

## CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS.

tion, called "Hashirim Asher Lishlomo," consisted of liturgical compositions patterned after the works of Palestrina (sixteenth century). Although this work received the moral support of Leon de Modena and of other Rabbis, it wielded no influence over the larger Jewish communities, for conditions were not favorable for such reforms. It is only with the Emancipation period when definite steps are taken to rid the Synagogue from the abuses of a decadent Hazzanuth. The protagonist of this movement is Solomon Sulzer, and his work transformed the character of modern Synagogal music. The introduction of the modern choir and organ began in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and the modern spirit affected the song even in Synagogues where no liturgical innovations were tolerated. Sulzer's popularity was due chiefly to his mastery of musical theory and to his familiarity with the traditions of the Synagogue. With our debt to Sulzer fully acknowledged, we must remember that his work was directed toward the needs of his own day, and for that reason cannot be regarded as final nor as even satisfactory. His aim, like that of the Jewish leaders of his day, was primarily to bring European culture to the erstwhile emancipated Jews. For this reason do we find that his work preserves too little of the traditional forms. In the works of Lewandowski, Naumbourg, Deutsch, Loewenstamm, Mombach, and Weintraub, we find a fuller regard for tradition.

### MODERN STATUS.

The works of our musical reformers did not receive the support which they so amply deserved. Even in the most conservative communities the Talmudic qualifications of the Hazzan (Taan. 16a) are not strictly insisted upon, and the perverted taste of the unqualified often robs such a service of all solemnity and devotion. On the other hand, in communities equipped with the best instrumental and vocal facilities one notes a rapid disappearance of every trace of our Synagogal tradition.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "Unhappily, the tendency of modern Judaism away from the unspeakably ancient ritualism of the Synagogue is robbing this music of its original appositeness and permitting it to fall into desuetude." H. E. Krehbiel: *Amer Hebrew*, May 27, 1891.

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This want of conservatism in our music is due primarily to the scarcity or neglect of traditional material which meets the esthetic demands of our day. Often the choice of such music is left to men who are fully qualified musicians, but for whom Synagogal music is a *terra incognita*. But a better appreciation of tradition is becoming manifested in the works of recent writers. In a number of instances we find the laudable attempt to retain the old tonalities or modes, though the purity of these is not always strictly maintained.

### OUR PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION.

This historical sketch was designed to show that there are musical traditions in the Synagogue. An effort was made to indicate the appropriateness or intrinsic worth of each form, and this further demonstrates that musical usage in the Synagogue was never arbitrary. Owing to inner and outer restrictions, our sacred music assumed forms which no longer meet with the esthetic demands of our day. To eliminate the antique forms of song will deprive us of a force which makes for Jewishness. To retain them unaltered, will assure their destruction. To escape this dilemma we must remember that ours is not the interest of the antiquarian. Musical curios have no place in a service designed to appeal to men and women of our day. Our task here is to combine the undying values of the past with the ever-changing needs of the present, and such an aim can be achieved by applying the principles of reform. We must distinguish between tradition and traditions in our music just as we do in our theology.<sup>44</sup> Traditions change, but tradition is immutable. Our traditional hymns, which are for the most part adaptations of folk songs, present no difficulty, and these are well represented in our hymnals. In the older forms a number of difficulties inevitably appear. The scales belong to an older musical system and the archaic character of these is often destroyed by modern harmonization. The task, however, is not a hopeless

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<sup>44</sup> Dr. D. Philipson, C. C. A. R., Year Book, Vol. XIX, p. 197.

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one,<sup>45</sup> and if we would follow the examples which our noted Hazanim have furnished, we shall reach a satisfactory solution. The older forms can be retained and these will lend Jewish character to our service. To eliminate them entirely would be as hazardous as to discard all distinctly Jewish symbols. Writers of Synagogal music must make the traditional forms a subject of especial inquiry. For the most part these will serve as sources for the modern Synagogal compositions, and the extent to which the traditional elements may be employed will depend upon the ingenuity and creative powers of each composer. The cantillations and chants must become for the modern writer of Synagogal music what the Midrashic Literature has become for the modern preacher. While no modern sermon can be developed along Midrashic lines, nevertheless whatever of Jewishness a sermon may contain is conditioned by the preacher's familiarity with that literature. Similarly, a composer's knowledge of traditional forms will give his composition an unmistakably Jewish character.

The practical side of this problem must obviously be left to musicians, and such a task does not lie within the immediate province of the Rabbi. As leaders of Jewish communities, however, it is incumbent upon us to formulate a policy which should govern those who are called upon to assume this task. The Rabbinic dictum *בנין זקנים כהירת זקנים* might serve as our motto, but we must remember that elders destroy for the purpose of rearing a more imposing edifice. The Synagogue has never enjoyed better musical facilities than it does to-day. We would be lacking in loyalty to our tradition if we permitted newer musical forms to displace the songs that wield such power in quickening and intensifying our Jewishness. The resolution of Sulzer presented at the Leipzig Synod, which urged the establishment of courses for the training of cantors, is not devoid of suggestiveness for us. We would do well to encourage the cantors in developing the theoretical as well as the practical side of their

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<sup>45</sup> Same difficulty encountered in Gregorian music. For solution, see Preface of Gregorian Accompanist, J. D'Ortigue (Novello, 1905). According to this writer, Gregorian music has a harmony *sui generis*. The same is true of Synagogal music.

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calling. Since most of our communities are not favored by the services of a cantor, our needs will have to be supplied in some other way, but the progress of our cantors will be of benefit to us all.

Our Rabbinical Seminaries would do well to include a study of Synagogal music in their curriculum. Such a course might be pursued with profit in conjunction with the study of our liturgy. Its practical value to the rabbi cannot be overestimated, especially in our smaller communities, and the impetus that traditional music would receive through the sympathetic support of the Rabbi would be incalculable.

We must strive to make our music artistic, popular (volkstümlich) and traditional. The first artistic element will appear in a discriminate choice of compositions which comport with the spirit of our service and which have unquestioned merit. The work of masters will supply an edifying element which will add to the dignity and inspiration of our service. Let us be discriminate in our choice.

The popular or (volkstümlich) element must be supplied in the congregational singing and responses, and the hymns selected will encourage the spirit of worship. Wherever possible the personnel of the choir should consist preferably of worshipers.<sup>46</sup>

The musical tradition of the Synagogue must be preserved because it is closely connected with the various phases of our unique history. In them are imbedded the holiest emotions which swayed the heart of the Jew throughout the ages. Their appeal to the Jewish worshiper cannot be equaled or even approached by better specimens of art, for in public worship the religious interest must take precedence over every other consideration. A retention of the old forms of our traditional song will furnish another bond which unites us with our unparalleled past, and

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<sup>46</sup> "Your American disregard of the personal faith of the co-operating musician is a fatal flaw. It seems to me, a sympathetic rather than an antipathetic observer of American Reform, that this blot is languidly endured rather than boldly and energetically tackled. . . . You rightly feel the need for congregational co-operation in synagogal song; . . . but your singers will have to be Jews before you can awaken the Jewishness in your singing."—(F. L. Cohen in a communication to the writer.)

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our loyalty to this sacred song will supply an added force which makes for Jewish solidarity. We are ready to assimilate the best types of sacred music, but we must not permit such forms to efface every element of song which is distinctly Jewish. The traditional material should be enriched by the better facilities which our happier conditions make possible, but we must adhere to every element of tradition which stimulates our religious consciousness, and which makes for Israel's immortality. Let us not impoverish ourselves by forsaking this sacred treasure.