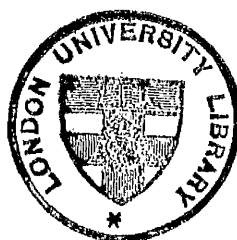


ISH-SHALOM (M.)
Ph.D., 1938.
HEBREW LITERATURE.

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JEHUDAH HALEVI

and

CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK.

A Study of their Literary Work
and
Outlook on Jewish Life.

By

M. Ish-Shalom, M.A.

Brody = Ch. Brody, Diwan, des Abu-l-Hasan Jehuda ha-Levi
Berlin 1901. (This work is still being
published).

Harkavi = A.A. Harkavi, Jehudah Halevi's Poems in two volumes,
Warsaw, 1893-94.

Al-Khazari = Judah Halevi's Kitab Al-Khazari,
translated from the Arabic by Hartwig Hirschfeld,
London 1905. (With some corrections).

Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi, Translated into English by
Nina Salaman, Philadelphia 1928.

Translations of few poems by:
M.H. Bresslau, Treasures of Oxford - Edelman and
Leopold Dukes, Part I, London 1851,
Joseph Jacobs, Jewish Chronicle 15th & 25th March
188

Bialik = Bialik's Works:
Book I Poems
Book II Stories, Essays & Articles
Tel-Aviv, 1933.

Bialik Orally = Bialik's Lectures and Speeches
on Judaism and Jewish Life,
2 Volumes, Tel-Aviv 1935.

Chaim Nachmann Bialik, Poems from the Hebrew, edited by
L.V. Snowman, London, 1924.

The Pool, Translation of Bialik's by Reginald V. Feldman
Views, A Jewish Monthly, Vol. I, No.3, June 1932.

All other poems of Halevi and Bialik in this Thesis are translated
by A. Eban.

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PART III:JEHUDAH HALEVI AND CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK.

INTRODUCTION.

Jehudah Halevi (12th century) and Chaim Nachman Bialik (20th century) are regarded by the Jewish people as the two most illustrious exponents of post-Biblical Hebrew poetry. This recognition might have been expected to make them each the subject of many monographs and considerable research. But in fact no comprehensive treatise has been written about either of these two poets, despite the deep reverence which Jewish opinion attaches to their names.

Jehudah Halevi, the poet, was also a religious philosopher the author of the Kitab al-Khazari. His philosophy has been the subject of copious research, while his poetry which is the essence of his creative work, has been a comparatively neglected study. It is true that many essays have been written about Halevi's

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- 1) Up to 1840 there did not exist in print a single collection of Halevi's poetry, only some manuscript collections were held in private possession, but were not accessible to scholars. A fairly large number of Halevi's poems were, however, known as they formed part of Jewish liturgies used in the synagogues. S.D. Luzatto was the first to publish an anthology of 66 poems of Halevi's Divan under the name "Virgo Filia Jehudae" -

הַיְיָ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Prague, 1840). Later he produced another collection of 76 poems called "Divan" (Lyck, 1864). Abraham Elijah Harkavi published 2 volumes of Halevi's poems (Warsaw 1893/4). All of these poems make up only a third of Halevi's work. Ch. Brody began work on a complete Divan of Halevi in 1901. This work ("Divan des Abu-l-Hasan Jehuda ha-Levi") is still being published.

poetry ²⁾, but few of them have an original approach and still fewer contribute substantially to our knowledge of his work. Many, unfortunately, consist of broad generalities and effusive periods extolling the poet's greatness without any serious examination of his poetry, analysis of its categories, or detection of its chief sources. A special treatise comprehending the whole of Halevi's poetic works has yet to be written.

With Bialik the position is far different. He, being a modern poet, has been the subject of many analytical essays. But, although hundreds of articles have been written about him, not even those which have a scholarly or literary approach usually comprehend all his poetry, or present a detailed portrait of it. These essays generally contain observations

2) The most important and authoritative are Abraham Geiger's "Divan des Castilliers Abu-l-Hassan Jehuda ha-Levi," Breslau 1851, David Kaufmann's "Juda Halevi", Versuch einer Charakteristik," Breslau 1877, Heinrich Brody's "Studien zu den Dichtungen Jehuda ha-Levi's: "Ueber die Metra der Versegedichte", Berlin 1895. In Hebrew there is J.N. Simchoni in "Haiv Hechadash", Warsaw 1913; B. Dinaburg:- "Halvi's Pilgrimage to Palestine" in David Yellin's 70th birthday volume, Jerusalem 1935, etc. Even these do not deal comprehensively with Halevi's poetry as a whole.

3) Especially J. Klausner's Jotzrim u-Bonim, Jerusalem 1929, Vol.III, Book I, pp.1-75 (5 articles). Also his article (in the monthly "Be'er" L, 72-83), Besheva 20, Vol. II, "What has Bialik given us?" Jaffa 1916 - a compilation in honour of Bialik's 25th year of literary work. Isaac Rivkin "Bialik's God," Berlin 1924; Articles in "Hatekufah", Vol.17 in "Sepher Bialik", 1925, and "Kneseth", 1936 (Tel-Aviv).

and comments on some special category of his work. But an article dealing specifically with Bialik's nature poetry or love poetry has never yet been published and there is certainly no literary treatise dealing with the whole range of his poetry. In addition, Bialik wrote essays and articles of the highest quality. He was a talented publicist and writer of stories and especially in his later years, gave frequent public expression to his views on Judaism and Jewish life. On these subjects, outside his poetry, very little has been written, and on his Jewish "Weltanschauung" nothing at all.

The first object of our treatise is to supply this want by attempting comprehensive surveys of the work of two great Hebrew poets. The aim is not criticism or even appraisal (although both are necessarily involved) - but rather the description of the actual work of ~~examining~~ the two poets, and the tracing of their sources and technique. Finally, there is need of an analysis of their poetry according to categories and sections, involving a close study of the text of the poems themselves.

Although there may be general agreement as to the necessity of special research on each of these poets, the propriety of studying them together is much less obvious. This treatise will seek to justify the view that they have enough in common to justify a comparative discussion of their work.

Halevi and Bialik have been almost "canonised" in Hebrew

literature as the greatest poets since the Exile. It is the accepted view that since Halevi there arose no more gifted Hebrew poet than Bialik, who came to be regarded by the Jews as Halevi's natural successor. Each had the fortune to live in atmosphere of veneration and affection and to have his poetry recognised by his contemporaries as supreme and unrivalled. Moses ibn Ezra ⁴⁾, Abraham ibn Ezra ⁵⁾ and R. Jehudah Al-Charl all paid high tribute to the merit and power of Halevi's poetry and in the first edition (1506) of the Kitab al-Khazari, Halevi is referred to not only as "the great sage", but as the "Father of the poets". ⁷⁾ The affection and friendship shown to him by various Jewish communities when he was on his way to Palestine their urgent entreaties to him to remain in their midst, and their keen interest in his personal welfare ⁸⁾ are all sufficiently sure tokens of the high esteem in which he was held. No less remarkable was the unanimous reverence which the Jewish of modern times accorded to Bialik. There was a period when the appearance of one of his poems was considered as a noteworthy event in literary and intellectual circles. ⁹⁾ The veneration of Bialik which began with his earliest appearance on the literary stage increased rapidly with the passing years. He was popularly

4) Poems of M. ibn Ezra (ed. Bialik & Rabnitzky). I, p.47.

5) A. Geiger. Divan, pp. 148-151.

6) Tachkemoni. Chaps. III and XVIII.

7) Khazari (Cassel's edition), Introduction, XXVIII.

8) See "Halevi's Life" further on.

9) Ch. Zutah - "The New Poet" (In Be'shaah Zo II, 70-77).
Z. Fishman - "Ein Hakore" -II-III, p.107.

styled "prophet", genius" and "prince of poetry". One writer has observed the similarity of the attitude manifested towards Halevi and towards Bialik by their people.¹⁰⁾ It arose from a perceptible similarity in their poetic work. "Like Jehudah Halevi, so Bialik plumbed the depths of Israel's eternal spirit".¹¹⁾ Halevi, as another writer remarks,¹²⁾ was the central figure in Spanish-Jewish poetry even though there were poets who excelled him in some respects. So it was with Bialik. Although he had serious competitors in poetic prowess, he was yet the central pillar of contemporary poetry. Even Ahad Ha'am who was apt to be most conservative in his judgments, regarded Bialik as the successor of Halevi. On Bialik's 50th birthday Ahad Ha'am writes to him: "So you are 50 years old and you wear the laurels of the national poet, whose like has not arisen since Jehudah Halevi, and perhaps since the prophets".¹³⁾ The same comparison has been drawn by many other eminent critics.¹⁴⁾

10) Klausner "Jotzrim u-Bonim" Vol.III, Book I, p.16.

11) ibid & p. 74.

12) Jacob Rabinovitch, Be'shaah Zo II. p.43.

13) Letters of Ahad-Ha'am, Vol.VI. pp.207-8.

14) The extent to which Hebrew literature is accustomed to draw comparisons between Halevi and Bialik, and to indicate the latter as the successor of the former is revealed in an article by M. Ehrenpreis (Hatekufah, Vol.17) written on Bialik's 50th birthday. The writer portrays the celebration of the birthday in Heaven. All the poets, including the greatest of them, gathered together - and Halevi delivers a eulogy of Bialik, designating him as his successor in Hebrew poetry.

6

This conventional comparison arises less from research into their poetry than from instinct, as one writer has shrewdly observed.¹⁵⁾ It is a popular feeling clearly reflected in Hebrew literature.¹⁶⁾

But this opinion, so widely and conventionally accepted, has yet to be proved. No attempt has been made to clarify its meaning or to illustrate its aptness, without reliance on popular instinct alone. One writer has said:¹⁷⁾ "Whenever somebody writes about Bialik, he mentions Halevi - and rightly so. There are many psychological and literary affinities between the renowned mediaeval poet and the greatest of modern Hebrew poets. Anyone who is interested in the spiritual currents which have flowed into Bialik's creative soul would find greater interest in examining the poetry of the Spanish period which influenced him considerably, than his modern predecessors whose influence was small. This literary question deserves close attention and inquiry.

Such, then, is the second aim of this treatise: to ^{show} ~~clarify~~ whether there is a sound basis for a conventional view in Hebrew literary criticism; to decide whether and to what extent Bialik can be regarded as Halevi's successor in Hebrew poetry, and to detect the influence of Halevi's poetry upon that of Bialik, illustrating the affinities between them by reference to their poems.

15) A.M. Berachyahu in "Sepher Bialik", p.12.

16) Also expressed in obituary notices by various people independently; comparisons between the ship bearing Bialik's hearse and the ship in which Halevi travelled to Palestine. "Davar" 22.7.

17) D.A. Friedman; "Hatekufah", V.575.

PART I.

J E H U D A H H A L E V I .

I. HIS TIME.

The twelfth century, during which Jehudah Halevi lived, was one of the most illustrious periods in the history of the Jews in Spain. Arabic culture in all its manifold forms flourished vigorously and reached its highest pitch of development. Spain became the centre of world civilisation. It was land where the creative and intellectual instinct had free scope and its gates were open to Jews who aspired to culture and learning, and enjoyed liberal rights in the political and cultural life of Spain.

The influence of Spanish-Arabic culture on the literature, poetry and outlook of the Jews of that time requires little description. The creative instinct of the Jews was under the influence of the culture of the countries where they lived. Hebrew literary work was still strongly influenced by the Hebrew literature of various ages before the Spanish period - especially by the Biblical literature; and Hebrew writers continued to draw from those ancient sources and in no way forsook them. But, at the same time, the idea prevailed amongst the Jews that Arabic poetry, with all its peculiar laws, systems and intricacies was poetry "par excellence" - the only true and natural poetry. Moses Ibn Ezra (1070-1138), for example, in his book "Shirath Israel" (Hebrew Poetry), devotes a special chapter to the

subject of "How far Poetry was natural amongst the Arabs and artificial amongst other Peoples".¹⁾ This idea was current amongst the Jews of the 11th and 12th centuries, even amongst their thinkers and intellectuals. It is therefore not difficult to understand why they were influenced so strongly by Arabic culture and literature. Similarly, it is evident that R. Jehud Halevi, whose intellectual background was not exclusively Hebrew, was himself influenced by the learning of Spain; and the traces of this influence are clearly marked in the development of his poetic talent. There are signs, in various places, that he strove vigorously to liberate himself from this influence, but even he, whose poetry was so essentially original, could not always succeed in this attempt,²⁾ as Arabic culture had taken root even in the Hebrew poetry before Jehudah Halevi; and it was from this poetry - that of Moses ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabirol and others - that Halevi derived much of his own inspiration. Nor was the influence of contemporary culture limited to his poetry, for it extended to his philosophy and general outlook as well. Greek philosophy had passed through various Arabic channels and assuming Arabic forms, had become the heritage of Arabic culture. Jewish thought, too, was sustained to a great extent by Greek philosophy, even though Jehudah Halevi opposed it strongly,

1) "Hebrew poetry" (*השירה העברית*) transl. from Arabic into Hebrew. B. Halper, pp.47-56.

2) Dr. Simchoni on "Ibn Gabirol", *Hatekufah*, XVII, p.256.

regarding it, unlike many of his predecessors, as an adversary and enemy of the Jewish spirit. In one of his poems he proclaimed

"And let not the wisdom of the Greeks beguile thee,
Which hath no fruit, but only flowers" - 3)

and even in the "Kitab Al-Khazari", a book of religious discussion, he was at pains to prove the superiority of the Jewish religion over others. Nevertheless, not even he could escape from being influenced by the prevalent thought and philosophy of the time.

That Halevi's poetry was strongly influenced by the events of his time is clear from its subject matter. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to classify his poetry, like that of other poets, in chronological order, since it was not the custom at that time to append a date to every poem. But we are left with the general feeling that the poetry of Jehudah Halevi took a new direction - more explicitly, a national direction - at the time of the political change which took place during the wars and quarrels of the Crusaders, and the Christian-Moslem feuds. These wars led to Messianic enthusiasms in Jewry. And it was against the background of these events that the "national" poetry of Jehudah Halevi developed and flourished.

3) Brody II, 166; Harkavi I, 19.

It is true that the Jews in Spain enjoyed religious toleration and lived in political and cultural freedom, and that the influence of Arabic culture and literature can be detected in all the branches of Hebrew creative thought. Nevertheless, there was a general feeling that universal Jewish redemption would only come with the collapse of Islam and the supremacy of Christianity, resulting from the conquest of Palestine by the Christians. In other words, redemption would come actually from the very people who had organised the Crusades, devastated Jewish communities and brought death and destruction on the Jews. A prominent Rabbi, the doyen of the Academy at Pumbeditha, wrote in his responsa that one of the signs of the liberation of Israel would be the conquest of Palestine from the Arabs: "When we see the victory of Edom (i.e. Christianity), we shall know that our redemption is begun."⁴⁾ Similarly, Jehudah Halevi sees in a dream that the downfall of the Arabs is imminent. There is much evidence during this period of the Jews' hope of redemption which was aroused by the victories of the Crusaders.⁵⁾ Messianic movements arose to herald the imminent salvation, and Jehudah Halevi's "Redemption Songs" were an echo of these hopes.

It appears, however, that Jehudah Halevi's songs of redemption not only sprang from the Messianic enthusiasms of the time of the Crusades, but also contained a clear echo - especially

4) Prof. Mann in *Hatekufah*, Vol. 23, p.247

5) *ibid* and in *Hatekufah*, Vol.24.

in the poems where he prophesies the fall of the Arabs - of the change which came about with the accession of Abd'ul Mu'min to power, and the renewal of the decrees against the Jews of Morocco in 1129.⁶⁾ This event is probably the subject of Halevi's poem⁷⁾ beginning with the words "Thou didst sleep, yea, thou didst slumber, and thou hast awakened in some fright. What is this dream that thou hast dreamt?". In the same poem he writes: "In the year 1130 (in Hebrew chronology ה'ס"ג) all thy pride will be shattered (Hebrew יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה); and turning to the Arabs he exclaims: "Say unto the son of Hagar - (i.e. the Arabs) 'withdraw thine insolent hand from the son of thy mistress with whom thou art enraged'". In short, we see here a new turning point in the history of the Jew during the first decades of the twelfth century - persecution of Jews in Europe and Palestine by the Crusaders, renewed oppression of Jews in Morocco and, as a direct outcome of all these, - Messianic movements arising in various places to prophesy the redemption of Israel, and even to make considerable efforts to that end.⁸⁾ It is no wonder that on the threshold of this period a poet appeared to sound the call for redemption and to expose the humiliation and tragedy of exile and the hope of revival and salvation. Jehudah Halevi sprang from the roots of contemporary history; and from those very roots his national poetry grew up and was sustained.

6) B. Dinaburg in the "David Yellin 70th Birthday Volume", pp.181-182.

7) Brody, II, 302; Harkavi, II, 61.

8) J. Mann in Hatekufah Vol.23-24.

II. HIS LIFE.

When we attempt to trace the biography of Jehudah Halevi we are confronted with serious difficulties. The relevant material that is available is extremely tenuous, and the utmost caution is required in using it. There are no straightforward biographical data, and we can only make biographical inferences from various allusions in the poems themselves. It is therefore not surprising that even the date of his birth is a vexed question on which the authorities are not in agreement.

Jehudah Halevi, whose Arabic name was Abu-l-Hassan A-levi, was born to R. Samuel ha-Levi in Toledo, Castile, a Christian province, in the year 1080-81, according to S.D. Luzzatto.¹⁾ S.I. Rappaport²⁾ puts the date of his birth between the years 1085-1086. The Spanish Jews of those days enjoyed liberal political rights under the rule of Alfonso VI. and the cultural life which flourished throughout Spain penetrated into the Jewish environment. Young Jehuda made good progress in his studies and achieved early success. In his 15th year he wrote his first poem,³⁾ dedicated to R. Isaac b. Baruch Albaliah on the anniversary of his grandson.

1) Bethulath Bath-Jehudah, pp.24-26. So also Edelman and L. Duke, Treasures of Oxford, XIII-XIV.

2) Kerem Chemed VII. p.267. He is supported by Sachs, "Religiose Poesie", S. 287, Geiger: "Divan Jehudah Halevi" 14, 116-120, Buds and Blossoms (the German part), p.25; also D. Kassel, Guzari, V.

3) Brody, I, 120; Harkavi, I. 76.

That Halevi was of tender years when his first poems were written is clear from the testimony of R. Moses ibn Ezra, who writes:

"How can a boy so young in years
 Bear such a weight of wisdom sage
 How 'mongst the greybeards find his peers
 While on the very blossom of his age?" 4)

When the centre of learning passed from Christian Spain, and the great scholars lived in the Arab province of Andalusia, Jehudah Halevi studied at the Academy of Isaac Alfasi in Alisana - apparently after the death of Alfasi and his succession by R. Isaac ibn Migash.⁵⁾

In Spain, ~~the~~^a land of rich culture, Jehudah Halevi received both his Hebrew and his general education. Many of his friends were amongst the greatest figures of Jewry in those times, and particularly significant was his intimacy with the famous Ibn Ezra family.⁶⁾ It is therefore not surprising to find him at the highest level of contemporary erudition. His Hebrew education has already been mentioned and it can be inferred that his general education too was also considerable and many sided.⁷⁾ He was a master of the Arabic tongue and proficient in the vernacular of Castile, ~~He~~ was also a student of Greek culture and of Arabic philosophy,⁸⁾ and he was also sufficiently well versed in nature.

4) Bialik Rabnitzky edition. I, p.47.

5) H. Graetz: Geschichte der Juden (Vierte Auflage)
 VI. Band. s.119.

6) David Cahana, Hashiloah, Vol. 12, pp.58-60.

7) A. Geiger, Divan, p.27 et seq.

8) ibid, 27 and 127.

sciences to be a successful physician⁹⁾ in Toledo.¹⁰⁾

Our knowledge of his family is very slight. The author of "Sepher Ha-yuchasin" - the Book of Genealogies - tells us¹¹⁾ that the mothers of Jehuda Halevi and Moses ibn Ezra were sisters, a statement for which there is no real foundation.¹²⁾ Gedaliah b. Yachia, in his "Shalsheleth Ha-Kabbalah"¹³⁾ informs us that Abraham ibn Ezra was his son-in-law, and that Halevi gave him his only daughter in marriage. This statement is equally baseless¹⁴⁾ for in Halevi's poem beginning "For thee my soul is confident or afraid",¹⁵⁾ where he mentions the name of his only daughter, he also records her son's name as Jehudah; and we know that Abraham ibn Ezra had only one son, and that his name was not Jehudah but Isaac.¹⁶⁾ The Author of "Shalsheleth Ha-Kabbalah" also believed

- 9) A. Geiger, p.129. For J. Halevi as a physician, vide his poems, Divan I, 224, II, 185. On his medical work our knowledge is slight. See S. Kraus: "Geschichte der juedischen Aerzte", s.15, Bem.30.
- 10) Landshut's Amudei Ha-avodah, 77.
- 11) Article 5, p.217.
- 12) Sachs. Die religioese Poesie - 291-294.
- 13) Shalsheloth Ha-Kabbalah, Amsterdam, p.31. Me'or Einayim chap. 42. So also: Don Isaac Abrabanel, Numbers Ki-Thissa, Warsaw 1862, p.20.
- 14) S.D. Luzzatto was originally of the view that Halevi had several daughters, and he therefore strove to show (Bethula Bath-Jehudah, 18) that the author of the Book of Genealogies was mistaken in saying that he had but one daughter. But Duch has remarked (Treasures of Oxford, 45) that here the Shalsheloth Ha-Kabbalah is correct, as in a poem which Luzzatto has not seen, it is found to be so. Luzzatto acknowledges his mistake later; see Luzzatto, Divan Halevi, p.4.
- 15) Brody II, 170-171, Harkavi I, 31-33.
- 16) Luzzatto, ibid 4, Note 9. See also Brody-Albrecht, Shaar-Hashir, pp.159-160.

that Halevi was a man of great wealth. On what he bases this belief is unknown, for there is nothing in Halevi's poetry to suggest it. It is, indeed, apparent that he was not poor,¹⁷⁾ and that he even had a private academy where he gave instruction for in his poem written on board ship, beginning "I am o'erwhelm with desire for the living God"¹⁸⁾ he yearns not only for his family, friends and acquaintances, but also for his academy and for Judah, Ezriel and Isaac, who were apparently his favourite disciples.¹⁹⁾ It seems that R. Solomon b. Parchon, author of "Mahbereth He-aruch", was also one of his pupils.²⁰⁾

Halevi always cherished a strong desire to leave the diaspora and to travel to Palestine - a desire which he expressed in his "Kitab Al-Khazari" (Article 5, 22-8) and in many of his poems.²¹⁾ From the latter it seems that his desire to go to Palestine was animated by the motive of repentance for sins and transgressions in connection with which he had made a vow which he was eager to fulfill in his old age.²²⁾

17) So Luzzatto, Bethulath bath Jehudah, 18-19.

18) Brody II, 172-174; Harkavi I, 20.

19) Luzzatto, Bethulath bath-Jehudah, 62.

20) Vid: Mahbereth He-aruch (Ed. Salomo Gotlieb Stern) p.XVIII, and there the Editor quotes the opinion of S.I. Rappoport, who denies that Solomon b. Parchon was the pupil of Halevi on the grounds that "we have never established that Halevi had pupils" - whereas we see that he had. Hence, it is possible that Solomon b. Parchon, who calls Halevi and others "my teachers", was one of his disciples.

21) Brody, IV, 171; Harkavi, II, 100; Brody, II, 186; Harkavi, I, 27.

22) Brody II, 155; Harkavi I, 8, 160.

Whether by his 'sins' he meant that he was living in the Diaspora in an environment unfitted for a true worship of God - or whether he was thinking of the errors of his youth when he tended to adopted alien beliefs,²³⁾ we cannot decide with any certainty. But there is no doubt that a sentiment both religious and personal was one of the important factors which led him to make the journey to Palestine, after much discussion with his friends and acquaintances. It was, however, against their advice that he undertook this daring enterprise.²⁴⁾ It was difficult to part from his family - his only daughter and his beloved grandson; difficult also to leave his academy and pupils. But eventually his strong desire to visit the land of his forefathers overcame his love for his family and birthplace.

We have mentioned the ~~satisfaction~~^{fulfilment} of a religious duty as a motive for his visit to Palestine; but there were other motives. He no longer had a congenial environment in Spain when the best of his friends had died. Solomon ibn Gabbai, as Halevi writes in one of his poems, was the last of his friends in Spain.²⁵⁾ And there seem to have been certain political

23) So Kaufmann in his article on Halevi, *vid.* Dinaburg in his article already mentioned, p.160.

24) See Brody I, 96; Harkavi I, 127, and Brody II, 164; Harkavi I, 16, 26; also David Cahana, *Hashiloach*, Vol.13, pp. 121-123.

25) Brody I, 13.

incidents which made him less reluctant to leave Spain. In one of his poems, whose date, like the dates of all his works, cannot be ascertained, he describes an incident involving bloodshed, the details of which cannot be clearly deduced.²⁶⁾ There are other poems, too, in which we feel changes taking place in the political life of Spain. All those factors must have influenced his decision to go to Palestine. But it appears that over and above them all, and even above the religious urge which would naturally be powerful in so pious a Jew, he had begun to feel instinctively, or perhaps as a result of the political and religious changes of the time, that, in the Diaspora the Jewish people had no "place of hope wherein they could dwell securely".²⁷⁾ On the other side of the picture, the Messianic ideals which had arisen in Jewry and had even found expression in practical movements led him to the same conclusion. On the one hand he writes "No portent is there, nor any sign or vision or omens, and if I enquire to see the end of the marvels they answer, 'Hard are the prophecies whereof thou dost enquire'".²⁸⁾ And on the other hand we find him in more than one poem dreaming of the downfall of the Arabs²⁹⁾ and the conquest of Palestine by the Christians, in which he, like many others, saw the possibility of a return of Israel to Zion.

26) Brody IV, 58, 60.

27) Brody II, 165; Harkavi I, 18.

28) *ibid.*, IV, 68; *ibid.*, 15.

29) *ibid.*, IV, 69; *ibid.*, I, 67.

It seems to me, although it cannot be proved, that his choice of a Jewish King as the hero of his Kitab al-Khuzari, was part of the same impulse which made him travel to Palestine, the cradle of Israel's temporal power in distant years. He wrote the "Khazari" in 1140 and in the same, or the succeeding year, he embarked on his perilous journey to the land of Israel.

The idea that his journey also had a national or communal purpose, as has been recently suggested³⁰⁾ is on the face of it acceptable, even though we have no full authority to confirm it. Halevi's poetry undoubtedly contains many signs of the desire to "accelerate the Redemption" - poems in which he advocated a return to Zion. But it would be too bold to conclude from this that the opposition aroused by his attempt to emigrate was due to the new character of his poetry and to his belief in an actual and not merely a verbal ascent to Zion.³¹⁾ It is, after all, not difficult to understand the motives of this opposition. There was, for instance, the political position with its many dangers and the bad state of the roads which were infested with bandits and highwaymen. A state of political and social disorder is portrayed again and again in the poetry of Halevi - not always in connection with his plan of travelling and the opposition which it aroused. Nor can it be overlooked that Halevi was

30) According to Dinaburg in his article, p.161, et. seq.

31) *ibid.*

recognised as the greatest poet of his time, and had many friends in many Jewish communities who were naturally solicitous for his welfare. Subsequent events - not necessarily the legend about his death in popular tradition, but the mere fact that he disappeared and never returned - justified this attitude on the part of his friends. But it is more than likely that Jehudah Halevi's journey was his way of recording his belief in the imminence of a Redemption and his desire to be a torchbearer and to go as a pioneer before the camp.

And so Jehudah Halevi went on his way; and wherever he travelled he was received by the Jews with the greatest cordiality. According to his own testimony, "I was greeted by every friend and kinsman".³²⁾ At Cordova Rabbi Joseph Ibn-Zadiq presented him with gifts³³⁾ in the name of the Jewish community in the town together with a song of praise in his honour³⁴⁾ in which R. Joseph called him the "Father of Poetry", "Crown of Beauty", "Brother of Wisdom", "Paragon of Grace", "Parent of Virtue", "Son of Knowledge and the Law". And Halevi responded with a poem ending with these words:³⁵⁾ "It is not enough that ye have bought my heart with a pure jewel-like love but ye now increase its price so that it becomes your own possession. All I crave is your love alone; I wish for nothing more; I will pass on with what I have". On leaving Cordova, Halevi wrote a second poem

32) Brody I, 43; Harkavi I, 108.

33) "You presented me with love and gifts", Halevi writes in his poem to Joseph Ibn-Zadiq.

34) Bethullath Bath-Jehudah, 58, also Harkavi in his preface to Halevi's poems.

35) Brody I, 118-119; Harkavi I, 106.

in honour of Rabbi Joseph.³⁶⁾ At Granada, too, he was accorded a warm reception; and R. David presented him with a praying shawl in the name of the Jews of the town,³⁷⁾ and event which he celebrated in a special poem.³⁸⁾ During his stay in Granada he was eager to see R. Jehudah ibn Geath, but he was unable to secure a meeting and wrote a short "Ode on Parting".³⁹⁾ He proceeded to complete his journey to Palestine through Egypt by sea. It was a difficult voyage, as the sea was rough and stormy and he was in constant peril of his life; but his yearning to reach his destination invariably revived his drooping spirits; and in his "Sea Poems" which are distinguished both for their vivid portrayal of Nature and for the expression of his most intimate feelings, we find that his faith in his mission finally prevailed over his fear of personal danger.⁴⁰⁾ Jerusalem indeed, was his ambition and his ultimate desire; and thither he wished to proceed without delay. It appears that the storm compelled him to disembark at Alexandria and to remain there for a long period, although he had originally planned to stay there but a short while. "I had thought to make Alexandria a short cut", he writes in one of his letters.⁴¹⁾

36) Brody I, 12; Harkavi I, 107.

37) See Graetz (Hebrew) IV, 177 and Harkavi "New & Old", P. 35.

38) Brody I, 181-182; Harkavi I, 106.

39) Ibid I, 43; Ibid I, 108.

40) Ibid, II, 169, 175. Ibid I, 24, 34.

41) Bethulath bath Jehudah, letter I. p. 110-111, ibid p. 78; Brody I, 211; Harkavi 161.

He stayed in Alexandria for about three months from Tishri (September) to the end of Kislev (November),⁴²⁾ at the instance of the Dayan, R. Aaron ben Zion. He left Alexandria for the town of Damietta, on the sea-coast, the residence of R. Halfon Ha-Levi, who had been his friend in Spain, and continued to assist him in Damietta.⁴³⁾

The Head of the Jewish communities in Egypt, Samuel ben Hananiah, invited him, while still at Damietta, to stay at his house in Cairo. Being unable in sheer courtesy to refuse this request, he accepted the invitation, but declined material support. It appears that he was ^{not} actually in any financial need as he writes in a letter "The Lord hath blessed me and hath not caused me to need".⁴⁴⁾ Halevi had accepted R. Samuel's invitation, despite his real desire to hasten his journey to Palestine, and his strange evil forebodings that he would not be vouchsafed a sight of the promised land. ^{if he delayed his journey} In one poem⁴⁵⁾ he appears to entreat his hosts to let him proceed on his way: "If it be your

42) So we conclude from his poems to Aaron Benzion Al-mani, of Alexandria *אברהם בן יצחק אלמני* 'א"י' ד"ר, 'פ' ד"ר 'ה"ר? see Bethulath Bath-Jehudah, 83.

43) In his letter to the Nagid, Samuel ben Hananiah, he writes that R. Halfon "overwhelmed him with kindness for two years, and Luzzatto concludes that R. Halfon may have been in Spain for two years previously, and had known Halevi and had shown him kindness, as he was again doing by receiving him honourably at his house in Damietta, and causing other charitable residents of Damietta to assist the wandering poet. But Brody holds that Halevi stayed with R. Halfon in Egypt for two years. (Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol.8, p.972). But this view is not probable.

44) Bethulath Bath-Jehudah, p.110; Brody I, 211; Harkavi I, 161.

45) *ibid.*

desire to fulfil mine, send me hence that I may go on my way unto the Lord.. No rest will I find for my feet until I shall have established my dwelling-place in the abode of the Lord. Restrain not my feet from the Journey, for I fear lest disaster overtake me".

Nevertheless, he accepted R. Samuel's invitation and remained in Egypt. In spite of his strong desire to speed his arrival in Palestine, he was fatigued from the journey and not disinclined to rest. It may be that there were friends who persuaded him to remain for a longer period, fearing the dangers of travelling at that time. Whatever the motive, he remained in Cairo within the rich and highly refined circle of the Nagid, R. Samuel. Egypt was the 'vestibule' through which he was to pass into the Palace of the Land of Israel. He wandered along the banks of the Nile, and his Muse was awakened anew when his eyes rested upon the ancient historical places which had been the scene of miracles on Israel's Exodus from Egypt. He even gathered around him a wide circle of friends; and his time in Egypt was passed pleasantly enough. Although R. Solomon ibn Parchon said of him that he "repented before his death and resolved never to write poetry again,"⁴⁶⁾ We still perceive in the poems dedicated to his friends that his inspiration was still easy and spontaneous and although he sang only of his

46) Mahbereth He-aruch V.

love for his friends, yet a vigorous style characterised even his latest poems which were composed in his sixtieth year.

From Cairo, Halevi went back to Damietta on a second visit to his friend R. Halfon Halevi early in Tebeth 1152.⁴⁷⁾ He spent some time in the company of his host and his friends and admirers, who again urged him to remain in Damietta. But this time he was adamant, and he left Damietta on his way to Palestine. From this point his footsteps are lost in uncertainty and his end is completely unknown. We have proof that he came to Tyre where he dedicated a poem to Ibn Hassan;⁴⁸⁾ but of his Palestinian adventures we know nothing. There are some who maintain⁴⁹⁾ that he settled in Damascus owing to the impossibility of reaching Palestine in those days, but this view has no foundation. Nevertheless S.D. Luzzatto⁵⁰⁾ is convinced that Halevi never reached Palestine but that some disaster overtook him on the way.

Legend has constructed a picturesque tale about Halevi's death. The author of "The Chain of Kabbalah" relates that

47) Harkavi I, 45, Note 2, "The fast of the 10th (month), which was my festival at the house of my benefactor Rabbi Halfon" The evening after the fast was made the occasion for a great celebration in honour of Halevi.

48) Brody I, 95-97.

49) Edelman and L. Dukes "Treasures of Oxford" Intr. IX, Note 1 So Graetz (Hebrew) IV, 181. Harkavi in "Old and New" has proved it wrong. (ibid. p. 35).

50) Bethulath Bath-Jehudah, p. 25-26; also Divan, p. 6.

on touching the soil of Palestine, Halevi rent his garments and went barefoot, singing his immortal ode "Zion, wilt thou not greet thy captives", and while in this ecstasy he was trampled underfoot by an Ishmaelite (Arab) horseman and killed.⁵¹ Luzzatto declares that this legend has not a grain of historical truth and that the poem was composed when Halevi was still in Spain. "O, who will make me wings" is one sentence, which clearly reveals that he had not yet reached Palestine. Luzzatto also refutes the legend on the grounds that Palestine was then in the hands of the Christians, and an Arab would not ^{have} dared to treat a Jew in such arbitrary fashion.

Luzzatto's view is, on the whole, sound, and it would appear that Halevi did not set foot in Jerusalem. But it seems to me that he did reach Palestine. To which part he came it is difficult to say. There may be some foundation in the tradition which places his burying place in Kabul in the Galilee district. The first authority for this tradition is the famous traveller, Benjamin of Tudela,⁵² who visited Palestine shortly after the departure of Halevi from Spain and certainly knew the situation of his grave by rumour. But he does not specify the exact scene of the grave, beyond saying that "they are all (i.e., the graves mentioned) in Lower Galilee". My view is that he refe

51) Shalsheloth Ha-Kabbalah of Gedaliah ben Yachia, Amsterdam p.

52) Traveles of Benjamin of Tudela, Adler's edition, 45. There is a variant reading, vid. Note 28. It seems to me that the second reading is wrong. There is another tradition which places his burying places in Safed (not in Kabul), but also in Galilee. (See: Sepher Ha-Yuchasin, p.219.)

III. HIS POETRY.

1. Its Methods and Forms.

The Hebrew poets of the Spanish period adapted themselves not only to the conventional forms of expression, but also to new rules of prosody. They voluntarily restricted their poetry by a rigid technique, which complicated it and detracted from its natural freedom. But, at the same time, these forms gave the poets a wide field for the demonstration of their poetic skill, and the greatest of them succeeded in overcoming the limitations imposed by technical rules and in exercising unlimited dominion over their linguistic medium and their poetic forms.

Jehuda Halevi was amongst those who succeeded most conspicuously in this respect. Although he could not reject much of what was accepted and conventional in the poetry of the Spanish school and his own verse was impeded by the restricting rules of the time, yet he achieved rare felicity of language and style within the framework of the accepted poetic forms. He appreciated the difficulties of preserving natural inspiration under the burden of an artificial technique. He even appeared to regret his earliest work because he had "lost the essential spirit of the Hebrew tongue."¹⁾

1) Al-Khazari II, 74.

But his mastery of the language generally enabled him to overcome these linguistic difficulties with the art which conceals art, so that his style appeared effortless, as if the forms of poetry were responsive to him before he even invoked them.

We pass, then, to the poetic forms of Halevi which were also common to the whole of Spanish-Hebrew poetry.

Halevi, like his contemporaries, usually begins his poems in the Arabic manner with a special opening. The opening is part of the decorative structure of a poem, summarising its contents so that the whole poem appears as a commentary or elaboration of the opening. This form attracts the reader's full interest at the outset and enhances the grace and elegance of the poem.²⁾ In the poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, a pessimistic ^{poet} ~~writer~~, these openings are designed to subdue the reader's mind and to induce in him a mood of despair, whereas the openings of Halevi's poems exalt the mood of the reader in harmony with his own buoyant enthusiasm. His famous poems written on the

2) Such openings are frequent in the Bible, and they are devised in various ways, e.g. in an invocation of heaven and earth, a country, its princes and peoples: "Hear ye, Heavens and I will speak, and let the earth hear the sayings of my mouth". (Deut.32,1); "Hear ye, O, Kings, ye princes give ear" (Jud.5,3). So Isaiah I, 2,34. Also the interrogative opening: "Who is he that comes from Edom..?" (Isaiah, 63,1). "Whither hath thy lover gone, O, fairest of women?" (Song of Songs, 6,1); and the exclamatory opening, "Oh, sinful people" (Isaiah,1,4); "Oh, crown of pride, drunkards of Ephraim" (Isaiah, 28,1).

sea³⁾ voyage begin in this mood, as does his poem on Ishmael, Israel's oppressor and tormentor.⁴⁾ These introductory stanzas are frequent even in his "Holy Songs".⁵⁾ "Asleep in the bosom of Youth, how long wilt thou rest? Know that boyhood is shaken off like tow".⁶⁾

Like other poets of this period, Halevi made use of what we know as the "transition-method",⁷⁾ i.e. the poet wishing to express a certain idea, does not begin ^{with} his main theme, but prefaces it with a verse which appears to have no special connection with the poem, and sometimes even excels it in its poetic quality and originality. This device causes a special attraction of the reader's interest, as he does not know the main theme of the poem when he begins to read it.

The "transition" form was generally used in odes of personal eulogy which were an important feature of the 12th century poetry. These openings on some general theme were useful as a means of concealing the flattery accorded ^{by} poets to their patrons and benefactors. Halevi, perhaps because

3) Brody II, 168-179; Harkavi I, 23-28.

4) *ibid* II, 302; *ibid* II, 61.

5) *ibid* III, 226, *ibid*, 149.

6) For the openings and examples thereof, see David Yellin, "The poetry of Ishmael in the literature of Israel", Hashiloach V, pp. 304-310. Dr. Yellin shows (p.307) that Halevi has openings which do not possess the usual qualities, but these are few in number. Against this, Halevi surpasses the Spanish poets in the openings of his poems and only ibn Gabirol can be compared with him in this direction.

7) See D. Yellin, *ibid*, p.517. et seq.

his economic standing was more or less independent, has very few poems dedicated to patrons, but he uses the "transition form in many of his odes to friends and colleagues. He employs this device with much dexterity and sometimes with surprising effects. For example, in his poem *חן וחסד רבנו ר' נחמן* 8) he begins with a description of the glories of nature in Egypt in spring, goes on to portray the ears of corn, and finally arrives at a eulogy of R. Nathan bar Samuel. So, too, in his exquisite love song *אני קול קדוש בנורא ל' פיו* 9) where he extols the beauty of young maidens, we find that the purpose of the poem is to eulogise R. Aaron ben Zion.¹⁰⁾

There are many poems which have a special form of ending,¹¹ usually expressed in words of formal benediction, (e.g. his poem "Zion, wilt thou not greet", ¹²⁾ which ends "Happy is he that waiteth, that cometh nigh and seeth the rising of thy light"). Similarly, his poem for Sabbath Evening, "Sheep astray in Exile"¹³⁾ ends: "Happy is he that awaiteth thy light; and the day will come whereon thou wilt rule. And on that day Thou wilt cause his salvation to shoot forth and make him forget that which

8) Brody I, 112-115; Harkavi I, 41-44.

9) *ibid.* I, 99; *ibid.* 47.

10) For other instances see Yellin, *ibid.* pp. 521-522.

11) Formal endings are frequent in the prophets and Psalms. Their value lies in a striking conclusion to the vision or the subject of the poem. We find them particularly in Isaiah and the Minor Prophets, whose books end with verses of consolation and encouragement for Messianic hopes. But the chief ~~storehouse of formal endings is~~ ^{and most frequent is} the Book of Psalms.

12) Brody II, 155; Harkavi I, 14.

13) Brody IV, 14-15; Harkavi I, 69-70.

hath befallen him". This kind of benedictory ending is especially frequent in the poems of holiness and of friendship.

Some poems of Halevi, especially those in which he employs formal openings and transitions, contain dramatic exclamatory or interrogatory forms of speech. This device, has the effect of revealing the poet's own mind in a phase of uncertainty and enquiry. The poem dedicated to Moses ibn Ezra, begins: "Is it an odour of myrrh or a sweet savour?"¹⁴⁾ In the second ode dedicated to him he asks: "Wilt thou exchange Youth for old age?"¹⁵⁾ and in another poem "Hath the flood come again and made the world waste?"¹⁶⁾ When the poet doubts a certain possibility and cannot reconcile himself with an actual contingency, he asks himself "Can this be possible?" Thus he emphasises a certain event or condition by taking up an attitude of incredulity towards it. The following are good examples: "Can bodies of clay be prison houses?"¹⁷⁾ "How can I find savour in food? How shall it be sweet to me?"¹⁸⁾ And in the same poem "How shall it be sweet to me to eat and drink, while I behold dogs tearing at thy lion's whelps?"¹⁹⁾.

14) Brody I, 58.

15) Brody I, 77; Harkavi I, 79.

16) *ibid.* II. 169; *ibid.* I, 23.

17) Brody II, 184; Harkavi I, 25.

18) *ibid.*, 155; *ibid.* 7.

19) *ibid.* 157; *ibid.* 13.

The poets of the Spanish period, ^{including} ~~and~~ Halevi amongst them, found room in their poetry for skilful linguistic diversions and "plays" upon words. They loved to employ words whose sounds were wholly or partially similar the device called "Paranomasia"²⁰⁾. The ^{chief} ~~main~~ characteristic of paranomasia is that each similar word in the speech phrase has a different meaning. Halevi uses this figure of speech with great effect. For example²¹⁾, in one of his poems he writes:

ד ע י כ נ ע ו ר י ס כ נ ע ר ר נ נ ע ר ר

"Know that boyhood is shaken off like tow".

There are many kinds of paranomasia in Spanish-Hebrew poetry and Halevi shows a predilection for the "full Paranomasia",²²⁾ i.e. a phrase with two or more words completely identical in lettering, but different in connotation. In his renowned sea-poem, he writes:²³⁾

אֲנִי עַל גַּב אוֹתוֹ "I on a ship's deck".

20) This figure of speech is frequent in the Bible:
 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים לֵיפָא (Genesis, 9,27); וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים לֵיפָא (ibid, 49, 19);
 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים לֵיפָא (Exodus, 22-4)

There are many varieties of Paranomasia in the Bible, as we shall see later on.

21) Brody III, 226; Harkavi II, 149.

22) e.g. וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים לֵיפָא (Genesis, 9.27)

23) Brody II, 175; Harkavi I, 34.

He also employs the "compound paranomasia"²⁴⁾ in which there are words of exactly similar orthography, of which one is split up into two words. For instance, in his poem "The dove thou hast borne on eagle's wings"²⁵⁾ we read: וְאֶהְיֶה לָהּ כְּאַרְבֵּיבָהּ וְאֶהְיֶה בָּהּ "And my tent became a high place for Oholibamah (Edom) and Oholibah (Jerusalem) - how shall she still hope?" Halevi more frequently than other poets, uses the figure of speech where the paranomasia has a changing syllable.²⁶⁾ i.e. he uses two words which are identical in form except that they differ in one syllable.²⁷⁾

וְדִבְרֵי אֲרֻבֵּי תַּחְתֵּי זֶרַע

"Words wherein lurk stinging bees",

הַבָּא מִבּוֹלַל וְשֵׁם פְּגַל הַזֶּזֶה וְאֵין לִי אֹרֶךְ כִּי אֶזְכֹּר

"Hath the flood come again and made the world waste, so that one cannot see the face of the dry land?"²⁸⁾ - and

כִּי תִרְדֹּף נַעֲרוֹת אַחֵר חֲלָשִׁים וְיִסְתַּךְ לְהַרְעוּפָה חֲלָשִׁים

"Wilt thou yet pursue youth after twoscore years and ten Since thy days are equipped for flight?"²⁹⁾

Halevi makes extensive use of paranomasia with one letter changed,³⁰⁾ employing words which differ in one consonant, but are alike in vocalisation, e.g.

וְגַעַר בְּדוּדִים וְבַחַר בְּדוּדִים

-
- 24) Only biblical example is perhaps: עֲשֵׂנוּ אֵל (Isaiah 8.10)
 25) Brody IV. 67; Harkavi I, 65.
 26) Many in Bible, e.g. וְיִהְיֶה צֶמַח עִם הָלֶב פְּדִים (Deut. 32.14)
מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם יֵשֶׁר וְיִשְׁקֹד כִּי שִׁקְדָה אֵין (Jeremiah, 1.11-12)
 (ibid. 50, 35-38) perhaps also: וְאֶהְיֶה וְיִהְיֶה וְיִהְיֶה (Isaiah 65, 25)
 27) Brody II, 164; Harkavi I, 16.
 28) ibid. 169; ibid. 23.
 29) ibid. 160; ibid. 28.
 30) Many in the Bible: אֶשְׁכַּח - חֲשָׁפָה; אֶצְקֶה - צִדְקָה (Isaiah 5, 7)
וְיִהְיֶה וְיִהְיֶה וְיִהְיֶה (Psalms 18, 8)
אֶשְׁכַּח - חֲשָׁפָה; אֶצְקֶה - צִדְקָה (Hosea 8, 7).

"He rebuketh his dear ones and chooseth exile"³¹⁾ ויבוכו ויבחרו
 "And the beams stagger and strain"³²⁾ קרשים השב חבלו כבן אמתו
 "He turned back his wrath from the son of his handmaid",³³⁾
 So too: וסמרה עניה ודלתה אניה³⁴⁾ and התעופפה התנופפה "Flying,
 flitting";³⁵⁾ and, the most beautiful of them all: ודוד' דמק
 "While my ruler oppresseth and my beloved is
 afar".³⁶⁾ There are many instances, too of "inverted paranom-
 masia"³⁷⁾ in which one part of the figure of speech differs
 from the other in the order of some or all of its letters, e.g.
 "And suffer my spikenard to flower by the waters of Jordan":³⁸⁾ ואפריח גליל ירדן נדד'
 "But beat out the deep and tore the
 heart of the seas".³⁹⁾ ויקע תהום וקרע לבב ימים
 His poetry also contains a form of
 "Defective Paranomasia"⁴⁰⁾, i.e., a play on two words
 of which one contains a single letter more or less than the
 other.

31) Brody II, 184; *ibid.*, I, 25.

32) *ibid.* 161; *ibid.* 29.

33) *ibid.* II, 179; *ibid.* 36.

34) *ibid.*; *ibid.* 37.

35) Luzzatto, *Divan*, 16; Harkavi I, 60.

36) Brody IV, 68; *ibid.* 66.

37) Not infrequent in Bible, e.g. את בוכתי לקח וקנה ערה (Isaiah 42,13) געיר קנאה זריע אף יצריח
 לקח בוכתי (Gen. 27, 36) וקנה ערה (Psalms 6,11).

38) Brody II, 173; Harkavi I, 21.

39) *ibid.* 172; *ibid.* 24.

40) (Jeremiah 16,19) שְׁלֵמָה - לְמָה
 (Ezek. 21,3); (Isaiah 1,10) עֵם עֲלֵמָה
 (Micah 1,15).

e.g., in the poem "Hath the Flood come again", we find ^{ואין כל} ⁴¹⁾
^{אין כל} "There is nothing but only water and sky".

Elsewhere we have ^{ונשים ואנשים נאנשים} "Women and men in
 distress" ⁴²⁾ ^{הטו גלים ברוך גללים} ⁴³⁾ or ^{יורה בל} ⁴⁴⁾
^{אש ולב כהן יאש} and ^{בזכר ים סוף אשר לא יסוף ערב וכסוף}

etc. It can easily be seen how intricate a business poetic construction was in that period and how subtle a talent was required to master those intricacies and to subordinate poetic mannerism to genuine inspiration. It is also evident that like the other Spanish poets, Jehudah Halevi was perceptibly influenced by the Bible and made Scriptural Verse his standard and guide. Nearly all the poetic forms of the Spanish period, which modern poets still use for euphonic effects, have their origin in the Hebrew Bible, which not only imparted its religious spirit to the poetry of Halevi and his contemporaries, but also influenced their poetic forms and idioms.

2. Songs of Praise and Friendship.

Songs of praise and friendship are abundant in the poetry of the Spanish period and must be considered in a special category. Poets, who were usually of scanty means, would wander from place to place and knock at the doors of wealthy patrons, on whom they would lavish songs of praise in return for ^{gifts} ~~gifts~~ and hospitality.

41) Brody II, 169; Harkavi I, 23.

42) *ibid.* 162; *ibid.* 29.

43) *ibid.* 77; *ibid.* 35.

44) *ibid.* 178; *ibid.* 35.

Hebrew writers of this period had several literary patrons notably R. Hasdai ibn Shaphrut, Jekuthiel ibn-Hassan, and R. Samuel the Prince, whose gates were open to wandering poets. Indeed, Donas ben Labrat, R. Isaac ibn Halfon and Solomon ibn Gabirol were able to live entirely on the proceeds of their poem. It seems difficult to understand how a man of the stature of Solomon ibn Gabirol could bring himself to eulogise his benefactors in poems containing the most fulsome and obsequious flattery. But that was well within the sanction of popular taste in the 12th century and had nothing invidious about it. There were also, however, genuine poems of friendship in which flattery found no place, and it is to this category that Halevi's songs of Praise and Friendship belong.

We need not assume that it was only because Halevi was more fastidious in his moral scruples than his colleagues that his poems contain no insincere flattery. It must also be taken into account that his economic position was well established and that he had no need of monetary support. Moreover, his songs and odes are not dedicated to men of wealth and substance, but to those who bore distinction in the world of learning and poetry. It must be noted that in these poems too there is obvious exaggeration in the praise awarded by the poet to the subjects of his veneration. Exaggeration is an oriental trait and not even Halevi could avoid it. Just as no man, least of all a poet, can easily isolate himself from the influences of his period.

When R. Joseph ibn Migash succeeded R. Isaac Alfasi at the head of the Academy, Jehudah Halevi wrote him an ode in which he portrayed his great learning, declaring that he was the man who would restore the glory of scholarship, for he was a "Sinai before the Lord",¹⁾ and he would spread knowledge amongst the people,²⁾ being a man of righteousness and justice. Therefore, although Alfasi had gone, with the accession of R. Joseph:

"This day hath the arm of truth prevailed,
And justice been established on its basis,
In thee the law is restored to its pre-eminence,
And its glory 'returns to its strength!'"³⁾

A genuine affection inspired the poems which he dedicated to his friend, Moses ibn Ezra, although these too contain much that seems exaggerated; but in this he may^{have been} ~~be~~ emulating ibn Ezra's own poetry, in which he showered much praise upon Halevi.

"It is not in his white hair or in his old age that Moses ibn Ezra's glory lies", writes Halevi, "but it is in the purity of his thoughts and the depth of his wisdom and understanding", Therefore his love for him surpasses the love of women. His very handwriting is dearer to Halevi than fair women, his voice sweeter than the voices^{of} men and women raised in song⁴⁾ and so manifold are the good works of ibn Ezra that his (Halevi's) pen is too dull to describe them. He declares that ibn Ezra

1) Brody I, 142; Harkavi I, 78.

2) ibid. 173; ibid. 79.

3) ibid. 142; ibid. 78.

4) ibid. 79; ibid. 83.

influences his own poetry, and it is thanks to his friendship and teaching that his own work has made great strides: ("Thou didst clothe my song in fair garments").⁵⁾ The eulogy becomes so unrestrained that the letters which he receives from ibn Ezra he promises to

"put as phylacteries between his eyes
and as signs bound on his hands". 6)

We can assume that if a religious man like Halevi could write in this strain of the letters of ibn Ezra, the sentiment of friendship must have been sincere and profound. When M. ibn Ezra parts from him, he compares him to the Holy Ark: "The Ark of law which hath been exiles afar."⁷⁾ His longing for his friend is intolerable, so that he finds no peace after his departure, and addresses him thus:⁸⁾

"Thou light of the West, return to thy sphere!
Be again the seal on every heart, the bracelet
on every arm".

For he is his "moon and daylight".⁹⁾ And on the death of his friend, Halevi writes a wonderful, heartrending song in which he portrays him as the "Crown of the glory of Spain"¹⁰⁾ which has fallen wondrously with his death; and he calls him: "The sweet singer in Israel"; "the nation's chosen master".¹¹⁾

5) *ibid.* 80; *ibid.* 84.

6) *ibid.* 80; *ibid.* 85.

7) *ibid.* 76; *ibid.* 88.

8) *ibid.* 93; *ibid.* 91.

9) *ibid.* 123; *ibid.* 92.

10) *ibid.* II, 105; *ibid.* 144.

11) *ibid.* It has been noted that the best of Halevi's poems are dedicated to ibn Ezra. B. Halper. *Shirath Israel* Intr. p.13.

Many poems are dedicated to his kinsman, Solomon ben Ferruziel,¹²⁾ one of them being written on the occasion of his murder.¹³⁾ Although the poem is perhaps excessively long, this description of the dead man's personality and qualities is vivid enough, and the love which Halevi bore him is powerfully recorded.

There are several poems dedicated to Solomon ben Karshphon, Joseph ibn Zaddiq, Judah ben Giath and other.¹⁴⁾ Some odes are dedicated to the Head of Egyptian Jewry, R. Samuel and his sons,¹⁵⁾ with whom he stayed on his arrival in Egypt. It might be assumed from the large number of songs eulogising R. Samuel that the poet had derived some material support from him. But we have already observed¹⁶⁾ that no such thing occurred, and we can deduce instead that Halevi had a real appreciation of the Nagid's services to the Jews of Egypt and that a genuine esteem animated these poems. Amongst the songs of friendship, special notice is due to a wonderful poem which he sent to a friend in Tyre, who had enquired after his health. The poem begins: "It is not the clouds which have opened, but my two eyes which drop tears".¹⁷⁾ And there is a poem beginning: "Earth like a little child was sucking but yesterday

12) Brody II, 92-100; Harkavi I, 95-103. About Ferruziel see: I. Behr, Political position of Spanish Jewry in the time of Halevi, in "Zion", vol. I, Book I, p. 17.

13) Brody II, 93, et seq.; Harkavi I, 97, et seq. About his murder see I. Behr, *ibid.* p. 8.

14) Brody I, 2, 12, 27, 38-40, 43, 44, 93, 105, 106, 116, 118, 175, 181; Harkavi I, 103-116, et seq.

15) Brody I, 76, 81, 85, 110, 111, 131; Harkavi I, 117-125.

16) *vid.* chapter on "His Life".

17) Brody I, 95; Harkavi I, 126.

the rains of winter, with a cloud for nurse,"¹⁸⁾ which though dedicated to R. Isaac Elithum, is for the most part a hymn of Nature. He composed several songs of Friendship while staying in Egypt on his way to Palestine. Apart from those dedicated to R. Samuel, mention must be made of the poem:¹⁹⁾ "Hath the time doffed the garb of Fear?", dedicated to R. Nathan bar Samuel, and a poem²⁰⁾ in honour of R. Aaron ben Zion of Alexandria. The former is noteworthy as a poem of nature describing the glories of ~~the Egyptian scene.~~²¹⁾ The latter is a great love song written in the poet's old age.²²⁾

A cursory review of the "songs of Praise and Friendship" is sufficient to prove that they do not belong to the same category as those of other poets of the period, whose work is full of flattery and obsequious praise. Halevi's poems never descend to this level even if some do contain exaggerations. The subjects of his odes are generally men of learning and poetic attainments; and if some of them were also men of wealth, it was not in return for favours received that Halevi immortalised them in verse, but out of appreciation of their public services, as is quite clear from his odes to R. Samuel, the leader of Egyptian Jewry.

3. Love Poems.

The love poems of Halevi and of his contemporaries, bear little resemblance to the love poems of modern literature.

18) ibid., 82, ibid., II, 58.

19) ibid. 112-115; ibid. I. 41-44.

20) ibid. 99-102, ibid. 47-52.

21) vid. chapter on "Nature Poems".

22) vid. " " "Love Poems".

For the most part they consist of Bridal songs or songs of desire (*ḥayyā 'izzā*) and courtship. The subject is therefore not love itself as an abstract conception, but the persons of those loved: not desire itself, but those who are affected with it. Little is said of the suffering of the lovers, their conflicts and agonies. The temper of Love's passion is only spasmodically revealed; and, on the other hand, little is said of the tranquility of Love. Romance is almost entirely absent from Halevi's love poetry.

The principal subjects, then, are the actual "heroes" of the Love, who are invoked in generous and vivid language. This approach is not merely the result of Biblical influence, (Song of Songs), but a direct reflection of contemporary Arabic Poetry, which was concerned not with the psychology of its lovers or their emotional experiences, but with their actual personalities and qualities.

The lover is called by the name *ḥayy* ¹⁾ (stag) or *ḥayy* ²⁾ (fawn) and the loved lady by the feminine of the same words. ³⁾, ⁴⁾. Sometimes, to intensify and accentuate the emotional impression, the lovers are called or likened to the Sun and Moon, ⁵⁾ to the burning orb and crescent ⁶⁾ (*ḥayy al-shams*) to Pelion and Orion. ⁷⁾ Not only the lovers themselves, but even parts of their bodies are denoted by similes which, as it were,

1) Brody I, 135; II, 23, 36, 31; Harkavi I, 132, 140.

2) Brody II, 60.

3) Brody II, 7, 14, 17; Harkavi I, 130-131, 138.

4) *ibid.* 12, 39; *ibid.* 131, 138.

5) *ibid.* 21, 22; *ibid.* 135, 141.

6) *ibid.* 43, *ibid.* 136.

7) *ibid.* 42; *ibid.* II. 52.

enhance their impressiveness and their lovable qualities. A lover's lips are as flowing honey or myrrh, her hair is like snakes and serpents.⁸⁾ The hair is also compared to⁹⁾ לְפָנֵי אֲדָמָה, wolves of the desert, or wolves black as evening (the two meanings of לְפָנֵי). Beauty and brilliance of countenance shine through the foliage of dark hair like the sun rising and breaking through the clouds.¹⁰⁾ The red and white of the loved one's face is compared to fire and snow resting peacefully on the cheeks.¹¹⁾ The colour of the face and hair is sometimes compared to the contrast of light and darkness.¹²⁾ Sometimes, instead, the simile is of precious stones, especially the ruby for the red of the lips.¹³⁾ The lips are also compared to the red, flaming embers of burning coal,¹⁴⁾ and also to sparks of fire.¹⁵⁾ Eyes are envisaged as arrows¹⁶⁾ flying straight to the target, or sometimes they are compared to a lion's whelps.¹⁷⁾ The range of metaphor is very extensive.

We can see that the epithets of lovers and of their bodily features occupy pride of place in bridal songs and songs of desire. But there are also effective descriptions of the

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- 8) *ibid.* 23, 41; *ibid.* I. 142; II, 49.
 9) *ibid.* 54; *ibid.* I, 134.
 10) *ibid.* 20.
 11) *ibid.* I, 83; *ibid.* II, 59.
 12) *ibid.* II, 54; *ibid.* I, 134-135.
 13) *ibid.* 9, 12, 17; *ibid.* I, 131; II, 56.
 14) *ibid.* 54; *ibid.* I, 134.
 15) *ibid.* 28; *ibid.* II, 51.
 16) *ibid.* 6, 12.
 17) *ibid.* 6.

longing for family life amongst the lovers, and of their sexual desire for each other. Nevertheless, many of these poems lack spontaneity. There is much that is purely imitative, and an air of exaggeration is perceptible in much of the verse, so that it is only occasionally that we find real emotion and genuine spiritual feeling. In this aspect of poetry Jehudah Halevi does not excel his contemporaries of the Spanish period. Like them, he was influenced directly by the "Song of Songs" and Arabic poetry; and he modelled his work on a fixed pattern. Those bridal songs which he wrote "to order" in honour of a wedding of his friends or acquaintances are spoilt by ~~the~~ sheer banality, and often by monotonous repetitions of similes and metaphors. They have little deep feeling and few outbursts of real sincerity.

Nevertheless, even in his love poems, there are qualities which make Halevi conspicuous amongst his fellow poets. He is essentially an optimist, a genuine poet of the heart - and it is inevitable that some of his love poems should be marked by real and sincere passion. It has been truly noted that Solomon ibn Gabirol had no real feeling behind his love poems, which he composed as a matter of duty or in order to reveal his technical skill, - whereas "the epigrams of Jehudah Halevi and, one need hardly say, his greatest love poems excel the poems of ibn Gabirol in their depth of feeling."¹⁸⁾

18) Dr. Simchoni on "Ibn Gabirol", Hatekufah XVII. p.202.

For Halevi sang of love's consummation and not only songs of the bridal feast and of desire. He sang real earthly love songs which had no vestige of spiritualised, celestial love.

The maiden, the paragon of beauty, the delight of his heart has mighty power, the power of healing and the power of death.

"Life dwelleth in her pleasure
And ghosts of the dead reside with her."19)

To all appearances, she is *דלל*, a doe, fleet of feet, skipping and leaping about harmlessly, but actually ~~she is~~

~~"A doe, but see how"~~ "She tears her prey as a lion"20)

And this doe whom in one poem, he calls "Ophra" is cruel in love, and cleanses her garments in the tears of her lovers and wooers:

"Ophra washeth her garments in the waters
Of my tears, and spreadeth them out in
the sunshine of her radiance" 21)

But she who was but recently cruel, has a heart full of love and longing, and reveals her deep desire as she awakens ~~from~~ her sleeping paramour from his slumber:

"If thou dream'st of one that is kissing thine eyes
Awake - and soon the dream I'll explain" 22)

19) Brody II, 17, Harkavu I, 131.

20) *ibid.*

21) Brody II, 12, Harkavi I, 131.

22) *ibid.*, 20; *ibid.* 132.

But Ophra without her lover is worthless and desolate:

"I am of little worth and poor when parted
From my glory, and my limbs become like a shadow" 23)

Her heart winces within her, and it seems when her lover kisses
her eyes, that he kisses not her eyes but his own image
reflected in them:

"Once I nursed love on my knee
He saw his likeness in my eye
He kissed the lids so tenderly
T'was his image he kissed, the rogue, not me" 24)

There is great power of expression in these little odes. Halevi
devotes himself utterly to his loved one and likens her cheeks
to a lily, while her eyes pluck the tender flower. Her lips
are as burning coals, while his hot mouth is as firetongs
ready to receive her kisses

"Cheeks of lilies and mine eyes gathering,
Breasts of pomegranates and mine hands harvesting
If thy lips be glowing coals 25)
Then let my jaws be tongs".

In one of his greatest poems dedicated to a departing lover,
his love and desire find powerful expression as he implores
her to cherish the memory of their mutual love:

"By the life of Love, remember the days of thy
longing, as I -
I remember the nights of thy delight" 26)

23) *ibid*, I, 135; *ibig*

24) *ibid* II, 16, *ibid*.

25) Brody II, 54; Harkavi I, 134.

26) *ibid* 8. *ibid* II, 55.

She left him, but ^{he remains faithful} "even in the halls of Death I will seek thy love and thy peace"²⁷⁾; although she had shed his life's blood in her cruelty - a fact of which he has two 'witnesses'

"Verily to thy shedding of mine heart's blood
There be two witnesses, thy cheeks and thy lips" ²⁸⁾.

She has wounded him and shed his life-blood. But his love is boundless, for she has no peer in beauty and grace. When he beholds her lips over her teeth it is though he sees "the likeness of ruby upon sapphire". Her dress too is exceedingly fine, but it is as nothing against her own beauty.²⁹⁾

"Fine silk and brodered work are the covering of thy
body
But grace and beauty are the covering of thine eyes".³⁰⁾

She is the "adornment of maidens" and her garb is "majesty with sweetness". What wonder then, that the stars of heaven should be happy to be her slaves, and he, the poet finds no peace except in one boon:

"As for share of wordly wealth I ask for nought
But a thread of scarlet from thy lips, a girdle
from thy waist."³¹⁾

But his loved one has gone from him. And the poet entreats that she should remember him kindly - him the 'special one' amongst "the victims of love for her".

A poet who could write in this strain must have

27) *ibid.*

28) *ibid.*

29) A similar portrayal is in another poem: "She stripped off her clothes but was not naked, for grace, glory and beauty were

her garments" (Brody I, 14; Harkavi I, 95)

30) Brody II, 9; Harkavi II, 56.

31) *ibid.*, *ibid.* 57.

had a true experience of love, and according to his own testimony he was one of "the victims of love for her". ~~Nor is~~ There ^{is} any ~~no~~ foundation for the idea that Halevi in his old age regretted³²⁾ his love poems and resolved, according to R. Solomon Parchon "never again to write Verse".³³⁾ Nor can we assent to the view that "even in the songs of ~~life and~~ love composed by Halevi in his youth there was much that was mere imitation of contemporary Arabic poetry; ~~but~~ ^{for} his heart was not in them"³⁴⁾.

As for the charge concerning the unoriginality of his love poetry, we have seen that although he was exposed, like other poets, to the influence of the "Song of Songs" and Arabic poetry, yet it requires little discernment to perceive that his love songs are not mere imitations drawn from other sources. They emanate from a sensitive mind and could only have been written in a mood of tempestuous love.

The notion that he regretted his love poetry, which is said to be implied in the "Kitab Al-Khazari" rests on a false assumption. The Khazari is a book of religious discussion and in the relevant passage Halevi deals with the question of spiritual purity. It is obvious that he is attacking licentious poetry which he regarded as ^a breach of religious standards. But there is no evidence here that he "decided never again to write verse". It is, of course, understandable that a man like Jehudah Halevi

32) Al-Khazari Article II, 60.

33) Machbereth Ha-aruch. p. 5 i

34) S.I. Ish-Horowitz in "He-athid" Vol. I. p.93.

who, in old age, wished to atone for his transgressions, gave a new direction to his poetry, and tended mostly towards a national-religious mood. "When a man is young he speaks words of music",³⁵⁾ but in old age the tune is changed. But there is no cause to minimise the value of his love-poetry as one critic has done³⁶⁾. Not only did Halevi never regret his love poems (although in his old age he composed them less frequently), but even in his declining years when he was in Alexandria, he wrote a poem, dedicated to R. Aaron ben Zion,³⁷⁾ the first half of which is unmistakably a love song - a surprising mood for a poet of sixty years of age. So that even if there was reason to put any credence in the statement of R. Solomon Parchon that Halevi "decided" never to write Verse again, this poem would lead us to the conclusion that Halevi's poetic impulse was so compelling that despite his firm decision not to write again, his poetry was to him as were the words of prophecy to Jeremiah "a burning fire pent up in his bones" (Jer. XX, 9). A short description of this remarkable poem may assist a general judgment of Halevi's love poetry.

Young girls with their beauty prey on men's hearts.
And the poet asks: Are they answerable for the harm done to their victims or are they immune? Their lovers have no choice

35) Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah, Chap. I, 10.

36) Horowitz in the above mentioned article.

37) Brody I, 99-102; Harkavi I, 47-49.

for how can men avert their gaze from women? Their beauty puts the sun to shame, for the brightness of their countenance speaks of light and their jet black hair proclaims darkness:

"They say 'let there be light' and 'let there be darkness'
With the radiance of their countenance and the blackness
of their hair" 38)

The number of fair maidens is legion and their form and likeness varies but they all have powers of attraction, and the choice is difficult and hazardous.:

"One can go astray amongst those tender and soft
And those fruitful, thickly leaved and branching" 39).

They all understand the heart of man clearly, and snare him by all manner of devices; and they all deal falsely and must be approached with due caution:

"Careful, careful with those that ever lie to me
Yea, careful for all their flattery". 40)

But the conclusion is that the hearts of those ensnared in their net are torn like the prey of wild beasts.

Such an "opening" of an ode to a Rabbi could only have been written by a poet whose heart had not yet become indifferent to the emotions of love. ~~Old~~ Halevi's artistic expression of those emotions certainly surpassed that of his younger days.

38) Brody I, 100, Harkavi, I, 48.

39) *ibid.*

40) *ibid.*, Harkavi I, 49.

It can not be denied that many of Halevi's love-longs do not accord with modern taste either in their mode of expression or in their contents. Sometimes, the profound emotion expressed in his poems only finds expression along the stereotyped paths of convention trod by other poets of the period. But when all is said and done, it must be emphasised that Halevi was genuinely a poet of love responsive to real affection; and that his love lyrics were written neither as imitations of older models, nor in a mood of extravagant exaggeration, (but they came from the sensitive heart of a poet who had struggled in the toils of Love, and penetrated into its most intimate mysteries. The spiritual agonies, the oppressiveness of Love, the yearning of hearts, and the passion of physical desire were all reflected in the poetry of Jehudah Halevi from his youth to his declining years.

4. NATURE POEMS.

From the days of the Bible onwards, Nature-poetry constituted^a special category of Hebrew literature; and many of these poems in the Bible are distinguished alike for their harmony of form and their wealth of content. This type of poetry, was not written for poetry's sake as the effusion of a visionary mind - but solely in some connection with the might of the Creator. The poems purpose is to extol His works and to glorify His might,

and they were written in honour of Him Who "maketh light and createth darkness"; It is not Nature itself which seems to be interpreted for us, but only manifestations of Nature; and the only purpose of the Biblical Nature-Poetry is to reveal how great and wondrous are the works of the Creator.

This type of poetry is only found in a few of Halevi's compositions: It is God Who fixed the stars in their courses; it is by His direction that the Sun rises and sets. The moon ^{moves} ~~walks~~ across the expanses of the sky along the path which He ordained. It is God Who changes the times and fixes the seasons even though He himself suffers no change.

"The seasons change; His glory changeth not."¹⁾
But Halevi is not content with relating the glories of God in these poems; he also introduces the theme of Israel's redemption which the Lord of the Universe is destined to bring. There is not only a portrayal of Nature, but an emphasising of the magnitude of Nature's powers. And even this ~~comes~~ is incidental to the real purpose, which is to express God's majesty ~~on the one hand~~, and Israel's redemption on the other. The congregation of Israel should pray to Him:

"Who kindleth the light of the sun,
who formeth light and createth darkness"²⁾

Prayer is due to Him Who created the world and the Heavens and the host thereof, and gave light advantage over darkness:

"So will He yet light up my gloom
And uphold him who raiseth my fallen estate
And make the light of mine assembly shine forth"³⁾

1) Brody III, 775, Harkavi II, 108.

2) Luzzatto, Divan, 25; Harkavi II, 63.

3) ~~ibid.~~ Harkavi I, 64.

Halevi mentions the forces of Nature as signs and portents of Israel's eternal existence. And under the influence of Jeremiah (Ch. 31) and Genesis (Ch. 8.), he declares that just as the sun and moon, and the fixed laws of night and day will endure for ever, so will Israel have eternal life, for these natural phenomena were only revealed as "signs for the seed of Jacob." ⁴⁾ There is another application which Halevi uses for the forces of Nature. When a friend parts from him and he writes an ode in his honour, or when he writes a eulogy of some distinguished notable, he employs various illustrations from Nature. When his bosom friend Moses ibn Ezra leaves him, he describes the darkness of his days and the gloom of his grief in similes illustrating the transitions between day and night. ⁵⁾ And in a poem dedicated to R. Solomon ben Karshpon, he compares him to the shining sun, to the vine whose twigs spread afar, and to the plants of spices which scatter their perfumes abroad. ⁶⁾

There is one real hymn of Nature: "Earth, like a little child, was sucking", which is distinguished for its detailed descriptions of spring and flowers. Love and Nature are interlocked in the poem. The Earth in winter is compared to a girl who has been shut away from her lover; and now with the advent of Spring and the approach of summer, she is

4) Brody II, 307; *ibid* I, 72.

5) *ibid* I, 45; *ibid* I, 87,

6) Harkavi I, 104.

let free:

"She longed for the wooing-time until the summer came
And then the longing heart was healed." 7)

The poet goes on to paint with artistic brush the changes and transitions of Nature in all her glory, and the vibrating, effervescent life of the world as it revives in spring time.

Sometimes when Halevi wishes to illustrate the beauty of a poem or some form of majesty and glory, or when he is singing a bridal song, he employs the device of using names of places in Palestine. The nature of Palestine, which is epitomised in the mere mention of a place, suffices for the poet to express the whole content of his thought:

"For you all beauty is becoming, all song and melody
Descends as dew from Hermon unto the Rose of the Sharon" 8)

or again:

"Thou art the glory of my forest, my shady place and
my Carmel". 9)

In his poem "Zion, wilt thou not greet", he contrives to portray the natural beauties of the Holy Land with remarkable precision.

"The air of thy land is the life of souls, and of pure
myrrh -
The grains of thy dust; and honey from the combs,
thy rivers". 10)

But none of these examples, with the exception of the poem "Earth like a child was sucking", can be accurately called ^anature-poem. Nature and natural forces are mentioned only incidentally.

7) Brody I, 83; Harkavi II, 58.

8) ibid I, 94; ibid I, 113.

9) ibid, 44; ibid.

10) ibid II, 157; ibid I, 12.

and only isolated expressions of Nature are introduced. Halevi's authentic Nature poetry consists only of those poems which he wrote on his sea-voyage and which are accordingly known as his "Sea Songs". In these the poet describes not only the forces of Nature and the origins of the living world, but the real manifestations of Nature's infinite variety. The storm of the sea, the tumult of its billows, the roar of the river, the splashing of the stream, the budding of flowers and the growth of lilies, the glare of the sun and the nip in the air, the change of seasons and the variations of climate - all these illustrations of Natural change are used with impressive effect in Halevi's nature-poetry.

During his voyage, while he was on board a ship on the verge of a wreck, he was faced by stark danger. He sees himself "buried alive in a coffin of wood",¹¹⁾ and it seems as if the end of the world is at hand:

"And no man is there and no beast and no bird,"¹²⁾
for ~~the~~ sees nothing

"but water and sky - and an ark".¹³⁾

His heart is convulsed with anxiety and panic. The end is near, and soon he will be drowned in the mighty depths. But his hope is not yet lost:

"And the sea rageth and my soul exulteth -
For to the sanctuary of her God she draweth near".¹⁴⁾

11) *ibid* II, 175; *ibid* I, 22.

12) *ibid*, 169; *ibid*, 23.

13) *ibid*.

14) *ibid*, 169; *ibid* I, 24.

On another occasion he writes:

"How shall I be otherwise since I, on a ship's deck
Suspended between waters and heavens
Am shaken and tossed about?
But this is but a light thing,
If I may but hold the festal dance in the
Midst of thee, O Jerusalem!" 15)

And he turns with gratitude and praise to the west wind which eases his voyage. The zephyr scatters a sweet savour wheresoever it passes, for it is crowned with all manner of balm. It was ^{for} such a wind that the children of Israel longed when they passed over the sea and

רָכַב עַל גַּב הַיָּם עַל גַּב הַיָּם עַל גַּב הַיָּם

"Rode over the crest of the sea on the bank of a plank!" 16)

It requires great imaginative power to conceive the idea that the sea has a back, on which the poet rides as on the deck of a ship. And he turns to the west wind which is leading him to tranquillity and peace, entreating it to rebuke the stormy east-wind and appease it so that he may come speedily to Zion, his destination.

The journey from Spain to Palestine is perilous both by land and by sea. The whole journey is overshadowed by anxiety, but in view of his prospect of reaching the Holy Land, his fears are set at nought. He writes vivid descriptions of the places he must pass:

"While wolves of the forests find in his sight
The favour of maidens in the sight of youths;
And ostriches please him like singers and players
And the roaring of lions like the bleating of flocks." 17)

15) ibid II, 175; ibid I, 34.

16) ibid 172; ibid I, 24.

17) ibid, 184; ibid, 25.

Halevi displays consummate artistry in the description of a stormy sea in his poem "Wilt thou yet pursue youth after twoscore year and ten". The tempest is violent and there is no escape, no corner of hope:

"And only the ocean before thee as a haven
And no refuge for thee ~~but~~ but snares". 18)

The wind skips and dances and seems to raise sheaves from the water, making them into stacks and piles. The heaving waters are as lions rising up; when the waters fall they are like serpents coiling themselves together. The water plays with him at its pleasure while "men and women are in distress" and fainting from fear. He portrays nightfall, the vanishing of the sun, the shining of the moon, the appearance of the stars; and he sees before him not only the sea, but the firmament which is itself a sea - and the heart of the poet is as a third sea between them:

"And the sea appeareth as a firmament,
Then are the two seas bound up together
And between them is my heart - a third sea 19)
Lifting up ever anew my waves of praise"

A description, at once mystical and realistic, of the raging sea, is to be found in another poem,²⁰⁾ in which the tempestuous fury of the sea is vividly presented to the reader's mind:

"The waters roar
As their wheels roll o'er
Becoming less and more
On the face of the sea.
The waters grow black,
Grim lowers the rack,
The breakers rear back."

18) ibid

18) ibid. 161, ibid 29.

19) ibid, 163; ibid 31.

20) ibid, 177; ibid 35.

A poem which we have already mentioned, dedicated to R. Nathan bar Samuel, contains a moving description of the beauties of Spring. The poet, who had been, as it were, imprisoned by the hard rigours of winter, ventures abroad and the loveliness of spring comes to greet him. There is light, sun, a frisky breeze, flowers and buds, pastures and wondrous verdure. The world seems renewed in the eyes of the poet, and as he strides along he asks: Has Time garments like the children of men which it can put on and discard, changing them for others? Does it put away its torn and withered rags and put on tunics and frocks of silk and embroidered work? The banks of the Nile are, in his words, like the "jewel-sockets in the priests breast-plate."²¹⁾

He sings of the glories of Egypt, which is as the Garden of Eden; of her fields and her ripe corn revived by the spring, standing proudly upright as though glad in festive raiment. At times the stalks sway before the clear wind; and in the poet's eyes, they seem to be praying and making obeisance to God.

"The red-green corn stands
Glad in embroidered raiment
And a sea-breeze sways them as they seem
As if they bow to God", ²²⁾

This is a poem in which the fruits and manifestations of Nature testify to Nature's Lord and Creator. Apart, then, from poems containing similitudes and illustrations of Nature, Jehudah

²¹⁾ *ibid*, I, 112; *ibid* I, 41.

²²⁾ *ibid*, 113. *ibid*, 42.

Halevi's poetry includes a definite category of poems known as "Sea Songs", whose chief merit lies in their effective portrayals of Nature. In these poems he reveals a lively talent for the detailed description of natural imagery. It is not too much to say that the poet's intention is to describe the phenomena of Nature, and its variations, as something separate and apart from all else. And the impressions of Nature are so faithfully recorded that no other forms of expression seem more suitable for the poet's themes. To his Nature-poetry Halevi brought an observant eye as well as an emotional sensitiveness which made him very receptive to natural influences.

5. RELIGIOUS POETRY.

It is not easy to differentiate between Halevi's "religious" and "national" poetry, since his religion is national and his nationalism religious.

Sacred poetry enters the intimate consciousness of every Jew, for it is fixed within the framework of his historical tradition, so that the expression of his religious emotions and ideas has a national character. On the other hand, the national mission and the prayer for its fulfilment is nothing more than the generalised emotion of each individual in the nation - the expression of his religious sentiments which are rooted in an ancient religious tradition. It is not surprising, therefore, that the origins of this sacred poetry are to be found in the ancient poetry of the Bible. A distant but perceptible

echo of the Psalms is preserved in the sacred poetry of Halevi, as well as the echo of the homilies of Ecclesiastes and the complaints of Job. All these influences are discernible in his religious poetry, which deals with two subjects - the Creator and the created - God and mankind. This religious poetry therefore, has a universal human value, like the Bible itself. But just as the Bible, could not be emptied of its specific Jewish interest without losing much of its appeal since the Jewish interest determines its historical background, so it is with Halevi's sacred poetry. He speaks, it is true, of God and Man. But God is the God of Israel and "man" is the people of Israel.

Man is mortal and it is his destiny to pass away. He is not only restricted and limited in time, but subject also to the limitations of understanding and knowledge.

"Do not press forward to see the secret things,
But subdue the plane of thy imagination.
Withdraw from unfathoming the depth of miracles,
For thou hast no permission to enter the foundation".¹⁾

Man has "small understanding" and he is in duty bound to keep within his province and not to seek "what is above and what is below, what was before and what will be hereafter."²⁾ These things are known only to the Creator, and man must have faith that He, the Omniscient One, governs His world with intelligence and good understanding, with rectitude and justice, from the

1) Brody II, 218-219; Harkavi II, 79.

2) Hagigah (Mishnah) II, 1.

first day to the end of time. This poem ends with a quotation from Genesis (1, 31.), the chapter on the Creation.

"And God saw everything that He had made 3)
And behold it was very good".

But although man must accept his fate and not enquire after what lies beyond his range of understanding, yet at the same time God has dealt with him as a merciful father deals with his children whom he dearly loves. Subjection to God is no slavery, but merely filial obedience to the Father in Heaven:

"Servants of time - the slaves of slaves are they;
The Lord's servant - he alone is free". 4)

This obedience and submission, being free of slavishness is in reality the highest form of devotion. The poet turns to God with the words:

"Thy favour I would ask for a moment and then die; 5)
Ah, would that mine entreaty might be granted".

The poet is ready to die if only he may hear the word of the Lord. The poetry of Halevi is indeed full of praise and exaltation of God. In every one of his sacred poems he extols God and His qualities portraying His deeds and miracles as Lord of the Universe and God of Israel. And it is not only of God that he writes, but also of the heavenly host; the ministering angels, the Hayoth, 6) the seraphim and the ministers of God. Halevi is by no means original in dealing with these subjects, for he was preceded in this respect by many poets. But even

3) Brody II, 220-240; Harkavi II, 81.

4) Brody II, 300; Harkavi II, 90. See also Al-Khazari V. 25.

5) Brody III, 266; Harkavi II, 90.

6) Ezekiel I, 5.

if there is nothing new in the subject itself, yet in his treatment of it, in his conciseness (although he did not always display it) and in his stylistic perfection, Halevi surpasses other poets of more limited imaginative power. Again, it must not be assumed that he was uninfluenced by his predecessors; for the ideas of his sacred poetry were influenced by the "Paitanim" ^(Liturgical poets) and its forms by his own older contemporaries such as ibn Gabirol. ⁷⁾

The peculiar type of poem consisting of a communion with the soul is well represented in Halevi's work. These poems of communion were common in the Spanish Jewish poetry before Halevi, and ibn Gabirol in particular brought them to a very high standard of perfection. ⁸⁾

The residence of the soul in a man's body is but temporary, and even if a man's days be many, they are still controlled by irrevocable laws of time. ⁹⁾ The life of this world, which is short and limited, serves only as a vestibule before the hall of the world to come. This world is but a grave or ^a prison in which the soul is compelled to reside for a certain time:

"Thou, schooled in faith, reject falsehood
And dwell in the world, as men dwell in graves". ¹⁰⁾

-
- 7) He imitated ibn Gabirol's verse - "The years of my life's longings - my youth is vain" - in his poem beginning " ^{לִי שָׁנִים בְּיָדֵי} " which is very similar in language and content. See too in his " ^{אֶתְּנֶנָּה לַאֲדָמָה} " and " ^{אֶתְּנֶנָּה לַאֲדָמָה} ", vid. Dr. Simchoni on ibn Gabirol in "Hatekufah" XVII, p.276, Note 2.
- 8) Simchoni - ibid p. 294.
- 9) Luzzatto, Divan 13, 2: Harkavi II, 146.
- 10) Brody II, 143; Harkavi II, 144.

"For thou art a captive and the world is a prison." 11)

The permanent abode of the soul is in the world to come, where life is everlasting. To the attainment of that immortality the soul must aspire and yearn. Therefore it should not pursue temporary materialism:

"Seek for thy soul the inheritance which will
be forever thine
And leave that which thou wilt bequeath". 12)

The soul must not only separate itself from the ^{vach} ~~hard~~ material world, but must also aspire to the world of good deeds and learning, and must exalt and purify itself. The soul in this guise - as a radiated spirit - is a very high conception, but it will become still higher when it draws near to God and dwells on high:

"Thou, my soul, art fair, whilst thou art within me
And thou art pleasant to me this day when thou
standest before the Lord, my Redeemer". 13)

For that is, after all, the ultimate aim of the soul, to return to its perpetual dwelling place, the higher, spiritual world. Halevi comes back to the idea that the soul is a beautiful ~~concept~~ even in this world, but the difference between the soul and the body is as the difference between light and darkness; for the soul aspires to eternal life:

11) Brody - Albracht Shaar Hashir, p.105.

12) Brody II, 248, Harkavi II, 143.

13) Luzzatto, Divan II; Harkavi II, 141.

"The precious one abiding in her body,
 As light abideth in deep darkness -
 Longeth she not to separate from the body,
 And return to the majesty of her trappings?"¹⁴⁾

It aspires to eternal life not only because that is its true world, its promised Garden of Eden, but also because it is there that it will receive recompense for its sufferings in this world.

"For she shall eat in the day of her separation
 The fruit of her law - and this is the fruit thereof."¹⁵⁾

Naturally, then, if the soul really aspires to a happy life in the world to come, it must perfect itself in this world by good deeds, learning, and the adoration of God.

But, as we have said, Halevi's was essentially a Jewish soul, and his God was the God of Israel. His religious poetry is therefore full of the idea of the relationship between God and the community of Israel. He gave noble expression to the firm devotion of Israel to God in the misery of Exile, and to Israel's unswerving confidence and perfect faith in the fulfilment of His divine promise. But, on the other hand, the poet described with the sympathy of affliction all the tragedy and terror of his people; lamenting the depressing squalor and humiliation of their plight. His scruples forbade him to cry out against Heaven and to protest against his Creator, but one cannot altogether miss the impression of protest, when making a careful study of these religious poems in which he describes

¹⁴⁾ H. Brody, *Anthologia Hebraica*, 154; *Harkavi II*, 139-140.

¹⁵⁾ *ibid*; *ibid* 140.

Israel's grievance. His submission to God and his deep humility make it sometimes appear as if he is justifying His divine purpose:

"Enough for me is the glory of Thy name.
That is my portion alone from all my labour.
Increase the sorrow - I shall love but more,¹⁶⁾
For wonderful is Thy love to me;"

while sometimes he tries to accept suffering with resignation, and even to love his people's oppressors, inasmuch as they are merely the instruments of Providence -

"My foes have learnt Thy anger - and I will love them
For they oppress the victims whom Thou hast smitten
On the day when Thou didst scorn me - I scorned myself,¹⁷⁾
For I cannot honour him whom Thou didst scorn;"

But, truth to tell, this attitude does not signify his acceptance of the verdict of history or his reconciliation with Exile, nor anything more than his unbounded faith in God. The evidence for this conclusion lies in his other poems, from which it is clear that while he always reposed his faith in God, and waited for the ultimate miracles which He would perform, he yet pleaded the nation's cause before its Lord, and placed its boon before Him, unceasingly stressing the injustice suffered by Israel.

"And wherefore hast thou sold me forever to them that
enslave me?"¹⁸⁾

"How dost thou abandon me as to-day, in the pit of
affliction alone?"¹⁹⁾

"My Redeemer, to redeem my multitudes
Rise and look forth from Thine abiding-place."²⁰⁾

¹⁶⁾ Harkavi I, 57. Brody, Anthologia Hebraica, 170.

¹⁷⁾ Harkavi I, 61-62, vid. Luzzatto's interesting comment there.
Brody Anthologia Hebraica, 169.

¹⁸⁾ Brody III, 4; Harkavi I, 55.

¹⁹⁾ ibid, 42; ibid 56.

²⁰⁾ Harkavi I, 57, Brody Anthologia Hebraica, 169.

"Will the Lord reject forever?
 "Is there no end to the appointed times (of suffering)
 in the vision (of the prophets and Daniel?"²¹⁾

There are many passages which show that ~~not~~ Halevi, the poet of faith and orthodoxy was far from reconciling himself to the Exile and its misery, and never ceased to long for liberation. Hence his religious poetry and his national poetry are inextricably bound together.

6. NATIONAL POETRY.

The national poetry of Jehudah Halevi concentrates on two themes; emphasis of the evils of exile, and the yearning for the Land of Israel. There is not a single poem in which we find him speaking of the good points about life in the Diaspora. In view of the conditions of his time, this omission is extremely significant, for his period was a time of prosperity for the Jews in Spain, who enjoyed full political rights and occupied very high positions in social and communal life. It was, according to common definition, the Golden Age of Hebrew literature, and cultural achievement. The gates of Spain's intellectual life were wide open to Jewish thinkers, and many, including Halevi himself, attained the highest rank of cultural distinction in their day. For all this, Halevi does not find it necessary to stress a single positive aspect of life in the Diaspora. He even

21) Brody IV. 69. Harkavi I, 66.

passes over in silence all the Hebrew literature of his own land, both in grammatical research and in poetry and philosophy. It is only of the darker side of the life of the Dispersion that he deigns to speak at all.

The Diaspora is for him "a pit of captivity"¹⁾ or "a pit of oppression";²⁾ and his life amongst Gentiles is like "swelling between an asp and a scorpion, in a prison house;"³⁾ He prays that the right hand of God may bring redemption to Israel "and redeem Thy captive from the house of bondage and deliver him".⁴⁾ Israel is a captive and his exile - "a house of bondage" exactly as in Egypt of old. Therefore it is no wonder that the people longs to be freed from its dungeon and yearns for liberty; but the nation remains a "prisoner of hope".⁵⁾ Its longing is keen, its desire is earnest, but the wait is protracted and the agony is beyond endurance:

"O cup of sorrow! gently! hold a while! already
my loins are filled, yea, and my soul with bitterness."⁶⁾

And this long agony gives rise to a dread fear - lest the people come to despair and even to forget Zion. In the most terrible moments of national suffering the poet himself falls into this mood of depression, and groans from the depth of his heart:

- 1) Brody II, 157; Harkavi I, 13.
- 2) Brody III, 42; Harkavi I, 56.
- 3) ibid 20; ibid II, 20.
- 4) ibid 42; ibid I, 56.
- 5) ibid 4; ibid 55.
- 6) ibid II, 157; ibid I, 13.

"My heart will despair at the rising of dawn,
Hoping for tomorrow, and then the morrow -
O, Thou who lovest me, what shall I say afterwards?"⁷⁾

Then he recalls the promise "Ye will be saved in peace and tranquility". Patience is necessary. A people's redemption is not built in a day, nor does it depend alone on the will of the people that aspires to liberation, since external political conditions can have a decisive effect. Therefore, he suggests that one must submit patiently to cruel necessity, which is only a temporary thing, and ~~one must~~ accept misfortune with good grace, never forsaking the ultimate aspiration to freedom. Nor is there any ground for the belief⁸⁾ that Jehudah Halevi was reconciled to Exile and to the idea of being perpetually homeless. The idea is for him preposterous. His intention is not to induce the nation to resign itself to exile, but to stir it up to renewed hopes - and "though ^(redemption) it be delayed, it will surely come". God's words to Israel ring out boldly:

"Let thy heart be strong - and wait for thine appointed time
Wherefore compest thou the time of the end of captivity
and art in turmoil?
Be strong; speak words of song; speak forth!
For Oholibah is thy name and my tent is in the midst of the
Scorn the words of mockers, although they roar them forth,
Gently lead thy flock - and walk gently with it".⁹⁾

And when he portrays the terrible misery of exile, the poet reveals a subtle understanding of human feeling. In the frenzy

7) *ibid* III, 20. *ibid* II, 20.

8) S.I. Ish-Horowitz. *Heathid* - Vol. I. pp.86, 91.

9) Harkavi I - pp. 57-58; *ibid*, p.73, (*הַיְּהוּדִים בְּעֵינֵי הַיְּהוּדִים*)

of his wrath he comes to believe that when the peak of suffering is reached ~~and the agony is prolonged~~, the path of freedom and redemption will lie open; and he calls out in his rage:

"Offer thy cheeks to them that pluck out the hair,
withdraw not thy face from spittle.
Perchance in the heaviness of sorrow/violence will be
assuaged.
Be thou a sister to the ostriches and a comrade to jackals
Make thine heart as the night, and clothe thyself in gloom
and walk gently." 10)

Then surely the nation's God will no longer contain Himself, but will remember how He has dealt with His chosen people, and will again shew mercy to them as of old. Therefore one must trust in God; and the poet's rage which had been at white heat gradually abates

"Be calm and trust in God. Not forever is the poor man
forsaken;
For he turneth away only for favour, so as not to make
an utter end
Until the time cometh for Israel, when God will give
salvation from Zion.
Then wilt thou be drawn with the bonds of love from
the pit of Exile." 11)

This is no compromise or resignation to the state of Exile; but it emphasises still further the connection between Halevi's national and religious poetry. It was his ~~perfect~~ belief that if the Exile was the will of God and the result of His work, then it must be accepted; but at the same time, he is quite confident that God will fulfil His promise to His people, and therefore one should hope for salvation, even though it be long

10) Brody III, 187; Harkavi I, 15.

11) *ibid*, *ibid*; *ibid*, *ibid*.

delayed:

"Prepare thyself for the end - and if it be delayed,
Know that I have not exchanged thee for another people,
Thou hast chosen Me; thee also do I choose". 12)

It is only on a few isolated occasions that he expresses the notion of temporary reconciliation with the actuality of Exile in accordance with his orthodox religious outlook. The greater part of Halevi's national poetry speaks only of the hope of redemption and he continually prays to the nation's tutelary God that He may speed the end of exile:

"Is there beside thee a redeemer, or, beside me, a
captive of hope?" 13)

"Right hand of God! Thou wert my help
How dost thou betray me this day in the pit of
affliction alone." 14)

and again: -

"Let thy favour pass to me, even as Thy wrath hath passed;
Shall mine iniquity forever stand between me and Thee?
How long shall I search for Thee beside me and find
Thee not?" 15)

and

"I prithee, bring near the time of my redemption
From the hands of the daughter of Edom
Who hath gnashed her teeth against me". 16)

He even declares that the length of the Exile has passed all limits and any further protraction of it is inconceivable;

"She deemed a thousand years would be the limit of her
set time,
But she is ashamed of all whereon she counted". 17)

12) *ibid* III, 21; *ibid* II, 21.

13) *ibid*, 4; *ibid* I, 55.

14) *ibid*, 42; *ibid* 56.

15) Harkavi I, 57. Brody, *Anthologia Hebraica*, 169.

16) Luzzatto, *Divan*, 15-16; Harkavi I, 59.

17) Luzzatto, *Divan*, 16. Harkavi I, 60.

And like parched Mother-Earth waiting for the heavy rain to irrigate her and make her fertile, so does Israel await the rain of redemption and salvation, but it comes not:

"Wilt thou be as an enemy to her, since she
Openeth wide her mouth for the rain of Thy salvation?" 18)

In his prayer to God he declares it to be unthinkable that Israel, who was created for the worship of God, should be the servant and subject of other nations of the world:

"Wherefore have masters possessed us when Thou art my
portion?" 19)

And the exile is long - endlessly long. But the yearning for redemption does not flag. He seeks a vision but it is denied him.

"Since there is no miracle and no sign, no vision, no sight
And should I ask to behold when shall be the "end" of
these wonders,

The prophecies answer: Thou hast asked a hard thing". 20)

He continues to entreat his Creator; and although the "end" of the mysteries is hidden and unknown, the poet does not cease enquiring after it:

"Then why standeth He afar off that dwelleth in the skies,
While my ruler oppresseth, and my beloved is afar, 21)
And so for the end of days - verily one asketh!"

Can such a terrible situation endure for long? Will not the "end" come of the visions of redemption which he dreams? -

"Will the Lord reject forever?
Is there no end to the time appointed in the visions
(of the prophets) for me." 22)

18) Luzzatto *ibid*; Harkavi, *ibid*.

19) Luzzatto, *Divan*, 17; Harkavi I, 61.

20) Brody IV, 68. Harkavi I, 65; and also II, 23.

21) *ibid* IV, 68; *ibid* I, 68. 22) *ibid*, 69; *ibid*.

And so Halevi is forced to the conviction that the Jewish people has no place in the world except in Palestine. He asks:

"Have we either in the east or in the west 23)
A place of hope wherein we may trust?"

There is not other place but that country which "He ordained for us and for our children". It may be that these words contain the first expression of a post-exilic Hebrew nationalism. There is no prospect for Israel's existence in Exile, and no hope or purpose in any existence away from the nation's home, for only in its historic homeland would it be able to live its true national life. It is therefore not difficult to understand his indignation against the alien dwellers of Palestine, who conquered it from time to time and brought it nothing but desolation. Not only were they themselves careless of its welfare and development, but they even begrudged the presence of the country's genuine sons, the children of Israel. The Arabs, who ruled Palestine, are according to tradition, the descendants of Ishmael, the son of the handmaid Hagar; and the poet taunts them:

"Do slaves sit now upon thy prince's throne?" 24)

The alien conquerors he regards as "thorns" and "thistles",²⁵⁾ for they had done nothing to prevent complete desolation and ruin.

23) *ibid* II, 165; *ibid*, 17-18.

24) Brody II, 156; Harkavi I, 12.

25) *ibid*, 165; *ibid*, 18.

It is not only against the Arabs that he shouts angry defiance. He falls foul of the Christians too, for they also had dealt harshly with Israel:

"I prithee, bring near the time of my redemption
From the hands of the daughter of Edom, who hath
gnashed her teeth against me." 26)

And in another poem, he attacks both Arabs and Christians, and prays for deliverance and liberation from both:

"Shall she that was undefiled go ever with uncovered locks?
A contempt and appalment to Mizzah and Shammah?
Lo the bondwoman's son hath spread terror for me." 27)

the agony of Exile is fearful, and the oppression of the persecutor knows no bounds; so the poet calls for vengeance - the destruction of his foes and adversaries:

"And requite upon them that reproached me a recompense
for my sorrow.
With dew of salvation descend upon him that feareth and
trembleth,
And bring low from his throne the bold son of the
bondwoman". 28)

They were days of Messianic enthusiasm when rumours flew around of the imminent redemption of Israel. The poet saw liberation drawing near, but he was not content with that alone. The oppressors of Israel must be requited for their sins against Israel:

"Rouse thyself to return to the Land of Beauty
And to sadden the plain of Edom and Ishmael.
Lay waste in wrath the house of the robbers
And throw open the house of love to thy lovers". 29)

26) Luzzatto 15-16; Harkavi I, 59.

27) Brody IV, 67; Harkavi I, 65. Mizzah & Shammah were Edomites
grandsons of Esau (Gen. 36,13.)

28) ibid. 69; ibid 67.
grandsons of Esau (Gen. 36,13.)

28) ibid, 69; ibid 67.

29) Luzzatto Divan 2, Harkavi I, 74-75; vid. Luzzatto's comments.

Thus on the day of redemption, God will be both a God of Mercy and a God of Vengeance - shewing mercy to Israel and vengeance to the other peoples:

"It will come to pass on the day of payment and recompense,
that I will deal differently between thee and between the
nations.

There will be rain of vengeance and the dew of mercy;
My pleasure and benediction will be thy dew,
And My wrath will be theirs". 30)

This prayer does not signify the poet's vengeful wish to injure others. For him it is purely a question of requital for the wrong which the nations have inflicted upon Israel:

"Edom was a dweller in my palace
And the hands of Arabs ruled as the son of Edom
And they oppressed me with the dogs of my flocks
And my name which had been a by-word
Was turned to scorn on the lips of strangers
As they vaunted themselves over me in my dreams" 31)

In his mind's eye he sees the end of Arab rule, as the punishment for the torture they had inflicted on Israel:

"Say ye to the son of Hagar; Remove thy proud hand
From the son of thy mistress whom thou hast
subjected". 32)

There is another side to the problem - the sanctity of Palestine in the eyes of Halevi. The sacred sentiment which he attaches to Palestine is violated and flouted by its alien inhabitants who pay no heed to the land but leave it in its desolation, or even increase the wreckage, preventing its true sons, the children of Israel, from seeking its welfare and making it flourish once again. It is hardly surprising that

30) Brody III, 14; Harkavi II, 19;
31) Brody III, 20; Harkavi II, 20.
32) ibid II, 302; ibid II, 61.

a poet who sees in the foreign nations the chief factor in the violation of Palestine's holiness, should wish them ill. And it is worth while examining Halevi's attitude to Palestine in a special light and in connection with his attitude to Gentiles.

Perhaps the word "attitude" is meaningless in this context for it expresses nothing of his passionate love for the country. He lived the life of the Holy Land while he still sojourned in the Exile.

"My heart is in the East and I in the uttermost West".³³⁾ And neither Halevi nor his poetry can be imagined without Palestine. He is a poet of Zion in a strange land: "To weep for thy misery I am as a jackal". And he is pre-eminently the poet of the future redemption ("When I dream of the return of thy captivity, I am as a harp for thy songs").³⁴⁾ This feeling emanates not only from his desire to see the nation freed and the land rebuilt, but also from his religious sentiment of which Palestine was an important part.

"Beautiful of elevation! Joy of the world! City of
The Great King!"

Jerusalem was once all these. And even now her sanctity is not dispelled though her temporal glory is eclipsed.

"I have sought thee even though thy King be not in thee
And though in place of Thy Gilead's balm are now the
fiery serpent and scorpion.

Shall I not be tender to thy stones and kiss them
And the taste of thy soil be sweeter than honey unto me?"³⁵⁾

33) Brody II, 155; Harkavi I, 7.

34) ibid II, 156, ibid I, 11.

35) ibid 168; ibid I, 7.

The land is in ruins and its Temple overthrown, but the glory of God has not departed from it and His presence still abides in its midst:

"There the Presence abideth in thee; yea, there
thy Maker
Opened thy gates to face the gates of heaven". 36)

The land is holy because it is the place where the Hebrew Kings ruled and the Prophets had their visions, where the Patriarchs were buried, and Moses and Aaron were laid to rest.³⁷⁾ It was there that the Temple had stood, and the Ark of the Covenant reposed till the day of redemption might come, the memories of political power and religious exaltation are united and interwoven in that country, endowing it with special sanctity.

His friends in Egypt urged him to remain there, saying that it, too, was a holy land, for Moses and Aaron were born there, the cloud of God's Presence had dwelt in its midst, and great miracles had been accomplished, so that Egypt was a land of great and honourable sanctity. To all these representations he makes answer:

"For I know that higher the Divine presence turned aside
Like a wayfarer, to the shade of the oak and the
terebinth,
But in Salem and Zion it is like one home-born,
For there is the Torah, there the greatness,
The abode of judgment, the abode of mercy,
And there may a man hope for reward of his toil".³⁸⁾

36) *ibid* II, 156; *ibid* I, 11.

37) According to Halevi's words in verse 15
of the poem mentioned here.

38) *ibid* I, 181; *ibid* I, 53.

Halevi, more than anyone else in his time, was obsessed with the idea that only in Palestine and Jerusalem could God's Presence abide. He must also have felt, though he did not say so explicitly, that the spirit of national creativeness and poetry and thought could only thrive temporarily in Exile. Even God's Presence only appears in exile as a passing guest. He is not in agreement with the dictum of the Talmud:³⁹⁾

"Whithersoever Israel went into exile, the Divine Presence accompanied them". God's presence is indeed omnipresent, but His essential Divinity has not left the Wailing Wall,⁴⁰⁾ its fixed, eternal abode. It is hardly surprising then that this country, embodying both a religious sanctity which still pervades it, and a political greatness of bygone days, evokes both a keen religious yearning and a national ambition.

Such are the sentiments which inspire Halevi's poetry. To-day when the concept of nationality has received a wider content and a greater clarity (though is it also more complex), it is difficult to differentiate between the religious and the national aspect in many of Halevi's poems. But it is scarcely necessary to do so. With him religion and nationality were of one substance. His religious poems contain lofty national poetry and his national poems reveal Israel's affectionate clinging to the Father in Heaven, so that his poetry is at once

39) Megillah, 29a.

40) Shemoth-Rabbah, ch. 2.

national and religious.

Israel, tormented and oppressed, never forgot, according to Halevi, its ancient homeland, and after the nation was scattered like flocks of sheep through the world, the homeland became the centre of its ambition:

"They, who ~~shall~~ grasp thy skirts and strengthen themselves
To go up and take hold of the boughs of thy palms", 41)

Israel always longed for Zion, even when unable actually to "grasp her skirts" and "take hold of the boughs of her palms". Even if hard material conditions prevented Israel from realising ^{the} ~~her~~ hope of restoration by an actual return to ~~the~~ Palestine, yet, at least:

✓(the daughter
of Judah) "She^v standeth afar off, worshipping toward
Thy temple from every place whither she is exiled.
The words of her entreaty she sendeth, an offering
to Thee,
While she hangeth her heart and her eyes upon Thy
throne". 42)

Wherever the children of Israel are scattered they send their supplication to Zion:

"They aspire to Thy habitation with prayer and exultation
And like prisoners in a dungeon they hope for liberty". 43)

It is wrong to believe that because there is a religious colour to Halevi's national poetry, his aspirations to regain Palestine is also purely religious, and is confined to a desire for the renewal of a religious life. He was indeed possessed of deep

41) Brody II, 158; Harkavi I, 13.

42) *ibid* III, 144; *ibid* I, 63.

43) Harkavi II, 17.

religious feeling and it cannot be doubted that he regarded the renewal of religious life as the most exalted purpose of Israel. But it must be remembered that the religious life of the Hebrews in antiquity was inseparable from their national life. Religious festivals were national festivals as well, and the King played a definite role in them. Many political developments occurred during days of feast and solemn assembly. Even the Temple which was, to all intents and purposes, the centre of Israel's religious life served also as a national rallying-point. While the ambitions and longings of the Hebrew people from the beginning of the Exile find their highest expression in prayers and religious poems, yet at the same time, Hebrew prayers and sacred poetry are the very means of giving voice to the powerful national impulse for political freedom. So it was with the poetry of Jehudah Halevi. It was pre-eminently in his work that the desire for national freedom was revealed with supreme dignity - not only because he was himself supreme amongst Hebrew poets, but also because he understood that Jewish renaissance did not mean visiting and worshipping at the graves of the Patriarchs, but a real revival and a practical realisation of it in actual life. He puts these words in the mouth of God:

"While thou dost tread the heights of hope, thy hope will
not be disappointed.
If amongst ye the pledge of brotherhood is broken - my
love is inviolate.
Unto my house the goodly daughter will return as in the
days of her youth;

And I will despatch a cherub of salvation to seek peace
for thee". 44)

The God of Israel will not break His promise, but will fulfil it entirely, and make Israel a nation as of old, living peacefully on its land, while God Himself "seeks out peace" for the people.⁴⁵⁾

God will bring His people to their peace and their inheritance, and will build up their land anew and raise up its ruins. "To bequeath desolate inheritances and on the top thereof a city will arise".⁴⁶⁾ The poet does not satisfy himself with ^{the} establishing ^{ment of} a Jewish settlement in Palestine, but he also aspires to the full establishment of a political State and the revival of the Kingdom. "Again, O God, lend Thy hand, to renew an ancient Kingdom".⁴⁷⁾ And the poet exhorts the Jews in exile to liberation and freedom. The Diaspora to him is "the grave of ambition" devoid of prospect or purpose - a mere prison for Israel, unlike the Homeland wherein they are to find peace and the final solution of their religious and national life.

So Halevi raises the cry for a new Exodus from "Egypt", and calls for an immigration to rebuild Palestine, in words charged with deep national significance:

44) Brody IV, 7; Harkavi I, 10.

45) *ibid*; *ibid* 9.

46) *ibid*, *ibid*. 10.

47) *ibid*, 4; *ibid* II, 12.

"Wherefore, children of God, will ye lie buried in the
 graves of ambition?
 Surely your soul is sated with the bread of mighty men,
 even on "days of fasting"
 Here is atonement to cure a sick heart; - - -
 "Go out from the house of bondage to the house of
 final Hope.
 Your loins girded; your feet shod". 48)

The Jewish people would find its proper course of history and the surest resting-place in Palestine, the land of its origin. The Diaspora is the "house of bondage" and only Palestine represents the "ultimate hope" of a complete national resurgence.

Jeremiah, the Prophet, had been not only "a jackal" to bewail his people's misery, but also at times a "harp" to sound the note of redemption and liberation, calling on his people to "set thee up way-marks, make thee guide-posts, set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest; turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these, thy cities" (XXXI, 20 et seq.) -. Jehudah Halevi, too, followed this prophetic tradition. He calls upon Israel to return to the homeland and stirs them up for redemption:

"Turn unto thy nest, unto the road towards thy tent,
 Even unto Zion; and set a way mark for thee.
 Thy Lover Who exiled thee for thy evil deeds
 He it is that redeemeth thee this day.
 And what will thy response be?
 Stand ready to return to thy glorious land!" 49)

48) Brody III, 299; Harkavi II, 32.

49) Luzzatto, Divan 2. Harkavi, I, 74.

Halevi's national poetry, then, was full of Palestine, which alone was the ultimate hope of Israel. The longing for it was expressed in Messianic yearnings, in the hope of redemption and the aspiration to freedom. as well as in words of admonition and rebuke to the nation - and, as a result of all these- a call for actual pilgrimage to the land of the past, in order to realise the vision of generations which had yearned for national revival.

7. SUMMARY.

Having analysed Halevi's poetry into its various categories and departments, we are in a position to pass a general judgment on the contribution made to Israel by Halevi's personality and poetry. Is there truth in his own estimate - "I am a jackal to bewail thy misery, and when I dream of the return of thy captivity, I am a harp to thy songs". Is it accurate to designate him as the greatest national poet since the Prophets?

Moses ibn Ezra, when asked to express his opinion on the nature of poetry, replied that "there was nothing in the world, apart from the books of prophecy, in which the critic could not find a blemish and the enquirer detect a fault. For the nature of created things is founded on defects and their composition is determined by shortcomings. Happy is the man whose beautiful words exceed his inferior words". 1)

1) Shirath Israel (Hebrew Poetry). Transl. by B. Halper. p.81.

This verdict of a mediaeval poet is fundamentally valid to this day. In our estimate of Halevi's poetry we have not deliberately looked for errors; if we do so at all it is not to prove that even a poet of his stature reveals certain defects and unwelcome influences, but purely in order to pursue a line of scientific inquiry which forbids us to disregard them. The end is not the quest for lapses, but the true appreciation of the virtues and qualities of his poetry. In fact the defects which have been noted do not lower the stature of his poetry, significant as they are. We have observed that he, like his contemporaries, was exposed, perhaps against his will, to the influence of Arabic poetry, with its rigid rules which often restricted and often burdened his verse. Both in style and in language he fought against the conventional barriers of contemporary literature and, to some extent, prevailed over them. But sometimes he was caught up and swept along in the currents which flowed into the Hebrew poetry of his age.

Then, again, in his songs of praise and friendship, although they surpassed the work of other poets in this sphere, he was unable to avoid exaggeration in his estimate of people to whom he dedicated those poems. Exaggeration was an Oriental trait, and excessive eulogy was in the spirit of the age, and Halevi, influenced by the culture of the East at that time, wrote accordingly. The same applies to many of his love songs - or,

more accurately, his bridal songs and poems of desire. We have observed that many of these lacked naturalness, and that sometimes the traces of imitation are plain, while many seemed to be written "to order", and lack genuine feeling. Others suffer from the repetition of metaphors and similes, again a frequent characteristic of 12th century poetry. In many instances, Halevi's songs of desire merely trod the path of stereotyped convention.

These are failings which should not be overlooked. But they should not be judged without reference to the literature of the time and to the taste of his generation. A scientific survey of Halevi's poetry must be made, not through the spectacles of our own age with its special standards of taste, but rather through the prism of history. From these considerations of time and place it emerges that Halevi, with all his imperfections on his head, is still superior to all his fellow poets. We have remarked on M. ibn Ezra's correct definition of the scope of criticism. Beyond all doubt, our own taste and aesthetic instinct are far different from those of the Spanish period. But if we set the poetry of Halevi, which, according to modern taste, has several faults, against the works of other poets of his time, we find that in every respect he surpasses them. He fought for individuality in language and style, even though he was influenced by his predecessors and often followed their

own linguistic conventions. And in this conflict, he generally prevailed, and by his powerful poetic talent he even contrived ~~by~~ ^{to} adapting to his own will the burdensome rules which weighed upon his verse. Amongst his poems of praise and friendship, we have noticed the entire absence of hypocritical eulogies, even though he did not escape from the tendency to magnify and exaggerate. It was observed that this immunity ~~was~~ ^{was} derived not only from his personal virtue, but also from his private conditions of life; but the facts remain as they are, whatever the cause and Halevi's supremacy in this field is clearly established.

What then of his love poetry? It is true that he was walking in well-trodden paths when he composed his songs of nuptials and desire. But in his real love-songs, which occupy an important place in his poetry, we find much that can still be read with ~~unbounded~~ pleasure. He portrays not only the subjects of love and those affected with it, but the actual concept of Love itself, and we have seen that he remained a love poet to the end of his days.

His nature poems are few, but quantity is no poetic criterion. We have observed that in his nature poetry Halevi revealed a versatile talent. He had a penetrating eye and a heart that was sensitive to all the various natural phenomena which are described with wonderful vividness in his poems.

The very nature of Nature is transmitted in a most inspired way.

His religious poetry was influenced by Biblical literature and pervaded by its spirit, but this does not imply any lack of originality on his part. Despite the Biblical influence, his religious poems not merely have an individuality of their own, but often approach the lofty heights of Biblical poetry itself. This was not only because he was filled with religious emotions derived from the old Jewish traditions, but also because he made noble use of his own poetic and imaginative gifts. His heart was responsive to the Divine manifestations of Nature, and bound up inseparably with his people's God to Whom he looked in loving devotion all his days. His religious poetry, in addition to his Kitab al Khazari, teaches us much about his Jewish outlook and his conception of Jewish life, so that it is inseparably connected with his national poetry. In Israel's communion with God are expressed not only the mutual love between God and people and the perfect faith in the world-Creator and national Guardian, but also a deep, silent sorrow amounting almost to indignation against Heaven; and even an echo of irrepressible protest can occasionally be discerned. The religious lament is turned almost into a national lament. These poems are marked by humility and self-deprecation as well as by protests and grievances which,^{as} it were, force their way to the Heavenly tribunal.

And so we come to Halevi's national poetry - a most difficult problem for scientific solution. Is national poetry possible amongst a people in Exile? The question is ancient: "How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land"?²⁾ asked the captives in Babylon when their conquerors demanded: "Sing us a song of Zion". Real folk-song is possible, as a rule, in a people's homeland, and not in countries of Exile which lack the necessary institutions and conditions for real national culture. In addition to lack of freedom, divorcement from the national soil and remoteness from normal, natural life, the Exile involves perpetual paralysis of creative faculties, the lack of spontaneous activity and ^{an} inability to contemplate the beauty of the World, owing to the blunting of natural instincts. How then can any exalted folk-poetry grow on such parched soil? A poet in the ^{home} ~~native~~ of his people draws his poetic sustenance from the fountains of creative life. The surrounding atmosphere provides rich natural material for his song. Very different is the case of a poet without a homeland, whose only motives can be the expression of perpetual sorrow and indignation against the realities of Exile ~~along~~ ^{and} with the exhortation to redemption. In the words of Halevi himself, he can be a "jackal" or a "harp".

2) Psalms 137, 4.

Halevi, indeed, according to his own testimony, filled both of these roles. His song was both of Exile and Redemption, and in each case he reached a summit of success. But his "exilic" poetry possesses no message or value in its own right. It did not spring from any love of the Exile or any belief in its necessity. We have signified that Halevi's poetry never shows us a silver lining in the cloud of Exile, even though his age has been termed the "Aurea Aetas" of Judaism. Halevi saw none of this radiance, and found no subject for song in it. This is not because there was no light to be seen, but because Halevi felt it to be a fleeting, transient thing: hence his exilic poetry is but the origin and motive of his poetry of redemption, and the means towards his national song of Zion. His exilic poetry serves as the storehouse of his people's trials and sufferings, degradation and misery: the conclusion of all these poems is on a note of hope and expectation. Thus, although the poet bewails the trials of his people in Exile - his subject in his exilic poetry is not so much the present as the past and the future. The past reminds him of his people's greatness of old, a greatness now stolen from it; and the future involves the restoration of that greatness in all its pristine fulness.

Halevi fought against the present. He regarded the life of Exile as a transient phenomenon, without a future of its own,

except insofar as it served as a preparation for the future in the land of freedom. Therefore, he declares war against the Exile, and particularly against the exilic mentality, which he regards as a worse enemy of the people even than the actual troubles of exile, which, after all, would lose their bitterness as soon as the desire for redemption was sufficiently aroused. Halevi in his own age fought against the Jewish mentality of the time of the Second Temple, when the Children of Israel were reluctant to leave their exile because "they would not be parted from their abodes and their affairs"³⁾. He regarded this attitude as an acceptance of the actuality of exile, and an acknowledgement of the values created there - an attitude whose outcome is to despair of the redemption that is to ~~come~~^{follow}. Halevi was a fervent opponent of Exile, and the cry of redemption was always on his lips.

The national feeling in his poetry is not only expressed in his protest against exile and slavery, but also in the form of his poetry, his Hebrew diction, his Biblical imagery, and metaphor. The Biblical spirit determines the national tone of his poetry and opens up wide horizons for a poetic tradition which serves as a continuation of the ancient song of Israel in the homeland.

3) Al-Khazari 11, 24.

These are not the only points of distinction in his national poetry. In the ~~motives~~^{emotional feelings and} contents of his poetry there are many national 'motifs'. He was one of the greatest dreamers since Israel's dispersion and he not only expressed the agony and torment of the nation in Exile, but also dreamed of revival and liberation. He was more than a dreamer; he was a practical warrior for his ideas, and his journey to Palestine showed him as an example and symbol to others in the fulfilment of the 'commandment' to dwell in Palestine. His dreams and struggles, his hopes and aspirations are all embodied in his poetry. Unlimited patriotism, compassion, sympathy, indignation, doubts and hesitations, as well as faith, hope and encouragement, pervade his song. Halevi alone was both the "jackal" to mourn his people's woe, and the "harp" to sing their dreams of redemption and hope.

The form and structure of his poems no less than their actual subject matter entitle him to rank high in the national culture, for in this respect, too, he was in a class of his own. Many poets of his own and later times became his imitators, but their efforts were in vain and "all who trod in his footsteps", says R.I. Alharizi,⁴⁾ "in order to learn the craft of his poetry, did not even reach the dust of his chariot; and all poets bore

4) Tachkemoni. Ed. Kaminka, III, p.44.

his sayings abroad and kissed his feet". And Alharizi writes;

"Many ran after him, and availed not
To find his way; and they knew not his paths". (ibid.)

In another place he writes that in Damascus he found people who plagiarised and imitated the great poets (Halevi and ibn Gabirol) and spoilt their poetry; "Some there are who steal the poetry of R. Jehudah Halevi and R. Solomon ibn Gabirol, and alter their content and destroy their metres, and add new words, and strip off the garments of embroidered work and clothe them in mean raiment".⁵⁾

The poet and the artist in him coalesced into one, and gave him this supremacy over other post-Exilic poets. But there was another factor in his eminence. The spirit of sanctity derived from the Bible, his loving devotion to his people, his special appreciation of Israel's religious treasures, enabled him to evoke ~~on~~ the most sensitive emotions of the nation and to interweave its sorrow and its hope into the fabric of his verse, giving them their deepest ~~and most genuine~~ expression. This was an accomplishment beyond the capacity of his predecessors and successors. He had his imitators,⁶⁾ as we have said; and sometimes when we read their verse we seem to recognise Halevi in it. But there remains a vast gulf which they could not bridge. Halevi's national poetry is unique in its class; and just as it was the

5) ibid XVIII, p.187.

6) e.g. ~~the~~ Rabbi Meir of Rutenberg in his lament on the burning of the Scrolls of Law; vid. Brody: "An Anthology of Hebrew Poetry", pp.295-296.

echo of Israel's yearning for redemption and future revival during his own lifetime, so it was for future generations, down to our own times. It is the kind of song which is uttered once and can never be repeated by anyone in the same form. The traditional song of national mourning, the Book of Lamentations, has become a national masterpiece - not only because of its rich content and style, but chiefly because of its expression of the people's deepest emotions. The same is true of Halevi's song "Zion, wilt thou not greet -". Perhaps someone could write a similar poem, which despite imitation could be a successful work. But a poem with the same profound and stirring effects upon the Jewish mind, requires the art of another Halevi.

Poetry of this sort is written but once in generations, and remains the heritage of posterity, never ceasing to express the national feeling, and serving as an unfailing source of an undying hope.

In the poetry of Jehudah Halevi an emotional force and an effortless artistry are combined; and over both there hovers the holy spirit of ^{his} ~~the~~ people's history.

It is therefore with justice that Halevi is regarded as Israel's great national poet.

IV. HALEVI'S OUTLOOK ON JUDAISM AND JEWISH LIFE.

Halevi's ideas on Judaism and Jewish life can be deduced not only from his poems, but rather more systematically from his book, *Kitab-al-Khazari*,¹⁾ which served as a reply to certain polemical works directed against the Jewish religion.²⁾

When we try to examine Halevi's "Weltanschauung" it is important to study first the distinction he drew between Israel and other nations. What, if anything, distinguishes this people from others, and what place does it occupy in human history?

1. Israel.

Halevi's thesis is that the "Godliness" of the divine manifestations in the lower world expresses itself in a degree relative to the self-perfection of the various earthly creatures; and that the higher the perfection of humanity, the greater and the more perceptible is the contact between the Creator and His creatures: "For the Divine influence, one might say, singles out him who appears worthy of being connected with it, such as prophets and pious men, and is their God. Reason chooses those whose natural gifts are perfect, such as philosophers, and those whose souls and characters are so harmonious that it can find its

1) Translated from the Arabic, by Hartwig Hirschfeld, London 1905
 2) Vid. I. Behr's "The Political Situation of Spanish Jewry in the Time of Jehudah Halevi"; "Zion", Vol. I. No. 1, p.8.

dwelling among them."³⁾ Or, as he writes elsewhere: "The Divine influence is as the rain which waters an area - if deserving of it."⁴⁾ Nevertheless, this contact has various degrees - from the earth to the plant, from the plant to the man, and from the man to the perfection of humanity - "the pure essence of humanity" -⁵⁾ by which he means the prophets and pious men. As an example he cites the Patriarch Abraham, who was transferred from Mesopotamia to Canaan for the sake of higher perfection: "Was not Abraham also, after having been greatly exalted and brought into contact with the Divine influence and made the heart of this essence, removed from his country to the place in which his perfection should become complete?"⁶⁾

We see that the highest degree of contact with the Divine is the prerogative of mankind; and in the forefront of mankind stands the "perfection of Man" - Israel. The perfect types of man were Adam, Seth and Enoch up to the time of Noah, Shem and Eber, and then the Patriarchs up to Moses. In them and not in others rested the divine influence. The patriarchs are called by Halevi " *אנשי קדש* " - "saintly persons", and they were certainly few in number" until Jacob begat the Twelve Tribes who were all

3) Al-Khazari II, 14.

4) III, 19.

5) II, 44.

6) II, 14.

under this divine influence. "Thus the divine element reached a multitude of persons who carried the records further."⁷⁾ That is to say, from that time onwards the divine element permeated the whole people of Israel.

The divine influence (Shechinah) cleaved to the line of Shem, particularly to Israel. Hence the source and repository of wisdom at all times were in the tents of Shem: "There is an excuse for Philosophers. Being Grecians, knowledge and religions did not come to them as an inheritance. They belong to the descendants of Japhet, who inhabited the North; whilst knowledge coming from Adam and supported by the divine influence, is only to be found among the progeny of Shem, who represented the successors of Noah and constituted, as it were, his essence."⁸⁾ If there was philosophy in Greece, it was derived from the line of Shem. The divine influence fell upon Adam and upon others, albeit few. Abel deserved to inherit the divine element from Adam, but he was killed by Cain, and it passed to Seth, and from him to Enoch, and so on until the time of Noah. All these were called "Sons of Gods". So it continued until the time of Abraham: "Abraham represented the essence of Eber, being his disciple, and for this reason he was called "Ibri". Eber re-

7) I, 47.

8) I, 63. See also II, 66, 64-65 and 29. The idea that Israel was the source of wisdom and philosophy was prevalent even before Halevi's time, ever since the time of Philo of Alexandria, vid. S. Rawidowitz, The Structure of the Guide of the Perplexed, Special Edition, p.63, Note 1.

presented the essence of Shem; the latter that of Noah. He inherited the temperate zone, the centre and principal part of which is Palestine, the land of prophecy. Japheth turned towards the north, and Ham towards the south. The essence of Abraham passed over to Isaac to the exclusion of the other sons, who were all removed from the land, the special inheritance of Isaac. The prerogative of Isaac descended on Jacob whilst Esau was sent from the land which belonged to Jacob. The sons of the latter were all worthy of the divine influence, as well as of the country distinguished by the divine spirit."⁹⁾

This quality of Israel makes it a special section of the human race, standing both above and within all the rest of Creation. The exaltation of Israel, as it were, radiates to the Creator Himself. "God of the Hebrews" is His title rather than God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and so He is called by Moses when he stands before Pharaoh,¹⁰⁾ and when Moses speaks to the Children of Israel, he describes God as the "Lord who brought them out of Egypt", and not as the Creator of the world.¹¹⁾ There is a close kinship and a mutual radiation of influence between the God of Israel and the Children of Israel, such as does not exist with the other nations: "for there exists no connection between God and any other nation, as He pours out His light only on the select people. They are accepted by Him and

9) I, 95.

10) I, 25.

11) *ibid.*

He by them. He is called the 'God of Israel', whilst they are "the people of the Lord" and the people of the God of Abraham"¹²⁾ This relationship is the prerogative of the Hebrew nation, because it is above the other nations, and Israel's status in relation to the Gentile "was to have been like that of a King to ordinary people."¹³⁾ The Israelite nation has a special quality in that it revealed to Mankind the existence of God. Were not the inhabitants of the earth prior to the Israelites in blindness and error"?¹⁴⁾ Thanks to them other peoples have been vouchsafed the Torah: "If there were no Israelites there would be no Torah."¹⁵⁾

His view is that the relationship between the various nations is similar to that between the parts of the body and the body itself; and all these parts (the nations) have each their particular purpose. Just as the heart is the essence and perfection of the parts of the body, so is Israel, as a result of its ethnographical and historical position, the choice flower of the nations. This superlative status expressed itself in various spiritual manifestations, particularly in the fact that Israel was the first to recognise the existence of God, before all other peoples, and was brought into contact with the Divine element. In this spiritual superiority lies also the secret of

12) IV, 3.

13) *ibid.*

14) II, 54.

15) II, 56.

Israel's existence in Exile; and it is therefore clear why God chose Israel alone to be His Chosen People. There is, indeed, no reason given for Israel's election since "it is the Creator's will". But at the same time, there is no place for the question at all, since every nation fulfils a special purpose in humanity. Since mankind is compared to a body, and we do not ask why any limb in a human body fulfils its function and not some other function, so it is useless to enquire why it was God's will to vouchsafe the recognition of God specially to Israel, and to make Israel the creator of religious consciousness.

2. The Torah, the Tradition and the Commandments.

The Torah is to Halevi ~~also~~ the "Divine Torah", and is superior to all the philosophies in the world. The Khazari said: "I perceive that your law comprises all sorts of profound and strange sciences, not to be found in other codes."¹⁾

Halevi attaches extreme importance to tradition. The nations which lack a tradition have but a defective and fragmentary history, in whose origins we can place no reliance or belief. As an example, he cites the Indians, who are an indeterminate people clothed in obscurity, "and arouse the indignation of the followers of religions through their talk, whilst they anger them with their idols, talismans and witchcraft."²⁾

1) II, 63.

2) I, 61.

Tradition has a value when portents are confirmed by the entire nation, as an eye-witness of them. Then only they receive their full authority and corroboration. "It must also have taken place in the presence of great multitudes, who saw it distinctly, and did not learn it from reports and traditions. Even then they must have examined the matter carefully and repeatedly, so that no suspicion of imagination or magic could enter their minds."³⁾ Such a tradition, beyond the range of doubt, was the Israelite tradition, for all the miracles and portents revealed by God were seen by the whole people who testified to their authenticity. "It is so well known that no suspicion of deceit or imagination is possible."⁴⁾

There follows evidence of the truth of these miracles. When Moses came before the Children of Israel they did not believe that he had spoken with God; "And the sages of the Israelites questioned him, and completely refused to believe that God spoke with man, until he caused them to hear the Ten Words."⁵⁾ And "although the people believed in the message of Moses, they retained, even after the performance of the miracles, some doubt as to whether God really spoke to mortals The people prepared ^{themselves} and became fitted to receive the divine afflatus, and even to hear publicly the words of God.....The fire remained visible on the mount for forty days. They also saw Moses enter it and emerge from it; they distinctly heard the Ten Commandments...

3) I, 8.

4) I, 9.

5) I, 49.

The people did not receive these ten commandments from single individuals, nor from a prophet, but from God; only they did not possess the strength of Moses to bear the grandeur of the scene. Henceforth the people believed that Moses held direct communication with God."6)

The tradition was believed by all succeeding generations in Israel, ^{because} ~~as~~ it was known that the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai had seen everything with their own eyes and because of "uninterrupted tradition which is equal to personal experience."7)

As for the commandments ordained upon Israel, they, too, in all their meticulous detail were handed down by the Deity of Israel, and they have preserved them throughout all the generations.

What is the special value of the Jewish commandments? We have seen that Israel is set apart from the other peoples. The emblem of differentiation between Israel and the other peoples is the code of practical ritual. Belief in the God of Israel is not sufficient in itself. Man does not attain the realisation of his faith without the realisation of the Divine commandments. "Man can only merit divine influence by acting according to God's commands."8) Or again: "Did we not agree that man cannot approach God except by means of deeds commanded to him."9) Or, as we find

6) I, 87.

7) I, 25.

8) I, 98.

9) II, 46.

elsewhere: "One cannot approach God except by His commands."¹⁰⁾

But what are these commands? If we say that they consist of the performance of justice and righteousness, then surely the other nations too are involved in them, because they are the foundations of human society, "They are indispensable to the administration of every human society."¹¹⁾ What, then, are the commandments specific to Israel, whereby the individuality of Israel is distinct from that of other peoples? There are, according to Halevi, two kinds of commandments and ordinances. There are "axioms and common custom" and there are "Divine laws". The first category is the common heritage of all humanity everywhere. It is the basis on which the preservation of human society is to be envisaged. Other peoples, however, can ~~be seen through~~ ^{manage with} these commandments alone, whereas for Israel the keeping of the "axiomatic" laws does not suffice, since they are under the ordinance of the "Divine laws" as well: "Can it be imagined that the Israelites observed the doing of justice and the love of mercy, but neglect circumcision, Sabbath, and the other laws, and feel happy withal?"¹²⁾

The Jewish commandments are not designed to make the individual remote from life, nor are they put as a yoke on his neck.

10) III, 23.

11) II, 48.

12) *ibid.*

"According to our view a servant of God is not one who detaches himself from the world, lest he be a burden to it, and it to him,"¹³⁾ or: "He who would like to retire into ascetic solitude, only courts distress and sickness for soul and body."¹⁴⁾ Jewish law is opposed to asceticism and solitude: "The divine law imposes no asceticism on us."¹⁵⁾ On the contrary, the body and the soul are of equal importance. Their unity is not aimed at the subordination of either the one or the other. Their position is one of equality and earthly life is not at all incompatible with Jewish law. 'Service of the Lord in joy' is of the very substance of Jewish law. But everything in due moderation. Just as one should not let joy become wantonness, so one should not require the Law to become identical with self-affliction: "Our law as a whole is divided between fear, love, and joy, by each of which one can approach God. Thy contrition on a fast day does nothing the nearer to God than thy joy on the Sabbath and holy days."¹⁶⁾ "Our law did not consider these matters optional but laid down decisive injunctions concerning them."¹⁷⁾ Hence, there is a statutory basis for all God's commandments, and one ought not to pass them over, but Israel ought to preserve them as they were commanded.

But the ceremonial laws, or the Divine Laws, have yet an additional importance. They not only serve as a distinguishing feature of Israel, as the people whom God has chosen, but their

13) III, 1.

14) *ibid.*

15) II, 50.

16) *ibid.*

17) *ibid.*

preservation is a safe pledge for the belief in God and His great ^{deeds} ~~qualities~~, since ~~it proves that~~ he who keeps them acknowledges Him Who ordained them, namely God. "The observance of the Sabbath is itself an acknowledgement of His Omnipotence, and at the same time an acknowledgement of the Creation by the divine word. He who observes the Sabbath because the work of creation was finished on it acknowledges the creation itself. He who believes in the Creation believes in the Creator. He, however, who does not believe in it falls a prey to doubts of God's eternity and to doubts of the existence of the World's creator. The observance of the Sabbath is therefore nearer to God than monastic retirement and asceticism."¹⁸⁾ Or again, "The Sabbath is the fruit of the week because it was appointed to establish the connection with the Divine Spirit and to serve God in joy, not in sadness."¹⁹⁾ The preservation of religion, and the fulfilment of the ceremonial laws is a surety for the improvement of the lives of Israelites in exile. Particularly is this so with the observance of the Sabbaths and the festivals: "Had these (i.e. the Sabbaths and the festivals) not been, not one of you would put on a clean garment, you would hold no assembly to remember the law, on account of your everlasting affliction and degradation."²⁰⁾ From this estimate of the special importance of the Torah in the life of Israel, Halevi goes on to discuss at length the necessity for Jewish life to be ^{founded} ~~based~~

18) *ibid.*

19) III, 5.

20) III, 10.

not only on the written Law, but also on the oral law which is based upon it. This leads him to his debate with the Karaites, who acknowledged the authority of the written law alone. We have already observed Halevi's view that "our law did not consider these matters optional, but laid down definite injunctions concerning them."²¹⁾ That is to say that each law and commandment is not left to the discretion of each individual Israelite, but that there is a fixed order of religious life which had been adopted for practice, since it could not be envisaged that "each man should do that which was right in his own eyes", and that in the course of Time they should change the Torah and make ~~of it~~ different Laws. The Jewish Torah is a practical code. "The Law enjoins that there should be 'one Torah and one Statute'. Should Karaite methods prevail, there would be as many different codes as opinions. Not one individual would remain constant to one code, for every day he might form new opinions."²²⁾ Then again, even the Torah of the Karaites, which acknowledges only the basis of the Written Law, is founded upon their own tradition, and "they admit the authority of tradition received from people who lived before them."²³⁾ But their tradition is unconfirmed and disordered. It contains conflicting views even in religious principles, and owing to an inadequate understanding, they have

21) II, 50.

22) III, 38.

23) *ibid.*

more difficulties than the authoris of the Talmud: "Those who speculate on the ways of glorifying God for the purpose of His worship are much more zealous than those who practise the service of God exactly as it is commanded. The latter are at ease with their tradition, and their soul is calm like one who lives in a town, and they fear not any hostile opposition. The former, however, is like a straggler in the desert, who does not know what may happen. He must provide himself with arms and prepare for battle like one expert in warfare."²⁴⁾ The Rabbinic~~y~~ authorities are like those "who dwell in resting places in an ancient and fortified city", while the Karaites are like men who seek fortresses wherein to entrench themselves.

Halevi takes a very conservative attitude to the Oral Law and its authors. At the same time, however, he does not hesitate to remark on the fact that certain passages in the Talmud, in his view, are not correct: "I will not deny, O King of the Khazars, that there are matters in the Talmud of which I am unable to give thee a satisfactory explanation, nor even bring them in connection with the whole. These things stand in the Talmud through the conscientiousness of the disciples who followed the principle that 'even commonplace talk of the Sages requires study!'²⁵⁾ They took care to reproduce only that which

24) III, 37.

25) Sukkah, 21.2.

they had heard from their teachers, striving at the same time to understand everything that they had heard from their masters. In this they went so far as to render it in the same words, although they may not have grasped its meaning. In this case they said: "Thus have we been taught and thus have we heard." Occasionally the teacher concealed from his pupils the reasons which prompted him to make certain statements. But the matter came down to us in this form, and we think little of it because we do not know its purport. All this, however, relates to topics which do not touch on what is lawful or/unlawful. Let us not therefore trouble about it, for the book (the Talmud) loses nothing if we consider the points discussed here."²⁶⁾

In the debate with the Karaites and the comparison of their Law with the Torah of Israel, Halevi deals with the main problems affecting the Oral Law - the development of the religious tradition in Israel, the gradual evolution of Jewish morality, the orthography, punctuation and accentuation of the text, etc. - in short, all the differences between the Law of the Rabbinites and that of the Karaites.

3. The Hebrew Language.

Halevi as a religious thinker differs from many Jewish Mediaeval theologians in acknowledging and stressing the great importance of the language (i.e. Hebrew) as one of the most essential attributes of Judaism.

He gives Hebrew pride of place amongst languages: "Considered historically its original form is the noblest." That is to say, according to tradition, it is the language in which God spoke. Indeed, Halevi enumerates three languages (Aramaic, Arabic and Hebrew) which are similar to each other,¹⁾ "but Hebrew ~~alone~~ was the best of them."²⁾ Its superiority is manifest from the logical point of view if we consider the people who employed it. Not only did the common people of Israel speak it, but its use extended to the Temple. The Hebrew Kings spoke it and the prophets prophesied in it: and "is it conceivable that their rulers lacked the words to express what they wished?"³⁾

The languages of nations vary. One excels in one quality, a second in another, but Hebrew is ~~undoubtedly~~ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ Halevi's ^{view} the most perfect of languages. As it is said: "And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." (GEN. 2, 19) The meaning is that it is fitted ^{with} ~~to~~ a name which suits it and which demonstrates its nature; and hence it is necessary to ^{assign} ~~give~~ supremacy to the Hebrew language.⁴⁾

Halevi ^{does} ~~is~~ not merely confining himself to praising the language. He does not avoid discussing the vital interests and

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- 1) It is interesting to note that Halevi mentioned the three semitic languages only; his appreciation of them can be explained not only by his peculiar attitude to Judaism, but also by the knowledge thus accessible to the mediaeval scholars about the origin and status of the semitic languages.
- 2) II, 68.
- 3) *ibid.*
- 4) IV, 25.

problems of Hebrew. He is very anxious to prove its originality and self-development. When the Khazar King speaks of the attempts to imitate other languages and to introduce their cadences into Hebrew, Halevi regards this as a detriment to the language, and he protests against the introduction of foreign metres into Hebrew: "This is because of our erring and our contrariness; not only did we neglect that superiority but we even mar the structure of our language which was fixed for unification (of the people) and we turn it into schism."⁵⁾ But we should observe that Halevi himself was not free from this tendency, and in his poetry he, like others, imitated Arabic forms.⁶⁾

Halevi also expatiates on the forms of the language and grammatical points, which he discussed in minute detail.⁷⁾ It seems that he had various opinions on points of language, but these do not come within the confines of his book: "If I wanted to enlarge on this subject, the book would be too lengthy. I only desired to give thee a taste of this profound study, which is not built on haphazard but on fixed rules."⁸⁾

5) II, 74.

6) Ch.N. Bialik has commented on this in his Address on Halevi (Bialik Orally, II, 167): "It is true that Jehudah Halevi recognised this defect, and at first opposed the imitation of Arabic forms, but eventually he too was swept away in the exile stream into the vortex of foreign influence which had flowed upon poetry..... That is the tragedy of Exile, that even its geniuses are subdued to it and cannot entirely liberate themselves."

7) W. Bacher, The Views of Jehuda Halevi concerning the Hebrew Language: Hebraica, a Quarterly Journal in the interests of Semitic Study, Vol. VIII (1892), pp.136-149.

8) Al Khazari, II, 80.

4. Palestine, Exile and Redemption.

We have seen that Halevi disparages the philosophers, not only because they are not of Semitic origin, and not only because he is guided by his preference for traditional rather than philosophical research, but also because they are "North dwellers", and on the other hand he exalts the Israelites not only because of their Semitic origin, but also because their land is the "land of Canaan, the soil of the prophets," and because "that region is peculiar in its divine characteristics." He speaks at length on the importance of Palestine from this point of view. To the Khazar king's wonderment at the importance attached to the Holy Land, he answers: "Thou wilt have no difficulty in perceiving that one country may have higher qualifications than others. There are places in which particular plants, metals or animals are found, or where the inhabitants are distinguished by their form and character, since perfection or deficiency of the soul are produced by the mingling of the elements."¹) And he goes on to point out that however suitable conditions may be for planting a vineyard, the vineyard will not succeed in yielding fruit unless the right men tend it and cultivate it. So it is with a country, "Priority belongs in the first instance to the people which is the agent of the religious acts connected with a country; for these religious acts I would compare to the cultivation of the vineyard. No other country can share the distinction of the divine influence, just as no other mountain can produce the same good

wine."²⁾

Halevi calls Palestine "the soil of prophecy", but the Khazari asks him, "Surely there were prophets who prophesied outside Palestine, so why should we attach prophecy specifically to Palestine alone, if it is possible in other countries?" To this question he replies: "Whosoever prophesied did so either in the Holy Land or concerning it."³⁾ So that even those who did not prophesy in Palestine were directing their minds and aspirations towards it. Such is Halevi's attitude to the role Palestine played in originating and developing the Jewish religion and thought. Very few Jewish thinkers and theologians were so deeply aware of the problems involved in the further development and maintenance of Judaism outside Palestine. One of the most important topics in the Al-Khazari is the position of the "chosen people" in the exile amongst the nations, the mission which it fulfils amongst the other nations; and the task it carries with it through the destiny imposed upon it by the Creator. In the early part of the Al-Khazari, it is related that when the Khazar king wished to choose one of the religions, he applied to other religions before that of the Jews, the reason was that "as regards the Jews, I am satisfied that they are of low station, few in number and generally despised."⁴⁾

2) II, 12.

3) II, 14.

4) I, 4.

The degraded life of the Jews and their lowly position amongst the nations is thus a factor in the other nations' contempt of the Jewish religion.

It is not only that Israel is degraded and lowly amongst the nations; others jeer at them on account of their degradation, and Halevi sees no grounds for this mockery. He has an unrivalled appreciation of the disaster of his people in Exile, as he often shows in his book, and even more in his poetry. But at the same time he sees no cause for mocking at this sad state, which he even regards as grounds for pride. "The Rabbi said: 'I see thee reproaching us with our degradation and poverty, but the best of other religions boast of both.'"⁵⁾ A proof of this is that other religions take pride in their suffering and torment. Christianity teaches "'He who smites thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also; and he who takes away the coat, let him have thy shirt also.'" Hē (Jesus) and his friends and followers, after suffering centuries of contumely, flogging and slaying, attained their well-known success, and just in these things they take pride."⁶⁾ Christianity is not alone in attaching honour to suffering amongst mankind, for Islam too is of the same mind: "This is also the history of the founder of Islam and his friends, who eventually prevailed, and became powerful. The nations boast of these sufferings

5) I, 113.

6) Ibid.

and not of those kings whose power and might are great, whose walls are strong, and whose chariots are terrible.⁷⁾ So, too, in another place he points out that the invocation of Israel's poverty as a proof of their contemptibility is mistaken: "The Rabbi said: 'It is only extinguished for him who does not see us with an open eye, who infers the extinction of our light from our degradation, poverty and dispersion, and concludes from the greatness of others, their conquests on earth and their power over us, that their light is still burning.'⁸⁾ And so he demonstrates that the glory of other nations and religions is expressed particularly in their torments and martyrdom: 'I have explained to thee in connection with the verse: 'Behold My servant shall prosper' (Is. 52, 13), that humility and meekness are evidently nearer to the Divine Influence than glory and eminence. The same is visible in these two religions. Christians do not glory in kings, heroes and rich people, but in those who followed Jesus all the time. Before His faith had taken firm root among them, they wandered away, or hid themselves, or were killed wherever any of them were found; they suffered disgrace and slaughter for the sake of their belief. These are the people in whom Christians glory, whose work they revere, and in whose names they built churches. In the same way the 'Helpers'

7) I, 113.

8) IV, 21.

and friends of Islam bore much poverty, until they found assistance. It is in their humility and martyrdom that they glory."⁹⁾

One writer tends to interpret this view of Halevi as a sign of reconciliation with the Exile, and as a justification for his being called the "philosopher of exile."¹⁰⁾ It seems to me that this view is baseless. His poetry is strident with protest against the Exile and its life. The "Al-Khazari" too, as is obvious from the sequel to the above quotation, is full of complaint against the protraction of life in the Exile, and full of urgent longings for redemption and liberation. His peculiarly keen appreciation of the degradation and subjection of his people does not arise from his reconciliation with that state of things. It is rather a demonstration that a people whom historic destiny had reduced to humiliation is not on that account deserving of contempt. On the contrary, a nation's agony and prolonged religious persecution shew forth the strength of a people or religion; and those who suffer persecution and martyrdom for their ideals, merit nothing but honour and admiration. This is very far from being an acceptance of the actuality of the Exile and its conditions.

Nor is there any evidence of this acceptance of the Exile in the words of the Khazari when he says that a Jew who accepts

9) IV, 22.

10) Horowitz, Heathid I, 85.

the decree of the Creator for suffering in Exile with good grace and without protest, is able to live comfortably and happily in the diaspora. "In this manner he lives a happy life even in exile; he gathers the fruit of his faith in this world and the next. He, however, who bears the Exile unwillingly loses his first and last rewards."¹¹⁾ In connection with these words we must give attention to Halevi's religious outlook. Both in his poetry and his *Al-Khazari* he does not indeed "rage" against God because of the Exile, but he continually hopes for redemption and supplicates the Creator for a return to Zion. Halevi's orthodoxy compels him to accept suffering with good grace, for as a religious man, he sees suffering as the will of God against which he may not be in anger. Moreover, the burden of Exile, accompanied by perfect faith in God, does not, in his view, lead to the perpetuation of the Exile or reconciliation to the existing state of affairs, or even to Israel living a comfortable life in Exile. On the contrary - it hastens the desired redemption: "If we bear our Exile and degradation for God's sake, as is meet, we shall be the pride of the generation which will come with the Messiah, and accelerate the day of deliverance we hope for."¹²⁾ The Exile is the price of Israel's transgression, and their degradation is the outcome of their sins. But sorrows will expiate the guilt.

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11) *Al-Khazari*, III, 12.

12) I, 115.

However bitter and intense, they will be followed by good cheer and there is no room for despair. Men of little faith, contemplating the degradation of Israel, doubt the possibility of the revival of these "dry bones". But Halevi's deep faith in the God of Israel brings the conviction that the sorrows are not in vain, and will soon have their compensation. He invites the sceptics and the pessimists to recall Israel's history, and to remember that the very dawn of Israel's life came in similar conditions. God delivered His people from Egypt, and the time will come when he will deliver them from Exile. Let the unbeliever draw faith and confidence from history, and then "he will find no difficulty in picturing how we may recover our greatness, though only one of us remained."¹³⁾

Halevi's attitude is not to be identified with that school of Jewish orthodoxy which says "If the Lord build not a house, vainly do its builders toil" (Psalms, 123, 1) and exhorts the people to wait for the coming of the Redeemer and to rely on miracles. Halevi of course believes unhesitatingly, in accordance with his religious outlook, that God will not forsake His people, even though He reduce them to a lowly state. This is the working of God's secret - "God has a secret and wise design concerning us (IV, 23) - and it is not for His creatures to instruct Him in how He should act. At the same time, redemption depends also upon the people's own will to be redeemed.

13) III, 11.

The redemption will be natural and not performed through miracles alone, although miracles there will be. Nothing will thwart the energetic resolve of the people to achieve its renaissance. When it wishes, it will be liberated by the help of God. The weakness of the aspiration for redemption was the cause of the failure of the Israelites in the time of the second Temple. Those who went up to Palestine were few and poor. The majority of the people preferred Babylon to Palestine, and remained to live in Exile. "Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs."¹⁴⁾ If the nations resolution had been strong in those days, then redemption would certainly have come, for "Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first." The calamity was that the national feeling was not sufficiently developed, and expressed itself in words alone: "Were we prepared to meet the God of our forefathers with a pure mind, we should find the same salvation as our fathers did in Egypt. If we say: "Worship His holy hill - worship at His footstool ¹⁵⁾ Who restorest thy divine presence unto Zion ¹⁶⁾ and other words, this is but as the chattering of the starling

¹⁴⁾ II, 24.

¹⁵⁾ Ps. 99, 9, 5.

¹⁶⁾ Jewish Prayer Book, Eighteen Benediction.

and the nightingale. We do not realise what we say by this sentence; nor by others."¹⁷⁾ This lack of zeal did not come only from satisfaction with the life of Exile - a thing to which Halevi is opposed - but also from the people's faulty understanding of the Exile with its bitterness, sorrow and lack of prospect for a full national life. "The Rabbi said 'Thou art right to reproach us for fearing that our plight will have no compensation."¹⁸⁾ These two factors - satisfaction with the Exile, and faulty understanding of the calamity involved in a exilic life, are responsible for the continuation of Israel's dispersion.

A formulation of the love of "the fleshpots of Egypt" and the reluctance to part from them; owing to the weakness of the national resolve, had not been made until Halevi's time with such directness and penetration. It is evident that Halevi's outlook was not only conservatively orthodox, but also fundamentally national. No one was more hostile to Israel's endurance of exile or so zealous in urging the revival of the people.

We have observed (in the chapter on "Israel") that Halevi held Israel to be supreme amongst nations. Humanity is represented as a body in which Israel is the heart "Israel amongst the nations is as the heart amongst the limbs" - II, 36). But Israel is also the "most afflicted of all, as well as the most healthy."

17) II, 24.

18) IV, 23.

That Israel is full of suffering and trials everybody knows. But why did this agony come upon them? Why does no other people suffer similarly? His answer is that the very mission of ^{the people} ~~Israel~~ makes ^{it} ~~them~~ feel ^{its} ~~their~~ sufferings more than other peoples. Just as the heart, the most sensitive part of the body is the most liable to feel impressions, owing to its superior delicateness - so it is with Israel. But the sensitive member of the body is also the best suited to endure suffering. This capacity is a sign of strength and resilience, not of weakness and ineptitude. The perception of bodily injury leads to cure, whereas oblivion of it leads to the destruction ~~and extermination~~ of the body. "The heart's extreme sensibility, caused by the purity of its blood, and its great intelligence, causes it to feel the slightest sickness, and expels it as long as it is able to do so. The other organs lack this fine sensibility, and it is therefore possible that they can be affected by some strange matter which produces illness."¹⁹⁾

But, as has been said, the afflictions of Israel are not in vain, since they have their compensation, not only in the contact of the nation with Divine Providence and Israel's fulfilment of a spiritual purpose, but also in the hope of a national future. The people's renascence will be a reward for all Israel's trials. "Do not consider it strange if it is said

19) II, 41.

in the same sense: 'Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows' (Is. 53, 4). Now we are burdened by them, whilst the whole world enjoys rest and prosperity. The trials which meet us are designed to test our faith, to cleanse us completely and to remove all taint from us. If we are good, the Divine Influence is with us in this world."²⁰⁾ "Now all that our mission promises us is that we shall become connected with the Divine Influence by means of prophecy, or something nearly approaching it, and also through our relation to the Divine Influence, as displayed to us in grand and awe-inspiring miracles. Therefore, we do not find in the Bible: 'If you keep this law, I will bring you after death into beautiful gardens and great pleasures'. On the contrary it is said: 'You shall be my chosen people, and I will be a God unto you, Who will guide you... You will remain in the country which forms a stepping-stone to this degree, viz., the Holy Land.'"²¹⁾

Halevi aspired with all his heart to the realisation of this mission. And although as a result of his religious consciousness, he always clothes Israel's redemption in a religious form, really believing that God alone would redeem His people, yet he also believed that the return to Zion in its full sense can be realised by means of Israel's earnest efforts to return to the land of Palestine.

20) II, 44.

21) I, 109.

Halevi practised what he preached; and himself obeyed the religious-national impulse of going to Palestine. The "Al-Khazar" ends with the words: "The Rabbi then decided to leave the land of the Khazari and to betake himself to go to Jerusalem."²²⁾ The king of the Khazari asks the Rabbi "What can be sought in Palestine nowadays, since the Shechinah is absent from it, and with a pure mind and desire one can approach God in any place. Why wilt thou run into danger on land and water and amongst various peoples?"²³⁾ The Rabbi answers that even if the Divine presence is absent from Palestine, yet the "hidden spiritual Divine essence" is present there, and a true worship of God and fulfilment of the commandments is only possible in Palestine, their special and unique centre of Jewish religion.

As for the dangers of the voyage - he puts his hope in God, and if it be his destiny to die, he will know that his transgressions are forgiven. When the king reminds him that by going to Palestine he increases the number of ceremonial precepts incumbent upon him, from many of which he would be immune in the Diaspora, he replies that by going to Palestine he is being liberated from slavery. The service of the Creator is no bondage but "worship of Him is the true freedom", as he once expressed it in a poem:

22) V.22.

23) *ibid*,

"Servants of Time are slaves of slaves;
 Servants of the Lord are free men."

It is clear that Halevi's journey to Palestine had a religious aim²⁴⁾ namely the atonement of his sins, the fulfilment of God's commandments and religious service in the Holy Land. But this was not all. The "Al-Khazari" concludes actually on a national note. He emphasises that Israel's redemption will be realised if the desire to rebuild the homeland is strong. Hence, it seems that Halevi wishes, in pursuance of the national aim, to be an example to others, a pioneer going before the camp, along the road where others must follow. And hence, too, the concluding words of the book: "This sacred country reminds and stimulates men to love God. It holds out to them the promise of a reward, as it is written: 'Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones and favour the dust thereof.' (Ps.102, 14-15). This means that Jerusalem can only be rebuilt when the children of Israel yearn for it so much that they embrace her stones and dust."²⁵⁾

24) Brody II, 300; Harkavi II, 90.

25) V.27. That these expressions convey not only a religious desire to visit holy places in Palestine, but also a national urge for the revival and upbuilding of the country, can be seen from the words uttered by Nachmanides when he stood before the gates of Jerusalem in 1267. Like Halevi, Nachmanides had left his family to go to Palestine, and on arriving at Jerusalem, he uses the same quotation (Ps.102) as Halevi - "to delight in thy stones - to show grace to thy dust." Nachmanides was revered as the father of the old settlement in Palestine, who laid the foundations for Jewish colonisation and reconstruction. ~~See Harkavi II, 90.~~

These are the fundamental ideas of Halevi as they are expressed in the Kitab-Al-Khazari, concerning Judaism, the life of Israel, and the aspirations and future mission of Jewry. In this single book Halevi comprehended nearly all the Jewish problems of his generation, and even many future generations. The qualities of Israel and the land of Israel; the importance of tradition; the value of the preservation of commandments; the Torah and language of the Jews; their degraded position in Exile; the weakness of the people's desire for redemption; the preservation of the national hope; Israel among the nations; the ^{mere} list is sufficient to prove the wide range of the book's treatment.

Although Jewish religion, according to Halevi, expresses itself in the keeping of ceremonial customs and in important tenets of faith - at the same time, its ultimate aim is the far greater concept of human well-being in the highest sense. Israel's aim is the achievement of the Prophet's aspirations and with the infiltration of the divine sanctity into Israel's midst, the purpose will be realised. Israel will become sanctified and exalted again to be the people of the Lord, serving as an example to the nations of the world. But the attainment of this aim will only come when Israel has returned to the ancestral soil, the only creative centre for their religious and national spirit.

The idea that Halevi's nationalism is religious is correct: but it is truer to say that he wove the two ideas inseparably into his outlook. This explains the importance which he attaches both to the nation and to the land. When the people live a free life on its own soil, the realisation of its peculiar mission will be in sight - a mission to Israel itself and to the outside world. It is not questioned that Israeli's redemption will come about by divine aid. But this aid will only be manifested in conjunction with the people's own intention to liberate itself. Even this is not sufficient. The intention must be expressed in action. "If the action is minus the intention, or the intention minus the action, the expectation of reward is lost." (V.27).

The Kitab-al-Khazari is not an ordinary book of religious discussion. The philosopher in Halevi is complementary to the poet in him - and poetry is the essence of his being. The Kitab-al-Khazari, for all its religious-polemical form, is dominated by the chief motives of his national poetry, and serves therefore as a lasting confirmation of Halevi's title to be regarded as Israel's great national poet.

PART II.

C H A I M N A C H M A N B I A L I K .

I. His Time.

Bialik's appearance in Hebrew literature came at a time of hopelessness and despair in Russian Jewry.¹⁾ The Tsar Nicholas II continued the reactionary policy of Alexander III, whose Ministers remained at the head of the Government and carried out a brutal anti-Jewish policy. Persecution, restriction of liberty and massacres fell to the lot of Russian Jewry at that time. The oppression of the Jews, as a fundamental item in the Government's programme, led to the poverty and virtual collapse of Russian Jewry. Nor was the intellectual position any better. The high schools were closed to Jewish youth who flocked to the schools of Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy. This agonising distress, leading often to sheer despair, gave birth to a feeling of uncertainty about the future of Israel:-

"A time of chaos, boundary-stones confused
'Twixt past and future, destruction and building, 2)
old age and youth."

Amongst the Jews there arose new tendencies which gradually caused their national feeling to crystallise. Various movements sprang up with national and social objectives, and Russia became, pre-eminently, the centre of an enthusiastic Zionist movement. Even before the foundation of Political Zionism by Dr. Theodor Herzl Russia was the chief centre of the activities of the 'Lovers of

1) S. Dubnow: "History of Israel in Modern Times", Ch. VII.

2) Bialik in his poem "To Achad-Ha'am", p.117.

Zion'. But owing to its narrow scope of activity, the limited aspirations of this movement awakened little response in the Jewish community. Political Zionism gave the movement a wider ambition and aroused greater enthusiasm.

Bialik's literary debut came only ten years after the 'Haskalah' period in Russia, and was inspired by the poetry of the great Haskalah poet, J.L. Gordon (1830-1892).³⁾ Gordon was a poet of rebuke who lamented the state of Israel's internal life. Apart from Gordon, Bialik was influenced by yet another Jewish poet, who wrote in Russian - S. Frug. (1860-1916).⁴⁾ Frug lamented the external life of Israel, the persecutions and torments of the Exile, and it was from him that Bialik's early work derived these motives. But apart from the influence of these⁵⁾ and other poets, Bialik was affected by the general atmosphere of the period, in which the cultural Zionism of Bialik's Mentor, Achad-Ha'am, was a very active force.⁶⁾ Bialik's first poem, 'To the Bird', reflects the ideas of the 'Lovers of Zion' movement and many of his other poems (especially 'To Achad-Ha'am')⁷⁾ testify to Achad Ha-Am's influence. There was

3) See J. Klausner's 'A History of Modern Hebrew Literature' (translated by Canon H. Danby), London 1932, pp.42-44, 64-77.

4) S. Dubnow - ibid, III, 128.

5) vid. Klausner in 'Beitar' I, 72-73.

6) M. Kleinman, Demujoth ve Kemoth, pp.282-290; Mordechai ben Hillel ha-Cohen, in his pamphlet on Bialik (Jerusalem, 1933), pp. 7-11, 18-24.

7) Bialik I, 117-118.

also the influence of Herzl's political Zionism. Although he was loyal to Ahad Ha-am in many points of Zionist practice, the new movement had its effect upon him⁸⁾ and was ~~celebrated~~ ^{acclaimed} in a few poems which form the bulk of his 'Songs of Zion'.

The position of the Jews in Russia became steadily worse until the great pogrom took place at Kishinieff in 1903.⁹⁾ It was then that Bialik was revealed as a poet of denunciation and that the cornerstone of his national poetry was laid. The subsequent years brought no great change in the condition of Russian Jewry. Their rights became more and more restricted, their agony and suffering more intense, until the Great War broke out in 1914. During the War, Bialik isolated himself from public events and his lyric poetry. A new period of awakening came to the Jews at the end of the War: the establishment of a new regime raised great hopes in Russian Jewry - but they were soon disappointed. The period of the Jewish National Home in Palestine had come, and although it was too late to affect Bialik's poetry, its importance was reflected in his literary and communal work.

In short, Bialik's lifetime covers one of the most eventful periods in Jewish history - the destruction of the diaspora centres and the beginning of a reconstruction process in Palestine. In a vital period fraught with great changes in the

8) M. Kleinman; *ibid*, 290-4; Mordechai ben Hillel ha-Cohen: *ibid*, pp. 12-15, 39-44.

9) S. Dubnow, *ibid* III, pp. 272-286.

national life, there appeared a poet who set his seal upon the literary history of his people.

II. His Life.

Chaim Nachman Bialik¹⁾ was born to his father, Joseph Bialik, on the 10th day of Tebeth 5633 (9th January 1873) at the village of Radi in the province of Wohlin. His father was a man of poor circumstances but wide erudition, who had never met with success in his private affairs, either as an inspector of forests and mills, or later as an inn-keeper. His poverty precipitated his death in the prime of his days, ~~and his family~~ ^{so that} Chaim Nachman^{had} received no education from his father, although his father's life and character undoubtedly left a deep mark upon his soul²⁾. ~~imposed on the realisation of life.~~

The village of Radi was a beauty-spot, girded with forests and fields which enchanted the child's tender spirit and left deep impressions on his nature-poetry later on. (e.g. "Elves of the Night", "In the Cornfield", "Radiance"). At Zitomir, ~~where~~ ^{whether} his family moved, Bialik entered the "Heder", (a Jewish institute for elementary religious education), at the age of six. According to the convention of the time, he studied the Pentateuch, Rashi's commentaries and the Psalms, whose poetry left a perceptible impression on his work. It seems that in Zitomir, too,

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- 1) Biographies about his life: J. Klausner, 'Jotzrim u-Bonim,' Vol.III, Book I, pp.1-12 (See also Sepher Bialik, pp.75-85); Z. Fishman, 'Ein Ha-Kore', II-III, 1923, pp.98-109).
 - 2) In his poem "אב" 'My Father' (Bialik I, 196-198) Bialik gives expression to the influence of his father on him.

Bialik was under the influence of Nature's grandeur, as he lived in close proximity to ~~high~~ mountains, ~~deep~~ valleys and flowing springs.

His family's lack of success meant for his numerous brothers and sisters, as well as for Chaim Nachman himself, a life of grim poverty, which he portrayed in one of his poems.³⁾ But, on his father's death, in Bialik's eighth year, even this condition grew immeasurably worse. The widow was left without any subsistence at all and was forced to become a pedlar in the market, working from dawn till late in the night. Even so, she hardly contrived to support her children in the most modest degree.

In these circumstances young Bialik lived his youthful years, ~~where~~ ^{and the} impressions he ~~absorbed and permeated~~ ^{gained when he later expressed} in the poem "My song". Obviously, if it was difficult for the widowed mother to sustain her family, it was impossible for her to supervise their education. Chaim Nachman was accordingly handed over to the care of his paternal grandfather, R. Jacob Moses, for education and upbringing. He was an old man of orthodox habits, strict piety, and deep learning, who spent all his days in studious occupations. Outwardly his demeanour was dry and crabbed, but his love for his grandson was sincere, if seldom revealed. He cherished great ambitions for the talented

3) Bialik, I, 90.

child who he hoped would become a great scholar in his day. But Chaim Nachman being of a cheerful and gay disposition and much enchanted by the observation of Nature, chafed under his guidance. The old man, for all his affection, was ill-suited to the versatile temperament of the frolicsome boy, who longed for the diversion and the freedom of Nature. His grandfather tried all he ~~knew~~^{could} to restrict his liberty and to confine him within the narrow limits of the "Heder" and the life of study. The exuberance of the boy conquered the rigidity of the old man, and often he would escape unseen to the environs of the village where there was a great expanse of green fields. Here the boy found a satisfaction which compensated for the torments of his grandfather's household. But the young Bialik, for all his exuberance, and love of ~~acquaintance~~^{communion} with Nature, revealed amazing capacity in his studies - a quality which evoked the affectionate admiration and pride of his family and caused them to take up an attitude of the most rigid insistence on his industry. At the age of eleven, he had not only learnt a great deal of Talmud with the various commentaries - books which were not altogether within the range of so young an intellect - but had also read voraciously from many philosophical works amongst his grandfather's books, including "the Principles" of R.J. Albo, the "Kitab al-Khazari" of Jehudah Halevi, and the

"Guide to the Perplexed" of Maimonides. Needless to say, most of these books were then quite beyond his understanding, but they paved the way for his future studies and formed the background for his poetic work. In addition, he read widely in homiletical and mystical literature, as well as in books of moral precepts. These early studies trained him in the methods of research and inquiry, enlarged his poetic imagination, and deepened his love for song and legend. Most marked of all was the influence upon him of the Haskalah ("enlightenment") literature to which he devoted himself with keen enthusiasm. It was this which stimulated him, as early as in his eighth year, to make his first literary efforts in the form of stories, which, while they have no intrinsic value themselves, did serve as an introduction to his serious literary work.

By the time he was thirteen ("bar-Mitzvah"), he was liberated from the control of pedagogues, and studied by himself in a Beth-ha-Midrash (a building devoted to the study of the law). Few people frequented the place on ordinary week-days, and the building was empty and deserted, causing him long solitude and moods of deep sadness, since there was none with whom he could share his thoughts and meditations. His loneliness was sometimes broken when the Rabbi included him in Talmud lessons for a few hours a day. Otherwise, his isolation was complete, and he continued to read widely in the Haskalah literature and to write

verses and rhymes. Gradually he developed acquaintanceships amongst the intellectuals of the city, and although there was no external change, his world began to crumble, as new ideals came into his mind. He aspired to the outside world - a vast world in comparison with the restricted environment of the Torah and the commentaries of the Law.

He cherished a dream of becoming a Doctor of Philosophy at the Berlin Seminary; but it remained a dream, doomed to unfulfilment. So he began to aspire to the celebrated "Yeshivah" (Talmudical Academy) of Valozin in Lithuania, which had the reputation of synthesizing sacred and secular learning. To this new plan his grandfather at first offered opposition, but it was discovered that Chaim Nachman had already begun to scoff at the Rabbi of the "Chasidim", so that, in his grandfather's eyes, he had started on the downward path. His request was, therefore, granted, in the hope that the teaching imparted in the famous Academy would serve as a check to the unorthodoxy into which he had lapsed and might even lead him to repent. Bialik set out in his seventeenth year, for the famed Valozin Yeshivah only to meet with bitter disappointment on his arrival. It was not what he had expected. Here too, as in Zitomir, one learned Talmud all day, and there was no sign of the much vaunted "Haskalah" of which he had dreamt. At first he despaired of any

secular enlightenment, and finding himself in a learned atmosphere, surrounded by hundreds of youths studying Talmud night and day, he was swept into the general current and joined the company of Talmud-scholars. And as he was endowed with a quick talent, and a competitive spirit, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the study of the Law, becoming a "Mathmid", a student who kept unceasing vigil at his work, his world empty but for the Talmud and its commentaries. His celebrated poem, "The Mathmid", presents an accurate picture of himself and his mood during that period:

"My God, take what Thou wilt, my flesh and blood!
 I've sworn by Thee, and by Thy holy Law,
 My lips shall move, my voice shall cry; I will not
 Stir from my place, my corner, and my heart
 Shall know no rest, my eyes no sleep, until
 Thy Word has quenched my thirst: the morning Sun
 Shall wake me, midnight lull me, till I know
 The Talmud and am learned in the Torah." 4)

So he, like others, hoped to become a "sage in Israel"; but soon his enthusiasm for ^{Talmudical} ~~Biblical~~ study waned, his concentration diminished, and his old dreams of "Haskalah" again dominated his mind.⁵⁾ He began, with great difficulty, to learn Russian, and the first book which he chanced to read was the "Poems of Frug," which according to his own testimony,⁶⁾ influenced his early work. His acquired his secular education with the aid of some of his colleagues in the Academy, who were also

4) Bialik I, 245.

5) S. Shneour, Hamiklat, Vol. I, Book II, pp. 235-237.

6) Bialik's poems, ed. 1923, p. 360.

attracted by "unorthodoxy" and founded a national group in the Yeshivah in the year 1891, based on the "Love of Zion". This group attempted a synthesis between the ideas of Achad Ha-am and those of Ze'ev Ya'avetz, i.e., an effort to harmonise cultural Zionism with Orthodoxy. Bialik apparently became the guiding spirit of this society, and began to interest himself in Jewish problems, being attracted especially by the early articles of Ahad Ha-am. At the request of his friends, he wrote the article "The Idea of Settlement," which was published in "Ha-melitz" (on the 9th Nisan, 1891, No. 80). The article expounds the programme and purpose of the "Love of Zion" group, and combines the system of Ahad-Ha-am with that of Ya'avetz.

Bialik's literary career had now begun. The religious-national poetry of Jehudah Halevi, the lamentation and soulful gloom of Frug's verse, the songs of wrath and rebuke of J.L. Gordon - all these are interwoven into Bialik's early poetry, which is a faithful echo of the spirit of the time as it was expressed in contemporary literature especially in the works of Smolenskin, Pines and Ya'avetz.

For two years he remained at Valozin, but the Yeshivah became too narrow for his outlook. He saw no purpose in remaining there any longer; but his aspiration now was not for Berlin, but for Odessa, the abode of Ahad Ha'am, and of many other celebrated writers. At the end of 1891 he came to Odessa, without informing his grandfather of his changed plans. His life in Odessa was poor

^{in affect poverty.}
~~up the point of starvation.~~ He eked out a precarious living by teaching Hebrew. After a time even this source of livelihood was stopped, and he was left in actual hunger. He made the acquaintance of Ahad Ha'am and of Lilienblum, and the former sent him to Rabnitzky with a recommendation to publish the poem "To the Bird" in the "Pardess", which Rabnitzky edited.⁷⁾ Rabnitzky published his poem and befriended him, for after reading some of Bialik's other poems, he was convinced that Bialik had genuine poetic talent. The poet's economic position was unchanged, and he endured a life of privation and wandering for six months, after which the Academy at Valozin was closed, and he realised that his departure from the Yeshivah would be revealed to his grandfather, who was in ill¹health. In response to letters from his friends informing him that the old man was on the verge of death, he left Odessa for Zitomir. On his arrival his grandfather received him with a frigidity which ill accorded with his affection for the youth. Soon Bialik was mourning for his grandfather and for his brother as well. In deep sorrow and desperation he remained at Zitomir. It was just at this period that his poetic talent developed with amazing rapidity, under the stimulus of his sufferings and wanderings in Valozin, Odessa and Zitomir. His poems "From a distant Town", "On my return", and "Thoughts at Night" belong to this period. These poems which aroused much admiration, showed

7) (See: S. Shneour, Hamiklath, Vol. I, Book II, p.238.)

conclusively that a new period had begun for Hebrew lyric poetry, which was to be marked by a force of expression and clarity of style that were unknown before. These qualities are especially clear in "Thoughts at Night", which was a reflection of the Poet's own sorrow, except that Bialik succeeded in sublimating it to such a pitch that every reader could ^{see} in it an expression of his own grief over the ~~darkness~~ ^{plight} of the whole people.

In 1893, Bialik married and lived in his father-in-law's house in Korostishov, a village in Southern Russia, for four years. He was engaged in forestry work, which distracted him from poetry; but even in that period he wrote extensively. In 1894-95, he composed "The Talmud Student" - תלמודן - (in its original form), "On the Treshold of the Beth Ha-Midrash", "The Nation's Blessing", and other lyrics and folk ballads. In the course of his work, he would frequent forests and ~~look~~ gaze upon fine landscapes - and thus his Nature poetry began. His lack of success in business affairs brought him to Sosnowitz in the Spring of 1897. It was a Polish town near the German border, and for 3 years his occupation was teaching. His literary talent continued to develop very rapidly. He completed the "Ha-Mathmid" and his poem of rebuke "Surely the People are Grass"; while "The Last Dead of the Wilderness" and "The Assembly of Zion", (a poem dedicated to the First Zionist Congress in Basle) also belong to this period. These songs of Zion, which were at once songs of rebuke and consolation, were written at the

time when Theodor Herzl founded the Zionist Organisation, as an expression of Israel's renewed hopes of a Return to Zion

In the spring of 1900 he ^{went again} ~~passed on~~ to Odessa, at the invitation of prominent Hebrew writers who appreciated his great talent. He decided to settle there⁸⁾ and was engrossed in teaching, writing, and even in commerce. It was here that he found his mentors, Mendele Mocher Sepharim, the novelist, and Ahad Ha-am, the essayist, and that his poetic vision steadily matured. He wrote that epic and majestic poem, "The Dead of the Wilderness", and during the same period, a whole series of melancholy Nature Poems ("At Eventide", "Secrets of the Night", "An Autumn Day", "On a Hot Summer Day", and others). There were also poems which expressed a surprising mood of gaiety - the "Songs of Radiance" "Morning Sprites", "The Opening of the Window", "Radiance" and "Winter Songs").⁹⁾ While his "Songs of Radiance" were appearing, he wrote "I have scattered my Sigh to the Wind", "My Tear will not be wiped away", and "The Tear falls" - reflecting a mood of gloom and abysmal despair.

In the year 1903, when the pogrom occurred at Kishin~~ieff~~, Bialik wrote a poem "On the Slaughter", setting out his first reactions of the terrible events. It was a poem of vigorous protest in which he made a passionate appeal to Heaven for justice and vengeance. And not satisfied with an ordinary, casual impression, the poet went to Kishinieff to see the

8) Rabinitzky in "Sepher Bialik", p. 125.

9) *ibid*, p. 127.

devastation with his own eyes, and to derive knowledge of the events from witnesses on the spot. Thus the "City of Slaughter" came to be written (under the title "The Burden of Nemirow"), a poem of frightening intensity and unprecedented influence on Jewish thought. With prophetic insight Bialik observed the calamity and humiliation of his people, "the grandsons of the Maccabees", who could not defend their lives, but

"fled as mice flee, and hid as bugs hide,
And perished, as dogs perish, where they stood."¹⁰⁾

This remarkable poem had a powerful effect not only upon the people's thought, but on its policies as well, for it brought about the organisation of Jewish self-defence in Russia.

From 1904 to the spring of 1905, Bialik lived in Warsaw as the literary editor of the monthly review "Ha-Shiloach".¹¹⁾ Here he wrote more of his "songs of radiance", culminating in the poem "The Brook". Most of his love-poems ("Short Letter", "Daughter of Israel", "Where art Thou?", "At Sunset", "A Butterfly", "Come Hither", "If the Angel Ask", "Take me beneath thy Wing", "Thou Goest From Me") were composed during this period. And as the crowning glory of his poetic work came the great epic "The Scroll of Fire", which marks the end of a period in the poetic creativeness of Bialik; afterwards a long period of silence ensued and was only brought to an end with his poems

¹⁰⁾ Bialik I, 269.

¹¹⁾ He continued this work later in Odessa.

"The Word", "God's Chastisement is This", "I know that on a Dark Night". In 1909 he visited Palestine, but that country left no impression yet in Bialik's poetry. "Seer, go and flee" the last of his "Songs of Wrath" was also written in the Warsaw period.

At this stage, Bialik branched out into another direction, and began to express personal subjective ideas in the section of his work which is known as "Individual Poetry". (שירת ה'יחיד) Amongst poems of this category these are "If thou shouldst find..", "Who and What am I?" "A Twig Fell", the poems published during the World War: "Oh, with you be my Lot", and "One by one while no man sees".

In this period too he wrote his "Folk Songs" whose popular ^{style} ~~expression~~ and deftness of touch won them a wide circle of readers. He also wrote many nursery rhymes which have found their way into various chrestomathies and school-books.

Bialik's stories and literary essays dealing with Hebrew creative art and thought, his articles on Hebrew legends and the legends which he himself wrote demand separate and specialised treatment. But in narrating his life story we cannot forget his work of compilation, beginning with an anthology of Biblical stories and Prophetical chapters, and culminating in the "Book of Aggadah"¹²⁾ the collection of the works of the Spanish poets (^{Moses} Ibn-Ezra, Ibn Gabirol), and the writing of a commentary on the Mishnah.

12) A collection of Talmudical and midrashic legends, homilies and aphorisms.

In the first period of his literary activity, Bialik wrote not only in Hebrew, but also in Yiddish. His poem "The Last Word" in the form of a prophetic vision, struck a new note in Yiddish poetry, which was, on the whole, only popular folk-lore. He also issued a collection of Yiddish poems " פֿון צעל און צאָרן " (1905; 2nd edition 1922). He wrote a Yiddish translation of his "City of Slaughter" and of some of Jehudah Halevi's poems which were published (1913) under the title "Poesie" (Songs and Poems). He also wrote Yiddish stories, but his Yiddish work is not within the scope of our discussion, except insofar as his translations of Jehudah Halevi's poems reveal a poetical-spiritual link between the two national poets.

During the War, Bialik lived in Odessa. He left Russia in 1921, resided in Homburg and Berlin for two years, and thence proceeded to Tel-Aviv (Palestine), where he lived for the rest of his life.

Bialik was an active translator. He translated and edited a Hebrew version of Cervantes' "Don Quixote", and wrote a translation of Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell". From Yiddish, apart from the works already mentioned, he also translated "Between Two Worlds" (The Dybbuk) of S. Ansky, ^{stories of} Abraham Reizin, Shalom Aleichem and B. Shafir, and the stories of "Ben-Ami" from the Russian. In conjunction with with Zelizenko, he translated "The ways of the State in antiquity", a book of biblical archaeology by Nowack, but his name is not mentioned in the title

page, although his initials are appended.¹³⁾

Bialik was well-known as a communal worker, and his public life began while he was still in Odessa. Together with S. Benzion Levinsky and Ravnitzky, he founded the publishing company "Moriah" for issuing educational text-books,¹⁴⁾ and afterwards, the company of "Dvir", through which he was able to further his programme of re-printing Hebrew classics. He travelled to America on behalf of the Zionist funds and in connection with the "Dvir" company, and his impressions of America are reflected in a poem he wrote there.¹⁵⁾ In Palestine Bialik revived the Jewish custom of "Oneg Shabbath" (Literary entertainment on Sabbath) which rapidly spread through the Diaspora. And after the death of Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, he acted as the head of the "Vaad-Ha-lashon" (the committee supervising the development of modern Hebrew usage) -- and he introduced much of his creative imagination into its deliberations. This committee has many branches, and there was scarcely one in which Bialik did not actively participate. He was the Chairman of the Hebrew Writers Association and one of the founders of "Moznayim", its monthly organ. He was also the President of the Friends of the Hebrew University and one of the members of the University Senate. His public activity became exceedingly

13) vid. Fichman, Hatekufah XVII, 412.

14) Ravnitzky, Sepher Bialik, p.128.

15) Bialik, I, 188.

varied during the last years of his life, and the number of institutions and enterprises in which he took a leading part was amazingly large.

Bialik died on the 21st day of Tammuz 5694 (4th July 1934) in Vienna, and was buried in Tel-Aviv.

III. Language and Style.

One of the most important aspects of Bialik's work is his language and literary style. The wide treatment already accorded to this subject¹⁾ makes it unnecessary to provide more than a condensed summary here.

Bialik's language and style can best be considered under four headings: (1) Language in Poetry; (2) language in stories and articles; (3) language in translations; (4) language in legends.

(1) As for Bialik's poetic language, it is certain that it has no rival since the Bible for its expressiveness and emotion. It has a wealth and kaleidoscopic variety unknown in Jewish exilic literature. Jehudah Halevi, whose intensity of emotion exceeds that of Bialik, is yet surpassed by Bialik in linguistic richness. There have even been those²⁾ who have disparaged this richness of language on the ground that it obscures the reader's understanding. But actually it is not a wealth built up by a

1) A.M. Lifshitz, Be'shaah 20 II, 59-69; D. Shtock, Sepher Bialik, 34-57; *ibid*, Kneseth, 111-115; A. Abrunin, Sepher Bialik, 109-122; *ibid*, Kneseth 123-140.

2) W. Klausner, Jotzrim u-Bonim, Vol. III, Book I, p. 40.

process^{of} accumulation so much as a result of the poet's lyric power, and his unlimited sway over the sources of the language. Not only does Bialik resurrect forgotten treasures of antiquity and give them a new shape by reviving words thought to be obsolete but he even invents new idioms as well as actual new word-forms. Owing to the genuine Hebraic spirit which he applied to this process, these innovations have all the authenticity of ancient traditions. Ancient words unused until Bialik re-introduced them through his poetry become so ~~modern~~^{modern} ~~natural~~^{creation} that they look as though they are of the poet's own ~~manipulation~~^{manipulation}.

Bialik's poetic language is basically that of the Bible, enlivened by words from the Talmud, the Midrash and later literature. He was able to transform the Holy tongue into a living language of great precision and clarity, while many other poets found the Biblical idiom inadequate to express the requirements of modern thought.

This authentic note is not only discernible in the language used by Bialik, but also in his poetic mannerisms and forms. Here, too, there is a clear Biblical influence, as well as an echo from the Spanish period. Biblical influence, with the Spanish poets, often meant mere imitation, and many poets strove, artificially to burden their verse with many plays upon words and linguistic adornments. In Bialik's poetry, however, the Biblical influence is really assimilated, and becomes an organic part of his poetry. It is not only that Bialik avoided a mere

mechanical application of Biblical phrases; he⁷ contrived to interweave most Biblical mannerisms and forms into his poetry in such a way that they are not easily visible and only those who make a scientific study of his poetry are able to analyse its Biblical sources.

A review of Bialik's treatment of Biblical mannerisms and forms would show that Bialik's poetry was not only affected by the Bible, but was also in the fullest sense a continuation of the Spanish poetic lineage. The unobtrusive use of the Biblical motif - was achieved by Bialik as a result of his absorption of all the manifold poetic sources of antiquity. He is entirely free from the artificial 'archaisms' of the Spanish Hebrew poets.

It is worth emphasising that Bialik did not use all the poetic forms of the Bible - or even all those used by the Spanish poets - since a modern poet ^{could} scarcely assimilate all the ancient conventions. Bialik's poetry therefore lacks some of the features peculiar to Biblical and Spanish poetry such as prologues, epilogues and transitional formulae. These conventions which were attractive in ancient and mediaeval times had no place in modern poetry. There is however a "finale" motif in which the poems conclude on a note of optimism and encouragement. We may take as examples his conclusions of the poems "To the Aggadah", "On the Treshold of the Beth-Hamidrash", and especially "A short letter", which concludes:

"I yearn to hope; and happy they that wait:
My brother, toil and suffer in the name of the Lord".³⁾

For the typical adornments of ancient poetry, Bialik finds little use, but the linguistic mannerisms of ancient literature are widely employed in his verse, especially paranomasia, complete or partial, and Assonance. There are many varieties of paranomasia, and Bialik uses most of those employed in Spanish poetry.

Complete paranomasia (i.e. the use of words completely similar in form, but different in meaning) is very popular with Bialik, e.g. ⁴⁾ ספני צפוני סוד ש'י כל ש'י (the talk of every shrub); ⁵⁾ עוד הלויים שם ג'גס על כה'פן וסבוכים על ג'גס

There are few occasions of paranomasia with different vocalisations, for instance: ⁶⁾ ח'ק'ש - ח'ק'ש

He has a predilection for the form of ⁷⁾ ~~ה~~ יינעלן - יינעלן paranomasia where one letter interchanges: ⁸⁾ עשניט - ישניט, ⁹⁾ ישן - עשן, ¹⁰⁾ תשובה - תשובה, ¹¹⁾ עפך - אפך.

There are frequent instances of inverted paranomasia: ¹²⁾ זק קו עבי חורף, ¹³⁾ ובשנאת שאול לקרב נהגה ובזק חרבנו, ¹⁴⁾ בעינות, כי אשאל להיור כרוב etc. We also find paranomasia between the words of different lengths:

3) Bialik I, 29; see Daniel XII, 12; Jehudah Halevi in his poem "Ode to Zion", Brody II, 158.

4) Bialik, I, 2.

5) ibid, 153.

6) ibid, 281.

7) ibid, 272.

8) ibid, 90.

9) ibid, 21.

10) ibid, 139.

11) ibid, 149.

12) ibid, 29.

13) ibid, 77.

14) ibid, 35.

15) ישן - ישן

16) שבת - שבת

17) שבת - שבת

There is special interest in the language of Bialik's folk-songs and nursery rhymes - a type of poetry which had not existed in Hebrew literature, and occupy only a small part of Bialik's work. Many of the folk songs were written (or translated) under the influence of Yiddish folk-lore. But as far as their language is concerned, it can be said that Bialik created a new style for popular poetry - a style distinguished at once by its lightness of touch and its clarity. His nursery rhymes are equally marked by facility and simplicity of expression, and are a noble heritage for the Jewish child of future generations.

(2) Language of Stories & Articles. It has already been observed that there the influence of Mendele is very prominent.¹⁸⁾ But Bialik was not for long a mere follower of Mendele for he looked out into wider horizons. Sometimes this makes his stories inferior to those of Mendele; for whereas with Mendele the language and the contents always fitted each other, with Bialik, as a result of his linguistic richness the contents sometimes become less important than the language. Indeed this is the chief fault of Bialik's prose which is often heavy and ponderous. But the language in itself is immaculate. It is a cultured style, marked not alone by wealth of vocabulary derived from all the

15) ibid, 237.

16) ibid, 67.

17) ibid, 150.

18) I. Shneour, Ha'miklat, Vol. I, book II, p.249;
J. Fichman, Moznaim, Vol. IV, pp. 141-142.

literary sources, but also by expressiveness, clarity and sharp precision.

(3) Language of Translation. Translation can be work, or it can be creation and Bialik's is creative in the highest sense. Sometimes his success is so complete that no vestige of mechanical labour is evident, and the impression of an original work of art remains. He does not translate sentence for sentence. He plumbs the depths of the language from which he translates, and as a master of the language into which he is rendering it, he transfers the meaning with integrity and accuracy. His poetic power no less than his wide Hebrew knowledge contributed to the success of his translations. While "Wilhelm Tell" is rendered in pure Biblical Hebrew, "Don Quixote" is in a more "mixed" language (Biblical-Mishnaic-Midrashic).¹⁹⁾ But his translations, as everything else which he wrote, bore no trace of a "mingling" process nor of an accumulation of incompatible styles. It is a language which for all its multiplicity of ingredients becomes a harmonious unity of remarkable cohesion and polish.

(4) The Language of the Legends. On the whole, the style here is Biblical, and in many instances Bialik reaches a high poetic level. There is a remarkable artistry of style, and the legends can be read with the same fluent facility as a Biblical

¹⁹⁾ A Abrunin, Sepher Bialik, pp.109-122.

narrative. One of the latest of these legends ("Prince of Onion and Prince of Garlic") is written in rhymed couplets -- not as poetry, but as rhymed prose -- a reflection of mediaeval Jewish influence. Bialik's style in his legends is one of his important contributions in literary and stylistic innovation.

This chapter would be incomplete without reference to Bialik's role in the revival of the language. Bialik did not only introduced new expressions and ancient idioms which had become disused until he revived them in modern usage. He himself often coined new words, and became one of the active pioneers in the renewal of the modern Hebrew language.²⁰⁾

To sum up -- Bialik's style and language have scarcely less importance than his poems themselves. A poet whose linguistic power greatly exceeds his poetic imaginativeness, produces mere verses -- an inferior poetry padded out with word-plays and devoid of dynamic effect. On the other hand, a poet of great lyric sensitiveness and poor linguistic attainments can never give his Muse an adequate expression, and his literary influence is accordingly limited. Bialik's greatness was that his poetic imagination and his language were of the same level -- a level unscaled since Biblical times. The felicitous harmony between his poetic emotion and his literary command is the main factor in his eminence.

20) I. Abineri, Milon Hidushei Bialik, Tel-Aviv, 1935.

IV. His Poetry.

1. Nature Poems.

There is a view, which is fundamentally correct, that Bialik's nature poetry has to be sought not in the celebrated poems which are principally devoted to the portrayal of Nature, but in poems whose chief content is some quite different poetic idea. In these poems, descriptions of Nature are introduced only incidentally and are not fundamental to the poems themselves, but it is in them that Bialik's nature poetry is best revealed. The root of the matter is that Bialik's poetry is prophetic rather than aesthetic in intention, and his interest is focussed more on the emotions than on the senses. Hence Bialik is more responsive to human reactions than to natural beauty. It is when the poet describes some phenomenon of nature as a means towards the portrayal of human reactions, that his natural imagery is most felicitous.¹⁾

It is true that this view is correct, on the whole, and that the isolated nature similies which are swallowed up in the contents of Bialik's poems are more vivid than many real nature poems. It is true that Bialik wrote many poems entirely devoted to the portrayal of Nature.

But even in those which we call Nature-poems, because the description of Nature is their chief purpose, we find, that the

1) vid. J. Klausner, Jotzrim u-Bonim, vol.III, Book I, p.38.

degiac motive sometimes overshadows their portraiture.

Such poems as "When the Day Ends", "Secrets of the Night", and "On an Autumn Day" are clouded with sadness. The poet refuses to distinguish between private and public sorrow, and even includes Nature in his grief. Although these poems contain numerous Nature-portraits, it seems that the natural similes are introduced only to mourn for the fate of mortal man. This impression can be felt even in such a poem as "On a hot Summer Day", whose opening lines indicate that the poet is free from sadness and gloom, and has inherited peace and tranquillity in their stead, so that his only concern is to portray a sultry Summer's day. But in the continuing stanzas the poet forgets and dismisses the summer and devotes the remaining five stanzas to autumn and winter, when he craves solitude and isolation, and asks the friend whose company he had invited, to leave him alone with his thoughts:

"Let no stranger's eye behold me;
Strangers comprehend it not.
Let me brood in barren silence 2)
With my grief."

Apparently then, the poet's purpose is less to describe the summer or winter than to indicate his own moods and his temper during the various seasons.

But in Bialik's nature-poetry, too, a change of mood occurred—particularly in "Footsteps of Spring". No longer is his poetry full of grief and sadness; it becomes full of life and sunny gaiety

2) Bialik I, 48.

The poem begins:

"A new wind blows, the Heavens rise higher,
And clear horizons show their broad expanse," 3)

and it ends:

"With radiant tears I still my soul's despair,
A newborn wind encompasses the earth". 4)

So that here too there is a melancholy mood at the end. But, according to the poet's own testimony, there is a new spirit which expresses itself not only in his personal mood (which was certainly the psychological motive of the change), but also in his attitude to Nature. For Nature began to receive a different aspect at the period of his "songs of light", a form of poetry consisting of the portrayal of colourful variation, natural richness and vigour. It is this part of his work which we term "Bialik's "Shirath Ha-zohar" - "Poetry of Radiance".

Bialik's nature poetry became dominated by the worship of light. In the poem "Morning sprites"⁵⁾ he proclaims: "O God, the light hath flooded me!" He is intoxicated with light and in this overwhelming obsession he loses all sense of proportion in redundantly detailed portrayals which give the poem an aspect of artificiality. Nevertheless, this remains the most beautiful of the "Songs of Radiance". And in the poem, "On opening the Window", when he describes the tidal wave of lights which pour into his room, overflowing into every corner and piece of furniture, he still thirsts for more light. All the sunbeams which

3) ibid 79.

4) ibid.

5) ibid, 117.

the Crwator has poured into the universe are not sufficient⁶⁾ and in the poem "Good Tidings" he shows that with the departure of the clouds from the sky, the barrier between himself and the Heavens is broken:

"I hold free converse with the clear⁷⁾
And open firmament."

And through the abundance of radiant light which has descended upon him and flowed through his heart, a new spirit comes, bringing with it a new poetry. The poet then turns to the light and says:

"Flit through my frame, sweet elves of light,
Awaken every string,
And with one burst of newborn song⁸⁾
My inmost soul shall sing."

And again, in another poem, he aspires to raise his eyes silently to the "dread light" and to direct all his thoughts and meditations "freely on Oceans of light".⁹⁾ In the poem "At Sunrise", he shows how all "oceans of light" in the world are bound up in the Sun, which shines upon the world and them that dwell therein. It is the Sun which brings happiness, and immeasurable hope, and therefore:

"Weaned from the darkness, drawn from the breasts of Night
Clasp to your head the light!"¹⁰⁾

All the motives expressed in these poems and in others dealing with light, all the thirst for Nature and the yearning for the

6) *ibid*, 102.

7) *ibid*, 122.

8) *ibid*.

9) *ibid*, 115.

10) *ibid*, 126.

Sun find complete expression in the two great poems

רָדִיָּא (Radiance) and הַיָּם (The pool).

"Radiance" is in effect an appropriate epithet for the whole of Bialik's nature poetry. From earliest youth, the world was very much with him, and all creatures were his companions who set their seal upon his poetry. But all the time he was longing for something of which he had no sure knowledge, something hidden and mysterious. And then:

"Suddenly the kingdom of Light was shaken
Like jewels and suns from a sieve
Blinding the eyes." 11)

So he became the "embodiment" of radiance" and in his heart was concealed the "sun of song". And being flooded with endless light he looks out on to the wideplaces of the world. First his eyes light upon the field and the standing corn, and then upon the "Pool", the mirror of the world"¹²⁾ as it appears in his imagination. His perception is keen and impressionable, and sometimes through the abundance of descriptive portraits, flowing from his lively and penetrating observation, the imaginative purpose of this poem is not grasped. The poem's richness of language and breadth of style help to give an impression of obscurity. Nevertheless, this poem contains descriptions of Nature which have no parallel in Hebrew poetry: His portrayal of the birds and the "embroidery of insects" in the fields;

11) *ibid*, 94.

12) *ibid*, 281.

the picture of the pool whose disturbance shatters the Sun's reflections in it into seven suns; the description of the fisherman hauling his net from the river - all these wonderful pen-pictures make the poem one of the supreme achievements of portraiture in the whole of Hebrew literature, marred only slightly by the accumulation of portraits and the excessive richness of language and stylistic effects.

Much the same applies to the great poem "The Pool" which as it were, completes Bialik's nature poetry. Like "Radiance" this poem is a collection of pictorial descriptions each of which could easily be separated from the others and stand complete in itself. As a result the poem moves slowly and is difficult to grasp as a whole. But these technical drawbacks are trivial against the artistry which turns it into a hymn of Nature in which the poet amply reveals his keen perception and skill both in descriptive writing and in nature-painting.

In his youth, "while yet the mystic effluence of God with fluttering pinion hovered o'er his head", the poet would frequent the wood and sit beside the pool, isolating himself with the "majestic kingdom of peace, with His Creator and his heart". He craved solitude, for he was between two worlds: the world of majestic peace and the world of natural conflict. Nor could he choose between them:

"Oft as I sat me on the marge and gazed
Upon the riddle of this multiverse,
Not knowing which came first....." 13)

The Pool is a mirror ("an open eye") in which the whole world is reflected; and in its turn it gazes upon the world "reflecting all, in all reflected". Thither comes the poet to solve the riddle of Life's mystery. Even here, as he sits and waits ^{with} ineffable longing for the solution of the eternal riddle, so as to

"Await some impact of the Deity
Or advent of Elijah" -

even here in the thick of the forest, the sycamores and cedars of the wood gaze upon him haughtily, in pride and astonishment,

"As though to say: 'What does the stranger here?'

It is here that the poet finds rest in the midst of Nature. But how does he solve his riddle here by the pool? This we can only understand in the poet's own words:

"A voice there is whose might transcendeth words,
Whose utterance flows in colours, spurning sound:
In suchlike tongue God communes with His saints;
The Lord of worlds embodies cosmic thoughts;
The master artist shapes his plastic stress,
And finds an answer for unuttered dreams.
It speaks through sight; its voice unfolds itself
Through the blue stretch and vastness of the skies,
Through silver sheen or blackening mass of cloud,
The stir of golden corn, the cedar's pride,
The dove's white fluttering wing, the eagle's sweep,
The beauty of man's form, his shining glance,
The wildness, rage and laughter of the sea,
The brooding night, the hush of falling stars,
In storm-whirled lightnings, snorting fiery seas
In which the sun goes up or sinks to rest.
To me in suchlike speech, too deep for speech, 14)
The pool unlocked its ageless mysteries."

14) *ibid*, 281-2.

This verse has rarely been surpassed as a hymn to Nature, and is a noble illustration of the poet's deep and sensitive observation.

In his poem "Radiance", when the "Kingdom of light" is revealed to him, Bialik gives us a description of a field with the sunbeams amongst the standing corn, and a picture of the "embroidery of insects" - a most felicitous attempt in nature-painting. Amongst other poems describing landscapes, one which deserves special study is "In the Field" which is a completely genuine Nature poem, even although its conclusion is on a national motive.

The poet flees "like a hound ^{that} men have chained and tormented for long" - to the field, where his thoughts and emotions can wander freely because the Divine presence haunts the field:

"I stand and I list to the voice of the Lord in the corn."¹⁵⁾
 So he comes and hides amongst the sorn and asks the earth why he too may not till the soil and find his subsistence from it. He receives no answer. Instead, there comes a strong wind, bearing the ears of corn away to another land, fleeing from him. Then he remembers that the ears of corn are not his, for it was not his labour which sowed them. Only then, when he stands before the "glory of the bright and joyful corn" does he perceive how much poorer he is for his divorcement from the field and the life

15) *ibid*, 25.

of Nature:

"I stand and gaze at the field, the beautiful mirthful
rustling -
I think how poor I am - there's a thought that eats
at my brain:
Not I broke up the soil, and sowed the seeds in the
furrows,
Not I, not I shall garner the wealth of the ripened
grain." 16)

But although the life of Nature is not for his, and the grain
is not his harvest:

"And yet, for the sake of the land of our fathers
Where, filled with a hope new-born,
My brothers are bidding their sheaves, now with
gladness,
I love you, O fields of the corn!" 17)

The allegory is clear. Israel is without land and bereft of a
national soil, and divorced from contact with Nature. The poet
who sees Nature as the "all in all", who sees "glory" in stalks
of corn and hears "the word of the Lord" ^{coming forth} ~~emanating~~ from them,
begins to understand how poor a nation is which is denied the
life of the soil. Only one consolation remains to him -
the thought of his brethren tilling their ancestral land.

Bialik's "Winter-songs" demand special consideration,
although they too do not stand apart, but come within the
category of "songs of light".

Winter in Bialik's poetry is a Russian winter: and he
describes it with robust vigour and exultation. In these

16) *ibid*, 26.

17) *ibid*.

poems, perhaps, the best of his Nature poetry, the emphasis is on man's ~~the~~ yearning for Nature rather than objective portrayals of Nature itself. But the fact remains that these poems contain descriptions of great vividness revealing the depth of Bialik's discernment, his power of objective detail, and his vigour of expression.

In the first of the "Winter songs", although there are many realistic descriptions of isolated features of the Universe, the poet's intention is to supply a general portrait of winter. More accurately - it is a portrayal of "wintriness", the picture of a winter world which is suddenly transformed overnight, as though it had been placed on the Creator's anvil, while He beat and hardened it with his hammer and made a new world from the old.¹⁸⁾ The world which had been languishing is renewed by the Creator, and becomes "firm and solid". And not only the forces of Nature, but Man as well draws upon new reservoirs of strength:

"To smite with the fist and to smash with a blow 19)
The Heavens above and the earth down below."

What then is the sequel to this longing? It must be understood as the reaction of a man whose life has been in an Academy divorced from Nature and ascetically removed from his heart's desire? He flings himself into the sleigh and entreats its Driver to lead him into "endless space".

The second "Winter Song" is in a logical sequence to its

18) *ibid*, 112.

19) *ibidm* 114.

predecessor. The poet no longer addresses the world of Winter as a whole, but certain features of it which he portrays with remarkable skill and penetration.

He describes a Winter, full of radiance and clarity, "a world clear and firm", as he writes in the previous poem. This world is of clear purity and from the poet's pen it appears before us as a living, moving picture.²⁰⁾

Soon he receives a "luxuriant radiance". The sun lies in wait for him for the recluse student whose "brow is of snow and whose face is as chalk", and sends its shafts towards him. The world is alive with cold and radiance at the same time.²¹⁾

The poet remembers the suppressed forces of Nature - and of himself. Again he turns to the driver of the sleigh asking to be conveyed to some place where life is more rapid and vigorous.²²⁾

New energy has been stirred up in the student who had been imprisoned within the four walls of an academic life, and with the coming of Winter, he feels the tumultuous life hidden within him which longs to burst forth into expression. He yearns to drain the cup of Life at one draught and to expend all the heat and energy of his soul. He does not fear that his soul will be empty and void? He will go to the forest far from the city, where a hammer and an anvil are hidden. On these he will beat

20) *ibid*, 127.

21) *ibid*, 129.

22) *ibid*, 132.

out his soul, having first of all purified it in the frost:

"My soul is filled with life renewed,
Which ne'er it knew before,
And sevenfold its force is grown 23)
And sevenfold its strength."

Bialik's Nature poetry passed through many stages of development, and had many obstacles to overcome on the way. Hebrew poetry before his time gave him little assistance. He found no conventional means of expression suitable to his own emotions and perceptions and even the subject matter of such Nature poetry as there was no longer appealed to him. Hence he had to grope and search - a fact which explains many of the deficiencies in his earlier poems and even in his later work, ^{when} his Nature poetry was at its best. In his childhood he lived amongst Nature's surroundings, which certainly left their hall-mark on his poetry. But his general remoteness, as a student, from the normal life of Nature was not an influence that could easily be concealed, and there is inevitably an unnaturalness at times which mars his keen observation and his clear, objective portraiture. It was poetry which he fashioned out of himself. But he never conquered Nature (except in a few fleeting triumphs) and Nature never conquered him, so as to be absorbed entirely into his soul. Nevertheless, his powerful poetic talent generally overcame these obstacles; and even though he could not sweep them from his path, they became of small account against the vigour with which his Nature poetry was expressed. His Nature poetry certainly

reached magnificent heights in "Radiance", "The Pool" and "Winter Songs", which stand in a class of their own for their portrayal and their piercing observation. They are all expressed with a richness of style and an opulence of language with which, in the poet's own words:

"The master artist shapes his plastic stress
And finds an answer to unuttered dreams...." 24)

Nature poems do not form a large portion of Bialik's work, but they are a very significant part of it. Radiant light is the keynote of them all.

2. Love Poems.

Simplicity and diffidence are the chief characteristics of Bialik's love-poetry, even of his later work. He meets his lady as if by chance in the wood, and his attention is concentrated on one feature only - her eyes: "Two glowing embers dipped in flame". But he, the unsophisticated pupil of the old Beth ha-Midrash, unschooled to life and inexperienced in the society of women whose world is a mystery to him, asks in naive wonderment:

"What have these eyes from me to claim?" 1)

The meaning of those eyes baffles him, but the fact remains that they have pierced his heart deeply and stolen his peace of mind, so that he trembles mightily fearing their appeal:

24) ibid, 281.

1) Bialik I, 12.

"Save me, heaven, save me now
Lilith hath ensnared my soul!"²⁾

The poem "For an Apple" although it reads like a spontaneous love-song, it is not an original poem, being based on Daudet. Despite its gay facility of touch, it betrays the awkwardness of a first fortuitous love.

There is more originality in the poem "She wrote a Small Letter to me", (p.49) which is conceived in a spirit of humility and innocence. We cannot decide whether there is occasion to compare it to the Book of Ruth,³⁾ for although there may be similarity in the simplicity of expression, the Book of Ruth contains the sexual motive - the urge of propagation - which is quite absent from this poem. Love, for the poet, is a "perfection of light and rays, as if born from one light into another". He is no longer alarmed by the loved one's eyes, as in his first poems, for now her eyes are "twin doves full of peace" to him.

"A soft, soft light of peaceful, restful calm
of loving kindness and purity of soul."⁴⁾

But his instinct tells him that this godlike creature is not for him:

"Too pure art thou to be my mistress fair,
Too holy to abide in my domain."⁵⁾

What then can she be to him, when he loves her with a strong enduring passion:

2) *ibid* 13.

3) J. Klausner, *Jotzrim u-Bonim*, vol.III, Book I, p.37.

4) *Bialik* I, 50.

5) *ibid*.

"Be thou a god and angel unto me
That I may worship thee with humble prayer, 6)
Be thou to me a sacred memory."

Here is a celestial abstract ~~love~~, remote from earthly materialism. It is a concept which had no place in Hebrew Literature until Bialik wrote this poem. It is not far-fetched even to deny that Bialik had no knowledge in his poetic mind of common corporeal love. He had heard of it, but remained free from its influence. It may seem that in the poem "Hungry Eyes" he is ~~thinking~~ of ordinary love when he describes "the hungry eyes", "the thirstly lips" and "the hidden treasures", or when he tells us that he has tasted of "the source of pleasure, the fount of blessing". But observe how he concludes:

"Ah, beauty, couldst thou know the languorous soul
Which thou hast wearied." 7)

That is not all. He had been pure and unsullied, but now in his exceeding folly he has lost "his innocence of heart, purity of spirit, all the tender flower of his youth". His world lies, in ruins, and with the words: "How great a price I paid for this fair flesh" - the poem ends.

So Love remains celestial, pure, non-material. He yearns for love and craves it passionately, but his longing is less for any single woman than for womanhood as a whole. The same longing appeal is woven as a continuous thread through other poems:

6) *ibid.*

7) *ibid.*, 103.

"I watched by Night" (p.104), "One Ray of Sun" (p.105)
 "With the Sun's Glow" (115), and, especially "Daughter of
 Israel" (119). Only the daughter of Israel has "the fair
 jewel called love". She is full of radiance, purity, love:-

"No fault so'ever shalt thou find,
 Not by the light of seven suns". 8)

And love for the particular woman, whom the poet never yet knew,
 filled his heart in his early manhood, so that in his student
 days she appears before him as in a dream:

"All day between the letters of the Book", 9)

and he entreats her to appear before him - her whom he regards
 as

"the single choice of his life, the spirit
 of his desire".

With her revelation, his own redemption would come:

"While yet I may be freed, come thou, redeem me,
 Over my fate be queen,
 Give back in one day the youth which has been stolen
 And slay while my spring is green.
 Thy lips may quench my flame, between thy breasts
 I shall usher out my day." 10)

So it is in his poem "The Butterfly". Here too there is deep
 and urgent longing; the poet cannot suppress his love:

"Thou leadest the way, I follow enslaved."

"Her flitting hair-lock seems to beckon to him. His longing

8) *ibid.*, 119.
 9) *ibid.*, 137.
 10) *ibid.*

is not to possess her - of that he scarcely dreams - but only to embrace her, and yet his enraptured heart denies him even this. A noble expression of these desires and longings is to be found in his poems "If the Angel ask" and "Come take thou me beneath thy wing." The poet's soul pines for love, but his Muse sings other songs - of Nature, sadness, life and radiance.

"But one song was unknown - of youth and love." 11)

His soul has no rest while it yearns for love and pines for the spirit of youth, and still:

"It puts its wings against the gates of love,
Beating, knocking, weeping - sh! so soft, 12)
and all for love its prayer....."

Ostensibly, the poet is pining for youth and love. But in fact he has not tasted of the first nor experienced the latter.

"In twilight's hour of ruth,
Bend down and hear the secret of my pain;
They say that somewhere in the world is youth -
Then where is mine? for I have sought in vain.
Hear yet again, I pray,
Consumed is my soul with inward fire;
And somewhere in the world is love, they say 13)
What is this love to which all hearts aspire?"

The poet knows not the meaning of Love; but men say that it does exist, so he longs for that which he has never attained. And although, in his poem "Thou goest from me", he declares that his loved one's departure leaves him peaceful and content, yet he cannot avoid the perpetual surge of longings and the inward turmoil and unrest which fill all his love-poetry.

11) ibid., 143.

12) ibid.

13) ibid., 144.

Bialik's poetry, although it contains different moods which appear separate in content and in expression, is yet a real unity. Its beginnings are modest and simple, with a touch of self-deprecation; it contains innocence, purity, and a mood of abstract unreality. It sometimes bursts out into sensual love which is afraid and contemptuous of itself; but beneath all of these runs the deep longing for a love that is not experienced or understood. It is this love which he wishes to express in song and to experience in life. And yet this poetry, which is a mass of conflicts, can become a unity, and finds a complete expression in Bialik's greatest love-poem, "The Scroll of Fire".

"The Scroll of Fire" is a work in which are embodied all the various subjects and contents which occupied Bialik's attention. Most of them are introduced into the framework of this poem, one of whose chief topics is love, to which the poet gives majestic and awe-inspiring utterance. One of Bialik's most distinctive poetic qualities is his wonderful knack of blending his own individuality with the general feeling of his people. In this poem his poetry of wrath, of exile and of redemption are all bound up together with his love-poetry, in one complete whole. The poem is thus a jewel of many facets. It can be called a great national epic or interpreted as a poem of wrath and rebuke. Or again if the contents are studied, it appears as a chapter in the nation's historical tradition, with

destruction on one side of the picture, and exile on the other. But, however, it is interpreted, this remains Bialik's greatest love-poem. All the interpretations can be maintained and defended, but here we have to discuss it from the standpoint of love-poetry.

The "youth tender and bright-eyed" sees the girl for the first time. It is not any particular maiden, but one whom he has never met; and she is "pure of flesh and of a melancholy glance". Her eyelashes point straight at him, and the "aura of the Dawn gleams upon her head." But despite her demeanour, he is bereft of speech and silenced for an instant, until his spirit returns to him. Then he pours out his soul to her in pure supplication, asking if she is the wondrous being whom he has always cherished in his mind, for whom he has pined and from whom he has fled and escaped. Is it she who has beckoned to him as a star from the sky "with silent love, causing my soul to tremble by the blinking of thine eyelid?" For she has always filled his heart with longing for her. But it chanced that an "aged man in Judah", a recluse and saintly hermit of God, of dread majesty", took him under his care "and taught me of his ways and caused me to serve His God, and estranged my heart from delight and taught me to gaze heavenwards, ^{to} plucking the buds of my youth one by one, and remaining steadfast in God." This old man¹⁴⁾ he holds in deep reverence, but he is still drawn

14) whom some recognise as Bialik's grandfather, e.g.
J. Klausner, Jotzrim u-Bonim, vol. III, Book I, p. 58.

after the maiden whom he has beheld "as a daughter of God embroidered in radiance and perfect in brightness." And although he is young in years and "still pure and modest and bashful, while his soul is unsullied within him"; and although "the dust of women¹⁵⁾ hath not cleaved to his garment, nor has he known her scent" - yet love fills him through and through:

"And yet a thousand springs of Life bubbled within my heart, and my soul craved a vast abundance of love."

Naturally, this love was directed to the maiden whose image ever hovered before his eyes. "By day when I went about, my eyes were lifted heavenwards while I groped thy shadow around me like a blind man; and in the wandering slumber of night I sought thee on my couch". And when he is "all aflame with the fire of Love", the old man is conjured up before him, and he fears him with so dread a fear that he overcomes his passion that burns within him. But still he found no rest nor knew any peace, and still the conflict of desires and the battle of flesh and spirit went on:

"There in the brook before me, I saw a girl bathing; and her fair skin shone at me out of the seeming darkness and maddened me.....I had almost sprung on her as a leopard - but the image of the saintly old man rose before me - and I strangled my desire with a cry. I hid myself in a cleft of the rocks and spied out from there on her fair body. I consumed her white flesh with my eyes, and my soul fondled with tremulous rapture her virgin breasts. I ground my teeth, I clenched my fist - I know not against whom, whether against the heavens for tempting me, or against Satan for provoking me."

15) Hebrew *אפר נשים* Dust of Woman - meaning the slightest contact with woman.

And he knows not his own soul. "For I looked at my soul, and¹⁶⁾ behold it was black and white at the same time, an interplay of day and night." So he does penance, and through the old hermit offers all that he has to Heaven. But since "the Heavens surely mocked me and encompassed me with cruel deceit, and took from me my youth, my all, and gave nothing in their stead" - he remains empty-handed and desolate, knowing no peace. To whom then shall he turn at such a time, if not to the maiden who is again revealed to him?

"Then thou didst suddenly appear to me, my stay, queen of my soul, thou standest now before me in the plenitude of thy beauty on the earth. The sceptre of happiness is in thy hand and the diadem of salvation on thy brow. No sooner had I seen thee than all my imprisoned desires emerged like adders from their burrows and glided tremulous, parched and famished towards thee, thee only, and a strange rebellious fire shone in their eyes.....See - my heavens filled with stars of gold and silver I shall give thee for one handful of love, one touch of thy sceptre."

This maiden wields unlimited dominion over him, and just as he¹⁷⁾ wished previously to give all that he had, even his last lock of hair, to Heaven, so he now wishes to deliver himself up entirely to the maiden:

"Take me, pity me, bear me up, my sister, - lo, I am in thy hand. Put me as a seal upon thy heart or a stool for thy feet.....I shall crouch as a dog by the skirts of thy robe and watch thy lids move or thy finger beckon. Or I shall spring on thee like a young lion and carry thee away to the jungle."

16) Bialik I, 293.

17) *ibid*, 294.

"...Or I shall create thee a new heaven, and surround thee with new azure and lustre. I shall set thee as a sun in the orbit of my life and weave the memory of thee into the song of my soul. I shall fashion thee garlands for my prayers and pave thy steps with lily white flowers. I shall hover about thy throne like a fiery eagle, and waft a flame on thee with my pinion. I shall fly at thy word to unimagined heights and my happy cry will reach the distant suns." 18)

It may seem that this is an insuperable passion, but the poet shows otherwise. For when the Dawn appears to him and whispers God's blessing from above, he again wanders in doubt. "Heaven or Perdition?" Instantly he forgets his former turmoil and cries out:

"O God, even the fire in my heart I consecrate to the heavens!"

And now he is confident of his fate and in his God-sent purpose, even though it defies true understanding and he "knoweth not what it is." As he walks along the stream "towards whatever is in store for him, with a sure heart", he sees that

"The image of the girl was in the water, and the silvery cloud was in the sky - they too moved, and went before him." 19)

And as he strides along, happy and full of hope, with the Divine fire before him, and Hell consigned to oblivion - at that very moment -

"There appeared to him again the image of the maiden from the depth of Perdition....Lo' it was she in all her delight and glory, her light shining on her brow. She gazed towards him, and threw her fire deep into his soul. Silently she was drawn upwards towards him, and silently she drew him down to her, to Sheol. Her hands were stretched towards him, spread to give and to receive. She looked with a love, mighty as death." 20)

18) *ibid.*
 19) *ibid.* 296.
 20) *ibid.* 297.

and finally -

"The youth clasped the holy fire to his heart and closing his eyes tight in dread, cried out 'Heavens - Perdition - thou art.....' and he dropped from the peak into the arms spread out in the depths of Perdition....." 21)

This, then, is the end of the terrible conflict in the poet's heart which was torn between two powerful forces: Heaven and Love. First it was inclined towards the one, then the other bore it away; and without finding peace in its free choice, it plunged into the depths of perdition.

The "Scroll of Fire" is the poet's "scroll of love". But whereas his ordinary love-poems express the mere longing for love and the yearning towards it without any violent spiritual struggle, in this work we find no poetry of yearning for love, but rather the poetry of Love itself, presented with unrivalled beauty and power. On the other hand, this poem reveals all the conflict of a broken heart, with its tempestuous storms and its agonising convulsions and desires.

Thus, in the "Scroll of Fire", a work made up of many sources and subjects, Bialik gave his most perfect expression to his complex love emotions. In this work lies the key and the solution to the understanding of his love-poetry.

There can be many opinions about this love-poetry which is based on duality and conflict, being sometimes pure and stainless, and sometimes yearning for the pleasures of the flesh, first confessing that it has never sung of true love, and then enquiring

what true love is. Whatever our analysis, this love-poetry is all of a unified pattern.

There are many explanations too of the causes which led to this love instinct. Whether we accept the view which solves the problem by describing it as the product of the poet's Jewish-exilic environment, and traditional upbringing²²⁾ or whether we agree that it symbolises Jewish morality²³⁾ or that it "represents the "real Jewish love",²⁴⁾ or even that "love of this sort is a general human phenomenon, the result of a deviation in sexual development"²⁵⁾ - whichever view we accept, it remains definite that Bialik sings principally of the longing for love. The various conflicts of this love, which seem to many to be contradictory with each other, in fact explain and confirm the view that Bialik's love-poetry consists in effusions about love in aspirations for it. But apart from the "Scroll of Fire", he does not deal with love itself, but stands only at the gate of love's palace and never penetrates within.

But this poetry of entreaty is not only distinguished for its exalted expression, and its intrinsic merit as a piece of craftsmanship, for it has a special value just because it is not of the usual pattern of love-poetry and just because it does not deal with the ordinary love which finds expression in the works of many poets.

22) J. Klausner, Jotzrim u-Bonim, vol.III, Book I, p.49.

23) I. Rivkind, Bialik's God, Berlin 1923, p.12.

24) *ibid*, p.11; also H. Zeitlin, Hatekufah, vol.17.

25) I. Becker, Bialik and his work in the light of Psycho-analysis, Part I, p.27.

It has been said that the love expressed in Bialik's poetry is "Jewish, pure, stainless, holy",²⁶⁾ that "his attitude to love is essentially Hebraic",²⁷⁾ that such a poem as "A short Letter" "excels all other modern Hebrew love songs in its Hebraism",²⁸⁾ "This is a love-song which none other than a Hebrew poet could have written, a poet Hebraic not only in origin and language, but also in spirit and temperament."²⁹⁾

Is this estimate of Bialik's love-poetry valid?

There are two sides to the question. This evaluation is untrue because Jewish poetry never sang of love like this. The oldest and greatest love-song in Jewish literature is the "Song of Songs", to which Bialik's love-poetry has not the slightest similarity. The love of the "Song of Songs" is unrivalled for its Oriental genuineness, and its earthly realism. And if for all that it gives an impression of innocence and simplicity, that is due to its primitive form of expression. But actually, it contains none of the longing desire for abstract love; it has none of the asceticism of celestial love. It is love with all its passions, convulsions and stormy ^{desires} ~~appetites~~. And even if we take the Book of Ruth as an example (although this is not strictly a poem even if it has a deep poetic content), it cannot be said that this Book expresses no sensual desire? The ambition of Naomi was that her daughter-in-law Ruth should wed a man:

26) I. Rivkin, *ibid*, p.11.

27) H. Zeitlin, *Hatekufah*, vol.17.

28) J. Klausner, *ibid*, 37.

29) *ibid*, 38.

"My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?"³⁰⁾ That was also the wish of Ruth. "Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman."³¹⁾ This was the tone of Hebrew poetry when Israel dwelt in their own land, and it was no different in the time of Exile. If we examine the Hebrew poetry of the Spanish period, for example, it is obvious that classical poetry, especially the "Song of Songs", was its guide and pattern. The poetry of ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra and Jehuda Halevi followed the same methods and forms of expression as the "Song of Songs". If anything, the poetry of the Spanish period was much more material and wordly than the "Song of Songs", owing to accretion of Arabic influences. In the later period the name of Immanuel of Rome is sufficient to confirm this view. Hence there seems to be little ground for the view that Bialik's love-poetry is fundamentally Jewish.

Nevertheless that view is not without a kernel of truth, if we add the modification that it is Jewish love-poetry with an exilic un-Jewish origin. In the days of Israel's normal national life on its own soil, the "Song of Songs" was written. But on being exiled Israel's spirituality completely ousted material interests. The beginnings of a new attitude to love can be discerned during the actual existence of a national life in

30) Ruth, III, 1.
 31) *ibid*, III, 9.

Palestine; but this was on the eve of downfall, when the spiritual elements of the national outlook had begun to conquer and subdue the materialistic elements. The Talmudic literature³²⁾ regards the "Song of Songs" not as a normal song of love between two lovers, but as a song of love between the community of Israel and its Father in Heaven. The exile and dispersion gave an entirely new interpretation to this love-poetry: Can it be imagined that Solomon, "the wisest of men", produced a poem which is no different from love-poems amongst all the nations? "Surely", concluded the Jews in exile, "the poem must have been an allegory representing the congregation of Israel entreating the love of the Lord Creator". This was the interpretation adopted by Judaism through various peculiar circumstances, and especially through the preferences of spirituality to materialism. Even in the religious Jewish poetry of the Spanish period, the congregation of Israel is the suitor, and God, the desired object of affectionate desire, - Israel the wooer, and God the bride. They produced human, material descriptions to express certain relationships existing between the people ^{and its deity.} ~~and humanity.~~ And Judaism saw nothing derogatory in this anthropomorphism, since there was now ~~now~~ danger of materialism in the Jewish religion. Judaism, being obviously unable to disregard a book of classical fame and sanctity, found a new interpretation

32) Mishnah Yodaim III, 5; Sanhedrin 100, 1; Midrash Shir-ha-Shirim Rabbah, Ch. I, ii.

for ancient love-poetry, putting new wine into an old flask in an attempt to give it a specifically Jewish semblance. If Bialik's love-poetry is approached from this view-point, we find confirmation of the statement that his love-poetry is essentially Jewish in character for it is the song of a love which fulfils the Jewish requirements of purity, innocence and reverence.

It is unnecessary here to discuss whether this is the direct outcome of his conditions of life, or whether the cause is in some personal biological factor. There are critics who adhere to each view, and a final decision is impossible. The important thing is the existence of this part of his work, which proves that the growth and evolution of love-poetry is feasible even on the soil of dispersed Jewry, which endeavoured to cast off materialism and sensuality and to enthrone spirituality in their place. The poetry of the heart and the spirit, of innocence and purity, found noble utterance in Bialik's work, despite his numerous conflicts and internal struggles, beginning with the early simpler poems and culminating in the tempestuous grandeur of the "Scroll of Fire".

3. Poetry of Exile.

Exile poetry has two aspects. It can be a cry of protest against the life of exile and a battle against it without respite; or, on the other hand, despite the recognition of the negative character of exilic life such poetry can reveal the content of

the life such as it is and illuminate its brighter side. These two interpretations of exile, contradictory to each other on the surface, comprise the exilic poetry of Bialik.

As far as the first side of his exile poetry is concerned, there was certainly no poet who reached the eminence which Bialik attained in his poems of indignation and rebuke. In his rage against the nation's God, and stern rebuke of the nation itself, Bialik reached his summit of poetic talent. Previous poets had lacked the strength and boldness even to reveal the miserable lot of a people which resigns itself to exile. Still less could they express a dignified protest to Heaven. Their poetry touched God only in terms of silent prayer, or at the most in complaint and supplication, because of the evil plight of Israel in exile. The end was always the acknowledgement that "God is righteous in all His ways." The prophets of old, and even Jehudah Halevi could not express more than an echo of Israel's grief. Perfect faith in the God of Israel and in the justice of His works forbade them to protest openly to Heaven. The indignation and rebuke in Israel's poetry throughout the ages are directed, primarily, against the people itself; and even this was confined to the moral and religious place. Israel had sinned in not keeping Divine ordinances, and for these sins they had incurred suffering. Let them only repent and healing will come. It is true that Halevi and the greatest of his successors all strove

to escape from this confinement and to transpose the causes of exile to the national place as well; but as religion and nationality were so intertwined in their poetry, the national "motif" was not very prominent and appears to have been swallowed up into the religious atmosphere which dominated all their poetry. Bialik's poetry of indignation and rebuke is therefore in a different category. He was a modern poet; and although deep religious feelings are found in his poetry, he can easily become rebellious and revolutionary. He is not only consumed with indignation against the people for accepting its bitter lot, but he does not even hesitate to protest to the Creator:

"No strength, no stay, we cannot see the road,
The heavens are dumb,
They know they sinned against us grievously."¹⁾

The guilt is clear and heinous; and appealing to the mercy of Heaven, he asks "if there's a God in you". He even expresses doubt of the existence of Divine justice:

"If there is Right, then let it now be shown,
For if when I have perished 'neath the skies
The Right shine forth, I pray
Crushed ever be its throne!
And through eternal wrong the heavens shall wilt".²⁾

Such rage and indignation had never been heard in Israel before; and it was by this rebellion that Bialik earned the title of the modern national poet. It seems inevitable that a poet of this sort, the essence of whose poetic quality is revealed in indignation and rebuke, should continually stress the darker side of

1) Bialik I, 141.

2) *ibid*, 124.

exile and fail to reveal even a ray of light in it. If a poet like Halevi, whose work is devoid of indignation, entirely ignores anything creditable in exilic life, surely Bialik, the unrivalled exponent of wrath and fury, must also fail to perceive the light of exilic existence. But in fact we find that Bialik is actually bound up heart and soul with the life of the diaspora. On the one hand he regards it as a God-sent curse, but on the other - he finds in it the "effluence of God."

The source of the Divine spirit which Bialik finds in the exile, is the Torah. Israel is banished but their Torah is with them, and it is that which gives them the elixir of life and enables them to exist in the dispersion. The people of Israel are persecuted and tormented, torn up from the soil of national existence and bereft of normal life. All that is left to them is the Torah in which they find consolation for their bitter life of oppression. Israel has no political or material refuge. Only the spiritual refuge is left - and that is the house of learning.

"Ye Beth Ha-medrash walls, ye ancient piles,
Abode of strength, a people's ageless shield."³⁾

Bialik sees that the "Beth Hamedrash", the "Sanctuary of God" is in the process of destruction. Scholars diminish, the house of learning gradually empties. Thus the one prop and support which he regards as the mainstay of national endurance is being cut away. What hope is left? None can be seen.

3) *ibid* 21.

"Shall these my tears mourn thy decline or mine
Or shall I weep and mourn for each at once?" 4)

But the poet cannot reconcile himself to the downfall of scholarship. He is full of the love for Israel's spiritual heritage and is at pains to demonstrate the power of the "abode of strength, the people's ageless shield". And in his poem "If you would know", Bialik shows that the Beth Hamedrash alone gave Jewry the confidence and the hope to survive its exile. It was from that source that the people drew strength and vigour to overcome its terrible agony. It was on its behalf and on behalf of the Torah, that Israel suffered martyrdom, because it was from that source

"Whence strength of soul
Was drawn in evil days
By those who gladly walked to meet their death
Bending the neck beneath the biting steel.
The headsmen's axe - or climbing to the stake,
First to the faggots clinging there to die, 5)
Proclaiming Unity - the martyr's death."

The Beth-Hamidrash was the centre of all the agonies of Israel, and at the same time a source of life, encouragement and consolation. And if there survived any memory of the ancient Jewish spirit, or any remnant of Jewish culture with its long lineage - it was that hallowed sanctuary which kept the sacred ember aglow in its midst. It is true, as the poet says, that not everybody appreciated the value of the Beth Hamidrash for Israel's survival, and the rebirth of a class of poor and hapless scholars would

4) *ibid*, 22.

5) *ibid*, 60.

appear to some people a most retrograde development. But, in fact, the Beth Ha-Midrash alone was the home of Jewish life, the storehouse of the people's soul.

"Some shrivelled Jews with parched and wizened face,
Jews of the Exile, burdened with its yoke,
Who lose their pain in faded Talmud page,
Their misery in Midrash tales of old,
And sing their sorrows in a psalm of praise
(Ah me! How slight and worthless all must seem
In eyes of strangers, heedless to discern).
Then shall the heart inform you how your feet
Stand on the treshold of our house of Life
And our Soul's treasure-house your eyes behold." 6)

And now - what has happened before his eyes?

"I looked - and lo! my fortress lies in ruins.
God's Presence flees and leaves an empty place 7)
Stealing away from underneath the veil."

But Bialik is a son of his times. He cannot conceal his reverence for the "ancient scrolls" of whom he writes -

"Ye were my garden in the Summer's heat,
My pillow in the Winter's stormy stress;
Within your scrolls I learnt to trust my soul 8)
To weave my sacred dreams between your lines."

But under the prevalent influence of the time, with the decline going on before his eyes, he too began to nurse a dissatisfaction with that mode of life. The "ancient scrolls" which had hitherto been the essence of his life and the cherished object of his dreams began to appear to him in a far different light.

----- "Your pages are bereaved,
Each letter is now orphaned and alone.
Hath mine eye dimmed or have mine ears waxed dull?
Or are ye rotten, dead for evermore -
Without a remnant in the realm of Life?" 9)

6) ibid, 61.
7) ibid, 165.
8) ibid, 164.
9) ibid, 166.

Thus faith and reverence is mingled with despair and dissatisfaction! The love of the Torah was something which only Israel knew, for only Israel exalted the Torah as a comprehensive concept of life, something indescribable and untranslatable in any tongue.¹⁰⁾ This love of sacred study is also, in a sense, peculiarly Jewish. It is, of course, a lofty ideal. But if self-immolation in the abode of learning is a noble aspiration, the flowing current of life is not reconcileable with it. Beyond the realm of learning and scholarship there is the actuality of life, from which no mortal can or may seclude himself. Thus there appears a sort of cleavage in Bialik's outlook. The whole structure of his world begins to totter on its foundations. The old way of life, for all its lofty idealism, is, in spite of all, obsolete and artificial, and the new life is natural to mortal man. This inner struggle between reverence of the old and aspiration for the new finds complete and remarkable expression in the famous poem "תלמודן" "The Talmud Student", which is at once a song of exaltation, to the Beth Hamidrash of old, and a violent protest against the excessive spirituality and repression of instincts which marked the average Jew of the time.

The Talmud student typifies the Jewish youths who dedicated themselves to learning, and secluded themselves within the four walls of the ^{Talmud Academy} ~~synagogue~~, far from the pleasures of life.

10) Bialik Orally, I, 50.

Only one ambition stood before them - to increase and aggrandise the Torah. They became the guardians of Judaism's perpetual lamp that is never quenched. They are the real standard-bearers of true Jewish culture.

The poem begins:

"Still in some hidden towns of our Dispersion
There smoulders on, concealed, our ancient light
In cities where our God a remnant spared
As 'twere a glowing coal amid the ashes." 11)

Bialik rightly sees the constant student as the symbol of example of those who preserved Jewish learning in the Exile. But for them, who would have guarded the remnant of Israel's soul throughout the generations? There is an element of real greatness in the youth who separates himself from all the pleasures of this world and suppresses all his ambitions and desires for the ideal of learning.

"O flint and iron! when the Jewish boy
Has taken to the Torah, where are you?" 12)

The Beth Hamidrash is no ordinary house of learning. It is a high institution which serves not only as a repository of ancient culture, but as a direct continuation of ancient achievement, and a source of new life.

Such a reverent appreciation of the old Jewish values had never been proclaimed in Hebrew poetry. But, in this chapter, what interests us is not the "light of Judaism" in itself, but

11) Bialik I, 237.

12) ibid, 243.

the way in which the light of Judaism found its abode in the Exile. Bialik in this poem reveals Jewish spiritual achievement on foreign soil and portrays its greatness. If there had been no change in Jewish life, and the type of the Talmud student was still prevalent, and the academies were still proceeding in the even tenor of their way, and supported by the loyalty of youth, then, perhaps, Bialik would have regarded the light of exiled Jewry as permanent and enduring, and this poem would have been unreservedly a hymn of praise to the Talmud student. But the times change - and Bialik with them. Bialik begins to see the abnormality of that mode of life. And so, although the student devoted himself completely to the Torah, and offered himself up as a sacrifice upon its altar, yet the poem goes on to express the struggle in the student's heart as he stands suspended between two magnets - the Torah and Life. On the one hand, complete seclusion from life, asceticism, mental isolation, emotional repression - and, on the other hand, the wide world, the joy of life, the widening of the mental horizon, the enjoyment of Nature in all its manifestations. The ultimate fate of the Mathmid is not described in the poem. But the poet makes it clear that he does not expect that anything good would result from the Mathmid's labours, however praiseworthy, for when the poet revisits the Academy and its tireless students, of whom he had been one, he cries without hesitation:

"Lord of the world! I cry within myself;
On what were all these lives, these powers, spent?"¹³⁾

True - he is still attracted as by some magic bond to the old Yeshivah in its decline:

"My fate hath not so willed that I with you,
Unhappy ones, should lose myself,"

But he admits that:

"The times have changed, and far now from your border
My altar-stone is reared, my tent-pole set." 14)

And so the poet, in a realistic spirit, comes to the conclusion that this mode of life for all its exalted beauty remains obsolete or at least obsolescent. In its survival, under modern conditions, he sees a wanton waste of enormous spiritual strength. If Bialik had been only a poet of indignation, he might easily have explained that the destruction of the old Beth Hamidrash was an inevitable phenomenon. Had he not been bound closely to the life of the diaspora by his belief in the possibility of spiritual achievement in exile, he would have come to the conclusion that just as Israel has no means of living a political and economic life in the diaspora, so there was no hope of cultural activity; and as a consequence, he would logically have arrived at Jehudah Halevi's belief that "The Divine Presence has vanished like a guest,"¹⁵⁾ and that the subversion

¹³⁾ ibid, 252.

¹⁴⁾ ibid.

¹⁵⁾ Brody, II, 181, Harkavi, I, 53.

of the institutions of Torah in the diaspora is a natural and logical outcome of the unnatural life of the Jews in exile. But Bialik, being under the influence of the spiritual life of the diaspora, does not come to that conclusion. He does, however, hint at the end of this poem that if "a ray of sunlight" would appear, and "had but a gust of generous air blown o'er you" clearing the "road which leads to Torah, which we so neglected and despised" - that is, if Judaism had found a compromise between "Life" and the "Beth Hamidrash", then the latter could have survived and preserved the remnant of the Jewish soul. And so the solution is still found on diaspora soil. For although in practice he regarded the life of the Talmud student as a transient, disappearing phase in Jewish life, by instinct he was attracted to that life and saw in it a great light of Judaism in the Exile.

But Bialik could sing not only of the Talmud student, torch-bearer of Jewish culture in Exile; he also sang the praises of exilic Jewry as a whole, in his poem, "The Dead of the Wilderness".

The Diaspora is the wilderness, and the exiled Jews are its inhabitants. Apparently it is an entirely negative picture; the diaspora is as a desert and the Jews are deemed as dead. The "camp of corpses" is revealed to us as a nightmare vision - the quietus given to "the giants of men that are withered and silenced forever amidst the golden sands of the desert"; the faith is cherished that these "dread men of might" will awake

once in the course of generations and strive to shake off "the heavy yoke from their proud neck", although their awakening is only that of exiles, a series of fleeting, transient events; for after the awakening,

"The stillness steals back to its place, and the desert stays childless."

It is an eternal exile.

There is no doubt that in this poem Bialik gave the deepest and most penetrating expression to the tragedy of Israel in Exile - a tragedy endless and seemingly insoluble. But at the same time this poem is a hymn of exile. The "dead of the desert" are "the most supreme apotheosis of Exile."¹⁶⁾ Ostensibly, they are as dead men in his eyes, but at the same time they are giants of life, as

"They lie on the golden desert sands, like lions 17)
securely."

The glory and strength of antiquity still hovers over them. It is visible and prominent in every limb of their body; and even though the marks of their long-suffering are not obliterated, yet there are signs,

"Of spears that were countless, but broken, arrows
shattered when shot from the bow,
Hurled on the rocks that are hearts, on the face of 18)
those tablets of quartz."

In the course of many generations, their heroism overcame all the vicissitudes and agonies which befell them; all those who obstructed them were broken as on a rock. And although these

¹⁶⁾ J. Klausner, Yotzrim u-Bonim, Vol.III, book I, p.42.

¹⁷⁾ Bialik, I, 259.

¹⁸⁾ ibid.

desert dwellers seem as dead, yet they cast a terror all around,
and when "a great limbed son of the rocks, an eagle, hooked beak
and curved claws, directs its flinty claws against them to rend
them to bits so that it seems as if it will soon make an end
of the dead body -

"But the carrion cruel, on a sudden, sheaths his weapons
again with affright,
In dread of the silence majestic and the glory of slumbering might." 19)

And it flies aloft, whence it came, in terror of the dead, with
its mission unfulfilled. Nor is this all:

"For long yet there is trembling below, caught by the
point of the spear,
A feather that fell from the eagle in flight, but its bearer knew not." 20)

And when "a great speckled asp of the waste" seeks to instil
its poison silently into the "dead" men, and it seems that with
"the hatred preserved from the serpent of Eden till now" ablaze
in its eyes, it is about to do its will - it too starts back:

"A moment - the serpent winces, about ^{to draw back} ~~the retreat~~ his head
With fear at the quiet of kings, and the glory of
slumbering strength,
He recoils in his length to the rear, and turning aside
slinks away, 21)
Sibilant, bounding and flashing in dimless distant light."

Even the lion, king of beasts, when about to jump upon the corpses
of the dead of the desert cannot prevail against them:

"And the lion has paused there to marvel at the glory
of slumbering might." 22)

He merely emits a thunderous roar - and does nothing, but "lifts
up his feet and departs". The lion, the eagle and the serpent

19) ibid, 260.

20) ibid.

21) ibid 261.

22) ibid 262.

are symbols of Israel's sufferings and torment, which have not prevailed because the great strength which sustained Israel in the exile overcame them all. Bialik portrays the Jewish people in a state of perpetual exile, broken by isolated Messianic intermissions, which are merely attempts to escape from the conditions of exile, from a vicious circle without beginning or end. And although there is no doubt that the poet's intention in this remarkable poem is to portray the true position of the people and to illustrate its tragedy from a national aspect, yet at the same time ^{the} poem ~~is~~ pays tribute to the vital force of preservation, albeit of a miserable life, which is stored up in the nation in its long dispersion.

It is Bialik's peculiar appreciation of Israel's achievements in the Diaspora, which leads to an interesting fact. Although he is full of pious reverence and longing for past antiquity, that longing is applied not to the distant, but to the immediate past, not to the aurea aetas of history, when Israel dwelt on the soil, the age for whose "renewal as of old" the Jews have prayed throughout the Exile - but rather to the past of the diaspora ghetto. Klausner has correctly seized upon this point, but his explanation of it is not convincing. He writes: "Bialik, with his healthy poetic instinct, feels that we are become so remote from the time of the kings and prophets that it is quite impossible for us to grasp their

aspirations and modes of life."²³⁾ This seems an improbable cause of a strange phenomenon. Jehudah Halevi, and the poets preceding and following his time, paid no heed to the recent past even though it had more brightness and naturalness than the ghetto life of a diaspora village. Their poetry all hinged around the distant past, when Israel was a vital, creative people on its historic soil. It may be retorted that a gulf of eight hundred years separates Halevi and Bialik, as over this gulf "we cannot grasp the aspirations and ways of life of the kings and prophets" as Halevi could. But the novels of Abraham Mappu (1808-1868) are a sufficient refutation of that idea.²⁴⁾ The distance of time between Mappu and Bialik is not considerable, and yet in his "Love of Zion" and "Guilt of Samaria", Mappu managed to "grasp the aspirations and ways of life of the Kings and prophets" just as vividly as Bialik portrayed the life of the Jewish little town, the Academy and the Talmud student. This shows how a writer with Mappu's power of imaginative thought, can not only penetrate into the spirit of ancient history, but can transport his readers into the golden age, which is revealed to them through his work not less vividly than Bialik's portrayal of the recent past. The real explanation lies in Bialik's love for the Diaspora to which we have previously referred. Bialik

²³⁾ J. Klausner, *ibid*, p.31.

²⁴⁾ J. Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* (translated by Canon H. Danby), London 1932, pp. 45-47.

did not fight against the life of Exile, as we shall come to see in his "Songs of Indignation" for he was bound to the Diaspora by very strong ties. Schneour has correctly remarked: "Not only does he not incite his neighbours to desert their mean life; he actually goes down to them, wallows in their dust and associates himself with their lives. Most of his poems imply the text:

"Take me into your midst, my brethren, let us rot
unto the end until we stink." 25)

His love for the Diaspora is the reason why he sometimes failed to be convincing when he tried to sing about Israel's ancient historical background. Even a critic like J.H. Brenner, who always regarded Bialik as the supreme poet of his generation, when he compares Bialik's poem on the Maccabees and Bar Cochba with that of Tchernichowsky, prefers Tchernichowsky's poem, finding in it "the authentic national note". For Tchernichowsky, disciple of the new school of ambition, representative of the "new trend", better understood the essence of historical heroism than did Bialik, "son of the ancient narrow confines of the Yeshivah, 26) disciple of sorrow, representative of the old trends."

It was not because Bialik could not "grasp" the period of the kings and prophets that he did not portray it in his verse. His imaginative range was sufficient to comprehend that ancient period had he so desired. But, his spiritual identity with the

25) Ha-Miklath, Vol. II, book 4, p.61.

26) Works of Brenner I, II, p.342.

Diaspora impelled him to sing the wondrous song of Exile, not only in its ugly decadence but in its unique spiritual grandeur.

4. National Poetry.

(a) POEMS OF RENASCENCE.

Amongst a people without a homeland and in exile, national poetry can have two forms. It can either attack the conditions of exile, or it can exhort the people to revival and liberation. The first type of poetry can disturb the people's complacent acceptance of its evil plight, causing it to loathe its degradation and servility. Hence it can stimulate a resurgence of the desire for liberation. The second type of poem encourages the ill-fated people, infuses it with the hope of revival and transforms a dispersed rabble into a conscious nation, yearning for its redemption. As far^{as} the "negation of exile" is concerned, Bialik has no peer in Israel for the historic presentation of all the sufferings and pains of exilic life. (We must except the "Exile Poetry", in which he also hymns the brighter side of the Diaspora). No poet since Halevi had been such a "jackal to bewail~~t~~ his people's woe." But when we come to Bialik's poetry of revival, we cannot discover that in that part of his national poetry, he rose to a proportional eminence. There are, as we shall see, some, if not many, songs of renascence in Bialik's work. But in them he did not reach the power which

he revealed in his songs of wrath and rebuke. It should be emphasised that if these poems were composed by anyone else, their author would have achieved great repute on the strength of them. But Bialik is supreme in his ^{Contemporary} ~~generation~~ of Hebrew poetry and these poems add few jewels to his poetic crown.

How is it that Bialik, who reaches prophetic heights in his songs of indignation and rebuke, falls far short of those standards in his poems of redemption and revival. The root cause, it seems, can never be found, and the whole phenomenon defies explanation. It may be simply that in the nature of his poetry, Bialik has his failures as well as his triumphs. But it is legitimate to emphasise an additional cause which may have been a factor, at any rate in his earlier work, in Bialik's failure to become a great poet of renaissance. That cause is - the Exile itself. Bialik describes Jewish poetry in the Exile in these words:

"For what is Israel's exiled Muse? - A blossom
long withered, blasted. Never will the dew 1)
Moisten its leaves."

The national poet who grew up with his people, was reared in its traditions, sees before him a strange history, unparalleled in the affairs of any people. He sees a fearful, awesome picture of a nation prolonging its life through two thousand years of Exile. This endless dispersion clips the wings of the greatest poet of the age, and brings him inevitably to a state of temporary

1) Bialik I, 20.

despair. Instead of being a prophet of renascence, he becomes a prophet of doom. He realises that not only will the song of redemption fail to stir a people that accepts its bitter plight, but even the song of rebuke will not have the desired effect:

"Woe to the bard whose heart is pierced with woe
Who sings his song to hearts uncircumcised." 2)

While in another poem he says the same thing in more vivid metaphor:

"Yea, if my force is spent - not mine the blame.
Your sin it is, and your transgression's fault.
My hammer found no anvil 'neath its stroke;
My hatchet struck a bark of rotted wood." 3)

The poet feels in the depths of his heart that he is ploughing barren soil which can never yield fruit. If the harsh prophecy and raging rebuke which he addressed to the people is of no avail, of what avail will be the song of redemption and renascence? If the nation contrives to reconcile itself with its hopeless fate, why should he sing of any golden future? As Bialik expressed it himself:

"Behold they glory in their life of shame.
What boots it now to comfort them?" 4)

The people has no longing for consolation or redemption; and it is the people which influences the poet. When the "clear-eyed youth" in the "Scroll of Fire" asks the sons of Judea, "my brethren, know ye the song of solace and the final hope?" he receives no answer; they know not the meaning of such a song.

2) ibid.

3) ibid, 169.

4) ibid, 274.

And so the poet who did try to sing of redemption, sang but rarely in that strain; and even the songs which did fly from his lips had clipped wings and no lofty range. And yet they have a special claim to merit. It may be that they left a strong impression on the people not because of their intrinsic merit, but because they came from Bialik, the poet of indignation who in other capacities won the wreath of poetic fame.

It is noteworthy that Bialik's first poem "To the Bird", is a poem of revival. Some see external forces at work here.⁵⁾ In my view the form and central idea are taken from Jehudah Halevi⁶⁾ and the idea of the bird comes from Kalman Shulman.⁷⁾ The fact remains that liberation was his central theme in his earlier work. It was only later that the events of his time and the vicissitudes of his people carried him to another place. The poet asks the bird, on its return from the east, about Palestine, and his brethren there. Had the trees and shrubs told the bird of a future of hope and solace?

"Did they speak of consolation, sound the hope of
better days -
When their fruit will rustle like Lebanon?"⁸⁾

He himself yearns for the land of the past:

"But, oh! for wings that I might fly
To where the palm and almond grow!"⁹⁾

5) Beshgav-Ze, p. 31.

6) See: Or Comparative Study.

7) In his book: Safah Berurah, p.2.

8) Bialik, I, 2.

9) *ibid.*

This poem is flooded with romanticism. It is the song of a son who is exiled from his ancestral home and yearns to know what is happening in his father's house. This poem was followed by a "People's Benediction", which is certainly a great national hymn. The poet strengthens the people's heart and demands the closing of ranks for a campaign of revival, since there is hope for the upbuilding of the homeland;

"Not yet the rafters - but the corner-stone you laid,
be satisfied, brethren. Not in vain ye toiled.
The day will come when ye shall build, and paint,
And spread the varnish. Now it shall suffice
That ye have stretched the line." 10)

Then the whole world will be astonished at Israel's work of redemption:

"The day will come when nations ^{will} stand amazed
To see the work of [^]small and wandering folk." 11)

And in his poem "A short letter", the poet exhorts his brethren in Zion to continue the reconstruction of a desolate land. In Exile there is no creative achievement. Everything perishes and no fruit is to be seen; but in the Land of Israel,

"Stern is your labour, brethren, but reflect!
The Lord Himself enjoined on you this toil.
Ye sow not thorns, your effort is not vain,
Ye shall yet see great guerdon for your work." 12)

Israel is not without great vital power. But the diaspora, is a prison, and only with the nation's deliverance will it burst its bonds and achieve wonders. The exile is protracted and holds out no hope for Israel. The source of hope is Palestine, and

10) *ibid*, 18.

11) *ibid*.

12) *ibid*, 27.

the poet sees in his imagination that his hope is on the way to fulfilment; and he is full of faith which he is eager to impart to others:

"I fain would hope. Yea, happy they who wait. 13)
My brother, work and suffer ~~now~~ ^(in the name of) the Lord!"

The poet is full of hope for the realisation of Redemption. But he knows that there are still many who are satisfied and easily adaptable to a life of degradation, while they exalt themselves in an illusory happiness in the diaspora. Against these he speaks in words of thunder. They, like the men of the wilderness, reconcile themselves to an intolerable reality. But they deserve no attention for it is their doom to fall by the wayside, as the "Last Dead of the Desert":

"Deplore them not! unwept let those remain
who fell as slaves; let us pass o'er the slain;
Dishonoured let them lie across the pack
They bore from out of Egypt on their back.
Sweet be their dreams of garlic and of leek,
Of flesh pots wide, of fatty steam and reek.
Around the last dead slave, maybe to-night,
The desert wind with desert beast shall fight,
And joyously to-morrow's dawning shine,
Upon the firstlings of a mighty line,
Upon a generation who shall brook
The sun's full splendour with an upward look." 14)

Then the poet sees a movement of revival amongst those who had seemed like the dead of the wilderness. On the convening by Dr. Herzl of the First Zionist Congress and the growth of a political movement in Israel with the aim of restoring a national

13) *ibid*, 29.

14) *ibid*, 44.

home - a cry of hope was heard in Bialik's poetry. The poet recognises that the advent of this political awakening is a sign that the people is losing patience with the long term of exile. He is aware that this assembly of the people will bring no tidings of joy and salvation, but only of lamentations and weeping. It does not matter, for all these tears will be gathered into one huge vessel and the result will be an increase of faith, an intensification of effort and the confirmation of the national hope.

"Redemption fails, but our redeemer liveth,
To come with that great hour for which we yearn.
The last on earth shall then discern
You - pioneers of our return." 15)

The poet encourages the emissaries of Israel and assures them of an abiding place in the national memory of their people. It will always be remembered that they laid the corner-stone of the Hebrew homeland. He turns not only to the leaders of Israel, but to the masses of the people as a whole. He demands the mobilisation of the people on behalf of the national task.

"Help! help! - the people summons all its sons.
Ask not with what to help! - With what we have!
Ask not with whom - with all whose soul inspires
their succour; all whose hearts do bleed
At Israel's grief. Let all be gathered in!
Let none be sundered. Grace be shown to all
That offer sacrifice and pledge their troth.
In hour of danger search not overmuch!" 16)

15) *ibid*, 56.

16) *ibid*, 82.

And, in his great poem "The Dead of the Desert", Bialik calls for redemption and liberation. The dead of the desert, men of eternal exile, sometimes awake from their long sleep and yearn for resurrection. The allusion is to the Messianic movements in Jewish history, which arose at various times through the Exile. The exiled Jews wish to cast off the yoke of bondage and long for national redemption. They proclaim:

"Warriors are we!
 Last in the era of bondage,
 The first to be free.
 'Tis alone our strong hand
 That has ripped from the pride of our neck,
 The weighty yoke band." 17)

The Messianic movements in Israel had the semblance of a revolt against God. The people's patience is at an end and its uncontrollable desire for redemption breaks down all barriers. According to Talmudic tradition, the hosts of Bar-Cochba were sufficiently strong to prevail and win victory against the Roman Empire. When they went forth to battle they used not to call to God for help. The leader would proclaim his ability to win by his own efforts. That is the temper which Bialik portrays and he goes even further. The nation's strong desire for freedom causes it, in Messianic eras, to boast that it has no need of Divine aid to secure its freedom, but is able to win redemption in God's despite. 18)

17) ibid, 263.

18) We have had occasion to remark that this is no atheism or irreligion. The revolt against Heaven itself involves Faith. A sure proof of this is the fate overtaking the reckless climbers "who warred with God". (Bialik I, 265.)

"'Gainst the ire of the Heavens in wrath
 We'll advance, through the storm!
 We are here, to advance!
 If th'Almighty denies us His hand
 And His Ark will not move from its place,
 Let's go forward without it, on chance!" 19)

This is a song of rebellion calculated to raise the people's spirit, to fortify its resolution for liberation. But the end of the poem clips the wings of rebellion. The tempest of revolt is abated; the temporary storm does not lead to victory.

This conclusion is symbolic of Bialik's poetry of renascence. It serves to remind us that his poems of revival are not only poetically inferior to his poetry of rage, but that they also lack a full belief in the national destiny and redemption. Perhaps it is the weakness of this faith which causes the laxity and tenuousness of the poems, which are often redolent more of journalistic propaganda than of true, original inspiration. At the beginning of his poetic work, Bialik is exposed to the influence of the Haskalah movement on the one hand, and to the "Love of Zion" - particularly Ahaï Ha'am's school - on the other, while the impression of a new renascence is strongly engraven on his poetry. In his first poem there is a sorry attempt to synthesize the aims of Haskalah, represented pre-eminently by J.L. Gordon, with the "revival" poetry of his predecessors - Dolitzky, Shapira and Mane. Hence his poems in this category are the product of external influences and do not

19) Bialik, I, 264.

bear the stamp of originality. The same thing happened later. When the political Zionist movement arose in the days of Herzl, Bialik again set about writing national poetry. These poems, too, are weak in comparison with his real poetic talent - and fail to give a full expression to the spirit of national resurgence at the time. In that respect they are surpassed by the poems of Dolitzky, Shapira and Mane. We must bear in mind too that Bialik's poetic inspiration was immeasurably greater than theirs and that in their days only the first signs of national activity had appeared whereas in Bialik's time there arose an organised movement to work for national redemption, and the Zionist movement soon became the most considerable popular movement in Jewish life. Yet even when the people was agitated, and responsive to the call of liberation, the poet himself gave no complete expression to the popular enthusiasms. Bialik's first visit to Palestine found no echo in his poetry. The Jewish ghetto village gave him more poetic material than the new colonies of Palestine. And even when the creation of a National Home in Palestine began with the Balfour Declaration, these events left no impression in his poetry.

On the death of J.L. Gordon, Bialik wrote an ode in his memory - in which he says:

"You were a jackal to bewail our woe -
Oh, who will be the harp to sing our joys?"²⁰⁾

And J.H. Brenner²¹⁾ comments that the allusion is to Bialik

²⁰⁾ Pardes (ed. Rabnitzky), II, p.249.

²¹⁾ Beshah Zo, II, p.9.

himself, who was to be the harp of song. But his hopes were not realised in himself. His power too was greatest as the "jackal" and he remained pre-eminently the ^{poet} ~~band~~ of Exile. His songs of renascence are few in number and give no complete echo of the emotions and aspirations of his time. Insofar as Bialik did contribute to the development of a national impulse, he did so in his songs of Rebuke which stirred the people's longing for escape and freedom.

(b) POEMS OF INDIGNATION AND REBUKE.

It was in this sphere of his work that Bialik won his crowning fame as the Jewish National poet. If there is any point of comparison between him and the ancient prophets, it is chiefly in these poems.

We have already remarked, when discussing Bialik's "Exile Poetry", that Jewish literature had never known poetry so full of frenzy and protest as these poems of Bialik. The difference between this part of his poetry and that of the prophets resolves itself chiefly into a different attitude to the justice of Divine decrees. The prophets and mediaeval poets (of the Spanish period) often expressed grievance and protest against God; but they always concluded with a justification of His deeds. But Bialik does not fear even to protest against the Father in Heaven, and goes to all lengths in attacking the injustice suffered by his people. His poetry of indignation never leads to justifica-

tion of the Deity; although no one knew better than he that the traditional prophetic injunction to live stoically had been accepted as axiomatic in the history of the people. The nation was accustomed to nod its head in consent after each new wave of trouble; they called this "martyrdom". Bialik rebels against this tendency, which he regards less as a "sanctification of the Divine Name" than as a profanation of God's majesty. Oppression and agony must have a limit like everything else. A real vindication of God must be expressed not in the people's slavery nor in its degradation, but rather in its liberation and renaissance.

"My wanderings have no end; no hallowed cause;
 God's shadow flees. His spirit is removed -
 My tears are vain, my supplication nought....
 Bow down and bear the yoke! For what - for whom?
 What profits all my woe; who wants my sacrifice?
 Nay - grant me freedom and I'll magnify
 My name, my actions . Then I'll build my ruins."1)

In olden times the people almost cherished its woes. With simple resignation it bared its throat to meet the slaughterer's knife. But now it is tired of suffering and has despaired of mercy. Throughout a long Exile it knew only how to lament. In tears and prayers it found a temporary healing and satisfaction. But that is no longer its mood:

1) Bialik I, 28.

"Weary am I, my Lord, of fruitless tears
Which nought avail; and weary too of words
That mourn for this our everlasting bane,
And wail for what a thousand years have wailed."²⁾

From grievance and complaint, it is a short cut to open and vigorous accusation:

"The heavens mute remain;
Knowing the grievous vastness of their sin³⁾
They bear their guilt in silence."

The poet utters his stern prophecy in the "City of Slaughter" when he beholds the dreadful assaults which had been made against his brethren, and his heart is smitten at the sight of the dread and gruesome scenes. He demands an answer for the horrible massacre - and gets none from Heaven. The Divine Spirit is silent, as though ashamed:

"Her head enwrapped in clouds, my old Shechinah⁴⁾
Shall sit for evermore and weep for shame."

When he sees his brethren accepting God's judgment, he denounces what he regards as a criminal attitude, and the poet's anger waxes so strong that he even puts his own protest into the mouth of God. God declares that Israel's woes are not ~~their~~^{his} just portion, and are therefore to be atoned not by supplication, but by an indictment of the wrong done to Israel from time immemorial. This indictment must have¹ power to stir the heavens and to shake the Holy Throne:

"What will they? Why stretch out their hands to Me?
Has none a fist? And where's a thunderbolt
To take revenge for all the generations,
To blast the world, and tear the heavens asunder,⁵⁾
And wreck the universe, My throne of glory?"

²⁾ In his poem, "Thoughts of Night" (original form).

³⁾ Bialik I, 141.

⁴⁾ *ibid*, 271.

⁵⁾ *ibid*, 272.

With this trenchant protest, full of the bitterness of attack, there yet appears a strong faith in the God of Israel. The poet recognises that he has not merely Someone to whom to protest (itself an implied recognition of God's Sovereignty), but he also evinces a firm confidence in Israel's God, a confidence which he expresses by placing the confession of injustice in God's own lips. Hence, even if this poetry of indignation is different from all that preceded it in Jewish literature, yet a Jewish faith permeates it throughout. The poet who calls on Heaven to pity him for not having found a way to God, does not hesitate to say that Heaven is conscious of a grievous sin which is still unatoned. The poet who sees the Schechinah hiding her face in shame ("The City of Slaughter"), not only believes in the existence and sovereignty of God, but also believes that the God of Israel partakes of His people's sorrow, and will take vengeance on Israel's persecutors:

"And the God of vengeance, wounded to the heart,
Will rise with a shout - go forth with His great sword." 6)

From the ~~frenzy~~^{wrath} to the rebuke! The "~~frenzy~~^{wrath}" is a trenchant protest against Providence; the rebuke is a harsh denunciation of Israel. The poet's frenzy, poured forth like molten lava, sends its flames against Heaven as well. There is injustice and perversion in the world - and he demands the reckoning from the Almighty Ruler, But, together with this consciousness of injustice,

6) *ibid*, 152.

he casts heavy blame on Israel too. For in Israel he sees one reason for the persistence of this injustice - as the prophets saw it. While their indictment was for social and religious errors, Bialik's is for national shortcomings. The prophets showed that because Israel failed to keep the Law and commandments, evil days come upon them. Bialik proves that sorrows came on the people on account of its national ineptitude and because it resigned itself to the degraded life of Exile. In that sense, Bialik's songs of rebuke contain a justification of God arising less from Heavenly justice than from Israel's fault.

In his "songs of rebuke", Bialik revealed all the nation's plague-spots. Exile had done havoc not only to the body but to the soul of Israel. The slavery of exile had become an accepted state, to which the nation was reconciled. Even when a movement of liberation appeared, the people did not respond as it should^{have done}. The national instinct had become faint in the wear and tear of exile - and there was no stimulus except suffering. Perhaps with the intensification of suffering a keener national instinct will emerge.

"Never will these awake, except that the source
awake them;
Never will these arise unless ruin rouse them," 7)

but in fact, the poet even doubts the efficacy of suffering

7) *ibid.* 53.

to restore Israel's spirit. ~~Israel~~^{It} appears, ~~the divine weapon, as~~^{to him},
 though nothing will ~~be of~~^{have} any effect ^{on Israel,} - and he concludes the
 same poem with the question:

"~~Then shall~~^{Will} the dead arise? ~~Will~~^{the} the dead awaken and
 tremble?" 8)

The Kishineff pogrom (1903) confirms his belief in the nation's
 ruin; and the poet styles himself "the prophet of doom". His
 rebuke becomes more angry and foreboding, mingled with deep
 sadness and despair:-

"And speak the curse that God puts in thy mouth,
 Let not thy lips know fear;
 Thy words may be as bitter as death - yea, death
 itself: we'll know and hear

 Unclose thy lips, O prophet of last things
 And hast thou words, then speak!
 Though bitter they shall be as death itself, 9)
 No matter - only speak!

And "the prophet of last things" spoke the dread speech in
 his poem "The City of Slaughter". Having portrayed the terrors
 of the pogrom and accused God and Nature and all Mankind - he
 directs his deepest anger against Israel. It is a rebuke which
 Jewish literature had not known since the prophets. The poet
 sees before him a pogrom - murders and butcheries, eyes pierced
~~out~~ and bellies slit, children torn to bits and women defiled.
 And on the other hand he sees not the slightest indignation from
 the victims themselves. On the contrary - the men of Israel,

8) *ibid.*

9) *ibid.*, 141.

young and able-bodied, fled and hid, - "fled as mice flee, and hid as bugs hide" thinking only of themselves and not becoming maddened with righteous anger.¹⁰⁾

There is not merely the catastrophe of men, women and children butchered for no fault. He is concerned with the greater shame that even after this terrifying pogrom, the people did not arise to avenge their humiliation and to let forth a cry which was bound to shake the civilised world:

"The shame is very great, and great the anguish, 11)
And which is greater, say thou, son of man!

In the poet's eyes, the shame is greater, as he contemplates the putrefaction and degeneracy which have eaten so deep into the body of the people, that even such a massacre does not serve as a stimulus for revival and renaissance.

"Thus wails a people only that is lost,
Whose soul is dust and ashes, and their heart 12)
A scorched desert....."

They continue to pray -but their prayer is no virtue.

It was thus that their predecessors prayed and so will their successors pray. Their prayers and tears do not win the poet's sympathy. Their "disaster" is indeed terrible and stirs the heart to its depths, but the poet is ⁱⁿ duty-bound to be severe and not to add his tear to theirs. For such tears only increase their humiliation:

10) *ibid*, 269.

11) *ibid*, 271-2.

12) *ibid*, 274.

"I will be/cruel to thee - very cruel,
 For thou shalt have no single tear to shed,
 And should a cry arise in thee - I'll choke it
 Between thy teeth if need be, I will choke it;
 I will not have thee mourn as do the others." 13)

This "cruelty" passes into bitter scoffing. For it appears that despite his anger and harshness, he would fain pity these unhappy wretches and even shed a tear of consolation for them. But no! They deserve neither anger nor consolation.

"Too poor are they to merit any anger,
 Too desperate for pity - let them be
 And go their way" 14)

But the rebuking poet cannot leave them - for they are of his own people. He persists in his rebuke and one of his chief denunciations is that the Jewish people robs itself of its best sons. Israel has produced great men, who have played a considerable part in the building of human society. They have had a large share in culture, commerce, literature, poetry, philosophy and all the branches of science and art. But what have these achievements done for their own people? Not only does Israel receive no gratitude from the peoples of the world, but their sorrow actually increase:

"And you shall build them Pithom, aye, and Rameses,
 With living bricks - your own children." 15)

The nation that produces such eminent sons is itself bereaved of them, and becomes void of cultural achievement:

13) *ibid.*, 273.

14) *ibid.*, 274,

15) *ibid.*, 148.

"While thus ye shall have spurned your best ones from
you,
One after another, you shall sit bereaved,
Your tent despoiled, all beauty fled your dwelling, 16)
A dread and desolation to be seen."

The nation resigns itself to its degraded plight, stirred by no impulse for liberation and renewal. It accepts its sufferings complacently and with apparent calm. If, sometimes, despite oppression and terrorism, it yields great men who might have become its leaders and guides, they gradually desert their people and become alien to them. His song is therefore not of indignation and rebuke alone. It is a cry of weakness and despair.

Bialik's rebuke is not reserved for his own people. It is directed against the other nations as well. In his poem "On the Slaughter", where he turns to the executioner and offers his neck for the death-blow, to be beheaded as a dog, he is still mindful that the blood of innocent people has been shed, and can never be expiated. He has no desire for swift and reckless revenge, for that would be an insufficient and incomplete answer. Bialik is eager for a different kind of revenge - which will surely come:

"Cursed be the man who says: "Vengeance!"
Such vengeance for a baby's blood
The devil never yet devised.
The blood will pierce the abyss,
To the gloomy depths the blood will worm it's way,
Eat away in darkness, gnaw upon the earth's
Foundations in decay." 17)

His great poem "The City of Slaughter" describing the horrors of Kischineff, is principally a rebuke to Israel; but it also fixes the ineffaceable mark of Cain on the forehead of the instigators of the pogrom and of all Europe which ~~stood~~^{stood} before the warm blood of the victims, and was silent.

Bialik's poetry of indignation and rebuke has three elements: a) Indignation against the God of Israel in which the poet denounces injustice on the part of Providence and pleads for human Right; b) Rebuke of Israel. Unlimited anger and rage is contained in this rebuke which is expressed with a prophetic force. It is a didactic and constructive rebuke, teaching the reader to recognise the actual position and to rebel against it. It is a cry of revolt - a fight against a wretched existence, a rebellion against an exile that is without end or purpose. But the conclusion of this rebuke is in utter despair; the people is so decadent that it does not even merit rebuke. This poetry has a note of harshness and of contempt for men who have lost their national instinct and allowed their national perception to become blurred; and c) Rebuke of other nations. Admittedly, Israel has sinned grievously, and God has not shown His expected graciousness. But what has that to do with the Gentiles? Butchery, plunder, looting and savagery was the treatment reserved by the peoples for Israel. Is there to be no expiation? They will always bear the mark of Cain to remind them of their crimes.

This powerful theme constitutes Bialik's "poetry of indignation and rebuke". He not only reproves his own people, but unfolds a stern prophecy to the other nations, as did the prophets of old.

Bialik's poetry of indignation and rebuke, with its strong prophetic echo, is the chief factor in his fame as the national poet. The ^{Jewish} nation forgave the rebuke, for it realised that it came from a patriot weeping for his people's woe. This denunciation, despite its despairing conclusion, succeeded, by dint of its great prophetic force, in introducing the spirit of life into the dry bones, of which the poet himself despaired. With all its harshness and contempt it was a healing draught to the Jewish people. The nation was really roused by this prodigious denunciation and began to feel that there was much truth in this stern prophecy, whose motive was not so much despair as the quality which sustained the ancient prophets - the will to live and powerful resolve to achieve freedom and redemption.

5. Poetry of the Individual.

In Bialik's poetry, the individual element becomes completely fused with the national element. The inter-connection of private sorrow with the agony of the people is one of the distinct

ive features of his poetry. This quality is especially prominent in his early work. But, gradually, the personal motif separated itself from the national emotion and became a poetic feature in its own right. Moreover, this individual poetry eventually became the dominant element of his work.

The reason is that Bialik arrived at a sort of despair about the future of the people on whom he ^{bestowed} ~~passed~~ his poetry of rebuke. His belief that his poetry would do its work and have its effect became weaker - and he lapsed into individual reflection. Let it be remembered, however, that the scepticism of his later work was discernible earlier on. This can be seen from his poem "My sigh have I scattered"¹⁾ and from these lines of "Seer, Go and Flee":

"Yea, if my force is spent - not mine the blame.
Your sin it is, and your transgression's fault.
My hammer found no anvil 'neath its stroke;
My hatchet struck a bark of rotted wood." 2)

At the end of the poem he seems to resign himself to his lot. He has fulfilled his mission, and if it was in vain - he will return whence he came. Of his people he despairs.

"Ye are rotten and crumbled; and to-morrow
the tempest will bear you all away." 3)

But this is merely on the surface. Actually though his despair increases, he cannot escape from the agony of his people.

1) Bialik I, 106.

2) *ibid*, 168.

3) *ibid*.

On his return from his visit to Palestine (1909) which made no great impression upon him, he was even more depressed. He writes:

"My fruit is fallen; what now do I care
For this my trunk - for this my branch?" 4)

The conflict is still felt, despite his evident despair. In place of his previous "song of rage", there comes reconciliation with tragic Fate. But he knows that there is no peace, that he will always feel his people's pain.

"Alone I struggle in the dark expanse,
And break my head against the flinty wall." 5)

But the end is hopelessness:

"Once more the Spring will bloom, and I alone
will hang upon my tree,
A poor, bald twig without bud or flower, 6)
Fruitless and leafless."

His Muse brings an offering in a cycle of individualistic poems. He sings no longer of exile and its agony, of redemption or liberation. These new poems are about himself, his own sufferings and his own activity as a man. Hence these poems serve as a kind of epitome and resume of the poet's own character.

In his poem "When I am Dead", 7) he calls upon his future mourners to remember that his harp of poetry did not express all his innermost feelings, his secrets and his mysteries. One thing was never expressed: "His song of Life was rent." And it is sad that the one unknown secret has vanished forever. Perhaps that secret could have heralded redemption; perhaps it could have effected more than all his other poetry.

4) *ibid*, 175.

5) *ibid*

6) *ibid*

7) *ibid* 135.

All his days he prayed to God to reveal that secret. He performed his work with diligence. He accepted small things and did not aspire too high. When the big things came, he accepted them with genuine surprise. But God had given just what he did not demand, and withheld what he desired.

"What he craved not he received, and the one thing
that he craved
Never fell unto his lot." 8)

He prayed for his heart's desire - and died in the middle of his prayer. He then justifies God's action. After all - who is he? Under the title "Who and what am I?" he writes a remarkable poem. The Divine blessing has delayed in coming to him, and he resigns himself to his bitter fate. "Nothing will I ask, nor try, nor seek." 9)

He seeks just one stone, his soul is dumb and mute as the stone.

"No dream or vision, memory or hope
Of yesterday or morrow call me thence!
Let all congeal around me; silence long
Engulf me, undisturbed by any sound or echo." 10)

Here is silent submission and justification of God - but no self-deprecation. His strength does not suffice to utter the great speech, to reveal the eternal secret; but his emotions, his indescribable torment, his agonies and sorrows- these let no man despise. The succeeding poet may surpass him, and his life may be more felicitous, but when he has drunk from Bialik's

8) *ibid*, 170.

9) *ibid*, 173.

10) *ibid*.

cup of venom, he will be unable to despise his achievement. This will be some recompense for his life of anguish.

The poet who spent his life proclaiming his people's woe, chastening and reproofing, saw that the great word of redemption had failed him and began to envy the silent ones ("the humble folk") of the world, whose greatness was that they never profaned their hallowed lips or spoke words fruitlessly, keeping them always locked up within:

"Your spirit's pride lies hidden in your breast,
Like gems that sink into the Ocean's bed;
Your virtues, as the berries of the wood,
Shall flourish in the bosom of the Shades.
Your heart - a holy Temple, and your lips
the gates that guard its inmost sanctuary.
Princes are ye - and know not; lords of spirit,
The architects of silence in due time
And priests of godly quietude and calm." 11)

These are they whom the poet envies - men who by their very existence scatter purity and radiance through the world. They are not hailed as heroes or prophets; their greatness is hidden within them:

"Your life is your choice handiwork and pride,
Your very being glorious in itself;
Ye guardians of God's image in the world." 12)

These men are destined for eternity. Until the end of days they will have an immemorial fame. In every generation they will live again.

Bialik contemplates his own loneliness. Will he have any remembrance in years to come? Will it be his evil fortune to "die while still alive, leaving no remnant or impression of himself."¹³⁾

11) *ibid*, 176

12) *ibid*.

13) *ibid*, 171.

Thus we see Bialik approaching pure "human" poetry. It is a universalistic poetry approximating to religious meditation. Bialik was, in all his poetry, close to God. Even when he pleaded his people's cause, the Divine name was always in his mouth. But now in his lyrical mood, when he makes his own reckoning, this affinity becomes still more prominent.

The prophet is full of despair, and in his "declining day". Even at this eleventh hour his prayer is to be restored, albeit for a little time, to the innocence of childhood. Samson, the blind hero, prayed to God before his death ("Remember me, and strengthen me only this once!" and demanded vengeance upon his Philistine enemies. So Bialik prays, not for vengeance, but for the momentary restoration of the joys of childhood.

"Would that God's grace would shine on me again
That in my evening, - once - as in a dream -
Just once, for then contentment would be mine -
The pristine vision of my childish years
Might be repeated with their precious joys,
And my life's Dawn would sweetly, as of old, 14)
Be wafted o'er me".....

This is his last request from God. But he knows that he has strayed far from God's paths; he confesses this and expresses the belief that God will forgive him and fulfil his request.¹⁵⁾

But the poet, though near to God, never dealt in metaphysical ideas. In one poem ("He peeped and died")¹⁶⁾, however, he treats a mystical subject. This was not because the subject was at all clear to him. He only deals with it to show that it should not be

14) *ibid*, 181.

15) *ibid*, 183.

dealt with. Anyone who poses the question "what is above and what is beneath, what is in front and what is behind" -¹⁷⁾ is destined to reap no fruit of his inquiries. Divinity is a thing above human comprehension or perception, and such searchings are in vain. He errs who believes that he can glance within and penetrate God's habitation. The inquirer will come to the "threshold of nothingness." All that the poet asks is nearness to God:

"O God, Thy breath hath passed across my face
And burnt me sore." ¹⁸⁾

The poet as a member of human society, seeks nearness to the Creator and an approach to Him. He prays and says:

"How shall I come unto holiness and how shall my
prayer be pure?" ¹⁹⁾

Bialik's poetry of the Individual, which went through many periods of transition, beginning with a self-deprecation which ignored his own poetic eminence, is easily understandable. There are two aspects of this poetry. On the one hand it can be explained as a negative phase - an effort to escape. The poet reproves, chastens and castigates his people to stir them on to a destined future - and finally he himself seems to desert their battlefield. From the national point of view this is certainly a negative factor; but from a general standpoint of universalism, it is precisely the opposite. The poet, who scaled the peaks

¹⁷⁾ Hagigah (Mishnah) II,1.

¹⁸⁾ *ibid*, 186.

¹⁹⁾ *ibid*.

of his art, looks down and sees that his toil is vain. It is true that he attributes the blame to the people for whom he sang, and of whose future he despairs. But, at the same time, there is another fear at the bottom of his heart. He begins to despair of himself. His own tempestuous force is abated. It seems to him that the genuine, liberating poetry which he required and craved has not been vouchsafed to him. This is the source of his discontent and despair seeps in more and more deeply, until he comes to admire the "humble folk" whose greatness is in their silence. This is the background of his ruminations about the limitations of Man's power and aspiration, and about his desire to draw near and cleave to God.

Bialik's "poetry of the individual", which at first grew out of national poetry, eventually becomes general and universalistic. It could be the work of a great poet of any nation, and perhaps that is where its value chiefly lies.

6. Summary.

After a detailed analysis of Bialik's poetry into its categories, a general survey becomes more possible. An effort has been made, as with Halevi's poetry, to estimate both the light and the shade of his work. The purpose was, first and foremost, to estimate Bialik's poetic merit and to test the accuracy of the common judgment that Bialik is Israel's greatest modern poet.

We have seen that with its power of expression, its wealth variety and cultured nobility, his language is itself a work of art. His unlimited knowledge of Hebrew, in all the phases of its development, and his perfect command of it, enabled his poetry to attain a very high level from a purely literary point of view.

Genuineness and originality are marked in most of his poetic work, which is however sometimes spoiled by the conditions and environment of the Diaspora. In his Nature poetry, we saw that his spontaneity, perception, and clarity of perspective were sometimes marred by the lack of normal, national experience. But his imaginative power usually contrived to master the handicap. His description of the Russian winter reveals a keen observation of Nature, while his poem "The Cornfield" is attuned to a national motif. Palestinian nature was remote from him, but he had a sentimental attachment to it. He lamented Israel's divorcement from Nature and the life ~~of~~ the soil and when he recalled his brethren returning to Nature in their own land, he felt some consolation. His Nature Poetry as it stands is an important part in his poetry, and his literary power produced majestic nature poems, even though his circumstances gave rise to certain defects.

His greatest Love Poetry is contained in the "Scroll of Fire" which is a genuinely natural love-song. The rest of his love

poems lack the typical Jewish concept of love - a concept born in ancient Palestine and carried on to the Spanish period. His was a Jewish love-song born of the Exile and exilic life. It was not earthly-sensual love, but spiritual-celestial love. Here too, in the poetry of his emotions, his poetic technique came to his aid, enabling him to write such a strong and turbulent love-poem as the "Scroll of Fire".

His Exilic Poetry is national in so far as it attacks the Exile. It is otherwise when it portrays the brighter side of Diaspora life and extols its spirituality. This too comes from a patriotic urge, a reverence for the people's achievements in the Diaspora, and an appreciation of the national tragedy. But it is not national poetry, in the sense of an aspiration to be liberated and reawakened to a full national life. Bialik's poetry contains complementary positive and negative phases. When he attacks the Exile his poetry has a positive national effect; and even when he praises the Exile, it is not for itself that he praises it. Although his poetry of indignation rises to the heights of a national prophecy, some of Bialik's Exile Poetry becomes exilic in quality. It is undeniable that even in the torments of Exile, there are rays of light which reveal the perpetuation of Israel's strength, at least in the spiritual sense. Israel's age-long persistence is not a rationally explicable phenomenon. The fact remains: the persistence of a people through many generations amidst alarming

terrors and oppression from all sides, - is a thing which merits appreciation. But a national poet in the Diaspora, who regards himself as a guide and leader, would have to be oblivious of that. To emphasise the positive aspects of Exile is to weaken the nation's ambition for liberation. Hence a national poet, even if he sees these aspects of the diaspora, would not demonstrate them. For him there can be only one slogan - liberation. This slogan he can only popularise by a constant emphasis of the negative aspects of the Exile, accompanied by assiduous stress on the song of redemption. Bialik's love of the spiritual values generated during the Exile compels him to sing the song of "Galuth^(Exile)". For all the beauty and exaltation of this Poetry in itself, it cannot be regarded as national poetry. Its importance lies in the fact that it serves as a lofty expression of Israel's mood in exile, of the love of learning and the reverence for the people's spiritual values, which enabled Israel to persist in the long exilic period. Bialik wrote the Song of Songs of exiled Jewry and its spiritual heritage, as well as warning the people lest this cultural stronghold be laid waste.

Bialik's National Poetry, as has been remarked, has two aspects: the denunciation of exile and the song of renaissance. It is in the full presentation of the "negation of Exile" that his national poetry has its chief importance. Bialik was able to be the "jackal to bewail the people's woe" in a way equal or even superior to Jehudah Halevi. For Bialik not only bewailed Israel's

woe, but also demanded justice from their oppressors. He even made demands to Heaven and claimed eternal justice from the Divine tribunal. His prophecy against the nation is also national poetry in the highest sense. When the people's resignation is disturbed, and the life of Galuth becomes hateful to it, the aspiration to a full national life arises. It is here that denunciation plays a positive role. But apart from portraying the degradation of Galuth, the poet must sketch the new life awaiting the people in their homeland whence they were exiled. He must sing the song of renascence, or, in the words of Halevi, he must be his people's "harp". Bialik did not fulfil this function. He wrote a group of renascence poems, although they were few in number. They have their points of beauty; but in comparison with the songs of rebuke, their merit is not considerable. The reason for this weakness lies in the poet's own nature; but in a sense the Exile itself is responsible as its conditions deny the poet any possibility of freely sounding a call for liberation. The national poet like the ancient prophet, rebukes, chastens, and then augurs consolation and redemption. Bialik, in the conditions of the Exile, could only be the preacher and rebuker, but could never become a poet of consolation. His prophecy, kept within him like hidden fire, was let loose; but the expected sequel of good tidings did not follow. Instead, he lapses into despair and writes his individual poetry. Like the "clear-eyes youth" in the "Scroll of Fire"

he "is silent with all the world in his great personal sorrow". His poetry becomes individualistic - the song of a man as a human being. As the reckoning and epitome of his way of life, his poetry becomes universalistic, and in effect, almost religious.

But the main stress is not to be laid on this poetry any more than it is to be laid on his Love and Nature poetry. His poetic greatness is derived from his Songs of Exile and Songs of Indignation and Rebuke. This poetry with its powerful prophetic force, was a draught of life to the exiled people. They recognised that together with the rebuke and harshness of his poetry, there went a prophetic moral, an irresistible will, and an overwhelming sympathy for the national renaissance. The language of these poems falling little short of the power and grace reached by the ancient prophets, set the seal upon this recognised supremacy. His powerful rebuke, his vigorous technique, and his vivid language all combined to proclaim Bialik, not indeed as the poet of renaissance - but as the greatest of Jewish national poets in modern times.

V. Short Stories.

Bialik's poetic talent is immeasurably superior to his qualities as a story-writer. But even in prose-writing his talent passed through various stages of evolution until it reached a very high level; and ^{he} came to be one of the foremost prose-writers of modern Hebrew literature. At the same time, unlike Mendele Mocher-Sepharim, he was not a pioneer in this field. He did exert an influence, not as the founder of a school of his own but as a distinguished disciple of Mendele's school - a disciple who often emulated the creative realism of his master, without ever becoming an originator in that form of literature.

This was not because he failed to comprehend Jewish life in its fulness, as his master succeeded in comprehending it. Nor was it solely because the scope of Jewish life in his narrative work is limited, just as the number of his stories is small. The chief point of interest is that despite the realism and movement of his stories - qualities which he had in common with Mendele $\frac{3}{4}$ they never attained the heights of his poetic achievement. In none of his narrative works (with the possible exception of "After-growth" - א'גו) did he win the place in Hebrew literature which he attained in poetry. As a poet he is in a class by himself, with no rival. As a story-writer, without reaching that supremacy, he is still amongst the most eminent.

What is the explanation of this gulf between Bialik's poetry and prose, which appear as two separate entities, as though some fixed and permanent barrier stands between them? There is a view¹⁾ that "Bialik is by nature a poet of eastern temperament, and in his prose he strives to be "northern", and therein he is false to his own nature." This analysis does not stand up to criticism. In his poetry, for instance, he distinguishes himself particularly in his "Winter Songs", describing the full beauty of a Russian winter. It seems that the true answer is that although Bialik felt the kinship between his poetry and prose, he actually tried to keep them apart as two separate entities. His natural strength was in lyricism and the portrayal of emotion, and on being drawn to another field of activity, he failed to attain in epic creation the heights which he reached as a lyricist. Of poetic forms he is a master, but in his stories his movement is laboured and his scope restricted. "In many, though not all his stories, he apparently strives to obliterate any lines of poetry."²⁾ It was the effort to liberate himself from poetry which denied him freedom of movement in his stories. This is the root of their faults and their deficiencies. But since his poetic strength was considerable, and realism plays a great part, even in his poetry, it is not surprising that he also managed to achieve a creditable record in the field of prose-writing. Even though his first steps in this direction were

1) J. Rabinowitz, Be'shaah Zo, II, 49.

2) J. Fichmann, Mosnaim, Vol.IV, p.139.

halting, they became gradually firmer until he achieved high proficiency.

We pass to a separate examination of each story.

"The Mighty Leon." (711 לַעֲזַר הַיָּדָא)

This story is a portrayal of a provincial type of man, crude, boorish and ignorant, with a very murky past of shady transactions, horse-stealing, and membership of a gang of touts. At the time of the story he is a respectable householder, whose chief interest is the timber-trade, and the lending of small sums of money at large rates of interest. His various business affairs have made him wealthy, but he lives sparingly and with miserly care. His guiding principle is the accumulation of wealth, and his motto is "The beginning and end of all things is - money-bags." He gathers much and spends little. His acquisition of wealth has not changed his mode of life, but he is content, and his money-bags satisfy him. He has no desire to study rich men's conduct of life, and he despises what he calls the "fancy Jews". In fact, he cherishes a suppressed contempt of all "who bear the hall-mark of luxury and refinement, nobility and spirituality." Thus, when through various circumstances - chiefly the influence of his wife, who wishes to alter ~~his~~ mode of life and to appear distinguished and aristocratic in ~~her~~ neighbour's eyes - he builds a new house ^{and fills it} with new furniture,

he finds no satisfaction in it. On the contrary, he longs to go back to his previous customs, which accord more with his coarse temperament. "Wagon-drivers are more in my line than fine creatures" - says Leon - "because they do at least respect you if you show esteem for them. But these others (i.e. the rich folk) are more scoffers who come to find the bare patches in the house and to make a song about it afterwards!" For Leon has grown up on a soil which reared him to be an independent creature, unable to mix with those who are above his cultural level. A wild fellow, who is not only content to remain in his own environment, but is actually incapable of being dragged into a different one. So he tells his wife: "Your husband doesn't want to be an important figure! Leon does not want anything of the sort, nor was he meant for it. And he'll be the same old Leon as before! I have my money-bags - and that's enough!

These money-bags, the entire purpose of his life, he acquires by all kinds of methods. He is in a state of continual war with the neighbours, especially the tradespeople in the timber business, to whom he is a severe competitor. Leon and his children - chips of the old block - went into battle and destroyed the livelihood of these traders. Of these the writer describes an interesting type, Alter Hentzky, a peculiar character who "hates everyone, and everyone hates him". But his financial position is poor - the opposite to that of Leon. He and his

children, the image of their father, find the battle of life embittered by Leon's family who have cornered all the timber trade and deprived others of any subsistence from it.

And so Bialik proceeds to depict different types of townspeople and their mode of life. The portrayal is, on the whole, realistic, but there is a palpable heaviness and conscious effort in the presentation. It is doubtful if we have to agree with Berditchevsky's view "that this is no real description, but an artificial process of construction."³⁾ It seems to me that there is genuine, realistic portraiture here. But the writer is not the master, in the way that he is a master of his poetic forms. The narrative is compared with conscious effort, which is especially noticeable in the description of the central character. Nevertheless, Bialik here presents us with a portrayal of several types, and through them, a portrait of a Jewish township in a period of transition, showing the decline of Jewish aristocracy, learning, and "Luftmensch" occupations, and the rise of boorish ruffians with money-bags against the sordid background of a Diaspora township.

This story reveals the author's sensitive and discriminating perception of Jewish life in the diaspora villages, as well as his expression of an implied protest against this unsubstantial form of life. The treatment, though laboured and heavy, is

3) Bidei Sefer, III, p.74.

yet full of realism.

"Behind The Fence." (אַהאַרץ 'אחור))

This story is told against the same background as the first.

Noah, the hero of the story, like the "mighty Leon", attracts the writers interest. In fact, Noah resembles Leon not only in his strength of body and sturdy temperament, but also in his dislike of "fancy creatures" with whom he too is in perpetual conflict. But in this story, unlike its predecessor, there is a wider range of interest. Whereas "The Mighty Leon" is only a description of Jewish provincial life, this tale adds a portrait of a typical Russian village woman, who is left alone and isolated after all the Russian folk have left the place, leaving an entirely Jewish environment; - a Russian peasant woman clinging to the soil, as it were "with her very fingers". Thus in addition to the conflict between a coarse ignoramus and his Jewish environment, we have a record of the conflict between the Jewish township and the solitary Russian peasant woman. The conflict is not only portrayed with great talent and faithful realism, but is also accompanied by wonderful descriptions of natural scenes, which are an important ingredient of the story. Bialik prefers the solitary courtyard of the lonely Russian woman to the Jewish ghetto in the village, because in the former he sees a natural and normal mode of life which is absent from the latter. In this story, his

portrayal is highly effective, perhaps because it is an objectively written chapter of Bialik's own experience. As an integral part of the story, the descriptive passages sometimes seem too complex and accumulated, but they are distinguished both by realism and by effective expression.

Between the Russian peasant woman (Shkoropintzicha) and her Jewish neighbours ^{there} ~~was~~ is ^{a constant struggle} ~~an unending~~, especially ^{literary} ~~in~~, the controversies with her neighbour Hanina-Lipah, Noah's father. But Noah, a complete ignoramus, who has to be dragged to school every day, is attracted by the life and scenery of Nature, although his mother pampers him fondly with all kinds of choice delicacies. It is not surprising that Noah finds congenial company in Marinka, the waif girl in the Russian woman's home. She is the only one who understands him; and he alone understands her wretched lot, so that he becomes her only consolation and ray of light in the life of toil and trouble imposed on her by her mistress. The affection between the two goes on for some time, despite frequent intervention by their parents and guardian respectively. But the end of their relationship on this basis came when intimate relations ensued. "Onenight Noah arose and ran off secretly with Marinka." But that is not all. Later, when Marinka has borne him a child, Noah takes a wife of Jewish blood under the canopy "according to the law and custom in Israel".

The forces arising against his Jewish environment were bound to be conquered and subdued by the force of Jewish life itself, which proved too strong for him.

On this note the story ends. In many places its movement is laboured, and in others there are palpable defects. But, at the same time, it is marked by great realism in the portrayal of character and circumstances, expressed with remarkable humour, and adorned with faithful representations of natural scenery in the little world to which the poet was attracted with such deep devotion.

"Aftergrowth". (2'20)

This is the best of Bialik's stories, and in it his narrative talent is shown at its best. A great part of his own life in childhood is absorbed into the narrative, so that it has great importance as autobiographical material. The story comprises the reminiscences of a Jewish boy about his own life. It is not all historical fact. There is much that is purely imaginative and much that is exaggerated fiction. But this does not influence the content of the story for it represents the way in which childhood was impressed upon the writer's mind. It is, therefore, irrelevant whether this part or that is authentic or fictitious. "My perfect faith in the essential reality of these fictitious words is not destroyed in the least. What care I if they happened

or not? Their occurrence is in my soul, and their reality impressed on all my being. The finger of God has engraved them upon the tablets of my heart, and who can erase them? If such are the ^{visions} ~~words~~ of dreams - no truth is as true as they, no reality as real." And so it is. Those interested in this story as autobiographical material can go and analyse it minutely, and after great enquiry, extract the material useful to them. For us the object of interest is the story itself, not from an autobiographical viewpoint, but as a work by itself.

In this story Bialik succeeds in giving us the memories of a Jewish boy's life from early childhood. There are remarkable descriptions of the school, the various teachers, the studies and the method of instruction. These are all vividly presented while the boy's character is being depicted. It is the character of a boy who is "different". At first he finds no purpose or interest in his studies, not because he has no studious ability, but because he does not find his studies satisfying. His heart is set on Nature in all its manifestations and he broods incessantly on the world and its inhabitants. His eyes look into distant horizons, and his brain is busy with "higher things" from early childhood. "He is full of wonderment about everything", even about the secrets of the world, and the mysteries which demand careful enquiry." Such a child seems strange in his environment - not only to his father who is preoccupied with the

business of finding a living for his household, but even to his teachers and his own group of playmates. From his elders he receives lavish beatings, and from his young contemporaries he gets scornful nick-names and ridicule; or else they ignore him. "At school I was isolated from my companions, and they from me. I was imprisoned within myself, building my own world inside me with none paying any heed." It was this which sustained him. It was his ambition to be isolated, to be in secret communion with Nature, to muse and dream his childish fancies. "I lie as a forgotten and deserted tool amongst the grassy plots. Their petals are mysterious to me, no one knows or sees me - and that is what I like. Far from people and their tumult, seeing and unseen, I lie alone, buried in the bosom of the world, left to myself and to my dreams, observing, listening, holding my peace."

At the beginning of this, as in other stories, there is a kind of protest against the Jewish life of that time. He protests with special violence against the bad system of schooling instruction. It seems as if the child is pushing his way out of his Jewish background, soon to desert it. But that is not so. As the story goes on, the child begins gradually to see the light in Jewish life, as well as the shade. His transition from one school to another- that of Rabbi Meir - produces this change. In this new school, the child sees "a new world".

The school is in the valley outside the township. Glorious natural scenery surrounds it, and gives him a view of two worlds: the Jewish world - the life of the village - and the world of Nature in the valley. The boy's mind finds rest. His imagination is enlarged, transcending his own environment and ~~period~~, and ranging over ancient times and scenes. Stories of the Bible and chapters of Jewish history are fused in his mind with his ~~visible~~ environment; and this new mood he transfers to the field of his visible world.

In his other stories we remarked on a certain heaviness of movement and awkwardness of exposition. These faults are due to the inability of Bialik, the story-writer, to adapt himself to Bialik the poet. He could not rise in his prose to his own poetic stature. But in this poetic narrative, Bialik found his remedy, being able to harmonise the ~~prosaic~~ element with the lyrical element which predominated in his art. The first chapter of this story has a poetic flavour and the other chapters are not without the same quality. Prose and poetry are as one; not in a confusion but in a harmony, with neither impeding the other. On the contrary - the one is complementary to the other; and the two together elevate the story to a very high creative level.

Several critics have commented on this wonderful blending of poesy and prose. But they have not attempted to explain this phenomenon or to demonstrate its cause. It would be instructive

to discuss the way in which Bialik was able in this story to remove the barrier between his poetic temperament and his prose style. We may account for it partly by the development of Bialik's talent in prose-writing and his increased polish in that sphere from a technical point of view, but chiefly by the lyrical "motif" pervading the entire ^{story} ~~narrative~~. Bialik, in this story, achieved success by allowing his lyrical outlook to obtrude into his prose. The heaviness of style which marks his other stories disappears, and the treatment becomes more attuned to the story and more appropriate to it, even though here as well he could not find complete freedom of expression. This elevation of prose to a lyrical height results from the fact that although this story is full of description which are presented with much realism, the realism is self-generated, and does not proceed from conscious effort. The rich imaginativeness which carried the author beyond the limitations of his time and place, helped him to synthesize poetry and prose, and to produce a ^{prose} work ~~of great scope~~ full of choice lyricism.

The survey of Bialik's stories should include *החצוצרה נתגישה* - "The Trumpet is Shamed", a playful folk-jest *יוס הששי הקצר* - "The Short Friday", and the three sketches called *שינוי כל אחד יד* - "Obiter Dicta". These are works of small scope, which do not in themselves add much to our knowledge of his work in this sphere. They also contain the qualities of remarkable realism, vivid portrayal, and faithful presentation, which are common to Bialik's narrative writing as a whole.

VI. Essays & Articles.

A very distinguished place in Bialik's work is occupied by his essays and articles. Unlike his stories, these have served and still serve as guiding landmarks in the development of Hebrew prose writing.

Bialik's essays, which are not numerous, revolve principally around questions of language and literature; the development and improvement of Hebrew usage and the evolution of literature and its penetration into wide circles of Jewish life. He discusses ideas about the spiritual heritage of Israel, systems of thought and art and writes many reviews, criticisms and isolated "feuilletons".

In one of his articles "The Hebrew Book", in which Bialik describes a programme for planning Hebrew literary development, he declares that the work must be done with "simplicity", precision, economy, restraint and clarity."¹⁾ All these qualities characterise his own essays in which his sentiments and opinions on literary matters are embodied. If we add to them the noble style and polished language in which they are written, it is not difficult to understand that these essays are in the front rank of perfection in Hebrew literature.

But even though these qualities distinguish the essays of Bialik as of no previous Hebrew writer except Achad Ha'am, their principal importance lies rather in their function as

1) Bialik II 317.

guiding models. Although they aroused opposition from many quarters, they yet gave a new aspect and a new direction to modern Hebrew literature. Their influence, both positive and negative, is considerable and is still having repercussions.

The central ideas of Bialik's essays can be expressed very [~]_A biefly - the revival of Hebrew language and culture and their development as a living, growing force in Jewry. But this revival inevitably raises many problems. Many can talk about the revival of a language. But how are we to envisage the revival of a language whose life has been confined to books for generations, so that it has become semi-animate and stultified? That the Hebrew people possesses great linguistic wealth and a large spiritual heritage nobody doubts. But all this rich heritage, and these spiritual possessions, have no vital value if they continue to remain enshrined in ancient books and not turned to vital account. "The existence of literary treasure, however, abundant, is not sufficient in itself; it requires continuous use, unceasing movement, and perpetual circulation in actual life, as a result of which a language's most faithful saviour arises - popular usage."²) This "literary treasure", according to Bialik, being deprived of movement and life, has set up a dividing barrier between the Jewish "psyche" and the Hebrew language, so that the "psyche" is incomplete, and the language under-developed.

2) *ibid*, 287.

The dividing line can only be obliterated by the complete revival of the language, in speech and in writing.

From these two premises - the existence of literary wealth and the desire to bring about a complete revival of the Hebrew language, Bialik comes to the question of the "widening" of the language.

Such a widening is possible in two ways. It can arise from within, from the hidden storehouse whose treasure is unused; or it can arise from without, under the influence of foreign languages and translations from them. Bialik shows that "widening" does not consist of a mechanical transference from one language to another, but is an internal and self-generating process. A language is not a mere collection of words or even of concepts, but is a deep psychological process which works itself out gradually on a nation's own soil. This alone explains the multitude of languages in the world. The language of a people is the most profound and vital expression of a people's life and development on its soil. When one speaks of the revival of the Hebrew language, the meaning is not simply confined to the increase of words and the consequent enrichment of the language, however important that is. It must be an expansion akin to the spirit of the language and of the people by whom the language was moulded. Bialik, therefore, considers that the first necessity in the revival of the

language is a process of organic expansion, assisted by the rich literary wealth of Hebrew literature throughout many generations.

Now, this wealth is many-sided. Not only are there many Hebrew words in literature which have not been used, but it is an important task to give them new light and new formations. In the "new formations of old words"³⁾ Bialik sees a more considerable creative force than in the coming of new words. He is confident that this expansion will not only enrich the language in words, but will also reveal new horizons for the enlargement and enrichment of the language.

Thus, in the expansion of the language, a primary task is expansion from within. But Bialik is not an antagonist of external accretions. This goes on with normal living languages as well, albeit to a lesser extent, since they expand very largely in an automatic way under the direct influence of each other. And it is all the more necessary for the Hebrew language, which had been alive only in a literary sense. Nevertheless, this external accretion remains secondary to the first task - that of internal expansion. "First of all internally, out of the language itself, and then, finally, from outside, wherever possible from kindred Semitic languages, and where there is no alternative, from other sources."⁴⁾

3) *ibid*, 290.

4) *ibid*, 293.

This expansion from the very inwardness of the language must be expressed, according to Bialik's idea, through the creation of a complete and methodical Hebrew dictionary, compiling the linguistic wealth of all generations, with all its full development and all the potentialities embodied therein."⁵⁾ This is work for scholars, experts in philology, and for the best creative writers, stylists, who desire the complete rejuvenation of the language. The scholars can contribute scientific research - and the writers, their literary instinct and their subtle, discriminating judgment. One section will be complementary to the other, and from them both the great ^{work} ~~pieces~~ will successfully emerge. Since the first condition of a language's revival is speech in it, this spirit must comprehend the entire process of expansion, both internal and external.

So Bialik envisages the necessity in the revival of the language, of an expansion based on the exploration of existing resources and their compression into a great authoritative lexicon. But he is concerned not only for the language, but for Hebrew culture generally. The language, of course, is not merely an instrument for the strengthening of culture, but a part of culture itself, and an inseparable part at that. But apart from that, there is a wide Hebrew culture including a literature of various branches: thought, philosophy, mysticism,

5) *ibid*, 296-297.

poetry, etc. All this cultural wealth, like the language itself, is practically divorced from the masses of Israel, and is the heritage of isolated individuals. And yet it has the power to educate the nation, to increase its creative capacity and to improve Hebrew literature and scholarship. What is to be done in order to render this vast cultural wealth a common possession of the whole people, and to cause it to permeate the whole of Jewish life?

Here, too, his conclusion is on the same lines as in the question of the language. It is necessary to re-discover these creative treasures, and to present them, after due choice and arrangement, to the whole people. This is not only possible through a great comprehensive thesis about Judaism, as Ahad Ha'am envisaged it ("The Encyclopedia of Judaism"), although that in itself is an important task in Bialik's view as well. The need is to present the cultural sources of Judaism themselves. "A book of Jewish knowledge is one thing, and the appreciation of the actual substance of Hebraic culture is another." "Actual Hebrew works should be known not only through books about them, but actually from their own material and contents." He expresses this principle by the word " קולקט " - "ingathering" - which became a celebrated term in Hebrew letters. The idea, he emphasizes, is no new one. It is the natural sequel to the process of " השלמה " - completion", which is well-known in Jewish history. There were three "completions" in Israel - those of the Bible,

the Mishnah, and the Talmud, and the time is now ripe for a "Third such ingathering, on a national and not merely a religious scale, of the best of Hebrew literature of all times."⁶⁾ This compilation will also serve as a tremendous incentive to the development of Hebrew creative art and to its rejuvenation. The question arises - who is to undertake this vast and vital task? Who is competent to decide what is to be done, and what chosen? And Bialik answers "The people's knowledge and taste, or in the ancient phrase 'the nation's 'holy spirit'".⁷⁾ The scholars who engage in the task must do so in accordance with the spirit of the people, even if this conflicts with their private inclination. That is what happened with the completion of the Biblical canon. Just as the nation's holy spirit acted then, so will it now. Bialik proceeds to emphasise strongly that this "ingathering" is not intended to impede active creative work in the present generation. Hence he avoids the words ^{השלימה} - completion - in case that intention is assumed. Not only will the ingathering not interfere with renewed creative work, but it will wed it to the ancient culture, so that the spirit of classical masterpieces will hover over modern literature, and become an additional factor in its development and expansion. The ingathering, if it is undertaken according to a well pre-conceived plan and in a spirit appropriate to its important function, will even abolish the barrier between ancient Hebrew

6) *ibid*, 309.

7) *ibid*, 308.

culture and modern literature, creating a unified Hebrew literature whose beginnings are rooted in the Biblical period, and whose culmination begins in our own time. Such a literature will be "the choice essence of the fruit of Hebraic thought and feeling throughout the ages."⁸⁾

This raises another question. An ingathering of the national culture throughout the ages must include the compilation of national masterpieces written in foreign languages. These Bialik divides into various categories. Bialik's view is that it is necessary and important to present these masterpieces in a Hebraic garb through translation into Hebrew. He considers this task as a "ransom of captives". All these works were written, through various circumstances, in foreign languages, and the process of ingathering must graft them on to Hebrew culture; and since, despite their foreign language they are of Israel's spirit, "we must spread a great, wide net over the ocean of world literature and haul in therefrom all the fragments of Hebrew spiritual craftsmanship." "That day will be a great day of redemption for the Jewish spirit, returning to its source, its inheritance and the "bundle of its ^{חיינו} life."⁹⁾ All the works written in Greek, Arabic and Spanish are to be rendered into Hebrew. Philo, Spinoza and Heine are to come within the purview of Hebrew letters.

8) *ibid* 311.

9) *ibid*, 315.

The ingathering would therefore comprehend the ancient national literature in Hebrew, the masterpieces in foreign languages, and the best of modern Hebrew literature. Bialik divides this vast storehouse into thirteen categories: (1) The Bible, the Apochryph and the Apocalypse; (2) The best of Alexandrine literature; (3) Writings of Josephus, ~~and the Talmud~~; (4) The Mishnah; (5) The Legends; (6) Philosophy; (7) Poesy and Poetry; (8) Ethics & Morals; (9) Kabbalah and Mysticism; (10) Homiletics; (11) Chasidism; (12) Folklore; (13) Modern Literature.

Here then is a gigantic programme whose realisation would mean something more than the ingathering of Jewish cultural wealth; for "the purpose of the ingathering is to widen the scope of influence of modern literature."¹⁰) Hence, apart from providing a repository of national culture, the process of ingathering has also a stimulating, renewing and creative function. Bialik sees a national as well as a cultural purpose in the "Hebrew book for the people of the Book", His essay ends with these words: "Our land bequeathed one small book to us. Who knows whether it is not the destiny of the book to restore our land." Is there not something in the spiritual life of a man or a people whereby the processes of birth are reversed and they become a father to their own fathers?"¹¹)

10) *ibid*, 321.

11) *ibid*, 321.

This central idea of "ingathering" dominates all Bialik's ideas and he himself prepares to be a pioneer in the fulfilment of his own plan. His article on the "Compilation of the Legends" is a sort of sequel to his article on the "Hebrew book", in which the idea of "ingathering" is expressed and analysed. It is not only a sequel, but actually a preparation for the fulfilment of the programme.

In the article "On the Compilation of the Aggadah", Bialik demonstrates the importance of gathering together the Aggadic literature, which is important from many aspects - for its content, its form and its style. In its content the ^{Aggadah} ~~legend~~ is a true mirror of life in Israel from a social and political standpoint. It is important also as a great literary storehouse, embracing nearly every branch of Jewish literature and its style can serve as a model for this generation. The quality of the Aggadic literature as the compiled work of many hands - and not the product of one author, enabled it to serve as a faithful echo of Jewish life in the widest possible sense. "Through the ^{Aggadah} ~~legend~~ a man enters into the complete structure of Jewish life and contemplates its most intimate essence".¹²⁾ Bialik deals at length and in detail with the method whereby one should approach the compilation of the ^{Aggadah} ~~legends~~ into one Book - a "Book of ^{Aggadah} ~~legends~~ for the People". He discusses the choice and clarification of the ^{Aggadah} ~~legends~~, the editing of the Book, and similar

12) *ibid*, 328.

questions, with a view to rendering the book easy to use and widely popular. He concludes with the statement "This is a book for which Hebrew literature is waiting."¹³⁾

In his article "The Birth Pangs of a Language", we find that when he discusses the concept of language, he insists that a language is not a mere accumulation of words common to men. Words which make up any language possess a special spirit which determines their identity with that language and people, and with no other. In his excellent essay "Concealment and Revelation in Language",¹⁴⁾ Bialik discusses that idea more fully.

Bialik is at pains to emphasize the importance of the words which are most prevalent in daily usage. They constitute the expression of the deepest emotions of a man, and it took many generations for them to be crystallised. Moreover, through their medium worlds of thought have been enlarged. History shows that even words are shaped by a certain destiny. Sometimes certain words are in the ascendancy, and sometimes they are in decline. Bialik sees great importance in this "cyclistic revolution" of words; and the artistry of language is real when even new developments appear as old - i.e., he attaches great importance to the traditionalism of language as a result of which even innovations ought not to appear as a sudden phenomenon

13) *ibid.* 333. And in fact Bialik did give the people this book, which some consider to be the most important in Hebrew Literature since the Bible (Rabinowitz, *Beshaah Zo* II (p.47) and although that is an exaggerated estimate, the book is undeniably one of the most vital in Hebrew literature.

14) Bialik II, 298-303.

of artificial origin, but as additional links in the long chain of the language's growth. He also discusses the static and the changing elements of a language, the similitude and community of words and phenomena, and the "characteristic qualities" of things. The language of prose-writers is in one category, and the language of poetry in another, and the two differ widely. In discussing the language of poetry, he affirms that the work of a true artist is "original creation", and entirely new concepts are generated by the spirit of the artist. From this he arrives at a discussion of the peculiar and considerable influence of poetic language to which not everybody is well-suited; and even the most gifted artist should show caution and precision in using it.

Bialik's vigilant interest in the Hebrew language and culture sometimes leads him into very profound examination of the problems revolving around the revival of Hebrew. Hence it is not surprising that Bialik the great poet, who eulogised the Aggadic literature so highly (even dedicating a poem to it), and demanded and realised its compilation, now turns towards a new line of thought. He demands the return to Halachah - confirmed law ("Agaddah & Halachah"). Bialik contemplates modern Hebrew literature, and beholds a generation given up entirely to "Agaddah". Belle-lettres and poetry monopolise the new literary movement. "Halachah" is absent, as though deliberately excluded. And Bialik, who had seen in Aggadah and unfailing source of the

understanding of people's life and a vital storehouse of modern literature, is now worried by "Aggadah" unaccompanied by Halachah". The importance of Aggadah lies in its influence upon Halachah, but by itself it lacks a substantial basis. And in this, perhaps the best of his essays, Bialik explains the content of both Halachah and Aggadah, and shows in contradistinction to ^{the} generally accepted view, that Halachah itself is by no means devoid of poetic interest, for it contains a rich epic material which is potentially able to enrich Hebrew culture not only in the evolution of a scientific style, but also in presenting a transvaluation in favour of realism in literature and in life. That is not to say that he regrets his eulogies of Aggadah. He still persists in that view, but emphasises that there is no incompatibility between the two. And if, in this instance, he shows preference for Halachah, it is because of a change of stress, arising from a desire to meet the unfortunate situation of a "generation with nothing but Aggadah"¹⁵⁾ - a situation which bears witness to an abstract remoteness in literature and life. In the course of his exposition, Bialik sheds new light on Halachah. It is not merely a collection of dry rules, devoid of life and vital movement, but it is full of impressions and reflections, ideas and opinions embodying the actual conditions of many generations. Hence Halachah should be restored to its pristine honour in Jewish literature, which in modern times "has little in its possession

¹⁵⁾ Bialik II, 348.

but a few poems and stories",¹⁶⁾ Since even belle-lettres will languish and decline if they receive "no influences from the other high sources of the Spirit."¹⁷⁾

Inclination and Duty:- The Aggadah is the former, the Halachah the latter - a positive duty allowing of no evasion. Inclination is a prior condition to the fulfilment of a duty, as a kind of instrument preparing the mood of those who are to bear the duty. Isaiah II, by his remarkable prophecies in verse, paved the way for the rebuilding of the Temple. Afterwards, in the time of the actual building of the Temple, Haggai and Zachariah came on the scene. They were the "last of the prophets and the first of the Halachists". But those who came after them, like Ezra and his colleagues, "were Halachists only."¹⁸⁾

And so we again observe (as in the conclusion of his article "The Hebrew Book") that although Bialik appears to be discussing a purely literary matter, he yet synthesises the Hebrew revival with the idea of national renaissance. In the revival of one he sees an assurance for the revival of the other.

There is special merit in Bialik's articles ("Mendele" and his "Three Volumes" and "Creator of the Model") on Mendele Mocher-Sepharim, his preceptor in prose-style and the object of his deepest reverence. Mendele's prestige is high in Hebrew

16) *ibid*, 348.

17) *ibid*.

18) *ibid*, 349.

literature. Some say that his greatness is reflected in the contents of his works; others exalt him for his style. Some praise the wide scope of his knowledge, others its completeness and unity. There is no doubt, concedes Bialik, that there is much truth in all these estimates, and that Mendele possessed all the virtues ascribed to him. But Bialik sees his greatness chiefly in his originality. He is a pioneer and an innovator in Hebrew literature and language. The literature immediately preceding his time scarcely deserved the name of literature at all. Mendele came and created it from the beginning, impressing his own hallmark upon it. This originality is revealed not only in the artistic and imaginative aspect of literature, but also in the evolution of a new Hebrew style. Before Mendele's time, the language itself, like the literature, was unpossessed territory without fences or hedges. His arrival led to a new style, and a new language composed of the best styles of bygone generations. That is not to say that it is a confused medley of styles and syntaxes; it forms a harmonious and well-moulded language, because "he found the synthesis, and the ultimate harmonisation of the essence of all the different styles at once."¹⁹⁾ The new Hebrew literature and style are derived from Mendele who was their creator and pioneer. The value of this originality is expressed in the creation of an accepted "formula" in the

19) *ibid*, 402.

literary movement of which he was the head. Bialik hence designates Mendele "the creator of the style". It was by this style of literary harmonisation that he paved the way for his successors to whom he was a guide and model. But the "creation of a style is meant the giving of fixity to thought and sentiment, and hence - guidance for future generations. This was the achievement of Mendele. It was a great achievement, because he not only enriched Hebrew literature with his own work, but served as a guide to many others who enriched and enlarged it in their turn, making the modern Hebrew literary movement worthy of the name.

Bialik wrote other essays which are all distinguished for their gift of expression, and their method of exposition, biographical criticisms, (e.g. "With Strength", "The old Mendele", "Levinsky's Death") polemical writings and feuilletons ("Youth or Infancy", "Culture and Politics", "A Pleasant Mistake"), as well as a review of the work of the Painter Pasternack, and an article on "Children who have left their Home", all find a place in his work. There is special merit in his critical estimate of Hebrew poetry in a remarkable article, called "Our Young Poetry". Ostensibly the title implies a discussion on modern poetry, but in fact this essay provides a full estimate of all post-Biblical Hebrew poetry up to his own day. This article has clarity, vigour and profundity.

Bialik's writings deal with most of the problems revolving

around the subject of Hebrew literature and language. Not all of his opinions have gained currency in modern literature, and many dispute the ideas expressed in his essays. But nevertheless, their influence was powerful. Even those who opposed his ideas helped in the enlargement and enrichment of Hebrew language and literature. Thus Bialik became not only the greatest of contemporary poets, but also one of the pioneers of the new literary movement.

VII. Literary Work and Activities.

Apart from Bialik's work as a poet, short-story writer and feuilletonist, we have to consider other literary activities which have their own importance.

His poetic work includes nursery rhymes
SONGS FOR CHILDREN
AND FOLK-SONGS. and folk-songs, which he wrote in great profusion.¹⁾ There is a special collection of his songs for children named "Songs and Melodies". Many were published at an early date in chrestomathies and juveniles text books, and they all show a penetrating study of the child mind. Their characteristics are an easy, fluent style, clever word-plays, humour and a captivating youthful jest. There are some which are marked by seriousness and even gloom, but these are outnumbered by the multitude of the merrier, nursery ^{songs} ~~stories~~. Many are devoted to Jewish Sabbaths and festivals, with a view to making them more interesting and pleasurable to youth.

Modern Hebrew poetry had contained no folk-songs. One writer has justly noted²⁾ that such poems can only be created by a people on its own soil, ^{in its spoken language} and that exile does not provide favourable conditions for the evolution of this type of poetry. But Bialik, under the influence of Yiddish folk-lore, contrived to produce Hebrew folk-songs as well. These are, of course, of trivial content,

1) About his Songs for Children see S. Streit. Sepher Hashanah (Palestine, 1935, pp.288-292).

2) Mordechai ben Hillel Ha-cohen, in his pamphlet about Bialik (Jerusalem, 1935), p. 48.

as they must be; but they exhibit fluency of style, freshness and 'joie de vivre', besides portraying phases of Jewish life in Russia which had found no previous expression in Hebrew poetry.

THE YIDDISH POEMS.

Bialik, apart from receiving Yiddish influence, also contributed to Yiddish poetry.³⁾ This subject is not within our province here, except that Bialik translated some of Jehudah Halevi's poems into Yiddish. This rendering of Halevi into a widely spoken language shows how keenly he felt Halevi's influence and appreciated the value of his Poetry for the Jewish masses to whom mediaeval Hebrew was not familiar. Bialik's wish was to infect the widest sections of Israel with the national buoyancy of these poems.

POPULAR LEGENDS.

The historical background of these legends is the Biblical period of Jewish statehood and spiritual ascendancy. The language of these legends has already been discussed.⁴⁾ Here it is important to stress one fact: that Bialik, despite his love of the Diaspora and his strong ties with it, chose the Biblical and not the exilic background for his folk-legends. Most of them relate to the golden age of Jewish monarchy under David and Solomon. The material for the legends is drawn from Talmudic and Midrashic sources, and into them Bialik infused much of his creative power, so that they are marked not only by their polished style and language, but also

3) פיוט צאנז, 1908. Second edition 1922; also נפתלי 1913.

4) See: Our Chapter on his Language & Style.

by their vivid descriptions of the Ancient East of Biblical times.

TRANSLATIONS. The most important of Bialik's translations are ^{of} "Wilhelm Tell" by Schiller and of Cervantes' "Don Quixote". In these, ^{as} we have remarked above, Bialik showed a very original approach to the task of translation. He also made an anonymous translation of Nowack's book on Biblical archaeology.⁵⁾ From Yiddish he translated S. Ansky's works, "Between Two Worlds" ("The Dybbuk")⁶⁾ as well as stories of Abraham Reisin, Shalom Aleichem and B. Shapir, and Ben-Ammi (from the Russian).

EDITORIAL WORK. Bialik was a joint editor of "Hashiloach" with J. Klausner as chief editor, from 1904⁷⁾ to 1910. His province was Belles-Lettres.⁸⁾ Bialik attributed great importance to folk-lore, and hence he founded and edited (with Druyanov and Ratnitsky) the compilation, "Reshumoth" of which 6 volumes were published, devoted mainly to memoirs, ethnography and folk-lore.

PUBLICATION WORK. At the beginning of 1911, Bialik (together with S. Ben-Zion, A. Levinski, and J.H. Ratnitsky), founded the publishing firm "Moriah" to produce text books and ancient Hebrew classics as well as modern literature. This firm

5) Halichoth Hammedinah bimei Kedem, in collaboration with Zelizenko, J. Fishman, Hatekufah, Vol. 17, p. 412.

6) vid. Bialik Orally II, 112-113.

7) See chapter "His Life" p. 136.

8) J. Klausner, Kneseth I, 103-110.

was an important factor in the development of Modern Hebrew Literature. The influence of some of the best poets and writers was brought to bear upon its publications. In 1919, Bialik founded the firm "Dvir" which began by issuing scientific books⁹⁾ and widened its range of activity later on. It was in this institution that Bialik saw the first realisation of his idea of "ingathering", for under its auspices and with Bialik's industrious initiative, some of the best works of ancient and modern literature were published.

Much has already been said here¹⁰⁾ about Bialik's concept of "Ingathering". His first work in that direction was modest enough, consisting of the production of text-books, "Biblical stories", 'Prophetic writings', 'Hagiographia', 'Jewish Poetry' (together with Rabnitzky and S. Ben Zion), 'Words of Law & Prophets', 'Words of Aggadah' (with Rabnitzky), 'Little Homilies', etc.

But a work of "ingathering" commensurate with Bialik's ambition was performed with the publication of the Sepher Ha-Aggadah (together with Rabnitzky). Here he compiled the best of Talmudic and Midrashic homilies, and the book is divided according to periods and subjects, and is accompanied by an easy commentary. The sources are given in their original language and form, apart from slight-stylistic

9) See: Abraham Levinson, 'The Hebrew Movement in the Diaspora' (in Hebrew), pp. 202-204.

10) See: Our Chapter, "Essays" & Articles".

changes carried out with great accuracy and care. The Aramaic sources are translated into Hebrew in accordance with Aggadic style. The importance of this work can scarcely be exaggerated,, and its wide circulation and frequent editions are adequate testimony of its popularity. It became a 'popular classic' in the full sense, affecting not only the young Jewish generation, but also the best of Hebrew writers, to some of whom ancient Hebrew literature was no longer familiar. Thus the influence of 'Sepher Ha-Aggadah' was not confined to the dissemination of knowledge of ancient literature amongst the people, but it also had a direct influence upon the development of modern Hebrew literature and contemporary Hebrew style.¹¹⁾

PUBLICATION OF
POETRY OF
SPANISH PERIOD.

In the programme of "ingathering" a special place is due to the poetry of mediaeval times. According to ^{Bialik's} ~~his~~ own testimony,¹²⁾ his first estimate of this poetry was not sufficiently high, and it was only after he had begun to work on the subject that he appreciated its vast importance. Indeed, as a result of this changed estimate, when he had issued all the poems of ibn Gabirol (in 6 volumes) and of Moses ibn Ezra (in 2 volumes) in collaboration with J.H. Rabnitzky, he made this work the crowning glory of his "ingathering". He edited these poems after long examination

11) S. Shneour, Ha'Miklat I, pp. 251-252.

12) Bialik Orally I, 110-111.

of manuscripts and after the compilation of poems scattered in all sorts of journals and anthologies. But it is certain that scholarly research would not itself have been sufficient for such a perfect publication, were it not for the added advantage of his poetic talent, which made Bialik so pre-eminently suitable for this task.

COMMENTARY
ON THE
MISHNAH.

While he was working on Spanish poetry, Bialik began to publish a popular edition of the Mishnah. His aim was to produce the Mishnah in a popular pointed text with a short commentary, including all the necessary introductions. He began his publication on these lines, but he produced only one part (*סוף המשנה*) before death interrupted his labours.

VIII. Bialik's Outlook on Judaism and Jewish Life.

Bialik's outlook on Judaism and Jewry can be deduced not only from his poetry, which is the chief source for his views, but also from his numerous articles and speeches (which have recently been published in two special volumes¹⁾ and from his letters.²⁾

Bialik's speeches and letters add little that is fundamental to what we know from his poetry and articles; nevertheless they help to complete the picture and to extend it, ~~and they~~ ^{and they} touching upon some subjects with which his poetry does not deal at all. There is enough material to enable a survey of his conception of Jewish life and culture, his estimate of the Hebrew language and its revival, his attitude to Yiddish and to the Exile and its culture, as well as to the upbuilding of the Jewish National Home and the revival of Jewish life in Palestine.

1. Jewish Torah and Culture.

Bialik's positive attitude to the Sinaitic code arose from his religious personality. His love of the Torah and its spiritual heritage is derived from his belief that a Divine Presence was manifest in Israel's exile. The Torah accompanied Israel in long years of wandering, and served as a beacon of

1) Bialik, orally, 1935.

2) Sepher Bialik.

light in darkness of exilic life. It was the spiritual refuge in which the nation found consolation for its terrible agonies. "Israel and the Torah are one."¹⁾ Bialik more than all the other poets of our generation penetrated to the essence of this dictum. He realised that the Oral and the Written Law had been organically absorbed by the people, and were thus the medium whereby the authentic Hebraism^{spirit} is most aptly expressed. The religious content of the Torah became Israel's national trait. The people preserved the Torah, and the Torah preserved the people. On the basis of the Torah, the people continued through many generations of exile to evolve a peculiarly individual culture, despite uninterrupted contact with other cultures. Even for external importations the people found its own receptacles, so that the external influence was absorbed as an original national possession upon which the nation set its special seal. Hebrew culture and the spiritual values of the nation were all embraced by the term "Torah" - an untranslatable concept for which the people had a most reverent admiration. "Its content and connotations embrace more than "religion" or 'creed' alone, or 'ethics' or 'commandments' or 'learning' alone, and it is not even just a combination of all these, but something for transcending all of them. It is a majestic, almost cosmic conception. The Torah is the tool of the Creator; with it and for it He created the

1) This phrase is based on a statement in Zohar on Exodus, chap. 18 verse 4.

universe. The Torah is older than creation. It is the highest idea and the living soul of the world. Without it the world could not exist and would have no right to exist."²⁾ Such is Bialik's description of the place occupied by the Torah in the popular mind. It was on this basis that the nation was educated during the long years of Exile. The Torah and the Beth Hamidrash where it was taught - the "hiding place of a mighty spirit, refuge of an eternal people,"³⁾ served as the focus of Bialik's thoughts. He hopes that the Torah will be maintained on the same high level to which Jewry had so long exalted it. "May we succeed in raising the science and learning that will issue from this house (the Hebrew University in Jerusalem) to the moral level to which our people raised its Torah!"⁴⁾ Israel must not segregate itself from world-culture, but must absorb its best elements, without, in any event, making an inferior imitation of it. The Jewish spirit has sufficient nobility to be an influential force despite its receptive character which exposes it to the influence of other cultures. "But we ourselves are not novices in the kingdom of the spirit, and whilst learning from everybody we also have something to teach."⁵⁾

Certain elements in the Jewish way of life have, by the

2) Bialik, Orally, I, 50.

3) Bialik, I, 21.

4) Bialik Orally I, 53.

5) *ibid.*

necessities of progress, become obsolete. But that which is fine in the old heritage - a very large part of it - must be preserved as the corner-stone of the people's renewed culture. Bialik says: "The house of knowledge and learning that has been erected on Mount Scopus will differ greatly, not only in the materials it is made of, but in its nature and purpose, from the old Beth-Hamidrash. But, amid the ruins of those hallowed structures ^(The Batei Midrashoth) there is many a sound and beautiful stone that can and ought to be applied to the foundations of our new edifice. Let not the builders reject these stones."⁶⁾ Just as the best of the ancient "content" had to be preserved, so too had the ancient receptacles of it. And just as the ancient content could be extended, but not exchanged, so also the traditional forms could be beautified and improved, but not exchanged for new, borrowed forms. Bialik is a vigorous opponent of the Reform School in Judaism which strove to exchange the old forms for new: "A nation which preserves its traditional forms may hope that the day of redemption will one day come when it will again be enriched and improved. "God wished to show favour to Israel; therefore He multiplied their Torah and their responsibilities." True, the ancient receptacles require occasional repair and improvement; but to break them is not a process which any nation can allow.

6) *ibid.*

"Any people which begins to evolve a new culture preserves its old receptacles for it."⁷⁾

The Torah was never dogmatic. It developed by evolution through the centuries, without shedding its principal elements. This must be its role at the present day as well. Bialik is anxious that "our Torah should not turn into a dry and frigid dogma; it must be a thing of life."⁸⁾ At the same time, Bialik ascribes great importance to the ceremonial laws in which he sees great national value. He particularly cherishes the Jewish mode of life, which is both a factor in the observance of the commandments, and in unifying and welding together the different parts of Jewry. "But for a code of regulations we would be as fragments amongst the nations, no one tribe like any other."⁹⁾

The festivals and, above all, the Sabbath, are of pre-eminent importance. The Sabbath played a high and vital role, and around it wondrous legends were weaved. It was the "Queen Sabbath"; that is to say that "in the popular imagination it was a living soul with a bodily semblance, the perfection of radiant beauty." "All Hebrew poets from Jehudah Halevi till Heine, sang to the Sabbath." The reason, in Bialik's view, is that the Sabbath is in itself a source of life and sanctity

7) *ibid*, p. 163.

8) *ibid*, p. 85.

9) *ibid*, p. 194-5.

to the whole people, and a fountain of holiness for all poets and singers in Israel.¹⁰⁾ The other festivals also have their share of sacred associations.¹¹⁾ But the Sabbath is the foundation of Judaism, being "the sign of the Covenant between God and his people, and if of all the precepts, the Sabbath alone was left, it could save Israel from destruction."¹²⁾ In the Sabbath are embodied national and social motives, and it serves as the basis for an original form of Jewish life. "The Sabbath hallows the entire people's sense of beauty. If we deplore our lack of a typical mode of life, we can begin to evolve it with the aid of the Sabbath."¹³⁾ To-day, therefore, when Jews return to their land to renew their independent national life, there can be no loftier purpose than to sanctify the Sabbath, as the basis of a general renewal of Jewish life.¹⁴⁾ Bialik's hope is that "with the healing of the national physique will come a healing of spiritual instincts so that we may know how to distinguish between the holy and the secular. Then the Sabbath in all its glory will come again into its own."¹⁵⁾ Bialik attacks those who desire to exchange the old festivals for new. Religious festivals cannot be evolved on anybody's personal

10) Bialik II (His article "Halacha and Aggada"), p. 336.

11) *ibid*, p. 337.

12) Bialik's Orally II, 163.

13) *ibid*, p. 161.

14) *ibid*, p. 160.

15) *Sepher Bialik*, p. 97.

initiative. but are the collective product of the nation as a whole. "Festivals cannot be invented from a man's own will. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, attempted this and failed. It is possible to adapt or reform the festivals to some extent, but not to 'create' them out of nothing. The festival is a concept of collective life, made up of many influences, such as Religion, tradition, history, art, nature and the like. Just as it is impossible to write a poem on demand, so one cannot create a festival or rite. Those who find no satisfaction in the existing festivals reveal a secular temperament, for which there is no remedy."16)

We have seen that Bialik discussed the role of the Torah as the companion of Israel during the dark days of exile, and how the festivals, especially the Sabbath, could become the basis for the renewal of Jewish life and the creation of original modes of life. That is not all. The Torah contains concepts which are so far from being obsolete, that Europe has unconsciously embodied them in its own culture.¹⁷⁾ Evidently, Bialik like Halevi, perceived that Jewish ethics preceded other systems of philosophy. More interesting to Bialik is the fact that his people seeks cultural forces outside itself, while all the time they are amply available in their very midst and were discovered centuries ago. If the people had not neglected

16) · ibid, p. 58.

17) Bialik Orally, II, 52-53.

its ancient heritage, it would be drawing on them as on new sources of renewal in an independent cultural life. The "ocean of Talmud", the Midrash, etc., are an uncultivated garden, sown lavishly with grains of thought. The people's duty is to perform the ingathering of this spiritual harvest. This process, in Bialik's view, is not only the salvation of Hebrew culture, but the invaluable factor in the enrichment of Jewish life. In his addresses, Bialik dwells incessantly on this theme.¹⁸⁾ (Lachover ¹⁹⁾ is wrong in assuming that in his addresses Bialik reveals a changed view in this matter.) Bialik desires the "ingathering" of this cultural material in order to "turn it into a vital force", "something living and useful."²⁰⁾ Only the ancient achievements can be the basis of future renaissance. "The products of the past are the soil for the products of to-morrow."²¹⁾

2. The Hebrew Language.

A language is the scale of a nation's cultural achievement, for in it culture finds expression. It is also a distinguishing feature between nations. When Israel was exiled only its language remained in its possession. Even religion and literature were embodied in the language and were saved by it from destruction.¹⁾ Assimilation and apostasy in Israel

18) *ibid.*, 150-152.

19) *Moznayim III*, p. 661.

20) *Bialik Orally*, I, 179.

21) *ibid.*, p. 22.

1) *Bialik Orally*, I, 15.

always began with those who forgot the language and neglected it.²⁾ For the Hebrew language is no mere framework or external form, but it is the essence and foundation of all. "Language alone preserves the independent character of a people."³⁾ The works of Jewish writers in other languages⁴⁾ will have no immortality unless they are translated into Hebrew, for the Hebrew language saves Hebrew culture from extinction. But the language too, according to Bialik, has been preserved miraculously by remaining the language of literature, and not of daily speech. Had it been spoken, there would have been many Hebrew languages and dialects; as it is, its unity has been preserved.⁵⁾ In one place, Bialik deals at length with this theme. He is conscious that the multiplicity of dialects is a language's asset, enabling it to be enriched with many shades and nuances of meaning, many idioms and forms. Hebrew has lacked this process. But with a wandering nation without a land, the language would have picked up words from different foreign languages and would have lost its character, so that a Jew from one country would not understand the 'Hebrew' of a Jew from another country. Eventually a number of 'Hebrew languages' would have been generated, whose only common factor was a few isolated Hebrew words, while the bulk of the vernacular was foreign in

1) *ibid*, 16.
 3) *ibid*, 71.
 4) *ibid*, II, 150-152.
 5) *ibid*, I, 70.

origin. Only a territorial existence can guarantee the normal evolution of language.⁶⁾ Understanding this, the Hebrew people resigned the use of a Hebrew vernacular out of a desire to avoid endangering its existence, preferring a unified Hebrew language in written form, to a rabble of oral languages, exposed to mutually alien influences."⁷⁾ Continuing his train of thought, Bialik maintains that with the renewal of a Jewish life in Palestine, the fear of linguistic confusion is allayed. Palestine, as a central Jewish focus, will assure the permanence of a spoken Hebrew in the diaspora, as well as in Palestine itself.⁸⁾

In this chapter we have to discuss a subject which has a direct connection with the Hebrew language. Yiddish is the widespread vernacular of many Jews, and is supported by two sorts of ideology. Some deny Hebrew altogether and claim Yiddish as the national language of the Jews, since most of them can speak it. Others merely assert that Yiddish has the right to exist since it is an actual reality. With the first category Bialik can obviously entertain no discussion, being quite unable to deal with those who deny the importance of Hebrew. As for the second view, Bialik holds that Yiddish has the right to exist

6) ibid II, 152-3.

7) ibid, 153.

8) There is, however, a letter in which Bialik, though expressing approval of the Hebrew speaking movement in the diaspora, yet is extremely sceptical of the success of this venture. "It is hard to believe that Hebrew speaking will win a complete victory in the diaspora." (Sepher Bialik, p.68.)

only insofar as it helps to achieve the greater ultimate goal, namely, Hebrew. "Hebrew is the end, and Yiddish the means towards it."⁹⁾

The "means" will be of short duration, like all the jargons used in history by the Jews, and discarded in due course. Aramaic is one example. "The influence and dominion of Aramaic over the culture of Israel was a hundred times stronger than that of all the Yiddish jargons."¹⁰⁾ And what was its fate other than extinction. Similarly, Yiddish but a few years back used to take pride in its hold on the masses; but within a short time, its position is weakened in Jewish life, from which it becomes detached, and its place is taken either by a European language or by Hebrew - which has had a renaissance in the diaspora as well.

Yiddish influenced Hebrew, ~~as did Aramaic, which~~^{and} being a spoken language,^{it} contributed some of its flexibility and vitality to Hebrew, preventing the literary Hebrew medium from becoming petrified and dead. On the other hand, Yiddish itself has gained from this alliance, for its affinity with Hebrew raised its popularity with the masses. Similarly, when Yiddish parts company from Hebrew, it will lose its value.¹¹⁾ But a future - this Yiddish has not. Aramaic was a Semitic language - but only a little of it was absorbed into Hebrew. But "the

9) Bialik Orally, I, 20.

10) Bialik, II, p. 314.

11) Bialik Orally, II, 154.

decline of Yiddish is a historic inevitability. All that will remain of the Yiddish literature will be those parts translated into Hebrew; the rest will perish."¹²⁾ "Though the jargons were a vehicle for Jewish thought for many generations, they will always remain in the last grade of Jewish thought. Yiddish was not the language of Hebrew kings, sages, or prophets..... A true drama must be written in a Divine language. I doubt if any deity ever revealed himself in Yiddish. One did in Hebrew."¹³⁾

Bialik sees various ways of reviving the ancient "tongue of the Gods". The "ingathering - the collection of all Israel's spiritual treasure of the ages", will be a real stimulus. The revival of Hebrew speech - wonderful process though it is, not sufficient for a language's revival or for satisfaction of cultural needs. Words, expressions, idioms are found in thousands in Hebrew, and have lain unused. It is necessary to revive them from oblivion and to revitalise them by daily use.

For this purpose, Bialik strove hard to maintain the 'Vaad Ha-Lashon' (Language Committee) - the beginning of a "Hebrew Language Academy". Bialik expressed the need for an academic Hebrew lexicon, not only for research, but for the purpose of aiding the revival of language as well,¹⁴⁾ since there is a need for new words to be coined in the spirit and atmosphere of Hebrew.¹⁵⁾ Similarly there is a need for the reform of

¹²⁾ ibid., 156.

¹³⁾ ibid., 120.

¹⁴⁾ Bialik Orally, I, 209-210.

¹⁵⁾ See S. Krauss' 'Haolam' 1934, No. 46, and 1935, No. 19. and also the reply of Isaac Abineiri 1935, No. 29.

pronunciation, for the standardisation of orthography,¹⁶⁾ and other matters. Bialik knows that this is a programme for many generations; but, the present generation having undertaken the re-building of a Jewish Palestine, is in duty bound to commence this task for the revival of the Hebrew language in literature and daily life. Herein Bialik saw an essential and fundamental factor in the renaissance of Jewry in its historic land.

3. The Diaspora and Palestine.

When Bialik was still a student in the Valozin Yeshivah, he published in the journal 'Ha-Melitz' (5.4.1891) his first article on the "Idea of Colonisation in Palestine" (לדין הישוב). Here the doctrine of a Jewish spiritual revival in Palestine is clearly visible. At the time, Bialik was entirely under the influence of Ahad Ha'am,¹⁾ an influence of which this article is a clear reflection, for it has little originality. Later on, as Bialik's literary stature grew, and when the Balfour Declaration had given a great impetus to the upbuilding of the Jewish National Home, Bialik's outlook on the movement of renaissance in Israel became more profound. At one time Bialik refused to accept the cultural hegemony of Palestine over the Jewish diaspora (vid. his article "Politics & Culture"). The Jewish settlement in Palestine, for all its high hopes and idealism, showed few signs of creativeness or originality. The majority and the best of Hebrew writers ^{lived} ~~were~~ in the diaspora, where they continued

16) Bialik Orally II, 138-139.

17) Bialik Orally, II, 192; 206-7.

their work, Bialik did not yet ^{see} ~~under~~ that circumstances would create a vast revolution in Jewish life and the utter demolition of many European Jewish communities. Thus, although it was necessary, to devote attention to a spiritual centre in Palestine and to further its progress, there was no cause to disparage Hebrew culture in the diaspora, where it had set its hall-mark on Jewish life. After the War, however, when many Jewish communities lay in ruins, and many Hebrew writers had moved to Palestine, which became a centre of Jewish cultural activity - Bialik's faith in Hebrew cultural prospects in the Diaspora was shattered; and even his belief in the continued existence of the Diaspora communities began to waver. Surveying Jewish history in the Diaspora Bialik sees that "every centre in the Exile has been doomed to degeneration and destruction, however, great its vigour, wealth and influence during any period." The Jewish communities in Alexandria and North Africa, in Arabia and Italy, Spain and France, which had played a great part in the life of the nation, had ultimately been dispersed and "buried in the dust".²⁾ Bialik apprehends a similar fate for the Diaspora at the present day. He is irritated by comparisons between Palestine and the Diaspora in this respect, because "Palestine, the basis and essence of our aspiration for two thousand years, cannot be so estimated, and there is no room for such analogies."³⁾ The secure Jewish

2) *ibid*, I, 82.

3) *ibid*.

communities must certainly assist their harassed neighbours, but "our peace is broken by the very contingency that this assistance is needed, and is, in fact, turned into a national ideal which some dare to compare with the work in Palestine."⁴⁾ He concludes: "Our existence in the Diaspora is a passive heroism. What we yearn for is active heroism such as is only possible for us in Palestine."

Bialik is sceptical not only of the economic and political prospects of the Diaspora, but also of the possibilities of Hebrew cultural and literary development. "It becomes increasingly obvious that there is no hope for the maintenance of Hebrew all over the world."⁵⁾ - a statement which he admits to be "bold and a bit venturesome, but one which it is imperative to make." He sees Hebrew being shut out of Jewish life, and the Hebrew book, and even the Hebrew journal becoming extinct. Nor does he envisage a change in the future. "All the efforts invested in all manner of educational institutions are scattered to the winds and the heavy toil of their promoters is in vain."⁶⁾ The same rule applies in every phase of creative, cultural work. In the Diaspora, failure is more frequent than success. The only possible sphere of success is in Palestine, "where we create from the bottom, create something from nothing."⁷⁾ History itself has

4) *ibid*, 83.

5) *ibid*, II, 79.

6) *ibid*.

7) *ibid*, I, 82.

determined this course of events and there is no other besides it. It remains the only hope left to Israel.

Bialik proceeds to envisage the revival in Palestine from the political and cultural standpoints. In incisive and felicitous phrasing, he emphasises this duality in his speech on the opening of the Hebrew University:

"Through cruel and bitter trials and tribulations, through blasted hopes and languishing of the soul, through innumerable humiliations, we have slowly arrived at the realisation that without a tangible homeland, without private national premises, we can have no sort of a life, either material or spiritual. Without Eretz-Israel - eretz means land, literally land - there is no hope for the rehabilitation of Israel anywhere, ever. Our very ideas about the material and intellectual existence of the nation have also meanwhile undergone a radical change. We no longer talk of a division of the body and the spirit or of a division of the man and the Jew. We hold neither with Beth-Shammai that the heavens were created first, nor with Beth-Hillel that the earth was created first, but with the Sages: that both were created simultaneously by one command; so that neither can exist without the other."8)

The responsibility is as heavy as the ideal is great. Every Jew is bound by a duty to be among the builders of the revival, and to count that duty as a high and momentous trust. Bialik's words on this subject are reminiscent of Jehuda Halevi's pronouncement on the upbuilding of Jerusalem.⁹⁾ "Every Jew who is brought up to pray thrice a day for Jerusalem, must understand the building of Jerusalem as his highest duty, and must think of it not thrice a day, but all the day."¹⁰⁾ It is not enough

8) *ibid*, 51-52.

9) *Kitab Al-Khazari*, II, 24.

10) *Bialik Orally*, I, 61.

to "think" of Jerusalem, and Bialik deals at length with the importance of national observances,* "we have been accustomed to live without religious observances; hence the superficiality with which the Jewish problem is understood and the secular, apathetic attitude towards our national tasks."¹¹⁾ The people must devote to its national task the same devotion and reverence as to its religious ceremonies.

The return to Zion was, in Bialik's view, a wonderful and significant event. In Exile, whatever culture Israel achieves, is not its own, but belongs to the various countries where Jews live and work. Bialik's explanation is that the Jews lack the travail of creation. They arrive when a cultural or scientific tradition is either established or in the process of completion. The importance of Palestine is that it provides an opportunity for Jews to create a cultural life from its very beginning and to feel the experience of its birth-pangs. Bialik therefore rejoices that the Jews are returning to Palestine, which is still a desert civilisation, and not an inhabited, built-up and cultured community. "... Otherwise we would have merely come to another Exile; for it is only by the labour of initial creation that a people acquires its land and its right thereto."¹²⁾ Hence Jewish culture in Palestine is a different concept from what it is in the Diaspora. In the Diaspora, Hebrew culture meant something with a specifically Jewish interest (for all else was accounted to the culture of the surrounding people.) But in

¹¹⁾ *ibid*, 120.

¹²⁾ *ibid*, 163.

Palestine everything that is created by a Jew from its first beginnings enters the comity of Hebrew culture. "All undertakings begun in Palestine are infused with the Jewish 'Shech¹³⁾inah'."

It is not only that Palestine is a vital element in the creation and preservation of Jewish culture,¹⁴⁾ Bialik believes that one day changes will come in the relations of the cultures of the world towards each other, and a world-culture will be developed, uniting the national cultures as a symphony unites many instruments and tunes. The Hebrew "tune and instrument" will be preserved from destruction and will be kept in all its perfection and integrity in the Land of Israel.

We are now in a position to complete our survey of Bialik's outlook on Judaism and Jewish life. The main elements could be deduced from his poetry, but his prose-writings also contain many ideas not touched in his poetry, and shed additional light on the ideas expressed in his poems. Bialik's articles and speeches form a convenient commentary on his poetry.

The most interesting development in Bialik's speeches is his change of attitude to the relation of Palestine to the Diaspora. This arose not from any prescience of Jewish history, but through the compulsion of facts. On the one hand, there was the

13) *ibid*, 178.

14) *ibid*, 164-5.

demolition of Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and on the other hand, there was the upbuilding of Palestine. The conflict and duality shown by his poetry towards the Diaspora and Exile gradually disappears,, until Bialik arrives at the conclusion that the Diaspora is irrevocably doomed, and that there is little hope for any section of the Jewish people to carry on its life outside Palestine.

It is true that his poems portray much of the wreckage of Jewry in exile. But whereas his poetry laments this fact without really accepting it, his speeches (mostly after he settled ^{as inevitable} in Palestine) no longer resound with lamentations, but show him resigned to the tragic realities, in which he sees the hand of History. As a direct outcome of his changed attitude to Jewish exilic life, there comes a new approach to Palestine. His poems of renascence were few, and fell below the level of his poems of Exile and of rebuke. The early days of colonisation in Palestine moved him but little, and found scant expression in his Song. But what was lacking in his poetry Bialik compensated amply with his speeches and activities in Palestine. With the new direction given to Jewish history after the Balfour Declaration, there came a powerful change in Bialik's ideas about the nascent life of Palestine. Before the War, the Jewish colonisation did not really impress him, although he supported it. This may have been due to the trivial scale on which it was conceived.

The new transformation, however, stirred him deeply, and his new confidence burst forth in all his speeches and lectures. What he saw was no longer an experiment, but a revolution in the life of the whole people in a political, economic and cultural sense. His "harp" began spontaneously to play in prose which was suffused with much of his poetic talent.

Bialik's exilic poetry, with its duality and conflict, and his renascence poetry, which was inferior to most of his work, were both atoned for in his numerous speeches and writings, which form an illuminating commentary on his national poetry.

PART III.

JEHUDAH HALEVI
a n d
CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK.

(Comparative Study).

We now propose to attempt a comparative study of the two poets who are the subjects of this thesis^{x)}: to inquire whether there is any substance in the conventional analogy drawn in Hebrew literature between the two, and if so to decide to what extent the analogy holds good. It will be necessary to see how far the first poet influenced the second and whether their poetry reveals any marked similarities. Lastly, the question arises whether Bialik can be regarded as a national "successor" to Halevi.

BIALIK INFLUENCED
BY HALEVI.

That Bialik's early work was influenced by Halevi is confirmed by his own testimony¹⁾. It is certain that when writing his first poem "To the Bird", Bialik had in mind the Songs of Zion of Halevi especially "Zion, wilt thou not greet....."²⁾. As we have already remarked³⁾, he derived the idea about the Bird from Kalman Shulman, but the form and the central idea - the greeting and inquiry about the Holy Land and his brethren there - comes from Halevi's poem. Halevi's poem opens with a greeting to the Jews in exile ("thy captives"); but actually the poem deals with Palestine and its decadence since its capture - in other words with the subject of Bialik's first poem. The difference is that whereas Halevi first greets the Jews in exile, and

x) see "Introduction".

1) Bialik's poems "With the Book", 1923.

2) D.I. Bornstein "Kneseth" p.85.

3) See this treatise. p.193.

proceeds to enquire after Palestine, Bialik's poem commences with a greeting to Zion and concludes with a portrayal of the Jewish position in the Diaspora. The common factor is that the essence of each poem is Palestine. But the affinity is not confined to a common subject, for there is much similarity in the form of expression and in the wording of sentences.⁴⁾

Halevi.

Bialik.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) "Peace from far and near, take
thou from every side | "Dost thou bring peace
from far, yet near
brethren in the land of Zion?" |
| 2) And greeting from the captive
of desire
Giving his tears like the
dew of Hermon. | Doth dew like pearls on
Hermon's peak,
Or like men's tears,
descend? |
| 3) Oh, who will make me wings that
I may fly afar
And lay the ruins of my cleft
heart among thy broken
cliffs!" | Oh, who will make me wings
that I may fly
to where the palm and
almond grow apace ⁵⁾ . |
| 4) Oh cup of sorrow, gently, hold
a while, already
My loins are filled, yea, and
my soul with thy bitterness. | My tears are spent, all
"ends" have had an end.
But to my woe no end hath
yet been found," |

The same influence can be detected elsewhere. Halevi describes his dual task - to bewail the woes of exile and to sing the song of liberation.

4) D.I. Bornstein, "Kneseth", p.85 has observed this too.

5) Similarly another line of Halevi "Oh let me fly...."and breathe the air of Zion" (Brody IV, 7).

So too does Bialik.

Halevi.

To wail for thine affliction I am
like the jackal, but when I dream
Of the return of thy captivity, I am
a harp for thy songs⁶⁾.

Bialik.

And now whenever the
thoughts of gloom
Afflict me, I take up my
harp -
The Aggadah - and I sing
of woe and consolation
To my folk.
("To the Aggadah", 16).

THE COMPARISON. Comparisons can be drawn chiefly in the
two poet's styles and methods in their poems
dealing with Jewish problems, and in their views on Judaism and
Jewish life. In other categories of their poetry, no comparative
treatment is possible. Halevi's "Bridal Songs" and "Songs of
friendship" have nothing comparable to them in Bialik's work. Nor
does their nature or love poetry allow of analogies, although
there are some broad general affinities.

NATURE POETRY. The nature poetry of Halevi and Bialik was
written in far different conditions and cir-
cumstances, but they have in common a keen perception of ~~nature's~~
^{phenomena} and their interpretation from a religious standpoint.
While this is readily understood with Halevi who was a religious
poet continuing the Biblical tradition which illustrated God's
powers by the phenomena of Nature - yet it is more interesting that

6) Bialik uses this also in his Ode to Y.L. Gordon: "Thou wert
the jackal to bewail our woe, and who will be the harp to
sing our song?" (Pardes II, p.249)

a modern poet like Bialik should take the same attitude in his poems of Nature. In the great poem "The Brook" and in "Winter Songs", this view of Nature as the handiwork of God, is well emphasised. In his poem "The Cornfield" there is a reminiscence of one of Halevi's poems. Bialik writes (p.25):

"I stand and I list to the voice of the Lord in the corn
 Why whispers the wind as though with a message t'were
 brought?
 And why do the ears wave their full golden heads in a
 dream
 And why do the little blue flowers seem heavy with
 thought?"

And Halevi describing the awakening of Spring, writes:

"The standing corn of red and green
 arrayed in fine embroidered garb
 Is moved by breezes and is seen
 to bow obeisance to the Lord".

(Brody I, 113, Harkavi I, 42).

LOVE SONGS. The same holds good of the two poets' love-songs.

Those of Halevi were of a Biblical style born of the Orient, while Bialik's Love Poetry rarely dealt with earthly love, except in the "Scroll of Fire". It is in that poem that we meet many reminiscences of Halevi's work, particularly of the poem "On the parting of his lover"⁷⁾. In each poem the lady vanishes from her adorer, and the lovers express their emotion and mutual affection in almost similar imagery.

7) Brody II, 7-10. Harkavi II, 55-58.

Despite these instances it is difficult to discern a general affinity still less a direct influence between the ideas of the two poets on Nature and Love. Hence these categories of their poetry are of little relevance to our enquiry whether Bialik can be described as Halevi's successor in the various forms of national poetry.

It is particularly interesting to detect
BIBLICAL INFLUENCE.

the influence of the Bible upon each of these poets and to see how they employed Biblical language, sentences, and idioms, and how closely they followed the conventions of Biblical verse forms. It is clear that the Biblical tradition is a powerful influence on both poets.

In previous chapters devoted to poetic forms and style we observed that Halevi employed all the Biblical conventions and forms, while Bialik only used some of them, since modern poetry by virtue of its contents as well as its aesthetic standard does not base itself on Biblical models. Nevertheless, in many idioms and forms, Bialik like Halevi followed the Old Testament verse closely. There is special affinity not so much in their use of Biblical quotations - a favourite habit with both - as in their methods of introducing them. They both had the poetic genius to introduce Biblical idioms and phrases not as visible imitations, but as organic ingredients of their poems. It was not a "borrowing" process. They were both so strongly influenced

by the Bible that they possessed a complete mastery of its language and idiom, and contrived to make their own poetry as original in spirit as the Biblical poetry itself. If an experiment was made to produce their poems with Biblical sources indicated in the margin⁸⁾, we would see how vast the influences of the Bible were upon them, and what genius was required to absorb them all into the structure of their poems. Each was successful in absorbing the Biblical writings in letter and spirit, and transferring and adapting them to the various contexts of their poetry. It is true that both in the Spanish period and in modern Hebrew literature (even that which preceded Bialik), the influence of the Bible was very marked, and that there were even poets of modern days (e.g. the Lebensohns, J.L. Gordon etc.) who employed Biblical usage even more than Bialik, some of the actually using an unmingled Biblical Hebrew. But the mere use of Biblical idiom is of little significance for it is often more a process of mere imitation than of organic assimilation of the style, language and poetic forms of the Bible. In this latter respect Halevi surpassed all the poets of the Spanish period and Bialik - all those of modern times.

In Halevi's exilic poetry when he laments Israel's woe and preaches vengeance against his enemies, he is influenced chiefly

8) Brody's edition brings a list of Biblical references at the end of each volume. But not all instances - least of all those concerning idioms and word-forms are included. D. Bornstein began to publish references of Bialik's poems.

by the Prophets⁹⁾, whereas in his religious and renascence poems, he is affected by the spirit of the Psalms. So it is with Bialik in whose poetry the influence of the Psalms is very considerable throughout.¹⁰⁾ In the songs of rebuke - Bialik is clearly influenced by the style of the Prophets. The organic absorption of Biblical influences is the first quality common to the two poets, who thus continue the line of succession of the ancient Hebrew poetry.

The second common factor is their preoccupation JEWISH INTEREST.

with Jewish interests. It may seem that every Hebrew poet must be pre-eminently a poet of Judaism. That is not so. In the Spanish period there were three great poets, R. Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra and R. ^{et}Judah Halevi. Ibn Gabirol who wrote the religious "Crown of Kingship" "קִרְיַת מְלָכִים" and sang songs of Zion was at the same time the author of "Fons Vitae" - a book which has no connection with Judaism at all. Indeed for many centuries it was thought that the author was an Arab¹¹⁾.

Moses ibn Ezra was largely under the influence of the contemporary Gentile culture, and there is a view¹²⁾ that he attached no special interest to Jewish spiritual values or to Palestine, whither he urged Halevi not to travel. Halevi despite the strong interplay of Spanish and Arabic influences upon him,

9) Also by the "Vengeance" psalms.

10) J. Klausner "Jotzrim u-Bonim" III, Book I, p.2.

11) Klausner in the introduction to "Fons Vitae", Jerusalem 1926.

12) D. Cahana - Hashiloach. Vol. 13. 121-122.

was entirely devoted to the service of his people. Foreign cultures were to him "flowers" without "fruit", whereas Hebraism was the fount and origin of human civilisation. All his poetry was a kind of hymn to Jewish creative values wherein alone he saw eternity and salvation for mankind. The "Khazari" was a development of this theme in a dialectical form. The same characteristic applies to Bialik. His contemporaries and even his predecessors sang chiefly of their people, but they introduced ideas and contents which were not specifically Jewish, and some even rebelled against certain Jewish concepts. Bialik was not one of that school, for although he was influenced by European poetry, he was never deflected from his Jewish interest.

We have said that they both took their stand on Jewish ground and confined themselves within Jewish limits. It remains to inquire how they expressed that position, and what kept them fixed to it. The answer is (a) their reverence for Judaism (b) the Hebrew tradition underlying Judaism, and (c) their closeness to Jewish spiritual values and their ability to sustain themselves from the Jewish original sources.

1). REVERENCE FOR JUDAISM. Halevi in the Spanish period and Bialik in our own days were unrivalled for the prophetic strength which marked their hymns to Judaism. They were both the products of learned Academies -

Halevi of Alisana and Bialik of Valozin ¹³⁾. This was no chance circumstance. Bialik deserted the Academy, but it did not desert him. He admits "Abashed, depressed and vanquished I return to thee" ¹⁴⁾. Halevi regarded the Torah as the highest wisdom comprehending righteousness, justice, morality and human ethics. These are the words which he puts into the mouth of the Torah:

"Let not your heart incline after the helpers
of Rahab, when these run whither they be not bidden,
By the shepherds tents and their footprints feed your flock
Then will ye know that your foot hath never strayed."
(Brody II, 305, Harkavi II, 96).

And Bialik takes up the very same strain:

"Not empty hast thou sent me from thy shade,
Thy guardian angels led me on my way
They are - a fruitful thought, a fresh, keen mind,
a tranquil heart, a knee that stumbles not."
(On the treshold of the Beth Ha-Midrash, p.22).

The value of the Torah has not in the least declined during the many generations, nor has its importance been diminished.

"This is she whom they that know her have not concealed
From age to age hath she been an heritage in their hand.
Her perfume is not changed as at this day, so was it ever,
She retained the same fair form, she groweth not dim."
(Brody II, 305, Harkavi II, 96).

So too Bialik writes of his people:

"Their mighty spirit and its essence pure
That sated with reproach and calumny,
Grey hairs sapped not the pleasantness of her youth"
("If you would know." p.60).

Halevi speaks of the Torah as

"The lofty tower of a fortress built" ¹⁵⁾

and Bialik describes the Beth-Hamedrash as "the Spirit's fortress" ¹⁶⁾

¹³⁾ Despite the difference between Alisana and Valozin, they both served as a refuge for the Jewish spirit and the Torah.

¹⁴⁾ Bialik's poems, 9.22.

¹⁵⁾ Brody II, 305, Harkavi II, 96.

¹⁶⁾ Bialik p.23.

They both devote many poems to the eulogy of the Torah and Jewish culture. Their reverence proceeds from the firm conviction that the Torah saved Israel from destruction and wreckage in the long Exile. Therefore it must be stoutly defended. Halevi as a religious man is concerned not only with the cultural essence of the Torah, but with the observation of all its minutiae and outward forms. Bialik ascribes to the Torah a great cultural importance, but he too stresses the value of ceremonial observances which have a special function in preserving the unity of the nation, as they did in the past. He therefore has great reverence for the Torah not only as a repository of national cultural values, but also as a collection of holy books. The conclusion is - that although they appraised the Torah from different viewpoints their reverence for it was much the same.

2). JEWISH TRADITION AS
THE BASIS OF JUDAISM. Similarly, they both regarded Jewish tradition as the basis of Judaism.

Halevi continued this chain of tradition of which he himself was an important link. In his poetry he sang odes to traditional Judaism, and in the "Khazari" he clarified its importance to Israel and its value to other cultures, as well as defending its prestige with great enthusiasm. If there is any cause to wonder at this emphasis^{on} tradition, as the basis of Judaism, it is with Bialik the modern "secular" poet, for it is not accurate to regard Bialik's poetry and outlook as completely

orthodox in the religious sense. Nevertheless his veneration of Jewish tradition and his view of its importance in Jewish life was very considerable. Halevi saw the preservation of traditional life and observances as the preservation of the Divine Torah, (as well as the fulfilment of a national purpose). It was a case of realising the demands of God upon his chosen people. And Bialik ascribed great importance to tradition as the foundation of Judaism; not as a religious observance but as a national aim. This tradition had preserved Israel's distinctiveness and unity; giving the background for an independent culture. But the conclusion of the two standpoints is the same. According to Halevi - if Israel observes the commandments, God will reward their loyalty, and renew their life as of old. According to Bialik - the observance of tradition has been a bulwark against assimilation and a guardian of the nation's original culture. Tradition has provided the power of existence, and will enable a renewal of the national life.

3). USE OF JEWISH SOURCES. Their reverence for Judaism and their view of the fundamental value of tradition led them both to inspire their poetry from Jewish cultural sources and to adopt a very intimate approach to Jewish spiritual values. There were other Hebrew poets, in both periods, who were influenced by Jewish currents of thought, but whereas with them the influence was often confined to details,

with Halevi and Bialik it was absolutely fundamental. This spirit is manifest in all their poetry. They were Jewish through and through. Their Hebraism was expressed not in language alone, but in the spirit pervading it. Their poetic emotion, their grasp of the Jewish problem and their line of thought were qualities which they held in common. Since the Bible, no one more than Halevi, and since Halevi no one more than Bialik was so completely absorbed in Jewish influences. Both received alien influence without succumbing to it and they never failed to preserve the authenticity of their work. This intimacy with Jewish values led Halevi to regard Greek Philosophy as "flowers with no fruit" and to restrict himself completely to a Jewish framework. It led Bialik to produce an essentially Hebraic poetry, and to conceive the idea of an "ingathering" of Jewish spiritual treasures throughout the ages.

BIALIK'S ATTITUDE TO SPANISH

POETS - ESPECIALLY TO HALEVI is an essential part of an inquiry into the relation between Bialik and Halevi. We have mentioned that Bialik himself testifies to the influence of Halevi's poetry on his early work. As late as 1917 we find Bialik complaining of the remoteness of Jewish youth from Jewish culture, in these words: "They are attached to Tolstoy and Turgenev, but not to Isaiah and Halevi" ¹⁷⁾. These two figures typify for Bialik the national spirit and art. Nevertheless, despite occasional other references to the genius of Halevi ¹⁸⁾

¹⁷⁾ Bialik orally I, 17.
¹⁸⁾ *ibid.* p.12, 181. Also his article on "Our young poetry" p.392.

we find Bialik in 1913 lecturing on Halevi ¹⁹⁾ with special reference to the philosophy of the "Khazari" which he praises emphatically, although in poetry he doubts if Halevi had found the simplicity of the original Biblical style. In Bialik's view many of the Spanish poets were Jewish in interest, but foreign in the forms, "wherein national type is expressed" ²⁰⁾. Bialik records Halevi's own opposition to the conventional imitation of Arabic forms - a convention which even Halevi could not avoid. Bialik ascribes this to the conditions of Exile. It is, of course, necessary to emphasise that even in this lecture Bialik regarded Halevi as the premier national poet in Israel ²¹⁾.

It seems that at first Bialik had an inadequate appreciation of the Spanish Hebrew poetry, including that of Halevi. In a lecture (1923) he himself admits that "my understanding of this work was very superficial, and my appreciation quite inadequate, so that I took up a rather unserious attitude. But the more I studied the Spanish writers' works, the more I appreciated the wealth of their bequest to our culture" ²²⁾.

It is evident that Bialik's earlier judgement was not securely founded, and it was only after deep research and the experience of editing part of the Spanish Hebrew poetry, that Bialik per-

19) Bialik orally, II, 165-168.

20) *ibid* 167.

21) *ibid* 168.

22) *ibid* 110-111.

ceived in it a direct continuation of ancient Hebrew culture. "There has been no higher branch of our culture through the ages than the Spanish poetry, which the hands of artists strove to perfect, men of mighty spirit from one generation to another - until they had reared a mighty Palace, great and majestic, standing as a glorious symbol for generations yet unborn" 23).

We have mentioned that Bialik detected a foreign form in Spanish Hebrew poetry and thought that even Halevi had failed to attain Biblical simplicity. Later he expressed a very different view. He sees Spanish Hebrew poetry not only as an invaluable cultural product, but also as a national asset enriching Hebrew culture in many directions. He thinks that there has been insufficient appreciation of the great contribution made by the Spanish Jewish writers, "who dug new channels for the current of Hebrew culture, and acquired a plethora of new forms and subjects" 24). Thus the popularisation of this poetry is vital to the enrichment of modern Hebrew culture. Unfortunately, this passage from Bialik (written to introduce his edition of ^{poems} ibn Gabirol) 25), does not reveal his specific attitude to Halevi whom he had previously described as the greatest of the Spanish poets 26), and "author of Hebrew poetry par excellence" 27). It is significant that the only poems he translated into Yiddish for

23-) On the ingathering of Spanish poetry, p.362.

24) ibid

25) Bialik and Rabnitzky published the poems of ibn Gabirol and Moses ibn Ezra. Ch. Brody produced a complete edition of R. Jehudah Halevi's ^{poems} in the year 1901.

26) Bialik orally II, 168.

27) Bialik p.392 ("On our young poetry").

the unlettered masses, were Halevi's "Songs of Zion", which he regarded as the complete expression of the national spirit.

NATIONAL POETRY. In the chapters on Halevi's national poetry

and Bialik's poetry of exile and nationhood, a great deal was said of the role of a national poet in exile. It was concluded that Halevi's expression of it was correct - i.e. such a poet is "a jackal to bewail his people's woe" and "a harp to sing of redemption" 28). Bialik envisaged his mission in the same terms.

"And now whene'er the thoughts of gloom affect me,
I take up my harp - the Aggadah -
And I sing of woe
And consolation to my folk." (Bialik, p.16).

Ostensibly the reference is to "Exile poetry" and "renascence poetry". But this classification is not altogether valid, since the two poets did not conceive the problem of exile in the same light.

HALEVI'S ATTITUDE TO THE EXILE.

Halevi's negative attitude to the Exile was uncompromising to the extent of his being oblivious of its positive and creative achievements. It is even doubtful whether Halevi can be said to have written "exile poetry" as such. Halevi could be the 'jackal' owing to his wonderful virtuosity as the 'harp' and if there is any 'exile poetry' in his work, it is only a step of

28) Brody II, 156. Harkavi I, 11.

transition towards his song of redemption. It is true that his poetry embodies the sufferings of his people, their degradation and decadence amongst the nations. But although this exposition is most vivid, the reader has the feeling that it is not really the subject of the poem. It is not the gloomy present but the historic past and desired future of his people that form the background of Halevi's poetry.

BIALIK'S ATTITUDE TO THE EXILE.

Bialik's attitude is different. Despite his song of rebuke and anger in which he surpasses even Halevi in his castigation of exilic life, he never fails to reveal the silver lining in the cloud of exile, or to emphasise the creative power of scattered Israel and mourn the destruction of Jewish learned institutions and cultural values. Bialik's exilic poetry is definitely in a class of its own, and is concerned with the Jewish present. Even when he is wistful about the past, it is the recent past of the Ghetto and Diaspora rather than the distant historical and political past to which Halevi yearned. Bialik at once hated and loved the Exile to whose life he was inseparably tied. Halevi's attitude to the Exile is well defined, whereas that of Bialik reveals duality and indecision.

COMMON FACTORS IN THE OUTLOOK OF THE EXILE.

But if from this standpoint Halevi and Bialik have no common outlook, there is another point of view from which they share a common attitude. Bialik like Halevi hated his people's

portion, ^{its} ~~their~~ life of degradation and bondage ²⁹⁾. We find then some extraordinary similarities in the way the ^{two} poets expressed the hardship of Exile and their reactions to it. Halevi laments:

"Each day I mourn the grief of Exile's pain
With lamentation for its wretched woe" (Brody IV, 21)

and Bialik -

"My father - bitter exile - and my mother
Black wretchedness" (Bialik, p.69).

They share the same view of the futility of Exile, the insecurity and hopelessness of Diaspora life. Halevi writes:

"Have we either in the east or in the west a place of
hope wherein we may trust" (Brody II, 165,,
Harkavi I, 17-18),

and Bialik -

"No place of trust have we wherein to bind
The bonds of our own soul" (p.37).

They both aspired to the end of the Exile, but it was not in sight. Halevi prayed:

"Since there is no miracle and no sign, no vision, no
sight -
And should I ask to behold when shall be the "end" of
these wonders,
The prophecies answer: Thou hast asked a hard thing".
(Brody IV, 68).

and Bialik's plaint is:

"I look to Earth, to Heaven send my gaze
No sound - no vision; only night and storm (p.10).

So in another place Halevi says:

"She deemed a thousand years would be the limit
of her set time
But she is ashamed of all whereon she counted"
(Harkavi I, 60).

29) Bialik in "Surely the People are Grass". p.52.

And Bialik's too

"My tears are spent; all "ends" have had an end -
But to my woe no end hath yet been found. (p.3).

Revolt against the misery of Exile is expressed in many other national poems. They both produced a penetrating analysis of the terrifying tragedy of exile. They both urged a revolt against exilic ideology, but their forms of expression differed. Halevi portrayed only the negative aspect against which he revealed to the people the happy future open to it. He was not only a national "mourner", but a poet of national hope. Bialik on the whole lacked this hope. He did, indeed, emphasise the negative side of Exile, but he scarcely ever drew a picture of a new future. Hence he was not so much the poet of liberation as of rebuke and wrath - the "prophet of doom" (Bialik, p.141).

HALEVI -NOT THE POET OF
REBUKE AND INDIGNATION. Halevi, of course, is in no sense a poet of indignation and rebuke. He

too complained to God and bewailed his people's sufferings. But unlike Bialik, he never came to preach revolt against Divine Providence. There is an occasional hint of this mood ³⁰⁾, but no more. His unbounded trust in God and his firm confidence in His justice saved him from that unorthodox course.

"I had all but despaired
When my adversaries made a slaughter of my children
Did I not believe that I would see God's blessing?
(Brody IV, 48).

30) S. Bernstein in his article "The National Tragedy in Spanish poetry", Hadoar, New York, No.229 (1923).

At the most he protests to God, and the echo of plaintiveness is heard, but in his poems at the end of all his protests and indictments of injustice comes the reaffirmation of complete faith that God will answer Israel and fulfil His promise of renascence and salvation. It sometimes appears as if the nation's sins "Have postponed redemption" ³¹⁾ but little of his poetry deals with Israel's sins. Halevi is always a defending advocate, never a prosecutor of his people, and hence a large part of his poetry consists of the "Songs of Zion".

BIALIK - POET OF REBUKE
AND INDIGNATION.

Bialik, on the other hand, reached his highest stature with his songs of rage and indignation. The nation's sorrows found in his, as in Halevi's poetry, their full expression. But whereas Halevi raises but an echo of protest to God, Bialik's poetry is full of revolt; so much so that he does not hesitate to put words of self-accusation into the Creator's lips. This was not a deviation from the spirit of Judaism, nor does it argue the absence of a religious motif from his poetry. The very fact of protest to God argues a firm belief in His existence ³²⁾. The chief difference between modern poetry and that of Biblical and mediaeval times is in the matter of "justifying God", (*ה'72 ה'75*) which conventionally concludes all complaints against God. Bialik

³¹⁾ Harkavi, II-18.

³²⁾ It has been observed that this revolt has a precedent in Biblical passages, especially in Job. Vid. Klausner in "Beitar" (Jerusalem 1933) I.77-78
Riwkind "Bialik's God". (Berlin 1923) 38-39.

never condones Divine inflictions, but always demands clear justice from the Creator,

At the same time Bialik never fails to rebuke his people. Israel too has a share of responsibility for injustice and the people's redemption is hindered by its own fault. Here Bialik is at one with the prophets, except that they arraign a religious sin and Bialik a national deficiency. The unpleasing acceptance of exilic life, the self-adaptation to servitude, and the weakness of the national hope of revival, have perpetuated the exile and prevented the solution of the Jewish problem. Bialik's rebuke is also a cry of rebellion against the conditions of Exile. The spirit of negation in this part of his poetry leads the poet to hopelessness and despair.

HALEVI'S SONGS OF ZION.

Halevi who lacked Bialik's pre-eminence in the poetry of wrath, earned the laurels of a National poet, for his "songs of Zion". It is the poetry of a great passion on whose altar he immolated his whole self. There were many songs of Zion in Israel's story, but none which touched its heights in the resolve to rise up and rebuild the land anew. For Halevi the rebuilding of Zion was the desire which inspires all his work - for his religious poetry is often inseparable from his Zion poetry. Halevi saw the restoration of Zion not only as the fulfilment of a national mission, but as the completion of a religious task - the realisation

of God's promise. With these two ideas - the religious and the national - embodying the nation's deepest emotions, Halevi raised his "Song of Zion" to the level of a prophecy which touched the heartstrings of every Jew for eighteen centuries. It became a source of perennial consolation and of national hope.

This cannot be said of Bialik's "Songs of Zion".
 BIALIK'S SONGS
 OF ZION. There are some poems where he too played his harp sweetly in the poetry of renaissance, but on the whole he was unsuccessful in this sphere. "Bialik", writes Prof. Klausner - "wants to become the poet of revival, but can only be the lamenter of exile. He demolishes the Exile but fails to provide the redemption" ³³⁾. And elsewhere he writes: "Bialik saw no vision of the future and sang no song of consolation (despite *אֶלֶּם הַבָּיִת, אֵלֶּם הַמִּלְחָמָה*), nor did he portray the living, reviving homeland and the reconstruction of a people's life" ³⁴⁾. The individual value of his few national hymns is considerable, but in the general structure of his work, they occupy no considerable place, nor do they stand on the level of Halevi's songs of Zion. It has been remarked that "Bialik's songs of Zion are weaker in content and form than his songs of rage and rebuke..... and they lack the pleasantness, originality and passion of Halevi's poetry of Zion" ³⁵⁾.

33) "Jotzrim u-Bonim" vol. III, Book I, p. 55.

34) "Beitar" I, p. 82.

35) Riwkind "Bialik's God" p. 54.

The conclusion is that the idea of revival in Zion finds practically no place in Bialik's poetry. 36) The few poems which are written in this strain warrant no comparison with Halevi. Even the poem "To the Bird" which was written under the influence of Halevi's "Zion, wilt thou not greet" falls into insignificance beside its model. But there is a genuine renaissance motif in Bialik's unsurpassable poems of indignation.

HALEVI'S RELIGIOUS POETRY
AND THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN
BIALIK'S POETRY.

There are interesting similarities between Halevi's religious poetry and some of Bialik's poems. As we have seen 37), the religious and national elements in Halevi's poetry are almost inextricable. Bialik's poetry is not religious in the narrow sense of the word, but it is impossible to deny that a strong religious current runs through it: This is evident

36) There is much interest in Bialik's view of the function of renaissance poetry. In one of his letters he trenchantly writes "I sometimes doubt the use or purpose of the poems which I and others are writing. For whom and what are they? We are confronted with the ruins of an old and ravaged world and there is no Jeremiah to sound the last dread lament..... Songs of Redemption are false and deceptive..... The appropriate tears have not been shed, and we are awaiting the great prophet to shed it - ^{we wait for the coming of} the inevitable Jeremiah ^{whose} tear will flood our Diaspora and become a universal lament" (Kneseth, 1936, p.52). It seems that this idea had troubled him for some time, for five months after this letter was written, he composed the poem (Bialik I, 88-89) which ends:

"And yet I hope a prophet will arise
To cause the world to shed another tear,
And thunder with a heaven-shaking groan
Whereat all men will tremble when they hear."

37) See this treatise, pp.62-64.

not so much because Bialik invokes the Divine name more frequently than most modern poets, 38) as because he regarded Jewish tradition as the basis of Judaism. His positive attitude to Jewish spiritual values shed a religious aura over many if not all of his poems. Bialik's poetry is never metaphysical; his God is not so much God of the Universe as the God of Israel - another point of resemblance between Bialik and Halevi. Bialik envisages the God of Israel as the God of the future redemption which will restore the Divine presence to Zion and rescue the people from the house of bondage. This element of divine function which is the basis of Jewish national philosophy, was comprehensively and fully expressed in the poetry and philosophy of Halevi, who emphasised that God manifested Himself to Israel not as a metaphysical abstraction who created Heaven and earth - but as a historic influence, the God of his fathers, "Who redeemed his people from Egypt, from the house of bondage." 39)

The view of Halevi, in his poetry and his "Kitab al Khazari" 40), that Israel gave the Torah and religion to the world found a clear echo in Bialik's poems:

"Across a bridge of flame through blood-red seas
We bore the creed of God from eastern shores
Westwards we took it thence through hazard, grim
And pierced a window for the living God" 41).

The burden which Halevi bore on behalf of his people was heavy indeed. But he did not desert God, his only aid:

38) Rowkind, p. 1.

39) *ibid*, p. 53-54.

40) *vid.* Khazari II, 54.

41) Poem 'East and West' (Eshkol III).

"I bore the burden of my people's sin
 Offered my shoulder to receive the yoke
 I will not worship any God but Thee!
 For but for Thee no other aid have I".
 (Brody Anthologia Hebraica, 159,
 Harkavi II, 2).

What Halevi wrote of himself, Bialik wrote of his people.
 Israel, through much suffering and torment, remained loyal to
 God.

"The foeman's axe befall us on the road
 We offered it our neck - we thought to die.
 The neck was hard as flint, we blessed our God
 And found salvation in His holy shade." 42)

So they both put their faith in God as their people's
 future bulwark. Halevi prays:

"Beloved mine, this my uplifted hand
 And these my eyes are lowly to thine height
 My strength and fortress thou!" (Brody, Anthologia
 Hebraica 159)
 (Harkavi II, 2)

and Bialik proclaims:

"The Lord is at my right Hand; he quellereth all
 And with His strength I too can conquer hosts".
 (Bialik p. 23).

The poet's intimacy with God expresses itself chiefly in
 a national form. The two poets trust in God to respond to His
 people in ^{its} ~~their~~ distress and accomplish his promised redemption.
 But in each instance we also find an intimacy with God in a per-
 sonal, individual sense. This is especially so of Halevi, the
 religious poet, but Bialik too has the same characteristic. We
 have referred to his frequent invocations of God, but it is real

in his lyric poetry that this intimacy is most keenly felt, and therein lies a further affinity with Halevi. It is true that Halevi's religious poetry drew faith from deep and constant convictions, while Bialik's individual poetry originates in despair. But the fact remains that a deep religious sentiment is present in Bialik's poetry.

Part of Halevi's yearning passion for God is discernible in Bialik. Halevi despises the world of falsehood and iniquity and yearns for a revelation, in a dream, of the "Source of true Life:"

"To meet the fountain of the life of truth I run,
For I weary of a life of vanity and emptiness....
Would that it were mine to see Him in a dream!
I would sleep an everlasting sleep and never wake".
(Brody II, 296
Harkavi II, 88-89).

So Bialik, whose "life is contaminated" in the world of evil, longs to return to his youthful days when God's glory was fully revealed in:

"The hidden light and radiance of the World
And of God's works, which once and never more
The eyes of children see....." (Bialik, 183).

The days of childhood are full of purity and brightness, and the poet prays for their restoration - be it but for a moment:

"Would that God's grace would shine on me again
That in my evening - once - in a dream or while awake
Just once, the pristine vision of my childish years
would be repeated in their precious joys,
and my life's Dawn would sweetly, as of old
Be wafted o'er me." (Bialik, p.181).

They both see themselves as unworthy of God's manifestation to them. Halevi prays to God:

"Crushed and weak, I sit and tremble every moment,
Naked and despoiled I go on my vain wanderings;
And I am polluted, through my manifold sins and
transgressions
Between thee and me - iniquity which divideth us,
Holding me back from seeing Thy light with mine eyes."
(Brody, III, 229)
(Harkavi II, 119)

and Bialik's words are:

"I have forgot the road that leads to God
No longer beat I on the gates of Grace
My ears are blocked and cannot hear His call
My eyes are blinded to His holy signs" (Bialik, 181).

And yet they both await the vision of God. Halevi longs to approach God and to learn His ways:

"Only I know not how to come before Thee
Nor what should be my service nor my law
Show me, O Lord, Thy ways!" (Brody III, 266,
Harkavi II, 91)

And Bialik, accounting himself loyal to God, awaits the sudden blessing which He brings upon the faithful ones:

"Silent I yearn and wait on thee, by day
And night, in hope, and pluck as of a harp
My heartstrings; ready is my soul for Thee!
My heart doth presage and my soul expect
Thy visitation and my soul's delight." (Bialik, 183).

One further instructive example of their similar approach to God and their allegiance to Him is in Halevi's prayer:

"O Lord, before Thee is my whole desire -
Yea, though I cannot bring it to my lips
Thy favour I would ask a moment and then die".
(Brody III, 266
Harkavi, II, 90).

And over Bialik's face passes God's fiery breath:

"O God, Thy breath passed o'er me and hath burnt
and scorched me
How shall I enter the sanctuary, how shall my prayer
be cleansed?"
(Bialik, 186).

Neither Halevi nor Bialik dealt as a rule in metaphysical problems. But Halevi in several poems and Bialik in at least one does enter that sphere. They both deal with it in order to show that it should not be dealt with, since he who poses mysterious questions will attain nothing and not receive the desired answer. According to Halevi, Man with his limited intelligence is unfit to probe the mysteries of existence:

"Do not press forward to see the secret thing
But subdue the flame of thy imagination,
Withdraw from unfathoming the depths of miracles
For thou hast no permission to enter into the
foundation." (Brody II, 218-219
Harkavi II, 79).

The same idea is repeated in another poem:

"Only upon Himself put not forth thine hand
When thou seekest the end and the beginning,
the too wonderful, the deeply bid."
(Brody III, 232
Harkavi II, 106).

And Bialik in his poem "He peeped and died" (*נִפְתָּח וּמָת*) written on the basis of a Talmudic legend ⁴³⁾, portrays the desire of man - Ben-Azzai in the legend - to probe the foundations and secrets of the world.

43) Hagigah 14.².

"He dareth! and the innermost confines
Where never yet the foot of stranger trod
He enters, and traverses boundless bounds
Where opposites unite in kindred roots." (Bialik 184).

And after many ~~undescribable~~ difficulties he passes all the gates
which lead to the last gate - where he sees his heart's desire.
But then -

"The torch is quenched, the gates fly open wide;
He looks within
His body falls; - near lies a smoking brand -
And into chaos' threshold glides. (ibid, 185).

While Halevi repeats ~~of~~ the prohibition to strive after
knowledge of the hidden secrets of the world, Bialik also portrays
the punishment of him who does so. Such a one stands on the
"threshold of chaos". His soul is empty and his life is at an
end.

THE POET'S SELF-APPRECIATION. Another aspect of resemblance
between Halevi and Bialik is in
their appraisal of their own work. They are both filled with
reverence and admiration for Jewish cultural values of the past.
With neither of them do we find any emphasis of the Poet's perso-
nality, as is usual with many poets. They give no prominence
to themselves. Halevi reveals his approval of contemporary great
men in Israel. He thanks Moses ibn Ezra ⁴⁴⁾ for all that he has
learnt from him, but generally preserves complete reticence about
all his own poetry. Bialik also shuns any self-exaltation or

44) Brody I, 80. Harkavi I, 84.

publicity. His remarkable reverence of his mentors Achad Ha-am⁴⁵⁾ and Mendele Mocher-Sepharim⁴⁶⁾ is well known, but in his own eyes he is himself "a simple, humble man, who hath not fled from small things nor sought the great"⁴⁷⁾ . . . When his 50th birthday was celebrated he wrote of himself - "Not a poet, not a prophet - a hewer of wood am I" ⁴⁸⁾.

At the same time they each knew their own worth. Bialik regarded himself as some authority on Jewish matters ⁴⁹⁾, and the very composition of the 'Khazari' - a book defending Judaism and Jews, is ample testimony that Halevi too thought himself fit to interpret the view of his people to the outside world ⁵⁰⁾. There is even evidence that Halevi regarded himself as superior to his contemporary poets. Asked why he no longer wrote poems, he answered with real self-appreciation ⁵¹⁾

"How shall the lion's whelp pursue a path
Whereon the little foxes erstwhile trod?"
(Brody II, 215, Harkavi I, 130).

Similarly ⁵²⁾ Bialik complains of the decadence of contemporary poetry and emphasises the contrast of his own work.

45) Vid. his poem "To Achad Ha-am" (p.117-118) and lectures on him (Bialik orally II, 191-210),

46) Vid. his four articles on Mendele (Bialik pp.398-421) and his lectures; Bialik orally II, 222-228).

47) Bialik, p.169.

48) *ibid* 187

49) Bialik himself coined the phrase "On Bialik all are unanimous". (*אין באליק כולם דאס זעלבס זאגט*), *Beshaah* 20, II, 106

50) This is just a supposition, and requires deep consideration.

51) J.N. Simchoni, *Haivri He'chadash*, p.65.

52) This is observed by M. Ehrenpreis 'Hatekufah' XVII.p.422.

"At dawn I sent my snow-white doves aloft;
At even they returned - as ravens foul
That know the dust-heaps; lo! a thick, hoarse screech
Came from their throat; their beak pecked filthy prey.
E'en so do words surround me, clashing words -
And as a band of harlots gleaming forth
In splendour false, and bad deceitful grace
They stand before me: whither can I flee from their
 throng?" (Bialik, I, 186).

The views expressed in their poems about language, literature and poetry are also expressed in their prose. Halevi indicts the language ⁵³⁾ and especially the poetry of his age: "We had already a certain latitude in poetic style which did not offend the language when it was applied. But we have been trapped, as were our fathers of whom it was said "And they mingled with the nations and learnt their ways", (Psalms 106,35) ⁵⁴⁾. Bialik also wields the sceptre of criticism over the poetry of his generation. ⁵⁵⁾ In a letter he writes "What do you think of the rhyming disease which has broken out so strongly in Hebrew poetry. There is no new talent or idea, no knowledge of the language, no divine spark" ⁵⁶⁾. At the same time he realised that his own work was above this level. "This poem which I am sending you", he writes to Rabnitzky, ⁵⁷⁾ "is at once pleasant and profound, and I am certain that this spice will improve your orchard ("Pardess"), for in any European language, I am certain that it would not be lightly esteemed!"

53) Khazari II, 68 and 74.

54) ibid 78.

55) It is fair to point out that this was written in 1896, before the appearance of Tchernichowsky, Schneour and Jacob Cahan - poets whom Bialik praised much in his article "Our young poetry"

56) Kneseth, p. 32 "

56) Kneseth, p.32.
57) Editor of "Pardess", ibid, p.29 also p.26,27,31,32.

Enough has been said both to indicate ~~that~~ poets' appraisal of their own work and to detect a common mental attitude in them both. They certainly had a sub-conscious feeling that they as great creative artists were fitted to be high dignitaries in the cultural life of their day.

FUSION OF NATION AND
INDIVIDUAL IN THE TWO
POETS.

It has been observed that Bialik's individualistic poetry only gradually became an important element in his work, and ultimately - its principal part. But a typical trait of all his poetry is the fusion of the individual with the public or national element. Bialik's lyric poetry came chiefly in the evening of his days, but most of his work show the complete identity of individual and nation. Here too Bialik is at one with Halevi whose poetry is a full synthesis of personal and national ideas.

When Halevi wrote off how he "moaned with pain in the Exile from the abundance of grief and wretchedness" ⁵⁸⁾ it was no mere phrase, for in most of his poems the nation and himself are synonymous. Whether it be a religious song, a bridal ode, or one of his sea-journey poems, the poet's personality is always identified with the national idea. And on the other hand, if the poem is a song of Zion or of exiled Israel, there is a clear expression of the poet's own individuality which is an inseparable and organic part of the poems. What is the position

58) Brody IV, 21.

with Bialik? "Bialik's poetry", said Prof. Klausner, "is marked by the way in which the troubles of the individual and of the people as a whole are interwoven and fused - so closely that it is difficult to know where one ends and the other begins" 59). This judgment is correct. Just as Halevi announces that his constant worry is the burden of prolonged exile, so does Bialik proclaim:- "My father is bitter exile; and my mother - black wretchedness" 60). And just as Bialik's individual poetry embodies the national problems, 61) sufferings and torments, or the aspiration for new life - so does the poet's own personality shine through his specifically national poems. Consequently - it can be said that this organic fusion of the national woe with the private sorrow, the personal ambition with the national hope - was a common feature of both Poets.

ABSORPTION OF
HISTORICAL
JUDAISM.

One of the typical features in the poetry of Halevi and Bialik - and a feature peculiar to them - is their full and comprehensive absorption of the historic spirit of Judaism. This absorption was not a matter of being influenced by ancient literature. It was that their whole poetry was hewn out of ancient material, and an ancient historic spirit pervaded it all. This assimilation arose from certain qualities which we have already mentioned - the

59) Jotzrim u-Bonim, vol.III, Book,I, pp.13,22,24.

60) Bialik, p.69.

61) In one love poem "Thou goest from me " some have sought a national content, Vid.M. ben Hillel Hacohen, in his pamphlet about Bialik, pp.47-48.

influence of the Bible, their Jewish standpoint, their veneration for Judaism, their regard for tradition as the basis of Judaism, their sustenance from Jewish cultural sources. But these qualities, important as they were, were not solely responsible for the way in which the poets assimilated historical Judaism to themselves. This phenomenon must always remain partially inexplicable, despite all attempts to fathom it, but it is in itself something more than an epitome of certain motives and qualities in their poetry. The analysis of these qualities brings us nearer to an understanding of it, without enabling us to grasp it fully. It implies a comprehensive view and a profound perception of the very inwardness of the Jewish people's soul in various generations, in such a way that their poetry symbolises the particular essence of the nation, in a way that no others could hope ever to emulate.

It has been remarked that Halevi's poems of Zion admit of no comparison with other poets' work in that category, either in the profundity of their expression or in their influence upon the people. It was suggested that such poetry is produced once in many generations - like the Book of Lamentations, the scroll of the Jewish tragedy, which has no parallel in literature. The same is true of many of Bialik's poems. (The Songs of indignation, the "Scroll of Fire", "The Mathmid" etc.) And just as the Book of Lamentations has a lasting effect, so it is with many poems of Halevi and Bialik, even though they often actually turn upon

contemporary events. Time has already proved this to be true of Halevi. The poem "Zion, wilt thou not greet....." written 800 years ago is able to express the nation's sentiment to this very day. With Bialik, however, we cannot yet employ Time as a criterion. But anyone who makes a deep study of his poetry and appraises the specially keen effect which it had upon the last two generations, will readily appreciate that many of his poems will be the welcome heritage of many generations to come. 62)

In brief, the fulness of expression, the profound and genuine reflection of the nation's ideas, the clear revelation of its innermost feelings - these qualities in a degree peculiar to Halevi and Bialik rendered their poetry unrivalled in Jewish history, and gave it the stamp of a common genius.

OUTLOOK ON JUDAISM AND JEWISH LIFE.

In the chapters on the respective views of Halevi and Bialik on Judaism and Jewish life, we completed the picture sketched by their poetry. Similarly if any points of similarity can be found between them in this respect, it will throw their poetic affinities into a stronger emphasis, as well as assisting to solve

62) I. Wartski correctly writes (Jewish Academy Vo.II, No.3, 1927 p.27) "In his 'Poems of Fury' Bialik gave adequate expression to the two-thousand years old agonies of the Jewish Nation. The deepest sigh of the Jewish heart was distinctly heard for the first time. There is some relief in the heaving of such a sigh. The lamentations of Jeremiah remained the classical dirge of the Jewish people even after the destruction of the second Temple. *וְיִרְמְיָהוּ בְּכִלְכִּלָּתוֹ הָיָה כְּבִלְכִּלָּתוֹ* is midrashically explained: "Jerusalem, repeating the poignant words of Jeremiah, weepeth by night for the destruction of the first and second Temples." And likewise Bialik's "In the city of slaughter" still sufficiently expresses Jewish nation sorrow even after the most brutal Pogroms in Russia in 1905 and 1917-19".

the problem whether or not Bialik can be regarded as Halevi's successor in Hebrew poetry.

Their poetry, as we have seen, was given up entirely to the enthusiastic praise of the Torah and Jewish culture. The same attitude is discernible in Halevi's 'Kitab al-Khazari' and in Bialik's essays and speeches.

To Halevi Israel's Torah was divine and insurpassable. The Rabbi in his debate with the Khazar King causes the latter to admit 'I see that your Torah embodies all that is profound in philosophy, in a way that no other Book does' 63). This quality is, in Halevi's eyes, not only a matter of content 64) but of sanctity by reason of the fact that it was promulgated by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Bialik's veneration of the Torah derives not from an idea religious sanctity - although he like Halevi keenly appreciates its ethical and moral purpose - but rather from the role which the Torah fulfilled in Jewish life throughout the long years of Exile, and the high honour in which Israel held it. There is, according to Bialik, no translation or explanation of the concept of 'Torah', since Israel made it transcend above religion, faith, morality and precept and above the aggregation of all these. It became a 'mystic concept', whose origins are older than the world. "The Torah is the masterpiece of the

63) Khazari II, 63.

64) Brody II, 304-306. Harkavi II, 94-7.

Creator's art therewith He made the world, and for it He made the world" ⁶⁵⁾. Hence the dictum that "Israel and the Torah are one" is not a mere phrase ⁶⁶⁾. Similarly Halevi sees the Torah as 'divine, and but for Israel, 'God's people' it would not have existed or have been given to the world ⁶⁷⁾.

In the fulfilment of the ceremonial commandments, Halevi sees a religious requirement. The precepts were given on Sinai. But in themselves they have a national purpose, as a distinctive mark of Israel amongst the nations ⁶⁸⁾. Bialik too attaches a national value to the religious precepts. The codex of commandments is vital in welding Israel together when scattered in the world, and is moulding a coherent system of life. "But for our code we would be as fragments amongst the nations" - with no one tribe resembling the other" ⁶⁹⁾. Halevi presents the same theory in a different form. In his debate with the Karaites he proves that while they have different Torahs, the Torah of Israel "demands one law and one sentence" ⁷⁰⁾. He therefore emphasises the value of the single code which provides a fixed religious life for the whole of Israel. Even in regard to the Creation, there is not one view in Jewry, declares Halevi, "and there is no disagreement amongst us from India to Ethiopia" ⁷¹⁾.

65) Bialik orally I, 7.

66) *ibid.*

67) Khazari, II, 56.

68) *ibid.*, 48.

69) Bialik orally I, 194-5.

70) Khazari, III, 38.

71) *ibid* I, 45.

The affinity of views between the two Poets is especially prominent on the question of the Sabbath and festivals. ⁷²⁾ Here it is necessary not only to emphasise that common veneration, but to stress their common view of the value of the Sabbath. Halevi shows that the Sabbath and festivals were a fundamental element in the preservation of Israel, "The Khazar said 'I have thought of your affairs, and discovered that God has a secret for your survival, and that the Sabbath and festivals are the chief of these causes' ⁷³⁾. And Bialik's view is "If of all the precepts, the Sabbath alone was left, it could save Israel from destruction ⁷⁴⁾. They both see social and national objectives in the Sabbath ⁷⁵⁾, and they both see its value in forming a distinctive mode of Jewish life. "The Sabbaths and festivals" writes Halevi, have preserved your honour and glory and form" ⁷⁶⁾. They have an aesthetic value as well, "but for them no one would put on a clean garment" ⁷⁷⁾. And Bialik writes "The Sabbath hallows the nation's sense of beauty. If we complain of our having no mode of life of our own, we can begin to create it by the Sabbath ⁷⁸⁾. The sanctification of the Sabbath is the best possible basis for a renewed Jewish life ⁷⁹⁾. They both see the Sabbath as the foundation of Judaism. Halevi says: "The preservation of the

⁷²⁾ *ibid* III, p.5,10, Bialik II, p.333.

⁷³⁾ Khazari III, 10.

⁷⁴⁾ Bialik orally II, 163.

⁷⁵⁾ Khazari III, 5-10, Bialik orally II, 161.

⁷⁶⁾ Khazari III, 10.

⁷⁷⁾ *ibid*.

⁷⁸⁾ Bialik orally II, 161.

⁷⁹⁾ *ibid* 160.

Sabbath is in itself a confession of Divinity" ⁸⁰⁾. And Bialik: "Just as the Torah is Israel's covenant..... so is the Sabbath the sign of the covenant between Israel and God - the foundation on which all Jewish culture is based. ⁸¹⁾

The views of the two poets on the Hebrew language do not lend themselves readily to comparison, since Halevi had little to say on the subject, as he testifies himself: 'I have told you but little of this art of language, which is not open to be used in any way one likes.' ⁸²⁾ This is a significant sentence. The doctrine that the language should be treated with circumspection was advocated strongly by Bialik in speech and writing, and he expresses it in similar words to those of Halevi. "There should be decrees for the public not to misuse the language" ⁸³⁾. Even in their way of justifying their admiration for the Hebrew language there is great similarity. Halevi shows that God spoke with Adam in Hebrew, that it was the language of Kings, Prophets and Princes - a token of its historic importance ⁸⁴⁾. And Bialik in almost the same words says: "Hebrew was the language of Kings, Princes and Prophets, a language of aristocracy and high scholarship wherein God and the Sons of God conversed. ⁸⁵⁾

In their outlook on Palestine and the Diaspora, there is more affinity between Halevi and Bialik the essayist and orator,

80) Bialik orally II, 163.

81) Bialik orally II, 163.

82-) Khazari II, 80.

83) Bialik orally II, 165.

84) Khazari II, 68.

85) Bialik orally II, 120.

than between Halevi and Bialik the poet. We have remarked that Bialik's speeches show a change of outlook on this question. The duality discernible in his poetry disappears, and Bialik concludes that the fate of the Diaspora is destruction, a fate to which he resigns himself. He joins the 'opponents of Exile' and draws closer to Halevi, who throughout the mediaeval period was unrivalled in the consistency with which he preached this view. This change also clarified Bialik's views on Palestine. Whereas his poetry contained few signs of national enthusiasm, his speeches reveal his elation at the revival of his people, and an exuberant prophecy enters his utterances. With the complete "negation of Exile" ⁸⁶⁾ comes the positive advocacy of reconstruction in Palestine. Halevi shows that the return to Zion depends upon the national resolution. "To-day, as in the days of the Second Temple if we were to prepare ourselves for the God of our fathers with a perfect heart and a willing soul we would receive from Him ^{complete redemption} as our fathers in Egypt received from Him" ⁸⁷⁾. But the people was not prepared. "When we say 'bow down to His holy mountain' and bow to His footstool', and 'He who restoreth His Presence to Zion', it is like a chirping of a sparrow, for we think not of what we say" ⁸⁸⁾. Similarly Bialik's exhortations

86) Hebrew: *אמונה ופחד* The belief or conviction that the Jewish people in exile is doomed to extinction.

87) Khazari II, 24.

88) *ibid.*

to return to Zion assume that much depends on the people's will. In words reminiscent of Halevi he says "Every Jew who is brought up to pray thrice a day for Jerusalem.....must think of Jerusalem not thrice a day, but all the day ⁸⁹⁾. The renascence of Israel and the building of the Land of Israel is the focal point in the philosophy both of Halevi and Bialik.

It is not unreasonable to declare that this comparison between Halevi and Bialik confirms the instinctive popular feeling which, without great research or inquiry, hailed Bialik as the successor of Halevi.

We have observed certain differences between their ^{JWB} poetry - but the 'heir' does not have to be similar to his predecessor in all respects. "No two prophets prophesy in the same style" ⁹⁰ and poets also have separate and distinct methods of self-expression. But there are certain principles by which one can estimate whether one poet is the real successor of another, and such broad principles also determine the value and quality of the poetry itself.

We have seen that Bialik's early work was influenced by Halevi. But it must be admitted that no such discernible

89) Bialik orally, I, 61.

90) Sanhedrin 89, i.

influence is visible in the rest of Bialik's work, and he had been influenced by other poets (especially J.L. Gordon and Frug⁹¹⁾ without retaining the marks of those influences. His genius paved its own way. And as he himself avows in his poem beginning "I was not granted free light"

From my own rock and substance was it made
From my own heart I hewed it"
(Bialik, III).

Nevertheless, this early influence is not to be underestimated, even though Bialik liberated himself from its forms. A poet of the modern age is not of the same type as a religious poet of the Middle Ages. But the fundamental thing in Halevi's poetry - its deeply-set Jewish hallmark - became the basis of Bialik's work as well, a basis which he inherited from none other than Halevi. The strong influence of the Bible, and the wholly Jewish standpoint which marked Halevi's work, emphasise Bialik's strong affinities with him.

Bialik's special veneration of Spanish Hebrew poetry which caused him to devote his best efforts to the editing and research of mediaeval poetry, is also significant evidence of an affinity between his own poetry and that of the Spanish period. It is therefore permissible to suppose that this influence, though sometimes latent and invisible, was yet active in Bialik's poetry and was responsible for the many similarities of trends and

91) See our chapter "Bialik's Time".

contents which we have here recorded.

It is not merely a similarity in details, which could sometimes be little more than coincidence, and could easily be detected between many Hebrew poets. We are concerned with a fundamental affinity in those elements which determine the separate character and colour of their work. These common elements are - their Jewish standpoint, their fusion of individual and national personality, and their absorption of historical Judaism. These three qualities are the marks of each poet, and they stand alone in the combination of them amongst all the poets from mediaeval times to the present day. It is chiefly this triple affinity which determines Bialik as Halevi's successor in Jewish poetry. We have also observed other similarities which are of secondary importance and need not be enumerated again. The most noteworthy of them is the importance of the religious motif in Bialik's poetry. Bialik was a secular poet whose work contained a profound religious undercurrent. The fact that most orthodox religious circles in Jewry regard Bialik alone of the moderns, as being close to traditional Judaism, is further evidence that the religious element is fundamental in his poetry.

The study of similarities should not blind us to differences. In our survey of the poet's outlook on Jewish matters, we observed the incidence of a clear change in Bialik's views, and this change annuls many divergences and conflicts which his

poetry reveals in his attitude to Palestine and the Diaspora. It is probable that if Bialik had written "Songs of Zion" in his later years, they would have corresponded^{and} more closely with the poems of Halevi.

The aim of this comparative study was to examine the popular conception of Bialik as Halevi's successor, in an analytical spirit. It is true ~~to say~~ that a scientific examination must not base itself on a popular instinct nor draw deductions from it; but it may be guided by it and must take it into some account. There is an objective truth sometimes in a popular feeling which is not consciously scientific. Research can examine and carefully analyse such a traditional viewpoint. But it may not, least of all in a poetic subject, demolish it out of hand. In this instance, analytical inquiry joins hands with popular sentiment. To me it seems true to affirm that Bialik is Halevi's successor in Hebrew Poetry.
