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THE JEWS IN JAMAICA AND DANIEL ISRAEL LOPEZ LAGUNA.

SOUTH of the island of Cuba, so much noted recently, lies the island of Janahina, or Jamaica. Discovered by Columbus on his second journey, it remained for one hundred and sixty years in possession of the Spanish, till it was conquered by the order of Oliver Cromwell, no previous declaration of war having been made. When the English occupied the island, so rich in gold and spices, they found already Spanish and Portuguese Jews settled there.

One of the first travellers on the island was Benjamin de Mesquita, a relation of Jacob and Abraham Bueno de Mesquita, wealthy and notable citizens of Amsterdam; and of David Bueno de Mesquita, who was the Resident of the Elector of Brandenburg, and general agent of the Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg. About 1661 Benjamin petitioned the king "for relief from the provisions of the Navigation Act," and, at the same time, "to be granted letters of denization¹." Although his request was granted, the permit was useless to him, and he could not enjoy his denizenship. Some Jews of Barbadoes, Isaac Israel de Pisa, Aaron Israel de Pisa, and their brother, Abraham Israel de Pisa, who lived in Jamaica, said that they had discovered gold mines, and had, in this way, put Sir William Davidson to considerable expense and loss. Their punishment was that they were expelled from Barbadoes. But the same punishment was also, quite undeservedly, inflicted upon Benjamin Bueno de Mesquita and his two sons; upon Abraham Cohen, who had sent out Aaron Israel de Pisa's mother with her other children to Barbadoes; upon Jacob Ulhoa, and upon Abraham Soarez². Abraham Israel de Pisa, who had indeed discovered some vanilla and pepper, but no gold, and was therefore called, in derision, "the gold-finder³," departed for England. He addressed a statement to the chief lieutenant Thomas, the president of the Council of Jamaica, in which he made suggestions as to the way of discovering gold, but found hardly any credence. Benjamin Bueno de Mesquita and the other Jews, banished from

¹ *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, V, 49.

² *Ibid.*, V, 69 sq. (*Colonial Papers*, vol. XVIII, no. 79), 91 sq.

³ *Ibid.*, V, 69 (*Calendar of British State Papers*).

Jamaica, took up their abode in New York. There Benjamin died on the 4th of Cheshvan, 5444=October 24, 1683¹.

It was in the year 1660 that Jacob Josua Bueno Enriques, presumably a relation of Elias Bueno Enriques and Moses Bueno Enriques, who lived in Amsterdam about 1675, petitioned the king to be allowed to work a copper mine, bought from a Spaniard, to lay out plantations, and to have, for these purposes, a sufficient number of negroes placed at his disposal. In his petition, which was composed in Spanish, he named, as a reference, the "Hebrew Manoel da Fonseca, who lived at that time in London, as interpreter of the Spanish ambassador, in order to learn the English language²." Bueno Enriques, who lived in the Punta de Cagoe in Jamaica, and who was called by the English "the French Jew," on account of his frequent intercourse with the French, asked for himself, and for his brothers Joseph and Moses Bueno Enriques, firstly, to become naturalized, and, secondly, to be allowed "to live openly and undisturbed, according to the tenets of their religion and to have a synagogue."

¹ His Spanish (not Portuguese) epitaph is given incorrectly in *Publications*, I, 92. It reads:—

Debajo desta Lo[s]sa sepultado
 Yace Binjamin Bueno de Mesq^{ta}
 Falesio y deste mundo fue tomado
 En quatro de Hesvan su alma Bendita
 Aqui de los vivientes apartado
 Espera por tu Dios que resuscita
 Los muertos de su pueblo con piedades
 Para bivar sin fin de Eternidades.

5444.

M. N. Taylor Phillips read *Ya se* instead of *Yace*, and translated accordingly *He who was*; he read *Para Bruir*—*Bruir* is no Spanish; it should read *Para bivar* for *vivir*, Old Spanish. The English translation would be thus:

Beneath this stone is buried
 Benjamin Bueno de Mesquita,
 Who died and whose blessed soul
 Was taken from this world
 On the fourth of Hesvan.
 Here from the living separated
 Wait for thy God who revives
 The dead of His people in mercy,
 To enjoy without end Eternity.

² . . . un breve de nombre Manoel da Fonseca que sta oy en Londres en casa del Embagador d'Espagnia de Interprete por saber hablar la lengua Inglesa.

We see, therefore, that as early as 1660 several Jewish families lived at Jamaica. For further information about himself, he referred to General Dall and the royal consuls, who lived with him on the island in 1658 and 1659, and also to the Englishman Peter Pino, who carried on a banking business in Jamaica¹.

The number of Jewish residents increased from year to year; they were allowed to reside there on condition that they took the oath of allegiance before the governor. Thus in the year 1668, Salomo Gabay Faro and David Gomes Henriques, two years later Abraham de Soza Mendes, and in 1671 Abraham Espinosa and Jacob de Torres came from London. They all of them possessed the rights of English citizens. The English government, in order to increase the number of industrious settlers on the island, instructed the governor, Sir Thomas Lynch, to absolve the new arrivals from taking the oath of allegiance, and to grant all inhabitants the freedom of their religious worship.

Although the obligation was, to a certain extent, put upon the Jews who settled in Jamaica "to settle and plant²," yet, they mostly occupied themselves with trade, and opened large shops. This aroused the jealousy of the English traders to such an extent, that, in 1671, they presented a petition to the council, urging that the Jews should confine themselves to wholesale commerce, and leave the retail trade in the hands of the Christian traders, and that all Jews who had not been naturalized should be expelled. There were only sixteen in all of the latter description. The governor was opposed to the suggestion, as being against the interests of the island, for "he was of opinion that His Majesty could not have more profitable subjects than the Jews and the Hollanders; they had great stocks and correspondence." These words occur in a letter from the governor, dated December 17, 1671, to the secretary, Lord Arlington. He proceeds to say that he had personally convinced himself of their usefulness. "He sent a Jew to the inland provinces, where the wine grows, to see whether he can procure any vanilla for the king and his lordship³." The petition was dealt with in this way, that the council resolved "that for the better settling and improving of Your Majestie's island of Jamaica, due encouragement may be given

¹ The petition is published: *Publications*, V, 65, from *Colonial Papers*, vol. XV, no. 74.

² The reply to the Baron de Belmont's petition contains the following words: "Their first introduction into the island was upon condition that they should settle and plant," *Publications*, II, 168.

³ *Publications*, V, 71 sq. (*Calendar of British State Papers*, Colonial, no. 697, p. 298 sqq.). The petition of the traders, *ibid.*, V, 73 sqq.

to the Jews, the Dutch, and other nations, to settle and inhabit there¹."

A number of Jewish settlers soon arrived, including Moses Henriques Coutinho, or Coutiño, who had relations in Amsterdam², and who came from Barbadoes; Abraham Lopez Telles³ and others, who came from Amsterdam and London. Their number was already in the year 1683 so considerable that they appointed as their Rabbi, R. Josiahu Pardo of Curaçao, the brother of the London Chazan David Joseph Pardo, and son-in-law of the Amsterdam Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira.

Although the Jews of Jamaica possessed civic rights, they were not on the same footing as the English as regards taxes. When, in the year 1693, after an attack of the French had been repelled, a sum of over four thousand pounds was levied within the space of three months, the Jews had to contribute seven hundred and fifty pounds, almost a fifth of the whole sum, towards it. The council of the island did not tax the Jews individually, but made the wealthiest and most important among the Jews responsible for the prompt payment of the tax by the collective body. The document says "... to be rated, assessed, taxed, collected, and paid in by Solomon Arari, Jacob de Leon, Moses Toiro (Toro), Jacob Mendes Guterres, Jacob Henriques, Jacob Rodriguez de Leon, Moses Jesurun Cardoso, Samuel Gabay, Jacob Lopes Torres, Ishac Coutinho, Ishac Nunes Gonsales, and Abraham Nunes, or any five of them." The amount had to be paid before June 10, 1693, in default of which two hundred pounds more would have to be paid as a fine. Should one of the persons rated refuse to pay, payment would be legally enforced, his slaves or chattels would be confiscated and publicly sold; if no goods could be found, the recalcitrant person would be arrested and detained in custody, till payment should have been made. The same regulations applied to another payment of one thousand pounds, which was levied from them in the same year, as their quota of a sum of nine thousand four hundred and seventy-three pounds⁴. A few years after this they were compelled to pay a special tax of one thousand seven hundred and sixty pounds, and on another occasion again, a tax of four hundred and thirty-seven pounds. In the years 1698 and 1699, not less than five thousand two hundred and fifty pounds was demanded of them. They were not able to bear such a crushing burden of taxation; they were a comparatively poor community of not more than eighty persons; and had besides to provide for the wants of their poor. The Baron de Belmonte, whom

¹ *Publications*, V, 75 sq. (*Colonial Entry Book*, No. 95, p. 97).

² Ishac Henriques Coutiño, Abraham Mendes Coutinho, and others.

³ *Publications*, I, 108.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 87 sqq.

we conjecture to have been a son of Manuel de Belmonte, the Spanish Resident in Holland, found it, therefore, necessary to address, in the year 1700, a memorial in reference to this affair to Sir William Beeston, the governor of the island, in which he proved that the Jews had paid during the last years three thousand four hundred and seventy pounds over and above the quota which could be legally demanded of them. He further complained that the Jews had been recently compelled by several officers to bear arms, and do active service on Sabbaths and festivals, although no urgent circumstances required it¹.

The council replied to this memorial that the Jews, as a separate people, were separately taxed; that their taxes bore no proportion to their large trading establishments, and that they must proportionally pay more than the English, whom they had beaten out of the field by their commercial capacities. "As for their bearing arms, it must be owned that, when any public occasion has happened or an enemy appeared, they have been ready and behaved themselves very well; but for their being called to arms on private times, and that have happened upon their sabbath or festivals, they have been generally excused by their officers, unless by their obstinacy or ill language they have provoked them to the contrary; the law of this country, without regard to the Jews or any other, giving power to the officers to call all men to arms when there is thought occasion for it." When Antonio Gomes Sorra, Andrew Lopez, and Moses de Medina, in the name of their co-religionists, again lodged a complaint, this time with the king, the Board of Trade of Jamaica was required to forward a copy of De Belmonte's memorial and of the reply thereto².

The Jews of Jamaica had, in spite of their being naturalized citizens, to submit to several exceptional laws. Thus, in the year 1703, it was ordained: "That all Jews that are or shall be hereafter masters or owners of slaves within this island, shall supply their deficiencies by their own nation or by hired white Christian men, and not by indented Christian servants under the penalty of five hundred pounds current money of this island³." Eight years later they were precluded, like negroes, Indians, and mulattos, "from being employed as clerks or any of the judicial or other offices⁴."

The most noted and respected Jew who lived at Jamaica for a number of years was the Spanish poet Daniel Israel Lopez Laguna. Only very few of those who wrote about him took notice of his

¹ *The Memorial of the Jews about their Taxes*, from the *Entry Book*, Jamaica, 57 sqq., by Prof. Dr. Charles Gross in *Publications*, II, 165 sqq.

² *Publications*, II, p. 171.

³ *Ibid.*, V, p. 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, pp. 57, 90.

poetical work, which, be it observed, was a splendidly got-up book, and is now extremely rare.

Lopez Laguna, whose parents were marañes of Southern France, went in his youth to Spain to study classics. There he was imprisoned for several years in the terrible dungeons of the Inquisition, until he succeeded at length in regaining his freedom by flight. He found a refuge in Jamaica, where he openly confessed his Jewish faith, for which he had endured so many tortures. Here he put in song the holy poems which had offered him consolation in the times of his sufferings, and which had kept his hopes alive. He undertook a poetical paraphrasis of the Psalms, a plan conceived by him when still in prison. He himself gives information about the history of his youth and of his sufferings in the following poem, which forms the Acrostic, "A el zeloso Lector," "To the kind Reader":—

"I was devoted to the Muses
 From my childhood.
 My youth was passed in France,
 And I studied in pious schools.
 I learned sciences in Spain,
 And was kept in dark prisons.
 Then I opened my eyes and looked,
 I escaped from the Inquisition.
 Now I sing to the accompaniment of my lute,
 Here the Psalms, happy and joyful¹."

The work, which the poet entitled *Espejo fiel de Vidas*, "Faithful Mirror of Life," is one of the most remarkable products of Jewish-Spanish literature. Abraham Pimentel, the son of the author's very intimate friend, Jacob Henriques Pimentel, also called Don Manuel de Umanes, tells us in the preface that the work was the product of twenty-three years' labour, and a further twenty-three years "dis-

¹	A las Musas	Ynelinado
	E sido desde mi ynfan	Sia
	La adolecensia en la Franc	Ya
	Zagrada escuela m	E ha dado,
	En España algo han	Limado
	Las	Artes mi Yoventud
	Ojos abriendo en	Virtud
	Sale de la	Inquisicion
	Oy Yamayca en can	Sion
	Los Psalm	Os da a mi Laud
	En my Pricion los	Deseos
	Cobré, de hacer	Esta obra.

See also Ps. vi. 8.

turbed by war, fire, and tempests," elapsed before it appeared before the public.

Lopez Laguna's *Espejo fiel de Vidas* is not, as Grätz and others thought, "a faithful translation of the Psalms." He was not nearly enough master of the Hebrew language to be able to furnish "a translation, faithful to the original." It is a paraphrasis, in the composition of which the author made use of the Spanish translation of the Psalms with paraphrasis of Jacob Jehuda Leon, which appeared in Amsterdam in 1671, under the title of *Las Alabanzas de Santidad*. He frequently follows Leon to the letter; e. g. Psalms v, lxxviii, lxxx, and others. He is, however, honest enough to admit, in his poetical prologue, that he was guided by Jacob Jehuda Leon Templo, and that, besides, he owed much to the writings of Menasse ben Israel, "that brilliant and lucid sun," as he calls him¹.

As already mentioned elsewhere², the poet gives quite a free rendering of several of the Psalms, in which he makes allusions to his sufferings and the tortures inflicted by the Inquisition. Thus, in Psalm x :—

"We are persecuted by tribunals,
Which malice designates as holy.
Cursed be slanderers, and godless boasting,
Blessing itself, may it end in shame³!"

1

Supliendo faltas de Ciencia
Regir mi nave el Timon,
Por Jacob Jehudah Leon
Templo de sacra excelencia.
Tambien logró my Pincel
Alguna Luz del Farol
Del clara y lucienta Sol
Menasseh ben Israel.
Sus lineas observo fiel
Siguiendo la Real doctrina
De la Eterna Ley Divina.

Among the works mentioned by Menasse ben Israel, as either commenced or completed, but not printed, there is also the work "De la Divinidad de la Ley de Moseh," which was already projected in 1641. This unpublished book could hardly have been known to Laguna; nor would it have served his purpose much. He probably consulted the Menasse ben Israel's *Conciliador*, which appeared in 1632.

¹ *Sephardim, Romanische Poesien der Juden in Spanien*, p. 300 sqq.

³ Presa sea el *malsin* que audaz se alaba. The Hebrew מלסין, which has come into the Spanish vocabulary, *malsin*, *malsindad* = מלסיות, the slanderous accusation; *malsinar*, to accuse.

He prays to the just Judge, in Psalm xxxix :—

“Oh, deliver me from all my sins,
And of the terrible tribunal
To proclaim the complaints of falsity !”

There is no lack of outbursts of his hatred of the religious tribunal and his cruel torturers ; but we will not reproduce all of them ¹.

Lopez Laguna resolved at last, after much hesitation, to publish his work, not for the purpose of becoming famous as a poet, as the above-named Abraham Henriques Pimentel asserts—no laurels could be obtained in those days by poetical productions—nor was he induced by prospects of material gain. His sole incentive was his pious zeal ; he only intended to make the Book of the Psalms accessible to such of his co-religionists as had escaped from the Inquisition, but who, in their ignorance of the Hebrew tongue, did not know what they read : he, therefore, wished to lay it before them “in the lovely and intelligible mother tongue, in beautiful diction, and musical verse.” In order to enable them to read the Psalms on various occasions, when agitated by different moods, he selected all sorts of poetical forms—redondilos, quintilos, terzettos, decimes, madrigals, romances, &c.

He went from Jamaica to London to have his work printed, and found there a Maecen in the person of Mordechai Nunes Almeyda ; he met also with a friendly reception from the cultured Spanish and Portuguese Jews of that city. Rarely has a work been so joyfully received and so frequently praised in verse, as that of Lopez Laguna. His above-mentioned Maecen, the latter's mother Manuela Nunes de Almeyda, his sisters Bienbenida Cohen Belmonte and D. Sarah de Fonseca Pina y Pimentel, her husband Manuel Fonseca Pina, his son Moseh de Manuel Fonseca Pina, all sang the poet's praises in Spanish sonnets. The same was done by the poet's eldest son, by the latter's nephew Jacob Lopez Laguna, by his intimate friend Jacob Henriquez Pimentel al. D. Manuel de Umanes, “Corrector de la Orthographia y Poesia,” by a nephew of the Maecen, by the latter's sons Abraham and David Henriquez Pimentel, and by Abraham Gomez Silveyra, who was a member of the Academy founded in Amsterdam by D. Manuel de Belmonte, and published sermons ². The physician, David Chaves, and Ishac de Sequeira Samuda, sang his praises in Latin hexameters ; Samson Guideon, a young financier ³, and

¹ Vid. Ps. xvi. 2 ; xlv. 23 sqq. ; lxxiii. 14 sqq. ; civ. 4, 5 ; cix. 16 ; cxxxix. 19 sqq.

² About Silveyra, v. *Biblioteca Española-Portuguesa-Judaica*, p. 102.

³ L. Wolf, *Plan of a Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish Biography* (London, 1887), p. 6.

Abraham Bravo, an intimate friend of Laguna's¹, lauded him in English verse.

¹ Members of the Bravo family lived at Jamaica. Benjamin Bravo and David Bravo were naturalized there in 1740. Vid. *Publications of American Jewish Historical Society*, V, 3 sq. Samson Guideon and Abraham Bravo belong undoubtedly to the earliest Anglo-Jewish poets. We cannot abstain from reproducing here the latter's poem in its entirety :—

As when the eagle to the vaulted skies
Aspiring mounts, and to those regions flies ;
Delighting in the lucid fields of air
To view the bright and shining wonders there.
So I, to sing thy praise exalt my muse,
Would you but her imperfect notes excuse.

I.

Oh, heavenly bard ! how well by you described
Are David's psalms, how gloriously revived ;
As if thy harp, tuned by his sacred hand
Did equal force, and melody command.

II.

How great's thy wisdom, how sublime thy art,
Since you to us such heavenly truths impart ;
Had you been present when the monarch writ
His thoughts you could not with more truth transmit.

III.

Such rays of bright divinity are shed
Throughout these works, and every line o'erspread,
That by the streams the spring is clearly shown,
And the translation makes the author known.

IV.

Sure you were inspired by the God-like king
His Hebrew prose in Spanish verse to sing ;
Thy muse will fire with devotion those
Whom verse admire and not the Hebrew knows.

V.

Even cherubims will to thy verses throng,
And will their voices tune thy sacred song ;
Then in chorus sung thy melodious verse,
While we with Hallelujah the Almighty bless.

VI.

The merit due to your immortal name
Will be a pyramid to speak your fame ;
Other attempts are vain ; since you excel,
Others may imitate, but not so well.

The work, provided with an approbation in Spanish by the Haham R. David Nieto¹, and ornamented with an artistic *Geroglifico* by Abraham Lopez de Oliveyra, appeared under the title *Espejo fiel de Vidas que contiene los Psalmos de David en verso*. Obra devota, util, y deleytable compuesta por *Daniel Israel Lopez Laguna*.

Dedicado al muy benigno y generoso Señor Mordejay Nunes Almeyda.

En Londres con Licencia de los Señores del Mahamad y Aprobacion del Señor Haham. Año 5480=1720. 4.

Lopez Laguna returned from London to Jamaica to Riki his wife, and his three sons, David, Jacob, and Ishac. We presume that the family remained on the island; Abraham, Jacob, and Rebecca Laguna were naturalized there in 1740 and 1743².

We do not know the date of Laguna's death; he was nearly seventy when he died.

M. KAYSERLING.

VII.

Nor may you fear the poem's common lot,
Read and commended, but withal forgot;
The brazen *mines* and marble rocks may waste,
Yet we shall even retain thy savoury taste.

VIII.

Oh! then let's ever chant Laguna's praise,
Success and glory crown his happy days,
Ah! may the heavens to him be ever kind
Since he to virtue only sways his mind.

¹ Nieto says in his approbation "... su autor tan fecundo en lo Heroico como fecundo en lo Lirico, tan fiel en la translacion como energico en la expresiva."

Joseph ibn Danon commences:—

לדניאל אר"הא דא
דלא גנדיה

בגנות ימא'ינה מאן
לפיש ק"ץ כומוריין

² *Publications*, V, 112 sqq.