

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 25 — Smolenskin, Perez

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SMOLENSKIN, PEREZ [Peter] (1842-1885), Russian Jewish novelist, was born near Mogilev (Russia) in 1842; he died at Meran (Austria) in 1885. His story is the Odyssey of an erring son of the Ghetto. He joined and left the opposite parties of the rationalists and the mystics, and followed a variety of precarious occupations. He settled in Odessa, where he familiarized himself with several European languages, and became an antinomian in religion, though he never left the Jewish fold. He became the rallying-point for the revolt of young Jewry against medievalism, the leader, too, in a new movement towards Jewish nationalism. His Hebrew periodical, the Dawn (*Ha-shahar*), exercised a powerful influence in both directions. Shortly before his death he became deeply interested in schemes for the colonization of Palestine, and was associated with Laurence Oliphant. Smolenskin was the first to dissociate Messianic ideals from theological concomitants. Smolenskin's literary fame is due to his Hebrew novels. He may be termed the Jewish Thackeray. In style and method his work resembles that of the English novelist. There is little doubt but that Smolenskin, had he written in any language but Hebrew, would be regarded as one of the great novelists of the 19th century. Of his novels only the best need be named here. *A Wanderer on the Path of Life* (*Ha-to'eh be-darkhe ha-Hayim*) is the story of an orphan, Joseph, who passes through every phase of Ghetto life; the work (1868-1870) is an autobiography, the form of which was suggested by *David Copperfield*, but there is no

similarity to the manner of Dickens. More perfect in execution is the *Burial of the Ass* (*Qeburath Ḥamor*) which appeared in 1874. A third novel, *The Inheritance* (*Ha-yerushah*), issued in 1880-1881, depicts life in Odessa and Rumania.

See N. Slouschz, *The Renaissance of Hebrew Literature*, chs. ix., x., xi.

(I. A.)

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