

Reviews of Books

AARON LEVY, FOUNDER OF AARONSBURG. By Sidney M. Fish. With a Foreword by Lee M. Friedman. [*Studies in American Jewish History. Number 1.*] New York: The American Jewish Historical Society. 1951. ix, 81 pp. \$1.50.

"On Sunday, October 23, 1949, an inspiring event took place in the little town of Aaronsburg, Centre County, in the heart of Pennsylvania. Some thirty thousand Americans from nearby communities and from distant cities came there to join the four hundred residents in celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Salem Lutheran Church. They came to do honor to the memory of Aaron Levy who founded this town in 1786, and donated the ground upon which the church was erected."

So begins the preface of the monograph *Aaron Levy, Founder of Aaronsburg* by Sidney M. Fish, Ph.D., published by the American Jewish Historical Society as Number 1 in its series of "Studies in American Jewish History."

This interesting and excellent monograph tells the story behind the unusual celebration just mentioned. Aaron Levy was born probably in 1742 and came to America some eighteen years later. He seems to have come from Amsterdam, Holland, where his family had settled toward the end of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth century. Like other Dutch Jews, they were, in all probability, emigrants from Poland or Germany.

He probably spent the first decade of his life in America in Philadelphia and Lancaster, where relatives and friends were already established. Here he married Rachel Phillips. He came to be interested in land promotion, and his first effort in this direction, as far as we know, was the purchase of a lot in the newly laid-out frontier town of Sunbury, in Northumberland County. His application is dated July 3, 1772, and the patent to the lot was granted to him on April 27, 1774, and is signed by John Penn.

This region, along with other vast bodies of territory, was acquired by the Proprietaries of Pennsylvania from the Six Nations or Iroquois in 1768 and was then opened for white settlement. Of the three counties organized in the state as a result of this acquisition, Northumberland was by far the largest, and is known as the "Mother of Counties" of Pennsylvania, for twenty-eight counties were carved out of the territory originally situated wholly or partly within its limits.

We find Aaron Levy already established in Northumberland by the spring of 1774. This town was situated at the confluence of the North (East) and West branches of the Susquehanna, some 150 miles from Philadelphia and 120 miles from Baltimore. In a power of attorney granted by him on June 30, 1774, he is described as a "merchant," a definite indication of considerable commercial attainment, as business people of lesser standing were generally called "shop keepers." He had close associations with the Gratz brothers of Philadelphia and others. He also had many Christian friends. At the outbreak of the War of Independence, Aaron Levy had already acquired considerable land holdings in the frontier region.

During the Revolution he served in the state militia and invested some money in treasury loans. Of the innumerable tracts involving hundreds of thousands of acres which passed through Aaron Levy's hands in his long career as a land promoter, one comparatively small area of some 334 acres deserves special attention, for it earned for him an honorable place in American history as the founder of a frontier town.

In 1779 he purchased a tract of land known as the White Thorn Grove, situated in Potter Township some thirty miles west of Northumberland, and later bought some adjacent land. He decided to turn this into a populated center. He believed that a town would develop into an important trading center and would become the seat of county government. It was in the heart of a fertile region, and it was astride a road leading to Philadelphia and the new highway to Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh) then about to be laid out.

He decided to call the town Aaronsburg. He issued a circular advertising it and its advantages, and by 1799 thirty-two families had settled permanently in Aaronsburg. A postoffice was also opened in that year.

The new arrivals were mostly of German stock, and in 1789 Aaron Levy conveyed, to a group of them, two lots "in consideration of five shillings" for a Lutheran church and burying ground. In 1794 the cornerstone of the Salem Lutheran Church was laid. Aaron Levy presented the church with a communion set, now a prized heirloom of the congregation. He also donated two lots to the Reformed Church in 1796.

Later, Aaron Levy moved to Philadelphia, where he died in 1815. He and his wife were both laid to rest in the Spruce Street Cemetery of Mikveh Israel Congregation.

The monograph includes pictures of Aaron Levy and his wife Rachel, of the Salem Lutheran Church, and of the communion set given to it by Aaron Levy. There is also a facsimile of the original deed to the two lots of land granted by Aaron Levy to the church.

There are also Appendices dealing with the Commemoration Program of October 23, 1949. These include the remarks of Dr. Ralph J. Bunche and Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, a list of deeds granted by Aaron and Rachel Levy, and other items.

Dr. Fish has told an interesting and important story and has told it well. His work is accurate, well written, and makes interesting reading. Basing himself on a study of the original documents, the writer has produced an authoritative work on the activity of a post-Revolutionary land promoter. It is a valuable addition to our knowledge of American Jewish life. The American Jewish Historical Society has rendered a real service by initiating this series of monographs.

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ALLAN TARSHISH

AMERICAN JEWRY AND THE CIVIL WAR. By Bertram Wallace Korn. With an introduction by Allan Nevins. *Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.* 1951. xii, 331 pp. \$4.00.

This history of American Jewry in the Civil War is described in Dr. Korn's preface as "an effort in group biography" and "a portrait of American Jewry — as an organized, articulate, self-conscious community of Jews," rather than a history of "individuals, Americans who happened to be Jews." With no desire to quibble over this description, it seems to me remarkable that the total effect of this study to some extent calls the author's description into question. The book seems to me predominantly the story of Americans who happened to be Jews, and throughout Dr. Korn's pages the repeated evidence is that there was little or no "community" of Jews prior to or during the Civil War.

Largely because of the rise of anti-Semitism, which had been almost negligible prior to the war, the American Jew came more and more to think and act self-consciously as a Jew, and to cultivate the development of a self-conscious community. Naturally enough, the bulk of the study deals with the activities and pronouncements of the rabbis, both because of Dr. Korn's intent and because perhaps their papers and published writings are more available than those of other American Jews. Also, a principal source lies in the Jewish journals of the time, which inevitably stressed a community point of view, if not a community solidarity. And yet these sources repeatedly testify to the absence of the Jewish community except as a religious group, and often testify to the lack of strong affinities among the divergent inner groupings into which Jews found themselves dividing on matters of belief and custom.

One wonders whether without the rise of anti-Semitism an Ameri-

can Jewish community would have developed at all, and under what circumstances. As Dr. Korn points out, the freedom which the American political concept gave the individual, although far from attaining the complete ideal, so far surpassed anything known in Europe that, whether Jew or gentile, the individual found geographical, political, social, and occupational community groupings more attractive to his way of life than was the religious body to which his forbears had belonged and to which his first allegiance was supposedly subscribed in social practice as well as in matters of worship.

Prior to the war Jews, like other Americans, were sharply divided in politics, particularly on the question of slavery. They remained sharply divided in politics during the war, in the North at least, there being no actual political parties as such in the Confederacy. Jews, like other Americans, made their successes and failures in all walks of life largely without either penalty or benefit deriving from their distinctiveness as Jews. When the war came they entered the armed forces, both North and South, with individual alacrity or slowness depending to no degree upon their Jewishness. They fought and died like other Americans, contributed to sanitary fairs, voted for their candidates, and went about their occupations without particular accent on their distinctiveness. But before the war was over Jews were being widely attacked (and defended) as a class, both in the North and in the South. Bigoted efforts were made to saddle the Jews with responsibility for economic ills and political failures. If one Jew speculated in cotton, all Jews were indicted as speculators. If a Jew uttered abolition sentiments, all Jews were abolitionists. Or if a Jew became prominent in secession, Jews were dubbed traitors *en masse*.

Dr. Korn not only tells the story but also interprets it in sociological terms of "prejudice," "the Jew myth," and "the scapegoat." But as he tells and interprets the story one wonders whether, in spite of accuracy of documentation and careful statement, the truth is not exaggerated. Demonstrably there was prejudice against the Jew before the war, and demonstrably the passion, disappointment, and tragedy of war fertilized and multiplied the original seeds of prejudice. And yet, as a student of the Civil War era, I cannot assess Dr. Korn's book without stating that its concentration on the story of the Jews gives me a somewhat exaggerated picture of the extent and depth of anti-Semitism. In my reading of sources of all kinds, I have found expressions of prejudice, both before and during the war, toward Mormons, Germans, foreigners in general, slaveholders, Republicans, Democrats, and "damnyankees"—not to mention Negroes, who were seldom granted even human status—so far more numerous and more virulent (even when occasionally expressed by Jews), that I simply cannot accept the picture of Judaeophobia during

the Civil War without noting that by selection it has been magnified out of proportion. This is not by intention of Dr. Korn, for he refers to the milieu repeatedly, but inevitably results from his restriction of subject.

A large portion of the book is devoted to two discriminatory measures which denied Jews equality of treatment. One was the section of the 1861 Volunteer Bill which provided that chaplains should be regularly ordained ministers of some "Christian denomination," and thus seemed obviously intended to exclude rabbis, although Mormons and other religious groups of lesser numbers were likewise excluded. Whether the phrase was originally drawn deliberately to exclude rabbis or not, the record of "Christian" opposition to a change in the law was a shameful exhibition of bigotry, and the painfully political language in which the law was finally amended (so that the section defining qualifications of chaplains "shall be construed to read . . . a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination") was testimony to congressmen's fears of religious issues in the forthcoming elections.

The other measure was General Grant's notorious general order expelling Jews from the Department of the Tennessee, issued on December 17, 1862. Dr. Korn has given a complete and authoritative treatment of this episode. In weighing the evidence of Grant's motivation and responsibility, he is precise and fair. In short, there seems to be no alternative to Dr. Korn's conclusion that Grant alone must bear the opprobrium for the order, albeit he was surrounded by officers who would, because of their demonstrable anti-Semitism, be most appropriate scapegoats. Although it is perhaps beyond Dr. Korn's purview to absolve Grant of anti-Semitism, especially when the language of not one but of several of Grant's orders discriminated against the Jews as a class, one must admit that Dr. Korn has gone about as far as he can go. That Grant was ever personally unfriendly toward Jews, or that he ever before or after displayed prejudice against the Jews, Dr. Korn simply could not find. And that during Grant's presidency a number of administrative recognitions were given to meritorious Jews, Dr. Korn fully relates. How then can the discriminatory orders be accounted for? Dr. Korn rightly cannot accept the explanation of Grant's apologists, that responsibility lay either on a subordinate or on the War Department. Nor can he accept without qualification Grant's own statement made in 1868, that ". . . I have no prejudice against sect or race, but want each individual to be judged by his own merit. Order No. 11 does not sustain this statement, I admit, but then I do not sustain that order. *It never would have been issued if it had not been telegraphed the moment it was penned, and without reflection.*"

Dr. Korn's own conclusion is as follows:

"How then can we reconcile the man with the action? Only by recognizing the fact that some persons are the victims of unconscious prejudices — that men sometimes assimilate stereotyped images, mythological concepts, bigoted ideas, from their environment, of which they are utterly unaware and which lie dormant in their unconscious minds until called forth by some severe experience. Grant must have been such a man — convinced of his freedom from prejudice and yet completely under its control in a time of stress like the campaigns of Tennessee and Mississippi. So he was willing to believe that all the thievery was due to the presence of Jews — the 'bogey-man' of social mythology — and he was willing to banish them from his Department. Then came the unexpected, shocking reaction — forcing him to analyze his own mind, his most secret thoughts. Perhaps, for the first time, he became conscious of the prejudice which he had carried through the years and, also, perhaps he was able, by virtue of that consciousness, to root it out from his spirit, although he was too ashamed to admit it."

One sometimes wonders whether it is possible for any man not to be prejudiced in some degree, consciously or unconsciously, toward some of his fellowmen. The man who becomes conscious of his prejudice may either exploit it or restrain it, depending upon whether he condones or disapproves it, and few religious groups go so far as to cultivate disapproval of prejudice by recognition that those of different faith may be equal in the sight of God as well as by political theory. Grant seems not to have been committed, any more than Lincoln was, to a particular faith. Viewing his life as a whole, one recognizes the sincere man who was troubled by religious uncertainty but who was unable to get the consent of his mind to subscribe to the dogma of any group. His relations with Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants of many denominations (including ministers) were those of aloofness toward religious commitments. And yet, as Dr. Korn says, Grant must have assimilated and retained unconsciously the common "Christian" prejudice which broke to the surface under circumstances of great stress when as commander of his department he had to take measures against speculators and traders who were damaging the Union cause. As Grant seems to have been a man of essential humility, with his full share of private misgivings as to his own fitness for authority, one can imagine his chagrin at having to face the implications of his order. And one can admit the sincerity, if not the accuracy, of his statement made in 1868. But more than this, one can admire in him the ability to learn from error. Grant's record suggests that having to confront one's own prejudice is a more valuable experience than the recognition of prejudice in others.

Although several of Lincoln's known contacts with Jews are treated in Dr. Korn's chapter, "Lincoln and the Jews," the major part is concerned with two of Lincoln's personal friendships with Jews who were notable personages in their day. One of these men was Abraham Jonas, a lawyer and politician of Quincy, Illinois, who commanded the respect not only of Lincoln but of other leading citizens of the state. This story has been fairly well known heretofore, and it is to be regretted that Dr. Korn was unable, through no fault of his own, to add much in the way of new data to the story, for Jonas was an admirable and interesting person in his own right.

The second friendship has been less known but even more intriguing. Isachar Zacharie, a chiropodist of New York whose profession enabled him to make contacts with people in all walks of life, and who became acquainted, more or less intimately, with many of the great and near great of his day, is a figure whose enigmas attract speculation. From first to last, Zacharie's numerous letters and telegrams preserved in the Lincoln Papers raise questions which can be answered only in part, or must remain wholly unanswered. That he was Lincoln's confidential agent, perhaps in a sense even a spy, seems clear from those letters written from New Orleans in 1863. That he was entrusted with certain matters of great consequence is also implied, but nowhere clarified. That General Nathaniel P. Banks employed him for duties of high financial and political importance seems certain, but the details are lost. Most intriguing of all was the mysterious peace mission which he and Banks proposed and which Lincoln seems to have considered favorably, but which Seward squelched. One gathers that it must have been parallel to the better-known peace mission proposed by the Illinois Methodist minister, Colonel James F. Jaquess, which Lincoln also favorably considered, but which, although pursued further than Zacharie's proposal, came to naught. One regrets that Zacharie did not follow Jaquess' example in writing an account of his efforts.

One also wishes to know more concerning Zacharie's political activities in support of Lincoln's re-election in 1864. That he was Lincoln's personal emissary seems incontrovertible from the only extant letter which Lincoln wrote to him. This letter poses a mystery concerning Dr. Korn's book—why the letter is never mentioned and is not printed in the appendix devoted to the Zacharie-Lincoln correspondence, when it is the key document of the entire series. Although Dr. Korn reproduces and comments on Zacharie's reply to this letter, he seems unaware of the fact that an autograph draft is in the Lincoln Papers. Because this hitherto unpublished letter proves not only that Zacharie was Lincoln's personal agent but also one who undertook a very special task, perhaps it should be quoted here:

“Executive Mansion,
“Washington, Sep. 19, 1864.

“Dr. Zacharie

“Dear Sir

“I thank you again for the deep interest you have constantly taken in the Union cause. The personal matter on behalf of your friend, which you mention, shall be fully and fairly considered when presented.

“Yours truly

“A. Lincoln.”

Zacharie replied on September 21: “Dear Friend. Yours of the 19th came duly to hand, it has had the desired effect, with the friends of the Partie. . . .” When so much is implied, one cannot but regret that Zacharie left no personal narrative of his work.

Similar to Dr. Korn’s oversight of Lincoln’s letter to Zacharie is his oversight of Lincoln’s letter to Samuel C. Pomeroy, November 8, 1863 (printed in Hertz, *Abraham Lincoln, A New Portrait*, II, 918), which sheds light on the case of Captain Cheme M. Levy, in whose behalf Lincoln refused to intervene, but who seems to have received, in March, 1864, a favor from Lincoln at the request of his father-in-law, Rabbi Morris J. Raphall. Also, Levy’s court-martial record, about which Dr. Korn seems to have been uncertain, is available in *General Orders No. 332*, Adjutant General’s Office, War Department, October 9, 1863.

One cannot avoid missing some important sources when writing history, but it seems that only bad luck of the worst sort could have brought about Dr. Korn’s failure to note Lincoln’s letters to Zacharie and Pomeroy.

In conclusion, however, I should say that my impression of Dr. Korn’s work as a whole is that he has assiduously researched and carefully weighed his data. His story of American Jewry in the Civil War is an important contribution to historical scholarship. Although Dr. Korn’s work should be widely read by American Jewry, in my opinion it should receive equal or greater attention outside the community.

ROY P. BASLER

YAHADUT AMERIKA BE-HITPATHUTAH. THE SHAPING OF AMERICAN JUDAISM. By Moshe Davis. *New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America*. 1951. xxvii, 403 pp. \$6.00.

This book is a history of Conservative Judaism in America up to the beginning of the twentieth century. The description of Reform and of

Orthodoxy is only incidental to the central theme. Hence, the book is "over-titled." It is not a "history of the evolution of American Judaism" except insofar as the history of any branch of Judaism contributes to our knowledge of the totality.

The book is of special interest in that it is written in Hebrew, although it is by an American author on an American subject. A book with this theme would be of interest to Jewish laymen in America and should normally be written in English; yet why it is written in Hebrew is easily understood. This is primarily a Ph.D. dissertation written by Dr. Davis under the auspices of the Hebrew University, and, also, it is evident that the book is intended chiefly for readers in Israel. Hence, it is in Hebrew and properly so.

This fact makes the book rather unique and a pioneer venture. It is, as far as I know, the first attempt by an American rabbi to write a book explaining American Judaism to the people of the State of Israel. That there is need for such a book requires no proof. Our life in America is lived under conditions unknown to the Israeli and is the product of historical circumstances with which they are not well acquainted and results in certain confidences and hope on our part which to them seem unwarranted. Therefore, Dr. Davis properly begins with a description of the unique historical ideas and environmental facts under which America grew: separation of Church and State, congregational independence, the western expansion, etc. It is against this background that he explains the growth of Conservative Judaism, which he prefers to call the Historical School of Judaism.

Considering the fact that Conservatism and Reform in America veered away from each other and developed separate institutions under the impact of a generation of bitter controversy, this book is remarkably objective, well-balanced, and just. The author may well be forgiven certain emotional slips, as on page 67, where he says that Mayer Sulzberger "understood Reform well; he appreciated the outward conditions, economic and psychological, which moved them to rebel against tradition." We Reformers believe that the rebellion against tradition was motivated by *inner* conviction and certain high ideals in addition to outward factors. Also, when the author speaks of Pereira Mendes struggling against the desire for Reform which grew up among some of the members of his synagogue, he refers to these desires for Reform as "in those years when his congregation was groping in the fog (or cloud) of Reform." Naturally, we Reformers prefer to think of Reform as light rather than fog. But all these are chance expressions of a pardonable partisanship. Dr. Davis does a fine job in dealing with the controversies after the Civil War between Conservatism and Reform. (Incidentally, Dr. Kohler never was rabbi of Temple Emanu-El. He was rabbi of Temple Beth-El [page 234].)

The most interesting part of the book is the series of biographies of the founders of American Conservative Judaism beginning with Isaac Leeser and including Morais, Szold, Raphall, and, towards the end of the book, a number of men of lesser grade. The biographies of these personalities should be made available to the average reader. Dr. Davis in these biographical sketches is terse, clear, and adequate.

Since all history is raw material for our human philosophizing, the book creates a certain mood and leads to certain conclusions. To this reviewer the history of Conservative Judaism in America, here so well portrayed, reveals the following fact: the bitterest controversies between Reform and Conservatism were in the earlier days, when both groups believed that they could form one united organization (as Isaac M. Wise and Leeser attempted in the Cleveland Conference). The fact is that basic religious differences cannot be permanently concealed or glossed over, since they involve the denial by one party of what the other party reveres as the actual revealed word of God. Thus, in the decades when Reform and Conservatism tried to form one organization, there were cries of treachery, superstition, etc., etc. But once the organizations of Reform were established independently, and those of Conservatism were created, peace "broke out" and comradeship developed.

The same situation is now developing in the relationship between Conservatism and Orthodoxy. Conservatism claims to hold the same basic ideal of unbroken revelation of the Written and the Oral Law as Orthodoxy, but sooner or later Conservatism will have to come to some clear-cut decisions as to the Sabbath, etc. Once these decisions become clear-cut and are frankly published, Conservatism will receive the same denunciation from Orthodoxy as it itself had hurled at Reform three-quarters of a century ago. But as Orthodoxy develops its own independent institutions it will be more concerned with building than with attacking, and Conservatism will itself be frankly a movement *within* Judaism, but not *K'lal Yisroel* ("the totality of Jewry") as it now fondly believes. Then it will no longer be subject to the accusation by Orthodoxy of deception, hypocrisy, etc.; then the same mutual respect and comradeship will develop between Conservatism and Orthodoxy as have developed between Reform and Conservatism. As has been said in another connection, we must be "separate as the fingers but united as the hand." In fact, if the fingers are not *well separated*, the hand cannot function as an integrated unit.

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