

## Two New Labor Poets.

The Brooklyn Eagle contains an interesting account of the rise and progress of two Hebrew poets who have appeared in the ranks of the wage-earners. It says:

One is Morris Rosenfeld, who recently went there from New York, and the other is Isaac Reingold, who has lived there for years. Both speak from experience; both have known the privations and the toil that they so pathetically picture; both have worked in sweat shops and both began their literary labors amid the surroundings that they describe. In fact, the first poems of both were written while they were earning their daily bread with the shears and the needle, in that soul-destroying grind of which so much is heard and so little is really known by the average man or woman. Again, there is a similarity in the fact that the genius of both was recognized by outsiders of discernment and opportunity was given them to better their condition and show what they could do.

Today Reingold still labors in a Chicago tailoring establishment, but under more favorable conditions than heretofore and with the hope that he may be able to give up the work later. Many of his songs have been set to music and published, and arrangements are now being made to translate them into English and publish the collection in book form. Rosenfeld, however, has been able to leave his bench, has supported himself several years by his writings and is now associate editor of the Jewish Call, a paper published from 213 West 12th street, Chicago. His family still lives in New York, and he has a book shop there at 202 West End avenue, to which he may yet return. He is at present undecided whether he will come back to New York or take his family to Chicago.

Of these two Yiddish poets Rosenfeld is deserving of first attention. There may be as much of merit in the work of Reingold, but circumstances conspired to bring Rosenfeld more prominently into public notice. His poem entitled "The Sweat Shop," created a veritable sensation when set to music by Miss Eleanor Smith and sung before the Chicago Consumers' league at Hull House, a short time ago, and the interest thus aroused has at least indirectly served to call attention to the other poet who is singing in the same strain. It may be said in passing that the song as sung on that occasion was incomplete, but it certainly served its purpose. Miss Smith, who is a Chicago music teacher, is still working on the music, and refuses to give it out for publication until it has been polished up to her satisfaction.

"So far as the music is concerned," she says, "the song was not finished when it was heard at Hull House. I have done a good deal of work on it since then."

The words, however, have undergone no changes. They were translated from the original Yiddish by Prof. J. W. Linn of the University of Chicago, and, in view of the fame they have brought their author the entire poem can hardly fail to be of interest. It is as follows:

The roaring of the wheels has filled my ears,

The clashing and the clamor shut me in;

Myself, my soul, in chaos disappears. I cannot think or feel amid the din, Toiling and toiling and toiling—endless toil

For whom? For what? Why should the work be done?

I do not ask, or know, I only toil, I work until the day and night are one.

The clock above me ticks away the day,

Its hands are spinning, spinning, like the wheels.

It cannot sleep or for a moment stay,

It is a thing like me, and does not feel.

It throbs as though my heart were beating there—

A heart? My heart? I know not what it means.

The clock ticks, and below I strive and stare,

And so we lose the hour. We are machines.

Noon calls a truce, an ending to the sound,

As if a battle had one moment stayed—

A bloody field! The dead lie all around;

Their wounds cry out until I grow afraid.

It comes—the signal! See, the dead men rise,

They fight again, amid the roar they fight,

Blindly, and knowing not for whom, or why,

They fight, they fall, they sink into the night.

It was first sung before the Arts and Handicrafts' association, and attracted so much attention there that the Consumers' league—an organization that aims to better the condition of employes generally—expressed a desire to hear it. As before stated, the finishing touches had not been put to the music, but it made a distinct hit nevertheless. That was February 15, and since then the poem has become a sort of anthem of the workers in the slums. It is far more typical of existing conditions than "The Man With the Hoe," and it bids fair to have a far-reaching effect.

And the man who wrote this song worked in the sweat shops of England and America for eighteen or twenty years, being finally discovered in a literary sense by a Harvard professor. Rosenfeld is the son of a poor fisherman, and was born in Russian Poland in 1862. Such scanty education as he received in his youth he secured there, but his whole life has been one continuous effort to improve mentally as well as in a worldly way. He learned the diamond cutting trade in Amsterdam, when he finally succeeded in getting away from his birthplace, and then found employment as a tailor in London. From there he came to New York, where he remained until invited to become associate editor of the Chicago publication. In such surroundings as the sweat shop life forces upon all thus employed he wrote his first poems, but nothing approaching literary success came to him until Professor Leo Wiener of Harvard accidentally got hold of some of his work in the original Yiddish. Professor Wiener was so impressed with its merit that he wrote to Rosenfeld asking him to come to Cambridge and see him. The result of this interview was an arrangement for an English translation of the best of the poems, and these were afterward published by Copeland & Day. Later an enlarged edition was put upon the market by Small, Maynard & Co., and now they have been translated into French, German, Polish and Danish, while an Italian edition is at present being prepared. Pretty fair for the son of a fisherman, is it not?

Since leaving the sweat shops Rosenfeld has supported himself and his family by his literary work. He has lectured and given readings, and a number of his poems have been set to music by Miss Helen Bingham. Three months ago he recited at the University of Chicago, and later gave some readings in Sinai Temple. Then came the rendition of his song, with music by Miss Smith, before the Arts and Handicrafts' association, and the invitation to appear before the Consumers' league followed. The sensation created there served to call general attention to him, and now, as the author of "The Sweat Shop," he is widely known and his productions are in demand. From this it should not be inferred that he had acquired no par-

ticular reputation before, for that is not the case. His first volume of translated poems attracted the attention of such authorities as the Critic and the Bookman, but it is "The Sweat Shop" that has accentuated his success and made him known to the general public as the poet of the lowly.

Of his literary compatriot Isaac Reingold, almost the same story can be told. Reingold has not achieved quite the same measure of fame—he has not yet broken away from the sweat shop, but he is already known as the poet of the Chicago Ghetto. He lives amid the squalor and the poverty of that district, but he has produced many poems, some of which have been set to music by G. Mendelssohn, a Jewish composer, formerly of New York, but now of Greensborough, Pa. His first volume has been published only recently, but it has enjoyed a large measure of popularity among the people of his class; and arrangements are now being made with Alexander Harkavy of New York, associate editor of the Jewish Encyclopedia, for the publication in English of some of the best that he has written.

Reingold was born in Russia, but, unlike Rosenfeld, his parents were wealthy. They suffered financial reverses, however, and he finally came to America to seek his fortune. So far as music and literature were concerned his education had been neglected, and this makes his recent success the more remarkable. The first opera he ever heard was in Baltimore nine years ago, and that appealed to him so strongly that he was seized with a desire to express his own emotions in song. He began the following day, and his first poem was one of revolt at having to put in a wearisome day at the machine. Like Rosenfeld, he sang of toil, and suffering, and poverty, of the life that so many thousands are compelled to lead, and his songs appealed to those who knew what that life was. Like Rosenfeld, also, his ambition lead him to improve his mind in every possible way. He knew nothing of the art of poetry, so he studied it. He had the ideas, and he sought to learn how to express them, procuring for this purpose all the Yiddish songs and poems that he could. The natural result of this was, that his work improved; it began to show the polish as well as the soul of true poetry, and he furthermore had the advantage of working in a field in which he was almost alone. There are many songs of the lowly, but such as he wrote could not be written by no one who had not had his experience. Imagination alone cannot picture the yearnings of a man thus tied down; nor can it adequately tell of the privations and the hopelessness of despair.

Eight years ago he came to Chicago, and here he now lives in a humble apartment at 263 Maxwell street. The sweat shop still provides his labor; writing is his recreation. "I am happy only when I am writing," he says. Yet there is little money in what he produces. In order to reach the people for whom they are intended his verses have to be published in such cheap form that there is practically no profit, and, as he has a wife and children to support, the needle and the shears still claim nearly all of his waking hours; but the proposed publication of a volume of English translations may materially better his condition. It is to be hoped so. The spec-

tacle of genius in a sweat shop is sad, to say the least.

Although Miss Eleanor Smith, who wrote the music of "The Sweat Shop," has had no such soul-trying struggles as the two Ghetto poets, she is in touch with the circumstances depicted. She has charge of the music department of Hull House in the Ghetto district, and also gives instruction in one of the training schools of Chicago. She has lived nearly all her life in Chicago and began her musical education in the Hershey school here, although she afterward studied three years abroad. Her time is principally devoted to the instruction of children.

## The Same Old Birthday.

Harry—"Girls take things so literally, you know."

Fred—"As, for example?"

Harry—"Five years ago, when my sister was 25, I wished her many happy returns. And, if you'll believe it, her 25th birthday returns regularly every year."

## His Betrothed.

Enraged Mamma—"The very idea of my daughter marrying an actor."

Betrothed Daughter—"Yes, but ma, he's such a very bad actor; you would never know he was one."—Baltimore World.

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