

SOURCE OF THE HATIKVAH MELODY.

By Dr. A. A. Roback

(Department of Psychology, Harvard University.)

We need not feel abashed at the fact that the well-known *Hatikvah* which has come to be regarded as the national anthem of the Jews is intoned in a foreign style, and contains so little of the characteristic features of Semitic music.

The origin of the *Hatikvah* air has been a source of speculation for some years. I remember reading quite some time ago an article by Israel Abrahams, I believe, who thought the tune was based on a Roumanian shepherd song. In his *By-Paths in Hebraic Bookland* (pp 359-360) the same author, after deriving the opening line of Imber's refrain from the Polish national anthem, "Poland Has Not Perished Yet," observes "So the melody is said to be a Polish folk-tune, but it closely resembles a favourite melody of the Sephardim." If it were true that our national song owes both its body and spirit to Polish aspirations, what food for sad reflection this circumstance might afford. Be it as it may, while prepared to concede the first part of Abrahams' claim, I am not at all sure that the allegation regarding the *Hatikvah* tune is any more than a mere conjecture, unless possibly the refrain may show such connection.

If my discovery is at all genuine, we must look to Bohemia, or what is now known as Czecho-Slovakia, for the musical source of the Zionist anthem; for the leading motive in the second part of Smetana's beautiful symphonic cycle, "Ma Vlast" (My Country) contains the following striking passage which no Jew can hear without experiencing that glow of familiarity that comes to one upon suddenly recognising a dear friend in a distant land.

This theme occurs several times in the movement which describes the Moldau River (Vltava). The variations, in an accentuated but graceful rhythm on the same theme, are of course more beautiful than the theme itself as may be gathered from the few measures given below, but they lack the primitiveness of the folk melody, which is so characteristic of the main theme.

From the notes in the third and fourth measures of the main *motif* it is apparent that Smetana's

idea was altogether different from that expressed in *Hatikvah*. The lyric beauty of the poem, as conveyed by these notes especially, bears no trace of exhortation. It merely describes with a feeling of nostalgia the flow of the stream in the woods which gradually widens into a river as it goes to make up the Moldau. The Moldau strain given out at first by the violins and woodwind instruments is originally an air of reflection, the pensive mood of a feeling individual—a poet. The *Hatikvah* song has been cast into a social mould by means of changes in the tempo and alterations largely in the last measure, where the melody ascends aggressively before dropping to the tonic. In spite of this change, however, the resemblance between the Czech *motif* and its Jewish off-spring is most marked.

* * *

It was in 1881 that the founder of the Czech national school of music (the Bohemian Beethoven, as he was sometimes called not only on account of his deafness but because of the sad existence which Smetana had led the last few years of his life) gave expression to his nationalistic sentiments in this melodious symphonic poem. There can be no doubt that many of the simpler motives running through this cycle are Czech folk melodies, and it is more than probable that our *Hatikvah* strain, which seems to be descriptive of the course of the Moldau river is originally a folk song of Bohemia.

Has the *Hatikvah* tune been borrowed direct from Smetana's music? This is hardly likely, condering that Smetana's music has been so little known until recently. In fact we have no good reason for supposing that the composer of *Hatikvah* was aware that he had been plagiarising. The inability to recognise assimilated material (and thus regarding it as original) is not uncommon among artists, and Felix Mendelssohn is said to have been saved from a charge of plagiary only through the alertness of a friend who, on reading the manuscript of the famous "Elijah" oratorio, pointed out to the celebrated composer that one of the leading airs had originally appeared in another composer's work. Mendelssohn is reported to have promptly changed the music for that part.

* * *

The Slavic antecedents of *Hatikvah* are, if not quite appropriate, at least intelligible in the light of history and race

psychology. In the first place, Imber, author of *Hatikvah*, who was born in Galicia, was well acquainted with the Polish hope of political independence, which not so long ago seemed impossible of realisation. Poland, torn to pieces by three empires, called forth the sympathy and admiration of many poets and musicians. We can understand, therefore, the impulse which led Imber to model a song of his after a Polish inspiration. It may be remarked here that not only the refrain, which Israel Abrahams refers to is of Polish origin, but the stereotyped beginning of the body of the song, "While there is (are)" strongly suggests in form the spirited Polish anthem, known also as Dombrowski's March (*Jeszcze Polska*).

* * *

As to the Czecho-Slovakian motive incorporated in *Hatikvah*, it must be pointed out that the Czechs, like the Poles, were held in abject submission without their daring so much as to entertain hopes of national independence. It is true that such men as Professor Masaryk, Smetana and Dvorak did indulge in dreams which *Mirabile dictu* came true in consequence of the European conflagration, but their aspirations were regarded as mere wishes except perhaps in a cultural sense. It is gratifying then to know that unlike Poland which in its day of triumph has become intoxicated with imperialistic dreams to the extent of tyrannising over its minority nationalities, Czecho-Slovakia, with its cultured and truly liberal Professor Masaryk at its head, has not shown itself unworthy of its liberation, at any rate so far as its attitude toward the Jews is concerned. And when the simple folk motive resounding along the banks of the Moldau blends with its more popular Jewish variant chanted in the same vicinity, many a hope which, in the language of the Midrashim, is the secret of Israel's existence, will be joined to a strain that, to employ a Cabbalistic figure, had already received "Tikkun" (Redemption).

The General Dealer's business registered Receiver of Revenue by Jim Posim. 157/158, and Magalie Edegen, 193304 at 45, Von Erandis Street, Turfontein, has been transferred to 18, Albert Street. O. 28.4.11

Zionism is simply to-day's phase of the unyielding effort of the Jewish people to make good the Promise of the Promised Land.

—Horace M. Kallen.

Drink and Enjoy

Mazawattee Tea

Refuse Substitutes.