו שלום במסתים יבין
גם פשתי הן נרות במזרחית דתו
הדלת נפתחה - אך לא בגביע...

Eliphelet avenged himself on Sarah for going to consult the Rabbi

ואלי פלש בקדאת שוה כאשר אחר
ויצוי אלי פלש לטרה כאשר דבר.

and after the divorce was not Sarah justified in wailing

אל אלקי אבי

משנה דרכך חרב ביתר
ושל גרמינו שוארם הקרובו קין!

Such is the tragedy of Jewish life!

הַיָּמִין הַזֶּה is another instance taken by the poet to show the inconveniences a strict adherence to Rabbinical laws may cause. Rabbi Kalmar, a Jewish ^{merchant} from the Pale who did business in Moscow far away from his home, is informed by his wife that a good match has been proposed for their daughter, that a meeting had been agreed on for the intended bride and groom and his parents and friends for the second days of Succoth, and she requested him to come home for the joyful occasion. R. Kalman informed his wife that he would arrive home on the seventh day of Succoth, and started out from Moscow. That journey was long and tedious, for it was in ante-railway days. The poor man tried his best to arrive home for the holidays - in fact he had reached within three miles from his home, when the shadows of the night told him that the holiday was begun. Unwilling to travel the short distance on a holiday, R. Kalman was forced to stop for the holidays in the village so near his home. He reached home early on the morning after the holidays only to find his wife and his daughter sick with disappointment, for the groom and his party had left immediately after the holidays disgusted with the unnecessary delay on the part of the bride's father.

The poet purposely exaggerated in order to show the absurdity of the Rabbinical law of שבת. The moral is shown in

הוּא הָיָה בְּמִסְכָּה
בְּיָמֵינוּ הַזֵּה
הַיָּמִין הַזֶּה

and in:

וְיָדָעְתָּ מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹם
כִּי הָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
לְיָמֵינוּ וְלְיָמֵי הָעָתִיד
וְלְיָמֵי הָעָתִיד

To R.Kalman however, the Rabbinical ordinances were equally binding and he fell a martyr to them.

The last poem of the series, *וְיָדָעְתָּ מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹם* surpasses by far in its pathos, realism and depth of feeling any poem in the Hebrew language. It is a terrible arraignment of the Jewish Consistorial boards during the reign of Michaelas; and shows at the same time the attitude of the masses towards the Maskilim. Joseph b Simon was a child-prodigy. At thirteen he was already famous for his knowledge and acumen in the Talmud, and was looked upon as the future light of Israel- in its Rabbinical sense. But Joseph soon realized the futility of a study of the Talmud only, and secretly he began to indulge in secular studies also, to the consternation of his admirers. His father attempted to dissuade him from his course; but Joseph maintained that the study of the sciences was not subversive of Judaism. He soon left his native town and went to Padua to study medicine. In the same town there was another boy of Joseph's age, Uri, the son of Jochanan the shoemaker. He was a wild lad, never cared to study though his father tried hard to make a Rabbi out of him. At the age of nineteen he had already become the terror of the town. He took to horse dealing, and engaged in other questionable undertakings. Upon being rebuked by his honest father he left home and disappeared.

R. Shamgar, the head of the Consistory now appears on the scene. The board-rooms are described with R. Shamgar sitting in judgement. It was the time of conscription; the board is busy selecting recruits taken mostly from the ranks of the poor; the rich bought exemptions for their sons. One woman complains of the abduction of her only son for military service; but R. Shamgar finds that she belongs to the same family with a man who has four sons, and since his sons were scholars her only son has to be the scape-goat. Other people come on business to get pass-ports and similar things and everyone is attended to in accordance with the bribe he offers. Finally a rough looking, stout but well dressed young man appears and asks for a passport. He was Uri the shoemaker's son. He spoke haughtily and impudently. He has to go abroad for "business", and must have a pass-port. "But" objects Shamgar, "you are a hidden one" (1). In response, the applicant drew a hundred rouble note from his pocket. The argument was convincing enough.

R. Shamgar knitted his brow, thought hard for a few minutes; then his

(1) Many fathers, to save their sons from military conscription under Nicholas (the length of service being twenty-five years) refused to enroll their male children in the official registers at their birth. These were called "hidden ones" (*anuyim* in Hebrew). Officially these were non-existent. As such proceedings were, of course, illegal, such hidden ones were always at the mercy of the professional informers who constantly demanded black-mail in lieu of their silence; and they suffered the further disadvantage of being unable to obtain a pass-port legally. As a pass-port is absolutely essential to freedom of movement in Russia, the hidden ones were forced to apply to the Consistorial boards for such documents. The latter often issued fraudulent pass-ports either in the names of the dead or absentees, for a money consideration of course and thus caused such tragedies as described in the poem.

face lighted up;he discovered a way out of the difficulty."Some ~~three~~ three years ago" he said " a young man of your age disappeared, and nobody knows his whereabouts. I will therefore issue a passport;only you have to assume his name." Uri readily consented;he paid the money,and left a new man, for he was now Joseph b.Simon. R?Shamgar went to the synagogue to recite the afternoon prayer.

Meanwhile, the real Joseph b.Simon was studying diligently in Padua not only medecine but also,Jewish branches.He was an idealist. Medecine was to afford him his livelihood; for the rest he would preach and teach and a more enlightened Judaism - a Judaism more in harmony with philosophy. After suffering hardships and privations for five years,he reached his goal;he became a doctor of Medecine and of Philosophy. He hesitated about returning to his native land. But the thought that the people there need him most,and the news that his mother was sick banished all hesitation. With his documents and his old pass-port in his pocket, he started home.

The train roared and puffed and Joseph,tired and weary,fell asleep. In his dreams he saw himself as a Rabbi instituting various reforms to lighten the burden of his people,and the smile of satisfaction played on his lips when he heard the blessings showered upon him by his congregants. He awoke with pleasant emotions,but fell asleep again. An unpleasant dream came to torment him.He saw himself in Purgatory where all who ridiculed the Rabbis

were punished. Among ^{them} he finds Elisha b. Abuyah, Acosta, Spinoza, various Jewish Maskilim, such as Lewinshon, Shatzkes, Erter and Levensohn; and he heard a voice proclaiming his own doom. He awoke with a start. Meanwhile the train was rushing on. A little more puffing and roaring of the engine and Joseph found himself on Russian soil. Officers demand pass-ports; Joseph showed his and trembled at the impression his name made on the officer. He thought it was ~~harmless~~ because his pass-port was out of date, and declared himself ready to pay the prescribed fine. The officer, however, arrested him on the charge of murder. His fellow passengers could hardly realize that their quiet, apparently naive fellow traveller whom they thought to be a doctor was a murderer! In prison Joseph was told that some months ago a horse dealer tried to smuggle a drove of horses across the boundary line. The officers overtook him; a fight ensued, and in the melee that followed one officer was killed by the desperate smuggler. He himself escaped, but among the effect left behind by him his pass-port was found, and the description and name tallied with that of the present prisoner. In vain Joseph protested that he never dealt in horses, and that he had been out of Russia these five years. He was kept in prison for some time; and then in company with other criminals he was driven on foot to his native town for trial. The convoy, upon arrival there, met a funeral procession. The soldiers according to law, presented arms in honor

of the dead. Joseph recognized his father as the chief mourner, and wanted to throw himself on the bier; but the soldiers gruffly forced him back into the line of march. Joseph was found guilty because the Consistorial authorities especially R. Shamgar deposed that there was only one Joseph b. Simon in the town, who had already long ago acquired a bad reputation as a heretic. There was nobody to take Joseph's part since he was considered a heretic. He was sentenced to hard labor. R. Shamgar continued as the head of the Consistory.

The poem begins with a scathingly sarcastic enumeration of the powers of R. Shamgar who, is described in all divine attributes for he too by doctoring the official registers, changed men into women, young into old, gave childless parents a half-dozen sons, and vice versa. These miracles however happen to the rich only; the poor have to pay for it.

Joseph's youth is described:

בן שש קרה דפגמא צום רשע
 בן שבע תרץ בתוספות בל קשור
 בן שמונה בל רשע צום פאמיליע

At thirteen he was already a Talmudist:

אין תלמוד יס-קוסף הקליות

and every rich man who had a daughter of marriageable age:

חשב תוספות למשורר לויגן אליה

A realistic description of the synagogue-court is next given (Canto IV) - it is so realistic in fact that we seem to see the disgraceful scene, and feel outraged. Brainin says (Hashiloah vol. I p. 339) that such verses would not be written by a poet in

another language. Perhaps; but then no other people presents such a sight. The poet

The poet takes occasion in Canto V. to apostrophize the extraordinary desire for study, characteristic of Jewish boys:

מה עצמות מה גברת תשוקת הדעת
בלבב נערי ישראל, רק עם מלצות!
אשתמיד על המדבח בוערת.
.....
עמדו על דרכי מיר, איש וישיאך תלדון
וראו בחורי עני הולכים בחפזון
.....
אנה הם צולים לישון על קמיר
לחיות חיוצצרי, לשאת כל קרע
ואת המורק אדם כי נוסות באהל.

(p.101)

and again:

בשם למנצח בקרוב ה' יהודים!

It is interesting to notice in Canto VI. that all the reform Joseph, or rather Gordon, would like to see instituted are as all of such a character, that they would not in the least infringe upon even Rabbinical Judaism, and yet would lift a burden from off the shoulders of the people. Even for advocating such trifling reforms Joseph was looked upon as a heretic!

The death and funeral of Joseph's mother are drawn by the hands of a master, and touch us to the heart with their genuine pathos. Especially vivid are the lines:

אנה קול חרד בקרוב הקריה
קול אסתר בלגונא קיש קיש קריה
וקול הקריה צדקה תצול ממות!
הכסים נפתחו, התעויות פגרו,
ושמחו אמות ודמויות נגרו
על אדם כשר כל צמח נחשבת.

But how terrible was the meeting of the two processions:

ובצור מצבר מזה הלוח עבר
בא מצבר מזה ללך אחרת....

and at this very moment:

נראה לי, אמר השמש המושך בקריו
כאלו הברמון והרגו בהרון,
לבי נקצר, שמא צדנה חיה....

Vain fright!

We are shocked at seeing Shamgar's hypocrisy who after

issuing the false pass-port and having received the bribe:

שמן חסאה בצלחת
ויצא להגפול מנחה בצירה

(p.96)

but how ironical and pathetic are the lines:

ונדיבו אדם רחמים בני רחמים
אגיש ל מנחה ואתה בסבר פנים -
דרך תפלה קטן ושני זוגות תפלין.

Indeed, what other comfort could the unhappy Joseph find?....

In his l'envoi יהודה אל the poet acknowledges that the pictures he had drawn were not at all agreeable; nay more:

גם לבי אלי יכאב, גם נפשי לי מרה,
אל מעשיך ירי השלבים בים צרה

(p.132)

but he excuses himself in the lines:

ומה מעשיך אמאחי יהודים
יבאנו רק צמות, רק צני ומרוצת
ובכל פנות העם, ממדד עד השפחת
רק דמעות גרות, ובכי ואנחות.

In a letter of Oct.27th 1876(Letters vol.1 p.210) he says:

"Perhaps my poem *אשר דרסוק* will bring it about that in the holes wherein Jews hide themselves, a family shall not be ruined because of a "suspicion of Leaven"; perhaps *וישמח ברחל* will show the simple minded R.Kalman or his likes the foolishness of distress

ing himself unnecessarily in order to fulfill the commandment: "Thou shalt rejoice on thy holiday"; perhaps ~~עולם אבנא~~ will stir up the Rabbis not to be so rigorous with the dietary laws; perhaps ~~הן שווי~~ which I wrote with blood and tears shall save some Jewish woman in the future from life-long ruin through the ignorance of the Rabbinical writers of grammar and the Bible; perhaps ~~הן שווי~~ will prevent a Jewish publican from issuing a false pass-port." And who shall say that his poems did not have the desired effect, did not open the eyes of hundreds and thousands of his readers? Mr. Brainin may be right in saying, (Hashiloah vol. I pp. 336-71) that there is nothing new in what Gordon says about the Rabbis. But a poet need not always proclaim something new, like Mr. Brainin's ideal poet who "sees from one end of the world to the other". Gordon, by giving popular ideas a poetic garb makes them more striking, more impressive. Had Gordon followed Brainin's suggestion as to what a poet should be, he would be unknown today, and could do nothing towards the awakening of his people. Fortunately, Gordon knew his people better; he knew what would impress them what would appeal to them. Hence his fame, hence his success, hence the good he helped to accomplish. Nor is Smolensky right in saying that his "Epics of the Present" are only of temporary value (Hashahar vol. 10 p. 462). Many generations will come and pass before the reforms advocated by Gordon shall be brought into realization.

While these misuses of Judaism endure, these poems cannot fail to be of value. And when the golden days of true reform come these poems will be read with renewed interest, because they will be recognized as having contributed a great deal towards making an era of reform a possibility.

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CHAPTER VI.

LYRIC POEMS.

As a lyric poet Gordon shows his powers only when expressing his feelings with relation to his people. His poems of nature are beautiful more because of the language than of the contents. The poems *הנחל והעץ* are didactic rather than descriptive. The gist of the former is; every feeling man is bound in love and nature of the God. The revival in nature symbolizes to him resurrection and immortality. He philosophizes as to the origin of nature, sings praises to God, and encourages man not to fear death. As a rule, nature descriptions are not Gordon's strong point. Of his twelve sonnets in Vol. I, only the 11th and 12th are Jewish; the poet bewails in them the death of two Russian Jewish periodicals, "Dawn and Zion." The rest are rich ⁱⁿ rhetoric and in mild satire, but lack in feeling and in depth. In his translation of ~~MM~~^{as} Byron's Hebrew Melodies, and of some of Schiller he shows himself the master of the Hebrew language that he was- the translation appearing like original poems. Gordon, the poet revealed himself in his Jewish lyrics for his heart is bound up with that of the people.

A poet, subject to various moods, he is swayed alternately

by feelings of joy and despair. He had dedicated himself to the Hebrew muse, from his earliest youth;

אֲנִי בְיָמַי חָרַפְתִּי, בַּת צוּר, אֶל מִצָּח
לֹא חָרַב שָׁל וְלִדְוָה, נִדְרַי נִדְרָתִי
בְּבֶד לְבַבְרִית, אֲנִכִּי עַד נֶחֱח
לֹא פֶל חֲשִׁי בִּי לְעִמּוּת, מְכַרְתִּי.

Vol. I, XVII.
He sings because he cannot help singing, Like the German poets

Wenn ich nicht ⁷dinuen und dichten soll

So ist das Leben mir kein Leben mehr,

So Gordon,

בְּפִשִּׁי לֹא אֶחֱלִיק, לִבִּי לֹא אֲחִיר
בְּנִי אֵלֵי בְּרָאִי וְלִדְוָה, נִדְרָתִי
רִחַ אֲדִי בִּי וּפְקִדְתִּי עֲמִלְתִּי,
צוּר אוֹסִיק לְעִיר בְּאֶשֶׁר שׁוֹרְתִי. (Vol I, XXII.)

He calls upon his people to arise from their lethargy:

הֲקִיץ חַיִּי עַד מָתַי תִּישְׁנָה?
הֵן גַּי הַזֵּל תִּשְׁמַשׁ תִּשְׁמַשׁ תִּשְׁמַשׁ... (IP. 44).

אֲרַץ עֵדֶן זֹאת הֵן לְךָ תִּפְתֶּנָּה
בְּיָדֶיךָ אֲחִינוּ' לְךָ יִקְרָאן אֶתֶּנָּה... (Ibid.)

Alas, it proved otherwise; but the signs of the time in 1863 looked so favorable; all ^{then} seemed necessary was

הִיָּה אֲדָם בְּאֶמְתֶּךָ! וְהָיָה בְּאֶמְתֶּךָ. (P. 45).

He refutes the imputation that the Jews are incapacitated for knowledge and education:

הן אמת יקרב כי צד כח נואלת
החורב בסבלות, חכמה געלת
ותמרוד באור ותשיב בחושך

But

לא בשאט נפש כל זאת משות
יר האונס היתה, הוא הקדמון.

and he ends with an appeal

כל צה תייכס לחכמה הקדמון.

But the poet does not always find himself in the happy mood of hopefulness. From the height of the heavens whither ^{he} was carried on the wings of his fancy, he sees a panoramic view of the condition of his people. He beholds the pillars of Judaism trembling on the point of collapse, and the ^{youth} ~~earth~~ escaping through the windows; the dingy

חור אשכנזים שחשי בני העצורים

young men sinking in the "Sea of the Talmud"; the blind old man who is

רב מברך את צמח בחמרה תצטעה

the heads of the consistories emptying the pockets of the people; the compulsion of ideas and ideals, one not understanding the other; and, above all, a flock, the ^{לדור לדור} without pasture; its

wool sheared, and led by blind goats he realizes

כִּי גַם בְּמָרוֹם יִכָּבֵד וְעֵשִׂירִים

He sees also a tablet with letters erased representing his own youthful ideals- he can no longer contain himself

אֵלֶּה הֵם !

מִכָּל חֲלוֹמוֹתַי לֹא נִשְׁתַּרְרָה אִמּוּמָה

שֶׁהָיָה תִקְוָה, הַשְׁכַּלְתִּי וְבֵנִי

וְשׁוֹב הָיָה וְתִקְוָתִי הָאִמּוּמָה

and he falls from heaven to earth. (בֵּית בְּלוֹלָה). the same undercurrent of despair runs through the poem לֹא מֵיָמַי צִמָּח .

A vague consciousness of the futility of his work steals upon him. Who will understand him; who will appreciate it?. The old generation looks with suspicion upon poetry and the poet:

מִתְּ בַּשִּׁיר, אֶפְיוֹרֵחִית בְּמַלְיָצָה

יִסְמָר עִם הַמְשׁוֹרֵר לְדֹר בְּמַחְיָצָה

the tender daughters of Zion are not given a Hebrew education, for

בֵּית תְּלִמְנוֹת תּוֹרָה-תְּפִלָּה לֹא מִדְּבַר;

the new generation have gone to opposite extreme.

הֵם הוֹלְכִים קְדִימָה שְׁנָה, שְׁנָה

מִיָּצֵד הַגְּבוּל עַד מֵתוֹ עַד אֵנָּה

אוֹלוֹ עַד מִקֵּץ מִשְׁמַע לֹא יָשׁוּב? ...

For whom, then, does he sing? He consoles himself with the

thought that there is still left "one in a city; two in a province" who do not ridicule the songs of Zion. For these he sings; they will understand him, then he embraces with tears and exclaims

הו' מי יקוץ צעידות מי זה יקריבני
אם לא האחרון במעוררי ציון הנה
אם לא גם אתם תקוראים האחרונים?

(P. 104).

Such feelings of despair cling to him continually. Even in the midst of a satirical poem, he cannot forget the misfortunes of his people, and a cry of anguish escapes him. The poet holds his pen in his hand. What shall be the theme of his poem? Various subjects suggest themselves to him, and one of these is

אולי תשימנה אצורך שפתי
ותהי למטר גשם ותתך דמעותי
על שבר בת צמי הגדול כיום?

Fortunately the ink drop on his pen dries up but not his despair. What are we, he asks in *עדר אדני*, a nation, a people, a race, a community? Seeing the various ways in which the Jews are exploited by their oppressors, who "skin our hide, shear our wool and lead us in a wilderness where there is no pasture", he comes to the conclusion:

לא עם, לא צדקה אנוחנו - ירק צדק

Thus, also, in *סלוק שכינות*. The Shechinah departs, because

it can no longer see the cruelties and injustice rampant in the "vale of tears"; it stops a few minutes with the poet and whispers to him:

זר לי צליל השורר בן אומי
גם אתה, ידעתי, תלית כמניני;
נלך יבאש פה מצחנה ורפשי
ומרחב יק אין לך להלך הנפש.

For what is the fate of poet, after all?

זר לי בעל החלומות, זר לי צליל
ממרוקים תשבץ כל חיי הבלך;
תושן, תראה חלום, רגע תנוח,
תיקץ, תראה שברון - שבר ברוח.

(Vol. I, P. 113-114.

How, then, can the poet sing of joy and happiness? "In my youth", he says in *בפלות השחר* (Vol. IV, 1-4). "I used to rise with the dawn, invoke my muse, and sing of love, of friendship, and delight, of freedom, and hope and comfort." But a change came over the vision of his dreams. For

Ere yet the morn in glory rose
While yet I turned my harp's sweet string.
A change came over me, alas!
I can but wail- I cannot sing!
For frightful dreams I saw by night,
I saw my people- horrid night!

He saw the lowliness of his people, their numerous bruises,
sources of their poverty, their false friends and evil teachers,
and his life because embittered:

No more my jalous strains shall ring;

Of freedom, light, I must despair-

Eternal servitude I sing,

I dream, disgrace, polluted air-

The rimes which from my ^{must} ~~name~~ do flow
Are ~~their~~ ^{it} dear drops on my nation's woe.

Henceforth my Muse is raven black,

Each word a curse; each phrase a dirge!

And withall that Lilienblum and Mordecai Cohen say that Gordon
was not a national poet. Verily, the ways of the critic are
strange.

The riots of 1881 called forth two poems of Gordon, the
one ^{defiance} ~~breathing~~ ^{אחיות רוחות} the second, ^{אחיות רוחות} con-
solation. In the former he says:

עם אחד היינו, עם אחד נהי'
כי מקרבך בור אחד נקרב
יחדיו נחלוק ק גם שמחה גם נהי'
זה שנים אלפים מזה נפרדנו.

And even though

הספר מתחולל, יהיום הריוח
מים ראדונים צד צואר הגויצו

we will not give up the fight, but

נחזיק באלהים, דתו אל נצובק
ושפת קדשו אל תשכח מפינו.

Yet

אם גמר האל כי צור נחזיק בפלך
בנצרינו ובזקנינו (מל. 11/4-11/6).

In a more passionate and vehement tone, the poem *אמורי חתמן* is one of the strongest, and most pathetic of Gordon's Lyrics. The dedication is devised by the ingenuity of persons who are not allowed to speak freely; but the symbol is well understood, and is more appealing. The poet addresses himself to the Daughter of Jacob whom Ben-Hamor has defiled— an allusion to Genesis 34. He begins with words of condolence:

Why waillest thou, O sister dear.
And wherefore do thy spirits droop!
Thy rosy cheeks why wan and sear,
Thou wast defiled by a bestial troop?
If Fist prevails, if cowards assault,
O sister dear, is that thy fault?

After showing to her that she was not at all rendered impure by the bestiality of her assailants since the very blood they spilled will mark them like Cain with the blood of Abel, he finds some melancholy consolation in her dishonor.

..... I patient bore

With aching heart and body sore

Afflictions, pains which did befall

And yet, ^{did} hope, nor left my land withal-

But thy disgrace I cannot bear,

Come hence, come hence, O sister dear.

And he ends by saying that since we have neither ^a the house nor a mother, let us go to another inn, let us go to the land where freedom reigns supreme, where no man is ashamed of his nation or of his God ').

1). The solution that Gordon suggests in his poem is evidently emigration to America, and not to Palestine. The following quotations from a letter written to M. Gordon in 1885 will throw some light on Gordon's attitude towards Zionism. In response to Lilienblum's criticism that he did not sufficiently bewail the afflictions of Israel (referring to the riot of 1881), and that he did not sing in honor of Zionism, he says in his letter: "The reason I did not write ~~any~~ ^{any} Jeremiah on the riot was because I did not see any use in it. Have we not enough

But to return to his personal poems. In *בצאתי ששנתי* written in 1872, the poet enumerates his exertion on behalf of his people and ends with the self gratulation:

ובכן שש שנים את אחי עבדתי
עמה אצא אין כסף - אך לא חנם
לא לחי וזהב כחי עבדתי
עוד יוצא פני על נדום לא נדום

But in the following poem *מחלת הזכרון*, his despair steals

lamentations? and will lamentations in Hebrew affect our enemies who don't read Hebrew anyhow?

מה נשף לעבדים? הם עתים ירצו.
נשף לעמים, וחרדו יושמרו.

It is false that I am opposed to the ideal of a national resurrection. Like all faithful and loyal Jews I desire to see the salvation of my people; but, I wish this redemption to be complete and not merely to be delivered from the yoke of the nation only to fall beneath a more terrible yoke- that of ignorance. How can anation exist without civilization? Our fathers escaped from Egypt and ~~MINIM~~ took along their silver and gold, but not their darkness ^{and} plagues..... If we are to leave Europe without taking along the civilization, what is the good of leaving at all? It is better to perish in slavery than to lead the supposedly free life of the savage. These are

upon him again. He addresses himself to Purah, Lord of Olivion, and begs him to cause him to forget his former Ideals. In this poem Gordon shows himself iconoclastic. In his youth he awaited every day the arrival of the Messiah- he did not come-. He hoped that the Haskalah would prove a blessing- it proved a failure. The Hebrew language used to be his delight, for he thought that

בתיות אשפה ישיב גם צאק לתקיה

and, like a lover,

מך אהבתי שיתק, הגות בה, סלסלה
לחך שיתק לי, נפני אלחום פניק

This hope was also doomed to disappointment. If he could only forget his former dreams; but, he feels there is no hope.

וביך לא תצמח לגות מני השבר
בלתי אם - בכתב שכל גבו הקבר.

To this appeal Purah suggests drunkenness as an antidote to unpleasant recollections, to which the poet replies:

א הקה! עברי אנני - נזיר מני רחם
יין לא ישכח רישי; צפתי לא אנחם

the reasons why I did not write any poems on the recent events. At any rate, silence is not opposition. A Secret love a some-
times better than ^{open} ~~any~~ one. (Letters Vol 2, Pp. 113-114).

בְּיָדָהּ מְשִׁיבֵל אֵי, שְׂעֵמֶת מִפְּרִי כֶחֶשׁ
בְּסִגְלוֹת לֹא אֲמִין, לֹא קָרָם בִּי, לֹא נָחֵשׁ,
אֵי, אֵי לִי, מְשִׁיבֵל עֲבָרִי, אֵין מִרְפָּא אֶל שְׁבָרִי
רִפָּא לֹא מִרְפָּא עַד בָּאִי אֶל קִבְרִי.

(Vol. V, P. 26).

Again, he exclaims in despair

עַל מָה אֶדְבָּרְךָ אֲחִי, עַל מָה רָחִי אֲבִי,
אֵי לִי אִם אֲחִירֵשׁ, אֵי אִם קוֹל אֲשִׁמוּעַ. (Ibid P. 36).

and after such an outburst we may believe with him

אֵוִלִי נִשְׁמַת הַרְבֵּיב הַעֲנִיתִי
הִיא הַמְחִיקָה אוֹתִי

In his more calm moods he felt the sweet consciousness of duty well done:

אֵי הַגְּבֵר אֶת חֲקִי הַשְׁלֵמְתִי.
שֵׁשֶׁת עָלִי יוֹלָהִי, חֲלָקִי מִמַּעַלָּה;
רָגַע לֹא נָחֵתִי, נִפְשִׁי לֹא דוֹמָמְתִי
עוֹרֶרְתִּיךָ לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה

(Vol. V. P. 28).

Addressing himself to his Pen:

אַתָּם עָטוּ עָדִי נֶגֶד כָּל קָמִי
כִּי בַתִּם וְיוֹשֶׁר יִגְעַתוּ כָּל יוֹמִי,
כִּי כְסִיפֶר בַּעֲמֹל מַלְאֲמִי חֲבֵתִי
לִמְנוּחָה עַד יוֹם אַחֲרוֹן לֹא מַצֵּאתִי.

(Vol. 1, 123).

Again in a poem to Dolitzky he expresses his optimism in the following noble apostrophe:

אֵימִים קָדִים וְיוֹד מוֹתָנִי
אך אל שנינו מפניהם נחתה
לא עצים יבשים אנכי ואהה
ומגלם קרה לנחור עצמני
כמיני כמורך אל נא ננחם
על חלומות שתחלוס, ועל אשר חלמתי.

לא מקדם כזב, רציתי בחלומי
ותרמית צינים גם אתה לא תחזר;
וכן אל תינא כמוני משחת
היא לך צטו, צלה רש מקומי.

This poem was written July 14, 1892. Three months later Gordon was no more.

CONCLUSION.

The ~~last~~ preceding chapter will, it is hoped, have given the reader a comprehensive idea of Gordon as a poet; To quote all the noble passages of Gordon's poems would be to reproduce the six volumes of poetry, which he left behind him. We have dwelt somewhat at length upon his Jewish poems, because they, moreso than the others, tend to show the true nature of our poet; though his *שירי אהבה* and *בית מדרש*, which are human and express *Weltschmerz*, are equally *fecible* and sympathetic. The latter, would in fact, favorably compare with Gray's Elegy. His Elegy *על חן* on his friend Micah Joseph Lebensohn, written in 1854 ¹) at the age of 22 in the form of a

¹). In his preface to this poem Gordon describes the state of his mind at the beginning of his career in 1854.

Those were the days before the young graves ripened; the days of the fledgling just coming out of its shell. A ray of light broke forth and I saw that the day was approaching for me to go out in the barn and to seek grain for myself; but my feathers have not yet *spouted*, and my beak was not yet sharp enough. The walls of the Beth Hamirash began to totter and I

morality play, is a masterpiece of poetic expression and shows a mastery of language unequalled in literature. Of his 123 fables, 36 of which are original, the translations surpass their originals by their consc^{ious}ness and beauty of the style and dicti^{on}, and his original fables are rich in ^{hum}or and pithy. His epigrams and Almakams are keen and brilliant. However, as this essay has been somewhat too long already we can but mention Gordon's other poems en passant. To sum up, we may say and with truth, that Gordon stands preminent, in fact, unique in Hebrew literature, ^(see note) and all the honor of the new Jewish literature is- vanity. What good is it to me to have written my verses seeing that no body appreciates my work? My songs are like the crowing of the cock which only peasants hear and understand. Can I expect praise after death who have been almost forgotten while living? Again, describing the funeral of Nekrassoff, Russia's nation-all poet, add the honors showed ^{on} upon him, (Dec. 30th, 1879) he says: "I also hoped to be a

was standing one foot in the four cubit of the Halachah, and the other in the regions of life. When I began to walk with trembling knees to shift for myself, and there was no body to help or support my tottering steps, I met Lebensohn, a fledgling ~~XIX~~ like myself, but with grown feathers and a ^{strong} ~~strong~~ spirit- and he

as a master of language, as a poet and a humorist.
Gordon's complaint of a lack of appreciation on the part of the Hebrew-reading public. Thus in a letter written in 1880 to his bosom friend Kaplan he says: My work in the field of Hebrew literature

Jewish Nekrassoff; I also hoped to break their chains by the force of my words and to level the wall which surrounds them, the Chinese wall, by the trumpets of poetry (an allusion to Joshua)6+20) But my people does not understand- therefore I shall not die the death of poets like Nekrassoff; my people with not stone me with poems, nor crown me with flowers; would that they do not crown me with thorns, and do not stone my coffin!

Fortunately, Gordon was not right in thus complaining. These letters must have been written under the impulse of momentary disappointments. It was true that he was greatly ^{disgained} ~~championed~~ and the ^{peace} ~~peace~~ of his mind was disturbed by the unfavorable and unjust criticism of the M. L. Lilienblum who was his friend; for he thought that the critic voiced the popular sentiment. But Frishman's brilliant reply, and the polemics of other writers against Lilienblum, should have reassured him. The banquet given in his honor on the 25th anniversary of his literary labors in 1881, and the numerous letters, dispatches, and poems of congratulation proved that he was still looked upon as the "Lion of the Company". And when the Lion was dead, a cry of sorrow rang out from the hearts of his admirers- and their name is le- showed me ~~the~~ the path to light. Some steps we plodded together- he leading and I following. Alas; he disappeared too soon....

1) Letters I, P. 277. 2). (Ibid P. 23).

gion- ^{not} but only throughout Russia, but, wherever there was a Jew who read Hebrew, for every one felt that with the death of Gordon, the Haskalah lost one of its most daring champions, and the Hebrew muse its darling child.

No nobler tribute can be bestowed on ^{any} ~~the~~ poet than that which Gustav Karpeles did on Gordon- and we close with some extract of his article in the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, 1892, #43, Pp. 506-508.

"In the Schiller Homestead at Weimar, a poor young wanderer came once with the question: " Does Schiller live here?" "Yes", was the reply, "He lived here", but he is long since dead". "Schiller dead!" The poor lad couldn't comprehend it. Can a Schiller die? I can well imagine that ^{the} same incident may occur to some Jewish youth in the future. Leon Gordon dead! and with these words a world of poetry and fancy is destroyed for thousands of our correligionists.

"He was a great poet", a pillar of fire of the muses".
Soft and lovely, pure and bright rang his song when it sang of human feelings. A ray of twilight of love diffused itself through his poetic creations, and gave them a peculiar character. He was not a mere singer of lamentations- but a leader on the path of progress and freedom. His vivid perception of

the conquests of the new-time expressed itself in his songs pervaded by a profound grief which moved every feeling heart by the delicacy of lofty sentiment and by the spirit of truth; also the old song of Zion found an echo in his poems.

"Poetry with him was not a profession-but a holy avocation. Pure, honesty and modesty which never offered appearance for life and truth, distinguished him from all his fellows. Whatever he expressed in song, the sorrows and desires of love; longing and satisfaction; grief, resignation and cheerful reliance- all sprang of the well of pure human sympathy, deep enough to penetrate everyone, bright enough to sparkle with variegated opalescence. In everything a genuine feeling finds expression; one picture suggests another; one thought follows another, but an ardent, sea-deep love for his people is always at the bottom. Gordon's art consisted in that he combined diverse elements of feelings and ideals in an artistic composition, in the shortest space and by the simplest means- "Especially remarkable is the fact that in the desolate tyranny in which he lives, Gordon was a poet of freedom". This nightingale sang also in winter! And, indeed his song was the tone of the nightingale and the bark; it announced the dawn of a new era to the poor, the oppressed, the deceived".

Dr. Karpeles concluded with a comment on the last line of Gordon's אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, which he reads אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

"No, my dear Gordon, your pen point was never dry. You had so much to sing and to say about all the misery that met thee! And thousands listened to thy song, and thousands lived with thee in the world of thy songs which enchanted them like a mid-summer night's dream; and thousands will revive and be elevated by the graces of thy song, the music of thy singing, the sound of thy words, and the power of thy feelings. Thy tomb will be set in their souls, and they will remember forever, thy profound feelings; thy noble conceptions, thy staunch faithfulness, thy firm truthfulness, thy pure love, lofty spirit, and, above all, thy genuinely poetic gifts".

GORDON'S L'ENVOI.

But fifty years and two I lived.

Already age is coming fast.

My vigor ^{wanes} ~~wains~~, my eyes are dim,

A cloud upon my spirit settles.

The cloud, the shadow ^{-th'} ~~has~~ of death!

I see him coming nearer, nearer...

My strength gives way at his approach,

Behold him aim his arrows at me!

Thy double edged sword is but a straw!

I fear it not; It cannot fright me!

I am prepared, O death, to go

To day ^{or} ~~on~~ whensoever it please thee.

My work is done, within these leaves

Unto my people my soul I poured;

What matters if my day ~~is~~ done!

Or if my frame to ashes turns?

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And may it rot, and turn to dust
Within these leaves my soul I bound
(For leaves possess vitality)
And from Oblivion thus ^{re} preserved it.

Destroy my skin, my flesh, O death,
And grind me unto dust and sand
(I am but clay- the potter thou)
My soul within my book shall live!

And some may joy when I am gone
Some may condemn me, stone my grave;
This be my comfort; One perchance
Will see my soul and understand me;

Will feel my thought and my emotions,
In flesh and skin my spirit clothe-
And if my people again aught by it
^e Then I will lie and rot- in peace.