THE "FLOIDERZAK" — EPHRAIM DEINARD’S "VIPERS’ HYMN"

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Ephraim Deinard (1846-1930) was a Hebrew writer and biographer who traveled widely, lived in Erezer Israel as two different periods, was a bookseller and ended up emigrating to America. He is best remembered for his sharp tongue and his many attacks on public personalities, writers, intellectuals and journalists. During one period he was especially prone to unprecedentedly sharp attacks on Hebrew newspaper editors.

As publisher and editor of a Hebrew weekly in New York, “HaLeummi” (“The National,” 1888-89), he lashed out unrestrainedly against all sorts of injustices, and especially against other editors. He carried on journalistic debates on contemporary Jewish issues, for example on Baron Rothschild’s settlement program in Erezer Israel, which he denounced mercilessly, labeling the Baron, his administrators and his supporters “Haters of Zion” and accusing the Baron of land speculation. He also wrote a satirical column on Jewish life in which he parodied other editors, including Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, as well as religious newspapers and Hassidic thinking and mores.

In 1890 he published a Hebrew volume of satirical newspapers, all written by himself, titled “Floidarzak” (literally, “Bug of Chincher”), in which he continued to lambast newspaper editors, calling them oppressors of the people and beasts of prey. This material was illustrated by caricatures apparently taken from the English press, some of which appear distinctly anti-Semitic.

The targets of his attacks included Michael Radkinson, another Hebrew editor who had immigrated to New York, Alexander Zederbaum, editor of “HaMelech,” and Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, editor of “HaYivri.” Deinard satirized Ben-Yehuda’s efforts to expand the Hebrew language, as well as his inclination to Aramaic it, as opposed to Deinard’s and many other writers’ insistence on the Aramaic alternative.

Deinard relied ridiculing the entire Jewish religious world, especially the “Hakotak” (disbursement of charities received from abroad) system in Erezer Israel and the behavior of the Hassidim. He also mocked the Reform Jews of America for imitating Christian practices.

It is likely that Deinard, who was fluent in English, was influenced in his journalistic approach by familiarity with the English satiric press.