The Yiddish Drama, a comparative study in dramatic development

English
A. M.
1910
The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the Latest Date stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

BUILDING USE ONLY

SEP 2 1 1978

SEP 2 1 1978
THE YIDDISH DRAMA
A COMPARATIV STUDY IN DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT

BY

MAX RAVITCH
A. B. University of Missouri, 1909

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN ENGLISH

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1910
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

May 12, 1910

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

MAX RAVITCH

ENTITLED The Yiddish Drama; A Comparative Study in Dramatic Development

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

Jacob Geitlin
In Charge of Major Work

C. W. Schurmann
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:

Daniel Wilham
R. S. O. Jones
Jacob Geitlin

Committee on Final Examination

169150
Jewish Drama before the Nineteenth Century.

The most important general bibliography is that prepared by Mr. A. S. Freidus (Bull. N. Y. Public Lib., Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Found., vol. VI., no. 1, Jan., 1907.). It is limited, however, to books possessed by the Astor Library. Wiener (Yiddish Literature of the Nineteenth Century, chap. IV., footnotes) makes one or two necessary additions. For the drama in Hebrew, see Karpeles, Geschichte der juedischen Litteratur, Berlin, 1886, and esp. the essay by him on "The Stage" in his Jewish Lit. and other Essays; Phila., 1895; Loew, Die Lebensalter in der jued. Lit., Berlin, 1894; Berliner's introduction to the Yesod Olam of Moses Zacuto; and Delitzsch, Zur Gesch der jued. Poesie, Leipzig, 1889. Also the article in the Jewish Encyclopedia, s. v. Drama, Hebrew. The early Purim mimes have been treated by Abrahams, in his Jewish Life in the Middle Ages (London, 1893.) Karpeles devotes a portion of his essay on "The Stage" (supra) to them; and a general article on the subject has been contributed to the Jewish Encyclopedia by Henry Walter (s. v. Purim Plays). The source for all writers on the attempt at a Jewish popular stage in the early eighteenth century is Schudt's Juedische Vermerkwerdkeit-en (Frank.a., 1714) Pt. II., pp. 307-317. See, however, the interesting bibliography by Steinschneider in the Scrapeum for 1848, '49, '64, '66, '69; and his article Purim und Parodie (Monatschr. fuer

Books or articles marked with * have been inaccessible to me.
It has often been observed that Jewish literature made no contribution to the drama, — that, for 4,000 years, this most religious nation in history, living in all climates and speaking a variety of languages, has produced nothing of that literary species which, more than any other, is rooted in religion. Students of the Bible have been struck by the fact that there is nothing in the Scriptures that approaches the dramatic, whether in form or spirit, and investigators of Jewish literature have noted the anomalous phenomenon that, while the Christian services, and others before them, gradually assumed the character of artistic representations, the Jewish services persisted in their original literary form. In more recent years scholars have discovered dramatic qualities in Job, the Song of Songs, and portions of the Prophetic Books. The purpose of this essay is to direct attention to the dramatic character of the Jewish Festivals and to some unique specimens of liturgical representations which, for a long time, have been the concern of the semi-religious Purim plays and the rise of the artistic drama in the nineteenth century.

The Jews first learned of the drama when the conquest of Alexander in the East brought them into contact with Greek culture; and only after Jerusalem had been conquered by the Romans was there a playhouse built in Judea. The religious elements of the action of the Biblical plays are kindly to the view that the Israelite Rabbis considered it as "a sort of the sacred," and led it under the ban. Yet in spite of all opposition, the drama constantly gained in popularity.
on the one hand among the enthusiastic lovers of Greek art and thought who saw in it a means for the rapid introduction of the new culture, and on the other, among the crowds of frivolous pleasure-seekers. As early as 150 B.C., the Alexandrian Ezekielos wrote the first drama known to have come from the pen of a Jew. Somewhat later, we hear of Jewish actors at Rome and elsewhere; and one of them, mentioned by Flavius Josephus, was so skilful that he became a favourite at court. But the masses of the Jewish people at home remained strangers to the theater, participating in it merely as spectators. The most ardent admirers of the drama looked upon it as a foreign importation, a luxuriant growth transplanted from a strange soil. Preserved fragments of even Ezekielos' play show unmistakable traces of Euripidean influence. Nevertheless, this first Jewish playwright is extremely interesting. As appears from the subject of his play, he seems to have attempted to lay the foundation for a national Jewish drama; for it is nothing less than a dramatization of the Exodus with Moses as its hero.

This last fact is very characteristic. We shall presently see that it was the story of the Exodus that contained the germ of what must be considered the first genuine Jewish drama. As is well known, France in the middle ages developed two distinct dramatic types, the religious and the farcical. The one was a product of the Catholic liturgy, and, but for the classic revival, might eventually have given rise to a native serious drama. The other sprang directly from the pent-up energy of a people naturally given to mirth, and gave the impulse to the comedy of Molière. Something of the same order took place among the medieval Jews. The Jewish middle ages, however, began six centuries before the French. After the fall of the second
temple, Jewish life and thought underwent a complete transformation.\textsuperscript{1} The nation's outlook upon the world was radically changed. Despairing of the present and the immediate future, the mind of the people turned with reverend longing to the past; and the ancient rites and observances, the memorial feasts and days, assumed a new significance. Under oppression and threatening dispersion, Israel began to feel, more than ever before, the ties of nationality. Hence, while the religion was felt by all to be the spiritual bond that would hold the race together, the popular consciousness instinctively dwelt on those holidays which combined religious solemnity with memories of national glory and triumph. In consequence, the celebration of the major feasts gradually assumed a dramatic character which rendered them unique among the customs of all races and peoples. It seemed as though a passionate desire had taken hold of the persecuted nation to live over anew the trials and sufferings of its past, if but to be thrilled again with the hopes of former victory and triumph. It was an attempt to bury the misery of the present in the exaggerated glories of the past.

Simultaneously, and as a result of the same causes, came the rise and development of the synagogal ritual, and more especially of that family liturgy peculiar to the home-loving Jew; and these new chords in the Jewish soul imbued them with a tragic feverishness, a lyric love of Zion, and a bitter irony amounting almost to satire. Of all the home-services, the most lavish attention was bestowed upon the Haggadah for the eve of the Passover. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was naturally regarded as the most typical national

\textsuperscript{1} Cf. Graetz, History of the People of Israel, v. II., passim.
holiday and as the prototype of all the later triumphs of the people of Israel over their enemies. Next to the synagoga, the artistic instincts of the Ghetto express themselves in an attempt to beautify the home on this and similar occasions; and on the eve of Passover every Jewish dwelling was transformed into a miniature theater, where for the thousandth time was reenacted the drama of the Exodus.

And a drama the Haggadah is beyond the shadow of a doubt. It has all the characteristics of a popular-religious performance, consisting, as it does, of dialog, symbolic representations, and narrative passages, and being throughout interspersed with amusing anecdotes, moral tales, and songs of all sorts. This is not the place to go into the historical development of this unique specimen of original Hebrew drama, or to make a detailed study of its contents. It will suffice for the purposes of this essay merely to indicate the meager foundations upon which it rests, and then to trace the outlines of its present form. The scriptural authority of the Haggadah consists in the following words: "And thou shalt tell thy son on that day, saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." This was later interpreted by the Rabbis in favor of a Passover-eve service of a highly elaborate nature: "The son shall ask (sic) his father about the meaning of the ceremonies, and according to the maturity of the son shall the father instruct him," — an injunction which contains the germ of the Four Questions (v. infra), or, in other words, the central dramatic element of the Haggadah. It was only, however, about the middle of our ninth cen-

---

1. Exodus, XIII., 8, R. V.
ry that the various practices and detach liturgies were combined and the whole arranged into the Haggadah as we know it today.

A mere glance at this curious book found in every orthodox Jewish home will leave no doubt as to its dramatic character. It opens with instructions in the vernacular describing minutely the manner in which the family board is to be arranged before the ceremonies begin, — dramatically speaking, the stage-setting, then. The table, covered with a silver-white cloth is decked out with a number of small dishes containing various symbols to represent the Egyptian bondage and the several stages in the Exodus, beginning with the "bitter" oppression — typified by the horseradish root — and ending with a sweet preparation suggestive of the sweetness of liberty. The formal opening of the services is made by raising the dish containing the unleavened cakes with the words — addressed to the household: "This is the lowly bred which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt."

Then follows the call of charity: "Let all that are hungry come and feast," which in former times was pronounced in a loud voice on the threshold, whereupon the invited poor waiting without entered the house.

Thus far, however, the paschal service resembles a dramatic pantomime. But now dialog is also brought in. The son, observing these ceremonies, turns to his father and asks him Four Questions concerning the meaning of it all. To these the father answers by relat-

---

1. I have before me a copy published in New York about 1890.
ing the story of the liberation from Egypt. The tendency in modern times seems to have been to weaken the dramatic element. Tradition has it that in the early days the entire servis was gone through by the members of the household standing up around the table, each with a bundle at the end of a stick over his shoulder — a rather realistic representation of the hasty escape from Egypt. At present the "Seder" (servis) proper is enacted by the father, who, drest in his best, is reclining on a couch, and the youngest son, who asks the questions and joins in the reading of the narrative portions. The emphasis is laid on the idea that on the eve of the Passover every Jew is a king (i.e., a freeman), rather than on the pre-liberation episodes.

This Hebrew family drama, substantially in its present form, has held the untiring attention of millions of spectators for a thousand years. It is, as has been seen, a liturgical play, revealing in its sources, its symbolism, its scenic and musical features, the essential elements of that genre. For this reason alone it should be of interest to the student of religious drama in other languages. But its greatest importance consists in the fact that it is only one of — and the most perfect — product of a tendency to celebrate in a highly dramatic fashion their half-national, half-religious feasts by a people hitherto supposed to be devoid of all dramatic expression. For it should be observed that it is not only the Passover but all the Jewish holidays that show this remarkable tendency. On the Feast of Tabernacles the religious Jew does not simply read the verses in Scripture which record the event commemorated by the holiday;

but he actually builds himself a thatch-roof tabernacle in which he
dwells for eight days, that he may as nearly as possible live over
again the historical experiences of his people. And on the Feast of
Weeks the reason why in orthodox homes the regular meat-dinner is
preceded by a dairy luncheon two hours earlier is found in the tra-
dition that on the Day of the Giving of the Law the women, having
been present at the awful event equally with the men, were unable to
prepare the usual meal, and so had to serve what was nearer at hand.
These are instances of something more than religious symbolism.

But of all Jewish holidays one of the least intrinsic importance
has been dramatically of the greatest influence, having been destin-
to effect the ultimate establishment of a Jewish public theater. This
was the Feast of Purim. The lightness with which this day is regard-
ed by the people is well expressed in the popular proverb; "Fever is
no illness and Purim is no holiday;" and perhaps also in the fact
that it is only one of two days in the Jewish calendar when one may
legitimately drink to excess, or as the Talmud puts it, until one
knows not the difference between "Cursed be Haman" and "Blessèd be
Mordecai." This levity and merriment was enjoined or at least warrant-
ed by the language of Scripture itself;¹ and it is to this lack of
solemnity of Purim that Jewish comedy and latterly the Jewish thea-
ter owe their birth. The Haggadah, with all its dramatic features,
divine
has remained a popular service. Nor could it, from the nature of its
origin, its religious tone, its antiquated language, and above all
its strictly domestic character, have been otherwise. On the other
hand, the Purim practices out of which the drama developed, had but

¹. Esther, IX., 15, ff.
little todo with either religion or the home; they were customs of a purely popular and social order. Hence they possest and exercised an element of freedom unknown to any other Jewish festival; and hence they hav gone thru a series of changes quite incompatible with the nature of liturgies.

To understand the medieval Purim-plays it is necessary to form some idea of Jewish life in the middle ages. Scornd and persecuted by his neighbors, and shut out from all social intercours with them, the Jew withdrew into himself and attempted to liv a life of his own. Communion with nature was forbidden him, and he was forst to preserv himself by a traffick which was directly opposed to the spirit of his past and his religion. To those who knew only the exterior of his life he seemd an unfeeling usurer and a despicable, cringing coward. The ghetto which he inhabited appeard bleak and sunless, the type of earthly sordidness. But it was so only from without. The soul-life of the Jew was a seald book to all about him. In his home, among his family and his friends, — here alone he was his true self. Here the cunnig, calculating money-lender became transformd into a the venerable patriarch, in% a spiritless coward into a hero struggling to preserv a race and an ideal. Within the ghetto, life had all the picturesque beauties of an oriental garden. On sabbaths and feast-days when its homes and its lanes were radiant with the religious light of myriads of candles and the transfigured faces of gaily-clad women and children, it seemd as an oasis in the desert of European barbarism. Here, retiring from the cares and the humiliations of his daily life in the outer world, the Jew gave himself up to the contemplation of the serener regions of his religion and his history.

It was an entirely spiritual life, removed alike from nature
and from man. Yet there were days even here when, in spite of himself
the human instincts in the Jew asserted themselves; and among these
Purim was the foremost. Then, for a brief interval, he seemed to emerge
from his counting-house and from his Talmud, to assume the shape of
common humanity, shaking himself free from the oppression of his ex-
iled existence on the one hand, and from the self-forgetting rumina-
tions of his diseased soul on the other. Purim had from the outset
been ordained a "day of gladness and feasting;" and now it gradually
took on the character of a carnival season. Such frivolous amusements
as on all other days were considered out of harmony with the spirit
of Judaism were not only permitted but encouraged on the Purim. Songs
on the fall of Haman were composed in Hebrew and in the vernaculars,
and they were sung, accompanied with extravagant rejoicings, in the
houses, in the streets, and even in the synagogues. Masking, which is
strictly forbidden by the Law and the Talmud, became one of the fa-
vorite practices associated with the festival, and even the Rabbis
connived at it. In the Orient, the custom of reproducing the story
of Haman and Mordecai as a mime came into vogue along with the other
features of the celebration perhaps very soon after the occurrence of
the historic event. It must have reached Europe much later; for we
hear nothing of it until late in the ninth century.

From this brief summary of the circumstances under which the f
first attempts at a regular Jewish drama originated, the difference
between the Christian miracles and the Purim mimes at once becomes
evident. The Church made a conscious effort to dramatize its litur-
gies as a means of instructing the masses of its worshippers in their
religious history, seeking thereby to introduce an element of spiri-

11

The very opposite motives gave rise to the Purim plays. To the Jew's whole life was wrapped up in his religion. What he now seek was not spiritual instruction, but something to strip him of the shell of his past and bring him nearer to the life ahead of him. This may be the reason why the Christian drama began with tragedy, the Jewish with farce or comedy.

We have no means for studying the medieval Purim times directly. So far as I know, none of them have been preserved in any form. They were for the most part improvisations on some well-known general plot, such as the story of Esther or Joseph and his brethren, and were probably never written down. But we shall not be very far wrong if in attempting to reconstruct them we turn to their modern representatives as we find them among the Jews of the East-European countries; for, it must be remembered, that the Purim plays are as popular today wherever there are Jews as they were in Medieval times. Here, then, a week or two before Purim, a half dozen young men—usually poor students or teachers' assistants but frequently sons of respected citizens—come together and prepare a "play" for the approaching festival. They hold regular rehearsals in a room of one of the synagogues or somewhere in a shed chosen for the purpose, where the parts are assigned to the different members of the group and the general run of the action is decided upon. Popular songs, Purim lays in Hebrew or in Yiddish, strains from Jewish cradle-songs, and peasant-ditties, are jumbled together and sung ensemble when words fail. No one thinks of writing down the speeches, for what actor does not know what to say?

1. This subject seems to have become a frequent one in art of his period.
once in Lis? They are, of course, paper, cardboard, and their historical imaginations. Their gaudiest colors and the most fantastic shapes. Paper and paste serve as materials for the costumes, and out of the peaceful wood are fashioned the most terrible weapons!

Thus prepared and fitted out, the troupe sets forth early in the morning in the stage-gag early on the night of Purim, followed by a long train of curious children and, not infrequently, by a mob of threatening ruffians. They enter the lions of the first prominent Jew, where they find a family seated around the table. They are greeted with kind laughter and open-mouthed expectation. Taking their position, they begin to address with the conventional couplet:

"A merry Purim, good people, a merry Purim and true,
We now come to relate Purim's meaning to you."

1. Gordin relates how, after a performance of one of his plays, he overheard a bearded Jew expressing his admiration for what he had just seen. Gordin turned to him and thanked him. "What are you thanking me for?" the old man could not understand. "I have written the play," said Gordin. "What did you want to write it for?" the spectator questioned again. "Well, but what would the actors say?" the author tried to explain. "Never mind what they. They are no fools. Fine actors they would be if they did not know what to say," and he walked away. A characteristic anecdote if not altogether true.

2. "A gut' en Purim, a gut' en Purim, eine lieb' 8.2.1801."
   Mir wissen auch gut'mann girt'el, wie der Purim floatet."
Then the "Play" itself begins. Usually we find a. sparkling and festal mood of the story of Ahasuerus. Esther, who is not only, is a minor character, and is often left out altogether. Even Haman is not the center of interest. Indeed, it is neither his story nor the plot of the play that are important to a spectator. The chief attraction consists in the songs, the jests, and the costumes. Frequently, however, the story of the Sale of Joseph—which, at least in modern times, has been a greater favorite than the Ahasuerus—is given instead. The most important part, of course, is that of the fool, which is inserted in defiance of history. It is he that keeps the audience in a roar by his elementary jests and comic songs. The "Play" is invariably short, a half dozen or more performances being given in different homes on the same evening. After, and even during, the representation the troupe is entertained with wine and victuals by the hostess. When it is ended, they take their leave, again with a stereotyped couplet:

"Purim will last only a day,
Give us a penny and chase us away."

Purim, however, is not the only occasion for these representations. In earlier days, as well as now, it has been customary to have "Spiele" at weddings, engagement-parties, and festivities of all sorts. During the Feast of Chanukah, which resembles that of Purim both in the nature of its origin and the manner in which

1. "Hount in Purim, morgen morgen;
   Git me a ducat, or 'stumpt up a grost."

2. Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, commemorating the victory of Jud Maccabees.
It is celebrated, dramatizations of the Maccabees have frequently formed a part of the rejoicings. But of late, a form of Anan Verus-plays, not written forms exist.

It was not until the first decade of the eighteenth century that any attempt was made to reduce the oral Purim operas to anything like literary form and to bring them upon a public stage. Frankfurt-on-Main, one of the largest Jewish centers in Germany, had the distinction of being the seat of the first theatrical performances of Jews and for Jews. About the year 1700, Ahasverus, the familiar subject of Anan Verus, was given at the court of Prince a crowd met. It is a composite character, combining the elements of an original mine with suggestions from the buffooneries prevalent on the German stage of the day, appears from the title of the printed version (1702):

"Ahasverus-Spiel... auf mine Seven Oden (number) which the Opera up is zugestossen an Torgin Salone" (The second Talmud translation of Esther)."

It was in an original work, to win the approval of the religious members of the community. The author made rather free use of his sources, shaping the character of Mordecai, and introduced new persons not found in the original. Moreover, he laid special emphasis on the immoral life of the Oriental court, depicting it with unrelenting condescension. In this way he aroused the antagonism of the prominent Jews of Frankfurt, so that the performance was stopped and the printed copies burned.

In the next year, probably to counteract the pernicious influence

1. For the facts in this section see Schudt.
Aha sue rug.

some sort, the pious Davie! Ulff (later Rabbi cf. Mannheim), in combination with sue, made a worthy name for himself.

Ulff's house in the Judengasse was turned into a regular theater, and performances were given there not only on Purim but throughout the month of Adar. A certain Beorman of Lirnburg wrote the text of the play on the S. h. of Joseph, a subject of far tenderer appeal to the most Jewish of the Jews, than it was not altogether free from blemishes of the Ahasuerus. The immediate and immense success of this venture was a proof of how keenly the lack of regular playhouses was felt in the Ghetto. And yet it had to be closed within less than a month. Had this theater succeeded in maintaining itself a little longer, a dramatic literature in Judeo-German might have been developed that might rival that of Goldfaden, with who knows what enduring benefits for the Jewish people. But all odds were against it. To begin with, Jewish life in eighteenth-century Germany was still very largely medieval. The immediate causes for the closing of the house in Frankfort, and the failure of similar attempts elsewhere, as gathered from Schudt's account, shows this very clearly. He says that the Christians began to flock to the Jewish theater that government authorities had rounded it upon penalty of heavy fines. But even more paralyzing...

1. We shall hear of a parallel case in the history of the modern Yiddish stage. When dissatisfaction among the theatre of Odessa compelled the Russian government to forbid performances there, the companies migrated to England and America, and planted in New York the most flourishing Jewish theatre in history. To...
The ancient commune (the Kahal) still exists, exercising all its medieval power over the bodies and the minds of its subjects. This commune, it was, let us remember, that burned the first published Jewish play. Another manifestation of Medievalism kept the projected theater at Metz in the cold. A pious Jew of that city told Schudt that the performance of the Sale of Joseph had been followed by an unusual number of deaths, which one might think the Lord is displeased with it.

The plays themselves are of very little literary import. Besides the Ahasuerus and the Joseph, copies have been preserved of a play on David and Goliath belonging to the same period, and another called Acta Bitter-Ahasuerus, which was produced at Prague about ten years later. Some of their general characteristics, however, may be summarized in a few words. In the first place, let it be observed that, without exception, they belong to the comic genre. In this, as in other respects, they show themselves to be the direct descendants of the earlier Purim plays. Had their authors stopped at this point and sought to create a purely national drama, they might have looked better. Unfortunately they failed to understand the spirit of their age; for by introducing the un-Jewish vulgarities of the German clown-farces they estranged the true element of their public, and delayed the birth of the Jewish theater by almost two centuries. To this day, in which they

---

1. See the catalog of the Oppenheim library, now in the Bad- loin, published by M. SteinSchneider in the Sammelb.
We hear of no further attempts at a Jewish stage until late in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, however, the original Purim plays continued to be played in private homes, in town and country.

1. I gather this from general estimates and hints to my authorities:

Ahasverus (1708): "Ahasverus is of similar coarse character.

Gar, aber und abgeschmackt." — Schudt.

Mekirat Yoseph (1710): "The dramatic or poetic value of such kind attaches to it.

"Die Juden haben ein gar gross Vergnügen daran, mussen." — Schudt.

The next play, Ahasverus: — "A somewhat more refined thing."

2. In the sixteenth century, Jews were among the first in the sixteenth century and continuing to the present, in literature and drama has appeared in Hebrew, but neither of these has much to do with the subject. The former belongs to the domestic literature of Spain and the world in general; the latter is a purely litera-
wherever there were Jews. Occasionally, the Ahasuorus and the Slais, like Judeo-German literature in general during the following century, was written partially in the gait every thing was in turmoil. Europe on the one hand and similar the stilted will witness the Ghetto to the event — the French Revolution and the Mendelschon Reform. In the meantime, it was gathering new life and strength for the period of bloom which was soon to come.

In summarizing the history of the Jewish drama from its beginnings to the period of the Enlightenment, we are struck by not only the general similarity of its course to the development of European drama, but also by its distinctive characteristics. The drama in England came from the miracle plays directly from the Church liturgy. The Jewish liturgy, too, tended to be dramatic, from entirely different causes. The impulse to Christian drama was didactic; the Jewish, religious drama originated in a desire to escape the sordid realities of medieval life. But this drama never entered a literary form and never entered the theater. It remained a dramatized liturgy. Along with it, however, as in France, another spirit arose, lost primarily in the social customs of the people. This was the Purim farce, which was destined to prevail and to develop into a national Jewish drama. Like everything else Jewish, it was of a semi-religious nature, and was at first growth intended neither for the stage nor for the people at large. It has a parallel in the works of Hrotsvitha and others in medieval European drama, and in the poetic dialogues of XI...
In conclusion, we are not, in the opinion, Whan the Jews inhabit the region of the innermost century? Thus it is well to be forewarned that the question, if raised, from what has been said, readily suggests itself. All that is fundamental in Hebrew culture is forbidding to imitative art. The beginnings of music and poetry were in Judaea as everywhere else, rooted in the popular religion; but the spiritual God of Israel could not, like the human gods of Hellas, be seen in marble or wood to vent his passions on the green earth before the multitude of his worshippers. The Shokhinah may be praised in psalms and songs, but it cannot form an image, as long as it be done in the garb of the gods and the bones of the gods. And since the dream of human art is pleasing to the fragile soul of god and man, imitative art is never seen in Judaea until the intellectual materialism of Hellenic culture is wafted to her spiritual borders. Ezekiel and other stray individuals meditating the tragic muse work under Greek inspiration and fashioned their art by Greek models. But the masses of the Hebrew people never became Hellenized; still less did their religion. Thus Hebrew drama, though in many ages the members of the literary importation, cultivated only by the cultured and the learned, not written for the masses and unknown to them.

But the Jew, more perhaps than any other race, possesses instincts that under favorable circumstances would express themselves in drama. Thus the dark ages of persecution and humili-

--- Fabius Schach, "Der Jude ist eine Kampfnatur, er redet und denkt kampferisch."
ition, men of record, in the farther away the globe of his Gauche, and from seven or the dimmed core of his Talmod, literally buried by a burden of indescribable pain, show it was—how strange, yet true of dramatic!—that the first sparks of a popular drama were kindled under the seemingly lifeless ashes of his pitiful existence. In his longing, back glances at the glory of his past, in the wrangling mixed and different contrast for the fallen enemies of his race, he found in first inspiration for a serious contemplation grew and there an intellectual outburst. Yet all attempts at formal plays and public meetings were blocked by the Talmud as long as the Ghetto and the Talmod remained the guiding mental influence. Medieval Jewish drama, like medieval Christian drama, had need of a new birth in religion and thought before it could blossom forth into life. The Renaissance and the Reformation were to the one what the Enlightenment and the French Revolution were to the other. Unlike the Hellenism of 2,000 years ago, in the kalah of the nineteenth century was a general awakening which affected the whole people. The new drama is a popular art, springing from the national feasts and their liturgies, and molded into form by the dramatic experience of European literature, in the same way the Classical Renaissance added art to the crude creations of the medieval Church.
The Rise and Development of the Theater.

Goldfaden and his Followers.

(Bibliography.—The Mendelssohnian Reform is treated fully in Kayserling, Moses Mendelssohn, sein Leben und seine Werke, Leipzig, 1862, 1888. For a general account of the movement, Graetz, Geschichte der Juden, v. v., ch. X. For the literary aspect, see Weissberg, Die Neuhebräische Aufklärungsliteratur in Galizien, Leipzig und Wien, 1898; and Leon Rosenthal, Toledoth Hebrath Marhe Haskalah be-Frez Russia (Hebrew), St. Petersburg 1890.—For the pre-Goldfaden theaters, see Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums, 1838, no. 155; The Israelite, Cincinnati, II., 3; Wiener, ch. v., pp. 234-5. On the establishment of the theater by Goldfaden and the period immediately following: Seifert, "Die Geschichte von Jüdischem Theater in Drei Zeitperioden" (Yiddish) (in Die Idische Bibli, New York 1897); Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Chazto, pp. 113-176, New York 1902; Wiener, ch. v.; Fabius Schach, "Das jüdische Theater, sein Wesen und seine Geschichte," Ost und West, Berlin, Mai, 1901—the only philosophical treatment of the subject.—For the life of Goldfaden: Vohliner (pseud.), "Abraham Goldfaden," in Der Haasfreund (Yiddish), v. i., pp. 165 ff. An estimate of his work is given by Pinsky in his Das Idische Drama (Yiddish), New York, 1909. A number of his plays have been published in separate pamphlets by the Hebrew Publishing Co. of New York. So have also some of Tzeitlens, Shaikevitch's, and Yurwitz's.)

The end of the Jewish middle ages was effected thru the publication of Mendelssohn's German translation of the Pentateuch in
1783. This work was at once the signal for a renaissance and a reformation. On the one hand it unearthed the ancient half-forgotten heritage of the people and pointed the way to the renewal of a broader and more natural form of life; while on the other hand, the commentaries which accompanied it fell like a bomb into the rabbinical camp and ultimately led to the reform of the ritual. In Germany, however, where the movement began, it had no enduring influence on Jewry as such. It was in Russia and Austria, where it spread during the next few decades through the efforts of Mendelssohn's friends and followers, that it produced the most significant results in education and literature.

This, it must be remembered, was the era of the first revolution, when Europe even to Russia was swept by a wave of liberalism and toleration. The emperor Joseph II. had just issued the edict which promised emancipation to the Jews in his dominions, and similar reforms were forthcoming from the Czar. Taking advantage of these encouragements, the reformers, or Maskilim as they called themselves, set about to establish schools for the study of Hebrew, German, and other liberal subjects. The details of their schemes varied with each country, as did also the results they attained; but everywhere alike their motto was the enlightenment of the Jewish masses. Mendelssohn himself had started the first Hebrew periodical. Now similar publications were undertaken in Galicia and in Lithuania, with the result that by the middle of the century a rich and varied literature in the language of the Bible had sprung up in the East of Europe.

Before long, however, the earlier generations of Maskilim had past away, and their descendants in Russia, realizing the in-
adequacy of Hebrew as a medium whereby to reach the masses, began gradually to pass over to the vernacular. Naturally their earliest writings were controversial, satirical, or didactic; but a pure literature was the ultimate outcome. Following the example set by the Hebrew writers, they sometimes cast their ideas in the form of dialogues, and in some cases actually produced dramas worthy of the stage. Such plays were written by Ettinger, Aksenfeld, and Gottlober. Abramovich, one of the most delightful writers in Yiddish, is the author of two of them, The Meat-tax and The Enlistment. The former is simply a biting satire in dialogue directed against the communal leaders. In The Enlistment we have a charming picture of Jewish life and a veritable gallery of Jewish types, the here, too, criticism of the Kahal is obviously the motif which inspires the author.

Meanwhile repeated attempts were made to establish a public theater for Jews, but all without success. As early as 1838, we hear of a play "Moses" written for and acted by a Jewish company at the "newly established Jewish theater" at Warsaw. Twenty-six years later a similar venture at Odessa ended in the same way. We know almost nothing of the character of these two theaters nor of the kind of plays they produced, but some suggestive hints as to the causes of their failure may be culled from the names connected with them. Schertspierer, the author of the "Moses," was a resident of Vienna, therefore proverbially unfamiliar with the life of

1. The entire subject of the didactic closet drama previous to Goldfaden has been treated rather fully by Wiener.

2. Jewish Encycl. (s.v. Drama, Yiddish). I know nothing more about these theaters.
the Eastern Jews for whom he tried to write. Besides, his name is nowhere met with in the Jewish literary annals of the time. Of the Odessa theater we know that two plays entitled Esther and Athalia respectively were presented there. One is easily led to the assumption that these were no other than Racine's plays, translated, or at best adapted, to the Jewish public. The situation and its difficulties are perfectly obvious. No Jewish theater could hope for success unless it took up the thread where the Purim plays had left off. By 1860, Russian-Jewish Society had advanced but little from medieval conditions. There was no public for a real drama such as the rest of Europe had; for the Haskalah had not yet made its way to the great masses. Yiddish literature, on the other hand, had marched too far away from the elementary popular forms; and the men who were willing to write for the theater had not sufficient insight to grasp the problems of their task. Nevertheless, and in spite of their failure, the theatrical ventures of this period showed hopeful signs. Clearly, forces were at work in Jewry that were rapidly preparing the soil for a drama based on the artistic traditions of the whole people. This hope was realized in 1876.

The story of the beginnings of the first successful Jewish theater is curiously interesting. It reads like a series of paradoxes. One might have expected that Russia, as the seat of the Haskalah, would have been its cradle, and that one of the well-known literary dramatists its father. But the contrary was the case. Goldfaden, the father of the theater, was a dramatist neither by reputation nor by temperament. In a language possessing an active dramatic literature of long standing, such a man would never hav
turned to the theater. Again, of all the European countries inhabited by Jews none had been so little affected by the culture-wave of the Enlightenment as was Roumania where the first performances were given. Like the Reformation in England, the drama entered the Ghetto by a back door.

The Yiddish miracle had begun as a semi-religious celebration and had ended in grotesk popular amusement. By the aid of an accident Goldfaden was now enabled to start the modern Yiddish drama at the very point where the Purim plays had ceased to develop. He had received a thorough Western education and had early become famous as a writer of popular songs. The year 1876 found him in Czernovich editing the "Rukowiner Israelitishes Volksblatt," and the request from his subscribers in Yassy to remove his paper to their city brought him in the same year to Roumania. In the cafes and taverns of Yassy he was not a little surprised to find small bands of singers reciting his own folk songs. It occurred to him that a combination of these songs with a slight prose plot of some sort, presented before a large audience, might be a venture worth attempting. No sooner thought than done. He immediately went to the task of recruiting a troupe; then he patched up a couple of vaudevilles; and during the Feast of Tabernacles the Yiddish theater was successfully launched.

After the holidays Goldfaden and his company removed to Bucharest. The Roumanian capital was then the seat of the Russian staff of war, and it swarmed with foren Jews who were making money and had long looked for some form of amusement in the language they knew. The Goldfaden was far from a gifted playwright, he was a clever man and knew his public thoroughly. His so-called comedies of this period are the quintessence of nonsens. When one of his more intelli-
gent spectators reprovingly asked him why he did not write a real play, he replied: "Do you want me to go straight to failure? Give me an intelligent public and a trained troupe and I will write to suit them." It is doubtful whether he could have made good the latter part of his statement; but it is a fact that Goldfaden constantly grew with his surroundings. The Purim farces which had preceded him were the most senseless of popular mummeries; and it would have been as wise for him to write real drama after European models as for Shakspere's predecessors in the sixteenth century to translate Sophocles for their spectators. What Goldfaden did was to follow his instinct and to construct a folk-drama based on the old Purim mimes, the synagogal chants (see below), and the popular song. Students of the classic and medieval drama will be struck by the parallel.

At the close of the war Goldfaden took his theater to Russia. Here, as might have been expected, he immediately came into collision with the intelligent as well as the unintelligent forces of the ghetto. The rabbis threw up their hands in horror at the new menace to Judaism; the assimilators cried that a specifically Jewish theater would overthrow the work of the Enlightenment and bring back the old narrow separatism; while the literary folk thought that nothing short of Shakspere was good enough for the Jewish masses. Goldfaden, however, took none of these cries to heart. With the people enthusiastically behind him, he attempted to refine the stage gradually. He stopped writing idle farces, and passed over to a much superior species, which he designated the "historical operette."

To speak of Goldfaden's plays as literature would border on sacrilege. Yet the operette as developed by him is interesting in many ways. He adopted the form from German sources; but nothing speaks more favorably for his good sense and knowledge of the Jew-
lish people than the manner in which he fitted it to the needs of his public. A literary purist would have made literal translations; an unskilful charlatan like Kurwitz would have appropriated only the tinsel and the noise of his originals, enuf to win the favor of the mob. Goldfaden transformed his models, or rather he merely took a suggestion from them. He chose his themes from Jewish history and legend, founded his arias on the traditional music of the cantor, and even adapted his vers-forms from the familiar balladry of the people. To supply the demands of his Russian public he wrote his three masterpieces—Doctor Almosado, or the Jews in Spain, Shulamith, and Bar Kochba—which have held the stage ever since and which suddenly raised the Yiddish playhouse to the dignity of a European theater. Here also his troupe acquired a number of new and valuable forces—Mmes. Finkel and Karp, and the two greatest actors the Yiddish stage has yet produced, Adler and Mogulesco.

At Odessa the first rival company was started by one Leo Lerner. Lerner was a man of some literary reputation, but like Goldfaden he lacked the qualities of a dramatist. He was not, moreover, the popular poet that Goldfaden had been and did not understand the tastes and the needs of the Jewish public. He took the suggestion of Goldfaden's critics, and attempted to fill his repertory with translations from the German. Gutzkow's Uriel Akosta and Die Juedin were among the first plays given in the new house, and they received the approbation of the intelligent classes. Then the attention of other literati was turned to the stage. Katzenellenbo-gen wrote a play on the life of Rashi, Lillienblum, a well-known poet produced an original comedy, Der Diskontist, and Shaikewich,
already famous as a novelist, enrich the repertory with an adaptation from Gogol's Revizor, and a series of imitations and original comedies of Jewish life and manners.

This period was the first Blutezeit of the Yiddish drama. The public was enthusiastic, and the authors and actors won unbounded applause and considerable financial success. But now came also the first disappointment to the founder and the hopeful supporters of the theater. Success turned the heads of the parvenus of the Yiddish green-room, and the first "war of the theaters" ensued. The humble café singers of five years ago, seeing themselves admired on all hands, commenced to style themselves Jewish Salvinis, Booths, and Ivings, and to assume a contemptuous attitude toward their audiences. Receiving no encouragement in their absurd claims to greatness, they rose against their management and broke up the troupe. Goldfaden and Lerner succeeded in reorganizing their two houses for a short time; but new revolts soon followed, and the theaters at Odessa had to be abandoned. Then small companies started out on the road, but the jealousies between them and between the members within them led to endless quarrels and scandals, and in the end caused their ruin. The government, tired of their unceasing denunciations against each other, cut the Gordian knot by forbidding the performance of Yiddish plays in Russia (Sept. 14, 1883). Goldfaden, however, evaded the ukase by removing his house to Warsaw and christening it the "German" theater. But the interminable disappointments and discouragements sapped the energy of even this indefatigable pioneer. He found himself unable to write new plays, and the old ones had ceased to draw. Finally a second ukase from the minister put an end to all Yiddish performances in the
Czar's dominions, and scattered the bands of actors and authors to all the corners of the earth.

The closing of the playhouses in Russia has been considered by many the greatest misfortune that could have befallen the development of Yiddish dramatic literature. It has been thought that Russia, as the center of Jewish population and Jewish culture, could not but have proved the most fertile soil for an artistic Jewish drama. But history has shown that the migration of the theater to New York, tho it delayed its progress for several years, ultimately brought it the best results. The massacres of 1881 caused the immigration to America of a large number of Jews who, for a variety of reasons, would never have assisted the growth of the theater in Russia. There were among them many young men of education who at home had been either directly opposed to Goldfeder's project or altogether indifferent to it; and these became in New York the chief promoters of the dramatic cause. Their coming to America had cut them off from the culture of their native country, but it did not enable them to take an active part in the intellectual life of their new home and so they were forced to create a literature and a culture of their own. Gordin, the man to whom Jewish drama owes more of its development than to all others combined, was one of that class; and there were many others.

The credit for the establishment of the first Jewish theater in America is due to Boris Thomashefsky, one of the most popular actors on the East Side today. He was in 1882 a young man working at cigarets and devoting his leisure time to private theatricals.

1. Cf. the article by F. Schach in Ost und West, "i, 1901.
He learned thru one of his friends at the cigaret factory that a Jewish troupe was giving performances in London and almost starving and he promptly decided to have them come to New York. A wealthy Eastsider, Wolf Frank by name, became interested in the project, and furnisheth Thomas hefsky with money to carry it out. Within less than three months the company arrived, and gave its first performance at Turn Hall on East Fourth Street. The place was ill-adapted for a theater; and the Up-town Jews tried all in their power to interfere. Finally Thomas hefsky succeeded in leasing the Bowery Garden and lay the corner-stone of a regular Jewish theater in America.

The next year Joseph Lateiner (formerly Goldfaden's prompter) arrived with his company and started the rival Oriental Theater, also on Bowery. Both companies were giving the old Goldfaden repertory, but the public soon tired of hearing the same plays, and Lateiner was forst to turn playwright himself. This was the beginning of the régime of what has appropriately been called the "rag-drama". Lateiner had neither education nor talent. In reading his plays, one wonders how such sensless rigmarole could ever have been listened to by any public no matter how uncultivated. But Lateiner had one saving virtue; he knew the theater. What he could not accomplish in words he attempted to effect by means of lavish scenery and "popular" music. In other words, he adopted Goldfaden's formula; but he was neither able nor willing to imitate Goldfaden's spirit.

When the success of these two companies became known abroad a third promptly set sail for New York. It was led by a certain "Professor" Hurwitz, who had made a failure as an actor and
now turned to the easier profession of a dramatist. This company contained men and women who later on, under the influence of Herdin, developed into some of the most capable actors on the East Side. "Professor" Hurwitz made his debut in the dramatic world with a new kind of play, styled by him "Zeitstueck," which consisted of nothing more than a newspaper "story" set to music. It might have been expected that such stupidity would be laughed out of countenance. But this was not the case. It seemed as tho there was no great enough fool who could write a successful play for the Yiddish stage. Even some of the actors, who could scarcely write their own names, became "authors". Only poor Goldfaden failed to win favor with the new regime, and had to return, wretched and broken-hearted, to his newspaper-desk; while Lateiner, Hurwitz, and Shaikevitch were the monarchs of their respective "palaces of art".

To summarize. The theater founded in Roumania by Goldfaden and carried by him to Russia was thru the tyranny of the Russian government transferred to America. Goldfaden attempted to create a national Jewish drama by gradually educating his public. The farces were far from literature, they were based on the traditions and the tastes of the Jewish masses. If they did not deal with life in a truly dramatic manner, they were at least suggestive caricatures of Jewish customs and manners. In his operettes he went a step farther. He sought, perhaps unconsciously, to concentrate in the theater all that was artistic in the Ghetto—the cantor's music, the beautiful and sad folk-song, and the extravagant hilarity of the Purim farce. But in the hands of his successors—a band without talent and without ideals—the movement he had started did not advance. The Yiddish theater became the habitation of
formless spectacle and stupid vulgarity.

Such was the state of affairs in 1891. It seemed that the Yiddish theater was doomed to be engulfed by its own sea of trash, when suddenly the wave of immigration brought forward the man who was to save it. This was Jacob Gordin.
The Drama as Literature.

Gordin and the Others.

(Bibliography. — For a brief account of Gordin's life and work see Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto, New York 1902; and Wiener, Yid. Lit., pp. 241-2. A number of articles on different aspects of his biography and relation to the drama and the stage will be found in the volume publishd on the tenth anniversary of his work as a dramatist, entitled Zu Gordin's zehn-jahriger Jubiläum (Yiddish) (New York, 1901). There appeared a general review of his dramas in the Zukunft (Yiddish magazine, New York) for August, September, and October 1908. From the pen of the excellent critic, J. Entin. See also the criticism in Pinsky's Jewish Drama (Yiddish), New York 1909. Some interesting facts concerning Gordin's character and methods of work have been related by Winchewsky in his book A Day with Jacob Gordin (Yiddish), New York, 1909. Reviews of individual plays will be found scattered thru the volumes of the Zukunft. The majority of Gordin's better plays have been publishd in pamflet form by the Hebrew Publishing Co. So hav also a number of the plays of Pinsky, Ach, and Firschbein; and one each of Kobrin and Libin.

With Gordin's first play, Siberia, (1891) the history of Yiddish drama begins in earnest. Gordin had been a man of letters before he entered the Yiddish field. He was forst to take up playwriting as a means of livelihood. He therefore wrote primarily for the stage; and thus his work represents the union of literature with the theater.
Tho Siberia was received by the Jewish public with great enthusiasm and secured for it author the support of the intelligent classes, the attempt, embodied in this play, to represent real life on the crude Yiddish stage, can not be said to have proved entirely successful. And this no one realized as readily as the keen-sighted Gordin himself. Siberia had been not only his first play, but also his first venture into Yiddish. He had put it forth as a means to test the pulse of his audience; and fortunately it had too many good qualities to fail to interest them. But the the masses of the spectators may have thought themselves entirely pleased with the new departure their theater had taken, Gordin himself could not help perceiving the weakness of the situation. It was too sudden and too great a bound to take all at once—from Lateiner's and Hurwitz's spectacular opera of nonsens to the highly-developed dramas of Hauptmann and Ibsen.

That he had learnt by experience, Gordin proved by his next play, in the writing of which he resolutely, the somewhat reluctantly, stepped down to the level of his actors and his public. Indeed the entire period comprised between Siberia and his translation of Grillparzer's Medea (1891-1898) represents a struggle between his artistic ideal and his practical good-sense, in which the latter was only too frequently the victor. What had hitherto past for drama on the East Side was but an excuse for impotent scribblers to parade before an art-starved populace their witless coarseness and meaningless duets. The East-Side playgoer went to the theater merely to amuse himself—to see a stale caricature of old-fashioned piety which tickled his sense of superiority, or to hear the latest
"couplet-song". He had not been taught to demand subtle characterization or even a well-told story on the stage. Now all this was to be changed; and Gordin, like the wise reformer he was, set about to build a bridge between the theater as he found it and the theater as he wished to see it. And thus his work came to form a natural link in the evolution of Yiddish drama.

Those who have associated the name of Gordin with the works of his maturing years will find it difficult to comprehend how the author of the Oath and God Man and Devil could have written such nameless trash as Miriam the Beautiful and The Philistines. Even such an able critic as Mr. Pinsky only proves how little he understands the inner development of dramatic literature in the shitho when he condemns Gordin as unprincipled for having been to cater to the uncultured throng. The throng indeed! For if there ever was an artist who rejected the hollow motto of aristocratic dilettantism of 'Art for Art' to substitute in its place the rational principle of Art for the whole people, that artist's name was Jacob Gordin. In a sens, he was indeed unscrupulous. He had made it the mission of his life to teach the Jews the beauties and the exalted uses of dramatic art; and it was immaterial to him what means he employed in attaining his end. He was even careless of his reputation as an artist, he was in the habit of saying that he wrote sometimes with his right and sometimes with his left hand. But in doing so he was merely making a virtue out of necessity. Poor Goldfaden had been driven from his throne at the very moment when he might have enacted the reforms he had cherished so long. Now Gordin had in turn succeeded in subduing the usurper; and he felt himself called upon to complete what his great predeces-
so had been forst to leave only half done. The ground had to be thoroughly fertilized; and Gordin did not scorn to do so with his left hand while with his right he was scattering the seed of a nobler and purer drama.

This was the extent of the influence exerted by Goldfaden and his followers upon Gordin. It was almost entirely negative. By far more potent and more beneficial to the future dramatist were the influences of his early training and of the literary atmosphere which he breathed in his youth. Born about the middle of the century (1853), in the south of Russia, his rudimentary education was the very opposite of that which most Jewish children were then receiving. His father being a Maskil and fairly well-to-do, wished to give his son the very best educational advantages that Russia could afford. The young Gordin was a zealous reader and early turned to literature. At the age of seventeen he became a contributor to the better class of Russian newspapers. Somewhat later he started a paper of his own. Meanwhile he had become a convert to the revolutionary theories of government and religion which fill the air of Russia. He began to preach assimilation to the Jews; then he organized a brotherhood of liberal believers; and finally he became a Tolstoyist. Perceiving that the secret police were on his tracks he quietly crossed the border, and took passage to America—where he hoped to realize his agricultural schemes.

This extraordinary career brought Gordin into contact with a class of Jews largely unknown to and seldom depicted by other Jewish writers of fiction. Raphael Friedlander of the Kreutzer Sonate, the heroine of Mirele Efros, the father in The Russian Jew in America, and many others, are types of the emancipated, self-
respecting, Russianized Jew of strong character and broad ideas whom Gordin must often have met in his father's house. On the other hand, it made him incapable of appreciating and treating sympathetically the old-fashioned Chetto-Jew. With very few exceptions, his Rabbis and his Khassidim are either fools or scoundrels. What is worse they frequently lack the convincing vitality of real persons.

The thing that strikes us most forcibly as we pass from Goldfaden to Gordin is that the plays of the latter are real dramas. To a reader of German or English literature, a "play" of Goldfaden's or Hurwitz's would be as strange a creation as a Central-African jig. It is true that Goldfaden and even Lateiner and Hurwitz had made use of German plays as models for their own. But, in the first place, the range of their reading had been limited only to the poorer class of novels and stage plays; and, besides, none of them had had training in dramatic technik. Gordin, on the other hand, was not only thoroughly familiar with what is best in the literatures of Russia and Germany; he had made a particular study of the classic and the modern drama. He was a great lover of the theater, and he constantly kept in touch with the latest developments on the European and even on the American stage. Had he chosen to learn English and write on the contemporary drama, he might have made perhaps a greater critic even than he was a playwright. He preferred, however, to write in the humble dialect of the East Side Ghetto, and to acquaint its stage with the traditions and the practices of the "world's great drama". Thus it is Gordin far more than Goldfaden who represents the advent of European influence in the Yiddish theater—the most important
event in the history of the institution, and corresponding to the classical influence on the artistic development of the English drama.

Gordin's career as a dramatist may be divided into three periods. The first will comprise the plays coming between Siberia and Medea. Its chief characteristics have already been suggested above. It is the period of preparation, when Gordin was organizing his public, and clearing the rubbish of his predecessors out of his way to make room for the realistic drama of his second period. Most of the plays which belong here are written much in the same style and follow the same methods as were employed by Goldfaden and Lateiner, with only now and then a suggestion of the latent powers of the future Gordin. They have the same incoherent jumble of "story episodes, the extraneous choruses, the couplet-songs, and the ever-present clownish merrymaker characteristic of the preceding era.

But at least one play belonging in point of time to this period deserves special mention both as a work of considerable intrinsic merit and principally because it shows us the direction in which Gordin even at this time was tending. This play is Deborah, a Woman of High Extraction. It is the story of a young Jewish woman who has married below her station. She is a pampered, somewhat light-minded, though essentially pure-souled girl. To the town where she lives with her husband there arrives a scoundrelly young lawyer, a friend of her childhood, whose only business in life now is to seduce the daughters and wives of the "lower classes". Thru the assistance of Deborah's own ridiculous old sister, he contrives to renew his acquaintance with her, and is about to succeed in carrying out his designs when Deborah, in a flash of momentary suspicion puts his promises to the test by asking him to carry
her off, and lays bare his treacherous purpose. Broken in spirit, she leaves him and returns penitently to her husband. The latter presses her for an explanation, promising to forgive her, but she, overwhelmed with shame and regret, is unable to speak. This confirms his suspicions of her guilt, and in a fit of mad anger, he shoots her.

This play, somewhat crude in the development of its plot and in the finer details of characterization, is yet remarkable in many ways. The heroine is drawn with exquisite delicacy, especially in the later acts, and forms the first of a long series of beautiful feminine characters. There are a number of really powerful situations, notably at the close of each act; and the moral atmosphere of the whole is strongly suggestive of the vigorous tone of Gordin's later problem plays.

The second period of Gordin's activity is intimately bound up with the names of three of the greatest actors that he has ever trodden the boards of an American stage—Jacob Adler, Kenny Lipzin, and Bertha Kalish. Mr. Pinsky laments the influence of the actors upon the playwright, asserting, not without some truth, that Gordin too frequently wrote "parts" for his "stars" when he should have been depicting character. But students of European drama will recall how many of the greatest plays have owed their birth to just such circumstances. Cyranò was written for Guéquelin, Tartuffe for Molière himself, and as Professor Prander Matthews suggests, it is not at all unlikely that Shakspeare had Burbage in mind when composing Hamlet and Macbeth. Adler had long been seeking for the man who, in his own small way, might do for him what Rostand had done for the great French actor. But it was Mrs. Lipzin that first "discovered" Gordin. She had been a member of one of the early com-
paniss in Russia, and had come to America with Adler. Now she had for some years withdrawn from the stage, shurning to take part in performances which gave her no opportunity of displaying her art. When she met Gordin she requested him to adapt for her the Medea of Grillparzer. The play was a success and Mrs. Lipzin applied for another. This time Gordin met her request with an original work, one of the best he ever wrote. He had already made use of the plot of Shakspere's King Lear in his first period. Now, in the zenith of his power, he took the suggestion again, and created Mirele Efros, one of the most fascinating women not only in Yiddish but in all dramatic literature.

As Mirele Efros is the most typical as well as the best of the play of this period, it may be desirable to consider it somewhat at length. We can scarcely do more than mention the others. Mirele Efros belongs to the class of plays known in Yiddish by the appropriate name of Lebensbilder. Briefly defined, a Lebensbild is a realistic play of serious nature but involving no problem and teaching no philosophy. In the example under consideration, the story is of a kind calculated to appeal to every Jew. Mirele is a middle-aged woman, old-fashioned but broad-minded, a loving mother but strict as the sternest of fathers, of a poetical temperament but possessing a keen eye for business. Her husband died shortly after their marriage, leaving her two small children and a house tottering on bankruptcy. By her ability and the strength of her character she has succeeded in saving the firm and in accumulating a considerable fortune. As the curtain rises, we find her engaged in choosing a wire for her eldest son. With a few bold strokes the author sets her, life-size, before us. She realizes at
the first meeting with her daughter-in-law to-be that she has made a bad blunder; but her son loves Shendele, and she permits the wedding to take place. In the second act she makes another and a greater mistake when, to prevent misunderstandings between the young couple, she divides her fortune between her two sons. From this point on, the action centers around the inner tragedy of the heroin's life, which reaches its climax when her pride compels her to leave her children and her home. It is a powerful ending, comparable to the soul-catastrophes of some of Ibsen's greater plays; but Gordin weakens its effect by forcing in a fourth act, a sort of an epilog, in order to satisfy the popular craving for a happy ending.

Of the rest of the plays belonging to this group, some of the most beautiful were written for Mrs. Kalish, whose womanly charms and artistic grace had made her the inspiration and to some extent perhaps the model for most of Gordin's fascinating women. Sappho is the inner tragedy of a girl of ideals who has resolved to live her own life and to defy the conventions of society. In the now well-known Kreutzer Sonata, Etty Friedlander sacrifices her own happiness for the love of her father and her child. Three more plays were written "specially for Mrs. Lipzin". These are The Slaughter, The Oath, and The Orfan-Girl. The first of these is a powerful tragedy of Jewish life in the Russian Ghetto. Both the latter two present somewhat unfamiliar aspects of Jewish character. The Oath is a study of the superstitions of a Little-Russian peasant woman. The Orfan-Girl is in some respects Gordin's masterpiece. It is the only one of his plays in which he succeeded in creating a poetical heroin in the manner of Hauptmann. It depicts the career of an
imaginative child of nature whose life is wrecked through contact with the artificial society of the town.

In his third period, Gordin falls under the influence of Ibsen and the fantastic school of dramatists of Germany and France. This fact is of the greatest significance for the history of Yiddish dramatic literature. We have seen how Gordin at first consciously linked himself with the chain of development started by Goldfaden and continued by his school. Now we find him unwittingly building a bridge between himself and the generation which was to follow him. By this it is not meant that Gordin in any way directly influenced the dramatic writings of Pinsky, Hirschbein, or Asch. It merely emphasizes the supreme importance of Gordin's historical position in the evolution of the Yiddish artistic drama. Had it not been for such problem plays as *God Man and Devil* and *The True Power* it is very doubtful whether the philosophical *House of Z’vi* (Pinsky) or the symbolical *Twilight* (Hirschbein) would ever have been written in Yiddish.

About a half dozen dramas of unusual power and depth constitute the last group of Gordin's works. Of these *God Man and Devil* is the first and the best, *In the Shade of the Mountain Peaks* the last and the worst. Between them come *Truth*—whose plot was suggested by Zola's novel—dealing with the problem of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles; *The Unknown One*, a fantastic melodrama in which the Nietzschean theory of the individual is treated much more forcibly than in Mr. Shaw’s play; *The True Power*, the central idea of which is the influence of character in education; and two or three more of lesser importance.

The great weakness of these philosophical plays is that they
take Gordin out of his sphere. Following in the tracks of Goethe and Maeterlinck, he believed it to be necessary to bring in poetry, prologues in heaven, and fantastic, feyly-velveted fairies, whenever he attempted to deal with a serious problem. But Gordin was no poet. He was a prose dramatist, endowed as he was with the power of telling a story in crisp dialog and the rare gift of character analysis. He lacked the fine frenzy of the poet and had no knack for versifying. So far as I know, he never attempted poetry outside of his plays. The songs found scattered thru his operettes, if they were written by him, are the same poor stuff that one finds in Lateiner and Hürwitz. Fortunately, in the serious problem plays his poetry seldom interfered with the conduct of his plot or the development of his characters, as was shown by the German translator of God Man and Devil when he eliminated the irrelevant prolog in heaven and changed the fanciful title to the much more appropriate designation of Das Geld.

But Gordin was a born playwright. Like the Elizabethan Thomas Heywood, he knew how to create a situation, and like Ibsen he knew how to carry an action to a climax. Whatever may be said against them, his better plays are always effective on the stage; and that is after all the first requisit of a good play. His acts are not merely an excuse for the shifting of the scene; they represent real divisions in the action, or distinct stages in the development of the hero's character. In God Man and Devil, for example, the first act ends with Herschele's falling into the Devil's snare as he yields to the temptation of the lottery; by the end of the second he has sunk another step, and he divorces his faithful wife in favor of her young niece; in the third comes the climax of the whole drama when at the end of the act the "Man" is awakened in her...
Scheie's soul by the sight of the blood of his one time friend now his industrial slave; at the close of the fourth and last act the inevitable catastrophe of Herschele's suicide leaves us with a sense of the triumph of good over evil. Readers of Gordin will deem it no exaggeration if the assertion is ventured that he was the most artistic dramatist that ever wrote in America.

Kobrin and Libin.— Only a few words need be said of Gordin's followers. Like the disciples of Goldfaden, they are incapable of carrying on the work of their master. They have taken over only his faults and his tricks, which have gone to seed in their hands. Both Kobrin and Libin are excellent short-story writers but their powers are entirely unfitted for the drama. It is only because in our day the stage is the most remunerative of all literary pursuits that they have attempted writing for it at all. Of the two, Kobrin is the more skilful. His Blind Othello is a good story in dialog even if it is a poor play. Libin's drama of tears, or "onion-plays", as his Yiddish critics call it, is good neither for the closet nor for the stage.

The Russian School.— Until very recently the revived Yiddish theater in Russia had been getting its plays from America and from the old repertory of Goldfaden. But in the last four or five years the great literary men of the Old World have turned a sympathetic eye to the stage. With but very few exceptions however, the Russian Yiddish drama, although intended by its authors for the theater, is fit only to be read. The well-known humorist, Shalon-Alechen (S. Rabinovicz) has produced the only true comedy in the language. 1

1. See note at bottom of next page.
The great Perez, who has lately begun to celebrate the idea of Jewish mysticism in his poetry, has written two or three poetical dramas of the mystical variety. The Maeterlinckian school is represented by the young mystic Hirschbein, whose plays are sometimes really worth while, tho he would surely be a greater success at the realistic drama. Some of his best works are: Nevelah, ("Carrion") Beyond the River's Bank, and Twilight, in all of which he has sought "to express the inexpressibles".

Among these younger dramatists two deserve special mention. These are David Pinsky, now residing in New York, and Schalom Asch, now of Berlin. Both are filled with the enthusiasm and energy of the new Jew; both have a mission to their brethren and to the world at large; and both are forceful writers. Pinsky's best-known-play is The House of Z'vi, a heroic tragedy "of the last and only Jew", laid "everywhere" at the time of a massacre. Asch's God of Revenge is a masterly drama of contemporary life dealing with the degeneracy of the Jews. The latter has had an unprecedented success not only in the Yiddish theater, but was translated into Russian and German, and given before large audiences at Berlin and Moscow.

Conclusion.——We have traced the rise of the Yiddish drama out of the mimetic representations of the Feast of Purim, and followed its development thru its various stages until we have seen it take its humble place among the dramatic literatures of the nations.

Note.——Disperst and Scatterd, treating in a humorous vein of the breaking-up of the Jewish home into hostile camps of Zionists, Socialists, Assimilationists, etc., etc. The play was produced in 1904 by the Progressiv Dramatic Club of New York.
In less than half a century its history has gone through successive epochs of the European drama—passing from the semi-liturgical farces to the crude musical plays of Goldfaden and his school, then gradually to the drama of real life as represented by Gordin, and finally to the contemporary problem play.

Throughout this study we have sought to discover the social forces upon which the evolution of a people's literature always depends. This has enabled us to compare or contrast the growth of Jewish with that of Christian drama. Thus we have seen how the peculiarly sordid life of the intensely religious Jews in the middle ages gave rise to the farce, while with their happier and more worldly Christian neighbors tragedy preceded comedy. In a similar manner, that unique specimen of Hebrew serious drama—the Passover-Haggadah—was the product of the Jew's yearning for his past. Again, it was only after the Mendelssohnian Reform and the Renaissance that followed it, that the Ghetto was prepared to receive the theater.

From Goldfaden, the founder of the theater, we passed on to Gordin, the greatest figure in Yiddish dramatic history. We noted the similarity of the European influence which he brought with him to the Jewish stage, to the classical influence on the Christian drama at the time of the Renaissance. In closing we have called attention to the promising work of the two great representatives of the new Russian school, Pinsky and Asch. Resting as it does in the hands of these two brilliant young geniuses, the future of the Yiddish drama cannot but be a glorious one.