



The Singer of Youth

It was Bialik who once said that Zalman Schneur was born a giant. Preeminently a lyricist, he is nevertheless the manliest poet of his age. Lyric softness, subtleness and beauty have not mitigated or mollified his passionate outbursts against the conventional falsehoods of our daily life.

Schneur is *par excellence* the Singer of Youth. His are all characteristics of youth; vehement hate of convention, the search for relentless truth, an indomitable will to life and achievement. Even his apparent pessimism is the trait of youthfulness—"The gods are dead and man has not yet asserted himself"—this is the key to his aspect on life.

There are poets who carve or chisel or paint. Schneur always sings. Harmony is the soul of his poetry. If he lacks the pathos of Bialik, his song has a matchless rhythm, vigor, virility, and beauty. He always seems to dip his pen in the Fountain of Youth. He alone seems to know the mysterious winding paths to that magic fountain, and to draw its crystal drops that quench the thirst of the straying wayfarer in the desert of present day Jewish life.

Whether Schneur sings of his girl, "upon whose forehead still vibrates the dew of childhood, and who gave him her heart while shadow embraced shadow," or whether he sings of his wish that "an autumn wind may carry him off and leave him alone like a patch of cloud;" whether he implores his sweetheart, Heine-like, to doze upon his breast that he might carry her away to the land which

"Free and alone we inhabit
The land for me and you—
When hungry our food shall be
starlight,
When thirsty—our drink shall be
dew;"

his song always, like a silver brook, reflects the cloudless enchanting sky of youth.

He sings:

"And when a golden ray comes
down
And knocks at the door of thy
heart—
Bid it come in!
Say: 'be welcomed, ray:
Be my father, comforter and
prophet . . .
Thou art a belated guest,
But I have still for thee
Shreds of hope and dreams un-
guessed"

And further:

"In the ruins of the temple of my
soul,
In a spot that is hidden and dark,
There's left a spark
A sacred spark of my golden
altar—
Blow it into flame . . ."

Or:

"Be a prophet of all that is good:
If thy prophecy be false, be
cheerful;
If thy vision be false, be
beautiful,
My hungry heart will yet
Willingly go into thy golden
net—
And believe thee."

This is the real and true secret of Poetry — and of Schneur's poetry in particular. The harmonious and the beautiful can never

be false, for their falsehoods are far truer than our quotidian prosaic truth.

Schneur has apparently no new themes. His themes are as old as the sky and the hills, but for that very reason they are also ever new. Life, death, love, field, woods, sunrise, and sunset—these are very old themes, but with the poet's magic touch, each of them is a revelation.

HOW many love-songs have been sung? Millions! And yet we are charmed and fascinated when we hear the poet calling to his sweetheart:

"Rosy apples, deep-green shadows
Velvet meads the grove sur-
rounding;
And the laughter of the river
Far and wide and loud
resounding!

Come to me, my angel—sweet-
heart,
Ripened fruit on boughs will
screen us;

Me—an apple; you—an apple,
And a stolen kiss between us."



Does that mean that Schneur sees nothing but velvet meads and hears nothing but the laughter of the river? Oh, no! He also sees and hears the sadder things of life.

Pale and weary lies the mother
In her chamber small and dim,
Lulls her hungry little darling,
And a song she sings to him.
Once there lived a cruel monarch
Robed in purple, crowned with
gold;

An Appreciation of Zalman Schneur

By

PHILIP M. RASKIN

"Mother dear, no king is cruel
As King Hunger and King
Cold."

As a matter of fact, Schneur's poetry doesn't escape the *tone de douleur* so characteristic of all Jewish poetry, that sad undertone which always betrays the child of the Ghetto. Only, his pathos never degenerates into mere sentimentality. It is this pathos, finding expression through a healthy harmonious and youthful soul, that lends to his songs their charm and beauty. "The most joyous poet," says Oscar Wilde, "is not he who sows the desolate highways of life with the barren seed of laughter, but he who makes his sorrow most musical." This is, indeed, the real meaning of joy in art and in poetry—that incommunicable element of artistic delight, which in poetry comes from what Keats called "the sensuous life of verse."

Schneur's poetic genius is often compared with that of Bialik. Some critics even assert that the former loses little by this comparison. This, to my mind, is hardly just. Bialik's soul is like the bush Moses saw in the wilderness—it burns with a never consuming sacred flame. Whoever approaches within its range must remove his footwear, for he treads on sacred soil. Bialik's Song of Chastisement is like a mighty thunderstorm. Schneur's song is like a spring shower, the occasional lightnings of which delight and refresh. Schneur, too, protests against man's injustice to man and the world's injustice to the Jew, but his protest is the challenge of youth.

"I see
On every parting of the road,
And in the night-robber's huts
and caves,
My ancient treasures wallowing
in the dust

"The treasures of my soul, the
gist of countless ages
Lie tattered and torn into shreds.
From every tower I hear
The voice of my God calling,—
From every hill and wood—
The pealing song of my life.

"I see the shreds of my people's
soul,
My hope, my land,
All trodden in the stranger's dust,
All hidden in the shade of alien
icons,
With wrath and guile regarding
me,
Whenever I approach them . . .

"But,
I scorn you!
With the scorn of an ancient
nobleman;
You—all slaves and upstarts,
Respect for my scorn!
I carry it like wine in my flaggon
Forty jubilees long . . .

"Young nations cannot drink it.
These nations—parvenus,
The brats of history, who but
yesterday burst from their
shell.

'Tis not for them to drink my
liquor strong and pure
Without spitting black hatred . .
Be blessed, my scorn,
And keep me from destruc-
tion"
You saved me till this day,

Schneur is still the youngest of our poets—not in years of course—but in form, in the mode of expression, in the handling of his themes.

Schneur is no preacher. The true poet who enters the serene House of Beauty leaves all conventional codes outside. In the upper spheres of life, the harmonious and the ethical merge into one.

One more phase of Schneur's genius should be recorded. He has proved, perhaps to a greater extent than any other Hebrew poet, in what variety of shades and nuances modern Hebrew is capable of expression. It is the irony of fate that a language which has been regarded as "dead" for centuries, has produced one of the world's liveliest modern poets.

THERE has been a world of controversy as to the relation of the poet's style to his theme. Some people seem to imagine that the hammer of golden beauty may well have a handle of wooden style. This is quite erroneous. Style and theme are one. Every artistic creation is born with its own style. Not only did God make man in His own image, but every true artist makes his creations in his own style. Emotion and idea which are not born with their particular style and form, is a dead-born child. Ideas may be old, and—according to Emerson—few. But style and form are always new.

That is why most poetic productions are not translatable unless recreated. Style and form are the silver nets in which an elusive mood, sentiment or idea is caught and brought into the world.

(Continued on page 19)

A Refugee Settlement in Holland

A Work of Reconstruction

NOT without reason is Holland called the Netherlands, the Low Countries, for a considerable part of its territory is below sea level. The North Sea cuts deep into the inland, forming a wide "bay" called the Zuider Zee. Frequently in the past the Zuider Zee stepped beyond its borders over the dykes, causing much destruction. By a bold decision the Dutch Government undertook to shut off this bay from the North Sea in order to reclaim most of the land and add a number of fertile polders (reclaimed land) to its area. They build a long embankment, a great feat of engineering, joining the two banks in the northern part of the Zuider Zee, thus closing up the "sea." Enormous sluices regulate the water of the artificial lake which has now been formed. The work of draining this lake is in full swing, and one part of it is already completed.

When I visited this land recently swept over by the restless waters of the sea, it was still fallow—the sea waters had left the soil very salty but experts foretell that after a short period of preparation, it will become excellent, fertile soil. There were few houses as yet—here and there a cafe and a gas station, and the beginnings of some villages. To one of these I directed my steps for there the highest type of reconstruction was achieved, the reclamation of despairing souls and blighted lives. Werkdorp (Workers' Village), established in 1934 by the Jewish Committee for German Refugees, is the expression of Holland's fine traditions of liberty and religious freedom. Living up to its high, historic standards of tolerance, the Dutch government has given practical assistance to the exiles. It leased this plot of land, now 500 acres, on easy terms to the Committee for use as a training farm, a Hachsharah Camp. The Dutch government has also facilitated the financing of the settlement by allowing the settlers to sell their products. This, together with the fees received from the students, forms the greater part of their income. The remainder is supplied by the Jewish Committee in Holland with assistance from England and America.

The village is in the shape of a semicircle. The inhabitants live in

wooden barracks which in Dutch fashion are spotlessly clean and gaily decorated with simple flowers. Every hut is divided into two bedrooms, light and bright and containing six beds each. Some of the refugees have come directly from the elementary schools, most of them are older. Many had already entered professions in Germany. Their training lasts for two years, after which they must seek homes in all parts of the globe, South Africa, Australia, North America and South America, but the majority hope to go to the land of their fathers — to Palestine. That is their greatest desire. The day I visited them they were anxiously waiting to hear the final results of the allotment certificates for Palestine. Who was to be allowed to enter the Promised Land? How they envied those who had already received their permits and were sure of entrance. Most of the three hundred pupils who have completed their training in Werkdorp have found their way to Palestine. There are about 150 pupils in residence at any one time.

Among the young colonists in Palestine those with a Dutch training have proved to be a very great asset. They have been trained to found new settlements and till land that has not been cultivated before. D. A. Ruppin considers Werkdorp the most perfect preparation for Haluzim.

Of the instructors in agriculture, two are Dutch, but most of the teachers are German Jews. The director of the village is an energetic Jew who came from Palestine, to teach the Hebrew language and culture. The colonists obtain their own gas from the soil. They possess more than fifty cows, have their own poultry farm, bake their own bread and in the dairy, prepare their own butter and cheese. They re-

ceive training in agriculture and horticulture, in carpentry and metalwork. The most up-to-date machinery and tools are found in the workshops. In the living rooms are beautiful pieces of furniture made by their own craftsmen, one of whom was a Berlin lawyer. The most visible sign of their skill is the new centre building, erected by the students themselves to replace the original wooden barn. The style is modern — bricks being used as material. This building now contains the offices, classrooms, library and the hall where all the cultural, recreational and religious activities take place.

They all learn Hebrew. English is taught to those planning to proceed to America or to South Africa and other parts of the British Empire; and Spanish to the future South Americans. The evenings are given up to study and delightful cultural and musical activities.

I was deeply struck by the intense intellectual atmosphere and the happy spirit that prevailed throughout the whole settlement, for here were young men and women who had to flee their country, leave their kith and kin and carry in their memories their own suffering still fresh, and that of their dear ones, still unrelieved. Yet their new surroundings, the new land, their new activities, combined with the atmosphere of freedom give them new life, restore to them their own souls and give them hope for the future.

Professor Norman Bentwich, who visited the village very recently, writes in the Manchester Guardian: "Experience has justified those who made the bold start; the number of young persons in Germany who seek preparation for a new life is steadily augmented; the good will of the Dutch government remains assured; Werkdorp has become a permanent institution . . . a symbol of the resolve of the young Jew and Jewess to prepare for a simple creative life."

It is well to know in these times of oppression, persecution, intolerance and war hysteria, that there are such spots where reconstruction of Jewish lives is carried on steadily and unobtrusively under the protection of a friendly government, an example and an inspiration for others to follow.

THE SINGER OF YOUTH

(Concluded from page 9).

Schneur's style is original. It is strong, graceful, playful, and harmonious. Its mystic beauty delights and inspires. His is the song that flirts with shadows. It is the deep mystery of mystic depth. Like the smile of a child it enchants and delights.

"Dark the sky and pale the earth,
Storm and grief comes with
the night;
But my room is warm and bright,
And my soul—it bathes in
light.

"May the tempest wail and weep,
To its tune my heart will dance,
Waves of rapture who can quell,
Or dim a flame-born glance?"

Schneur was born in White Russia, in the town of Shklov. I know the town very well. It happens also to be my birth-place. This town is clustered with ancient Jewish legends and traditions. The old "Shul" in Shklov dates from the Fifteenth Century and is an edifice of exalting beauty and grandeur. The place has played a unique role in Russo-Jewish history. Unlike Lithuania, Shklov is surrounded by great parks and gardens. It has the wonderful river Dnieper. It has also a magnificent lake in the midst of the city. It is not only replete with Jewish types and Jewish folk-lore, but also with some enchanting landscapes. Perhaps this is why Shklov was the birth place of several prominent Jewish poets and artists.

From his first love-song to his latest "Pirkei Yaar," his song breathes youth and life.

Schneur has recently won the Bialik prize for his latest book just mentioned; but he has long won the prize of universal Jewish recognition as the Singer of Youth of the Jewish Renaissance.

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