

certain sums to some of the projects deemed appropriate to the goals of the Society as specified in its statutes, the committee has decided to set aside three-eighths of the Society's income this year, for support of needy Jewish students in the institutions of higher learning; and one-eighth of the Society's income for the promotion of the Russian lan-

guage and useful books among the Jews. . . .

Further, we will increase the stipends given to students in the colleges in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Cracow and Derpt, in the St. Petersburg Medical School, the Technical Institute, the Art School and the Music Conservatory.

NOTES

1. The Society for the Promotion of Culture Among Jews was founded in St. Petersburg in 1863 by members of the Jewish upper bourgeoisie; the society was under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The principal reason for the founding of the society, according to Leon Rosenthal (1817–1887), its first treasurer, was to address a charge made by the government: "whenever Jewish leaders broached the question of civic rights to government representatives, the latter countered by charging them with the task of educating the masses of Jewry" (Rosenthal, *Toldot hevrat marbei haskalah beyisrael beerez Rusyah*, p. vii).

The society accordingly set as its task, as its program reflects, the preparation of its brethren for emancipation and integration into Russian society and culture.

2. Hebrew periodical appearing intermittently in Warsaw from 1862 to 1931. The initial object of the periodical—until 1879, when Nahum Sokolow (1860–1936) joined its editorial staff and changed its direction to emphasize Hebrew literature and Zionist ideology—was to disseminate a knowledge of the natural sciences and mathematics among the Jews of the Pale.

ISAAC DOV LEVINSOHN

18. Yiddish Is a Corrupt Jargon (1828)¹

This language which we speak here in this country, which we borrowed from the Germans and which is called Judeo-German—this language is completely corrupted. This corruption is a consequence of the eclectic nature of the language, a mixture of corrupted words taken from Hebrew, Russian, French, Polish, as well as from German, and even the German words are mispronounced and slurred. Moreover, this, our language, cannot serve us except for popular usage and simple conversations. If we wish to formulate concepts about higher things, Judeo-German will not suffice. . . .

Why Judeo-German?—From these obser-

vations [concerning the shortcomings of Judeo-German] you will readily acknowledge the need to study at least one pure language and know it well. And there is no need to add that the language of the country we live in is doubtlessly the one we are obligated to learn correctly. Thus we can ask: in this country, why speak Judeo-German? Either pure German or Russian. Not only is Russian the language of the country, it is also an especially pure and rich language. It is not lacking in pleasant tones or aesthetic form and it contains all the elements considered necessary for the perfect language (as I have explained at length in the introduction

Source: Isaac Dov Levinsohn, *Teudah be-Israel* (Vilna, 1828), pp. 34–36. Trans. by D. Goldman.

to my book in Hebrew, *The Elements of Russian Language*, which I wrote for the benefit of Jewish youth and which will be published soon, if God grant me life. I conclude from our discussion so far that it is a great obligation and necessary

NOTE

1. Isaac Dov Levinsohn (1788–1855) was the first great protagonist of *haskalah* in Russia. He was hailed by his contemporaries as the "Moses Mendelssohn of Russia." His works are polemical, excoriating traditional Jewish practices, particularly Hasidic, and advocating

PEREZ SMOLENSKI

19. Hebrew—Our National Language

. . . When people ask what the result of the Hebrew language will give us I answer: It will give us self-respect and it will bind us indissolubly to the nation. Other peoples may erect monuments . . . and spill their blood like water in order to perpetuate their own names or name, and the only memory remains us from the destruction of the Temple. Hebrew language. Many [Jews] despise it, scorn it, and those who do, deny the name of the entire people . . . they are traitors to their name and faith. They exhort us: "L

NOTE

1. Perez Smolenskin (1840–1885), Russian novelist and publicist. In 1868 he founded the Hebrew monthly *Hashahar* [The Dawn] under his dedicated editorship, became a significant Hebrew literary platform of the time in its late period. Smolenskin sought to steer a middle course between what he held to be the Scylla of th

Source: Perez Smolenskin [Foreword], *Hashahar*

... large and useful books among the Jews. ...
 ... further, we will increase the stipends given
 ... to students in the colleges in St. Petersburg,
 ... Moscow, Kiev, Cracow and Derpt, in
 ... St. Petersburg Medical School, the Techni-
 ... cal Institute, the Art School and the Music
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... society accordingly set as its task, as its pro-
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 ... in Warsaw from 1862 to 1931. The initial object of
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1828)¹

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... reform and the transition to a life of labor and
 ... agriculture. This selection is taken from his most
 ... influential work, *Teudah be-Israel* [Testimony in Is-
 ... rael], written in 1823 but, due to fierce Orthodox
 ... opposition, not published until 1828. The Russian
 ... government gave him an award for this work.

PEREZ SMOLENSKIN

19. Hebrew—Our National Fortress (1868)¹

*more-nationalism
 literary not spoken
 revival*

... When people ask what the renewal of
 ... the Hebrew language will give us I shall an-
 ... swer: It will give us self-respect and courage,
 ... it will bind us indissolubly to the name Israel.
 ... Other peoples may erect stone monu-
 ... ments . . . and spill their blood like water in
 ... order to perpetuate their own name and lan-
 ... guage. . . . We have no monument, country
 ... or name, and the only memory remaining to
 ... us from the destruction of the Temple is the
 ... Hebrew language. Many [Jews] despise and
 ... scorn it, and those who do, denigrate our
 ... entire people . . . they are traitors to their
 ... name and faith. They exhort us: "Let us be

... like all the other nations." I answer: Let us,
 ... like other nations, pursue knowledge and
 ... reject evil, let us, like other nations, take
 ... pride in our origins and acknowledge our
 ... language and national honor. Our faith must
 ... not be a source of shame to us. . . . We are
 ... secure if we hold fast to the ancient language
 ... which has accompanied us from country to
 ... country, to the tongue in which our poets
 ... and prophets spoke, in which our forefathers
 ... cried aloud with their dying breath. . . . Our
 ... language is our national fortress; if it disap-
 ... pears into oblivion the memory of our people
 ... will vanish from the face of the earth.

NOTE

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 ... brew novelist and publicist. In 1868 he founded
 ... the Hebrew monthly *Hashahar* [The Dawn], which,
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 ... between what he held to be the Scylla of the Ortho-

... dox obscurantism and the Charybdis of assimila-
 ... tion. He found this path in Jewish nationalism.
 ... Accordingly, he was a passionate advocate of the
 ... Hebrew language and literature, which he deemed
 ... to be the ground of Jewish nationhood and the
 ... surrogate for a national territory.

Source: Perez Smolenskin [Foreword], *Hashahar* 1 (1868), pp. v–vii. Trans. by L. Sachs.

MENDELE MOYKHER SFORIM

20. My Soul Desired Yiddish (1862)¹

... Here I am, observing the ways of our people and attempting to write for them stories from Jewish sources in the holy tongue, yet most of them do not even know this tongue. Their language is Yiddish. And what life is there for a writer, what profit in his labor, if he is of no use to his people? The question—"for whom do I toil"²—has not ceased to trouble me. . . . The Yiddish language in my day was an empty vessel, containing nothing but slang and trite, meaningless phrases. . . . The women and the poor would read Yiddish without understanding it, while the rest of the people, even if they didn't know how to read in another language, were ashamed to be caught reading Yiddish, lest this private folly of theirs become public knowledge. And if one of them gave in to temptation and read a Yiddish book and, enjoying it, laughed over it, he immediately justified his deed by saying to himself it was unintentional. Indeed he would justify his reaction by dismissing the book as women's literature, capable of provoking laughter but not thought. Those of our writers who know Hebrew, our holy tongue, and continue to write in it, do not care whether or not the people understand it. These writers look down on Yiddish and

greatly scorn it. And if one out of many occasionally remembered the cursed jargon and wrote a few lines in it, he kept his works hidden, so as to escape criticism and ridicule. How perplexed I was then, when I thought of writing in Yiddish, for I feared it would entail the ruin of my reputation—so my friends in the Hebrew literature movement had warned me. But my love for the useful defeated false pride, and I decided to take pity on the much-scorned language and do what I could for my people. One of my friends [Shiye-Mordkhe Lifshits³] joined me in persuading the publisher of *Hameliz*⁴ to publish a periodical in Yiddish, the language of our people. The publisher agreed and *Kol mevasser*⁵ began to appear with great success. I was soon inspired to write my first story in Yiddish: "*Dos kleine Menshele, oder a lebens beshraybung fun Avrom Yitzhok Takif*," gedruckt b'hishtadlus Mendele Moykher Sforim.⁶ . . . And other stories and books followed.

My first story made a big impact on the Jewish masses and was soon published in a third edition . . . and then in a fourth edition. . . . That story laid the cornerstone of modern Yiddish literature. From then on, my soul desired only Yiddish, and I dedicated myself entirely to it. . . .

NOTES

1. Mendele Moykher Sforim is the pen name of Russian, Hebrew and Yiddish author Shalom Jacob Abramowitsch (c. 1836–1917). Beloved for his affectionate descriptions and satires of the Jewish masses of Russia in the late nineteenth century, he was an innovator in artistic prose style in both Hebrew and Yiddish literature; his influence on the latter was particularly marked.

Source: Mendele Moykher Sforim, "Autobiographical Notes," *The Complete Works of Mendele Moykher Sforim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1947), pp. 4–5. Cited by permission. Trans. by D. Goldman.

2. Title of poem by Judah Leib Gordon; see document 9, in this chapter.

3. Shiye-Mordkhe Lifshits (1829–1878) was one of the pioneers of Yiddish literature.

4. *Hameliz* [The Advocate] was a Hebrew periodical that appeared from 1860 to 1904; from 1886 to 1904 it appeared as a daily. Considered the central organ of Russian Jewry, it was moderately

conservative and very influential.

5. A Yiddish supplement of *Hameliz*.

6. ["The little man, or the life of Abraham I

AARON LIEBERMANN

21. The Jewish Question

In all countries about to acknowledge dignity of every child of man, the quest of Jewish civil rights has, in the context of normal social life, become increasingly important. As of now, however, this quest is still out of place in the countries of the East where it has not yet occurred to anyone to consider someone not of his tribe or of his language as human. [This question has not occurred to the] barbaric peoples nor to the yet more barbaric rulers. In America and Western Europe, on the other hand, the question has already been forgotten, there the concept "man" has dispelled concepts of nation and faith—at least among the enlightened. Only in those countries bordering the East and the West—the settlements of the Slavic tribes—will some parley over the Jewish question without solving the "unsolvable riddle." . . .

[In Eastern Europe] the Jews and their supporters have been compelled to fight their lives in a defensive war against enemies waging a war of offense, and their stratagems greatly vary depending on the features of the battlefield. In Rumania Jews seek refuge from persecution and oppression in the protection of the powerful kings. And sometimes they gain satisfaction by hurling insult and abuse back at those who vilify them. It is understandable that they then completely overstep bounds, seizing upon the doings of their opponents to heap scorn and contempt on the ears of the Rumanian people. For the misdeeds

Source: Aaron Liebermann, "Sheelat hayehudim"

MENDELE MOYKHER SFORIM My Soul Desired Yiddish (1862)¹

Here I am, observing the ways of our people and attempting to write for them stories from Jewish sources in the holy tongue, but most of them do not even know this language. Their language is Yiddish. And if life is there for a writer, what profit in labor, if he is of no use to his people? The question—"for whom do I toil"²—has not troubled me. . . . The Yiddish language in my day was an empty vessel, containing nothing but slang and trite, meaningless phrases. . . . The women and children would read Yiddish without understanding it, while the rest of the people, if they didn't know how to read in another language, were ashamed to be caught reading Yiddish, lest this private folly of theirs become public knowledge. And if one of them gave in to temptation and read a Yiddish book and, enjoying it, laughed over it, he immediately justified his deed by saying to himself it was unintentional. Indeed, he would justify his reaction by dismissing the book as women's literature, capable of provoking laughter but not thought. Those of our writers who know Hebrew, our holy tongue, and continue to write in it, do not know whether or not the people understand it. These writers look down on Yiddish and

greatly scorn it. And if one out of many occasionally remembered the cursed jargon and wrote a few lines in it, he kept his works hidden, so as to escape criticism and ridicule. How perplexed I was then, when I thought of writing in Yiddish, for I feared it would entail the ruin of my reputation—so my friends in the Hebrew literature movement had warned me. But my love for the useful defeated false pride, and I decided to take pity on the much-scorned language and do what I could for my people. One of my friends [Shiye-Mordkhe Lifshits³] joined me in persuading the publisher of *Hameliz*⁴ to publish a periodical in Yiddish, the language of our people. The publisher agreed and *Kol mevasser*⁵ began to appear with great success. I was soon inspired to write my first story in Yiddish: "*Dos kleine Menshele, oder a lebens beshraybung fun Avrom Yitzhok Takif*," gedruckt b'hishtadlus Mendele Moykher Sforim.⁶ . . . And other stories and books followed.

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5. A Yiddish supplement of *Hameliz*.

6. ["The little man, or the life of Abraham Isaac

Takif," printed with the assistance of Mendele Moykher Sforim] (Odessa: Kol mevasser, 1864).

AARON LIEBERMANN 21. The Jewish Question in Eastern Europe (1877)¹

In all countries about to acknowledge the dignity of every child of man, the question of Jewish civil rights has, in the context of normal social life, become increasingly important. As of now, however, this question is still out of place in the countries of the East where it has not yet occurred to anyone to consider someone not of his tribe or allegiance as human. [This question has not yet occurred to the] barbaric peoples nor to their yet more barbaric rulers. In America and Western Europe, on the other hand, the question has already been forgotten, for there the concept "man" has dispelled the concepts of nation and faith—at least among the enlightened. Only in those countries bordering the East and the West—the settlements of the Slavic tribes—will some still parley over the Jewish question without resolving the "unsolvable riddle." . . .

[In Eastern Europe] the Jews and their supporters have been compelled to fight for their lives in a defensive war against enemies waging a war of offense, and their strategems greatly vary depending on the features of the battlefield. In Rumania the Jews seek refuge from persecution and oppression in the protection of the powerful kings. And sometimes they gain satisfaction by hurling insult and abuse back at those who vilify them. It is understandable that they then completely overstep bounds, and seizing upon the doings of their opponents heap scorn and contempt on the entire Rumanian people. For the misdeeds of

some, they defame an entire nation with curses of the marketplace. . . . These strategems may help, but woe to the member of the household who seeks the protection of strangers to defend him from the blows of his father or brother! On most occasions they will manage to break all his bones before his protectors rush to his aid. In the land of Galicia, the Jews are strong enough to defend themselves without outside help. Those Jews with sidelocks as twisted and as long as our exile, who wear cloth pants, stockings, and all the other old Polish garb—now called "Jewish clothing"—those men are politicians and diplomats! Positioned between the Germans and the Poles, they always lean toward that faction whose way seems right to their sight. There, in Galicia, the Jews truly stand on one footing with the other national tribes as far as politics are concerned, and in a time of need they will come here to Vienna with their shoes and stockings, their sidecurls and *zjupitse*² to stand before the Kaiser. The Jews of Russia are not like that. Only rarely may their voices be heard speaking of their enemies in the Russian journals. It is not a voice of jubilation but—whoever hears may laugh—a voice of supplication spoken halfheartedly, gravely and in a spirit of utter defeat. We know that our brethren in Russia apologize that they have not been permitted to respond to their enemies as they would like, and we can believe them. . . . But in fact it is all the same to us if they respond in a tone of jubilation,

Source: Mendele Moykher Sforim, "Autobiographical Notes," *The Complete Works of Mendele Moykher Sforim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1947), pp. 4–5. Cited by permission. Trans. by D. Goldman.

Source: Aaron Liebermann, "Sheelat hayehudim," *Haemet* 1 (Summer 1877), pp. 1–5. Trans. by A. Schwartz.