

FORWARD

ARTS & LETTERS

Twice Told Tales

Ginzberg's 'Legends of the Jews' Returns

By ALLAN NADLER

Hayyim Nahman Bialik, the great bard of the Jewish national revival, said of his friend Rabbi Louis Ginzberg,

"Miyom she-hikartiv, ahavativ" —

"From the day I met him, I loved him." At first blush, the Hebrew poet's love for the prosaic, exacting scholar is startling. Both in temperament and by vocation, these men could hardly have differed more. What explains the affection of the creator of stirring nationalist hymns and love poetry for the author of dry scholarly works with forbidding titles such as "Yerushalmi Fragments From the Geniza" and "Geonica"?

The key to Bialik and Ginzberg's friendship is the *shtetl* of Volozhin. Both men received

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their higher Jewish education at the famed Yeshiva of Volozhin, the mother institution of the great network of Lithuanian yeshivas, and both deserted the Orthodox

world for careers that helped shape modern Jewish culture and learning. At the same time, neither man was ever fully disengaged from the enchantment and influence of Volozhin. Quite the contrary, both Bialik and Ginzberg ultimately engaged in efforts to reconstruct and popular-

ize the vast treasury of rabbinic literature for modern Jewish audiences in Israel and America. Bialik collaborated on the "Sefer Ha-Agada," a thematic multivolume compendium of rabbinic tales, while Ginzberg produced history's most comprehensive scholarly anthology of rabbinic midrash and classical Jewish tales, "The Legends of the Jews,"

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