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THE  
JEWISH QUARTERLY  
REVIEW

JANUARY, 1896

JOSEPH DERENBOURG.

Two years ago it fell to my lot to write a short obituary of my friend Isidore Loeb (*JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW*, V, p. 1). With a sense of grief that deepens as one after another is added to the list of lost friends, I have now to record the death of Joseph Derenbourg, which occurred suddenly on the 29th of July last at the age of eighty-four years, when he was זקן וישבע ימים. The deceased was born at Mayence, and he had to seek the means of making a livelihood which would allow him to continue his studies in Rabbinical literature, as well as in other Semitic languages, like his senior Salomon Munk, since at that time Germany had closed the door of the Universities to Jews. After having accomplished the course of Latin and Greek in the Gymnasium of his native place, he went to the Universities at Giessen and Bonn to begin the study of Semitic languages, and took his degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the famous Professor Freytag in 1834. Simultaneously, as was then the custom with the Jews, he followed the course of instruction of the Jewish schools in the Talmud and its commentaries. J. Derenbourg then accepted a tutorship in a rich family at Amsterdam, but left this lucrative post for Paris, as Munk did, in 1839, where he continued his Oriental studies under Quatremère, Caussin de Perceval, and Reinaud. During his sojourn in Holland, he began his

literary career by articles which appeared in Geiger's *Zeitschrift*. The most important is that on the writings of Isaac ibn Giyath (or Gayath), and extracts from the University library at Leyden, of which Steinschneider afterwards compiled the Catalogue. It is probable that Derenbourg wrote the following essays when still in Holland: (1) with the title *Ueber das letzte Paschahmahl Jesu* (1841), a subject taken up lately by Prof. D. Chwolson in the *Mémoires* of the St. Petersburg Academy, 1892; (2) *Notes on Hebrew Grammar* (1846), both of which appeared in the *Orientalia*, edited by Juynboll, signed *Dernburg*. At the same epoch the deceased began his Arabic publications, which we shall not enumerate, since Mahometan subjects have only a remote right to entry into a Jewish Quarterly. The new edition of Lokman's *Fables*, with a French translation and notes (Berlin, 1847), by the deceased, has an interest for Jewish readers, since Derenbourg identifies Lokman with the name of Balaam.

Between 1848 and 1860 the deceased was obliged to slacken his literary energy, having been forced to seek his daily bread. However, he wrote a notice on Maimonides' *Guide*, which Munk was editing, and went on with his Arabic labours, editing together with M. Reinaud the famous work of Hariri. About 1862 he took up his old studies in Hebrew literature, writing many valuable reviews in the *Journal Asiatique*; he also published notices on Semitic epigraphy, and reverted to his old love, viz. Hebrew Grammar and Massoretic studies. His great knowledge of the last subject he showed by publishing critically with a commentary the famous Yemen Grammar, found in MS., as a kind of Massoretic guide, with the title of *Manuel de Lecture*, which appeared in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1867. M. Derenbourg then turned his attention to Jewish history. He published in 1867 his great work on Jewish history, which appeared under the title of *Essai sur l'histoire et la Géographie de la Palestine d'après les Talmud et les autres sources rabbiniques*, vol. i (history), now out of print.

He planned a second edition, enlarged by recent research, and with the addition of an index which readers missed in the first volume, but we know not how far his revision went, or whether it is found among his papers. The second volume (geography) did not appear at all, and as far as I know only the slips of it exist. For curiosity sake I may mention that after 1871 he entered into a political controversy with Geiger, the latter siding with Germany, while Derenbourg was heart and soul for France. This correspondence exists in print. We cannot enumerate all the minor articles which he wrote after 1870 in the *Journal Asiatique*, of which he was one of the committee of publication, nor those in other periodicals, more especially the *Revue des Études Juives*, his contributions to which would make more than a big volume. Here he tried his hand on Biblical criticism, Hebrew palaeography, on the Mishnah, on grammar. The most important publication was the glosses of Judah ben Balam on Isaiah, according to a MS. at St. Petersburg. He was also member of the committee of the *Revue*, sometime President, and an assiduous contributor. It is curious to mention that Derenbourg did his most important work after his eyes began to fail, and he became, alas, completely blind. He published in this state the Himyaritic part of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, issued by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, of which he was elected a member in 1871. The same was the case with the publication of Abul Walid's (Jonah ben Jannah) *Opuscula* (1880) and the *Grammar* (1886), both in Arabic; the former with French translation and with collaboration of his son, M. Hartwig. Others of Derenbourg's publications are the two Hebrew versions of *Calila ve Dimnah*, which appeared in 1881 amongst the publications of the *École des Hautes Études*, where he taught Rabbinic. In this collection he published, also in 1887, *Johannis de Capua Directorium Vitae Humanae*, which is the Latin translation of *Calila ve Dimnah*.

The last great work of the deceased was the edition of

S<sup>e</sup>adyah Gaon's collected works as far as they exist, in honour of S<sup>e</sup>adyah's Millennium which fell in 1892. Generous subscriptions came in after the appeal of the octogenarian Derenbourg. He himself published in Stade's *Zeitschrift* a revised translation of Isaiah by S<sup>e</sup>adyah. At present the edition of the Pentateuch by the deceased; the translation and commentary on Proverbs aided by M. Lambert are published; and, we understand, Isaiah as far as the commentary exists, are ready. Derenbourg chose the collaborators of this arduous work, but M. Lambert will be the pilot now that the master's hand is removed. Our consolation is in the words of the prophet *כי לא אלמן ישראל*, and the collaborators are of vigorous age.

Derenbourg was for a time member of the Consistoire de Paris; an active member of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and of the Sociétés des Études Juives. He took part in preparing the Catalogue of the Hebrew MSS. in the National Library, begun by Munk, and continued by him and Adolphe Franck. The deceased was for a long time reader of Semitic for the *Imprimerie Nationale*; in this capacity he was very useful to authors, and especially to beginners. M. Derenbourg was kind hearted in every way, benevolent, and never despaired of the future, despite his terrible affliction. In that respect he was a Jew of the old type, having confidence in the future. He encouraged young students to work. Isidore Loeb, Lambert, and Israel Levi are in some respects his pupils, and those who survive will not easily forget him. To me he was a dear friend for nearly forty years. *הנצבנה*

A. NEUBAUER.

P.S. I understand that the Committee which is directing the S<sup>e</sup>adyah publications has placed the continuation of the work in the hands of Prof. H. Derenbourg, son of the deceased. Unfortunately the funds at the disposal of the Committee are almost exhausted.