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"An Analysis of the Periodical Kerem Chemed As A Source
for the History of the Galician Haskalah"

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An Analysis of the Periodical
Kerem Chemed
as a Source for the History
of the Galician Haskalah

by
David Rose

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Hebrew Letters Degree
and Ordination

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Professor Rivkin

Digest of Thesis

Kerem Chemed seems to have had in mind an audience of young Jewish students, encouraging them to pursue diligently the path of the Haskalah. Made up of contributions by various Maskilim put in the form of letters, its contents are preponderantly scholarly and scientific in nature. Polemics and discussion of contemporary Jewish questions form only a small part of the subject matter throughout Kerem Chemed. It can, therefore, better serve as a source for the scholarly and scientific views of the Galician Maskilim than for detailed exposition of the dynamics of the Galician Haskalah.

This thesis attempts to deal with what Kerem Chemed reveals regarding the views and pronouncements of the Galician Maskilim on contemporary Jewish affairs. What they say on this subject in Kerem Chemed can be divided into three areas: 1) the program they advocate; 2) their attacks on Chasidism; 3) the explanations they offer for the rise and success of Chasidism.

1) The Galician Maskilim advocate in Kerem Chemed a set of high educational goals, both Jewish and secular, toward which Jews must strive. Only thereby, they say, will the Jewish name become great and mighty, as it was in the past.

2) Chasidism is attacked for its ignorance, superstition and hatred of the ways of the secular world. It

Digest of Thesis(continued)

is contended by the Maskilim that these shortcomings have always been the historical causes of Jewish suffering in the past, that the Chasidim are in a lowly condition because of their own guilt in this regard, and that through their actions all of Jewry is endangered.

3). Various explanations are offered for the phenomenon of Chasidism. One Maskil states that it embodies a preservation of ancient notions of idolatry. Another says that the evil has resulted from the influence of Shabbatai Zevi. The Chasidic "rebbeis" are seen as, far from being miracle men, men of reason who in their cunning and shrewd capabilities play on the desire of their ignorant followers to believe in wonders.

Nowhere do the Maskilim of Kerem Chemed advocate relief for their oppressed brethren as a prerequisite for their enlightenment. Nowhere do they acknowledge the burdens imposed by the government upon them. Nowhere do they offer as an explanation for the rise of Chasidism and its growth the possibility that these represent a normal reaction of the mass of Galician Jewry to the difficult circumstances of life which they faced.

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I

Kerem Chemed and its
Historical Background

The years during which the volumes of Kerem Chemed appeared (1833-1856) comprise a period in which the mass of Galician Jews was made up of an impoverished petty bourgeoisie which found itself brutally suppressed. Governmental discrimination against them was quite open, and it was carried on under only the thinnest veil of justification.

One of the burdens imposed was a special tax on kosher meat, a tax sufficiently high to more than double the price of this commodity. While a Jewish family could avoid paying this extremely high price by refraining from meat altogether, it could not avoid the payment of the government's tax on the lighting of candles. This tax was originally levied toward the close of the nineteenth century, but was increased two and one half times within two decades thereafter. It was required that the specified amount be paid to the tax collector before the beginning of the Sabbath each week. Payment had to be made regardless of whether one lit candles or not. The result was that this tax often left nothing in the family till with which to purchase the candles themselves. Other taxes,

such as those on marriage and residence rights, served to further increase the difficulty which these already poverty-stricken people faced.

Simultaneous with this discrimination through taxes, the government sought to Germanize the mass of Galician Jews, encouraging the elimination of their Jewish characteristics and language in order that they would become completely assimilated to the German culture and language. This was a calculated policy which had as its object the making over of the Jews into an instrument for the spreading of German culture. Trading and inn-keeping, two of the occupations in which Galician Jews were most widely engaged, were regarded by the government as being too heavily filled with Jews. Claiming that its desire was to improve and enlighten the Jews, the government instituted legislation forbidding them to be inn-keepers in the villages. With no other apparent way to earn their livelihood, Jews so engaged had to live, therefore, in constant fear of detection.

Thus, already heavy-laden with poverty, the Galician Jews' burdens were increased through the government's economic exploitation and its threat to their tenure of the occupations whereby they eked out an inadequate living, as well as its attempt to coerce them in the matter of Germanization.

Superimposed upon this situation was the rise in formerly feudal Galicia of a capitalist economy, partici-

pated in by a small number of wealthy Jews. The differences between the Galician Haskalah and Chasidism were directly related to this conflict which arose between the old feudalism and the new, successful capitalism. The struggle between the Haskalah and Chasidism "was mirrored in the antagonism between the rising Jewish upper classes and the persecuted, exploited Jewish petty bourgeoisie. Simultaneously, it was a struggle between the mass of the population, which tried to escape the Draconian measures of the government and who hated the alien German culture, and the small group of the wealthy with their intellectual appendage. The latter looked upon the government as an aid for their social elevation and found in the German language and culture a point of contact with the Christian bourgeoisie of the monarchy and of Europe."(1)

Being the victims of what was occurring, the Chasidim understandably attributed Jewish suffering to the oppression of rulers and accordingly felt deep resentment at the government's harsh treatment. The program of Germanization was looked upon as simply another aspect of oppression, and all that was involved in it was, therefore, to be resisted. Secular learning, science and the vernacular were viewed as being opposed to God, unclean and empty.

The Maskilim, on the other hand, being alligned with the small group of wealthy Jewish capitalists and enjoying

the benefits of influence and social prestige, expressed praise for the government and its policies. The ignorant Chasidim might thereby be purged of their superstitions, their "confused ways" and social unacceptability, which characteristics in their fellow Jews, they felt, constituted a threat to the continuance of their own welfare and security.

Kerem Chemed was one of the publications of the Haskalah involved in its battle against Chasidism, although its character was not meant to be predominantly polemical either in nature or in makeup. Intended as a successor to Bikurei Ha-Itim, its first volume was published under the editorship of Solomon L^öb Goldenberg in 1833, the same year in which the last volume of Bikurei Ha-Itim appeared. Although it was not printed annually, as Bikurei Ha-Itim had been, seven of its nine volumes had been published by 1843. Three years later, Goldenberg died, and the publishing of Kerem Chemed was not resumed until 1854, when Schneiur Sachs assumed the duty of compiling and editing its contents. In 1856, the ninth and last edition of this publication was printed.

Kerem Chemed is ostensibly composed of items of correspondence written by various Maskilim. This is the first impression drawn from a glance at the beginning and end of each of the items on its pages. While Kerem Chemed does contain some letters written by Maskilim to each

other, most of the "letters" which fill its volumes are nothing other than essays and scholarly treatises sent to the compiler for the purpose of being published, each accompanied by a few words of salutation. In spite of the desire of the compiler to present all the material that was published within the framework of letters and his occasional modification of it to fit his scheme, the men who wrote for Kerem Chemed, of course, looked upon what they submitted as the scholarly treatises and essays that they were. As a result, one may smile at reading the following passage addressed to Goldenberg by Isaac Erter:

When you were here in the city where I live in 1834, I gave you an essay, "Chasidism and Wisdom", and you changed this essay into a letter...If you had let me know that you like only letters, then I would have with my(own) hand changed the essay into a letter...(2)

The significance of the fact that the content of Kerem Chemed is made up of what was written with the knowledge and purpose of publication rather than actual correspondence is that very few unknown or private facts are revealed in it.

Joseph Klausner tells us that the initial purpose of Kerem Chemed was to carry on the function of Bikurei Ha-Itim, but in a "more scientific and less rhetorical" vein of writing. He also says that Kerem Chemed became "entirely scientific" after the second volume of it was published.(3)

If one were to measure this latter statement in absolute terms, it would be found inaccurate; however, with the exception of an occasional remark or paragraph here and there, this appraisal of the last seven volumes is a correct one.

The majority of the letters contained in Kerem Chemed might be said to intend to set the example which their authors hoped would be followed by the readers, an example of rational and scholarly enquiry into matters both religious and secular, Jewish and non-Jewish. They treated numerous subjects, running the gamut from philosophy and book reviews to treatises on such topics as astronomy, mathematics and the question of the perpetual punishment of sinners. Of course, not only was Kerem Chemed meant to set an example of scholarship, but it also provided an outlet for publication of some of the writings of the Maskilim.

Kerem Chemed cannot serve as a source for detailed and documented exposition of the economic, social and political factors intimately bound up with the Galician Haskalah, but it can be used as a source for detailed information on the scholarly and scientific views held by the men who participated in this movement. Nevertheless, along with their purely scholarly and scientific enquiries, they devote some of their attention in Kerem Chemed to questions of the day, presenting views and ratio-

nales which aimed at instilling in their readers a certain orientation and set of attitudes to be applied to the practicalities of Jewish life. It is mainly with these views and rationales that this thesis will attempt to deal.

Expressing the hope that they will learn from its contents and act accordingly, reference is often made in Kerem Chemed to the children of the generation and to the young ones of our people. Kerem Chemed would thus seem to have been intended primarily for an audience of the young men of the generation, the students and thinkers who, in the view of the writers, might turn to Chasidism if they could not be influenced to remain in the camp of the Maskilim.

Kerem Chemed embodied the plea that its readers be at one with the language and mores of modern society and that they follow the path of enlightenment and research.

Notes to Chapter I

- 1) R. Mahler, "The Austrian Government and the Hasidim During the Period of Reaction(1818-1848)", in Jewish Social Studies, Vol. I, p. 198, New York, 1939.
- 2) Kerem Chemed, Vol. III, p. 106, Prague, 1838.
- 3) J. Klausner, הספדיון על חסידות החסידים, Vol. II, p. 38, Jerusalem, 1952.

II

The Program of the Galician Maskilim

Although the men who contributed their essays for publication in Kerem Chemed dealt with questions in various fields of Jewish and secular scholarship rather than with problems of the day and practical, effective paths toward meeting them, one might nevertheless attempt to construct a kind of recommended program of action which they apparently hoped their readers would adopt and help to spread.

Underlying any program that the Galician Maskilim might be said to put forth in Kerem Chemed is the strong feeling that the favor and regard of nations and ruler is to be sought at all cost. Whenever one of them mentions an instance when such favor or recognition has been extended, even in the most trivial matter to which little significance can be attached, he does so in enraptured language.

These men advocated a program whereby Jews were to become an integral part of the life led in the cultured and socially proper secular world. The Jewish community had to improve the manners, widen the understanding and develop the intellect of its members, so that they could

become harmonized with the world outside. Everything had to be done "so that the nations might say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"(1)

At the time of publishing the first volume of Kerem Chemed, Goldenberg chose to begin it with a letter written fifty-one years earlier by Naphtali Hirz Wessely. This letter was written in connection with an imperial order requiring Jewish children to be educated in the vernacular. Its author mentions the negative reaction of the Jews of Vilna and Prague to the order and expresses his own concern in words which signalize the attitude which the Maskilim sought to inject into the body of Jewry:

...it was a time of trouble in their eyes... and we trembled greatly because we thought that these men in their foolishness might weaken the thread of lovingkindness that was extended to us from on high; and in order to persuade our brethren that it is proper that we take hold of this, and that the study of the languages and the knowledge of geography and history do not break down the fortified walls of the Torah, but that they crown and glorify the wisdom of a master of the Torah... we have written the following letter...(2)

Solomon Judah Rapoport expresses the basic feeling of the Galician Haskalah when he speaks of the great loss that is involved when Jews labor under the misconception that they must shun everything that lies outside the Jewish world:

...I do not say, God forbid, that my soul is not attached to the House of

Jacob...but many experiences and enquiries have shown me that not by separating themselves from every people, without partaking in all their wisdom, their teachings and their precious books, will they ascend to the height which has been set for them, but only if they seek the good from every land and people...(3)

Similarly expressing the necessity for Jews to occupy their interests beyond the narrow confines of Jewish lore and learning, Isaac Samuel Reggio, playing on the words **העלוי והשואל**, speaks of those

...to whom it has not yet been made clear that the Israelite is obligated to study the holy language and the language of the peoples and some of the fields of study which do not deal with faith...and now because such men have increased...let us express gratitude to the precious author (i.e. of the book **תורה ודעה**), who in the uprightness of his heart has been prompted to remove from them such a stumbling block and to open the eyes of the blind Hebrews...(4)

Elsewhere, addressing himself to Goldenberg, Reggio expresses his confidence that far reaching benefit for all of Jewry will result from the work of Jews who concern themselves with applying modern methods of scholarship in order to remove from Jewish belief and practice elements unacceptable to contemporary society:

...Would that the heart of those who come forth from Jeshurun were perfect as yours, grasping the coattails of research, and purging through it the divine judgments of human additions; for then the sun of righteousness would shine on the remnant of Israel, and it would be well for us all the days!(5)

Pursuant to their emphasis on wide Jewish participation in world culture and wisdom, the Maskilim sought to encourage the translation of secular works into Hebrew. It would seem that they also hoped that such a practice would adapt Hebrew to modern literary purposes and thereby give it reputation as a fine contemporary literary language among others. It was anticipated that Hebrew, as other languages, could be made into a medium for secular scholarship. Reflecting this attitude, Isaac Michael Monies advocates the view that it is necessary for Jewish scholars

...to engage in the work of copying learned writings and useful knowledge from foreign languages into our holy tongue, and to make it the queen of the languages as formerly, and to make it great and mighty as in antiquity...(6)

While such statements as that of Monies regarding a desired status for the Hebrew language do not occur very often in Kerem Chemed, his wistful gaze into the past epitomizes a tendency of the contributors to Kerem Chemed to dip into the Jewish past and choose from it objects of striving which could justify their advocacy of a program of Jewish involvement and ultimate compatibility with the secular world. In the course of the increased intercourse with non-Jewish cultural influences which they emphasize, the writings in Kerem Chemed often appeal to what their authors feel are fine precedents and examples set in former times. The essence of Judaism, its pure

elements of needed guidance for today, they claim, can be rescued from the harmful and superfluous notions that have cropped up to mislead the masses of the Jewish people. In order to demonstrate that this pure essence which must always guide Jewish life coincided with the program which they presented for their times, they write apologetics for pieces of Rabbinic literature and for those Jewish personalities of the past whom they can idealize and look to as heroes, champions of a view similar to their own.

The man most consistently sought out and represented as treading the only path which it is proper for Jews to follow is, as would be expected, Maimonides. Such statements as this, that "the one who lights the eyes of Israel, he is the Rambam..."(7) are to be found in great abundance wherever one looks in Kerem Chemed. In holding him up as the supreme example of the pure Jewish way of life, the Galician Maskilim found support for much of their program. Maimonides employed scholarly research to purge Judaism of impure and superstitious elements that had attached themselves to it, at the same time benefiting Judaism by bringing to it the learning of the nations:

...the Rambam, of blessed memory... brought the wisdom of Greece close to the path of the Torah, and in truth his greatness is that he restored to our religion that which it had of old, but now with more explanation according to reason and wisdom...and making it clean of all foreign dross...(8)

The unnamed author of this statement also tells his readers that centuries ago Jewish scholars recognized the fact that the true Judaism, as expressed in the works of Maimonides, could never be harmonized with the notions reflected in the Zohar. He also voices the hope that, recognizing this, learned rabbis will come to congregations of every land, so that "there will be in this a significant gain in the condition of the people there in (regard to) religion and ethics."

Solomon Judah Rapoport states that the man who feels that the life and thought of the nations must not enter into his Jewish world is proved wrong when we glance back at our great men of former times:

...he thinks that the love of the true good lies only in hatred of every people--in hatred of all their ways--even the praiseworthy and nice ways, in which all the great men of our people walked, like Rabbenu Saadia, the Rambam and others like them...(9)

According to Aaron Charin, the work of Maimonides indicates, moreover, that free use of the vernacular is not only sanctioned, but even desirable:

...our teacher and our light, the Rambam... wrote the book of the Moreh and the Peirush Ha-Mishnayos to give light to the children of his generation in the accustomed language of the people, the Arabic language...(10)

In the Galician Haskalah's idealization of Maimonides, the most extravagant homage is paid him as representing a deathless figure. To know him is to have all the

tools necessary for elevating the lives of Jews and helping them out of their ignorance:

To this man alone have I lifted my eyes....a veil of darkness covers our entire land...A thousand thanks to you, Rabbenu Moshe, my guide and my teacher!(11)

Referring sadly to a young man whom he had been teaching and who apparently had recently been attracted to Chasidic ways, one Maskil laments:

I wrote him a letter of reproof and warned him not to be caught in the net of the Chasidim...all this has come upon him only because he did not hearken to my voice(telling him) always to meditate in the books of Rabbenu Moshe...(12)

The same letter proclaims the indispensable value of Maimonides in this way:

...And, therefore, if you listen to my advice, drink pure water, which flows without interruption from the head of the rock, from which all the enlightened men of the people of Israel drank and will continue to drink; and they will still not come to the depth of his enquiries; he is our lord who lights our darkness, Rabbenu Moshe bar Maimon...(13)

Such was the manner in which the Maskilim writing in Kerem Chemed hung a great portion of the intellectual phase of their program on the figure of Maimonides. Their approach to Rabbinic literature was similarly apologetic and self-justifying throughout. The rabbis were rational men, according to their view, who held to the same pure conception of Judaism as that advocated by the Maskilim.

Our sages of antiquity would never have agreed to the use of interpretations and descriptions such as those of the current Kabbalistic view. They also claimed that whenever Rabbinic literature contains references which reflect ideas unacceptable to the modern world of thought that the Maskilim meant to be a part of, these references did not really intend what one might ordinarily think, but something else altogether. A typical example of this attempt of the Maskilim to justify the point of view which they had adopted from their society is contained in a letter of Aaron Charin:

And behold(in Chapter 2 of Sukah),
'Our rabbis taught: at the time when the sun is eclipsed, it is a bad omen for all the world...' and it concludes: 'and at the time when Israel does the will of God, they do not have to fear any of these omens...'--The lips of he who uttered this ending should be kissed for removing from our teachers...the reproach and mockery of the fools who say: 'Where is their wisdom, that they ascribe the causes of events to the eclipses of the luminaries...?'--Of course, everyone goes according to the ending, and the ending of the B'raita is true; in it our sages, of blessed memory, revealed to the hearing ear and discerning heart that all that they said concerning the eclipses of the luminaries they said only because of what the masses believed in those days...(14)

Interestingly enough, Charin at the same time claims that the ancestral sages never anticipated the supernatural, mystical ideas of the Kabbalah, that they would have been shocked by them and fought for their eradica-

tion. He goes on to bemoan the state of modern Jewish literature, arguing that Jewish literary excellence must be an object of endeavor because it was so with our ancient teachers:

And there is no man who knows how to perform well in the literary field, concerning which our sages, of blessed memory, guarded what came out of their lips when they spoke...(15)

The Maskilim of Kerem Chemed portrayed themselves as paragons of Jewish virtue, living examples of a lofty and desirable condition that could be attained by the entirety of the Jewish people, if only the ignorant masses would recognize the true good and adopt the path of understanding which led to its attainment. Nachman Krochmal refers to

...the glory which they have inherited who grasp the crown of the Torah, the enlightened men, who are upright in their hearts, both in the opinion of the great men of our people and in the opinion of kings and princes...If you go in the path of good ones...and walk in the way of understanding, as your teachers have taught you, when the appointed time comes you will inherit the heritage of wisdom...She will exalt you and set you far from the subjugated poor people, among rich men; there you will laugh at the wrath of jealous men, and your name will continually grow greater...(16)

Seeing themselves as the only saving factor for a deteriorated Jewish people justified in the eyes of the Galician Maskilim their attacks on Chasidic practices with which they were at odds, as well as their procedure

of reporting such practices to governmental officials and recommending harsh action in cases where they felt the ruling groups might agree with their point of view. Raphael Mahler cites a number of such incidents.(17) Would that all Jews would hear, wishes Isaac Erter, the call that inspires the Maskilim to bear up under the hatred of their fellow Jews. He fancies this call as coming from "the quiet woman of wisdom":

...Lift up your eyes to the illustrious men whom I have raised up; I am wisdom, the daughter of God from of old in the midst of your people. They have faithfully loved the House of Israel, they have labored with all their strength to remove the reproachful attitude of the nations from your people, have with their insights blotted out the stain of the hater and have turned to praise the noisome curse of the reviler; and there has never come forth from them reviling for the House of Jacob. Nevertheless, they have not covered over his sins, but like the prophets of the Lord in antiquity they have proclaimed his sins and have not falsified. Thus, like those men of God...they are considered as spittle; these men of the spirit have also been subjected to revilings and slanders. They have cast away their soul in order to teach the people a love for knowledge and to root out from its midst every evil person and every fool, even though his root has grown old in the people...(18)

In regard to "improvements" needed among the "great mass" of Jews, a "road to help and give light to the people of Israel," and anonymous author says in his letter:

...To what should we dedicate all our thoughts? Only to multiplying schools of

sciences and languages, if we can, and to
arouse a great love for education...(19)

Only we, the Maskilim, see the light, the road which
Jews must walk if they are to better their condition,
they claimed. On this path lies the only hope.

...may the enlightened men among the
people increase every year, who have
ability and reputation in languages and
fields of study like one of the illus-
trious sages of the nations...(20)

Notes to Chapter II

- 1) Kerem Chemed, Vol. II, p. 107.
- 2) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 5.
- 3) Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 83-84.
- 4) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 134.
- 5) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 70.
- 6) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 60.
- 7) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 60.
- 8) Ibid., Vol. V, p. 25.
- 9) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 83.
- 10) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 106.
- 11) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 77.
- 12) Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 76-77.
- 13) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 76.
- 14) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 44.
- 15) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 31.
- 16) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 91.
- 17) Mahler, op. cit., passim.
- 18) Kerem Chemed, Vol. II, pp. 144-145.
- 19) Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 56.
- 20) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 125.

III

Their Attributing of Jewish Suffering
to Chasidism

The Galician Maskilim hurled many vitriolic accusations at the Chasidim and their practices. Looking down upon this oppressed mass of fellow Jews from their comfortable position as the "intellectual appendage" of the wealthy Jews, they ridiculed all that characterized Chasidic life. The leader and champion of the Galician Maskilim in this attack upon their less fortunate brethren was Joseph Perl. A letter in Kerem Chemed pays anonymous tribute to him and to his satirical pen:

...the author has already made himself a reputation through his marvellous work, *מגלה סודות*, and he is known as a chief and great man in Israel... There is not an enlightened man in our land, and perhaps no man well learned in Hebrew books in the land of Germany, who has not read it and who has not derived pleasure at what he says. At the time when it appeared it worked wonders in the land; many of the Chasidim hid themselves...and if one of them was seen one time when the people gathered together, and he couldn't be deceptive and depart from his customary manner, they quickly recognized him and called him by the name of the man who was like him...in some letter from the book,
מגלה סודות... (1)

Later in the same letter, the author typifies the shocked resentment expressed by the Maskilim at what they look

upon as the undignified and shameful manner in which the Chasidim conduct themselves in worship:

...And what do they do before they go into it(i.e. their place of gathering)? They literally transgress all of the Ten Commandments, and they think that they may purify all their presumptuous sins through water; and after they go to the place of prayer, they make a mockery of themselves and jest, they shout and cry out, they clap their hands. They make a tumult and they shake, they skip and dance, they form themselves into a circle and tremble. And sometimes they get drunk, they storm around outside, they roar and get all heated up. And they call all these things the worship of God...(2)

Isaac Erter points to the strange ways and filthy habits of the Chasidim:

...Then I saw...the Chasidim, men different in their deeds---strange were their deeds and strange was their worship...; like one of their "rebbeis" I poured a libation on my feet every morning, and the walls of the Beis Hamidrash reeked and rotted from the abundance of water which I spat on them inside and outside every day.(3)

A young Maskil's books have been burned by the Chasidim. There is uncertainty as to whether this was done against his will or with his cooperation. Nachman Krochmal, assuming the possibility that this young man has decided to forsake his secular studies for Chasidic life, writes him a letter in which he calls the Chasidim "striped hyenas" and tries to convince him that they are worthless men:

...Are you not a man, and who is like you among the thousands of young people of your age? All your drunk and idle

disturbers will certainly never reach your ankle, either in Torah or in true reverence or in any quality...(4)

The contempt in which the Maskilim of Kerem Chemed held the Chasidim involved not only scorn for their filthiness and undignified behavior, but also attacks upon their ignorance and the implied accusation that they were responsible for their own wretched lack of understanding and their superstitions. Isaac Erter portrays this view of Chasidism thus:

...With doubt hidden in my bosom, I heard the conversation of the Chasidim when they recited the wonders of their saints and their "rebbeis", and my soul refused to believe wonders done by the thousands on no(rational) basis...and I meditated on their books, and behold all of them were clouds and blackness, darkness hid them...(5)

He goes on sarcastically, saying that in their lack of understanding the masses of the Chasidim choose to be ignorant, attaching themselves to any stupidity. These are the words which Erter places in the mouth of the spirit of Chasidism:

...Therefore, I have commanded my sanctified ones(i.e. Chasidic leaders) to add a commandment to the commandments of the Lord, so that they may be called children of the living God and His servants to whom He reveals His secret... to speak to this people in mocking speech and in another language words which have in them no understanding; for to a people lacking in understanding utterances of knowledge are not pleasing, and that which they do not understand they call holy...(6)

The "Beshtites" are "spoilers of science, seers of

falsehood and doctors of nothingness."(7) The Maskilim hold them guilty of, instead of grasping the true Judaism, continuing to pervert it into a violation of its spirit, making of it a life of foolishness and superstition. As for the attachment of the Chasidim to their "rebbe", a letter submitted by Joseph Perl describes it in this manner:

...he who is able to walk with a bending of his head, to clap his hands, to show that his hair is wet from the mikveh..., to do strange movements, to deliver expositions that one cannot understand... he is considered as one who lights the eyes of the exile; and even though he does not know one halacha properly, all of them turn at hearing him and bow down to the glory of his holiness and say, 'This is your God, O Israel.'(8)

Expressing resentment of the attitude of the Chasidim toward the Haskalah and its adherents, one anonymous letter reads:

...From them(i.e. the Chasidim) there have gone forth arrogant men into every city...ruining and destroying everyone who will not be redeemed by the foolishness of their ways; and the name of an unbeliever is always on their lips, with which to villify and scorn everyone who will not enter into their covenant, and humbling a number of rabbis...They acknowledge the authority of the lad over the elder, of the lightly esteemed over the honored...(9)

In his letter, entitled "Chasidism and Wisdom", in which he personifies wisdom in order to show what guides and inspires the Maskilim, Isaac Erter contrasts with this personification the motivation and guide of the Chasidic leaders. Chasidism personified is viewed as luring

men to ignoble lives in which they are inspired only by the desire to acquire money. By taking advantage of the foolishness of the masses, the reader is told, a leader of the Chasidim may milk his adoring followers dry. They willingly submit to his oppression. Thus speaks Chasidism to the prospective "rebbe":

...and your treasure is vaster than the treasure of the king, for yours is the silver and yours the gold of the whole House of Israel who live in the land of your habitation. He who rules... the land oppresses the people by means of tax officers to pay the silver which has been imposed as a tax upon them, each man according to his worth; but to you the children of Israel bring their wealth as free will offerings on whatever day you wish it. The burdens which the king and princes seek from their people are minor, but there is no end to the free will offerings which the...faithful ones of the House of Israel give to you out of the desire of their heart; this is the free will offering which you take from them:

1) When a man or woman is sick and takes to bed and they give you a ransom for their soul to redeem them from death, they are smitten with their own sin, but you have gathered the silver of your ransom to your bosom. And if they rise (again) and go about on the earth, behold God has heard your prayer.

2) When a man or woman is smitten with madness and their reason is swallowed up, then they bring them to you so that you may pronounce with your lips words without understanding to drive out of them the spirit which is attacking them. They give you mighty wealth in return for the pronouncement of your lips, but they, as before, conduct themselves with madness...

Aside from the free will offerings of the children of Israel which they bring to you on the year's Sabbaths and at its appointed seasons, when the people come to you from far and near to spend

the Sabbath or to celebrate a festival in your house, their silver and gold are with them...From the ends of the earth they come to meet you, men and women and children, the blind and the lame among them, the pregnant together with the woman giving birth, a very great throng... and in every place where you pass, gifts of the people from their choicest and finest foods make you fat...And guards stand at the door of the house and tell all those who come of your righteousness and of the multitude of your wondrous deeds, and they do not permit any poor or empty-handed man to come into your rooms, because people must buy the sight of their eyes for a high price, with them to see the holy one of Israel and the glory of his presence. This, my son, will be your lot, if you choose me...(10)

Such was the depravity with which these Maskilim endowed the Chasidic "rebbe". It is seen that the men of the Galician Haskalah sought to stereotype the Chasidim in the eyes of those who read Kerem Chemed, condemning the participants in this movement of the Jewish masses for their riotousness and lack of dignity, their ignorant superstitions, their "confused ways", their hatred for the nations, their rejection of what the secular world's culture could offer, and their perversion of the true Judaism by elevating to positions of influence knownothings who spread darkness and were "spoilers of science". The Chasidic leaders were cast in the role of phony miracle men, ignorant and yet capable of shrewd deception, money-hungry misleaders of their people, oppressors of those foolish enough to follow them:

...the mass walks bound in the fetters of

every priest, every self-sanctifying and self-righteous man, astrologer and magician, master of a name or master of a devil(*ve lra lk pe lra*)...(11)

It is for much more than reasons of taste in manners or in matters of reason, learning and understanding that the Maskilim brand the Chasidim as they do. They picture them as "worse than senseless things" and more than simply worthless men. In discussing periods of Jewish suffering, both those in the past and the contemporary low estate of the mass of European Jewry, they claim that such unpleasant experiences have been brought by Jews upon themselves through their own actions. In almost all cases, the reader of Kerem Chemed is given to understand, these actions are precisely those things for which the Maskilim criticize Chasidic life. The Chasidim and their kind have always been responsible for misfortunes that have befallen the Jewish people at the hands of rulers and nations.

Just before bewailing the reluctance of the Jews of Vilna and Prague to comply with a new governmental decree that they teach their children the vernacular and train them to speak it clearly, Naphtali Hirz Wessely says:

...there came to us the report that the Lord spoke good concerning Israel and had set a wise king on the throne, all of whose aspirations were to break the poles of our yoke...(12)

The decree regarding the vernacular is looked upon as part of "the thread of lovingkindness which has been extended to us from on high" and as being bound up with

the "aspirations" of the king. The clear implication is that their ignorance of the vernacular was a basic reason for the yoke imposed upon the Jewish masses. Mention is also made of geography and history in this same connection. The Chasidim are viewed as being responsible for their lowly condition, as well as for endangering the wellbeing of all of Jewry, through their ignorance of the language of the land and their refusal to engage in secular studies.

Aaron Charin lays the whip to superstitious practices and beliefs:

...we have become a reproach, for there have arisen men who no longer have the right path in beliefs and opinions... and every man who feels like it makes an idol or an image, and there is drawn out of their multitude a profanation of the honor of the holy Torah. For they have said among the nations: 'Surely this people is a nation bereft of understanding, worshipping things of nought and believing in vanities'...(13)

The Chasidim are thus accused of being guilty of provoking men of the modern world by their unacceptable and revolting actions and beliefs. Their peculiar ideas and their darkly strange customs will, if continued, bring disaster, as did similar tendencies in the past:

...when the kings of the land and its officials see how far their(i.e. the Jewish masses) honor has sunk...and that they do not want to return from their confused customs which brought on them the yoke of the exile...turning the heart of the ruler backward when he sees that there is no hope of raising the honor of the men of our group in the matter of understanding...(14)

Ultimately, contended the Maskilim, the leaders of the Chasidim, their beloved wondermen and heroes, are to be held responsible for maltreatment of Jews today, as are their counterparts among the Jewish people in other ages. If the "rebbeis" have their way and continue to be exalted by the people, suffering will be the inescapable result:

See how we have fallen into this bitter exile, if men such as these want to be exalted over us; they want to show us the path where light dwells, but darkness, clouds and deep darkness cover their eyes. We still remember what was done to the children of our people when the wicked one, Shabbatai Zevi arose, and after him Frank, may the name of these evil men rot...(15)

Isaac Erter expresses this view more specifically:

...Know, my son, that prophets whose heart is deceit and priests of vanity have always been among the troublers of your people; they cast his crown down to the ground; they caused him to go into exile from a desirable land, and they have made him subject to taxes; in lands of the enemy and in captivity they also crush the House of Jacob to the ground and make him a reproach among the nations and a derision among the peoples...(16)

The Chasidic scorn for the nations and their ways is held up as one of the gravest causes of the harsh treatment accorded the Jewish people. No mention is made of the possibility that resentment of the peoples and hatred for their ways may be the normal reactions to oppression, poverty and the struggle to live in spite of them. Speaking of a Jew who harbors such feelings of

ill-will toward the outside world, Solomon Judah

Rapoport says:

...but he loves his people. And behold, love like this is considered as hatred, and it has been our nemesis from olden times. It increased the grudge of all the nations against us and it made us dwell in darkness many hundreds of years. Our hands were too weak to do any good, and we were a burden to our neighbors in every land...(17)

In a metaphor comparing Jews living in countries to people staying at inns, an anonymous writer expresses the fear that, as a result of the revilings of the Chasidim and their attacks upon the Maskilim, rulers will become impatient over this internecine warfare and decide to bring down persecution upon the Jewish inhabitants of their lands:

...their(i.e. the Chasidim) revilings reach the lords of the land...Hatred will grow against us and who knows what will be born some day, God forbid...

...and we do not stop being afraid all the day because of the wrath of the distresser, for this is the owner of the inn, whose heart is good to us today, (but) can easily be changed into an enemy of ours, God forbid, if he sees us arguing and divided into many groups and always reviling each other, so that through this our reproaches and blemishes will become known...and the owners of inns will hear our insults to one another, and will return to their ways against us, God forbid, as, to our sorrow, certain beginnings of which have already appeared in some lands.(18)

It is to be noted that, while speaking of "reviling each other", the author lays the major responsibility for this at the doorstep of the Chasidim, refusing to acknowledge the great guilt of the Maskilim in this regard.

We thus see that the outlook which the members of the Galician Haskalah writing in Kerem Chemed sought to convey was that the life of the Chasidim in general, the things that characterized them, and their refusal to do what the Maskilim advocated were those factors which made the Jewish masses oppressed and which also represented the paramount dangers to the future of all of Jewry.

Notes to Chapter III

- 1) Kerem Chemed, Vol. IV, p. 45.
- 2) Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 47.
- 3) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 139.
- 4) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 90.
- 5) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 139.
- 6) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 141.
- 7) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 70.
- 8) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 34.
- 9) Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 245-246.
- 10) Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 49-50-51.
- 11) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 92.
- 12) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 5.
- 13) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 31.
- 14) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 7.
- 15) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 34.
- 16) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 144.
- 17) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 83.
- 18) Ibid., Vol. V, p. 246.

IV

Their Explanations for Chasidism's
Rise and Success

One of the most interesting areas of their comment on contemporary Jewish affairs in Kerem Chemed is that in which the Galician Maskilim seek to explain to their readers such questions as those of the origin of the Kabbalah, Jewish superstition, Chasidism and of the continued strength and growth of the Chasidic movement. The somersaults they execute and the contortions through which they put their interpretation of history in order to formulate rationales for the views they held are of such a nature that they require little comment. They speak for themselves.

Isaac Samuel Reggio blames the evil of Chasidism on a combination of two things, the influence of the Kabbalah and the willingness of the people to accept this influence because they have always despised learning:

...in truth we are partly to blame for this turning of theirs from the right path, because the printed books of the Kabbalah, which cannot be counted because of their multitude, have made their heart err by bringing the desire for miracles to enter into them, and it has enticed them to turn aside from the rightness of the ways of our holy Torah. And because of their having been despisers of deliberation and research

from a time far in the past, they were easily enticed after the hidden secrets, and they did not know and fell into guilt...(1)

Had we, the enlightened ones, says Reggio by this statement, seen to it that the Kabbalah had not become widely distributed, none of our Jewish people would lead the lives of superstition and ignorance, with all their accompanying habits and practices, which we see among the Chasidim.

Judah L^ob Mises also attributes the negative influences in Jewish life to the Kabbalah. His major objective, however, is to show the ancient origin of the notions which make the Chasidim what they are:

...Therefore, I decided to search and seek after the matter(i.e. the source of the ideas of the Kabbalah)...and to take hold of a new path on which no researcher had gone before me...I have already shown... how most of the notions of the Kabbalah are similar to those of the idol worshippers, because most of them came to the children of Israel through the fact that they also worshipped them before they had received the Torah, and also learned many notions pertaining to this idea from the nations, from the time when they were mixed in with them... I didn't yet know the correct reason why many of the great men of Israel tried to explain the Torah through notions of the Kabbalah or what moved them to make mixtures of its(i.e. Torah's) words and of the notions of this idea, or why they did not content themselves with teaching them by themselves to their students, in the same way that all wise men of antiquity customarily did when they expounded before their listeners the rest of human ideas in the houses of study, without any mixtures...I will make known some other reasons which brought many of the great

men of Israel to take hold of the notions of the ideas of the Kabbalah... And now I will explain those (reasons) which brought some of the great men of Israel to expound the Torah by means of this idea and to make mixtures of its (i.e. Kabbalah's) opinions and its (i.e. Torah's) words and to turn aside from the way of the ancients who taught this knowledge to their students without mixtures and all by itself.

1) In former times there were many men among the nations who did not stop worrying Israel's wise men with marvellous and strange questions about certain words of the Torah which then seemed the opposite of the ways of men and the customs of the world; these wise men tried very hard to answer the sectarians concerning the miracles by means of the philosophy which was famous in their time as true wisdom...and they stoutly expounded the words of the Torah which are mysterious in some places because of a lack in ancient knowledge, according to the manner of Pythagoras and Plato and the foundations of the faith of Zoroaster. While they themselves did not believe in these expositions, they nevertheless latched onto this path, for their whole desire was to loosen the mysterious things in order that our Torah would not be made little of by their discussion and so that its holy words would no longer be scorned in their eyes...These explanations remained in the Kabbalah in the possession of the students of these great men, and they transmitted them to their students; and thereafter, for various reasons their source was forgotten, and they were written in a book for a latter generation which would not know how to distinguish between truth and falsehood and would think that they were a heritage from Sinai.

2) It is already known from the Books of Kings and Chronicles that when the children of Israel came to their land in the days of Joshua, they still held to the idol worship which they had done in Egypt, and these things remained in their hands from long before; this also is not hidden from the eyes of anyone who reads these books, how they accepted many strange notions from the nations while they were

in exile and brought them with them into the Second Temple. If they did indeed forsake the idols at this time, they nevertheless did not stop believing in the majority of the related notions of worship which pertained to them, for their heart clung to these notions mightily, and all their attempts to remove them from their soul were vain and worthless, especially because they did not yet know their source and did not understand how they are drawn from belief in idols, because it is known that it is impossible for a man to forsake a notion...and all the work to forget the things drawn from it is in vain if he does not know clearly how they are connected to it; though he might succeed in blotting out from his memory the fundamental notion, from time to time, they will pass before him and set themselves up confronting his imagination...

And when many days passed, and the destructive source of these strange notions and falsehoods was forgotten, even by the heart of the great men of Israel, they also thought that they had a pure source, and that they were an inheritance from their fathers...

...one should not be surprised if there are found in the words of the Torah and prophets many things and stories which are the opposite of the laws of our generation...and...do not agree with our customs which are based on the rules of reason and the foundations of beauty...and it didn't occur to them that there is a difference between one generation and another...; therefore, it was difficult for them to understand many words from the Bible, and they didn't find agreement between them and the ways of the world in their own time, and they were unable to dispel their confusion, but could only explain these things by means of miraculous explanations which had no basis except in their imagination and in their strange and mixed up notions...(2)

A letter which appears to have been written by Joseph Perl confines its tracing of the origin of Chasidism and its characteristics to false Messiahs of a few

centuries earlier. The immediate point of departure is the author's railing against the custom of giving donations in the name of **רבי שאול הכהן**:

...from them(i.e. Shabbatai Zevi and Frank) there began to blossom a plague of leprousy from confused notions such as these in recent times...they still remain the notions which detract from and destroy our pure and holy faith to this day; and you shouldn't think, my friends, that the plague flowered from empty and senseless men. God forbid that we should think that such as these could turn the heart of the children of our people from their faith...Israel was always captured by self-righteous and self-sanctifying men...At the time when Israel turned from the good path and made the golden calf, those who pressed him said: 'Make us a God Who will go before us;' they didn't speak as unbelievers, deniers of the Lord, (but) only as men who couldn't live for an hour without God; and therefore, they said: 'Make us a God', 'This is your God, O Israel'; and from that time, all who have made the people of the Lord err and who have misguided them always say: 'This is your God, O Israel'... And instead of what we find in other peoples, a number of sects which came into being from some unbelievers or philosophers, deniers of the Lord, we do not find in our faith even one sect such as that, because all of those(sects) which existed and exist among the children of our people came into being through men who were confused in the ways of faith and learned false studies and new ways in the service of the Lord; in the time of Shabbatai Zevi and Frank there arose self-righteous and self-sanctifying men, and they taught us a way to worship the Lord, dug for us broken cisterns and showed us proofs that the way of our fathers, to which they were accustomed, was not correct in the eyes of the Lord, and that all the hidden matters of wisdom were revealed to them, that they knew the

path, that they were those who give light to the earth and its inhabitants, and that men other than they walk in darkness...(3)

It is sadly stated by Aaron Charin that Chasidism is a perversion of Judaism that arose, as did other sects, by justifying itself on the basis of using literally interpreted Biblical quotations:

...because they have ceased to have fullness of study in the holy tongue, which is the only thing through which the wisdom to understand the secrets of the Torah or how to treat people justly can increase, whether in the area of opinions or virtues or in respect to leading the state; thereby, in God's Torah and the books of prophecy they have perverted the straight, and they have taken the exalted rhetoric only according to its literal meaning... and this is the reason why the sects came into being and the disagreement increased in Israel, because every sect did according to its opinion, basing its opinion on Biblical quotations...(4)

Some of the writers of Kerem Chemed seem to have felt that it was also necessary for them to explain why, with all the right that was on their side and with all their efforts to the contrary, the Chasidic movement continued to maintain its strong hold over the people and was even growing in size.

One anonymous author seeks to explain this phenomenon by saying that the matter of beliefs and opinions which formerly nourished the root of the controversy between the Haskalah and Chasidism is no longer the dynamic factor in the situation. A stage has been reached where it

is simply a case of each side mightily hating the other and being obsessed with desire for victory over the opposition. Reasons are no longer needed, nor are they sought after. As for the Chasidim, the letter states, a large number of them actually recognize the folly of their movement, but they are too caught up in the unreasoning hatred to leave its ranks. Here are the author's words:

...Instead of what we saw in our vision, that the Chasidim would continually diminish until they would be no more, they have since then greatly increased...; perhaps you think that the book, *נתיבות* *נתיבות*, made no impression whatever-- not so! It did and it also still can, but in a different way from what we imagined.

...We said: the young will see and will take instruction, and those who err in spirit will learn understanding. And now, if you should ask whether this thought of his (i.e. the author's, of revealing the truth about the Chasidim) bore fruit, whether those who erred learned and whether the eyes of the blind were opened, we would certainly answer, yes: all of them now know, both young and old, their way of foolishness; but when you ask further whether they have abandoned their idols and have improved their deeds, it would pain us that we would be forced to answer, not so: The evil has grown much beyond what it was...

And so that you will understand the reason for this amazing thing, that normal men to whom the evil of the way of their friends and companions has been made clear also walk on it and stumble, I say to you that every aspect of the dispute which existed in this affair among our brethren who are in these lands has been greatly changed from what it was. Formerly, the reason for it was the difference in opinions and ways which bring us to cling to God and His Torah...But now the reason for the dispute is a suppressed hatred on the part of both sides,

and with a mighty desire for victory which will have no bounds, without asking any more "why" and "wherefore". And this suppressed hatred and the desire for victory have grown greater from the time when the book, *אגרות אבות*, appeared. From then on, their way was revealed to the Chasidim and to their opponents, and everyone knew their foolishness and their evil...And if you should want to hear how far things have gone, know that there are already among these self-righteous people who wish to be called believers in the righteous men of the generation a goodly number of men who themselves laugh at and mock their "rebbeis", and even to their faces they do not honor them as formerly and do not heed their command any longer...and nevertheless they do not abandon their house of gathering...and they still do all these things only to strengthen the sect and to prevail, through the power of the sect, over all who are not crushed beneath them...(5)

Another writer would reduce the matter to a hatred for all studies which involve the intellect, although, strictly speaking, he says this only of the Jews of Poland:

And that which most estranges the heart of the lads of the children of our people in Poland from the bosom of faith is the fact that almost all the people of Poland are accustomed to despising in their souls all studies involving the intellect. And whenever they merely see one of the lads of the children of Israel set his face to some writing or speaking from the languages of the peoples, or especially to some field of wisdom, they keep themselves far away from him, consider him evil and worthless and an unbeliever, without paying attention to whether his works or deeds are upright or not...; and by this means the lad also estranges himself from them and considers them hard-hearted and callous and haters of men. And thus the hatred between

them continually grows greater until the lad hates and loathes all their ways and deeds...(6)

Isaac Erter makes the following statement in partial explanation for the persistence of Chasidism:

...Mighty is the desire of the ignorant people to hear of marvels...For before a child knows to loathe evil and choose good she(i.e. the spirit of Chasidism) tells him stories of her marvels from the time of his weaning; and when he cries, with them she puts him to sleep on her knees. With the breath of her lips she creates a new heaven and a new earth in the heart of the boy or the girl...and the parents of the child, and also its teachers, establish this earth in him, so that it is established that it cannot be moved even when he grows older...(7)

Erter seeks also to explain the success which the heroes of the Chasidim have had with their people, the reason why their followers cleave to them faithfully. Once more he expresses his views through the personified spirit of Chasidism::

...The chosen ones of these(i.e. of the Chasidim) have performed many signs without knowledge of the wisdom of Egypt, without performing magic or doing the deed of a necromancer or soothsayer, except that these magicians had in their hand deceits of the heart, treacheries and fools who believe anything...In these paths went the Besht, and he made himself a name on the earth. His hands did not perform all the multitude of marvels about which the Chasidim talk at the gate; few were his works, and not one of them a wonder, except that I, Chasidism, placed deceit in the heart of my chosen one, this one dear to my soul. And he did his deed by reason, but his hands worked with cunning and he put his mouth into the heavens. And to a people of no understanding he showed strange things, and he pronounced with his lips

words which were meaningless...Their ears heard but they understood nothing. And they were astonished at this man of wonders, and they praised him at the gate, and they told his deeds to their children... and they exaggerated the marvels which they told, and added to them still others... until today there is no counting the marvels which this chosen one of my holy men did in the earthly world. Behold, these are the inheritance of his children after him, and they labor with all their strength in order not to detract from their inheritance or from the name of their father which he made for himself in the midst of the children of Israel; for through the righteousness of their father they are a seed blessed of the Lord, holy from the time of their breaking forth from the womb...(8)

The only one of these explanations for the people's adherence to Chasidism which acknowledges to some extent the true state of affairs and gives some cogent reason for the Chasidic attitude is unfortunately offered by an unnamed author, the same man who is mentioned in this chapter at the bottom of page 38. Here is an extension of his assertion(cf. page 39 of this chapter) that relations between Chasidim and Maskilim are governed only by a hatred and a desire for victory, not by beliefs, opinions and genuine reasons:

...In any case, argumentative words have broken out also among the Maskilim, even though they are few in number. There is he who scorns his brother and also hates him in his heart if he has heard praise of him from a third party, and he then attempts with all his might to discredit him. Everyone praises himself, not only in his deeds and writings, but also in his methods of study, for he says that only they are the proper ones in his eyes. The critic praises only methods

of research in the antiquities of Israel, the Midrashist only explanations of the Scriptures, the poet and rhetorician only the ways of poetry and rhetoric, and the philosopher will say that only enquiry concerning what is above, etc., is the central thing in the religion of Israel. Also, some of them have grown mighty in the land through trade, and not through faith. In any event, formerly, in Israel all of them were considered as being more the observers of the commandments applying in matters between man and man, but now there is even found in the pockets of some of them the money of poor people...

In view of all these things, what could the young person do, one who has already been somewhat accustomed to the way of the Chasidim and to whom their stumbling blocks were suddenly made clear? He turns to the right, to Talmudic students, and there is no reverence for God, and to the left, to the Maskilim, and they are few, and there is no truth or loving-kindness except in a few of them. And he says, it is good that I be as I was, and that from my place and circumstance I contend with all these who say that the right is with them...And I know of such a man who said to one who is considered as of the greats of the Maskilim: 'Yes, there certainly do exist among us many blackguards...but among you there are even bigger ones.' What a great profanation of the honor of wisdom is this!... And it is easy to see how, after they saw the true character of the leaders on all sides, all of the mass of the people drew nearer to the Chasidim and were mixed with them, because it is the easiest path for them, while in order to be a knowing man or a Maskil it is necessary to know something. And after they knew that in any event a large part of either side is evil, was it not best for them to drink strong drink in a big crowd and to be considered in its eyes as righteous...(9)

Notes to Chapter IV

- 1) Kerem Chemed, Vol. I, p. 70.
- 2) Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 129, 131-132-133.
- 3) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 34.
- 4) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 39.
- 5) Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 46-47-48.
- 6) Ibid., Vol. III, p. 57.
- 7) Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 140-141.
- 8) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 141.
- 9) Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 49-50.

V

Behind the Facade

Somewhere behind their cultured, intellectual interests, railings and rationales, there were other attitudes, emphases and motivations which the Maskilim of Kerem Chemed generally keep in the background, submerged in the sea of their words and ideas. Occasionally, however, some of these break through to the surface to indicate that the Galician Haskalah's ideally intellectual aspect was employed as somewhat of a facade and at least to some extent as an excuse and means to ends beyond the purely cultural and religious.

Though often expressing sympathy for all of their brethren of the House of Israel, these men of enlightenment reveal from time to time the complete scorn which they, from their exalted social position, felt for these oppressed and ignorant brethren. One refers to "the mass of fools among the people".(1) Aaron Charin looks upon them as "the multitude of fools who believe everything"(2), and elsewhere he expresses similar contempt for the masses of the people in ancient times.(3) By far, the most extreme statement of this attitude of the Maskilim as indicated in Kerem Chemed is that of Nachman Krochmal, which is reminiscent of Aristotle's doctrine of the

natural slave and goes so far as to compare the masses to an evil beast. Krochmal endows the member of the masses with

...a crushed spirit and lowly soul which was created by nature for servitude and slavery. And he who wants to be differentiated and exalted above the mass of the people, who are confused in their opinions and inferior in their qualities, must be a man of valor and great deeds, strengthening himself like a lion to fight the battle of the Lord...And when you do research, you will find that the mass walks bound in the fetters of every priest, every...astrologer and magician...; and whoever raises himself up against them, they set on him the evil beast, many mouthed, but lacking in eyes...(4)

Raphael Mahler clearly sets forth the economic aspect of the struggle between Chasidism and the Haskalah in his article, "The Austrian Government and the Hasidim", in the first volume of Jewish Social Studies. He documents the intimate relation which existed between this economic phenomenon and the desires of the Galician Maskilim. Although Kerem Chemed reveals almost nothing of this, and such specifically economic and occupational emphases that would be involved are generally not exhibited on its pages, following are the few such references which this reader found. They do confirm, if feebly, some of the dynamics of the situation as posed in Mahler's view:

...our hands were too weak to do any good, and we were a burden to our neighbors in every land...(5)

...wisdom will exalt you and set you far from the subjugated poor ones among

rich men; there you will laugh at the wrath of jealous men, and your name will continually grow greater...(6)

...without the love of science and of man, without doubt many wise men from among them(i.e. illustrious Jews of the past) would not have attained to be doctors and advisers and important men in the lands of the king and the princes, as we know from those in Spain and Portugal until the master Abarbanel...(7)

But I am very sorry that when this letter reached Prague, they spoke against it...and a rabbi, the head of the Jewish court there, came out against it in the synagogue with sharp language...and thus did he also come out against the copying of the Pentateuch by our friend, the sage, Rabbi Moshe(i.e. Mendelssohn's translation into German)...and many of the common people and also many teachers of the Torah depend on him..., because from their youth there is nothing in their hand except their house and the street on which they live. (They must be educated in)...., and especially in sciences and wisdom, some of which it is absolutely necessary that a man know them, some of which are a glory to all who know them. And though everything is strange to them, they believe that they alone are fit to be rulers over the congregations of Israel, and not only over Israel, but also to lead all the people of the land; for all the great things that are hidden from their knowledge they consider as things of foolishness and of no avail...

And therefore, you know the perverse ways of Germany and Poland, which are completely empty, whether in their deranged speech which makes them scorned in the eyes of the peoples, or in the education of their children, who don't learn discipline or politeness in school or those things necessary for carrying on business, in which the honored merchants of the land are occupied....(8)

In what appears to be an obvious appeal for the preservation of the status quo, in order to maintain the favored position in which the Maskilim found themselves, an anonymous writer implores:

...I say to the powerful men of the congregations, those who guide the masses, do not rebel against your chiefs and your teachers who have been appointed over you and whom you have chosen according to the laws of choice which are handed down by the legislators in various lands. Let the condition of the society of Jeshurun be as it is; do not raise a hand against it, and do not smite it into broken pieces and splits, lest you overturn the house, God forbid...(9)

One letter in particular summarizes much of what the Galician Maskilim admired in men and what they themselves would emulate. It is entitled, "A Biography of the sage, Sampson Cohen Modin, of Blessed Memory, a Man from Mantua":

His family is one of the aristocratic and precious families which are in this city. All of them are rich men who are leaders of the children of Israel, rich in property, near to the court of the House of the Kingdom, the dukes of the House of Gonzaga, who then ruled in the city of Mantua. And because of their nearness to the ruling families, they acquired from them a franchise for the sale of oil...

And behold, this wise man...acquired a name in all fields of study, and this not only in our holy books and in the books of the nations written in the Italian language, but also their letters written in French, Spanish and Latin-- he used to read them and become wise through them.

And the wisdom which strengthens the wise man exalted this man, giving him reputation and honor; and with other advisers he was appointed to be one of

the chosen ones of the leaders of the community of Israel of the holy congregation of Mantua, who were sent from there to the capital city, Vienna, to come to bow down at the feet of the king and caesar who was in his days, Carlo the Sixth; and with the help of the Almighty...they returned in peace to their homes, happy and light-hearted because they had found favor in his eyes so that he graced them by speaking pleasantries with them.(10)

In conclusion and summary, it should be said that the writers of Kerem Chemed are generally guilty of what one of them berates the Chasidic "rebbe" with, putting their mouths in the heavens, failing to talk in terms of reality and down-to-earth facts.

The only hope of which these Maskilim speak lies in Jews' improvement of themselves through education and enlightenment. Nowhere do they advocate a program of relieving the oppressed circumstances of their brethren as a prerequisite for such enlightenment. Their view of "confused ways", Jewish ignorance and superstition as the cause, past and present, of Jewish suffering seems equally unrealistic. Their explanations for the persistence of Chasidism seek out origins in ancient idolatrous notions and even in inborn hatred for knowledge and intellect. Nowhere do they propose the possibility that Chasidism might be a result of and refuge from poverty, oppression, and the absence of hope.

Notes to Chapter V

- 1) Kerem Chemed, Vol. I, p. 97.
- 2) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 31.
- 3) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 44.
- 4) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 92.
- 5) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 83.
- 6) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 91.
- 7) Ibid., Vol. V, p. 24.
- 8) Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 6-7.
- 9) Ibid., Vol. V, p. 247.
- 10) Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 77, 83.

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