Song in the Synagogue

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VIEWS ON SINGING.

Finally, it is interesting to listen to Mr. Davies as he states his views on singing and the study of the art of song. He is very emphatic upon the fatal mistake so often made by young singers of rushing into publicity before they have become thoroughly grounded in vocal technique. In this connection he pays a high tribute to the skill of Mr. Henry Russell, jun. (son of the "Cheer, boys, cheer" veteran), as a first-rate "foundation man." The importance of being well prepared cannot be over-estimated. That hard, relentless work is a *sine quâ non* as an element of success may be taken for granted. And then he very properly lays great stress upon the necessity of getting behind the mere notational hieroglyphics, so to speak, and by so doing to obtain that deep insight into the hidden meaning of the music which shall reveal the true beauties of its inmost soul. There is no more *expressive*, and therefore artistic, singer before the public than Ben Davies. Again, his career furnishes another instance—so frequently dwelt upon in the course of these biographical articles—of what may be achieved by steadfast perseverance, high ideals, and a patient continuance in well-doing. All honour to him for having attained his present position by sterling merit, straightforward methods, and earnest endeavour. Young singers may not only derive encouragement, but may learn many lessons from the career of this self-made and estimable man.

One more incident and we have done. On a recent occasion, during one of many walks and talks with him, the conversation turned upon the tenor solos in Mendelssohn's "Elijah." Mr. Davies thereupon remarked—with no thought that his words would ever appear in print—"I have been ten years trying to sing 'If with all your hearts,' and only a year ago did I begin to satisfy myself." The man who adopts such a creed as this and acts up to it is a true artist. He is worthy to occupy a high place in the roll of distinguished tenor singers of which this country has just cause to be proud.

SONG IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

BY THE REV. FRANCIS L. COHEN.

A NOTE on the Maccabæan Hymn, which appeared in a recent number of THE MUSICAL TIMES, may possibly have led to the impression that there are many points of contact between the worship-music employed in Church and in Synagogue. Such an impression might indeed be carried away on hearing some of the choral numbers sung in synagogues, and hearing nothing else. For it is a Jewish characteristic to take a keen interest in all details of modern progress, while still keeping, more or less consciously, a firm hold upon the traditions of the past; and thus the passages which fall to the share of the choristers in Jewish worship are set

to much the same kind of music as are similar passages in the rituals of the Christian churches. This is further due to the circumstance that choirs in synagogues did not exist before the present century, and have become general only in the present generation. Choral music had therefore to be newly procured, and it was of necessity modern. Yet the choral portion occupies but a minor position in the Synagogue Service, and the tendency now is even to construct that portion upon the basis of traditional material, as far as may be done.

UNACCOMPANIED VOCALISATION.

The traditional material is melody ever tending towards ornate elaboration, and it has throughout the centuries been chanted *without instrumental accompaniment*. At the present day, among all the forty-nine synagogues established in the London district, there is but one, the "Reform" synagogue, where an instrument is used at the Sabbath or Festival services. It is a pity that the organ became so crucial a point of contention when the Reform movement, which sought to establish a liberty of choice in ritual matters, and in many minor points broke away from Rabbinical tradition, first convulsed Jewry some two generations since. But something similar happened elsewhere, we remember, in connection with that same "kist o' whistles"; and if many Jews disliked the idea of employing the organ in public worship, because they regarded it as peculiarly a "Christian" instrument, so did the early Church experience compunctions in the matter of the organ, because men then asserted that it was a "Jewish" instrument.

A FENCE TO THE LAW.

Although musical instruments had been so largely employed in the Temple of Jerusalem, after the fall of the Jewish State the people for a long period voluntarily abstained from all use of music save in worship, and thus had no secular association with instruments. A Rabbinical "fence to the Law" came into force, which prohibited the use of instruments on the sacred days, on the ground of their then almost inevitably needing repair or tuning, and so tempting the performer to turn from art, which is not in itself prohibited on the Day of Rest, to labour, which is. The practice of centuries has lent sanctity to this protective prohibition; and thus the music of the Synagogue is still chanted without accompaniment on the Sabbath and the Festivals. But instruments are freely introduced at services on week-days; and it has for centuries been considered that instrumental music at Jewish marriages is even particularly desirable.

In yet another feature of its ritual the "Reform" congregation is isolated in its divergence from ancient tradition, for in all the other synagogues the prayers are not spoken, but *intoned*. This was the custom already in Temple times, when even the Levites

in the Temple choir used to proceed to the synagogues to study and worship after taking part in the sacrificial ritual of the Sanctuary. From the very earliest days of the Synagogue the Jew has been exhorted to utter *with the singing voice* every word recited aloud in the Service. Already, therefore, ages ago, syllabic monotone must have begun to develop into cantillation, and a form of plain-song to come into existence.

CALLING UP.

At first, from the days of Ezra until the third or fourth century of the present era, the chanting of the praises, prayers, and lessons appears to have been the duty and privilege of private members of the congregation; and to this day ordinary worshippers (from three to eight in number, according to the importance of the occasion) are "called up" from their seats to the lectern to read the Scriptures in public. This they now do by proxy, returning thanks for the privilege and overlooking the Precentor during his reading. Yet in the case of a lad so honoured for the first time on the attainment of his religious majority, a congregant selected to commence or end each annual cycle of Pentateuchal lessons, or the person entrusted with the reading of the Prophetic lesson, the worshipper usually himself cantillates the section for which he is "called up."

THE PRECENTOR.

But it was already from a very early period found expedient that the recital of the lessons should be entrusted to a well skilled reader, and that the prayers should be led by an official who would be certain, because of his office, to be provided with a manuscript—for those were the days before the printing press had made books cheap enough for ordinary folk to acquire copies. With the ever-growing accretion of melismatic adornments to the traditional chants, a professional Precentor became a congregational necessity. Termed *Maqré* (Reader) in the Temple, he was known as *Shēliakh Tsibbur* (Messenger of the Congregation) or *Khazzan* (Overlooker) in the Synagogue; and already in the days of the Sanctuary had inaugurated that sequence of specialists in synagogal vocalisation by whom the tradition has been perpetuated. While these specialists have in each succeeding generation amplified their repertory according to the tonal fashion of their day, the vigour of tradition in Jewish observance has brought down to our own times many strains of hoar antiquity.

THE READING OF THE LAW.

The Reading of the Law was in Temple times the main object for which the people assembled in the synagogues. In the Dispersion it became even more the central point of the Jewish ritual, for the recital of the sacrifices took the place of the offerings themselves, when

the Jews enjoyed access no longer to the one spot where sacrifices were permitted. As, with certain rare exceptions, it is at Morning Service that the Law and the Prophets are alone read, the Morning Service far excels those of the Afternoon and Evening in importance as well as in length. This Service falls on Sabbath and Festivals into two parts called "Morning" and "Additional," in accordance with the two sacrifices in the Temple on those days; and the Reading of the Law takes place between them. In some West-End synagogues the "Morning" Service is read at an early hour, and the congregation only attend in numbers later on, when the Reading of the Law is proceeded with. There is sometimes an additional lesson read in English, when the Revised Version is usually employed. Such a vernacular reading, of course, is recited with the speaking voice. But the Hebrew lessons, both Pentateuchal and Prophetic, are chanted.

CHANTING THE LESSONS.

The reader of the Pentateuchal lesson has to devote some time to previous study of the text, for while the cantillation is to be found designated in printed Bibles by a system of accentuation, the public lessons are invariably read from the unpointed text of the *Scrolls*. These consist of many sheets of vellum tacked together end to end, and the extremities each wound round an ornamental rod—this being the ancient way of making a book. Hebrew, like other Semitic tongues, has an alphabet of consonants only, read from right to left. The vowels are designated by little strokes and points added below or above the consonants voiced by them. The cantillation—and the syntax—are further marked by neumes or accents, small dots, strokes or curves, accompanying the vowel points. This punctuation has been in general use since about the sixth century; but in the more ancient form, as in the *Scrolls* read from by the officiant, only the consonantal text is given. Accordingly, the lesson, which averages over a hundred verses in length every Sabbath, *must be carefully prepared*, as may be gathered from the following transcriptions. In the *Scroll* the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, for example, begins as follows:—

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה
את אברהם ויאמר אליו אברהם ויאמר
הנני

This simply gives the following unvocalised text: *Vyhy 'khr hdbrym h'lh vh'lhym nsh 't 'brhm vy'mr 'ly 'brhm vy'mr hnny*. But in a printed volume the same verse would be *pointed*, thus:—

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה
את אברהם ויאמר אליו אברהם ויאמר
הנני :

This pointing enables one who is not scholar enough to recognise the inflections of the text without such assistance to read it with accuracy; and an ordinary English Jew would accordingly vocalise the verse as follows: *Vayēhi akhar haddēvorim hoēilleh, vēhoēlahim nissoh es Avrohom; vayaumer eilov, Avrohom, vayaumer hinneini* (vowels as in Italian or German).

When the accents are added, the verse would appear fully pointed thus:—

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסּוּהוּ
אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר
הִנְנִי:

The accents, about thirty in number, constitute at once a syntactical and a musical notation, marking not alone the chant melody, but also the *dichotomy*, or division and sub-division into halves; for the Hebrew sentence, alike of prose and of verse, is constructed on the lines of the period in mensurate music, with half cadence and full cadence. The longer or more involved the sentence, the more elaborate accordingly is the melody of its cantillation, which is essentially a development of the original monotone recitative in the direction of facilitating the comprehension of what is uttered.

THE CHANT-ACCENTS.

The accents themselves are known as *Neginoth* (strings, musical notes) or *Ta'amim* (adornments, tropes). It is pretty clear that they are literally a *cheirography*, or rough diagram of the movement of the voice in declamation, as conventionally designated by the movements of the teacher's hand; and their musical value gives us a fair idea of that bardic intonation interpreting the text chanted, which for the ancients constituted melody, as tune does for us. The two systems now in use were settled by the Massoretic (punctuating) School of Tiberias, before the seventh century; but the cantillation must of course have existed in a well-developed form long before any such notation for it was invented. The vocal interpretation of the accents used in the poetical books—Psalms, Proverbs, Job—was still retained until about the fifteenth century; but it has since been forgotten, owing to the greater congregational advantage of an unvarying chant for poems consisting of verses of fairly equal length. But the other system, for the books recited by an individual reader, where the verses are not so regular, is still in constant employment. According to the use of the congregation, the particular occasion determines which one of several parallel musical interpretations shall be given to the accents. Jews nowadays follow one of two main *Minhagim* or uses, although many local variations are also to be recognised. These uses are purely liturgical, and by no means rise to the level of sectarian distinction. They scarcely differ in anything beyond the

pronunciation of the vowels and the musical intonation of the Services; and even these differences are in detail rather than in principle. These main uses are those of the *Ashkēnazim* or "Germans"—broadly those Jews whose ancestors of the Middle Ages were resident in Teutonic lands—and of the *Sēphardim* or "Spaniards"—broadly, those Jews whose ancestors have dwelt among the Latin and Arab peoples. The vast majority of Jews in these days follow the use of the *Ashkēnazim*, which is the one particularly dealt with here.

MODAL DIFFERENTIATION.

In each of the uses the same musical principle is followed out, a principle which may be traced back to the Temple itself, if my interpretation of the Psalm-headings has any force. According to this principle, all chanting, whether of the lessons or the prayers, follows out one system on well recognised lines; but the cantillation or plain-chant of each particular Service falls in a *particular mode* or scale-form anciently set apart for that Service on account of some æsthetic peculiarity or appropriateness. These modes are all of an antique or Oriental character, and include not only those tonalities familiar to students of the Church plain-song, but also others preserved in the Byzantine and Armenian traditions, in the folk-song of Eastern Europe, or in Perso-Arab and even Hindu melody. The modal feeling of Jewish worship-music is thus still in many ways reminiscent of the musical theory and practice of Eastern Asia, which dominated the ancient world, and still rules from the Slav lands of Europe away to Southern India. Using wherever possible the nomenclature of the Gregorian modes (although it must be borne in mind that these are by no means scrupulously followed), we find that the use of the *Ashkēnazim*, who, it must be remembered, have been resident among the peoples of Northern Europe for something like twenty centuries, finds an æsthetic correspondence between occasion and tonality as follows:—

SERVICE..	Gregorian Mode.
LESSONS.—Pentateuchal (Ordinary Days)	.. <i>Æolian</i> .
" (Penitential Days)	.. <i>Mixolydian</i> .
" Prophetical (all Days) ..	.. <i>Hypodorian</i> .
Book of Lamentations ..	.. <i>Hypoæolian</i> .
" Esther ..	.. <i>Hypolydian</i> .
PRAYERS.—Sabbath Eve ..	.. <i>Mixolydian</i> .
" Morning ..	.. <i>Chromatic Phrygian</i> .
" Afternoon ..	.. <i>Dorian</i> .
Festival Eve ..	.. <i>Æolian</i> .
" Morning and Afternoon ..	.. <i>Mixolydian</i> .
Penitential Eve ..	.. <i>Ionian</i> .
" Morning and Afternoon ..	.. <i>Phrygian</i> .
Daily Eve ..	.. <i>Chromatic Hypolydian</i> .
" Morning and Afternoon ..	.. <i>Lydian</i> .

The accents of the verse of Scripture given above would accordingly be chanted as follows when read as part of an ordinary Pentateuchal lesson:—

- rim . . ho - eil - leh, vě - ho - ě - lau -
 - him . . nis - soh . . es Av - ro - hom; . . vay -
 - yau - mer ei - lov, . . Av - ro - hom, . . , vay -
 CODA.
 - yau - mer hin - nei - ni.

On the Penitential Days, however, it would be chanted in another mode, thus:—

Rather slower.

Va - yě - hi a - khar had - dě - vo -
 - rim ho - eil - leh, vě - ho - ě - lau - him . . nis -
 - soh es Av - ro - hom, vay - yau - mer ei -
 - lov, . . Av - ro - hom, vay - yau - mer, hin - nei - ni.
 CODA.

Lento—molto dolente.

A - las! How . . ! doth sit . . sol - - it - ar - y the ci - ty that once was
 full of peo - ple, now is she . . like a wi - dow; she that great was among the na -
 - tions, prin - cess a - mong the pro - vin - ces, . . is be - come . . . trib - ut - a - ry. She
 weepeth sore in the lone - - ly night, and her tears are on her cheeks; . . none are
 com - forters of all her lov - ers: her friends have all be - tray - ed her, . . now . . are they her
 en - e - mies. Ju - dah hath gone . . cap - tive be - cause of af - flict - ion, she dwell - eth a - mong the Gen - tile, no . .
 rest . . for her is found, her per - se - cu - tors have o - ver - tak - en her in nar - row pla - ces. The ways of Zi - on
 are in mourn - - - ing, for none come to her feasts, her gates . . are all des - ol - ate, her
 priests all sigh - ing, her maid - ens are af - flict - ed, and woe is her, . .

(To be continued.)

Again, if it formed portion of a lesson from the Prophets, its accents would be quite otherwise interpreted as regards their tonality, in the following manner:—

Rather briskly.

Va - yě - hi a - khar had - dě - vo -
 - rim ho - eil - leh, vě - ho - ě - lô - him nis -
 - soh es Av - ro - hom, vay - yau - mer ei -
 - lov, Av - ro - hom, vay - yau - mer, hin - nei - ni.
 CODA.

Each of these modal interpretations of the accents has a "jubilation" as *coda* for the last words of each section, a sort of musical "Here endeth the Lesson," the form of which is shown in each of the above illustrations. To make clear the manner in which the cantillation elucidates the text, and how the "distinctions" denoted by each several accent blend smoothly into a homogeneous chant, a transcription with English text of the first verses of Lamentations may be added.