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Jewish literature, undated.

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## CONTEMPORARY JEWISH LITERATURE

### I

#### The Historical Background of Contemporary Jewish Literature

Literature may be defined as the written record of the life experiences of a people presented in an artistic form and having emotional appeal. The ancient Hebrews escaped great dangers and lost great heroes and immortalized these experiences in a song by the Red Sea or a lamentation over Saul and Jonathan. Similarly the Jewish people of today are suffering experiences which, while they are not glamorous to us because of our nearness to the events, are still the stuff of which great literature is made. A glance at the sweep of events affecting Jews during the past century will serve to give us some idea of the sources of inspiration of our modern Jewish literature.

In the eighteenth century Moses Mendelshon attempted to bring his people out of the narrowness of the Ghetto and to make them an integral part of the country in which they happened to be living by making available to them in Hebrew the cultural works of Germany as well as by urging them to learn German. These efforts were destined only to partial success, almost tragic in its incompleteness. For, while the culture thus brought within the reach of the Jews conferred upon them intellectual enlightenment and freedom, they were still fettered by the mediaeval shackles of political restrictions. It was not until the great Europe-wide revolutions of 1848, which through economic, industrial, and political upheavals wrought great changes in European governments, that the



Jews began to enjoy a certain measure of civic liberty. Gradually Jews in various countries--Germany, France, Austria--worked themselves up to high and honorable positions in their respective governments. By 1870 from Poland to France outstanding Jews enjoyed civic positions of honor.

But bright spots in history never endure for long in the case of the Jews. In THE VOICE OF JERUSALEM Israel Zangwill says, "Two opposing forces are thus at work upon the Jew--the wind and the sun. The gaberdine thrown open for a moment in the burst of heat, is buttoned tighter the next before the biting blast". And it was long before the end of the nineteenth century which had thus far seemed so auspicious to the Jew of Europe, that he was obliged to gather his well-worn gaberdine tightly about him in the face of the "biting blast" of Anti-Semitism, which received its initial reviving impulse in Germany. Incurring by his liberal tendencies and sympathies the wrath of the conservative element in Germany just after the Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the new German Empire, the Jew began to suffer all the evils of mediaeval Anti-Semitism, directed this time not so much against his religion as against his race. While Jew-hatred in Germany found its basis in opposition to Jewish liberalism, in France it was based on a suspicion of pro-Germanism aroused by the Franco-Prussian War. Anti-Semitism thus once revived spread rapidly over Europe and found its most fertile ground in Russia which had never, except for a brief respite under Tsar Alexander II, released its Jews from mediaeval restrictions. Rioting and blood accusations, occasional in other countries, became rampant and violent in Russia at the close of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the enlighten-



ed twentieth century. The Pogroms of Russia in the first decade of this century are one of the outstanding disgraces of modern civilization.

It is, therefore, to the force of Anti-Semitism that we must look for the source of the movements that have arisen among the Jews of today to ameliorate their conditions and for the basis of the problems we find mirrored in the contemporary literature of the Jews. The Anti-Semitism in Russia led to wholesale emigration of Jews from that country to Western Europe, especially England, where they were greeted none too favorably, and to America, where

they have been quite favorably received. This influx of Jews into strange lands with its consequent problems of adaptation to and assimilation of new customs and the ensuing ~~and~~ disagreement between conservative parents and their more adaptable children is treated by such authors as Zangwill, Asch, Nordau. The Anti-Semitism of France which reached its climax in the notorious Dreyfus case, furnished the immediate motive for the founding of the greatest single movement upon which the attention of the Jews of today is focused-- political Zionism, initiated and fostered by Theodor Herzl. And Zionism finds its most inspired singer in the neo-Hebrew poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik.

These are but few of the problems confronting the Jew of today and but few of the authors treating these problems in writing that is real literature. While we find Jewish Literature today written in the European languages, much of the best that is being produced is in Hebrew and Yiddish and is being produced in Russia and America which have most of the Jews of the world.



Yiddish and Hebrew literature are but now going through their periods of initial growth and renaissance respectively. To watch and trace their development will be a fascinating study.

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READING LIST\*-Contemporary Jewish Literature

ISRAEL ZANGWILL

Children of the Ghetto  
Dreamers of the Ghetto  
Ghetto Comedies  
Ghetto Tragedies  
King of Schnorrers

The Melting Pot

Blind Children ( Selected Poem

MAX NORDAU

A Question of Honor



We read in the Bible that "it came to pass in the days when the judges judged" and "in the days of Ahasuerus" that marvelous experiences befell our traditional heroines Ruth and Esther. And these stories, whatever basis they may or may not have in history, are the attempt on the part of the early Hebrews to satisfy their cravings for tale-telling, which one author calls "a fundamental need in the heart of man". Moreover not only in the Bible but later in the Talmud as well short fictitious narratives stirred the Jewish imagination until the truths the Rabbis sought to instill in the minds of their hearers took hold. These stories were told, of course, for instruction rather than for entertainment, yet they formed the national literary precedent of the first notable nineteenth century Yiddish sketch-writers, Shalom Aleichem and Isaac Loeb Peretz. Modern Yiddish fiction is a far cry from these early stories; and yet, when we realize the perfection of style and structure of the pastoral idyll RUTH, we are convinced that the development of the modern Yiddish sketch, short-story, novelette, and novel is an expansion rather than an innovation in form and an adventure in content rather than in style.

While Shalom Aleichem and Isaac Loeb Peretz were doing their best work with the sketch and the short-story, a younger group of writers arose who were destined to cause the center of Yiddish literary production to shift from Russia to New York. Indeed all of the outstanding Yiddish writers of the present day, with the exception of one or two, have been living in the United States for a number of years. Abraham Raisin was



born in Lithuania in 1876, and, after having been a teacher, written poetry, and served in the army four years, came to New York in 1911. Israel Hurewitz, whose pen-name is S. Libin, also born in Lithuania, served as a druggist's assistant at thirteen, went to London at twenty, and seven months later (in 1893) arrived in New York, where he worked as a cap-maker. And in the preceding year there had come to America from Russia Leon Kobrin, unsuccessful as shirtmaker, baker, weaver, and newspaper seller, yet immediately famous in Europe and America when he began to write Yiddish tales and sketches. Isaac Goldberg tells us that "for a whole generation Kobrin and Libin dominated Yiddish letters" in America. Israel J. Zevin known as "Tashrak", the humorous sketch-writer and also an immigrant from Russia, came to New York in 1889, while David Pinski, student in Vienna and Berlin, editor, and foremost Yiddish dramatist of the present day, has been living in America over twenty years. Only Shalom Asch, perhaps the greatest living Yiddish novelist, has remained in Europe.

Just as in the stories and sketches of Shalom Aleichem, so in the stories of Raisin, Hurewitz, Zevin, and Kobrin the chief emphasis is on background in the delineation of Jewish life in Russia and America. And by background we mean not mere physical surroundings, but all the wealth of tradition, custom, and racial experience which cause the Jews to act as they do. Whenever in these stories the interest seems for the moment to be fixed on an individual, deeper analysis will reveal that the individual is only acting or thinking in accordance with or in rebellion against his traditional environment. For example, Abraham



Raisin tells us of the boy Lebele who loves the outdoors and is kept from enjoying it because duties at Cheder and at home occupy all his waking hours; or of a cantor who discovers that his voice is failing and that he will no longer be able to earn his living by singing in the Synagogue; of a sickly father whose longing for a son to say Kaddish after him is fulfilled after he has almost given up hope of ever having anything but daughters; or of Avrohom the orchard keeper who derives his keenest delight from going off by himself to read in solitude the legends of the Jews. Israel Zevin (Tashrak) humorously shows the tenacity with which Jews cling to tradition by portraying the tumult caused by a baker who dared to make a beigel not in the accustomed shape. He also glorifies the Jewish mother who makes her love for her children the pivot of her life's happiness. Moreover he sketches the life of the materialistic middle-class and poor Jews of New York by recounting the experiences of Shulem the Shadchen in arranging marriages for them. But far more interesting glimpses of New York Jewish life we gain from S. Libin, who tells of the unfortunate picnic planned by a laborer's family who have had no other outing during a whole year; of Manasseh abused by his wife and finding pleasure in a fenced-in garden in the midst of a city of concrete and steel; and of a poverty-stricken family obliged to stay in bed as much as possible to save fuel and light. In "Yahrzeit for Mother" Libin shows how the lighting of the memorial candle on the anniversary of a grandmother's death caused a child's illness to result favorably. Isaac Goldberg writes that Libin and Kobrin "have been called by their associates the twins of the tenement, because of their



preoccupation with the many themes furnished by East Side life in the early days". And it is unfortunate that we do not have in translated into English any of Kobrin's stories which treat of New York tenement life. What we have in translation is a series of sketches entitled A LITHUANIAN VILLAGE, picturing life in the Lithuanian village of B-----: its institutions, customs, everyday occupations; its fair, its reactions to different seasons of the year, its celebration of the various holidays; and the final, gradual yet certain, exodus from the village to renowned America, the only inhabitants left being the very aged who have remained, to die in loneliness. Most of these stories by Raisin, Zevin, and Libin have no action at all: they consist chiefly of background and character portrayal. Kobrin's sketches particularly are sheer lyric description. But these productions are the chrysalis from which emerged the perfected fiction of Shalom Asch and David Pinski.

When Israel dwelt in Canaan he could tell stories of heroes and heroines distinguished for individual characteristics of nobility--self-sacrificing loyalty to persons or to their native land. But Israel in Galuth for hundreds of years of years was forced to subordinate the importance of the individual to the welfare of the group. Each new attack by his non-Jewish neighbors drove him to cling more tenaciously to the minute details of ceremony and belief which were the insignia of the identity of the group. Hence these outward trappings of faith came to be the cohesive force in world Jewry. Hence the reason for the emphasis on traditional background exhibited by the early sketch-writers. But the ideal of national revival, the long smoldering hope which burst into flame at the end of the nineteenth century, gave the Jews a new uniting force against the world, what Abraham



Cahan calls a sense of self-respect as a nation. And a self-respecting nation pursuing actively an ideal has need of people imbued with hope regardless of whether they cling to forms and ceremonies or rebel against them. Then the individual assumes the place of primary importance, and tradition becomes secondary. And it is just this philosophy of history which we find reflected in the best Yiddish literature of the present day. With Shalom Asch and David Pinski the individual emerges gradually from his traditional background and becomes interesting not as a Jew reacting to his small world but as a human being among human beings.

David Pinski, who is best known as a playwright but who is also a notable writer of short stories, is one of the chief exponents of this individualistic type of fiction. He is a psychological realist. Isaac Goldberg says of him: "The noted Yiddish author is concerned chiefly with the probing of the human soul,... the hidden mainspring that initiates, and often guides, our actions." Pinski seeks to penetrate into the secret of human motive..... That is why, if he must be classified, one places him among the psychological realists. Pinski writes chiefly on Biblical characters, the life of the laboring masses, and sex problems, and in treating all of these subjects, succeeds in creating characters who are intensely human. In a series of stories entitled TEMPTATIONS he shows that even the most perfect of human beings is susceptible to suggestion and cannot overcome temptation always, particularly when that temptation presents itself as a situation altogether new and unprecedented in the individual's experience. To illustrate his theory he places Biblical and traditional characters of Jewish history in such situations. An extreme



ly minute and penetrating psychological study is Pinski's "Tale of a Hungry Man", which traces the mental reactions of an embittered man to cold and hunger until he finally commits suicide. But perhaps the most artistic of the short stories of Pinski is "In the Storm". In this tale a mother, angered because her daughter has gone out with a man of whom she disapproves, sets out in a thunderstorm on the Sabbath of Repentance to find her. With rage in her heart equal in intensity to the thunderstorm, she curses her daughter. At last she finds the two struck by lightning, a fulfillment of her curse. Then for the first time dumb with grief, she experiences a tender feeling for her daughter. This is an excellent description of anger matched by the thunderstorm in nature. The powerful description develops in intensity until the final discovery of the tragedy and the instant change from anger to dumb grief and resulting tenderness. This story illustrates well the consummate skill in technique which Pinski uses in all his short-stories.

Moreover the dramatist tried his hand at still another form of fiction, somewhat shorter than the novel and having fewer characters but more extended in time than the short-story, namely the novelette. DRABKIN: A NOVELETTE OF PROLETARIAN LIFE is the satirical story of a Russian workman who cannot hold a job in his youth because of his continual tirades against employers. Later, influenced by a wife who gains control over him through her money, he becomes a weak, wife-ruled employer himself, while the woman who really loves him and sympathizes with his earlier ideals is left alone to her grief. This is the tragedy of ideals gradually dwindling away, the most intense form of tragedy because its source lies in the character of Drabkin himself. The effectiveness of the story renders any comment on the skill of plot dev-



elopment and character portrayal redundant.

It would be erroneous to suppose that Pinski's fame as a writer depends solely on his psychological analysis of human motives or even on the very careful structure of his plots, for much of the pleasure we derive from his writing has its source in his style. Even in the translation there is a fluid brilliancy and a lyrical vividness. Sheshana declares to her lover:

" You are my king and my kingdom is your love. It is greater and wealthier than that of Ahasuerus. The sun never sets upon my kingdom, and my rulership over it is unlimited. Your powerful bosom is my firm land, and upon it I build my most glorious palaces. Your eyes are my seas: I sink into them even as the sinking sun, and like the rising sun I look out from them, and my world is bathed in splendor and in light. Your mighty arms are my armies, and I am secure beneath their protection. I desire no other kingdom, and the whole world without you would be too small and too forlorn. My beloved, my only one, my fortress and my sun, protect your Sheshana, guard well your queen! "

There is a charm and a grace in Pinski's style which comes from its utter simplicity. Isaac Goldberg explains the essence of his style when he says of these stories: " Theirs is that rare beauty which is an indissoluble union of manner and matter. In the original, they represent the most melodious Yiddish that has been written! "

However the writer who has done the most sustained and notable work in modern Yiddish fiction is Shalom Asch, dramatist, short-story writer, and novelist. Asch, like Pinski, is both a psychologist and a realist, but unlike Pinski, he very



obviously uses environment and background to motivate the reactions of his characters. Environment plays a large part in his short-stories as well as in his novels, but in none of them, even for a moment, is interest in character sacrificed. The story of the young Jewish bride who refuses to have her hair shorn until her husband pleads with her to save him from disgrace is not submission to tradition but a sacrifice for love, while the tragedy of "The Scholar's Mother" lies in the son's lack of understanding of his mother's sacrifice to give him an education. But the most powerful short-story by Asch which has been translated is "Abandoned". In this story a young scoundrel finds himself abandoned by his wife with their young baby on his hands. He attempts to abandon the baby also, but despite all his moral delinquency, the combined urgings of the maternal instinct and human pity bring him back to the child and lead him to go from door to door begging for milk to feed it. Thus in the various short-stories of Shalom Asch we find the outstanding features of his longer novels--the use of environment to explain character and the ability to invest his blackest rogues with redeeming traits which make them appeal to our sympathy.

In his longer novels which have been translated Asch treats two outstanding topics: First, characters and situations essentially Jewish; and, secondly, rogues who are Jewish but who exhibit human qualities which make them universal. AMERICA and KIDDUSH HA-SHEM are novels of the first type. AMERICA is the tragedy of the failure of an intensely religious-spirited European Jewish child to adjust himself to the assimilative carelessness of American Jewish life. The book is not exceptional



and is of value chiefly as a picture of a typical situation which arose in consequence of the immigration of the Russian Jews to America. KIDDUSH HA-SHEM in general is the story of the massacres of the Jews of Poland by the Cossacks in 1648; in particular it is the story of Mendel, the inn-keeper, who strove to build up a Jewish community at Zlochov, Poland, finally succeeded, and then was driven away by the Cossacks to Nemirov where he lost his son and Daughter-in-law at the hands of the Cossacks who later massacred him and his wife Yocheved. The story is embellished by the romance of Schlome and Deborah, married as children. When they come to realize their love for each other, they are separated by the Cossacks, Schlome to be sold as a slave to the Tartars and redeemed after Deborah has caused herself to be slain rather than become the bride of the Cossack Yerem. All these misfortunes were suffered for the Sanctification of the Name.. This is a Yiddish historical novel, vividly told both in description and narration. Moreover the character portrayal is sympathetic, especially the treatment of Deborah, the nurse Marusha, and the manly Cossack Yerem.

But Asch's character studies of rogues, UNCLE MOSES and MOTTKA THE VAGABOND, far surpass the foregoing stories. Uncle Moses is an industrial czar who has gradually brought all his relatives and fellow-townsmen from Kuzmin to New York to work for him. He terrifies everyone by his tyranny except Masha, the daughter of worthless Aaron Melnick. Uncle Moses, who has been a rake all his life and has no legitimate heirs, educates Masha and finally marries the girl, who thereby sacrifices herself for the material good of her family. The marriage ends disastrously, Masha runs away, and Uncle Moses becomes a drunkard and a wanderer until he finally dies. Thus in a style that is



direct and vivid Asch portrays a rogue whom we both hate and pity. For the external veneer of harshness in Uncle Moses masks an intense inner weakness which brings on the tragedy. Uncle Moses is a universal type of rogue. MOTTKE THE VAGABOND is without a doubt Shalom Asch's masterpiece. "Mottke Ganef" is a luckless Jewish child born of the coarsest type of parents. Childhood has meant to him cruel beatings by his half-blind father and lack of proper care by his mother. By the age of fifteen he has broken all the Commandments except the one which forbids murder. But it is not long before he murders a man in order to gain his passport and thus be able to travel about freely. Thereafter he lives in the underworld of Warsaw and sees nothing wrong in his life until he falls in love with Channele, the carefully guarded daughter of a Jewish household. Channele inspires in him the first tenderly sacred feelings he has ever experienced, and he tells her of the crime he committed long before. Channele betrays him, and, although at the trial she denies that he ever told her anything, Mottke confesses his guilt and takes his punishment. In this story Asch expands the theme he suggested in "Abandoned", but MOTTKE THE VAGABOND is far the more effective story because, being more extensive, it drives home the lesson of the effect of environment on human life. Mottke was a ruffian against whom all the fates conspired, but he had a heart of infinite tenderness. He had every reason to be the sinner that he was; the wonder is that he was still able to detect and respect the beauty of purity. As a character study set in a vivid background and presented in a series of strikingly dramatic and colorful scenes, MOTTKE THE VAGABOND is a masterpiece of Yiddish literature. Its universal appeal entitles it to be placed among the masterpieces of world art.



It is therefore Shalom Asch who has brought Yiddish fiction to perfection. In plot development, character portrayal, vivid directness of style, as seen in MOTTKE THE VAGABOND where he describes child labor in a glass factory or underworld life in Warsaw, as well as in conciseness he is unexcelled. His emphasis on environment as an element in human psychology gives substance to his work and enables him to create sustained works of fiction which Pinski's concentration on the analysis of motive in the abstract can never attain.

We cannot leave a survey of modern Yiddish fiction without mentioning the work of Abraham Cahan, the American Yiddish journalist and socialistic labor leader. Cahan is the author of several Yiddish tales on New York Jewish life, but he is best known for his novel, THE RISE OF DAVID LEVINSKY, the epic of the women's clothing industry in the United States, written in English. The story is directly told and its subject is interesting. Though not distinguished for its style, it will live chiefly because of its subject-matter.

Yiddish fiction has developed from the early plotless Sketches of Abramovitz, Shalom Aleichem, and Peretz with their emphasis on background with some suggestion of psychology to its present culmination in Shalom Asch's characterization through the influence of environment on human action and character. Story telling is as old as the Hebrew people and style, itself, was perfected in the days when the Bible was written. The modern writers are but carrying on the heritage. Schooled by centuries of restraint and repression, the Jewish literary genius has learned the lesson of concise simplicity, and while the philosophy underlying this literature is broadening so as to exhibit more



universal tendencies, modern Yiddish fiction is still characterized by what Ludwig Lewisohn calls " a large and sad simplicity, by excellent technique, and by an austere honest realism!"

*Helen M. Friedman*





#### IV.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN YIDDISH LITERATURE.

Modern Jewish literature written in the European languages suffers two serious drawbacks: first, there is comparatively little of it that is really literature of the first rank; and, secondly, it reaches but a pitifully small minority of the total Jewish population of the world. The Maskilim, followers of the Haskalah movement fostered by Moses Mendelssohn and his circle in Germany, sought to bring about reform within Judaism itself as well as adaptation of the Jews to the customs of the countries in which they were living by adopting in addition to German and Russian, Hebrew as a medium of literary expression. However, despite a relatively rich production of novels, stories, poems, and dramas in Hebrew, the bulk of the nineteenth century Jews remained deaf to the call of the Maskilim for Enlightenment. For, in order that a literature should appeal to a people and represent faithfully its problems and experiences, it must be written in the language in which the people are living those experiences. And the greatest number of the Jews of the nineteenth century were living, not German or Russian or Hebrew, but Yiddish.

Yiddish had its origin in the mediaeval German ghetto scarcely five centuries ago. It was called "Ivri-Teitsch" or Hebrew-German, a name which described the language well, a jargon without an established orthography and grammar. Despised by the leaders of the movement for Enlightenment, it was regarded by them as the language of the masses beneath the dignity of literature. As has been noted, the Maskilim aimed at the assimilation of the Jews nationally in the countries in which they were living and looked upon Judaism purely as a religion and not at all as a nationality. Hence their scorn of Yiddish, the universal language of the Jews; hence their failure as leaders of their people. But the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in Russia, saw the decline of the Haskalah movement and the rise of a spirit directly antithetical to it. Disgusted at the failure of his fellow-Maskilim as leaders of the Jews, Perez Smolenskin, novelist and founder-editor of the Hebrew periodical Ha-Shahar (The Dawn), fostered through his publication the spirit of national revival. "Numerous peoples and powerful kingdoms have disappeared, have gone down when their day came, and have not risen again before those that destroyed them; and many another people, when its day comes, will go down and be lost. But Israel will still live, for the breath of life is in him." Such was the philosophy of Israel's history given by Smolenskin to the Jews of his day. But it was not until the reaction against the Jews and the occurrence of the great pogroms in Russia which followed the death of Tsar Alexander II that the national spirit took firm hold upon the Jews. Unlike Haskalah this was a



movement of the masses of the Jewish people. The language of the masses was Yiddish, and it was not long before clear-visioned writers of initial period of Zionist hopes turned to Yiddish as their literary medium. Abraham Cahan described the flowering of this movement concisely when he wrote: "The birth of Yiddish literature in Russia and the beginning of the great Jewish exodus from that country to America are two effects of one and the same cause. The same anti-Semitic crusade that forced the Children of Israel to go beyond the seas in search of a safe home, aroused them to a new sense of their racial self-respect and to an unwonted interest in their native tongue."

The first great writer of significant literary ability to show interest in his native tongue was Shalom Jacob Abramovitz, called "Mendele Mocher Sefarim" or "Mendele the Book Seller". Waldstein describes Abramovitz as "a travelling book dealer, a person curious and inquisitive, a good listener to stories and a good narrator; and though somewhat more learned than his fellow Jew, ---- yet a man of the people without the slightest haughtiness or pride". Abandoning Hebrew, "Mendel Mocher Sefarim" (1835-1917) wrote Yiddish novels and stories treating of conditions of life and types of characters among the Jewish people of the age just preceding the period of his literary activity, all with a fascinating style and plentiful humor, which is often satiric. Moreover Abramovitz possessed a power of vivid and colorful description as well as a keen understanding of the squalor and the poetry of Jewish life which are apparent in the following picture of the Sabbath eve in a home of poverty:

"Six days in the week Shmulik the rag-picker lived like a dog. But on the eve of the Sabbath all was changed in his house. The walls were white-washed, the house was cleaned; a new cloth shines on the table, and the rich and yellow bread, a joy to the eye, rests thereon. The candles burn in their copper candlesticks, burnished for the Sabbath; and a smell of good food goes out of the oven, where the dishes are covered. All week long the mother of the house has been black as coal; today her face is resplendent, a white kerchief is tied on her head, and a spirit of grace has breathed upon her. The little girls, with bare feet, have come back from the bath; their hair is coiled in tresses; they linger in the corners of the room; by their faces it may be seen that they are waiting, joyous-hearted for those whom they love ---- And to and fro in the house the father and son go, singing with pleasant voices, the Shalom Aleichem songs that greet the invisible angels that come into every Jewish house when the father returns from the house of prayer on the Sabbath."

Abramovitz is regarded as the father of modern Yiddish literature and with Isaac Loeb Peretz and Shalom Aleichem enjoys the reputation of being one of the three greatest Yiddish writers of the past century. Unfortunately almost nothing that Abramovitz wrote is available in translation.



The latter half of the nineteenth century which saw Abramovitz turn from Hebrew to Yiddish, also witnessed the rise of numerous minor Yiddish writers, all in some way interested in Hebrew or Yiddish journalism as editors of or contributors to such periodicals as Ha Shahar, Ha Boker - Or Die Welt, and Ha Zeman. Among the number of these writers were Reuben Asher Brandes, Judah Lob Lewin (Jehalel), Mordecai Spektor, Eliezer David Rosenthal, Isaiah Lerner, Judah Steinberg, David Frischman, Micha Joseph Berdyczewski, Isaiah Berschadski, Hirsh David Naumberg, Meyer Blinkin, Lob Shapira, and Isaac Dob Berkowitz, all producers of short stories or sketches, which seem to be the particular forte of the modern Yiddish writers.

These sketches are short descriptions of situations, conditions, and characters typical of the life of the Russian Jew of the end of the nineteenth century - the trials of a physically weak but mentally alert Jew in the Russian army; the mental agony of a poor Jew throughout the Yom Kippur service for having stolen money for his daughter's dowry; the tragedy of the failure of a cantor's voice; an ironical begging partnership of a Jew and a Gentile, both maimed in war in the Russian army; the self-sacrifice of three pious men who ate on Yom Kipper to convince the people of their plague ridden village that they should take care of their physical health to stem the progress of the plague; and the tragedy in a Jewish family caused by brutal, beastly Russian pogroms. Many of these writers lived all their lives in Europe; others brought Yiddish literature to America and prepared for signal developments in American Yiddish literature in the early twentieth century. Of those who remained in Russia Shalom Aleichem and Isaac Loeb Peretz are the most famous. We shall be able to consider them at greater length because translations of some of their works are available.

Shalom Aleichem is the pen-name of Shalom Rabinovitz, born in Russia in 1859. At twenty-one he was government Rabbi at Lubin, near his native town, but later he moved to Kiev where he spent most of his life. From 1905-1907 he visited America. Rabinovitz wrote, in Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish, poems, plays, and humorous short stories, and he was a constant contributor to Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals. However he did his best work in Yiddish, and he, himself, translated much of what he wrote in Yiddish into Hebrew.

Shalom Aleichem is known as the "Yiddish Mark Twain", and his particular style of humor is clearly shown in some of his short stories translated by Helena Frank in the volume, Yiddish Tales, but more especially in the series of sketches called Jewish Children. The former stories tell of commonplace yet significant, often whimsical happenings in Jewish village life. In "The Clock" an old clock strikes thirteen instead of twelve to announce the imminent dissolution and, despite all efforts to repair it, finally falls to pieces; "Fishel the Teacher" experiences great terror when he is forced to cross a flooding river in a row-boat in order to be at home with his family in time for the Seder; Chaim Chaikin, accustomed to fasting to give food to his children, finds his last fast, one whole week before the Ninth of Av, easy because it ends in his death in the Shool; while in "The Passover Guest"



a child's ideals are shaken when it is discovered that a wayfarer from Jerusalem who has been entertained at Soder has proved to be a scamp and robbed his host. On the other hand, the whole of the book Jewish Children is concerned with the experiences of Jewish children in a Russian village with objects, events, and people. It gives a clear and mellow picture of the lives of Russian Jewish children, their reactions to nature, ritual ceremonies and human beings: games of the school boys on L'Ag Boomer, joyous expeditions into the fields to gather "greens for Shevuoth", tricks played by Cheder boys on their flogging teachers, and contrivances by which young boys strive to satisfy intense desires, as for pocket-knives or violin lessons. Three of the stories are concerned with the idyllic love of Shemuak for his orphan niece Busie.

And it is in these stories about Busie as well as in the stories which describe ritual ceremonies that we feel most strongly a certain rich lyrical tone of half suppressed emotion. There is a trick of repetition which the author uses, and, though it is an extremely artificial device, it emphasizes and intensifies the lyrical rhythm. Rabinovitz uses this mannerism with enchanting effectiveness when he repeats in each of the stories concerning Busie the brief explanation of her relationship to Shemak and her unfortunate parentage. But the outstanding excellence of Shalom Aleichem's style, the real source of its lyrical beauty, is his marvelous power of description. His nature descriptions in particular are both vivid and colorful and at the same time full of feeling. He describes a field thus: "The Levada is big. It stretches away without a beginning and without an end. It is covered with a green mantle, sprinkled with yellow flowers, and nailed down with red nails. It gives out a delicious odour- the most fragrant spices in the world are there." And of the falling of night he says: "The night had already spread her wings over the heavens. Her shadow was slowly lowering itself over the earth. A silent, warm, holy Passover night it was -- a night full of secrets and mysteries, full of wonder and beauty. The holiness of this night could be felt in the air. It descended slowly from the dark blue sky -- The stars whispered together in the mysterious voices of the night." Shalom Aleichem was evidently a keen and sensitive observer of nature. Moreover his descriptions of human beings are outstanding because, like Dickens, he delineates characters through emphasis on one conspicuous characteristic. His description of Ephraim Log-of Wood illustrates this method; "In person, Ephraim was a tiny little man. He had short little legs, and small little hands, and red little cheeks, and a quick walk which was a sort of little dance. And he tossed his little head about. His speech was rapid, and his voice squeaky. And he laughed with a curious little laugh which sounded like the rattling of dried peas." On the whole the charm of all of Shalom Aleichem's descriptions, whether of nature or of human beings, lies in their appeal to more of the senses than merely the sense of sight, and his style is colorful, mellow, and rich in half suppressed emotion.



It is the lyrical style and humor of Shalom Aleichem which distinguish him from his contemporary Isaac Loeb Peretz. Peretz was born in 1851 in Samosez, Russian Poland. After having received a thorough education in Jewish philosophical, and literary subjects, he took up the practice of law. As clerk to a congregation in Warsaw he collected statistics on Jewish life. Peretz wrote in Hebrew and Yiddish, and was editor, publisher, and contributor to Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals. Like Shalom Aleichem he wrote mostly in Yiddish, later translating some of his works into Hebrew.

The short story or sketch was Peretz's specialty. In "Travel Pictures" he describes the social and economic conditions of the Jews in Russia; in "The Chat", "Kabbalists", and "If not Higher" he gives us pictures of the life of the Hasidim; while in others of his stories he presents certain specific psychological situations. Peretz's motive was that of a Maskil-- reform. This motive is especially obvious in such stories as "In a Past Chaise", "Married", and "The Outcast" where the author deploras the custom among the Jews of keeping their women uneducated and thereby rendering their lives exceedingly dull. He also wrote symbolical sketches criticizing social conditions and suggesting remedies. Two stories of this type are "In the Pond" satirizing our failure to recognize that only the spiritual world is eternal and the material world suffers change, and "The Pike" presenting the author's plea for concerted action on the part of the Jews for their own social welfare.

Several of Peretz's sketches are of interest individually because of subject matter and manner of presentation. In "A Woman's Wrath" we have an intensely dramatic scene in which a Jewish woman starving and goaded to madness because her husband continually studies and will not work, drives him from home and is saved from hanging herself when her baby cries for food. In "The Treasure" a Jewish man, unable to sleep on Friday night, goes out for a walk. Suddenly a flame appears on the ground before him and continues to go wherever he goes. He cannot put his hands on it because it is the Sabbath. However it follows him home, and after the Sabbath is over, he finds a treasure where the flame was. In the collection of Peretz's sketches called Stories and Pictures the following stories are of interest: "What Is the Soul?", in which a child wonders and asks what the soul is until finally, when he grows up, he decides that his beloved is his soul; "In Time of Pestilence", in which a hated Gentile doctor and an ugly Jewish orphan student are disappointed in their hopes of profiting by the village plague, the doctor leaving the village and the student hanging himself; "Bontzye Shweig", the story of an unfortunate man rewarded in heaven for his meek submissiveness on earth and asking as a prize only a fresh roll and butter every day for breakfast; and "That Woman Mistress Hannah", written in the form of letters and depicting Mistress Hannah's gradual loss of sanity through jealousy of her husband, who has gone to earn a living in America and left her too long at the mercy of selfish and exacting relatives. All these stories are interesting psychologically and have forceful endings.



The style of Peretz is extremely simply, but we miss in it the warmth and the colorful vividness of the style of Shalom Aleichem. We have here no genially humorous outlook on social manners but biting satire on life's problems and society's short comings. Peretz also wrote some poetry; for example, in "The Two Brothers" he shows symbolically how the desire for wealth may lead to desperate acts. However very little of his poetry has been translated and even that small quantity gives little indication of unusual excellence. Peretz had the soul of the preacher and the reformer; the soul of the poet belonged to Shalom Aleichem.

Abramovitz, Rabinovitz, and Peretz, the three pioneers of all modern Yiddish literature that is worthwhile, lived well into the twentieth century. All three died between 1916 and 1918 when the movements for national revival and the establishment of Yiddish as a literary language were well under way. They saw the feeble beings of Yiddish journalism and literature, watched their gradual growth, and had the satisfaction of living to see some of the work of the present-day masters, Rosenfeld, Yehoash, David Pinski, and Shalom A. Asch. If the movement for national revival did much for the evolution of Yiddish, in its turn Yiddish has proved to be instrumental in furthering national hopes among the Jews. Isaac Loeb Peretz wrote a short poem in which he said:

"I walk about  
In foreign fields,  
The sun is bright  
Yet no warmth yields.  
The song that from my heart would spring  
Is dead for want of echoing.  
The world about me  
Is not free;  
The fields I tread  
Bloom not for me.  
I pluck a rose in early morn--  
A stranger's rose is but a thorn!"

With the development of Yiddish into a well ordered language and its use by masters of literary style this sense of homelessness in literature as well as in national life is now steadily disappearing.



## II

### Israel Zangwill

In the last decade of the nineteenth century the Jewish Publication Society of America issued a request for a "book on Jewish life in a western milieu" and presented the request to a young Jewish journalist of England, Israel Zangwill. Born in London in 1864 of parents who had come to England from Latvia, his father being a peddler, Zangwill had attended school at Bristol, where the family lived for a short time, but for the most part he had received his education at Jew's Free School, London, where he obtained a scholarship and also became a pupil teacher, remaining in that position until he was graduated with honors from the University of London. A disagreement with the authorities of the school led to his resignation and his devotion of his entire time to journalism and literature. While teaching he had written literary sketches, for example MOTZA KLEIS with a collaborator, Lewis Cowan, and had been on the staff of an Orthodox Jewish weekly, the JEWISH STANDARD. After his resignation he contributed to various periodicals including ARIEL, a humorous, satirical weekly. Zangwill had already published his initial novel, THE PREMIER AND THE PAINTER, under the pen-name J. Freeman Bell, and was a successful writer of short stories (see collections called THE BACHELORS CLUB and THE OLD MAIDS CLUB), when the attention of the Jewish Publication Society of America was arrested by certain of his articles on Judaism then appearing in the JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW. It was the excellence of these essays that motivated the choice of Zangwill to write the required "book on Jewish life in a western milieu."

Zangwill earned a high position in the realm of English fiction, but it is his contribution to modern Jewish literature that appeals to our interest. Zangwill is known as the outstanding novelist of Jewish life writing in a European language today. His success is due to his sympathetic understanding of the principles, practices, and philosophy of Judaism. Harry Schneiderman in an essay on Zangwill says of him: "Next to his interest in literature, yet not far behind, was his devotion to the trials and problems of the Jewish people, a devotion which had a double source,--his keen Jewish consciousness and, what was largely an outgrowth of that consciousness, his deep sympathy with the downtrodden, no matter of what race or creed." Zangwill was interested in woman suffrage, the negro problem, Bolshevism, and efforts for the promotion of peace. He was enlisted in the cause of Zionism by Theodor Herzl and attended the first Zionist Congress at Basle, Switzerland. In 1905 he helped form the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO), which aimed to secure some territory, not necessarily Palestine, as a center of refuge for Jews who needed such a place. He immediately became President of the organization and continued to be the leader until ITO was officially broken up in 1925. And it is all this sympathy with and knowledge of Judaism of which these interests are but the outward expression that Zangwill brings to his masterpiece CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO.

In the introduction to CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO Zangwill says: "Into the heart of East London there poured from Russia, from Poland, from Germany, from Holland, streams of Jewish exiles, refugees, settlers, few as well-to-do as the



Jew of the proverb, but all rich in their cheerfulness, their industry, and their cleverness. The majority bore with them nothing but their phylacteries and praying shawls, and a good-natured contempt for Christians and Christianity. For the Jew has rarely been embittered by persecution. He knows that he is in GOLUTH, in exile and that the days of the Messiah are not yet, and he looks upon the persecutor merely as the stupid instrument of an all-wise Providence. So that these poor Jews were rich in all the virtues, devout yet tolerand, and strong in their reliance on Faith, Hop, and more especially Charity." Against the background of this voluntary Ghetto is portrayed the slender tale of the life of Esther Ansell, who lives a youth of poverty, compelled to rely on Charity because of the shiftless incompetency of her study-loveing, impractical father. Discouraged by the early death of her brilliant brother but with her genius more sharpened than stifled by her life of want, she is taken in by the rich Goldsmiths and educated by them. However she is not happy, for she sees all too clearly the sham and artificialities of the life of these "grandchildren of the Ghetto." Soon after the beginning of her friendship with the idealistic journalist Raphael Leon, she reveals to him that she is the author of a much discussed book severely criticizing the life of the social circle to which the Goldsmiths belong. She makes a confession to Mrs. Goldsmith, also, in a letter and leaves her home to return to the Ghetto where she spent her childhood. When Raphael finally finds her again, she is ready to sail for America where she at last goes, undeterred by Raphael's desire to marry her. The story of Esther's career, however, is used merely as a meagre plot motivating the portrayal of the Ghetto with artistic balance of lights and shadows. In this book Zangwill is said to have interpreted the Jew to the Western world. We see in it the tragedy of the poverty-stricken student Moses Ansell and of the sternly orthodox Reb Shemuel, who would sacrifice his daughter's happiness for the sake of an antiquated dictate of the Talmud; the comedy of the machinations of Sugarman the Shadchan and of the materialistic poet Melchitsedek Pinchas, and the lofty idealism of Esther Ansell and Raphael Leon. Zangwill depicts the good and the bad in this picture of Jewish life, emphasizing the weaknesses as well as the strong points of certain beliefs and practices. Through this method he has recreated a section of Jewish life and has made it interesting to non-Jews as well as to Jews. George E. Woodberry says in his book, THE APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE: "The enduring worth of the novel.....depends much on the success of the writer in giving the scene of life as a whole, in securing the illusion of a full world, or one that at least is complete for the characters inhabiting it.....There is no surer sign of greatness in a novel than this large grasp of general life, the crowded stage, the throng of affairs, the sense of a world of men". In CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO Zangwill has created the illusion of just such a full world. Judged by the above standard, then, the novel has enduring worth.

CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO is to GHETTO TRAGEDIES and GHETTO COMEDIES, two subsequent collections of short stories, as the whole firmament of stars is to its individual constellations. Having once created the Ghetto world in his novel, Zangwill selects certain significant characters and situations from this world and presents each by itself in a well constructed short story, which makes a fine vivid impression because of its concentration on a single phase of Jewish life. The sorrows, problems, aims, and ideals treated in their relation to each other in CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO are represented singly in GHETTO COMEDIES and GHETTO TRAGEDIES. In the latter volume the story "Transitional" depicts the struggle between conservative parents and Anglicized children on the subject of intermarriage; "Noah's Ark" tells of the failure to carry through a project to establish a territory in post-Revolutionary America as a homeland for the Jews, while "The Land of Promise" is an immigration restriction tragedy.



"The Keeper of Conscience," "Satan Mekatrig," and "Incurable" are really character studies: the first, of a young girl who proudly works herself to her death to live down the disgrace of her father's desertion of his family, only to have her father and mother reunite after she dies; the second, of a man led to sin, disease, and death by an atheistic, socialistic comrade; and the last of an invalid woman who unselfishly gives up her husband to the other woman he loves since she herself is incurable. "Bethula" is the tragedy of the sacrifice of a young girl's happiness because of her father's Chassidic belief that she must not marry an ordinary man. Two excellent examples of Jewish mother love are set forth in "They That Walk in Darkness" and "The Sabbath Breaker," both mothers having their hopes frustrated by the deaths of their sons. The latter story is unusual in form since it is the delirious dream of the aged mother just before her death. However one of the most interesting of these stories is "The Diary of a Meshumad," written as a journal and depicting the tragedy of a convert whose son, not knowing of his Jewish extraction, becomes a violent Anti-Semite and incites the Russians to bloodshed while his father experiences mental tortures because of his lack of courage to confess his faith openly to his son.

GHETTO COMEDIES, written somewhat later, reveals a more mellowed outlook on Ghetto life, an insight on the part of Zangwill that enables him to see the subtle humor in situations which barely escape being real tragedies. In "The Model of Sorrows" and "The Luftmensch" immigrant Jews play upon the sympathies of an artist and prove to be scamps, thus destroying trust in really sincere Jews who are in need. "Anglicization" tells of an unsuccessful attempt of a mother and son to be completely Anglicized. In "The Jewish Trinity" an artist becomes intensely interested in Judaism and Zionism, thinking that the girl he loves and her father are sincere Jews, only to find that they are practising ritual Judaism without being at all in sympathy with its more cherished ideals. "The Sabbath Question in Sudminster" is an amusing account of how the Jews of this town develop the habit of keeping their shops open on the Sabbath because they began the practice to teach a lesson to one Simeon Samuels who had been an incorrigible Sabbath-breaker. The story of an "old clothes woman" who rears the child of the reprobate husband of her dead daughter and his worthless non-Jewish second wife is the theme of "The Bearer of Burdens." The efforts of Sugarman the Shadchan, whom we met in CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO, are defeated in "The Tug of Love," while our old acquaintance Melchitsedek Pinchas, the egotistical dramatist and poet, quarrels with a producer for mutilating beyond recognition to suit the public taste his version of HAMLET in "The Yiddish HAMLET." "The Converts" shows how a man who has deserted his wife to follow a show-girl reacts to her repulsion of him on his return by becoming a Christian clergyman. "Elijah's Goblet" and "Samooorona" are decidedly Jewish, the former being the story of an escape from a pogrom brought on by the treachery of a converted Jew, the latter depicting the slaying of a whole community of Jews because each was loyal to his own "ism" and refused to unite with the rest for defense against a common enemy. The last story is an excellent example of a serious comedy.

Somewhat longer than these short stories and yet not extensive enough to be called a novel is Zangwill's sketch call THE KIND OF SCHNORRERS, which relates the adventures of one Acosta, an eighteenth century professional "schnorrer." His clever methods of begging, his pride in his Sephardic ancestry, and his overbearing self-assurance do not save him from getting himself into such a position that he is forced to give his daughter in marriage to a "tordesco" Jew, thought to be far beneath her. This is an interesting character study, full of clever dialogue and repartee, and presenting some good dramatic situations, especially the scene in Remorse Red Herring's home where Acosta is outwitted by the "tordesco" schnorrer who seeks his daughter's hand in marriage. It is more likely that this sketch grew out of Zangwill's home experiences which seems to



have been the Mecca of beggars. He once said to an interviewer who had experienced difficulty in finding his residence, "Any Galician schnorrer emerging for the first time into the swelter of Waterloo station finds me easily enough."

From the voluntary Ghetto of English Jewry of the end of the nineteenth century to the older Continental Ghettoes of the preceeding centuries and from the commonplace English Jews with their joys and sorrows to the outstanding Jewish minds of those earlier days we turn with Zangwill when we put down CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO, GHETTO TRAGEDIES, and GHETTO COMEDIES and take up DREAMERS OF THE GHETTO. We have wandered from the realm of realistic fiction to the realm of realistic fiction to the realm of imagination and philosophy. For in sketches half-true and half-fictitious Zangwill presents to us the tragedies of the lives of these dreamers of the Ghetto: Uriel Acosta, Zabbatai Zevi, Baruch Spinoza, Israel Baal Shem, Moses Maimon, Heinrich Heine, Ferdinand LaSalle, and Lord Beaconsfield. Zangwill portrays these historical personages and fictitious heroes to us as seekers after ideal truth, as gropers out of the narrow ritualism and ceremonialism of the Ghetto into the real philosophy behind mere forms. For some of them, such as Uriel Acosta and Baruch Spinoza, tragedy lay in the fact that the people among whom they lived could not see the relationship between this ideal truth and their established forms and persecuted the thinkers beyond endurance. To others, such as Lasalle, Israel Baal Shem, and Heinrich Heine ideal truth beckoned from outside the Ghetto walls and they deserted their traditional background to follow the ideal expressed for them in socialism, Chassidic ecstasy, love and poetry. Both types came to grief, for both were without ballast when cut loose from their traditional background. Harry Schneiderman says that the lives of these men were "tragedies, because, being essentially Jews, they could not thrive in a non-Jewish atmosphere." This book vies with CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO for first place among Zangwill's works.

But Zangwill's love of Judaism was not completely revealed in these realistic pictures of the Ghetto, nor was his mastery of literary forms limited to the short story and the novel, for one of his most typically Jewish productions is a dramatic idealization of the Jew's dream of finding a land of perfect peace in which to dwell. THE MELTING POT, his most famous and only entirely Jewish play, has for its hero a genius, David Quixano, extremely emotional and impressionable, who, as all Israel in exile, never forgets the horrible scenes of his childhood and sees in America the opportunity to create a symphony of the best of all nations and to enjoy freedom without fear. While the play may be adversely criticized for its strong melodramatic qualities and certain mechanically forced situations, its chief merit as a specimen of Jewish literature is the essentially Jewish idea it expresses, the longing for peace and harmony, which release the best in all peoples.

Out of Zangwill's interest in and study of things Jewish he acquired a knowledge of Hebrew literature which is most obviously revealed in his translation of the mediaeval poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol. These poems are all of a philosophical, religious nature. But Zangwill also wrote entirely original poetry of fine beauty and in various metres, some of it on abstract topics, such as love, beauty, death; some of it on topics of special interest to modern Jews, such as the war, Zionism, and the duty of American Jewry today:

"Jews of the great Republic  
 Clasped to her mother-breast,  
 Nestling so warm and peaceful  
 Within that bosom blest,  
 Turn to our tortured Europe,  
 Hark to the myriad moan  
 Of pinched lips, white with hunger,  
 That stiffen as they groan,  
 And remember in these wan creatures runs



the blood that is your own.  
 .....  
 Set your lips to the Shofar  
 Waken a fiery blast,  
 Shrill to the heathen nations--  
 This slaughter shall be the last!  
 And send our old Peace-greeting  
 Pealing from cot to throne,  
 Till mankind heeds the message  
 On the Hebrew trumpet blown,  
 And the faith of the whole world's people  
 is the faith that is our OWN."

Still others of his poems treat of typically Jewish ceremonies and characters, such as "The Hebrew's Friday Night," a colorful description of the Sabbath eve ceremonial in the home, "Adon Olam," a translation, "Israel," and "Moses and Jesus," a picture of the two leaders whose beliefs were the same yet whose followers cannot live at peace with one another. The philosophy behind his poetry is Jewish and the thought is clearly expressed, yet none of his poems as a Jewish poem reaches the level that CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO attains as a Jewish novel.

Zangwill's genius expressed itself in almost every form known to literary art. He was also an essayist and a speaker of note. THE WAR FOR THE WORLD contains essays on modern topics, the war, the position of women, and the position of Judaism. THE VOICE OF JERUSALEM is another volume of his essays on similar ~~XXX~~ topics, emphasizing particularly his view of the Jew and his opinions of Zionism. The genius of Zangwill was versatile and his humanitarian interests were extensive. But it is chiefly on his interpretation of the Ghetto Jew that his literary fame rests. And as we turn from his work we carry away with us an appreciation of the truth of the genial, understanding philosophy underlying his best work, which he himself expresses clearly in his masterpiece:

"Not here in our London Ghetto the gates and gaberdines of the olden Ghetto of the Eternal City; yet no lack of signs external by which one may know it, and those who dwell therein. Its narrow streets have no specialty of architecture; its dirt is not picturesque. It is no longer the stage for the high-buskined tragedy of massacre and martyrdom; only for the obscurer, deeper tragedy that evolves from the pressure of its own inward forces, and the long-drawn-out tragi-comedy of sordid and shifty poverty. Nonetheless, this London Ghetto of ours where, amid uncleanness and squalor, the rose of romance blows yet a little longer in the raw air of English reality; a world which hides beneath its stony and unlovely surface an inner world of dreams, very fantastic and poetic as the mirage of the Orient where they were woven, of superstitions grotesque as the cathedral gargoyles of the Dark Ages in which they had birth. And over all lie tenderly some streaks of celestial light shining from the face of the great Lawgiver.

The folk who compose our picture are children of the Ghetto; their faults are bred of its hovering miasma of persecution, their virtues straitened and intensified by the narrowness of its horizon. And they who have won their way beyond its boundaries must still play their parts in tragedies and comedies--tragedies of spiritual struggle, comedies of material ambition--which are the aftermath of its centuries of dominance, the sequel of that long cruel night in Jewry which coincides with the Christian Era. If they are not the Children, they are at least the Grandchildren of the Ghetto."



### III

#### Contemporaries of Zangwill -- Samuel Gordon and Max Nordau

The age of Zangwill was one of high idealism and revived hopes among the Jewish people. It was the age of Theodor Herzl and it produced as literary contemporaries of Zangwill, Samuel Gordon and Max Nordau, the one slightly younger, the other considerably older than Zangwill, but both presenting, with some difference in degree of success their reactions to phases of modern Jewish life. Gordon attempted to write of the same London Jewish life as that of which Zangwill treats and, as we shall see, failed of attaining the perfection reached by Zangwill. Max Nordau, on the other hand, wrote a forceful and convincing distribe against Continental anti-Semitism. Herman Bernstein, after a personal interview with Doctor Nordau, described him as "one of the intellectual giants of our time, the brilliant philosopher, publicist, and critic, and one of Israel's most courageous leaders ----- a modern Jewish prophet, fiery and eloquent, fearless, and far-sighted ----- nevertheless almost childlike in his simplicity, which is the outstanding characteristic of all true greatness". And a consideration of the work of Gordon and Nordau reveals that to us as Jews the writing of the Continental author is far the more interesting.

Samuel Gordon was born in Buk, Germany, when Zangwill was a child of seven, and was brought by his parents to England to live when he was twelve years old, Zangwill being then a university student and just embarking on a literary career. Gordon received his education at City of London School and later at Cambridge University. In 1894 he received an appointment as secretary of the Great Synagogue, and from that time on he devoted to literature the time that remained after his everyday duties were performed. Gordon wrote several novels and short stories on Jewish life and characters and a few non-Jewish works. Among his Jewish productions *SONS OF THE COVENANT* and *STRANGERS AT THE GATE*, the one a novel and the other a collection of short stories, are the only ones of which we shall speak of as examples of his art.

*SONS OF THE COVENANT* is the story of the two sons of a London Jewish widow, one practical and making his own way in the world, the other studious and adopted by a wealthy Jewess to fill the void in her family circle caused by the death of her own son. When they reach manhood both sons are imbued with the ideal of educating their sweat-shop-oppressed brethren out of their misery and training them for more healthful occupations. The practical business man clings tenaciously to this cheme but the student temporarily abandons it in order to enter Parliment, returning to it wholeheartedly only when his political hopes vanish. The subtitle of the story is "A Tale of London Jewry", which is far from being an apt designation for the novel.



There is nothing distinctly Jewish about the book except the social reform outlined to ameliorate the conditions of the Jews. The story is not vibrant with Jewish atmosphere and feeling as Zangwill's stories are. Moreover not only as a picture of Jewish life, but also as a novel the story is poor. Its events are all too happy and its characters too typical to be real. The humor of Mrs. Diamond and her friends is too broad and lacking in fineness. Gordon has given his characters Jewish names, but he has failed either to detect at all or merely to convey to the reader the fine shades of character, feeling, and custom that distinguish the English Jew from his non-Jewish fellow-citizens. Moreover one is conscious of this same shallowness in STRANGERS AT THE GATE, a collection of short stories purporting to describe certain phases of Russian Jewish life. In almost all these stories the reader is interested in the people and events as individuals and as human events rather than as Jews and Jewish experiences. Most of the sketches are portrayals of self-sacrificing characters, beautiful friendships, and incidents each with a moral. There is one Jewish legend "The Fourth Dimension". In "Towards the Sunrise" we are interested more in the romance of the hero than in the success of his Zionist efforts. "Rabbi Elchanan's Quest" interests us more than the rest because, being written in the form of a letter from Rabbi Elchanan, temporarily in England to earn a dowry for his daughter, its comments on London Jewish life remind us of Zangwill.

On the whole Gordon does not deserve to be mentioned in the same breath with Zangwill and our only excuse for devoting time and space to him is to reveal by contrast the excellence of Zangwill. It is a common observation that we can only appreciate sweetness fully when we know what bitterness is; similarly we cannot appreciate Zangwill to the full until we have considered the far inferior work of Samuel Gordon.

Moreover far apart as Zangwill and Gordon were in literary ability, their visions of the future happiness of the Jews were as divergent as the poles. Among Zangwill's literary contemporaries it was Max Nordau who was nearest of kin to him in his Zionist leanings. In fact we might almost call Herzl, Zangwill, and Nordau the triumvirate of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Zionism. Max Nordau was born in 1849 in Budapest of very poor parents, his father having been first a rabbi in Prussia and later a private teacher. After receiving his elementary education from his father, Nordau studied medicine at the University of Budapest. While he was still a student, however, studies in literature and history claimed much of his time. Some of his early poems, stories and essays were published; he contributed to periodicals, and after six years he was the editor of a periodical himself. After his graduation he travelled as military physician in the principal countries of Europe for several years. Finally in 1880 after two years of medical practice in Budapest, he went to Paris to live and work. Nordau's travels around Europe had taught him much concerning



European culture and civilization and had also awakened him to the precarious position of the Jews in the various countries. Therefore, when Herzl inaugurated the Zionist movement Nordau connected himself with it wholeheartedly and was its active spokesman thereafter. At the first Zionist Congress at Basle in 1897 where we also found Zangwill in attendance, Nordau was elected first vice-President of the organization, and Herzl being considered its two real leaders.

Nordau's chief work was philosophical in nature. He was a fearless critic of the morals, culture, and civilization of his age, writing extensively on these subjects. He was convinced that at his time civilization in all its aspects was decadent, and expressed these ideas very freely in his book called *THE CONVENTIONAL LIFE OF CIVILIZATION*, where he pointed out the discrepancy between our principles and practices with regard to religion, monarchy and aristocracy, politics, economics, and marriage. Yet not all of his criticism was destructive, for he had a happy vision of the future of the world and a firm faith that there would be a better era for the coming generations. He said: "I see the civilization of today, whose characteristics are pessimism, lying, and selfish egotism, followed by a civilization of truth, love of one's neighbor, and cheerfulness. Humanity which today is an abstract idea, will then be a fact. Happy the later-born generations, whose lot it will be to live in the pure atmosphere of the future, flooded with its brighter sunshine, in this perpetual fellowship, true, enlightened free, and good".

Nordau wrote novels, tales, and dramas in which he embodied these views of present-day society. But since this philosophy of criticism of the present and vision into the future is essentially Jewish, it is Nordau's concrete application of his theory to Jewish life that arrests our attention. In *A QUESTION OF HONOR*, called in the original German *DOCTOR KOHN* after the hero, Nordau gives us a view of German anti-Semitism and suggests the remedy. Doctor Kohn, a brilliant student of mathematics, has just won a prize in his favorite subject and fails to be appointed to a professorship at the University in consequence, merely because he is a Jew. Meanwhile Doctor Kohn has been courting the daughter of a converted Jew, Moser, who has married into a family of rabid anti-Semites. Moser fails to convince Doctor Kohn to give up his religion to win the girl and comes away from his interview with Doctor Kohn with all his long-dormant innate Judaism once more aroused. He feels himself a stranger in his own family and especially so when his own brother-in-law openly asserts his hatred of the Jews when he is consulted on the matter of the proposed marriage. Moser's son, in love with his cousin, sees that his sister's marriage to Doctor Kohn would render his own marriage impossible, insults Doctor Kohn's race, and forces him into a duel, in which the Jew is killed because he will not fire at the brother of his beloved.



As a drama A QUESTION OF HONOR is excellent in structure. Facts and arguments are marshalled in most forceful array, and each act ends in an unavoidable climax. The force of the ideas presented carries us away, and we forget in our interest, that the characters are not individuals at all but only mouth-pieces expressing Nordau's views of the causes and results of anti-Semitism, directed not against religion but against race. We see here the futility of conversion in the final consideration, to eliminate this prejudice, and in Moser we find confirmation of the fact that the Jewish consciousness is as eternal as is the feeling against it. The converted Jew is unwelcome, homeless in his own household. Doctor Kohn says: "Every Anti-Semite will tell you that the Jews are a race, and that to say: I will emerge from Judaism, is precisely the same as if a negro should say: from this time I will cease to be a negro. The Jews' origin follows them like an agent of the secret police, even into Christianity, and prevents their vanishing among the Germans". And it is Doctor Kohn, also, who suggests the remedy: "We will try to obtain a country, and we must recall our forgotten tongue". A homeland and a revival of our national language and literature! This is the program for the Jews who is to live in the "future, flooded with its brighter sunshine, in this perpetual fellowship, true, enlightened, free, and good."

Zangwill and Nordau were twin spirits of their generation, which saw the initial flowering of the hope of a homeland. Zangwill was chiefly the litterateur, Nordau the social critic. At heart both were essentially Jews and both took their places actively in the group Nordau completely described when he wrote:

"The young Jewish intellectuals, vigorously stimulated by this current of Anti-Semitism, recalled the Jewish national ideal which had always been affirmed by the Jew of the East, and rallying together, sought to revivify a dying Judaism that it might continue its ancient destiny under the guidance of its unchanging historic ideals of justice, fraternity, charity, and knowledge."