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JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

The Victoria Institute,

OR,

Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

VOL. LXIII.



LONDON:

Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W.1.

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1931

741ST ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, JANUARY 19TH, 1931,
AT 4.30 P.M.

DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the following elections :— As a Member, the Rev. Charles Leopold Clarke, and as Associates, the Rev. Arthur Body, M.A., and the Rev. W. E. Woodhams Denham, B.D., F.R.G.S.

The CHAIRMAN then explained the absence of the Rev. Dr. W. M. Christie, the author of the paper, in his field of labour, and then read the paper entitled “The Renaissance of Hebrew.”

THE RENAISSANCE OF HEBREW.

By REV. W. M. CHRISTIE, D.D., Mount Carmel Bible School,
Haifa, Palestine.

MISTAKEN NOTIONS.

THE common opinion, even amongst educated people, is that during the Captivity in Babylon the Israelites forgot the Hebrew speech, and came back an Aramaic-speaking people, and that in so far as Hebrew continued to exist it was merely a learned language practically confined to religious purposes, like the Latin of the Middle Ages, and along with it to be reckoned one of “the dead languages.” There has, however, in every age been a great difference between the dead ecclesiastical languages used in prayer and Hebrew as used by the Jew for a like purpose. We have challenged those who used Latin, Ancient Greek, and Slavonic in church services, and asked

its value, seeing the worshippers did not understand it, and we have invariably got the answer, "It does not matter, God understands it." No Jew ever gave such an answer. He was always able at the least to read his Hebrew and say "It means so and so," in short to translate into current speech.

HEBREW NEVER REALLY DEAD.

And from the time of the Maccabees to the present day we have an unbroken series of writings in the Hebrew tongue. It is quite true that Aramaic was the common speech of the people, but Hebrew literally lived alongside of it. There can be little doubt that the Hebrew of the Mishnah, Tosephta, the Midrashim, and the Talmuds was the language of the schools in both Palestine and Babylon; and though at times mechanical, awkward, and mixed, there is, especially in the Haggadah, a facility and liveliness that could only be attained if the language were living to the authors. The commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud from the tenth century to the present day might very well be the fruits of a dead tongue, but when one reads with familiarity and facility the poems of Shemuel han-Nagid, Jehudah hal-Levi, Ibn Gebirol and Aben Ezra, one is convinced that in Spain from the ninth to the fifteenth century Hebrew at least equally with Arabic was the living spoken language of the great mass of the Israelites. These works were never produced as were the Latin University exercises of our youthful days, "written up by the help of a gradus." The great extent of the vocabulary, the facility and fluency and the very word-plays all testify to life.

THE LOWEST LEVEL.

We may, however, fix the date of the Expulsion from Spain (1492) as the commencement of a period of decline of Hebrew as a tongue spoken for purposes of daily practical use. The Jews were now more scattered than ever. There was a clear distinction between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, and they were again in many ways separated from their brethren in the East. Around the Mediterranean the Sephardic pronunciation held sway, but there were modifications in Africa, Italy and elsewhere. The Ashkenazic pronunciation was unintelligible to these southern Jews, and it had many "dialects," of which

thirteen have been reckoned in Poland alone. In such conditions Hebrew as an international speech was impossible, and even communities that enjoyed uniformity of pronunciation became accustomed to employ their second language—Jargon, Ladino or Arabic, as the case might be. The decline went on, and we may consider that in the middle of the nineteenth century Hebrew had sunk to its lowest level as a practical daily language. This was equally the case in Palestine, and in 1890 we made inquiry and learned that only about a dozen persons all told in Tiberias and Safad together professed ability to carry on a conversation in the holy tongue.

UNDESIGNED PREPARATION.

But Hebrew, in addition to being the universal religious language of the Jew, had maintained by persistent usage its place as the general literary vehicle. Then the Mendelssohn school had emphasized the value of Gentile education and literature, and many Jews sought to make its acquaintance. Good translations of the best English, French and German works were made, and we remember in the 'eighties the existence of Byron's Hebrew Melodies, a few of Shakspeare's plays, one or two of Scott's novels, *Robinson Crusoe*, while Milton's *Paradise Lost* was translated on Jewish lines of thought and sold in Jerusalem for one franc. *The Wandering Jew*, by Eugene Sue, had naturally a place, and Schiller's works were favourites, while the Koran was printed in unpointed Hebrew, and selections from *Kalilah wa-Dimnah* (Fables of Pilpay) were greatly relished. Then from the year 1837 newspapers began to appear in various places printed in Hebrew. One of the best of these, and a great favourite in Palestine fifty years ago, was *haz-Zephirah*. It was published in Poland, and both as a news-sheet and a literary review it was well fitted to take a place alongside of the best products of the European press. In the 'eighties Ben Jehudah, the great champion of Hebrew as a spoken language, settled in Jerusalem. In connection with his propaganda he issued a weekly which he named *haz-Zebhi* (The Gazelle). Very soon a rival named *Chabbatzeleth* (The Rose of Sharon) appeared, and these satisfied Palestinian needs for two decades. An interesting incident occurred in connection with the rivalry between these two weeklies. Ben Jehudah expressed the wish in one issue of his paper that the modern

Jew might manifest something of the spirit of the Maccabees. Reported to the Turkish Government this was regarded as treasonable. Ben Jehudah was imprisoned, and his paper stopped. Through the usual method he was liberated, but even backsheesh could not secure the publication of the old paper. He was, however, allowed to publish another which he named *ha-'Or* (The Light). When the next issue of *Chabbat-zeleth* appeared, the following hit at its rival stood prominently forth: METH HAZ-ZEBHI WENISHAR HA-'OR, "the gazelle is dead and the skin remains." We have here a pun on 'Or, light, and 'Or, skin; but the victory was Ben Jehudah's, for the language had attained to a life that made even puns possible and enjoyable.

FACILITIES.

The advent of Ben Jehudah became with time the greatest impulse toward the real renaissance. But he had much to endure for many years. The great mass of the Chassidim, constituting the majority of the population of the ghettos, considered Hebrew too holy to be spoken, except on the Sabbaths, and then if they tried it they were more conspicuous by their silence than by their speech. They engineered every possible opposition to him, and induced others to do likewise. Attempts were made to starve him out, he was cursed by his own people, stoned on the streets, falsely accused and imprisoned, but he persevered. Hebrew became the language of his own family, and gradually of a widening circle of friends and sympathisers, and by the close of the century it had found a secure footing in the land and in the affections of multitudes, who but a few years earlier had looked upon its use as a profanation. Accordingly it was no mere sentiment, but a real necessity, that in 1918 gave Hebrew a place as one of the three official languages of Palestine. Ben Jehudah lived to see the success of his efforts, and now the children of his opponents honour his name and raise monuments to his memory.

Still the times were favourable to the purposes of Ben Jehudah. The earlier colonies had been established, and persecution in other lands was driving in a different class of Jew from those who occupied the ghettos and lived on Chalukah. The various sections of the ghettos, each with its own tongue, were breaking down or getting mixed. There was need of a common speech.

Jewish settlers of even several generations knew little Arabic, and immigrants knew none. It was useless, and as a matter of course all took to the language they had in common. Ben Jehudah had, with great wisdom, adopted the Sephardic pronunciation. It was more genuinely Semitic, and its use reduced to a minimum a good deal of false idiom that might have come in with more Ashkenazic influence. It was universally accepted by all classes, and we never heard of any manifestation of "intertribal jealousy" in this matter. We have thus now a compact population, German Jews, Spanish Jews, Jews from Yemen (Arabic), Bokhara (Turkish), and Persia with similarity of speech and pronunciation.

It must also be remembered that every Jew has from the first an adequate vocabulary for beginning conversation. It has been calculated that with a command of 500 words one may go a long way in understanding and being understood. We have tested the matter several times, and found that much that is still in doubt in conversation can be fairly well guessed, confidence is attained, and rapid progress is made. Now every Jew has more words practically at his finger ends. He knows the Torah, the prophetic sections, the Daily Prayer Book, and a good deal of Machzor, and these give him an ample stock for the ordinary conditions of life in Palestine, and for any particular sphere of employment he soon gathers his vocabulary.

THE LANGUAGE ITSELF.

We sometimes hear distinctions drawn between Ancient Hebrew and Modern Hebrew, but such designations are misleading. The difference is no greater than, say, that between the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611) and a modern book or well-written newspaper. The whole vocabulary of the Bible is used in modern speech. There are, indeed, small differences in grammar, idiom, and a more extensive word formation, but all are on pure Hebraic lines, and there remains only a small and diminishing list of foreign words. We shall take up the essential points of "modern" Hebrew now in due order.

THE PRONUNCIATION.

We have indicated that the Sephardic pronunciation was followed. This corresponds with what we call the Academic,

which, fortunately, through the teaching of Reuchlin, a disciple of the Sephardic Sforno, became the accepted mode in Great Britain. In conversation, however, there are some differences. When without the dagesh only three of the begadh-kephath letters are aspirated—Beth, Kaph and Phe. Then there is a distinct advantage in the accurate pronunciation of the 'Ain and in the clear distinction made between the He and Cheth. The presence of Arabic has probably compelled acceptance in these three cases.

THE MODERN SCRIPT.

We naturally take notice of this as being the Ashkenazic contribution, which, equally with the Sephardic pronunciation, has been universally accepted. It has one small disadvantage, and that is it is not well adapted for vocalizing, but as the vowels are seldom used with it except in the case of unfamiliar proper names and foreign words, there is but small loss. It is now used by all classes for all ordinary purposes.

THE GRAMMAR.

The Old Testament literature, in virtue of its small extent, does not present us with all the possible forms of the verbs, nor with all the plurals and constructs of the nouns. Perhaps not in one single verb are all the parts found, and we used to be told that the Dual Construct for "two kings of" was non-existent, though occurring in every grammar. But many of the blanks may be filled up from subsequent literature, and we now feel that we are entitled to use all the parts grammatically possible of all verbs, nouns and adjectives, subject only to the limitation that in some cases there might be passives, reflexives, reciprocals, or occasionally a plural to an abstract term that would be sheer nonsense.

A noticeable addition to the Old Testament grammar is the Passive of the Hithpa'el bearing the form and name of Nithpa'el. It is found in the Mishnah, and has been frequently used since the second century.

The Vav Conversive (Consecutive) is seldom used in conversation, but it maintains its place in the written language.

The use of the particle SHEL, derived from 'ASHER L- (*cf.* already Jonah i, 7) is very common. It really means "of," and aids in the formation of the genitive case. This usage may

not be so neat as the old construct arrangement, but it adds definiteness in many cases, and makes possible the use of the article with both the construct and absolute positions. Thus, if I say MALKATH HA-'ARETZ HAṬ-ṬOBHAH, there may be a doubt as to whether I mean "The good queen of the land" or "The queen of the good land." The new construction, however, gives us a different form for each, HAM-MALKAH HAṬ-ṬOBHAH SHEL HA-'ARETZ and HAM-MALKAH SHEL HA-'ARETZ HAṬ-ṬOBHAH.

THE VOCABULARY.

This contains, of course, all the words of the Old Testament. Thereafter the first necessities of the new colonists for agricultural terms and the names of the fruits of the ground were met by drawing upon the Mishnah. During the Jamnia period of Jewish history all the vegetables and fruits then known were cultivated in the Plain of Sharon, and the Israelite through systematic land cultivation gained a knowledge that enabled him to produce the treatises on the subject that are found in the Zera'im section of the Mishnah. For modern importations designations have been found by imitating European formations as in the case of TAPPUCHE 'ADHAMAH (earth apples) for potato; TAPPUCHE ZAHABH (apples of gold) for oranges, or by translating the idea contained in the European name, as 'AGHBANIYAH (pomme d'amour) for tomato.

Then in the Middle Ages the Jews were great medical practitioners. In this connection they studied and translated the works of other peoples. They did not, however, take over the medical terms in foreign form, but translated them into their own Hebrew speech. A book has recently appeared with a complete medical vocabulary, most of the words being drawn from the older literature, with additional necessary modern terms invented on legitimate lines.

The Jews also from the eighth century onwards were great philosophers. It is true that the majority of such works were originally written in Arabic, but they were very soon presented in Hebrew dress, mainly through the efforts of the Ibn Tibbon family. A Hebrew philosophical vocabulary was wanted. The older language had been very deficient in abstract terminology, but now the need was immediately met. Arabic and Aramaic terminology supplied models, and the abstract termination in -UTH began to play a great part. All needed terms were produced,

of which the following examples may suffice: YESHUTH, being existence; KAMUTH, quantity; 'ECHUTH, quality; 'ELAHUTH, divinity; 'ENASHUTH, humanity; with SIPHRUTH, literature. From these nouns, too, it was possible to form adjectives by the addition of the termination -I, as 'ENASHUTHI, SIPHRUTHI. The earlier philosophical vocabulary was considerably extended by the Kabbalistic writers. The beauty of this terminology is that the words are derived from the roots on uniform and simple lines, and are thus universally intelligible.

Modern inventions in former times brought their names with them. In our earlier days we were familiar with such words as telegram, telephone, post, vapor (steamer), billet and samovar, but all these have now Hebrew designations that are in daily use. In the formative period for such words "telegraph" for a time assumed the form DOLEG-RABH (springing afar) as an imitative, but now we have MIBHRAQ derived from BARAQ (lightning). Revolver was for a long time QANAH-ROBHEH (a throwing tube), but now it is 'EKDACH. During a visitation in Safad the rather neat form CHOLI-RA' (evil sickness) made its appearance for cholera.

Words are being formed as occasion arises, and on clear legitimate lines of derivation. We do not usually think so, but it must be remembered that Hebrew possesses powers of word formation scarcely equalled by even Greek or Gaelic. Hebrew grammars (*e.g.* Gesenius-Kautsch) set forth about sixty possible formations of nouns from a single stem. Modern speech has added, if not invented, two more very useful forms—HAQTALAH and HITHQATELUTH. Thus we have HAGHDALAH, enlargement; HASHLAMAH, completion; HITHHALLELUTH, self-praise, boasting; HISHTADELUTH, endeavouring. A short time ago we required a word for "self-teaching" or "Selbst-unterricht," and almost unconsciously used HITHLAMEDHUTH. We never saw it anywhere, and it is not in the dictionary, but it was perfectly well understood by every hearer. Some months ago we visited the Technicum at Haifa, and seeing the great variety of tools in use, asked how names were got for them all. We were shown a list prepared for newcomers with explanations in English, German and Russian. All were good Hebrew and perfectly intelligible to any one who knew the simple stems.

We believe that the number of foreign words in actual use does not exceed one hundred. These are mostly connected with modern inventions or international political conditions, and for

such the newspapers are generally responsible. Words like "constitution" and "parliament" look ugly in Hebrew, while "status quo" unpointed is puzzling. These will probably be soon replaced by genuine Hebrew words. Some modern terms, however, are based on ancient foreign roots long embedded in the language. Thus from the Greek *'Aer* (air), the Midrashim formed a Hebrew word *'AVER*. Thence there have been produced *'AVIRI*, airy; *'AVIRAN*, aeroplane; *'AVIRANUTH*, aviation. From the Greek *Lestes* (thief) we find the Midrashic, *LISTIM*, highwaymen, and *LISTUTH*, robbery. Such words will maintain their place in the language. But as it is, we have already attained to the *SAPPAH BERURAH*, "pure speech" of Zeph. iii, 9. Of all modern languages Palestinian Hebrew is the purest, and this position will likely be perpetuated. To this end there is in Jerusalem an association which might very well bear the name of *Academia Hebraica*, though it is not yet so called.

JEWISH PALESTINIAN EDUCATION.

The Jew is never illiterate. In all our association with them we have never met a man, and seldom a woman, who could not read and write some language. Accordingly it was quite natural when colonies were being established that the village school should be the first consideration. Then Zionism linked itself with the Hebrew tongue, and so it became at once the medium of instruction. As soon as children get past the creeping stage they are introduced to the kindergarten (*GAN-HAYELADIM*), and thence to the equivalent of our primary schools. Many of the teachers, too, are scholars of good standing. One of these we met had been head-mistress of a high school in Bohemia. She spoke with facility German, French, Russian and Hebrew, but had willingly given up all her bright prospects that she might aid in "the building of Zion." A companion teacher in the same colony had made a fine collection of fossils and geological specimens that for Palestine was almost complete. In such schools the whole of the teaching is in Hebrew. Everything is "Hebrew in Hebrew"—reading, writing, history, geography, arithmetic, all in the holy tongue. A generation has grown up under this discipline, and now Hebrew is the language of the home everywhere. Travelling the other day there was with us a young mother with her two-year-old boy. She sang to him as the day wore on the Psalms of David in the very words of the

poet. Our own conversation was a little more secular. Wishing to test his intelligence and knowledge, we addressed him as if he were a girl by using feminine adjectives. Very soon we got the response that he was YELED LO YALDAH, "a boy and not a girl."

Secondary schools find place at several centres, especially at such colonies as Tell Aviv, while there is a Training School for Teachers in Jerusalem. These will multiply and improve as time goes on. They add to the Hebrew teaching of the junior schools instruction in sciences, art and languages. These lead up to the Technicum, a well-equipped technical college at Haifa, and to the University of Jerusalem. This institution, opened by Lord Balfour on 1st April, 1925, has made steady progress. It has hitherto given only certificates, but is just on the eve of conferring its first degrees.

By this persistent use of Hebrew from the earliest years under competent teachers the chief pitfall in such a renaissance is being overcome or prevented, that is the introduction of foreign idiom. As a rule each new immigrant comes with another language whose idiom is of another kind, and mistakes made by simply translating are sometimes extremely amusing; but the schools and the reading of well-edited literature very quickly eliminates these faults, and the second generation in the land is entirely free from them.

OUTPUT OF LITERATURE.

This embraces every department of knowledge—educational, secular and sacred. The first Hebrew book printed in Palestine after the British occupation was a dictionary in which Hebrew words were explained in Hebrew, the only exception being that in the case of the rarer plants and animals explanations were given in footnotes in English, German, French and Russian. All the needs of the schools are provided, and the books produced would do credit to our best authors and best publishers. Maps and scientific charts are all in Hebrew. Then there are even advanced text-books for all the sciences—algebra, geometry, chemistry and botany. We have before us at the present moment a classification of plants, according to the best systems, and more intelligible than even in English, for the root of every designation tells its own story.

Children's picture books and children's newspapers abound, with their conundrums, puns and crossword puzzles, and they

are not mere imitations or adaptation of European models. All is Hebrew in word, mentality and spirit. Then the best of all the literatures of the world has been translated. We select a few names at random—Shakspeare's plays, Goethe's poems, Gulliver's Travels, the works of Jack London and Rudyard Kipling, Sherlock Holmes and the stories of the Iliad and the Odyssey. In addition, all kinds of original works are appearing, including a good deal of fiction.

Then the Jew has always been a philosopher, and of each aspect of philosophy we are getting a supply. One of the professors of the University is busy on Aristotle's Philosophy. This may seem a small thing to the uninitiated, but it must be remembered that he was the controlling power of the Middle Ages, and a consideration of his influence entails a knowledge of both Judaism and Christianity in exact detail through many centuries.

And the Bible is not forgotten. Commentaries on the individual books are printed, giving the text with the poetical portions divided into lines and strophes, and with short but adequate comments in pointed Hebrew. Critical investigation of the text appears in such works as *CHIQRÉ MIQRÁ* on Job, in which an attempt is made to get at a clearer understanding of Hebrew rhythm, while another elaborate commentary on the same book gathers up all that the latest Christian scholars have written along with the best Jewish work on the same subject.

We have also reprints of all the older literature of Israel, got up in form something like Reclam's Universal Bibliothek. Individual tracts of the Mishnah with a modern commentary cost $2\frac{1}{2}d.$, or, with the Commentary of Bertinora, $3\frac{3}{4}d.$ Selections of the best of the poems of Samuel han-Nagid, Ibn Gebirol, Aben Ezra, Jehudah hal-Levi and Alcharizi can be got at like prices, and these are supplied with footnotes on strange words or subject-matter. The young colonist, however poor, may at very small cost get into touch with the whole literature of his people, and possess a great quantity of the best of it. Indeed, the remarkable thing about the colonies is the small select library that practically every settler has gathered.

PRESENT CONDITIONS.

At the present moment 98 per cent. of the Jewish population of Palestine speak Hebrew. That means 160,000, and all are

enthusiastic for the language. Children up to 12 years of age generally speak nothing else. The non-Hebrew-speaking Israelites consist of the Chasidim in the holy cities. Most of them have got over their prejudice against its secular use, but generally they have been too old to acquire facility in speaking. In so far as the printing press is concerned other languages have disappeared. Nothing is now printed in Yiddish-Jargon, Ladino (Judæo-Spanish) or Judæo-Arabic. Yiddish and Spanish are still useful at the ports of Haifa and Jaffa, but elsewhere they are allowed to go. There are three Hebrew dailies and several magazines, and the printing presses in Tell Aviv turn out 300 Hebrew books every year. That means an intelligent reading public and a language that has come to stay.

GENTILE INTERESTS.

The first of these is naturally the interpretation and understanding of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. The Jew has commenced this on modern lines, and he will continue it with the advantage of carrying it on in the land of origin, and in the light of all that his predecessors have written; and Christian scholars also will make the language their own as a living speech. In the past critical work has been too much a matter of concordance and grammar, and all has been at the best very mechanical and at times clumsy and inherently objectionable; but with a living language style will be really appreciated. Think of the joy and satisfaction, too, of the scholar who, with accurate pronunciation and exact accentuation, can read aloud the old psalms and the poetic portions of the great prophets! We are on the eve of great revelations in connection with the Old Book. A word of warning may be necessary. In Hebrew, as in all other languages, words change their meanings in the lapse of ages, but in the case of the Old Testament we have sufficient ancient material to keep us right, and gains in word-interpretation may only amount to what modern Greek gives us for the Greek New Testament.

But the modern student's Hebrew must be also colloquial. He must be an efficient scholar in that language, and to this end he will find facilities at the University of Jerusalem. The Chancellor and the staff are most cordial in their desire to welcome Gentile students, and for those at every stage there will be suitable studies. The young undergraduate might take up language,

literature and history, or Bible fauna and flora, and such studies as throw light on Old and New Testament alike; while the advanced student, coming with an Honours degree, might very well, after an attendance of two years, have a Ph.D. of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in very deed "a strategic centre" in matters of literature, science and Biblical interpretation.

The relations of Christian and Jew in the matter of mission work is hardly within our sphere, but at the present moment many a Jew is intensely anxious to discover the link between the Old Testament and the New. That almost sums up what the missionary has been attempting for the Jew. Only in the past it has been done with an inadequate knowledge of the Jew, his mentality, his literature and his aspirations. There has been a persistence in the use of Arabic in Palestine in dealing with the Jew, even when it was to him an acquired language. Whatever language the Jew spoke, his religious vocabulary was always Hebrew. He knew nothing of "mediator, atonement, repentance, salvation, redeem, justify," and such like in anything but Hebrew. To the ordinary Jew "Allah" was the god of the Arabs, just as Chemosh in old time was the god of Moab, and to Allah the Christian sought to convert the Jew. Now there will be facilities with this one language, and that the language of religion. The preacher will require but that one language, and not half a dozen as in past days. There will be time to reach an understanding on things Jewish. Jew and Christian will understand one another better. The Christian needs the Jew just as much as the Jew needs the Christian, and through Jerusalem, the strategic centre, Christianity may, through the Jew, get pruned of many of its superfluities—mostly heathen—and brought back nearer to its primitive form.

CONCLUSION.

More than a century ago, Trelawny, the friend of Byron and Shelley, declared: "No people, if they retain their name and language, need despair." These have been invariably the charter of liberty and the guarantee of nationality. For nearly 4,000 years the name of Israel has had a place among the peoples of the world, and their language has an unbroken history from the first verse of Genesis till this very hour, and although within our own lifetime it was as a living tongue threatened with extinction, it has been restored to its rightful place in the world

by the irrepressible efforts of the great Ben Jehudah, backed in due time by the great Zionist movement.

The hour came and the man ; but there was a divine preparation for the results during almost two millenniums. Peasants in the Plain of Sharon, poets and philosophers in the Spanish Peninsula, medical practitioners in Provence, grammarians, commentators, and travellers all contributed unconsciously to the end now fully attained—the renaissance of the Hebrew tongue.

And this revival of the speech of Israel is but a symbol of the renewal of the people as a nation. Not only in mentality and breadth of outlook is the Jew of to-day a different man from his predecessors of half a century ago, but physically the whole people has been completely changed in a single generation. Instead of the frail, sickly, blear-eyed populace of the holy cities of the last century we have now the stalwart, clean-living, clear-thinking, independent tillers of the soil in 100 Jewish colonies. Such men and women are being prepared for great things. Israel played a great part in the Old World's history. We see in the Divine Providence, so manifest in all that has been done, a guarantee of preparation for great events through Israel in the coming days.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Dr. Thirtle) said : The paper sent to us by Dr. Christie cannot but excite the deepest interest in its appeal to men and women whose eyes have been fixed upon the Holy Land during recent years. Simultaneously with the recovery of the land from the desolation of ages, we have witnessed the coming together of a people descended from the old-time possessors of the land, inheritors of a marvellous tradition, warmly cherished during long centuries of exile in the midst of the nations of the earth. Though for many generations alienated from the homeland of their ancestors, yet, in response to some mysterious urge, the Jews have turned their feet to a soil made sacred by great events of past days, and invested (in the minds of many, at least) with a continuing vitality by reason of " things to come," foreshadowed in the writings of prophets, wise men, and scribes of the House of Israel. And, strange to say, as

shown in Dr. Christie's paper the ancient speech, during long generations known as "the holy tongue," has been given back to the returning tribes. Here, assuredly, we contemplate a truly marvellous providence. And however strong and vital may be the tradition that lies at the back of the modern development, we must recognize that the Book that we all revere and read is providing, in its substance and integrity, the speech that is designed to enrich the Jewish people in the rebuilding of their National Home.

Happy is the nation that comes into such a heritage of blessing ! The extent to which the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament have contributed to the Renaissance of the Hebrew language has been shown by Dr. Christie in his comprehensive statement of facts and principles ; and we find that, now at length there is prevailing among the Jewish people, and regarded as a peculiar treasure, a tongue of truly noble characteristics. From whatever land the pioneers—the immigrants—have come, they choose and employ—not the tongue of the market, not the tongue of social life as spent in the lands of dispersion, but rather, and emphatically, the tongue of prayer and praise, the tongue that, from ancient days, has served them in hours of sacred worship and holy meditation ; and in a time that is already opening upon the people of Palestine, we shall see that, for every purpose of life, during every day of the week, the month, the year, the Jews will converse in words made holy by the exercise of prayer. Is it not wonderful ? And can it be other, in the good providence of God, but that the nation will reach a new experience, high and ennobling, as they realize the prophetic outlook given forth thousands of years ago : " I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the Name of the Lord "—provide them with a " pure lip," or speech. How else can a people build after the manner of God, in order to the saving invocation of His Name ?

What have we seen ? With a strange enthusiasm the people have surrendered forms of utterance and conversation that have served the purposes of life in exile, and then have proceeded to cultivate the tongue of days when the Word of God had power among them as a nation ; they have herein been led along a way that no other nation has travelled. In the days of mourning and sorrow a composite Jargon that was not without its charms was used for the common concerns of life ; but all along in acts of piety

the people have read the Scriptures in Hebrew, or at least envied the privilege of doing so, and sought the heart of God in prayer in the same sacred language, at least when following the regular forms of worship. Hence the "pure lip," having assumed control of heart and mind, men, women, and children seek to employ the same medium of speech in regard to all and every concern in the daily round of life. Can it but be that the higher aims and deeper activities will sanctify such thoughts and intents as are merely commonplace? May not this be in the Divine design as it affects the renaissance of the holy tongue?

As we have heard, the tongue which has thus been accorded a national preference is equal to all the needs of life. Is it old? None the less is it new; and this fact is being found out day by day. We may watch the process. As is well known, before going abroad, thoughtful men and women study some language or languages, so as to be able to make themselves understood; they lay in books of travel, with instruction in regard to conversational methods, and they labour at lists of words and phrases. Such has been, and, indeed, such is, the present passion of backward "pioneers" among Jews going to Palestine. And for the use of such there have been issued from Jewish printing-houses and book-shops, in the East of London, as well as in continental centres of Jewish activity, grammars, dictionaries, and other books specially suited for people going to a land where the Hebrew tongue is spoken. In the old days, as we know from certain Books of the Bible, the Hebrew language incorporated loan-words from Egypt, Persia and surrounding countries, and it is the same to-day, as latest lexicons and grammars of the Hebrew language plainly show. Words from classic sources, and modern continental tongues are readily received and systematically Hebraized, with a result that plainly shows that the old tongue has, in the providence of God, been preserved for such a time as this.

It gives me much pleasure to call for a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. Christie for the paper which we have heard this afternoon. The resolution was carried with applause.

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF expressed regret at the absence of the lecturer, and acknowledged indebtedness to Dr. Thirtle for the

illuminating emphasis with which he read the paper. The speaker proceeded : The paper is informative and highly interesting, especially in regard to the modern developments of the Hebrew language. It is probably true that the key to a nation's intellectuality is its vocabulary. The references on pp. 77 and 79 to the relations of Christians and Jews are significant, notably the printing of the commentary on Job, in which Christian scholarship and Jewish work are combined.

In a book by the late Henry Craik (a Hebrew scholar), entitled *The Hebrew Language*, published in 1860, there are four short paragraphs relative to the subject :—

“(1) In the 12th century, Raymond, a monk of the Dominican Order, attempted to revive the study of Hebrew in the Church, and in 1311, Pope Clement the fifth published a decree requiring that in every university in Christendom, there should be appointed six professors of Hebrew and the cognate dialects ; but for the space of two centuries, it was found impossible to provide a single professor in any University with the exception of Oxford.

“(2) It may safely be affirmed that Hebrew has been more thoroughly investigated since the early part of the 18th century, than it had ever been for, at least, 2,000 years before.

“(3) The number of distinct roots in the ancient Hebrew may be reckoned rather under 2,000 ; and the number of words altogether does not probably exceed 7,000 or 8,000.

“(4) In copiousness of diction, in variety of phraseology, in definite exactness, in capability of indicating distinct shades of meaning, the Greek excels the Hebrew ; but in a pervading moral element, and in a species of pictorial expressiveness, the more ancient language bears away the palm.”

MR. SIDNEY COLLETT called attention to one point in the paper. Dr. Christie, in his opening remarks, said : “ The common opinion, even amongst educated people, is that, during the captivity in Babylon, the Israelites forgot the Hebrew language, and came back an Aramaic-speaking people.” The lecturer implied that such an opinion was faulty ; and yet on p. 68 he says : “ It is quite true that Aramaic was the common speech of the people.”

I believe it is a fact that, during the Babylonish captivity, the priests and rulers of the Jews retained among themselves the

knowledge of pure Hebrew, but that the people generally, after living so long in the land where the Chaldean language was spoken, in course of time lost the purity of their original Hebrew, and spoke what was practically a mixture of Chaldean and Hebrew, known as Aramaic.

It was probably owing to this fact that we read in Neh. viii, 8, when the Jews had returned from Babylon, the Levites "read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and *gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading,*" which would otherwise have been impossible, as the reading was in pure Hebrew (as was always the case when the Scriptures were read), while the people only understood Aramaic.

Moreover, it would appear that Aramaic was the common language of the people in the time of our Lord, for words spoken by Christ, on more than one occasion, are given in clear Aramaic form, as, for example, *Talitha cumi* (Mark v, 41), and *Ephphatha* (Mark vii, 34). See also Matt. xxvii, 46.

Lt.-Col. SKINNER said: Surely no one can have listened to this wonderful story of the renaissance of the Hebrew tongue, coupled as it is with the rebirth of the nation itself, after nearly two thousand years of unexampled persecution, without a deep stirring of heart for God's ancient people. Put but three facts together, the Book, the People, the Language, and, having in view their miraculous preservation through all these long centuries, must we not surely conclude that some wonderful purpose of blessing to mankind through His ancient people awaits the unfolding of the Divine plan?

A word in reference to the sentence on p. 78: "We are on the eve of great revelations in connection with the Old Book." Many years ago I was privileged to have some close association with Dr. John Goldstein, then a young medical student, a Jewish convert whom the Mildmay Mission to the Jews had brought to England from inimical surroundings on the Continent: he is now, I think, working in Salonica. He and Marshall Broomhall and I had had two days of very happy fellowship, and a Bible-reading being suggested, we got the family together round the Word. The portion selected was "The blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel," and never in all my experience

have I heard anything to equal the unveiling of God's heart of love for His beloved people, by Goldstein, who was only a boy, but to whose Spirit-instructed Hebrew mind the deep things of God lay open as to no other. The impression left on my mind after thirty-four years is ineffaceable.

Mr. WILLIAM C. EDWARDS spoke of Dr. Christie as a learned and valiant champion for the truth. He continued: During my recent stay at Haifa I met him frequently, and saw something of his work. Every Saturday there was a meeting for Jews, which was often crowded out. Addresses were delivered in various tongues. At times there was English, then a great deal of Jargon, otherwise called Yiddish, and then again Hebrew. Mr. Rohold, besides English, could be eloquent in Arabic, Hebrew, and Yiddish. As to the paper read, the speaker declared that its correctness was apparent to all who had visited Palestine during recent days. There is Arabic, of course, also German and English, but above all, there is everywhere evidence of the spread and penetration of the Hebrew language, as Dr. Christie had made abundantly clear in his paper.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.

Brig.-Gen. HARRY BIDDULPH wrote: "I presume that Dr. Christie's remarks on the knowledge of Hebrew by the Jewish people apply in particular to European Jews. I recall that some twenty-five or more years ago I was stationed at Poona, in the Bombay Presidency, and among the clerks in the Government office where I worked were two Jews, named Joseph and Daniel, the elder being an office accountant and a man of education. He conducted me one day over the synagogue, which had been built by David Sassoon, who lies buried near the entrance. I soon ascertained that the ignorance of my friend in regard to elementary matters of the Jewish Scriptures and faith was abysmal. I remember commenting at the time on the fact that we had Roman Catholics, Moslems, and Jews, all worshipping in unknown tongues—namely, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew. I have no reason to think that such ignorance as my friend displayed was in any respect unusual in the Jewish community in Poona.

THE LECTURER'S REPLY.

The question raised by Mr. Sidney Collett is one of old standing, and yet ever new. My old teacher, Franz Delitzsch, started the translation of the New Testament with the idea that the "Mishnah Speech" was that of Palestine in the first century. While some sections of the Mishnah consist of concise legal terminology—the language of the schools—other portions as also the Hebrew Haggadic parts of the Palestine Talmud, are so full of life and so free from the mechanical, that they must represent actual speech, and that not merely of the learned, but of the life of the home.

In the Levant the question of linguistic boundaries has always been difficult. Apart from the Arab peasantry of to-day the Oriental has seldom been monolingual. In Christ's day the men of Galilee must have spoken Greek, and a St. Andrew's Professor wrote two volumes to prove that the Gospel teaching was given in that language. We do not agree with him; but it is to be noted that there was not the same objection to that language in Galilee as there was in Judea. In 1891 we discovered a Jewish tombstone (Cent. IV) at Sepphoris (one of the seats of the Sanhedrin) with a Greek inscription giving the genealogy of an *archisynagogos* for three generations. But Aramaic had its place, and we believe it was the language of the homes. The position may have been something like that of Safad forty years ago. Then the women seldom spoke anything but Yiddish, and that after generations of residence, while the men as a rule spoke also Arabic, and frequently some other language.

In connection with Christ's use of Aramaic there is a psychological fact to be considered. There is an inherent compulsion that makes people speak with one another the language of their first acquaintance. Personally I found it very hard to speak English with the male members of my German Congregation in Aleppo, although they knew it as well as I did. In the homes, Christ most likely used Aramaic, and hence its use on the occasions recorded. But that does not exclude a knowledge of Hebrew as another colloquial.

General Biddulph's note claims attention. It is well known that the Jews discovered in Central China, the Falashas of Abyssinia, and probably others have no Hebrew. Business Jews, too, even in

Europe are careless ; but few of them have not " the necessary 500 words." Probably, too, among the very poor in the actual ghettos of India a more extensive interest might be discovered.

The language progresses by " leaps and bounds." Shakespere's " Twelfth Night " is at present being presented in a local theatre. Three comic papers on Purim have just come in ; and to-day (February 3rd) there was handed to me a tin-smith's or tinker's advertisement leaflet, in Hebrew. It touches every phase and stratum of life, and even the Arabs are learning it for business and trade purposes.

I desire to record my sincere thanks to Dr. Thirtle for his presentation of the paper, and for his illuminating contribution to the subject.