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T H E S I S.

The Transition of the East European Jew From  
Orthodoxy to Modernism in the Nineteenth Century,  
As Reflected in the Hebrew Memoirs of  
Letteris, Lilienblum, J.L. Gordon,  
Asher Ginzberg, S.Bernfeld and Tschmerinsky.

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*English his country*

Orthodoxy to Modernism in the Nineteenth Century.

The history of Russian- Jewish relations is the history of violence and cunning, of duplicity and despotism. It is a lesson in civilized barbarousness; of the prehensile paw within the glove of silk. Towards the Jew, Russia of the last century was a sort of grinning fiend that beckoned with one hand and smote with the other. It allowed itself every imaginable kind of indulgence against him; there are few pages in recorded history so red and vexatious. Since the time of Peter I , with few interludes, the Czaristic heritage was a patrimony of lupercals and bestiality; the Czars of the eighteen hundreds exhibited all the dark strains of the progenitors and few of the brighter ones of the age. Raisin describes Russian- Jewish history as the game of the cat and the mouse. The analogy is excellent. While the feline monster pretended to sleep, peeping through its eyelids, the tiny, nervous rodent with its bright, harassed eyes looked out through a hole in the wall ( The Pale Of Settlement ) upon the gleaming world and flowering meads without. If it ventured forth and were snatched up, it would be devoured; if it escaped, the rodent God alone knew its destiny, for many and multifarious were the snares that were set for it. A grinning fiend, Russia, a sort of Jabberwock with mangling jaws; while the Jews stood by like a little, stubborn Alice, none-too-confident or courageous, twisting her lips diffidently, starkly wondering, a bit pathetic withal.

That the mass of East European Jewry remained for the most part medieval and unenlightened, unmoved by the richer and freer trends of the time was not surprising. It had much to contend with; and only one intemperate resource, its Faith. The nineteenth century started propitiously enough. Alexander I ( 1801-1825 ) upon his accession manifested a most

unautocratic spirit, appearing a most humane and promising ruler. In 1802, he had ordered a commission to investigate the status of the Russian Jews. The results of their research was the *polozheniye* or the enactments of Dec. 9, 1804, according to which the Jews were to be made eligible to one-third of all municipal offices; they were likewise permitted to establish factories, to become agriculturists and either attend the schools and colleges of the empire with the same considerations tended every other denomination or to found their own schools. Of course, there were ancillary disabilities; Jews were to be refused leases on land, and were to be prohibited from keeping taverns, saloons or inns, enterprises which had afforded a livelihood to fully one-half of the whole Jewish population in Russia. This might have been expected. Russia couldn't possibly leave the sweet unmixed; the dark stain in its *vein* must draw its measure of blood. Still it was a step in the right direction of which the Jews were eager and prepared to take advantage. And "Had not the wheels of progress suddenly stopped revolving Russian Jews might have constituted one of the most useful as well as most intellectual elements in the vast empire." <sup>1</sup> But in 1815, Alexander formed the acquaintance of Baroness Krudener; thereafter as Prince Galitzin blandly remarks: "with what giant strides the emperor advanced in the pathway of religion!" (Of such divergencies is the empire of truth and justice composed)! Alexander swerved from humanitarianism to a consuming religious mysticism, and the last ten years of his life, he inaugurated that period of empyreumatic patronage and oppression which with few exceptions in years existed through the succeeding reigns. "He who had claimed that his greatest reward would be to produce a Mendessohn, now resorted to various expedients to render education unpalatable to the Jews." <sup>2</sup> The

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1. Raisin--Haskalah Movement, pg. 113.

2. *ibid*--pg. 128.

Jews were expelled in 1818 from St. Petersburg; they were interdicted the employ of Christians as servants (1820), they were prohibited to immigrate into Russia from abroad (1824) and to reside in the towns and villages of Mohilev and Vitelsk. In 1825, the " Deputation of the Jewish People " was abolished.

This particular regime is delineated above for only one reason. It is in a sense exemplary. For from this time henceforth, through the reign of Alexander III (1881-1894) whose tutor Pobiedonostzev, the presiding officer of the Holy Synod, is responsible for the infamous declaration of the Russian programme for the Jews (" a third might be converted a third emigrate and a third perish "), or a decade later during the irruption of the hooligans, the "Black Hundreds " who met the cry " Down with Absolutism " with the counter cry " Down with the Constitution and with the Jews ", --from this time henceforth, the Russian Jews learned the bitter wisdom of what they might reasonably hope for from those in power. In all, the successive Russian governments left nothing undone to demolish the Jewish spirit; the exclusiveness of patriarchal Jewish life, its curious modes of conduct, the peculiarity of its religious ceremonies. From annual conscription (Aug. 26, 1827), the horrors of Cantonism, the beguilements of privilege, the abolition of communal autonomy, civil disenfranchisement, persecution and oppression, it overlooked no device to bludgeon or seduce Judaism from its moorings. The Reaction of the Jews was in the most part as violent as the means employed to convert or shatter them; they met an external despotism with a commensurate despotism within. They remained on the whole, as we perceive later in the Memoirs, immovably conservative; and clung tenaciously to the obsolescent in their religion as well as the permanent. They drew tighter the cordon of particularism about them. Unfortunately they prevented the infusion of fresh influences from without, but by this very scrupulousness of observance,

it cannot be denied, that they saved themselves from annihilation.

Properly speaking, it is impossible to say that there had been a transition of East European Jewry (Russia for our purposes) from Orthodoxy to Modernism. The bulk of the people remained stationary, subject to the rigorism of the Rabbis, the ecstasies of the Tzaddikim, the saltatory emotionalism of the Hassidim even to the present Century. It was the Great War which finally loosened the grip of Orthodoxy. As for those who broke through the cordon and stopped before they plunged into assimilation, the "transition" was very much of the nature of an explosion. This can hardly be said to be transitional; not enough of understanding, of alembication, of interior inquiry went into it. The "heretics" looked back with contempt and hatred; they spilled vials of wrath and columns of diatribe and pasquinade upon the orthodox. One is reminded in this study of a series of snap-shots projected upon the screen before the secret of movement was discovered; there is no swell of continuity between them. The changes here were too abrupt and revolutionary; and the "modernists" never really found their bearings until they lost them in the miasmatic nightmares of '81 and '82.

These "modernists" in Eastern Europe were the Maskilim. Haskalah had careened into Russia from Germany through the writings of Naphtali Herz Wessely. "Die programmatischen Werke der gesamtösterreichischen galizischen und gesamttrussischen "Haskale." haben einen einzigen Ahnherrn: Naphtali Herz Wessely's ("Words of Peace and Truth") מילים של שלום ואמת These writings were in turn utilized and amplified in the work of the so-called "Russian Mendelssohn", Isaac Baer Levinsohn; his T'eudah b'Yaroe and others. Krochmal and Rappoport were also instrumental in propagating the gospel of the modern man in Russia, and helped to solidify the ranks

of the Maskilim and in increasing their numbers. The early Maskilim performed a diligent and sedulous service, so that before the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855) drew to its end, Haskalah centers, small as they were, were as numerous as the larger cities wherein Jews resided. In Grodno, Kovno, Lodz, Minsk, Mohilev, Pinsk, Zamocsz, Slutsk, Vitelsk, Zhagory, Maskilim were to be found straining to attain their beau-ideal, the upliftment of the masses through the new enlightenment. Naturally, the cities on the border of Russia were the first strongholds of Haskalah. Odessa the capital of New Russia and just out of its infancy, and Vilna, the old capital of Lithuania became the centers of the Haskalah movement. 1826 witnessed the opening of the first Jewish school for secular education in Odessa. Among the teachers was the great historian of Karaism, Simcha Pinsker. In the 1830's we already meet with the two founders of the Neo-Hebraic literary style; the great prose writer Mordecai Aaron Ginzburg (1796-1846) and the celebrated satiric poet Abraham Baer Lebensohn (1794-1878). As we remarked, the fountain-heads of Russian Haskalah were German, and though until the "sixties", the Russian Maskilim were dependent upon the German Jews, there had been evinced from the beginning one essential difference between them. Both were humanistic, tending to the emancipation of the language, to-wards its use as a fine art, its secularization with a view to the religious and social enfranchisement of the Jews of the Ghetto, and both were a decided break with Rabbinism. However, this was the point of distinction. German Enlightenment through the Meas-efim was "accompanied by a strong drift towards assimilation which led to the elimination of the national language from literature".<sup>4</sup> In Russia the enlightenment merely laid the foundations for a national, literary renaissance. The Russian Maskilim were largely auto-didacts who having

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4. Dubnow: History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, pg. 132--Vol.3.



acquired a measure of European culture proceeded to disseminate it by literary means in the Hebrew language. In Germany, Haskalah had served as a stepping-stone to secular culture, it was the passport into cultural German society and it led to the enjoyment of minor advantages, whereas in Russia, Haskalah involved a goodly amount of social ostracism. Haskalah was synonymous with apostasy and licentiousness. To be called "Berlinchik" or "Deitschel" was equivalent to being denominated infidel and epicurean, anarchist and freebooter. The Maskil was estranged from the Jewish community, persecuted by the Orthodox, and regarded with little sympathy by the outside world to which he had no means of entrance other than conversion. Morgulis vividly describes the struggles and conflicts of the small though zealous party of Maskilim in Russia: " These upon whom the sun of civilization and freedom happened to cast a ray of light, showing them the path leading to a new life, were compelled to study the European literatures and sciences in garrets, in cellars, in any nook where they felt themselves secure from interference. Neither unaffiliated Jews nor the outer world knew anything about them. Like rebels they kept their secrets unto themselves, stealthily assembling from time to time, to consider how they might realize their ideal, and disclose to their brethren the fountainhead of the living waters out of which they drank and drew new youth and life. Whatever was novel was accepted with delight. They looked with envy upon the great intellectual progress of their western brethren. Fain would they have had their Jewish countrymen recognize the times and their requirements, but they could not give free utterance to their thoughts. On the contrary, they found it expedient to assume the mask of religion in order to escape the suspicion of alert zealots, and gain, if possible, new recruits. In many places societies were founded under the name of Lovers of the New Haskalah, the members of which observed such secrecy that even their kinsmen and those among whom they dwelt were un-

aware of their existence. If through the discovery of some forbidden book any of them happened to be detected, he never betrayed his friends. Such a one was usually compelled to marry<sup>h</sup>, so that, being burdened with family cares, he might desist from his unpopular pursuits<sup>5</sup>. The struggle was indeed a bitter one; a long and stubborn conflict between parents and children, in the adjustment of old ideals to a new but none-too-friendly environment.

In form, as has been indicated, the Haskalah movement had assumed the guise of the secularization of language, of the outreaching for alien cultures, of the desire for a modernization of the school; in essence however, the movement sprang from that period during which the power of Napoleon was supreme throughout Europe, when the nations under his direction, sought to find the rede for the Jewish Question. Haskalah was the inner response of the more liberated Jews to this effort, the impulsion of a minority who felt garroted within the musty walls of the Ghetto to formulate and establish their own interpretation of the Jewish Problem so as to resolve their own needs. It is evident, therefore, that the battle of the Maskilim was not one that ensued in the field of Religion or over philosophical concepts as was the case in Western Europe but was essentially a struggle between Religion and Life. This particular point is emphasized over and over again in the Memoirs of our consideration and especially in that of Moses Loeb Lilienblum. These men felt themselves borne down by the incubus of a Religion which afflicted Life instead of illuminating it. Their perforce resolution was to free themselves from this crushing bolus.

In the six Memoirs committed to us for our study of this period in Eastern Europe, we find reflected in sharp lineaments the character

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5. Quoted in Raisin: Haskalah Movement, ppg.187-188.

of this conflict. We observe the drab, stagnant environs of a rigid Orthodoxy, the dull appointments of an outworn ritualism, the obsolescence of a medieval system of education, the acquisition of futile, jejune knowledge; then the shattering struggles of the few to bloom to wider reaches, to seek ampler horizons for their spirits, to inspire with a new ichor the petrified limbs of their people; and ultimately, the profound hopelessness of the combat, for neither could be other than what it was. A new age had evoked a fresh outlook upon the drift of things; there was Napoleonism and the Age of Reason, the Reformation and enfranchisement. This liberalism, however, was for the most part a western one; it never truly penetrated into the court at Muscovy. In Russia, liberalism was of a specious kind; it was never critical enough to be true. Regard the evidence of literature. Always the litterateurs had portrayed the Jew as some obscene kind of teratological species; remark Pushkin's prisoner or Turgenief's Zhid, Gogol's traitor or Lermontoff's spy, or later, the squalid monstrosities depicted in Dostoevsky. What chance had the Jew against so ungenuine a liberalism? There had been bodied forth a new era not too distant from Russia; it educed the spiritual writhings and romantic dreams of a few brighter intellects. But there remained seemingly inviolate the sprawling medievalism in Russia: the cruel, fatuous autocracy of the Czars, the blunt lustful eyes of the Russian masses. While opposing it the inherent, conservative wisdom of a subject people. Thus the conflict between the Maskilim and the Orthodox was inevitable; its futility almost a foregone conclusion. Perhaps Wisdom was with the larger host; assuredly daring and magnificence with the few, those brighter intellects. For cannot Wisdom be accounted a "saving" grace, a staple of preservation; magnificence, a spiritual diathesis, an inexorable impulsion?

As creations of art, as artistic biographical pieces, the Memoirs of these men are sad failures. With the exception possibly of Tamerinsky's

<sup>is</sup>  
 "My City--Motele", which properly not autobiographical but sentimentally  
 reminiscent, these works, saving a few shining pages here and there, are  
 slipshod and tedious. Ranging from the incredibly, misshapen, maunder-  
 ing volumes of Lilienblum's "Sins of Youth", the diffusions and pane-  
 gyric divagations of Letteris' "Memoirs of the Boon", or the splenetic  
 cantankerousness and irrelevant incidentals in J. Gordon's "On the River  
 Kebar", through the broken, piece-meal masses of Ahad Haam's "Memoirs",  
 it becomes increasingly evident that these Maskilim may be excellent  
 protagonists but lamentably poor self-portraitists. They are lacking  
 in a particular quality which makes, let us say, the autobiographical  
 literature of Cardan or Goethe or Brandes successful; the quality of  
 irony, of critical detachment, perhaps a sense of distance. Possibly  
 they are in dearth of a specific and well-groined tradition, here an  
 autobiographical one, without which consummate artistry cannot thrive.  
 Conflict, <sup>again</sup> is not the soil out of which great literature burgeons; it may  
 produce dogmas but never Art. It is the mastery of such conflict, the  
 residual perception of the whole, the achievement of irony, which is the  
sigil and persuasion of important and perfected art. The Maskilim were  
 essentially Reformers, a species of Missionary; conflict was the fillip  
 of their lives. Their work was shoddy--it can be said, almost as a conse-  
 quence. Perhaps if it were less so, it might understandably be less true.  
 And we, in this paper are primarily concerned with its truth; in the  
 service these men render as reflective media of the period in which they  
 lived. That service they perform adequately enough. They commit little  
 of the political history of their times, important enough though that  
 may be, but they do present an effective picture of the the stress and  
 struggles of sundry groups of men; with their strenuous efforts to  
 elude the paralyzing grip of the Ghetto, to reach out and expose themselves  
 to wider and fresher influences, to find and develop themselves as men, as

it were. Let us advert therefore to these pages; they are interesting enough. We shall discern therein what the "modernists" reviled and misprized, the forces against which they contended, the character of the things they wished to inaugurate and effect.

If there were a gradual and inevitable development of the "modernistic" Jewish tendencies in Eastern Europe throughout the Nineteenth Century, where the needs of one generation are the accomplishments of the next, it would be a simple matter to sketch chronologically the lives of these writers, to indicate the trends of the time in one Memoir and then to fulfill its promise in the next. Unfortunately, however, the evolution of the movements are not continuous; the efforts of one period are not the gains of another, nor the gains of one the premises of the succeeding. Here history really repeats itself. For the early years of Letteris, born 1800, are not greatly different from those of Bernfeld, born 1860. The sorrows and bruises of Gordon, born 1831, are very similar to those of Lilienblum, born 1843, or even Ahad Haam, born 1856. The exertions and difficulties of the Maskilim were almost a constant thing; one looks in vain for a decisive progress, but no, each one passes through the same drudgery, repeating the struggles of the other even though two generations should have elapsed between them, while the environment, for the most part, seems, like God, a changeless inevitability. Therefore, it would seem as if the best policy to pursue in a delineation of the times would be not so much a chronological one, for here it would be largely meaningless, but rather a topical portraiture, bringing to bear upon some one subject the burden of material found in the Memoirs, and noting of course, wherever necessary such changes and variations as might be. At the conclusion of each topic, we intend to append the life history of one of the Maskilim who to our mind best typifies in his experiences the traits and trends of the topic under consideration. The topic, however,

shall be used in this latter connection only as the emphatic cause for each individual presentment, but it cannot reasonably constitute the whole of it; insofar as it shall be our intention in these "Lives", to shadow forth through them the fuller temper and condition of the times in which <sup>our subjects</sup> lived.

## Section I .

### Early Education.

The fanatic is always an astonishment; his absolute dependency upon an especial thing or desire is a miracle in human behavior. He is interesting, in a Chekovian sense, as a type; while the temper of his intelligence is rarely evocative of admiration. Under the influence of his special genius he does things; he moves, like Don Quixote, in line with a particular desideratum shuffling away all that may be inhibitive or trammeling. His is an interesting condition, a sort of necessary myopia to insure security; yet it is rarely illuminative or profound. Similarly the dependency of the Orthodox upon the Talmud and its injunctions was a lesson in fanaticism. Mayhaps it was inevitable, undoubtedly it was preservative; nevertheless it was throttling to the more liberated in spirit. Only "four ells" and nothing more; it's a deadly thing. "To live" a human being must swing between "four ells" and the blue vaults of the infinite. Measure and chaos, restraint and intemperance, the paved highway and the endless bypaths, are these not the systole and diastole of the growing human intellect? One cannot live by Talmud alone; or, at least, such was the verdict of the Maskilim, and did not one of them call it "a sin against youth"?

The condition of the schools and schooling in Letteris' day was wretched and lamentable. In his "Memoirs", he presents a vivid picture of the sordid circumstances in which the less favored of the students received their earliest education. It merits quoting: "When you enter the room of such a school, one's feet almost sink in mud, for the floor of the house is not made of boards or stone or brick, but of clay and mire, which has largely oozed in from the outside during rainy seasons or which has formed under the duress of wettings from the domestic utensils. The stove

and hearth and kitchen are not separated from the school-room but are in one and the same location. In this room where the children learn their pieces, there the teacher and his wife and children prepare and eat their food. There too, they undress themselves and the~~re~~ they clothe their nakedness, and all without shame. There they sleep and there perform their peculiar human offices. There they fatten the geese and slaughter the chickens. There they knead dough and bake bread, while the house is rendered unbearable with a stench and smoke and heat whether in summer or winter until the tender youngsters strangle from dearth of air and space. In the same place too, one overhears continuously the voice of contention and reproach, of noisy shouting between the teacher and his family, or catches the tingling sound of a slap upon the cheek or the monitory sandals laid against naked flesh; a great tumult like the fierce clamor of waves in a storm. This is the place where the sons of Jacob are taught--ethics and the pleasant portion! Such are the teachers, totally lacking in personality, within surroundings so wild and vicious, who are to serve as exemplars of manhood! Alack! this ancient disease, which like a burning fire consumes the goodly part, so that every decent sentiment is extinguished in the boy, and his growth is dust. Would not the finest jewel be marred under such inclemency, while no man tries to rectify this distortion or to heal the grievous wound which bites like an unmedicated canker to the heart and soul."<sup>6</sup> All through the nineteenth century, the Maskilim made herculean efforts to right or mollify the extremity of the situation in the orthodox schools. Their success with them was not very great, primarily of course because of the natural conservatism of the group, and secondly, because they enlisted the power and assistance of the government in their behalf, and the Orthodox had good reason to suspect the

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6. Letteris: Memoirs of the Book, ppg.30-31.



the intentions of the Uvarovs and Stroganovs. The Maskilim, however, did succeed in modernizing their own schools; though this accomplishment was something of poisonous flower. Many of the students abandoned their Hebrew studies as soon as they had acquired a thorough knowledge of Russian or another living language. The Maskil for all his meritorious intentions, resembles somewhat the homebound Ulysses stranded somewhere between Scylla and Charybdis, save that in his case there was no favorable goddess to give him succor. As for his effect upon orthodox schools, its dimensions can be easily gauged, when we discover in a very recent autobiography, that of Shmarya Levin, the existence of the same squalid conditions in schooling under the same gruelling and abominable circumstances.

All of the modernists had been brought to school at a very tender age, and nearly all complain of the futility and onerousness of the teaching methods in the Hadarim. To them the learning there was mostly a rote performance, a mere babbling and prattling with very little assimilation. "I was five years old," says Letteris, "when my father took me to school, and I became like the other children of my age prattling a bible-babble above our comprehension, which the teacher put into our mouths... All that they (teachers) taught me even though it penetrated within and my memory held it, was nevertheless a burden and an ordeal, something strange to me, futile and useless."<sup>7</sup> Almost all the pedagogues of the time began immediately with the teaching of Gemorah, a difficult and abstruse regimen, racking to a youngster, so that when Judah Loeb Gordon, something more fortunate than others, begins with the simpler diet of the Bible, he deems it worthy of happy and precise notation. He outlines the method his teacher, a Rabbi Lipka, employed: "He did not

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7. *ibid*, ppg. 21-22.

begin as did the other teachers with the Gemorah, but started with the Bible and its pschatic(ordinary) interpretation; and when we finished the Five Books we returned to them, this once with the Rashi commentary, reading too the Major Prophets and the Book of Psalms. Only then did we turn to the Gemorah, not gulping it like kine but masticating little by little till it was thoroughly digested... In addition, Rabbi Lipa taught us calligraphy and also the general principles of grammar as we knew them. This is a wonder and an amazement if we recall the time when it was done --the second quarter of the century." <sup>8.</sup> Again: "Rabbi Lipa never embittered his pupils nor lifted his hand to strike them, for he knew how to punish them in a mild albeit effective manner..." <sup>9.</sup> A genuine tribute, indeed, in that time of hirsute and minfatory Melameds. Lillienblum, like the others was taught only Gemorah and Tosephos: " Outside of these studies, I learned nothing more." <sup>10</sup> There was a Gymnasium in Keidany where Lillienblum lived, but his father with others considered it insanity to send his only son there, " to learn, " as he bluntly put it, " things which an intelligent student could without effort pick up in a privy." <sup>11.</sup> Lillienblum never knew the pleasures and freedom of childhood. At the age of four, he was thrust into a school-room to study matters incomprehensible to him and utterly inutile. All work and no play; is it a wonder he condemned the builders of his youth so vehemently in his later days?

The early education of the three above-mentioned Maskilim, Letteris, Gordon and Lillienblum belongs more distinctly to the first half of the nineteenth century, or at least in the case of Lillienblum, who might legitimately be allocated thereafter, before the accession of Alexander II

8. J. Gordon: By the River Kebar, in Reshumoth vol. I, pg.78.

9. ibid, ppg. 78-79.

10. M. Lillienblum: Sins of Youth, vol. I, pg.12.

11. ibid, pg.12.

and his burst of reforms <sup>which</sup> for some few years won the heart of the Jews, and during which the grip of Orthodoxy was not so strenuous and adamant. It would be wiser, therefore, to continue our discussion of the education and restrictions to which these three were subjected. Later, we shall deal with the others.

The actual dread of the Orthodox Jew towards anything outside of the "four ells of the Halakha" which might conceivably broaden his social and mental horizon was fierce and grotesque. Students found difficulty in reading even such books which to us seem not only harmless and tepid but indispensable to Jewish Learning. Letteris enumerates some of the forbidden books he was constrained to read in secret: "The Mikraoth Gedoloth with Rashi, Ibn Ezra, David Kimchi, Ralbag, Saadya on Daniel. Sefher Hamadah of the Rambam and his introduction to the Mishna. Likewise the "Guide to the Perplexed"... the "Ikarim" of Joseph Albo, the "Book of Wars" of Ralbag...and others of a similar nature." <sup>12.</sup> What had Judaism come to? Assuredly the finest fruit of the Jewish intellect! But the Rabbis looked with disfavor on all free research and regarded the incompatibility of Philosophy with Judaism as an irrefrangible dogma. In this connection, Letteris' grandfather quotes the Kabbalist Joseph Yavitz ben Abraham who speaks derogatively of the philosophers in his book "Light of Life": "These are the men who assuming that they understand God and His Wisdom, break the yoke of the Torah and the yoke of the commandments; alienating themselves from God in heaven, and casting spears of scorn on the supporters of His Torah and commandments. I have been both both boy and man and throughout I have not seen <sup>but</sup> one out of a hundred of the such concerned with the Torah and the commandments and that one standing at the parting of the ways--but I have seen women and ignoramuses

who would forfeit their lives and wealth for the sanctification of the Name, while the majority of the arrogant in wisdom are all too prone to sell their honor on a bitter day."<sup>13</sup> This was an attitude general enough to make spiritual and intellectual advancement an impossibility. It is little wonder that the Orthodox Jewish mind was doomed to sterility.

"In a quarter of a century, Rabbinism, aside from the Gaon, had not put forth a single literary figure of any magnitude, not a single writer of large vision. It seemed as if the spirit of originality had fled from it."<sup>14</sup> Letteris relates an interesting account of tale-bearing and the wrath of the populace upon its discovery of several youths ruminating over the "Guide to the Perplexed": "The day came and we were arguing quietly about some hard passage in the book which was open before us, while the tale-bearer stood behind to spy us out. Suddenly he delivered himself of a piercing shriek, exclaiming therewith: "Empty, giddy-headed men have arisen, who stray from the right path and then defile the Temple of God by their reading of strange books, strange to us and our fathers, which contain nothing whatever of the laws of God and His revelations." All the people became quickly incensed, and sought to stone the boys. There was great tumult indeed; the entire population of the village gathering in a circle about us. They raised their voices in slander against us, shouting that we read the works of an alien god in the Beth Midrash, that we were corrupted and thought<sup>15</sup> swerve from the ways of God, and to sully His Glory..." This wrath and hullabaloo, simply because several students poured over the fine web of cogitations of the great Jew and philosopher, Maimonides, about whom some earlier Rabbis

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13. *ibid*, pg.26.

14. Dubnow: vol.I, pg.381.

15. Letteris, pg.85.

had said in a fervor of admiration: "From Moses to Moses, there was none like unto Moses." In sooth, Orthodoxy was in a bankrupt state. As for the students, as was natural, the fury and malice of the people served but to whet their curiosity and they continued their studies, however with greater circumspection. A half century later, Lillienblum confesses that "he feared to read the "Guide" lest he turn agnostic." <sup>16.</sup>

Another instance of the excess of bigotry against which the Maskilim had to contend is in the following incident which Gordon recounts: "One day during winter after my confirmation, Rabbi Isaac suddenly returned home, and behold he descried a sheet of paper in my hand written across in very short lines. What's that in your hand? the Rabbi called in great vexation, the while he took the paper from me by force. Would that God had appointed a prodigious fish to swallow me at that moment! Would that the earth had opened its lips beneath my feet! But not every day a miracle; and I remained before him with lowered eyes and bowed head and with knees striking like a man condemned to death or in last extremity. For on the face of the sheet, <sup>of</sup> paper, God preserve me!, was indicted a poem... He struck me a number of times, crying: "Creeping abomination! Will you bring contamination within my house! So you employ yourself with poetry and rhetoric! And he tore the poem to bits and scattered the <sup>pieces</sup> <sub>17</sub> to the winds." Only a poem, and an inoffensive one to boot. From the invective and thwacking he received, one might have believed he were apprehended at something really offensive and pernicious, like Aretino's "Dialogues", or the cheerless ~~de~~clamations of Apollinaire.

Yet despite all these prohibitions, the Maskilim, with the ingenuity always attending suppression, managed to lay hands on the secular books they needed and longed for; but not without trepidation

16. Lillienblum, pg.34.

17. Gordon: Reshumoth, vol.I, pg.92.

and persecution. It should be fairly clear now, from what confining obscurantism the early Maskilim sought to disengage themselves. They were a crew of ravenous students desiring all fields of knowledge as their province. The Talmudic studies, the stupid, futile equilibristics at which Rabbinism was so markedly adept, the tawdry, ignorant extravagances of Hassidism (which Gordon and Ahad Haam so frenetically execrated) were insufficient nutriment for their leaping, hungry minds and spirits.

The year 1856 saw an important turn in the history of Russian-Jewish affairs, however temporary. Alexander II (1856-1881) before the reaction of his later years, was the most liberal and benevolent monarch Russia ever had. His coronation signified the end of the recruiting inquisition, of the cantonist terrors; high schools and universities were again thrown open to Jews without discrimination, after two-score years; Jewish scholars, capitalists, skilled laborers were admitted within the regions lying outside the Pale; rights of rural self-government and judiciary were granted the Jews; the missionary activity of the Government was curtailed and begins to fade. "Russification" became the war-cry of the time and especially among Jewish circles. The orthodox groups mollified somewhat, though still rigorous, grew less persecutory of the more adventurous Jews amongst them; while the Maskilim became more aggressive in their demands. They exposed the charlatanry of the Tzaddikim, lampooned the blatant ignorance and credulity of the masses, spilled spleen against the more burdensome ceremonial disciplines, and proclaimed the necessity for immediate religious and cultural reforms. These metamorphoses--the abetted aggressiveness of the Maskilim, and the somewhat diminished fanaticism of the Orthodox, are made manifest in the memoirs of Ahad Haam, Bernfeld and Tschmerinsky all of whom had their youth and early education during this era.

Just as with the other Maskilim in quondam years, Ahad Haam was

taught Talmud and Poskim. By the age of sixteen, he was a reputed scholar in Eben Hoezer. However, he also concerned himself with Hebrew and Bible and though unsystematically, he read a good many of the Spanish Philosophers. "Of course," he says, "these latter studies were regarded by the barbarians of those parts not only as idle matters, but also as dangerous, lethal poisons."<sup>18</sup> Later, he took to the study of German and Russian, on which foreign tongues, he heard his grandfather say, that "he had it from the lips of one of the great Tzaddikim, that the shape and form of a foreign letter profanes the eye."<sup>19</sup> He read these books openly, but was rarely taken to task for his aberrations. He is inclined to believe that this special tolerance was due to the position and wealth of his father, and though people then were as flunkeyish and subservient to such considerations as they are today, still it would not explain why the learned Rabbis of Skvira sought him out to argue with him, heatedly but not denunciatively--arguments where neither was convinced and "both sides parted, each side as it came." It would be slightly too much to expect of human nature. Rather it would indicate that though Haskalah was still abjured and in odium, some of the biting virulence of its opponents was temporarily sloughed away. However, Haskalah still had its battle to fight as the following incident would prove: "Once, during an autumn day, a bookseller came to our village. It was customary for these men to pass through village and village vending their merchandise. I began to rummage about... and behold amongst them "The Watcher" of Erter. What did I do? I purchased the book. This happened before sundown. After dinner when all the family was in bed, I read throughout the night until I finished the book. In the morning when the servant came and fired the

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18. Ahad Haam: Memoirs, Reshumoth vol.5, pg.86.

19. *ibid.* pg, 88.

furnace, I threw the book inside, and there remained no sign that I had read the book at all." <sup>20.</sup> Again through contraband literature, from a Maskil living in a near-by village, he became acquainted with such works (Epikorsus) as the Poems of Adam Hakohen and his son Micah Joseph Lebensohn. It must be admitted that such copious but desolatory reading on the part of all these Maskilim could not but lead to a half-way station of Culture. There were huge gaps and lacunae in their learning. For example, at the age of twenty-two, Ahad Haam had gone to Warsaw to visit the "enlightened" there. He meets Gottlober, the editor of the "Morning Light" and many another prominent figure. Nevertheless, he was keenly dissatisfied with the individuals he met. He felt a marked ellipsis within them. They were not sufficiently informed or familiar with other cultures. They shammed a good deal. That might have been expected. These men, despite their pretensions were emancipated neither within or without. And there can be no true Culture without liberation. However, they at least made the effort; that was in itself commendable. Thereby, they could never sink to the depths of lack-culture and inconditeness which was the blessed state of the majority of the Orthodox, especially the Hassidim. For instance, when Ahad Haam was eleven, he studied algebra on the sly. He became so enthusiastic over his new aquisition, that he scribbled algebraic formulae over all the doors and windows of the house. His grandfather was so ignorant of mathematics that he believed his grandson to be occupying himself with some magical letters. He complained thereon. The dereliction of little Asher was discovered and the book of "thaumaturgy" destroyed.

Truly these orthodox were a changeless folk. A half-century after the tale of Letteris on the misery of his early schooling, we



encounter a description in Ahad Haam which is almost an exact replica of these conditions: "My teacher had only one living room, so that the small desk upon which we studied stood next to the bed, whereon slept the Rabbi's wife all the morning.. . The cold in this room was extreme. There we spent the morning hours every day. Sometimes about the hour ten or eleven we interrupted the study and went to pray in the Klaus of the Hasidim in Sadigorea, which was not far away. There we warmed ourselves by the furnace and prayed. "<sup>21.</sup>

Of the six memoirists, Bernfeld was undoubtedly the most privileged. His father was a Maskil; hence all his own arduously acquired knowledge was committed to his son as an inheritance. Bernfeld studied Latin and German while a youngster. He read such advanced books as the "School-house", the "Book of the Right", the "Sprig of David". He also studied the philosophers and the higher critics. He claims ~~that~~ the "Ethics" of Spinoza to have considerably influenced him in his youth. But few of the Maskilim had such fine opportunities; his was a rare case.

In speaking of the accomplishments of the town Rabbi and the excellence of his sermons, Tschmerinsky records the fact that the Rabbi often adverted to Plato and Aristotle in his discourses, quoting them<sup>22</sup> ingeniously and advantageously. This is indeed a strange fact. It would seem as if the newer tolerance were not without some effect upon stray orthodox adherents. On the other hand, when one of the town Jews had learned Russian, through a translation of the Bible, and was bold enough to speak it in public, he was looked upon with annoyance and oppugnancy. "The people listened and were annoyed, ~~and~~ none understand, and whoever<sup>23.</sup> made anything out, he quickly forgot it since it was forbidden here."

21. *ibid*, pg. 126.

22. H. Tschmerinsky: "My City Motele". Reshumoth, vol.2, pg.20.

23. *ibid*, pg.21.

A curious situation is to be observed here; like a cat spitting and purring at the same time. The Orthodox seem precariously unsettled. As for the educational methods in Motele, they are identical with those of other Orthodox places. The students begin with Gemorah, sometimes if fortunate, with the Tanach, and then continue with Poskim or Schulchan Aruch. The more adventurous smuggled "contraband" literature and read it in stealth.

Judah Loeb Gordon.

Judah Loeb Gordon, acclaimed the greatest poet of the Haskalah, was born in the central city of that important movement, in Vilna, Dec7, 1831. His father was a sweet-tempered, unambitious, scholarly individual. In the poet's words, "he was a good man and a generous, a man of truth and justice, of faith and credulity, peaceable and conscientious." He was something of a Maskil, and possessed of a fair knowledge of Polish and Russian, in which languages he occasionally wrote without too many errors. His mother, on the other hand, was as he termed her, "a woman of valour, somewhat flinty in character". "A strong-minded woman, hard as cedar." Both parents had been previously married; the present one being his father's third. Toward Judah, his mother was amiable and tender; he was a late and only son. At the age of four and four months, he was sent to Heder to learn "Humash" from his teacher, Rabbi Lippa. He was ever grateful for the lucky star which gave him this "good teacher and pedagog strong in his generation." Lippa's method was quite a modern one; he proceeded from the easily-acquired to the more difficult. The poet, Judah, distinguished himself early by an exceedingly retentive memory. At other Hadarim, he learned Talmud and Poskim. He was particularly fortunate during this time to be taught "the art of writing Hebrew", calligraphic and stylistic, by one of the Maskilim, an Aaron Jonesomson, who had composed a book of poems called "Instruments of Song". Through Aaron, he became more sensitive to the language and was inspired to express his thoughts in that medium.

Until the year 1838, when Nicholas grew especially despotic, Judah's father was in favorable circumstances. He was a hosteler at an inn to which many Polish noblemen repaired whilst on the road. And though

his position became more precarious as the years followed, they continued to educate their son as heretofore. He studied under the "Melamedim" until the age of fifteen when he matured beyond the jurisdiction of his teachers and he proceeded with his studies alone. At this time, he commenced the contemplation of "heretical literature" in earnest. According to the poet, most of his hours were spent "half-way up to the neck in the sea of the Talmud" until he was almost overwhelmed, but then a short while devoted to the Haskalah, and like Canute, he breasted the waters. When seventeen he forsook the Beth-Midrash and yielded himself to the acquisition of Hebrew grammar, of Russian, Polish, German, French. Now Gordon came into contact with the Maskilim of Vilna, especially the younger set. He grows friendly with the all-starred poet, Micah Joseph Lebensohn, with Harry Kaplan, Mordecai Plungyan and others. In the year 1850, he was sent to Pinsk on some financial pursuit for his father. While residing there, he supported himself by coaching several pupils in Hebraics. This experience taught him the need of some lucrative profession. Therefore when he returned to Vilna, he enrolled at the Rabbinical Seminary, receiving the degree of governmental Pedagogue at the age of twenty-two. The following year, he was appointed teacher in a school for Jews opened by the government in a near-by town, Ponevyez. He taught until the year 1861. There he married some woman about whom he consistently remains "strangely" reticent. In 1866, he left Ponevyez and went to Shavel; where he occupied two positions, as teacher in a governmental school and as principal in a girls' Hebrew school. He was very industrious in his work. He not only kept school, but studied himself and wrote. The same year he left for Telz, an exceedingly benighted village, where he was appointed superintendent in a governmental school and where he again opened a Hebrew school for girls. In Telz, the critical and satirical spirit of Gordon blossomed to

bloom and he wrote the famous poem: "Awake my People!", which he published in the "Carmel". He also vented himself in pungent and mordant proverbs, in various satirical poems, in trenchant letters. The Jews in Telz became indignant at what they regarded as defamations by an upstart teacher; they conspired against him, calumniating him before high officials. He returned a "Roland for an Oliver"; describing the stupid antics of the Hassidim and the spiritual poverty of the Orthodox. His great satire, "Kozo shel Yod", is annihilatory in its wit and pungency.

In 1872, Gordon left for St. Petersburg, where he was appointed secretary to the "Society for the Promotion of Culture Among the Jews of Russia." The same year, Sir Moses Montefiore came for the last time to Russia. Gordon was sent to greet him as representative of the community. He portrays Montefiore as "a gentle, benevolent man, but an innocent." In 1879, a vicious blow was struck Gordon by his enemies. He was accused of conspiracy against the government; he and his family were taken and imprisoned. The malignant charges of the Petersburgian Hassidim seemed unfortunately confirmed by the concomitant incarceration of a Vilnan Jewish conspirator also by name of Gordon, whom the officials identified as the brother of the poet. For forty days, the Gordon family lingered behind bars and then were exiled to Olonetz where they pined another few months. Gordon emerged very much embittered by the experience; for of all his friends among the Maskilim not one lifted a finger to deliver him. All of them feared a similar accusation and conviction. Only his brother and father-in-law labored untiringly in his behalf and succeeded in proving his innocence and extricating him. Thereafter, Gordon, disillusioned, kept far distant from the government, busying himself mainly with periodicals, composing lyrics, short stories and feuilletons. He edited such magazines as the Hebrew "Ha-Melitz", and the Russian-Yiddish "Voskod".

Gordon lived through the massacres of '81, witnesses the debacle of Haskalah and in his later years allied himself with the "Lovers of Zion" movement. But he lacked faith in the establishment of the dream of Zion and awaited the "reaction" of Rabbinism against its principles. In 1891, the doctors discovered a cancer growth in him and ordered him to Berlin for an operation; all to no avail. He grew more and more bitter and desponding as the end drew near. He indited then an extremely acidulous poem: "This too for the Best"; he collated his unpublished manuscripts, evincing a special regard and predilection for the more vitriolic; he bade his friends be not too negligent or pusillanimous in the publication of them. He died Sept. 16, 1892 in St. Petersburg and was buried there.

Note: the material for this last paragraph was assembled from works other than the Memoirs.

## Section 2.

### Conflicts and Conquests of the "Modernists".

Throughout the pages of these Memoirs, we are persistently sensible of the constant and passionate activities of the Maskilim, who with almost incorruptible assiduity, strive to deliver their message of the Newer Learning to a lowering, contumacious mass of obscurantists. There was something marvelously idealistic and selfless about these men; they felt an obligation to improve the world of their brethren, to uplift them to a more considerable state of Culture. Ignorance to them was the bane of life, enlightenment the catapasm of all ills. True they sought Culture primarily for themselves, yet unlike others who have striven for self-development, they were not vain or apathetic to the needs of others. They made of themselves no Thebaid or Atalantis; they were indeed a company of social idealists who after self-cultivation labored for the common weal. On occasion they overstepped the bounds of judgement and clemency as when they impetrated the Government for such assistance as might accomplish their program. But the social idealist isn't always a sage; while the sage is rarely an active social idealist. At times their <sup>im-</sup>zealousness might have made them intemperate and politic; however, their sins were mostly venial and always pardonable.

In the following quotation, we discover such ideals as the Maskilim stressed and which often led them astray in their endeavors to improve the masses: " In 1841, forty-five delegates, representing the six chief committees of the Lovers of Enlightenment, assembled in Vilna, and thence issued an appeal in which they adopted as their platform the elevation of the moral standards of adults by urging them to follow useful trades and discouraging the Jewish proclivity to business as much as pos-

sible; a reform of the prevailing system of the education of the young; the combating, if possible, the eradication, of Hassidism, the fountainhead as they thought of ignorance and superstition; the establishment of rabbinical seminaries, after the model of these in Padua and Amsterdam, to supply congregations with educated rabbis. It was further agreed that a Consistory be created, to supervise Jewish affairs and establish schools and technical institutes wherever necessary. To these main points were added several others of minor importance. The Maskilim of Besasz insisted that steps be taken to stop the prevailing custom of premature marriages. Those of Brest proposed that Government aid be invoked to compel Jews to dress in the German style, to use authorized text-books in the hadarim, and interdict the study of the Talmud except by those preparing themselves for the rabbinate.<sup>24</sup> The Orthodox Jew, we know, deemed the knowledge of the Talmud the most significant achievement of a student; the Maskilim regarded such knowledge as an inutile performance and no achievement at all. Themselves, they set up the crystal ideal of Culture. In this connection a word about the "Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment" which Gordon alludes to in his Memoirs would be applicable and would serve to clarify further the objectives of Haskalah. This organization was perfected in Dec. 1863. It owed its existence to some of the most prominent Russo-Jewish merchants, whose efforts in the promotion of Haskalah have never been fully appreciated. Its object, as it records it, was "to spread the knowledge of the Russian language among the Jews, to publish and assist others in publishing, in Russian as well as in Hebrew, useful works and journals, to aid in carrying out the purposes of the Society, and further, to assist the young in devoting themselves

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24. Raisin: Haskalah Movement, ppg. 165-166.



to the pursuit of science and knowledge."<sup>25.</sup>

All the Memoirists speak of the shameless custom of early marriages of the time; cleping it a hanging of millstones upon the necks of the young. "Such was the habit of young boys," cries Letteris, "to take to themselves a wife, to enter the estate of man, before they knew the right or the wrong in the way of the land, before they could provide for their wives and offspring...for their fathers have sinned in placing millstones upon their necks prior to their knowledge of the world!"<sup>26.</sup> Lilienblum, himself, was married at the age of fifteen, while his bride was a mere lass of thirteen. He was constrained, as was the custom, to go to live with his wife's people in Vilkomir. His mother-in-law was a sort of curmudgeon, a proud, nasty woman who caused the lad endless miseries. He bewails continuously the misfortune of his lot; of the malicious fate which burdened him with a family before he was through counting his teeth. At the age of thirty when reviewing his past life, he laments: "What has my life been, and what is it now? When I was hardly sixteen, there were millstones about my neck, without my knowledge or consent, without any inclination for those particular weights. I was forced to live in an atmosphere of death, shut up in the mouldy "four ells of the Halakha". I had no commerce with the world and its finer dilections; all my province was nothing but folly which men long since dead have ordained and propagated. Who will return to me the lost years of my youth, sealed in the dreams of chaos, none a delight to me? I have been as a man deaf from birth who has never enjoyed the bliss of song and music..."<sup>27.</sup> Ahad Haam might have voiced a similar complaint. He was married off at sixteen, and it was more to this early alliance than ought else which is responsible for his never having attended university. Besides this fact, an accident

25. *ibid*, pg.238.

26. Letteris, ppg.41-42.

27. Lilienblum, pg.59, vol.1.

or indisposition married him to the wrong girl. From the age of ten or eleven, he had been pestered by the marriage-makers (Shadchanim) who having heard of his reputation as an "elui", a precocious student, came to his home to examine him at his studies and to make arrangements for a suitable match. He was given the choice between two girls, neither of whom he had met; he was merely told that one of them had wealth and the other "Yichus" or noble lineage. He himself was inclined towards the former since he feared the inevitable and excessive devotions and piety of a woman with "Yichus"; however at the last moment he failed to make his choice clear, an embarrassing constriction of the throat prevented him, and so he found himself beneath the canopy with the woman he had repudiated. Such occurrences were of course not very frequent (besides the fact that to be offered a choice was a rare thing), but it does prove conclusively that something was radically wrong with the entire system. All through the Century the Maskilim contended with the Orthodox over this lamentable condition, but not very effectively.

In a fine passage, Bernfeld describes his father's comprehension and appreciation of the nature and condition of the period: "He realized that the times were changing. Already some of the Orthodox Jews had begun to send their children to public schools. My father observed that the majority of these students turned derelict, and grew up with little knowledge of the Torah... He thought it were possible to stand before this onrushing tide by founding schools where Hebrew lore and general culture were cultivated. This was the ideal which inherited the soul of the Maskilim."<sup>28</sup> This was indeed a splendid ideal and the Maskilim appreciated its importunity. Education without emancipation is the quickest way to conversion or indifference. "Witness the thirty thousand Jew-

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28. Bernfeld: Memoirs, Reshumoth vol.4, pg. 164.

Jewish apostates in St. Petersburg and Moscow alone, most of whom, hailed from the Baltic provinces, where the Jews were more cultured, but not less oppressed, than their brethren." Or as the disillusioned Lilienthal remarked: "These men who have acquired from study an idea of the rights of man, and that the Jew ought to enjoy the same privileges as every other citizen; those men who tried, by the knowledge they had obtained, to open for themselves better prospects in life, and now saw every hope frustrated by laws inimical to them as Jews, ran, from mere despair, into the bosom of the Greek Church."<sup>29.</sup> However, if conversion did not ensnare them, then a profound apathy to all Jewish values gripped them. Lilienblum had many heart-rending contacts with the such. Persecution had forced him to flee Vilkomir and make his abode in Odessa. But he found little comfort there; no friends, no real spiritual activity. He perceived the external forms of Modernism, Jews with European dress and without "Paces", earlocks, but he describes the condition as an exterior Haskalah and not an internal one. "They do not respect the duties of religion. There are many who smoke on Sabbath in the streets or in public cafes; ninety out of a hundred probably work on the Sabbath day... Hebrew literature is dead, or better it has never been born... Thousands of Hebrew books are bought, still there is no literature in the city. The multitudes do not understand the language while the dissembling Maskilim despise it, its books and authors with an utter contempt."<sup>30.</sup> Bernfeld likewise depicts the apathy of the "Maskilim" he met in <sup>Levav</sup> ~~Levav~~ to which city his family had removed in 1872: "Already there were Maskilim there, who broke away from the commandments if not in public at least in their homes. There were Eight stores belonging to Jews which were not closed

29. Raisin, pg. 177.

30. Lilienthal: My Travels in Russia, quoted in Raisin, pg.177.

31. Lilienblum: Sins of Youth, vol.2, ppg.10-11.

on Sabbath. Indeed there were numerous Jews, especially the doctors and lawyers and officials who were exceedingly remiss in their religious duties.<sup>32</sup> It is quite evident from these passages that the intentions of the genuine Maskilim, such as the writers of these Memoirs certainly are, was by no means to subvert Jewish custom, but to ally and combine it with the environing culture. It was as Gordon once put it: "to be Jews at home and men abroad."

It was this situation, the apathy and apostasy of Jews, which moved the Maskilim to such feverish educational efforts and methods; they must save those who were being seduced away from the fold. That was why they advocated so passionately the reading of Hebrew and labored so heroically towards the creation of a Hebrew Literature. The condition existed for the most part in the larger cities. In the small towns and villages, Orthodoxy was more cohesive and the skeptic didn't have much chance to flourish. For example, take the amusing tale which Tschmerinsky relates of an observing Epikorus in the small hamlet of Motele: "Joshua-Moses the consumptive, was one of the luminaries of our Beth-Midrash. He knew Torah, was a Maskil and a real philosopher, a sapient but an utter skeptic who was not abashed from speaking his mind in public, of God and His Messiah. It is understood, of course, that in deed he never sinned. And insooth, how can a skeptic transgress in Motele? In order to provoke and irritate, is one to eat tallow candles? ... Joshua-Moses merely "spouted words" to his heart's content, while in the long nights read the books he loved."<sup>33</sup> However, in the larger cities the efforts of the Maskilim could be more effective and fruitful. But in a sense, that was like bringing coals to Newcastle; for metropolitan people are characteristically radical and amenable to changes. The change of garb they rightly

32. Bernfeld, Reshumoth vol.4, pg.170.

33. Tschmerinsky: MyCity Motele, Reshumoth vol.2, pg. 86.

advocated for village Jewry was already in vogue in the city; which would make this clause of their program gratuitous here. Again commercial interrelations exacted a knowledge of the surrounding language, hence, without a fanfare of usherment, city Jews would have acquired this "enlightened" touch. The true work of the Maskilim, therefore, remained to clothe Jewish knowledge in modern garniture; to make it acceptable to the foundering and the fastidious. It was their true task and duty to preserve Judaism in the more fluxional and "heretical" citadels. In a sense, Kaskalah can be said to be a "metropolitan" performance and movement. It grew out of the Ghetto villages but its stand and labor transpired in the cities. A village is always the final fortress of conservatism; in social life, it is the nearest parallel we have to the immutable. It resists change like the "law of the Medes and Persians"; it wears a kind of perennial Ethiopian skin. To shake or disturb a village one must do more than "advocate"; like those fabulous, happy folk, Stevenson describes who lived on the declivity of a crater, they only move when an irruption casts its burning contents between its teeth. So as far as the villagers were concerned, and the overwhelming majority of Jews were villagers, the Maskilim could only "advocate". Lilienthal for example tried to do more. He enlisted official assistance in his effort to disseminate "Kultur". He found the villagers, crude, suspicious, adamant; and his sudden departure for America proved their opposition to be not entirely unfounded and his own work a futile affair in those parts. However, in the cities the Maskilim, for some time, performed a not ungrateful or unprofitable service. They succeeded in establishing their modern schools and in interesting a not inappreciable number of pupils. "In that day", remarks the genial Letteris, "the desire of certain Maskilim of Brody, at whose head was my wise and dear friend Judah Loeb Landau, was to set up a Vorschule for Jewish youth where the young would be taught by expert Has-

kalah teachers in preparation for entrance into a realschule... they placed at the head of the school the renowned scholar Isaac Erter...  
 34. who raised the Brody school to a considerable eminence." We have already made mention of Gordon's position as a teacher in a government school for Jews, whose staff was composed of Maskilim, and which post he occupied for twenty years. We have also attended the wish of Bernfeld's father to found a school where Hebrew lore and general education would be imparted; on lines comparable to those of Samuel Raphael Hirsch. Bernfeld himself further specifies an organization of Maskilim in Levuv called the "Watcher of Israel" which he claims did a fine service in the propagation of Haskalah ideals. Their purpose he says was two-fold: "To defend the political interests of the Jews in Galicia and to encourage the spread of Haskalah.... I also joined up with this society... it was a great help to my progress. The works of Zunz, Geiger, Goltz, and those of Samson Raphael Hirsch came into my hands... I saw types of Galician Maskilim which to our regret and detriment are gradually passing away... In all my life I never heard such penetrating Epikorsus (Skepticism) as I have heard from the lips of these men... But their Epikorsus was Jewish and in every sting and snap of their speech was the Jewish spirit..." 35d.

That the efforts of these organizations, the defenses of Haskalah in periodicals, the quotidian embattlements of Maskilim were not entirely without effect was evident in the first golden years of the reign of Alexander II. In the large cities, particularly in Odessa, St. Petersburg, and Moscow even the more conservative Jews were fast becoming "Russified." Of course, they were greatly encouraged by the Government, which at this time was making every attempt to "Russify" the Jews and held out glamorous offers of privilege to the compliant. Jewish financiers likewise held out offers of material aid. But it was to

34. Letteris, ppg. 136-137.

35. Bernfeld, pg. 187.

the accomplishment of Haskalah to give the movement a sanction, and a justification and a *raison d'etre*. Orthodoxy itself was largely still unyielding but no longer as viciously ~~as~~<sup>as</sup> heretofore. A decade before, Rabbi Israel Salanter when he was apprized of the delinquency of his son who had gone to Berlin to study medicine, removed his shoes and mourned, observing Shiva, as if for the dead. In these days, however, the Orthodox might react more clemently; for though they were not utterly beguiled by the bright promises of the government, they were not utterly unmoved. They thought, perhaps...at last! ... yielded some of their truculence and obstreperousness... ~~the~~ little of their own private way of life.

It was this last adamantine conservatism of the greater body of Orthodox villagers, during a period of comparative freedom and privilege which roused the ire and contumely of the Maskilim and they whipped their "co-religionists" in scorn and violent words. The Maskilim of the "forties" and "fifties" -- those depicted in the memoirs of Letteris, men like S. Block, Rappoport, Isaac Eichel, Krochmal, and Letteris himself, were comparatively unruffled and lenitive when measured by <sup>the</sup> vehemence and bludgeonings of this generation of "sixties" and "seventies"; Lilienblum and Gordon are the two most brilliant, demonstrative and flaming of this company. Tradition was attacked as if it were a plague; the battle transpired on the field of "Life and Faith"; the battlemented citadels were the periodicals--the "Ha-Melitz" and the "Ha-Shachar" in Hebrew, the "Kol Mebasser" in Yiddish, and others in Russian. Lilienblum began and declared the war with his articles "The Ways of the Talmud" and "Additions" and was followed in his assaults by Gordon's "Wisdom for Those Who Wander in Spirit." Lilienblum believed that the excessive legalization amongst the Jews, which was the aversion of the Maskilim, had been caused

preeminently by a disharmony between life and religion. He wrote the articles mentioned above: "the goal of which was to open the eyes of the readers on the ways of the Talmud and the Poskim and to imbue the leaders of the people with the need to unite Faith and Life." <sup>36.</sup> He was wholly actuated by the belief that Rabbinism did not in truth represent the essence of Judaism; that Judaism has always changed in accordance with the requirements of the time, and that Judaism in his day too must be comportsingly reformed. These views to us seem ordinary enough but his own townsmen were thoroughly incensed by them, and so incontinently persecuted him that he was forced to flee from Vilkomir and take refuge in Odessa.

The "sixties" and "seventies" were the period of the greatest Haskalah efflorescence and accomplishment; of the most intense activity and of its final emancipation from its dependency upon the German Jews. The pages of Letteris are redolent of "Berlinerdom"; while those of Gordon and Lilienblum are more completely autochthonous. The Haskalah was by way of realizing itself in the large cities of Russia. If the government had remained liberal, who knows but that Orthodoxy might have been persuaded to even greater reforms. Already the Bathe-Midrashim and the Yeshiboth were something corrupted. The Tree of Life College in Volozhin became a foster-home of Haskalah. Hebrew, German and Russian were surreptitiously studied. Brinkle and Spenser, Turgenief and Tolstoy passed from hand to hand. Some of the students even proposed the transformation of the Yeshiba into a rabbinical seminary on the order of the Berlin Hochschule. But, like Penelope's web, in its very realization, the thread of Haskalah was running itself out, as it did in Germany. In Germany it had led to the destruction of Hebrew writings and to assimilation. In Russia the shuttle was turning in the same direction. As the liberalism of Alexander II

<sup>36:</sup>Lilienblum, vol.1, pg.88.



continued and good prospects opened to those Jews with a good Russian education, such youth as had been captivated by the Haskalah doctrine of Russification, now turned away from the Modern Rabbinical Seminaries or from the Russian-Hebrew schools and flocked to the Russian institutions of learning. No longer having soundings in Judaism; for them the foundations of religion having been undermined, parental authority jettisoned they were an easy prey to the Linos song of assimilation and nihilism. Haskalah had intended to establish a half-way station between Judaism and General Culture. Such an objective could only be achieved when the strain and burden of the time was antagonistic to the Jew; then the more intrepid and ravenous could forsake the old and yet repose in a refuge not so wholly foreign. Liberalism made this half-way asylum disserviceable and bootless. The Maskilim lost their hold upon the younger generation; schools, like those in Vilna and Jitomir, were going from bad to worse. Haskalah had run its course. It had begun with the advocacy of reform, of adjustment, of Russification; it had served an availing function during darker times in rendering life more compatible with the old faith; but like a tedious scholastic argument it finally was drawn into its own antipode. Where it had espoused a modernized Judaism, a life within the faith, it began nolens volens to play Galeotto to Assimilation and the secret wishes of the government. It was a hero who in the last chapter turns out to be the hapless dupe. Ahad Haam's father wails before him: "And you...when you will be eighteen, you will no longer understand what is written therein (the Bible)."<sup>37</sup> Such a note, general enough, testifies to the moribundity of a movement whose aim was otherwise. The massacres of '81 and '82 inscribed the conclusive epitaph, the memento mori as it were, upon the gravestone of Haskalah.

Moses Loeb Lilienblum

The most radical exponent and agitator in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the cause of Haskalah, was Moses Loeb Lilienblum, a "martyr of the enlightenment". A positivist, who distanced himself from all imaginary things, a simple-hearted man whose primary concern was the province of life and action, he gave himself a willing sacrifice to the grave and significant problems of the time; towards discovering the means whereby the Religion of his fathers and the Life of his surroundings might be compatibly wedded. He was born Oct. 22, 1843 in Keidany, in the Government of Kovno, Lithuania. His father was a poor cooper and not a very learned man. Therefore he was taught in his early years by his grandfather, who first put a Bible in his hands, made him familiar with the clear and giant swing of the Scriptures and then proceeded with the fatuous albeit whetting subtleties of the Talmud. There was a Gymnasium in town, yet his father considered an absurdity to send him there, "to learn things that an intelligent student could with ease pick up in a privy." Besides, many fabrications and false rumors had spread through the village anent the cruelties practised in these "outside" schools. No, it was impossible that little Moses be sent there. At the age of 15 and 10 months, he was married to a child of 13. After the marriage, he removed to the home of his mother-in-law in Vilkomir where he slept and ate and suffered for many years. His wife's mother fulfilled all the laws of termagancy supposedly attending the species, and she made of Moses' life a bitter, insupportable thing. A litigious woman, and a proud; energetic and scrupulous in religious observance, she is probably responsible for the later devastating moodiness and introspection-

ism of his writings.

Lilienblum always hated Talmudics; its close and sequestered air. It was easy for him to become a convert to Haskalah; his spirit demanded a less oppressive atmosphere. Early he read the forbidden works from the Middle Ages; and then went on with studies of the Newer Learning. Of the latter, he ruminated over "Rappoport's "Test of Faith" and his "Test of Tradition"; he was deeply stirred by Krochmal's "Newer Guide", and he found much comfort in the "T'eudah" of Isaac Baer Levinsohn. This did not prevent him from mastering Talmudic dialectic and Talmud; his abilities in this field were so readily acknowledged that at the age of twenty, he was made head of the Yeshibah at Vilkomir. His responsibilities in teaching only tended to exacerbate his abhorrence for the studies, and served to augment his interest in Haskalah. His perfidy was not long in being uncovered, and the illimitable list of his trials and persecutions begins. He was charged with every inculpation and scurrility. His name was allied with the "Berliners" and the "Epikorsim"; he was not fit to be admitted into the "Minyan", nor tolerated as a teacher of impressionable children. He was ostracised in the village, his books confiscated, every means of livelihood deracinated. Many examples of the folly and the petrified leglization of the rabbis are noted in his Memoirs. He was told that reading Haskalah literature profanes the eyes, he was ordered to discontinue writing poetry, "for do not the agnostics write poetry; it and is not wrong for us to do as they do and not to follow the example of the Tzaddikim"? <sup>38.</sup> Once when he had cantellated a poem, he was rebuked for the profanation of sacred notations.

In 1868, he wrote an incisive article entitled "The Ways of the Talmud" for the "Ha-Melitz", There he arraigned the beliefs and

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38. "Sins of Youth", vol.1, pg.67.

customs of Jewry; intimated that it had ever been the practice of the Sages not to "burden" but to "lighten", and insisted upon a closer bond between religion and life. This article was hailed as the rallying flag of the younger Maskilim. Various writers in the "Ha-Melitz" carried on its message, but more drastically and contentiously. It all redounded to Lillienblum's hurt in Vilkomir. His persecutions were increased, his life made unbearable. Everything he had performed, he had committed with a sorrowing and ingenuous spirit; he had seen evil and would exenterate it, he witnessed deviousness and a narrow, insupportable existence and would rectify it. He did everything seriously and grimly. His Memoirs when he speaks of these times, can be described as the "shriek of a wasted soul"; the Memoirs of a man stranded on a lonely isle circumvallated by a host of envenomed monsters. He remonstrates: "Behold, my heart burns with a consuming <sup>rage</sup> against my wretched people who in their stiff-neckedness withhold me from saving them and myself." <sup>39.</sup> "I have begged the leaders of our nation to give thought to our condition and to strive to unite our life with Religion for the good of the whole." <sup>40.</sup> But all to no avail. The resentment against him assumed terrifying dimensions. Only the happy intervention of the Rabbi of Kovno saved him from disaster. His predicament was grievous; his support was gone, his family estranged from him, the village a hot-bed of hatred and acrimony, there was none to give him succor. No, but there was one; a charming, enlightened woman who is signified as N in the Memoirs. She played woman's historical role; pillowed him and delivered him from despair.

In 1869, under the persuasions of his Haskalah friends, Lillienblum left Vilkomir and removed to Odessa. While there, another critical

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39.pg.81.

40. pg.82.

period of his life transpired. He, who had fought a lion's battle in the cause of Haskalah, descends in one of the very strongholds of Haskalah, Odessa, an uninspired life, unguarded, irreligious, no true spiritual activity. His supreme struggle begins to dwindle in his eyes before the tragic testimony of his surroundings. Here was freedom and "Aufklärung"; but where was Religion, where Judaism? His loneliness grows apacè, his sorrows increase. His confidence in his point of view trembles. He begins to feel less religious and to think less theologically. Soon he slipped over into the radical positivistic ideas of Chernyshevski and Pisaryev. His theories of Jewish life were transformed; he became an advocate of "Life", sheer living, sans religion. However, despite himself, such an outlook was not embracing enough for him. A great void was cleft into his soul. He knew not where to turn; his conflict seemed irremediable. It is this frame of mind, the substance of this struggling and writhing, recalling of all pathetic things the vermiculations of a scotched worm, which is so vividly and plangorously reflected in his Memoirs, especially the Memoirs of the second part, after his departure for Odessa. He depairs over the state of Israel: "Alas, the virgin of Israel is fallen, fallen! There is none to lead her or to raise her up..."; and his own constant refrain, "What will be my end? What will be my end?"

41.

The Memoirs "Sins of Youth", which title was taken from Ps.25:7: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions", was written when Lilienblum was thirty years of age. The following extract constitutes the summary of his life as Lilienblum saw it, and which would seem to indicate that by his title the author was really referring to those sins which are committed against youth, rather than to those committed by youth. "My father did not give me a proper education; hence the most

distinct and material sin which he sinned against me, was that because of it I as aman have remained unsuccessful, having to live an unworthy hand to mouth existence. My father did not give me an education and my mind sought nutriment...so that I must seek it for myself...therefore I could not put my mind to simpler, material things...but like many another drunken writer I was drawn after general, delusory problems which might pertain directly and significantly to the life of cerebation but not to the lives of men...therefore I isolated myself from the group...and I earned persecution and revilement for myself... my early days passed by in vanity and chaos. I had no pleasure of them for the decaying stench of the elders and the putrid air were stifling...there is hardly a single pleasant memory I bear of those early days... My father introduced me beneath the canopy while I was still a boy, before I could support wife and children... before I understood my strain and tendency... years later I found myself bound to a wife whom I loved not, with whom there was no chance of felicity...Due to the sins of my father, I too sinned...so that I pursued the phantom of a false Haskalah...so that I enslaved my heart in the love of another without thought or judgement...these blows and abrasions have begotten all my later sorrows and woes, and these mark and imprint will never depart from my life." <sup>42.</sup> The confessions terminate with Lillienblum's verdict upon himself. If he were asked, he says, "Who are you?" he would unhesitatingly reply: "Ani, Ani Umlal Bo-oretz, I am the stricken of the land." A not too romantic estimate either when we realize that he authored one of the most agonizing Memoirs ever written, which bear an eloquent testimony to the tortures and afflictions of a man scourged and pilloried by the ghosts and confusions of his own soul.

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42. vol.2, ppg.127-141.

After the Massacres of '81 and '82, he found a temporary asylum and a new exaltation in the "Lovers of Zion" movement. Thus he passed over from Haskalah into Zionism. His life is the token and symbol of the whole age of transitions; from Hethodoxy to Haskalah to Zionism. His literary contributions to Haskalah were not outstanding; but of all things, he contributed the most precious gift in his power--his own life. He died in 1910.

Note. The dates and activities of this last paragraph have been garnered elsewhere than the Memoirs, which only take us to the year 1873.

### Section 3.

#### Zionism.

Possibly the most fortunate occurrence to Russian Jewry were the very catastrophes of the "eighties". The liberal policies of Alexander II. had "Russified" Jewish youth to the point of assimilation, had, as we remarked, weakened the hold of the Maskilim upon the younger generation, had inspired the "enlightened" with an uncritical acceptance of all things Russian and with a constant and unreasonable deprecation of all that was Jewish. "Assimilation" and "Russification" had become watchwords. Russian youth was in a dangerous state. It required a few well-tailored Slavic pogroms to teach them the Way of Wisdom. These pogroms tolled the death-knell of Haskalah but sounded the welkin in the cause of national rejuvenation upon modern foundations. Zionism had not been unknown in Russia before the "eighties" but it had been a desolatory, indeterminate rather dreamy affair. It took the growing Czaristic enmity and the brutal, premeditated massacres to carry a wild influx of enthusiastic converts into Zionism. "On Nov. 6, 1884, for the first time in history, a Jewish international assembly was held at Kattowitz, near the Russian frontier, where representatives from all classes and different countries met and decided to colonize Palestine with Jewish farmers." <sup>43.</sup> The same year saw the creation of the "Hovebe Zion" movement, and with this organization, Haskalah in Russia became definitely nationalistic and Palestinian. Great was the exhilaration among the former desponding Maskilim. Lilienblum writes: "We have seen our youths return to us, and our hearts were filled with joy. In their restoration we found balm for our wounds, and with rapturous wonderment asked 'Who has born us these?' "

While Gordon sings:

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43. Raisin, pg. 285.



"Behold our sons, of whom we despaired,  
 Return to us, the great and the small;  
 God's grace is not ended, our power's unimpaired,  
 Again we shall live, and rise after the fall! "

But the labours of Haskalah had not been altogether in vain. In reality, its deepest and fondest hope was by way of being realized. Zionism, in a sense, was its culmination; for through it, and this was what Haskalah always desired, a feeling of self-respect and a consciousness of national importance was being ingenerated within the Russian Jew. Haskalah had chafed the stiffened limbs of Jewry into some semblance of life, Zionism came and extended the hand by which Jewry could rise, then indicated the path by which it must go.

From one viewpoint, Tschmerinsky, though he wrote his Memoirs in 1917, gives us no suggestion of the trend and current of the times. He never refers to these latter movements in Russian Jewry. His Memoirs "My City Motele", are the ietus of a romantic nostalgia for the old, a sort of lament that "in those days things were picturesque, men more vivid and interesting; undoubtedly something has been gained, but, so much more has been lost." However, it is this very accentuation, this retrospective brooding upon the old wherein he offers us the clue we seek--announcing that Haskalah and its "modernizing" tendencies has lost its power, its meaning; that it is defunct in Russia. Tschmerinsky's tales and sketches are all presentments of the older types of Jews; the Jews whom he fears have forever departed from Israel. Such an obsessive retrospection in an intelligent and enlightened mind clearly illustrates the failure of Haskalah--the failure of a movement which sought the reform or removal of these types.

As for Bernfeld, his Memoirs only extend to the year 1879, when

departs for Koenigsberg to assume some editorial office on the "Ha-Kol". It is to Ahad Haam, therefore, to his observations and recollections that we must turn for a reflection and illumination of this period.

Above everything else, we feel in Ahad Haam after he terminates his description of his early education and his removal to Odessa in 1884, a sense of the stir and swell of the time. Everywhere things are changing and moving; there is conflict and contention, there is assembly and dissention, organization and re-evaluation. In 1884, while in Odessa, he meets with the "Lovers of Zion" movement and he extends himself to participate in their work: "For in those days in Odessa, there was a fine center of "Hibath Tzion" and all its branches; and when I entered the organization of the "Lovers" I won myself a good name among them and took part in all their affairs".<sup>44</sup> Asher, from then on, despite himself, as he says, became a man of action, and we find him in the thick of every battle and activity. "That year too various groups were assembled into one central society and they established a Central Committee at whose head stood Pinsker; I also was selected to sit on the Committee. Every Tuesday we gathered at Pinsker's home and busied ourselves with matters of colonization."<sup>45</sup> He similarly mentions the Kattowitz Assembly referred to above and asserts that it generated new life into many an enervated community.<sup>46</sup> Because of a justly famous essay called "This is not the Way", wherein he supports the superiority of a cultural Zionism over that of the physical Zionism of his time, he was elected president of a secret society known as the "Bene Moshe" (Sons of Moses) which maintained as its objective the moral and intellectual improvement of the colonists of Eretz Yisroel. "In its early years it was full of life, and its moral influence upon all its members, and through them on all the activities of the

"Lovers of Zion", was very great."

44. Reshumoth vol.5, pg.91.

45. ibid, pg.92.

46. ibid, pg.92.

47. ibid, pg.95.

In 1891, Ahad haam was sent by the Organization for the Support of Jewish Agriculturists in Palestine and Syria whose center was in Odessa to investigate and report on the material possibilities of Palestine; and for the next three or four years, he busied himself as an agent of this Organization. In his Memoirs, Asher describes his impressions and reflections on these trips; and it is a source of amazement to realize how clear-eyed and prophetic he was with regard eventuations in Palestine. There is indeed very little in contemporary Zionism which he did not foresee. In his last pages, he reviews the political aspects of Zionism, declares their inadequacy as a groundwork for national building and then puts the pertinent question to the leaders of the movement: "M'ayin v'l'an?" (Whither goest thou?)

Anent this period, there is no more specific information in Ahad Haam; but wherever he had spoken of the movemants outlined above, he had expressed himself with affection and loyalty, though never uncritically, and gives us to understand that despite the many limitations of the societies and the newer movements, they had indubitably been a source of Grace and Deliverance in Israel. Israel had passed through evil times, he says, but the past has gone and a new life begun for the Jew. All that is necessary, and this is his constant iteration, is to approach Judaism and Jewish Nationalism with a comprehensive and critical spirit; never to be precipitate and improvident but to proceed wisely and deliberately.

Thus we see, that a national ideal, rather an ideal of a vivified Nationalism, had usurped the place of Faith in the forefront of the Jewish consciousness. Israel had indeed travelled a long distance since the beginning of the Century. It was modernism with a vengeance.

*university*

Asher Ginsberg.

Preeminent among the new nationalists of the later nineteenth century was the meditative thinker and essayist, Asher Ginsberg. He was born in Skovia, in the government of Kiev, Russia on Aug. 5, 1856. His father stemmed from an aristocratic Jewish family in Galicia. He was a wealthy, learned Jew and a Hassid. His mother was related to the Sadigrean dynasty of Tzaddikim, of which lineage she was exceedingly proud. As might have been expected, Asher was disciplined as a Hassid in his formative years. At the age of three, he started "Heder", from the which he graduated as the years advanced to other "Hadarim". All his spare moments, he was forced to spend in the Klaus of the Hassidim; thus he read much of their literature. Like Lilienblum, he complains that he savored few of the ordinary childhood joys. Secular literature was likewise forbidden him, his teacher being expressly prohibited from admitting to him even the knowledge of the Russian alphabet. However, Asher was an industrious and curious lad, and through various business ledgers taught himself the crude outlines of the language. At the age of ten, his father hired an expert pedagogue, who taught him "Shas" and "Poskim" by day and night, so that in a few years, Asher had acquired a regional fame as an erudite in these studies.

When Asher was twelve, his family moved to a near-by village. Not far from the house was a woods, and there Asher repaired after his studies in the schoolroom and pondered and meditated upon books forbidden him. He became a diligent student of the Spanish Philosophers. Maimonides was especially infusive and left a marked impression upon the temper of his thought. He spent a good deal of time and effort in perfecting his

knowledge of Bible and Hebrew grammar; this might account for the later purity of his style.

Up to the age of thirteen, Asher was a believing Hassid; but one particular incident weakened all his ties with the group. His father had taken him to Sadigora to receive from the "Tzaddik" his special benediction and a staff of advise and direction. While there, he witnessed the cheap and frivolous antics of the sons and relatives of the Tzaddik which greatly disgusted him. And though the Great Man himself made a deep impression upon him by the excellency of his deportment and speech, the previous scene of outlandish devotion had dealt a serious blow to his Hassidic loyalties which in a few years were entirely to disappear. An apocryphal story is told of that occasion on the meeting of Asher and the Tzaddik. It was said that after Asher had pressed the hand of the Tzaddik and had received his blessing, the Exalted Minister wiped his hand upon his girdle as if it had come into contact with something unclean.<sup>48.</sup> It is possible the Tzaddik did have a vivid presentiment of the coming years. Asher was to grow into a most redoubtable Mithnagged and Maskil.

Asher was slow in piercing the veil of the modern Hebrew writers. His father had interdicted these studies as abominations and for a while Asher was obedient. Before he was seventeen, he was a married man; having been betrothed at fifteen. He left his father's home in the customary fashion to live with his wife and her parents. There he took up the study of the Newer Literature and in earnest. He read the works of Ben-Menachem, of Luzzato, Krochmal, Rappoport and others. He extended his boy's knowledge of Russian and then proceeded with the acquisition of German. With another student, while in Odessa, he read the works of Pisaryev and Turgehief. He was of a mind to go to University; but a sudden illness of his wife made it impossible. Later, he deemed himself a bit too old to start schooling of that kind, so he never attended University.

In 1881, with the pogroms in Russia, which played such havoc with the structure of Haskalah, the inner Haskalah world of Asher likewise tottered and fell. His faith in the movement was shattered; Russia could not be relied upon. He looked about himself for sounder moorings. He travelled to Vienna, to Berlin and Breslau; finding nothing of what he sought with the canker of uncertainty still taking a toll of his spirit. These years were according to Asher the most agonizing of his life. The inward struggle and the outward confusion, the metastases within and the incalculable transformations of Russian Jewry without, the hatred he felt for his life as business agent to his father-in-law and his impotence to change his lot to one more suitable--all contributed to his wretchedness. Finally, he determined to leave the village and journey to a larger city where he might find enterprising and stimulating contacts, where he might feel less trammelled and hemmed in by his environment. He went to Odessa in 1884 to test things out. Two years later, he assumed a more permanent residence there, and a new life began for him. He read widely and omnivorously; at least he no longer felt a lack of books and opportunity. He became familiar with many languages. He became a man of affairs. He discovered himself as a writer; and began to translate into stirring words long-fermenting ideas on the redemption of the nation. He had become a member of the "Lovers of Zion" society. His countrified erubescence and shyness soon vanished, and taking courage in hand he proceeded in vigorous and chaste language to criticise the ideals and methods of the existing nationalistic movements ("This is not the Way") and to body forth his own. His first article, he published in the "Ha-Melitz" in 1889. With it, he earned his future soubriquet, Ahad Haam (for so he entitled himself in the essay to distinguish himself from the professional writers); and through it, he made his first and decisive step into the field of Hebrew Letters.

The same year he was elected president of the "Bene Moshe" society. He led it for two years and thereafter was its spiritual mentor; until its demise in 1897. In his capacity as president of the society, Ahad Haam, was called upon to participate in many of the projects of the "Lovers of Zion". He was appointed a member of the First Committee of the "Society for the Support of Hebrew Agriculturists in Palestine and Syria." He was also appointed an agent to visit these countries and to ascertain their resources. His judgements were none too favorable, and he fathered a considerable tumult in Zionist camps with his essays "Truth about Palestine", "Slavery in Freedom", "Fragments" and others. These essays were later collated and published in one volume: "On the Parting of the Ways."

In 1897, Ahad Haam became editor of the "Shiloah", which position he maintained until 1903. This was an active and creative period in Russian-Jewish history. It was then that Political Zionism under Herzl first saw the light; then too the Youth movements assumed more sturdy proportions and Hebrew Literature received a new impetus. A critic, a sort of check and overseer were necessary; these offices Ahad Haam capably performed. His was the interjectory word of caution, the ethico-philosophical note and monition which every movement requires and begets. In 1903, however, he abandoned the "Shiloah", having been offered an honorary or sinecure position in a Commercial House by an admiring Jew. The position unexpectedly exacted more time and effort than Ahad Haam had thought to give to it. Hence, as year succeeded year, his literary work suffered in desuetude. These were not very happy years; Ahad Haam despaired of ever again taking pen in hand, and to a writer there can be no greater catastrophe. He was fortunately commissioned, however, in 1908, to go to London for his firm; there he found the inspiration and the leisure to write again. This trip was productive of some of his happiest and finest fruits. The essays were later published in the fourth

volume of his "On the Parting of the Ways."

During the period of the World War, the disease which later ended his life, that of arterio-sclerosis, began to trouble him. In 1921, he left to make his final abode in Palestine. He had intended visiting England again in order to gather material for a maturing work at the "British Museum", but the caution of his physicians restrained him from so extensive and laborious a task. Instead, he went to Tel Aviv, where he made his last residence. There, sickly as he was, he collated and arranged his "Letters". These "Letters" extend over a period of ten years and contain intimate writings on the most significant topics of his day addressed to notable leaders in Zionism. After the completion of this work, he began his final task, the Memoirs of our study, which were finished and published before his death two years later. He died in Tel Aviv in 1927, full of years and honor. He had been a great thinker and a wise. His loss to Zionism was irreparable, for his age had seen few clearer brains. He was mourned by all Israel.

Note: Material for the last paragraph gathered from sources other than the Memoirs.



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