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## “ THE JEWISH YEAR.”

MRS. HENRY LUCAS' new volume of metrical translations from the devotional writings of mediaeval Hebrew poets<sup>1</sup>, is the first successful attempt to supply a collection of hymns “for the use of English Jews.” Curiously enough, just at the moment when Hebrew is again becoming the living language of the Jews of Palestine, a new and better group of translators is making the Hebrew soul live again in an English body. On the one side, there is progress towards the nationalization of Hebrew in the East. The secular songs of Europe are turned into Hebrew, and in the little colony at Moza I heard Schubert's *Serenade* sung in Judah Leo Gordon's Hebrew version. I saw Mr. David Yellin's admirable Hebrew translation of the *Vicar of Wakefield* in the hands of several Palestinian Jews. These are but two incidents indicative of the enthusiasm of Palestinian Jews for Hebrew: a language prattled by the little girls in the playground at Jaffa, and used (with more or less fluency) at public meetings in Jerusalem. But it cannot be denied that, concurrently with this movement, Hebrew is becoming a stranger tongue every day to the mass of Jews in England and America. It would be unfair, however, to attribute the need of Mrs. Lucas' book to ignorance of ordinary Hebrew. The Hebrew of the mediaeval Jewish hymns is so difficult that a Hebraist good enough to get his First at a Semitic Tripos in the University might find himself unable to construe a stanza

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Year, a Collection of Devotional Poems for Sabbaths and Holidays throughout the Year*, translated and composed by ALICE LUCAS (Macmillan & Co., London, 1898).

of Kalir or even of Jehuda Halevi. Yet these poets deserved a better fate than has befallen them in England. It is not too much to say that English translators have, on the whole, so mutilated and caricatured their originals that they have robbed them both of poetry and prayerfulness. By her *Songs of Zion*, and her fuller and more adequate *Jewish Year*, Mrs. Lucas has restored some at least of these mediaeval hymns to English synagogues and homes.

Jews indeed have succeeded far better as translators into than from the Hebrew. Salkinson's Hebrew *Paradise Lost* and *Othello*, to name no others, are masterpieces of translation. One country, however, has enjoyed a happier fate than the rest. The German Jews were fortunate enough to have as the translators of the Hebrew hymns writers who were at once scholars and men of taste. German translations of the mediaeval Jewish hymns are as old as the nineteenth century. Not the least of Zunz's services to modern Judaism was his warm rebuke of the indifference displayed by his brethren to this branch of their literature, and his remonstrance roused even Heine to enthusiastic eulogy of Jehuda Halevi. Zunz himself, prince of bibliographers, was no mean translator, and the specimens given by him in his *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* (1855) are among the best of their kind. Somewhat earlier than Zunz, Steinschneider (an author better known as a bibliographer than as a litterateur) had published some translations in his *Manna* (1847). Far more than both of these the Rabbi-scholar, Michael Sachs, effected in his *Die religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien*. But Sachs did not rest content with this vindication of the Spanish-Jewish hymnologists. He felt that justice had to be done also to the *poetanim* (Gk. ποιηται) of the extra-Spanish school. His famous edition of the Machzor or festival prayer-book (1856-1857) was a plea in behalf of Kalir and his like against the harsh judgment of critics from the day of Abraham ibn Ezra in the twelfth century to Professor Graetz in the

nineteenth. Graetz was a fervid admirer of the Spanish-Jewish poets, with their symmetrical form, their smooth artifices. For Kalir and his imitators Graetz had no appreciation. Kalir deserves all that Graetz urges against him<sup>1</sup>. He did violence to the Hebrew language, and "in place of word-pictures" gave his bewildered readers "obscure riddles." But the Kalirian *poetanim* were often inspired, and Sachs proved that, especially in their Selichoth (penitentiary hymns), they sometimes reached the emotional intensity even of Solomon Gabirol when he sang of the soul's communion with God, and the tragic pathos of Jehuda Halevi when he mourned for the desolation of Zion.

It was, however, a simpler matter to convince the public of the merits of the two last-named Spanish poets, and most of the efforts of German translators have been reserved for them and their school. Though he weighted his work by including the obsolete astronomy of Gabirol, and by reproducing his equally obsolete puns upon Bible texts, Ludwig Stein's *Königs-Krone* (1838) was a not unworthy rendering of Gabirol's masterpiece. Stein's translation deserves special mention, not only because of its early date, but also for its completeness. A greater place among German translators of Hebrew hymns must be assigned to Abraham Geiger (1810-1874). This great reformer acted as the intermediary between S. D. Luzzatto and the general public, for if the former "discovered" Jehuda Halevi, the latter gave his discovery vogue and popularity. It is a strange anomaly that, though reform has more or less taken the direction of the exclusion of the *piyutim* (mediaeval Hebrew poems) from the synagogue liturgy, the reformer Geiger's works on Jehuda Halevi (1851) and Solomon Gabirol (1867) were devoted to the glorification of the *poetanim* from the religious as well as the secular standpoint. Not the least merit of Geiger's translations was indirect. Geiger inspired

<sup>1</sup> Graetz, *History of the Jews*, English Translation, vol. III, ch. iv.

the gifted American Jewess, Emma Lazarus, to some of her noblest strains, until her early death robbed Judaism of one of its brightest ornaments. Her translations, like those of many others, were made from the German rather than from the Hebrew; but Geiger was a safe guide. Geiger, it should be remembered, owed much of his interest in the *poetanim* to the famous grammarian, Wolf Heidenheim, the first to attempt a German (prose) translation of the *Machzor* (1800-1805). Heidenheim's commentary on the *piyutim* remains the only serviceable one. The other great Jewish liturgical work of the century (Baer's, Landshut's, and Senior Sachs' excepted) has dealt, like Julian's *Hymnology*, not with the poems themselves, but with bibliographical details; with the hymns as landmarks in history, not as living witnesses to faith.

Little would be gained by continuing a mere list of the German translations of the Hebrew hymns<sup>1</sup>. Of works known to me, the best are Max Letteris' *Oestliche Rosen* (Prag, 1850), Moritz Rappoport's *Hebräische Gesänge* (Leipzig, 1860), A. Sulzbach's *Dichtungen aus Spaniens bessern Tagen* (Frankfort a. M., 1873, a book which is distinguished for its appreciation of the merits of Joseph Zabara's *Book of Delight*), David Rosin's *Reime und Gedichte des Abraham ibn Ezra* (Breslau, 1885-1894), and the works of S. Kaempf (1818-1892) and Seligmann Heller (1831-1890). Kaempf's *Die ersten Makamen des Tachkemoni* (1855) and *Nichtandalusische Poesien andalusischer Dichter* (1859) recall Zunz in their combination of literary style with critical erudition. Kaempf was mainly concerned with the secular work of Charizi, but he rendered many hymns into German. He possessed the power of uniting close literalness with artistic form. Seligmann Heller has no claim to this merit, but his posthumous collection, *Die echten hebräischen Poesien*

<sup>1</sup> Much information is given by Dr. M. Kayserling in Winter & Wünsche's *Die Jüdische Litteratur* (Trier, 1896), vol. III, p. 824 sq. and p. 885 sq.

(edited by Professor Kaufmann in 1893), will be the most remembered of the works of this versatile teacher, journalist, poet, and dramatic critic. A man of similar versatility, Gustav Karpeles, has also edited a series of translations by various hands under the title of *Die Zionsharfe* (1889), and the Berlin Society for Jewish Literature issued in 1893 a capital book, *Divan des Jehuda Halevi*, with an introduction by the editor of *Die Zionsharfe*.

So far as English translations are concerned, it was only at a comparatively late date that the use of metre was thought of. The earliest version of the *Zemiroth* (or table hymns for the Sabbath), strangely enough, occurs in a work (1656) by a Christian "A. R."<sup>1</sup>, a fact paralleled by the curiosity that the oldest translation of the synagogue hymn, *Adon Olam*, is to be found in a mediæval Christian drama. This version of A. R.'s was melodious, though unmetrical and unrhymed. It is, moreover, in good, nervous English; and a like remark applies, in the main, to the prose translation of Isaac Pinto (New York, 1766), and, to a lesser degree, to a MS. translation (date 1729) described by Mr. Singer in the essay referred to in the last footnote. Unfortunately, however, the translations on which the Anglo-Jewish public has been nurtured were compiled by men like the Alexanders (latter part of eighteenth century), who had no knowledge, whether of Hebrew or of English, or who, like David Levi, had little Hebrew and less taste. Mr. Singer justly holds that David Levi's "insight, diligence, and conscientiousness merit far greater appreciation than they have yet deserved." But the sins of David Levi are too great for a favourable verdict to be entered in his behalf. As to Alexander, it will suffice to quote a verse from his "metrical" translation of the *Pizmon* (song or psalm) appointed in the Spanish ritual for the New Year's Day.

<sup>1</sup> S. Singer, *Early Translations and Translators of the Jewish Liturgy in England* (vol. III, *Trans. Jewish Hist. Soc. of England*).

It is even now that heaven's gates open, mercy to descend :  
It is the day that my hands unto the Lord I do extend.  
O remember unto me this chastening day and ever after,  
The merits of the binder binded, and the holy altar.

Space cannot be spared for many specimens of this nonsense. Yet one or two quotations from David Levi must be given. The well-known hymn, “Lo, as the clay in the potter's hand,” opens thus in Levi's version :—

O behold, as the clay is in the hand of the potter, who when he pleases extends it, and when he pleases circumscribes it, thus are we in thy hand, most gracious Preserver.

Apart from the blunder in the last phrase, this translation utterly destroys the beauty of the original. Here is the far better version of Miss Elsie Davis<sup>1</sup>, which is as poetical as it is accurate :—

Lo ! as the potter mouldeth plastic clay,  
To forms his varying fancy doth display ;  
So in thy hand, O God of grace, are we :  
Thy bond regard, let sin be veiled from thee.

Here the last clause is not quite happy, for the idea is not that sin shall be veiled from God, but that he, in his mercy, shall pay no regard to man's sin, but only to his own divine covenant of grace.

Mrs. Lucas<sup>2</sup> gives the verse thus :—

Lo, as the potter moulds his clay,  
Shaping and forming it from day to day,  
Thus in thy hand, O Lord, are we.  
O thou whose mercies never pass away,  
Forgive our sins once more,  
And keep thy covenant as in days of yore.

Or take again David Levi's rendering of the *Selicha*, “I am the suppliant.” A *Selicha* is a hymn of penitence, and is in essence an expansion of the text, “But thou (O Lord) art righteous in all that is come upon us ; thou hast acted truthfully, but we have wrought unrighteousness.” The *Selicha* (prayer for forgiveness of sin) differs

<sup>1</sup> JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, VIII, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 109.

from the *Kinah* (lament for Zion, appropriated to the Fast of Ab) in that the *Selicha* is a means to an end, while the *Kinah* is an end in itself; the *Selicha* is universal, the *Kinah* national; the *Selicha* has a hopefulness of near pardon, while the *Kinah* at most ends in a remote yearning for the rebuilding of Zion. To return to this fine *Selicha*, "I am the suppliant," David Levi begins with this trivial sentence:—

My sighs are many, when I consider how I shall turn my heart to God, who is the rock of my salvation.

It is a fact, scarcely credible as the statement seems, that the literal, accurate meaning of the original is the following; I cite Miss Nina Davis' translation <sup>1</sup>:—

Amid the walls of hearts that stand around,  
My bitter sighs swell up and mount the sky;  
Ah! how my heart doth pant, with ceaseless bound  
For God, my Rock on high.

The same magnificent hymn dies off in Levi's version in this futile fashion:—

O view my degradation and have compassion on my congregation, and as for my precious soul, it is better that I surrender it to thee. Purchase thy son Israel the second time. O open thine eyes, and behold; hide not thine ears to my cry and supplication.

Miss Davis' rendering closes:—

Behold me fallen low from whence I stood,  
And mine assembly with compassion see;  
And this my soul, mine only one, 't is good  
To give it unto thee.

Take back thy son once more, and draw him near,  
Hide not from him the radiance of thine eye,  
Turn not away, but lend a favouring ear  
Unto my plaint, my cry.

Little wonder is it, that knowing the *piyutim* solely from such "translations" as David Levi's, the Anglo-Jewish public has grown up with a feeling towards these hymns

<sup>1</sup> JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, loc. cit., p. 78.

which halts between contempt and disgust<sup>1</sup>. Mrs. Lucas' new book, with its accurate versions, and its strong, full echo of the beauty and poetry of the original, should do something to modify this prejudice. Though less catholic in her taste than her German predecessors, Mrs. Lucas is more literal and more natural. She will at least afford English readers an opportunity of judging for themselves the literary and devotional merits of a representative selection of the *piyutim*.

Apart altogether from certain limitations which the authoress has placed on her selection—limitations which will be considered below—*The Jewish Year* contains of necessity but a small selection from these Hebrew hymns. The authors of these hymns form a vast array of names, even though we exclude the Tannaites (or Mishnaic authorities), to whom popular fancy assigned some *piyutim*, and the Apostle Peter, who, according to an eleventh-century myth, wrote a favourite synagogue meditation. The *piyutim* themselves, which began in the ninth century and are still written at the present day, are numbered by the thousand, and masses of unknown hymns have of late been recovered from Yemen and Egypt. There is not a stream of *piyutim*: there is an avalanche. To the majority of the *piyutim* may be applied the jibe in *Hudibras*, that Hebrew roots are “found to flourish most in barren ground.” They are exercises in rhyming and alliteration, in the construction of acrostics rather than hymns or poems. They are discords rather than harmonies. There is scarce a gem among the mass of new-found *piyutim*; lost for centuries, they deserved to be lost for ever. To understand many of the *piyutim*, the reader must be a scholar of many parts;

<sup>1</sup> There have been several later attempts to give metrical English translations of some of the Hebrew hymns of the Synagogue. Those of Miss Davis are excellent. Few of the others, however, attain even mediocrity; in most of them the “verse” is sheer doggerel. Some accurate prose renderings, marred by their poverty of style, are given in *Treasures of Oxford* (London, 1881).

he must be familiar with the rarest Hebrew and Aramaic words and forms; he must have the Talmud and Midrash at his finger's end. He must respond to the slightest touch of allusion; he must be callous to all grotesqueness of language and thought, however gross. He must keep his countenance while the Leviathan disports itself; he must retain his devoutness (if he can) while the angels multiply themselves, enlarge their wings, and humorize their functions. He must pray with one eye on the text and the other on the commentary. But it must be remembered in extenuation that a large body of these *piyutim* were scarcely designed for devotional use. The synagogue was an adjunct of the school; and the *piyut*, regarded as a versified treatment of the learned themes prevalent in the schools, deserves a higher place in the critic's regard. It was a species of scholarly exercise for the scholar, and the layman had no right to complain of their difficulty seeing that they were not invariably intended for him. They may be found, it is true, in vast numbers in MSS. and in printed editions of the liturgy. But this was often done for mere convenience, or to provide thoughtful literature for study between whiles in the synagogue service, and to fill up gaps in the long waits on the fast-days. Moreover, only a small selection was used on any one day; it was left for the modern synagogue to so accumulate *piyut* on *piyut* in one and the same service, that the weary worshipper retaliated (as in many synagogues he has done) by ejecting all but the best from the liturgy.

But, further, the severe strictures which it was my plain duty to make above have no application to a residuum of *piyutim*, a residuum so large that it can hardly fall short of the hymns of the mediaeval church in extent. It is to the credit of Jewish taste that the best of the *piyutim* have always been the most popular. Mrs. Lucas has shown the same taste in her selections. If, as mentioned later on, she has drawn too scantily from certain types, yet she has included some of the cream of these adjuncts

to the liturgy. Solomon ibn Gabirol, Jehuda Halevi, Abraham and Moses ibn Ezra are all well represented. These are true poets, instinct with melody, gifted with what Mrs. Lucas calls<sup>1</sup> “a whole-hearted faith, a supreme sense of God’s love.” They are not always simple, but scholars though they were, they set a plain man’s common sense against the pedant’s pride. Their hymns are a good second to the Psalms, and they would have approached their model more closely had the writers fully appreciated the spirit of the Biblical rhythm, that unrhymed parallelism of line which is much more in keeping with the genius of Hebrew poetry than the tricks of rhyme and metre imitated from the mediaeval Arabs. Chaucer’s lament of the unsuitability of rhyme to English applies with tenfold force to Hebrew. Like the Psalms in Temple times, the best-loved *piyutim* gained an additional hold on the mediaeval Jew’s heart by the melodies to which they were set<sup>2</sup>. Like the Psalms, too, the *piyutim* gained a set and fixed place in the liturgy. I mean that they were composed in cycles, in close relation to the regular prayers—cycles which recall the hymnology of the church. The *piyutim* derived their names from their position in the service: the *Yozer* (praise of God as Creator of light), the *Ofan* (the angelic chorus of threefold praise of the Highest), the *Zulath* (uniqueness of God), the *Geüllah* (redemption), were all associated with the passages preceding and following the *Shema* (Deut. vi. 4-9, xi. 13-21; Num. xv. 37-41)<sup>3</sup>. Then in the *Amidah* came, as *piyutim*, the *Kerobah* (offering), *Kedusha* (sanctification), and *Silluk* (conclusion). These forms were common to all the festivals, and a similar remark applies to the *Maarabith*, reserved for the evening prayer on feast-days. In addition to these there were special types of hymns for special days, some of which will be

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> See the admirable essay of Dr. A. Ackermann in *Die Jüdische Litteratur*, III, p. 477 sq.

<sup>3</sup> *Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, ed. S. Singer, p. 40.

mentioned below. Mrs. Lucas has followed another arrangement; she has indiscriminately selected from all these types, and it must be freely confessed that the hymns have only occasionally lost by this method; only at rare intervals is the sense affected by the displacement. Even in such cases, a footnote would have removed all ambiguity.

Mrs. Lucas' book is "meant as an adjunct to the prayer-book, to be used at home, in the Sabbath school, perhaps occasionally in Synagogue, as an aid to religious meditation, derived in a great measure from the prayer-book itself<sup>1</sup>."

She has given a poem for every Sabbath of the year, and a good collection for the feasts and fasts. Some of these are original, and their fervent simplicity shows that the author has no mean gift for hymn-writing. As to the merits of the hymns that she has selected for translation, the reader of her book will be able to form his own judgment. But I shall be surprised if the general verdict is aught but favourable to the master-products of the Jewish poetic spirit.

But it will at once be asked, Can a fair judgment be made from a translation? In her preface Mrs. Lucas says<sup>2</sup>: "I have endeavoured to make my translations as accurate as possible; but, though I trust that some of the devotional spirit of the originals has been retained even in an English version, I am regretfully conscious that I have not succeeded in giving them that glow of intense religiousness which these liturgical poems possess in the Hebrew. Uncouth and laboured as that Hebrew sometimes is, it is never commonplace, and never aught but spiritually forcible." It is undoubtedly true that much of the charm of the best *piyutim* is derived from the use in them of the Hebrew language, just as so many of the mediaeval Christian hymns owe their quaint effectiveness to their Latin dress. Translation loses or clouds the graces of style which, when turned into English, become mere tricks and

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

jingles which are almost as comic in their effects as they are in the originals of the worst *piyutim*<sup>1</sup>. Mrs. Lucas has done well to avoid any attempt at reproducing the acrostics on the authors' names, the alphabetical arrangements, the plays and puns on Scriptural phrases, the successive use in different lines of the words of a consecutive Biblical passage<sup>2</sup>. All these devices are found in the majority of *piyutim*, whether by Spanish or Kalirian poets. Now, it is possible indeed to retain all these peculiarities in a translation, witness Mr. Israel Zangwill's careful rendering of a well-known hymn for the eve of the Atonement<sup>3</sup>. I cite the first two and two of the last three stanzas:—

Ay 'tis thus	Evil us	hath in bond
By thy grace	guilt efface	and respond
		“Forgiven!”
Cast scorn o'er	and abhor	th' informer's word;
Dear God, deign	this refrain	to make heard
		“Forgiven!”
Voice that moans,	tears and groans,	do not spurn;
Weigh not flaws,	plead my cause,	and return,
		“Forgiven!”
Yea, oft-rolled,	as foretold,	clouds impure,
Zion's folk,	free of yoke	O assure,
		“Forgiven!”

As a *tour de force* this is magnificent. It closely imitates the metre of the Hebrew, the rhyme scheme, the alphabetical arrangement. But it retains little of the devotional beauty of this strikingly fine hymn, and the English is far harder to construe than the Hebrew, which is admirably

<sup>1</sup> Of one of Gabirol's poems, published in *Treasures of Oxford*, the editor, M. H. Bresslau, says (p. 40):—“This Hymn cannot be rendered into English, though exquisitely beautiful in the original, so as to convey any tolerable notion of its excellence, as it abounds so largely in paronomasia, or plays upon words, that however admirable to the Hebrew student, have no corresponding phraseology in any other language.” A defter hand than Mr. Bresslau's was needed to grapple with such difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> The editors hope to publish shortly a special paper by Mr. A. Feldman, dealing with the use of the Bible in the mediæval Hebrew poems.

<sup>3</sup> אָמֵן כָּן. *Jews of Angevin England*, p. 109.

simple. Moreover, literal as it is in the main, there is no Hebrew for some of the English lines. In Mrs. Lucas' translations there is very little "padding," and her English is usually simpler than the Hebrew originals. "Involved and obscure" are the terms which she applies to some of these, and the epithets, as has been said above, are just. But there is always a tendency towards obscurity and inversion in hymns, whether of Church or Synagogue, towards the introduction of remote historical or Biblical allusions or of dogmatic niceties. The Church hymns, as represented by *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, are not free from these peculiarities: "Thrones and dominations," "Seals assuring, guards securing," "Midst the doctors sitting round," "Raise the *Trisagion* ever and aye," "Bishop of the souls of men," "Consubstantial, co-eternal," "Each in his office wait,"—these<sup>1</sup> and many other phrases remind one forcibly of the defects of the Hebrew *piyutim*. Mrs. Lucas has given little indication of these faults in her translations, and to that extent the reader may form a better opinion of the *piyutim* than they deserve. In some of the dogmatic hymns, however, Mrs. Lucas has but caught the exact spirit of the Hebrew; for if the dogma is simply and devoutly presented in the English, so is it in the original. Here is a verse from the *Adon Olam*<sup>2</sup>:—

And he is one, his powers transcend,  
Supreme, unfathomed, depth and height,  
Without beginning, without end,  
His are dominion, power, and might.

So, too, with the more rigidly dogmatic *Yigdal*<sup>3</sup>:—

The living God we praise, exalt, adore!  
He was, he is, he will be evermore.

<sup>1</sup> *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, Nos. 306, 498, 473, 423, 408, 396, 268.

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 184. Another English version of the *Adon Olam*, originally by Mr. Van Oven, has been current since the beginning of the century. It has undoubted merits.

<sup>3</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 186. A German translation, superior to that of Sachs, is given by Oskar Waldek in the second part of his *Biblisches Lesebuch*.

No unity like unto his can be,  
Eternal, inconceivable is he.

With love and grace doth he the righteous bless,  
He metes out evil unto wickedness.

He at the last will his anointed send,  
Those to redeem, who hope, and wait the end.

God will the dead to life again restore,  
Praised be his glorious name for evermore.

These are good renderings, which can only fail to please perfectly a Jewish ear because the Hebrew originals are among the most familiar, and therefore the least translatable, hymns in the liturgy of the Synagogue. They are indeed the only two metrical hymns in constant daily use among Jews. Some of the others, however, are sung every Sabbath, and Mrs. Lucas attains a considerable measure of success with these. The beautiful invocation for the eve of the Sabbath is, in the original, somewhat marred by its allusiveness: by its use of a childish piece of Talmudical exegesis (which Mrs. Lucas retains), and by its periphrastic reference to the Messiah as “the son of Perez” (which Mrs. Lucas omits). But the author, Solomon Alkabetz, was not the “dull, spiritless writer” whom Graetz queerly declares to have been less famous himself than his song of welcome to the Sabbath bride<sup>1</sup>. Alkabetz lived in the sixteenth century in Safed, then the home of mysticism, and in his wonderful hymn there is a note of personal emotion, such as is only found in the writings of the mystics:—

Crown of thy husband, come in peace,  
Come, bidding toil and trouble cease,  
With joy and cheerfulness abide  
Among thy people true and tried,  
Thy faithful people—come, O bride!  
Come forth, my friend, the bride to meet,  
Come, O my friend, the Sabbath greet<sup>2</sup>!

<sup>1</sup> Graetz, *History of the Jews*, English Translation, vol. IV, ch. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 168.

Just as Mrs. Lucas is more successful with *Yigdal* than is Sachs, whose rendering has too little dignity, so is she more true to the original than the popular German version of the Sabbath hymn by J. Schwanthaler<sup>1</sup>. She is a little less happy with the *Zemiroth* (table-hymns), a curious species of Hebrew song which precedes the grace after meals on the Sabbath. There is hardly the *abandon* of the original in the following lines<sup>2</sup>:—

His flock our Shepherd feeds  
 With graciousness divine,  
 He satisfies our needs  
 With gifts of bread and wine.  
 Therefore with one accord  
 We will his name adore,  
 Proclaiming evermore  
 None holy as the Lord.  
     Our Rock, with loving care,  
     According to his word,  
     Bids all his bounty share ;  
     Then let us bless the Lord.

There is more of the haunting melody of the Hebrew in Mrs. Lucas' version of another table-hymn, of which the first verse runs thus<sup>3</sup>:—

To Israel this day is joy ever blessed,  
 Is light and is gladness, a Sabbath of rest.  
 Thou Sabbath of rest,  
 To a people distressed,  
 To sorrowful souls,  
 A strong soul hast given.  
 From souls tempest-driven  
 Thou takest their sighing ;  
 Thou takest their sighing,  
 Thou Sabbath of rest.

This is entirely true to the spirit of the Hebrew. So, too,

<sup>1</sup> In the prayer-book published by J. Kauffmann (Frankfurt a. M.). The refrain is in Schwanthaler weakened into this by "padding" :—

Komme, Geliebter, entgegen der Braut !  
 Empfängt den Sabbath, lieb und traut !

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

is her original hymn “Offerings”<sup>1</sup> true to the Jewish spirit. This yearning not to bring to God that which has cost naught is the chief *motif* of the table-hymns. But Mrs. Lucas is obviously more fully inspired when there is no secular element in the hymn that she is translating. Mrs. Lucas says of her selections that “they are intended for devotional purposes, and it is entirely from this point of view that I have regarded my material<sup>2</sup>.” This is a justifiable but incomplete view of the liturgical *piyutim*. Mrs. Lucas, for instance, entirely excludes Wedding Odes from her collection. Yet these Odes were characteristically Jewish. They were sung in Synagogue, and brought God and the community into the individual’s joy. As I have shown elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, they often had a devotional “tag”; but even where this was not the case they were religious hymns in the sense that to the Jew marriage was, in sober and literal fact, a divine institution and a religious duty. A Hebrew epithalamium (like the great canonical exemplar, the *Song of Songs*) might be a sensuous love-song, and yet interpretable as a mystical expression of God’s relation to the individual soul pictured forth in the favourite symbol of the mystics—the mutual love of bridegroom and bride. It has been well said, that until you have made a god of your beloved or a beloved of your God, there is little comfort in your prayers. So, too, with another class of *piyut* which Mrs. Lucas has excluded. The translator asserts, with much justice, that hymns are often criticized as monotonous, and adds a fear (which is more or less groundless, however) that a similar complaint may be made against her own book. As regards one reason for this monotony, Mrs. Lucas writes<sup>4</sup>: “A further reason for the tendency to monotony in this collection may be found in the fact that hymns of what we may call historic interest, which have reference to such passing events as

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Macmillan, 1896), ch. x.

<sup>4</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. xviii.

the founding of a new congregation, or the migration of an old one, the death of a famous Rabbi, or, too often, a more than usually grievous persecution, have been omitted from these pages, as having but little devotional value to the present-day reader." The last assertion is true, in the main, of readers who will require translations of the *piyutim*, but it does not apply to *all piyutim* of the class excluded. Such an exclusion obscures one of the chief glories of these poems, viz. their ready and throbbing responsiveness to the incidents of Israel's life among the nations. And is there no inspiration in such a hymn as the following, written in the heat of the first crusade? I cite it in a translation made, unfortunately, not from the Hebrew of Kalonymos ben Jehuda, but from the German of Zunz, by E. H. Plumptre<sup>1</sup>. Some English translations from the same chapter in Zunz may also be found in a publication of the Hebrew Literature Society<sup>2</sup>. Dr. Löwy's versions are, of course, scholarly, but they are unrhythmical. Let us listen now to Mr. Plumptre's version of a hymn called forth by the Crusades<sup>3</sup>; in its English form it trips along too jauntily, but it shows how these elegies, intolerant though they were, helped the suffering Jew to be strong unto death:—

Yes, they slay us and they smite,  
 Vex our souls with sore affright;  
 All the closer cleave we, Lord,  
 To thine everlasting word.  
 Not a word of all their Mass  
 Shall our lips in homage pass;  
 Though they curse, and bind, and kill,  
 The living God is with us still.  
 Yes, they fain would make us now,  
 Baptized, at Baal's altar bow;

<sup>1</sup> Written in Mayence : translated from Zunz's *Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*.

<sup>2</sup> *Miscellany*, Second Series.

<sup>3</sup> I quote from Isabel E. Cohen's *Readings and Recitations* (Philadelphia : The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1895), p. 179.

On their raiment, wrought with gold,  
 See the sign we hateful hold;  
 And, with words of foulest shame,  
 They outrage, Lord, the holiest name.  
 We still are thine, though limbs are torn;  
 Better death than life forsworn.  
 Noblest matrons seek for death,  
 Rob their children of their breath;  
 Fathers, in their fiery zeal,  
 Slay their sons with murderous steel;  
 And in heat of holiest strife,  
 For love of thee, spare not their life.  
 The fair and young lie down to die  
 In witness of thy Unity;  
 From dying lips the accents swell,  
 “Thy God is One, O Israel”;  
 And bridegroom answers unto bride,  
 “The Lord is One, and none beside”;  
 And, knit with bonds of holiest faith,  
 They pass to endless life through death.

The high-water mark of this class of hymn is reached by the man of sorrows and renown, Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg. There is surely eternal spiritual worth in his sublime elegy on a passing grief, the burning of some scrolls of the Law in the middle of the thirteenth century<sup>1</sup>. How ably Mrs. Lucas can render such poems is shown by her masterly translation of Jehuda Halevi's “Ode to Zion,” a poem on which Meir of Rothenburg's elegy was clearly modelled. The loss of Jewish independence was a bigger event, no doubt, than a local persecution in mediaeval Germany; but it may be doubted whether, to the Jew, the burning of a scroll of the Law was not a more serious sorrow than the burning of the Temple itself. Mrs. Lucas' version of the “Ode to Zion” has, since its appearance in

<sup>1</sup> See the excellent German version by Geiger in *Jüd. Dichtungen der span. und ital. Schule* (Leipzig, 1856), and the fine English translation by Miss Nina Davis in the *JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW*, vol. VIII, p. 426. The elegy has become one of the liturgical *Kinoth* of the German and Polish rite.

this REVIEW<sup>1</sup>, become a classic. It has been printed and reprinted, at every fresh publication has charmed a new circle of readers, and has won for Mrs. Lucas a place among the consummate translators.

Perfect in beauty, Zion, how in thee  
 Do love and grace unite!  
 The souls of thy companions tenderly  
 Turn unto thee: thy joy was their delight,  
 And weeping, they lament thy ruin now.  
 In distant exile, for thy sacred height  
 They long; and towards thy gates in prayer they bow.  
 Thy flocks are scattered o'er the barren waste,  
 Yet do they not forget thy sheltering fold;  
 Unto thy garments' fringe they cling, and haste  
 The branches of thy palms to seize and hold.

I have selected this verse from the Ode because of its poetical use of ceremonial. In this branch again Mrs. Lucas' *Jewish Year* is weak, because probably she does not admit spiritual beauty in a mere didactic presentment of the details of Biblical and Rabbinical law. In this she is right. There is a whole class of liturgical compositions (one can hardly term them hymns) appropriated to the Temple ceremonies of the Day of Atonement (*Abodah*), and another to the Feast of Weeks, the traditional anniversary of the Revelation on Mount Sinai. These latter poems, termed *Azharoth* (*Exhortations*), consist sometimes of mere catalogues of the 613 precepts into which the Law was distributed, but in the hands of Solomon Gabirol the *Azhara* becomes a vehicle of devout meditation. Much cannot be said in praise of the liturgical summaries of the ceremonial observed on the various festivals; these are mainly obsolete, arid, and spiritless, full of recondite reference and straining after effect, and Mrs. Lucas has shown excellent taste in ignoring them. This has carried with it, however, an almost complete rejection of Kalir, who is represented in Mrs. Lucas' volume by one slight piece, though his contributions to the prayer-book are numbered

<sup>1</sup> JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, vol. V, p. 652.

by scores. There can be little question that Kalir has little to tell us to-day<sup>1</sup>, but I think that place might have been found for some more of his *piyutim*, among them for his Passover verses on the Dew, which I cite in Sachs' version. I make this citation for the further reason, that it would be a sin against justice to omit, from an article on translations of the *piyutim*, a specimen of Sachs' manner in rendering Kalir's difficult yet devout, forced yet forceful stanzas:—

O milden Thau gieb für Dein Land zum Heil!  
 Durch Deine Huld sei Segen unser Theil.  
 Gewährst Du Most und Korn im reichen Segen,  
 Richt' auf die Stadt, die liebend Du willst hegen.  
 O sende Thau, das Jahr mit Heil zu krönen.  
 Des Feldes Frucht—lass sie gedeih'n verschönen!  
 O sei die Stadt, die öd' und ausgeleert,  
 In Deiner Hand ein Diadem voll Werth.  
 O weh' herab den Thau auf Segensland.  
 Dein Gut in Fülle sei herabgesandt.  
 Lass aus der Nacht in hellem Glanze prangen  
 Die Theure, die Dir nachzog voll Verlangen.  
 Der Thau durchdufte, was auf Bergen spriesst.  
 Durch Deine Macht sei Köstliches versüsst.  
 O Deine Lieben rett' aus Drangsals Haft,  
 Dann tönt Dir Lob und Dank in lauter Kraft.  
 Der Thau mit Fülle unsere Speicher tränke,  
 Uns zu verjüngen Deine Huld uns schenke.  
 Für ewig, Herr! lass unsern Namen blüh'n,—  
 Wie Fluren durch die Segensströme zieh'n!  
 O sende Thau zum Segen unsrer Zehrung,  
 O schütze Fülle vor der Noth Verheerung.  
 Die einst gleich einer Heerde Du geleitet,  
 O sei ihr Huld und Gnade stets bereitet.

A similar beauty may be detected in the *Hoshaanoth* (Hosannas), or hymns sung during the Procession of the Palms on the Feast of Tabernacles. Mrs. Lucas has avoided

<sup>1</sup> Little, that is, religiously; but to the student Kalir is a mine of Hagadic lore. His citations from Midrashim sometimes preserve otherwise forgotten traditions and exegesis.

the hymns based on ceremonial from design, and not from inability to cope with them. This is quite evident from her beautiful rendering of Ibn Gabirol's "Happy he who saw of old<sup>1</sup>," a poem entirely inspired by the priestly ceremonial in the Temple of Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement, as poetically set forth by the son of Sirach. It is a triumph of the translator's art, just as Gabirol's alternations of joy—"Happy he who saw of old"—and sorrow—"But to hear of it afflicts our soul"—are a triumph of poetic pathos. It is an added affliction to the Day of Atonement: the *hearing* of glories that eyes once actually beheld. I cannot refrain from giving this translation in full, for this and the "Ode to Zion" are, to my mind, the gems of Mrs. Lucas' collection. Her own original conclusion is exquisite in feeling.

Happy he who saw of old  
 The high priest, with gems and gold  
 All adorned from crown to hem,  
 Tread thy courts, Jerusalem,  
 Till he reached the sacred place  
 Where the Lord's especial grace  
 Ever dwelt, the centre of the whole:  
 Happy he whose eyes  
 Saw at last the cloud of glory rise,  
 But to hear of it afflicts our soul.

Happy he that day who saw  
 How, with reverence and awe  
 And with sanctity of mien,  
 Spoke the priest: "Ye shall be clean  
 From your sins before the Lord";  
 Echoed long the holy word,  
 While around the fragrant incense stole:  
 Happy he whose eyes  
 Saw at last the cloud of glory rise,  
 But to hear of it afflicts our soul.

Happy he who saw the crowd,  
 That in adoration bowed,  
 As they heard the priest proclaim,  
 "One, Ineffable, the Name";

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Year*, p. 67.

And they answered, “Blessed be  
 God, the Lord eternally,  
 He whom all created worlds extol”:  
 Happy he whose eyes  
 Saw at last the cloud of glory rise,  
 But to hear of it afflicts our soul.

Happy he who saw the priest  
 Turn towards the shining east,  
 And, with solemn gladness thrilled,  
 Read the doctrine, that distilled  
 As the dew upon the plain,  
 And as showers of gentle rain,  
 While he raised on high the sacred scroll.  
 Happy he whose eyes  
 Saw at last the cloud of glory rise,  
 But to hear of it afflicts our soul.

Happy he who saw the walls  
 Of the temple’s radiant halls,  
 Where the golden cherubim  
 Hide the ark’s recesses dim,  
 Heard the singer’s choral song,  
 Saw the Levites’ moving throng,  
 Saw the golden censer and the bowl.  
 Happy he whose eyes  
 Saw at last the cloud of glory rise,  
 But to hear of it afflicts our soul.

Ever thus the burden rang  
 Of the pious songs, that sang  
 All the glories past and gone  
 Israel once did gaze upon—  
 Glories of the sacred fane,  
 Which they mourned and mourned again,  
 With a bitterness beyond control :  
 Happy he whose eyes  
 Saw (they said) the cloud of glory rise,  
 But to hear of it afflicts our soul.

Singers of a bygone day,  
 Who from earth have passed away,  
 Now ye see the glories shine  
 Of that distant land divine,  
 And no more (entranced by them)  
 Mourn this world’s Jerusalem.

Happy ye who, from that heavenly goal,  
 See, with other eyes  
 Far than ours, such radiant visions rise,  
 That to hear of them delights our soul.

Mrs. Lucas has yielded to a more comprehensive conception of what belongs to the literature of devotion by admitting a few Talmudical parables; here she has well prospered. "The Mission of Moses," "Simeon ben Migdal," "Hillel and his Guest," "The Commandment of Forgetfulness<sup>1</sup>," are all good, the last particularly so. The Rabbi had always lamented that he could not fulfil the law to *forget* a sheaf in the field (Deut. xxiv. 19), because when he *remembered* to perform this duty he *eo ipso* failed in it.

But when autumn came,  
 And waves of corn glowed 'neath the sunset's flame,  
 It chanced at evening, that, his labours o'er,  
 He stood and gazed upon his garnered store,  
 And suddenly to him his little son  
 Came, saying: "Father, see what thou hast done!  
 Three sheaves in yonder field I have espied  
 Forgotten!" "Oh!" the pious Rabbi cried,  
 "Blessed art thou, O Lord, whose gracious will  
 Enables me thy bidding to fulfil,  
 Even through some oversight." And with the day  
 Unto the house of God he took his way,  
 And offered of his flocks and herds the best,  
 For joy to have obeyed the Lord's behest.

I have already exceeded the limits of fair quotation in a review, and yet have so far done little justice to many of the best features of the hymns in Mrs. Lucas' book. It will surprise some who are accustomed to the conventional charge against Judaism of "Pharisaic" self-righteousness to find how often the note of humility is struck by the *poetanim*.

Man cannot by his works alone  
 His load of guilt annul;  
 Let him with prayers besiege the throne  
 Of heaven most merciful.

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 28, 62, 88, 105.

To those who seek him earnestly,  
 In penitent humility,  
 The Lord our God will multiply  
 Mercy and Pardon.

So sings Chiya<sup>1</sup>.

The faithful men have perished one by one,  
 And there remaineth none  
 With ceaseless prayer to seek thine aid,  
 Pleading for pardon, even as he,  
 The faithful of thy house, who prayed  
 By day and night incessantly:  
 Yet, as in days of old,  
 Have mercy on us, Lord, with mercies manifold—

is the conclusion of another hymn<sup>2</sup>, which is one of the favourite *Selichoth*.

Another note frequently struck is the note of resignation. Abraham ibn Ezra was perhaps as much buffeted on the waves of misfortune as any mediaeval bard, yet this is how he requites the bitter blows of his fate<sup>3</sup>:—

Hope for the salvation of the Lord,  
 In him I trust, when fears my being thrill;  
 Come life, come death, according to his word,  
 He is my portion still.

. . . . .  
 Him will I serve, his am I as of old;  
 I ask not to be free.

. . . . .  
 Sweet is ev'n sorrow coming in his name,  
 Nor will I seek its purpose to explore;  
 His praise will I continually proclaim,  
 And bless him evermore.

The greatness of God is, indeed, constantly set in contrast to the impotency of man, not, however, to make God more transcendent, but to glorify his grace in responding to the lowly cry of humanity.

<sup>1</sup> P. 160.

<sup>2</sup> P. 9.

<sup>3</sup> P. 60; compare p. 53.

Evil seed our sins have sown,  
 Evil fruit from them has grown ;  
 Seek we, then, to end our woes,  
 Him who knows our framé, and knows  
 That dust are we.

Thus Jehuda Halevi<sup>1</sup>.

The God of Israel, as conceived in these hymns, has a home not afar, but near in the very heart of the worshipper.

And though thou seekest out my sin,  
 From thee to thee I fly to win  
 A place of refuge, and within  
 Thy shadow from thy anger hide<sup>2</sup>.

This is one of the sublimest, the most original thoughts in the devotional literature of all the churches in the Middle Ages. Israel, in some of these hymns, occupies a special relation to God ; but so surely does the Christian, who as often hymns his special hopes through Jesus. In another point the parallel may be drawn between Church and Synagogue : the intensity of pathos poured out in the hymns of the Crucifixion has its like in the *poetanic* heart-pouring over the sacrifice of Isaac (the *Akeda piyut* of which, inadvertently, Mrs. Lucas gives no specimen). So, again, some of the best thoughts of the church hymns have their Jewish parallel in the mystic Hymn of Glory<sup>3</sup> :—

They saw in thee both youth and age,  
 The man of war, the hoary sage,  
 But ever Israel's heritage.  
 O thou whose word is truth alway,  
 Thy people seek thy face this day,  
 O be thou near them when they pray.  
 O let my praises, heavenward sped,  
 Be as a crown unto thy head,  
 My prayer an incense offerèd !  
 O may my words of blessing rise  
 To thee, who, throned above the skies,  
 Art just and mighty, great and wise !

<sup>1</sup> P. 55.

<sup>2</sup> P. 148.

<sup>3</sup> P. 120.

And when thy glory I declare,  
Do thou incline thee to my prayer,  
As though sweet spice my offering were.<sup>1</sup>

My meditation day and night,  
May it be pleasant in thy sight,  
For thou art all my soul's delight.

In these hymns, then, as in the Jewish prose liturgy, there is an exaltation of prayer into the place once partly occupied by ritual.

Seek ye his presence, and implore  
His countenance for evermore;  
Then shall your prayers accepted be,  
As offerings brought continually.

This hymn of Solomon ben Abun<sup>1</sup> may be compared to the oft-recited *piyut* based on Hosea xiv. 2, which Jewish exegesis rendered, “We will pay the former offerings by our present prayers.”

The clouds of incense fail,  
Gone is our altar, rent the golden veil,  
Naught but our prayers remain—  
Forgive, then, our transgressions once again,  
As when the appointed one  
Led forth the scapegoat to the desert lone:  
Have mercy, Lord, and hear us when we pray,  
And with our lips the steers we will repay<sup>2</sup>.

And as prayer becomes the only means of bringing man nearer to God, so the psalmists' mystic yearning for communion of the human soul with the divine is luxuriantly developed in the *piyutim*. The poetan, however, like many a church hymnologist, weakly attempted a syncretism which has no place in a mystic hymn. He would address God in one and the same poem as his soul's Beloved and as Mighty King; he would combine the language of love and of homage, to the destruction of poetical unity. But, when all this is allowed, Mrs. Lucas has translated many verses about the soul which might claim a place in the

<sup>1</sup> P. 45.

<sup>2</sup> P. 59.

most exclusive anthology of the world's greatest thoughts on the spiritual life. To quote in proof of this assertion would be to reproduce more than is fair of the gems of Mrs. Lucas' volume. The reader will find the illustrations ready to his hand, and if the translator sometimes falls short of the sure and vigorous sweep, the bold and glowing colour of the originals, her version lacks nothing of their grace, their sublimity, their inspiration.

Here I must take leave of this remarkable book. The hymns which it contains, "written in the dark ages of Jewish life, are illuminated by a divine optimism which may well serve to strengthen our own often wavering faith, and lead us too to find in our religion that peace and happiness which blessed the singers of those days in the midst of sorrow and persecution<sup>1</sup>." This, after all, is the true purpose and value of a hymnology. All the hymns of all the churches add very little from the spiritual or literary point of view to the psalms. But they do add the testimony of spiritual experience. As the world grows older it is something to know that men in all ages have been able to echo in their lips and in their lives the optimism, the trust, the devotion of the psalmists. And there is one thing more. In the great hunting after the blessings of the world there seems no place for unalloyed thanksgiving, and the tendency becomes daily stronger to "end our gloria in a whining petition." The hymns of Synagogue and Church come in here as a corrective. They bid men praise God, and live by praising him; for a pure, unselfish praise may help the heart of the eulogist towards purity and unselfishness. Mrs. Lucas has given to Jews a new and powerful aid towards attaining this ideal. She has earned the gratitude of many not merely by her talents, her scholarship, her graces of style, but chiefly by the noble end she has aimed at, and in a large measure has attained. It is even conceivable that Mrs. Lucas'

<sup>1</sup> P. xvii.

book may induce a stray reader here and there to go to the original Hebrew sources in order to drink more deeply of *poetic* faith and love. What though the source be hard of access, and the waters more than a little troubled? In Keble's lines <sup>1</sup>:—

Dim or unheard, the words may fall,  
 And yet the heaven-taught mind  
 May learn the sacred air, and all  
 The harmony unwind.

I. ABRAHAMS.

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Year*, “Catechism.”