

# A Documentary History

*of the Jews in the United States, 1654-1875*

## A REVIEW ARTICLE

ELLIS RIVKIN

In view of the sad state of American Jewish historiography, any collection of documents, no matter how one-sided, or arbitrarily chosen, will have value. This reviewer, therefore, has no quarrel with Mr. Schappes' documents, although he would undoubtedly have made different selections. Indeed, many of the documents are very useful for a reconstruction of American Jewish history, and many of the notes and references are of great value. It is rather Mr. Schappes' view of history, as it appears in his Introduction and in his prefatory remarks introducing the various documents, that presents a challenge.

Since Mr. Schappes has been unwilling to allow the documents to speak for themselves, his interpretations of what they signify represent a historiographical commitment which must be analyzed in relation to the pertinent facts of American history. This is all the more necessary in view of Mr. Schappes' statement that his "introductions and notes to each document . . . help to provide the *objective setting* in which it [the document] can best be appreciated and understood" (p. xv), and in view of his insistence that "since . . . history is not a toy but a tool, it is also his [the editor's] aspiration that the tool be used well and often" (p. x) [*italics mine*].

Furthermore, Mr. Schappes insists that the objective historian must evaluate issues in the light of their significance for human progress, for otherwise a mere striving for objectivity may lead to the covering up of reality and to the impeding of the movement for progress (p. xviii). It is therefore Mr. Schappes' expressed hope that his documents will aid the Jews in their struggle for liberty and equality (p. xxi).

In view of Mr. Schappes' own insistence that his researches are to assist American Jewry in coping with contemporary problems, it is

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fitting that the point of view of the editor on current Jewish affairs be examined closely. Recognizing this need, some reviewers have correctly pointed out Mr. Schappes' affiliation with the Communist Party, and have cited a few examples in his work where he clearly indicates socialistic, and anti-capitalistic opinions. They have, on this basis, drawn the conclusion that Mr. Schappes' introductory remarks to the documents are radical, and Marxian. Yet other reviewers, equally well-informed of Mr. Schappes' Party connections, and equally opposed to Communism, do not hesitate to recommend the book as one "worthy of a place . . . wherever a true understanding of American democracy is cherished and sought."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Schappes' Party affiliation is crucial for understanding the role the book was meant to play, but those who have pointed to the few radical statements that have occasionally crept in have missed the real significance of Mr. Schappes' efforts. Statements such as these are more than compensated for by the hundreds of passages in which Mr. Schappes sings the praises of democracy, progress, freedom, and liberty. There can be little doubt that the average reader will come away from the volume feeling not only like a proud, democratic American, but also anxious to contribute to American democratic ideals as a progressive Jew.

Yet it is precisely in the emphasis placed on such abstractions as democracy, progress, and liberty that Mr. Schappes' Communist bias is to be sought; for this emphasis is an exact reproduction of official Communist policy as it was at the time Mr. Schappes was compiling his work. The editor, as a Communist, was not primarily interested in winning Jews to the Communist Party, but in having them rally to the support of those heterogeneous forces of progress attempting to form a third party. Socialism and the elimination of capitalism were the stated ultimate aims of the Party, but for the present, Jews were to seek salvation in the Progressive Party's struggle against monopoly, fascism, and war, in the tradition of democratic, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, Lincolnian, and Franklin D. Rooseveltian Americanism.

A glance at the official Communist publication, *Jewish Life*, of which Mr. Schappes was one of the editors, makes this orientation crystal clear. In an article by Samuel Barron, entitled "The Communists Fight for the Nation," the tactic is stated unambiguously:

Why could not the Communist Party be the new party [rather than the Progressive Party]? And if not, why does it have to exist now that a new, people's party has come into being?

The Communist Party is the party of socialism, and has the objective of winning the majority of the American people to accept socialism as the final and lasting solution of all present problems. . . .

But the Progressive Party is not a party of socialism. It is a coalition party of different sections of the American people, who see the need for curbing the wolf-pack, and even for ridding the American scene of this rapacious pest. Included are all elements, middle class, professionals, farmers and workers, who still have illusions that capitalism can be reformed, patched and made workable. The Progressive Party, which is on the way to winning the adherence of . . . the majority of the people, is their party.<sup>2</sup>

In its treatment of the past, *Jewish Life* was pre-eminently concerned with identifying certain movements, such as Jeffersonian democracy, with progress and with the aspirations of the people. The truly democratic American forces of today, as those of yesterday, struggle against the reactionaries who would pervert true American ideals. In an editorial, "Proclaim These Truths," the link is made between the patriots in the American Revolution and the "progressive" elements of 1948:

One hundred and seventy-two years ago, the subversives of America, who included the overwhelming majority of our colonial ancestors, determined to smash the grip of tyranny held over them by a predatory force from across the sea. Since then, our country has more than once had to renew the battle against domestic and foreign tyranny, against reactionary resistance to progress whether organized by southern slaveowners or nazi imperialists.

Today, as we approach the celebration of the anniversary of our revolutionary struggle that set us free, the American people are again faced with a fateful decision. Shall we take the path of the German people that led to fascist enslavement? Or shall we continue on the democratic road that leads to progressive advance? Do we submit to American fascism, or do we fight to crush this un-American, anti-democratic offensive against the rights of the American people?<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Schappes' interest in winning over Jews to the side of progress by dangling before them the Lincoln legend is forthrightly expressed in his article "Jews in Lincoln's Third Party, 1854-1860":

It was not easy for the Jews to begin to break away from the old parties that dominated our country in 1854 and to join in the building of that great new venture, the Republican Party that elected Abraham Lincoln to the presidency. . . . Looking back on those days 90 years ago, *American Jews are proud of those of their ancestors who had the wisdom and the courage to make the break and move forward with the remainder of the progressive forces of the United States. . . .*<sup>4</sup> [Italics mine.]

Isaac Mayer Wise . . . learned later to appreciate Lincoln, but we honor those who learned it sooner, who fought for the new party and Lincoln's election, who risked contumely and resisted intimidation to fight for progress.

The backbone of the Republican Party was known to be, in those days, the independent farmers in the West and North. . . . Yet in New York, where the Jewish population was largest, there are the splendid examples of new party activity already mentioned. From Baltimore to Chicago and Louisville to New York there is woven this record of clear-headed, far-sighted and bold Jews who were in the front ranks of the resistance movement of the 1850's. Those who honor should imitate them.<sup>5</sup>

An analysis of Mr. Schappes' historiography as it appears in *A Documentary History* reveals that it is compounded of the same elements that characterize the Popular Front philosophy as expressed in *Jewish Life*. While emphasizing the progressivist elements, he has not negated his belief in the ultimate anti-capitalistic goals of the Party. The following quotation documents his continued loyalty to his concept of socialism:

Like other liberal capitalist interpreters, however, *The Nation* . . . failed to realize that capitalism would permanently breed such [anti-Semitic] conflicts, and that they could be abolished only under a non-exploitative, socialist system. When capitalist apologists point to such social cause of anti-Semitism, they always seem to justify the anti-Semitism; only those who oppose capitalism can define this cause without the appearance of lending sanction to anti-Semitism, for they obviously oppose the system that creates the cause (p. 727, n. 12).

Most of his comments, however, adhere to the general program of the Party which sought to align the Jews with the progressive forces. As a consequence, the homiletical and the inspirational motif is predominant. Such an emphasis is certainly conveyed by the following remarks:

In this letter an American Jewish patriot defends the honor and reputation of his country and the Jewish people. . . .<sup>6</sup> The Jews' just pride in their services to the revolution is set forth ringingly. . . .<sup>7</sup> This petition is a vigorous and lofty expression of the Jews' interest in democracy and equality of religious expression. . . .<sup>8</sup> the Jews express their loyalty to the independent, democratic, and federal government of the United States. . . . Washington . . . eloquently declares the principles of equality of all religious denominations that he espoused. For a century and a half these declarations have been used to confound the enemy in the ceaseless struggle against those who would subvert American ideals through the propagation of anti-Semitism and other doctrines of bigotry. . . .<sup>9</sup> The introduction by Myer Moses reflects and exudes the deep democratic sentiments of international fraternity that inspired the American people at the time. . . .<sup>10</sup>

[Uriah P. Levy's] Defence is a stirring one, both in its recital of the facts . . . and in its eloquent insistence on the right of the

Jew in the Navy to equality of treatment not only for the sake of the Jew but for the security of the service and the welfare of the country. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Homilies and inspirational passages, such as these, could be multiplied. It is against this type of approach that the critical historian must raise his voice. Sermonizing is no substitute for clear analysis, and the use of meaningless clichés and threadbare stereotypes is ineffective for conveying the relationship of historical forces. The result is a travesty of scientific historiography. Mr. Schappes cavalierly labels every movement and personality as either progressive and democratic, or as reactionary and conservative. The latter are pictured as motivated by selfish class interests, whereas the former are for the people, or for the nation, or for progress and democracy. No attempt is made by Mr. Schappes to carry out a consistent analysis of the social content of those movements which he acclaims as progressive. Thus the Tories in the American Revolution serve class interests, whereas, presumably, the patriots are concerned only with the nation and democracy:

The loyalists were generally found among the rich merchants and landowners who put the class benefits they expected to derive from the continued connection with Britain above the national interests of the new state. While motivations involved factors such as abstract concepts of loyalty and personal and cultural ties with English life, the decisive factors lay deeper in the class relations, including especially fear of the democratic masses (p. 50).

Now even a beginning student in American history knows that rich merchants participated in the revolutionary struggle against England because she stifled their trade. It is also common knowledge that large planters fought against England because British policies adversely affected their interests. It is equally well-known that the upper classes who supported the American revolution had no great love for the democratic masses. Yet Mr. Schappes would condemn the Tories for their selfishness, and hail the patriots for their altruistic motives.

Mr. Schappes' method is likewise apparent in his treatment of Jacksonian democracy and the Whigs. "The American people, triumphant in having elected Andrew Jackson . . . rejoiced when news of the July . . . Revolution reached New York. . . . The democratic Jacksonian press was jubilant. Meetings, parades, demonstrations, and festivals were held, despite the hostility of the Whigs and the moneyed interests. . . . Jews figured prominently in the organizing of this great democratic manifestation" (pp. 181-82).

Yet these same Whigs and moneyed interests were in opposition to the "expansionist war of conquest . . . [and] looked upon the war



*Courtesy, National Archives*

JUDAH P. BENJAMIN, ELECTED TO THE U. S. SENATE A CENTURY AGO

as an act of aggression against Mexico designed to add slave states to strengthen the slaveowners' control of the government" (p. 264). This time Mr. Schappes does not inform the reader that it was the democratic Jacksonians who supported the war.

Thus we discover that on pp. 181-82 the Whigs are against progress, on page 264 they are for progress since they opposed the Mexican War, and finally, on pp. 349-50, they are the "upper-class Whig party, which was born in the struggle against Jacksonian democracy," and from which two Jews seceded with thousands of others, "to build a third party to save the nation and democracy from the aggressive slave power." It would seem, then, that thousands of conservative members of the upper class became democrats when they left the moribund Whig Party to join the Republican Party of progress and democracy.

Mr. Schappes' moralistic approach to American history leads him to imply again and again that the Republican Party and Abraham Lincoln were the very incarnation of democratic virtues. At no time does Schappes analyze the composition of the Republican Party, and at no time does he indicate that Lincoln was not an abolitionist. In view of Schappes' denunciation of all those who did not realize that slavery was the main issue,<sup>12</sup> his use of Lincoln as the symbol of the struggle leaves the unwary with the impression that Lincoln was from the first opposed to slavery. Similarly, Schappes does not mention that the Republican Party represented not only western farmers, but also industrialists who were interested in tariffs and a stable currency. He insists upon viewing the struggle as a moral crusade to abolish slavery.

In dealing with the South, however, Mr. Schappes takes pains to show the economic alignments. Thus he informs us that Judah P. Benjamin represented the interests of the planters and bourgeoisie, and assures us that "history has found Benjamin guilty and his cause evil."<sup>13</sup> So, too, the Jews of Shreveport, Louisiana, join the Confederacy because of their economic ties to the dominant plantation economy.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in referring to a Jewish Confederate soldier, Lewis Leon, Mr. Schappes informs us that "Within three years [after his arrival in Charlotte, North Carolina] he thoroughly absorbed the point of view of the reactionary classes in the South. . . . There is not a mention of slavery in the entire Diary [of Mr. Leon], so little did the fundamental cause of the war impress itself upon the consciousness of this Jewish rank-and-file private" (p. 481).

The sort of difficulties that Mr. Schappes makes for himself underlines the strictly arbitrary nature of his method. Consider, for example, the odyssey of Mr. August Belmont from reaction to progress. In one of Mr. Schappes' introductions, Mr. Belmont is a reactionary war-monger, since he "helped finance the war of aggression against Mexico,"

favored the annexation of Cuba and expansion into Latin America, and opposed the abolitionists and supported Douglas.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in the same introduction, he does yeoman's service in Europe for the progressive Lincoln administration during the Civil War.<sup>16</sup> So, too, it is difficult to know what one is to do about Mr. Mann, the American ambassador to Switzerland during the negotiation of the Swiss treaty. "Now Mann," Schappes informs us, "was 'a convinced democrat [who] viewed the rise and sweep of the revolutionary movement (in Europe) with unbounded enthusiasm.'" <sup>17</sup> His democratic views notwithstanding, we learn from Mr. Schappes himself that Mr. Mann was an advocate of states' rights, a secessionist, and a Confederate special agent in Europe.<sup>18</sup> So, too, we are informed, on p. 112, that Tammany is very progressive, but on p. 631 it is already corrupt. The Nativist movement is reactionary,<sup>19</sup> and yet it advocates clean civic government,<sup>20</sup> and even supports the Jews in the Mortara case.<sup>21</sup>

The inadequacy of Mr. Schappes' method is perhaps most clearly revealed in his triumphant analysis of anti-Semitism. It is Mr. Schappes' firm belief that his documents "reveal for the first time that anti-Semitism in our country has a more ancient history, a more persistent continuity, and a wider dispersion than even liberal opponents of anti-Semitism have hitherto dreamed. . . . Analysis is invited of the anti-Semite displayed in this volume. . . . It is this editor's judgment that the evidence points to this as a fundamental, irreducible cause: in any society so class-structured that a minority economically exploits, politically dominates, and culturally controls the majority, the usefulness of anti-Semitism in all its forms and verbalizations is assured and endless because it helps keep that minority in power" (pp. xii-xiii).

Such a general formula, unfortunately, does not take the place of an analysis. Anti-Semitism is a very complex phenomenon which does not become clear merely because one identifies, as does Mr. Schappes, anti-Semitism with reaction and philo-Semitism with progress. Neither is anti-Semitism a characteristic of any specific economic system. It has appeared in ancient Alexandria, in Mohammedan Spain, in feudal Europe, and in Stalin's Russia. It has been resorted to by monarchists, conservatives, liberals, socialists, populists, and communists. Any explanation of anti-Semitism must be one which can account for its use by such apparently contradictory elements. Each anti-Semitic manifestation must be analyzed in terms of the specific social context in which it appears. The only generalization which is at all valid is that anti-Semitism has a close relationship to stresses and strains within any society, where, as a consequence of certain historical developments, dormant anti-Semitism can be appealed to. No society, irrespective of its economic configuration, will resort to anti-Semitism as a *basic* policy unless it is undergoing decay. It is therefore essential

to draw a distinction between that anti-Semitism which manifests itself as part of the stresses and strains accompanying an expanding society, and that anti-Semitism which emerges when permanent crisis sets in. That this distinction is extremely significant is proved from the quite different history of anti-Semitism in the United States, even during the depression, from that of Germany during the same years.

Mr. Schappes, however, fails to make this fundamental distinction. Whatever anti-Semitism did exist in this country during the nineteenth, and even the twentieth centuries, was sporadic, symptomatic, and temporary. On the whole, the nineteenth century was a period which witnessed the acquisition by Jews of rights that they had never before known. And it was the phenomenal development of capitalism in this country during this period which made these achievements possible; although there were occasional evidences of anti-Semitism, the foremost capitalist newspapers decried such manifestations. Indeed, during the nineteenth century, other groups were more persistently used as scapegoats.

Such an analysis, however, does not coincide with Mr. Schappes' purposes. He is primarily interested in showing that anti-Semitism and reaction went hand in hand, and in reiterating dogmatically that capitalism *per se*, by its emphasis on competition (pp. xi-xii), continuously breeds anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism was not confined to the reactionaries is proved by one of Mr. Schappes' own documents in which a Jeffersonian democrat identifies the Jews with Hamilton and speculation.<sup>22</sup>

It is also instructive that the most outspoken defence of Jewish rights in the North came from the Copperhead forces of "appeasement," and not from the "progressive" Republicans.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, there was as much, if not more, anti-Semitism in the North, as in the Confederacy. General Grant's General Order No. 11, issued by the commander of the armies of "progress," cannot be paralleled in the "reactionary" South, and it is little consolation to know that, since the soldiers of the North were fighting a just cause (p. 465), they were to overlook the anti-Semitic manifestations in the Union forces.<sup>24</sup> Mr. Schappes cannot show that Jews were in any way endangered in their rights by the Confederacy or by a slavery economy *per se*. The Jews in the Civil War could make their choice freely, precisely because neither side offered the Jews, as Jews, either more or less than the other. A victory for the Confederacy did not necessarily carry with it the threat of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was used on both sides as a reaction to the stresses and strains placed upon the contending forces by the war.<sup>25</sup>

The pitiful plight in which Mr. Schappes finds himself is highlighted by the following paradox: Jews are judged by Schappes on

the basis of their stand on slavery. The Jews in the Union forces were fighting on the side of justice. Yet — note the implication — they were presumably fighting for the success of an industrial society, which, according to Mr. Schappes, must breed anti-Semitism. The Jews were thus fighting to establish the foundations of their own oppression!<sup>26</sup>

Mr. Schappes insists that capitalism breeds anti-Semitism because it places a premium on competition in a framework of scarcity (p. 465). But it was this competitive capitalism that threw open the doors of opportunity to Jews not only in this country, but in every European country where this form of enterprise became dominant. The relationship that exists between capitalism and anti-Semitism is much more complex than Mr. Schappes cares to admit; an inadequate analysis can only do much harm.

This insistence upon sweeping, untested generalizations marks most of Mr. Schappes' statements. Only one additional example need be given. "This impulse [toward Reform]," Mr. Schappes informs us, "came from the needs of the rising Jewish middle class. These well-to-do business men attempted to adapt themselves as far as possible to the forms of life of the non-Jewish upper class with which they had or sought ever closer relations. Thus the emphasis was laid upon reducing the differences between Judaism and Christianity" (p. 171).

The development of Reform in the United States cannot be comprehended in so neat a formula. The roots of Reform in this country were very diverse. In certain instances it represented an attempt of German immigrants to challenge the dominant, Sephardic, orthodox, oligarchy. In other cases, as in Charleston, it was motivated by the incompatibility of the needs of a new generation of American-born Jews with the institutional demands of the prevailing Sephardi leadership. In still other instances, it derived from the difficulties of observing the minutiae of Jewish laws in the mushrooming frontier towns. In general, it corresponded to the attack on privilege which characterized the Jacksonian era. To say that it was the creation of the newly rising middle class is meaningless, since the Sephardic orthodox leaders were merchants and men of wealth themselves, so that, as framed by Schappes, the causes of the movement even in Charleston are enveloped in a nebulous generality. It would seem that Schappes should have been a little more respectful of his reader's intelligence in view of the fact that he himself, in an introduction to one document, hails Isaac Harby as a Jeffersonian republican (p. 135), the same Isaac Harby who, later, appears as the leader of an upper-class Reform movement!

We are now in a position to assess Mr. Schappes' work. Motivated by the desire to win Jews over to a point of view advocated by the Communist Party, Mr. Schappes collected the documents with this

purpose clearly in mind. To make sure that these documents would yield the interpretation of American Jewish history so dear to his heart, Mr. Schappes provided introductory explanations, which, by their very emphasis on abstractions, such as democracy, progress, freedom, etc., coincided with the Communist Party line for the years when Mr. Schappes was preparing the volume, and when he was one of the editors of *Jewish Life*. He hoped, through this vehicle, to bring Jews over to the support of a third party, dedicated, presumably, to the progressive principles of Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Starting from the Party's position, all movements were forced to fit in with the line. This has led to a distortion of the contours of American history; for it has substituted fuzziness for clarity, exhortation for analysis, and moralizing for historical method. Many of those who have read the book were misled by the documents and the detailed notes, and thought that, for the first time, a critical analysis of American Jewish history was being attempted. Others were swept away by Mr. Schappes' eloquent words about democracy and progress. In this review, an attempt has been made to show what the book really is, namely, an effort to win Jews over to the policies of the American Communist Party. It is, in its own way, as misleading as the apologetic and inspirational volumes which have cluttered American Jewish historiography; for it, too, is a homiletical discourse.

That Mr. Schappes is entitled to his views and to his political affiliations goes without saying; that his political affiliations should give his work immunity to scholarly criticism, he has no right to demand. Mr. Schappes' prefatory remarks are not objectionable because they reflect the program of the Communist Party, any more than the existing histories of the Jews in the United States are acceptable because the politics of their authors are more conservative. The test of any historical treatment is its compatibility with the existing evidence. The objection to Mr. Schappes' historiography derives from its inadequacy, from its failure to show a mature understanding of historical forces, from its naive reading of the record, and from its scarcely concealed homiletical character. Insofar as Mr. Schappes' adherence to the program of the Communist Party is responsible for the artificial mold into which he has fitted American history, to that extent has his political commitment warped his historical sense.

Although the inadequacies of Mr. Schappes' historiography mar the usefulness of *A Documentary History*, the documents are of great value, and the detailed notes give evidence of prodigious labor and technical skill. The serious student of American Jewish history must be grateful to Mr. Schappes, however repelled he may be by the editor's propagandistic approach.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Lee M. Friedman's comment on the book jacket of Schappes, *A Documentary History*.
- <sup>2</sup>*Jewish Life*, October, 1948, pp. 11-12.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, July, 1948, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, October, 1948, p. 13.
- <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>6</sup>Schappes, *A Documentary History*, p. 53.
- <sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.
- <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.
- <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 182.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 376.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 436-37, 317, 704, n. 16. Note the manner in which Mr. Schappes manages to smuggle in Franklin D. Roosevelt as the friend of the immigrant (pp. 252-53) and as the twentieth-century Lincoln (p. 498). The appeal is to a symbol, and not to the actual meaning and significance of his specific acts.
- <sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 429.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 439. Similarly, in discussing the Swiss treaty, Schappes is careful to point out that "Southern export interests dovetailed with states' rights to make the equal rights of the Jews . . . secondary" (p. 316). Maryland's adherence to the Union was economically motivated (p. 691, n. 5), as was that of Missouri (p. 476).
- <sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 452.
- <sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 453: "This letter of Belmont's is a forceful and telling exposition of the Union's stand on the civil war and an able refutation of Confederate arguments. . . ." Cf. pp. 456-57, 451, 273.
- <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 316.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 252-53.
- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 631.
- <sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 386.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 462-63; cf. pp. 472-73.
- <sup>24</sup>Schappes makes clear that he feels that those who raised the issue of fighting anti-Semitism in the North during the Civil War were disrupting the war effort, and that Jews should have kept their minds on the basic issues (cf. pp. 472-73). Had anything comparable to General Order No. 11 or discrimination in the chaplaincy provisions appeared in the Confederacy, we can be fairly certain that Mr. Schappes would have placed responsibility upon the reactionary ruling classes of the South who resorted to anti-Semitism to buttress their slave economy. Thus, even though the South had no law preventing Jews from serving in the chaplaincy, Mr. Schappes nonetheless triumphantly points to the fact that there were no Jewish chaplains in the Southern armies (pp. 462-63).
- <sup>25</sup>Cf. Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, Philadelphia, 1951, pp. 156-88.
- <sup>26</sup>Cf. p. 465: "That there was anti-Semitism in the army was not due to the just cause for which the men were fighting, but to the social system which put a premium on competition in a framework of scarcity, and thus bred antagonism." But this was the very system which emerged from the war, as Schappes states in quite a different connection, where he maintains silence about industrialism and its supposed anti-Semitism: "That the Jews had a particular stake in the defeat of slavery and the advance of industrial capitalism is at best only hinted at . . ." (p. 437). Schappes' reasoning thus involves the active support by Jews to usher in a system which, according to Schappes, by its very existence must breed anti-Semitism.

## Reviews of Books

THE STORY OF RADICAL REFORM JUDAISM. By Leo Kaul.  
*Los Angeles. Privately Printed. Mimeographed. 1951. 52 pp.*

At first reading it is not difficult to understand why Leo Kaul had to resort to mimeographing this little tract himself and circulating it free. Yet *The Story of Radical Reform Judaism* has value, especially to those interested in a specific phase of American Jewish history. Leo Kaul was a collaborator of Emil G. Hirsch. For forty-two years he served as contributing editor of Dr. Hirsch's *Reform Advocate*. He was a disciple of Dr. Hirsch and an ardent protagonist of the radical interpretation of Classical Reform. For him, ethics and social justice were the pre-eminent features of the Jewish heritage.

Leo Kaul feels he has a message. Now in his middle eighties, he believes that the hand of history is guiding his pen: if he does not set down his recollections of Dr. Hirsch's days at Chicago Sinai Congregation, no one else will. He is one of the last survivors of Hirsch's contemporaries — men of his generation who had a passion for the Classical Reform of complete universalism and a contempt for any effort to swing the pendulum toward any particularism associated with the Jewish people.

Leo Kaul's eulogy of Dr. Hirsch is a touching tribute of affection and reverence. It has historical value as well. Some day a gifted historian will write a full-scale biography of Emil G. Hirsch. The work deserves to be done. In Leo Kaul's memoirs that historian will find interesting source material relating to Hirsch's radical impact on Reform Judaism.

It is good to have this evaluation of Hirsch's contribution to Jewish life in America. His few remaining contemporaries in Chicago prefer to remember him by anecdotes now almost legendary from repetition — his sarcasm, his gruffness, his pulpit tirades, his intolerance of ceremonial and cant. Tragic it is that a titan of Hirsch's stature should be remembered for trivia. His masterful sermons are gone. They were never taken down as delivered, only written up after delivery from memory for publication in the *Reform Advocate*. His erudite articles and papers are scattered throughout the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and scholarly journals. All that remains in book form is the single volume *My Religion*, published posthumously, a book which regrettably presents only a fraction of the power and learning of Hirsch in and out of the pulpit.

If Leo Kaul's effort has any merit, it is to emphasize a historic moment in the story of Reform Judaism and to focus attention on one who towered over his colleagues as a giant.

*Chicago Sinai Congregation.*

RICHARD C. HERTZ

NO PEDDLERS ALLOWED. By Alfred R. Schumann. *Appleton, Wisconsin: C. C. Nelson Co.* 1948. x, 325 pp. \$3.50.

The ubiquity of the Jew not only geographically, but integrated through all phases of American life, is now accepted almost as a commonplace of American history. It is still a matter of romantic interest, rather than a surprise, to turn up participation of Jews in the most unexpected sections of the country and in all sorts of activities and movements which developed our country into the nation of today. Even as gold was discovered in California, Jews were well acclimated there. When John Brown raids made headlines, Jews were part of the conflict. When Brigham Young was building up a Mormon community in Utah, Jews were his fellow-pioneers. Otto Mears, as an early settler, was a real factor in the opening up of Colorado. So we could go on from Maine to Florida and East and West with like associations. Therefore, can we be surprised, when we turn to yesterday's pages of history, to find that in the creation of that highly provocative Progressive Political Party, which for some years played so important a part in national affairs in its days of gathering strength under the leadership of Robert LaFollette, from the start, in Wisconsin, at his right hand stood a Jewish co-worker? Solomon Levitan, East Prussian Jew, charter member of the Progressive movement, and one of its recognized leaders, six times elected state treasurer of Wisconsin, primary candidate for governor, delegate to several national Republican conventions, deserves to have recorded in the annals of remembrance a truly American romantic career of successful accomplishment.

In 1881, at the age of nineteen, Solomon Levitan landed in Baltimore and began his American career as a peddler. Peddling into the developing outposts of Wisconsin, where the pack-peddler was still a useful factor in the business of distributing merchandise, and welcomed socially at many a farmside as the harbinger of news and friendly contact with the outside world, Levitan came finally to set up a general store in the little community of New Glarus. Although it is only seventy years ago that Solomon Levitan landed in Baltimore, the America he faced has completely changed. No longer do wholesale peddler-supply houses start young immigrants on a peddling career. Indeed, there is no longer a place for the peddler in the domestic

economy. The mail-order houses, chain stores, rural free delivery, the extension of highways throughout the land, and the widespread use of automobiles have revolutionized retailing and the distribution of merchandise even in the remote countryside. Levitan later opened up branch stores and finally moved to Madison where, ultimately, he became a successful banker.

This outline of a prosperous full life could be duplicated, with slight variations, for many another Jewish immigrant in all parts of the country, but what gives Levitan's biography significance is his early meeting with the rising young politician, LaFollette, their fast friendship, and the growth of Sol Levitan into a Progressive Party leader in the state where the development of that party was nationally significant history. Levitan, self-educated, never free from an accent, in a state and at a time where there was no potent Jewish community, by personality, native droll wit, force of character, and native ability, gained for himself such standing and confidence that he became a very important, state-wide, potent influence in public life.

This volume, *No Peddlers Allowed*, written by Alfred R. Schumann, a Wisconsin schoolteacher interested in politics, painstakingly attempting to tell the story of Sol Levitan's life, just fails to hit the mark. He takes as a title the fact that at the start of his career as a peddler Levitan ran up against signs excluding him from trading at places where there was prejudice against Jews. All through the book there is the undertone that Levitan made good constantly in the face of the "No Peddlers Allowed" signs, handicaps scattered throughout life's highways. That:

Throughout the state the wonder grew

So white a man could be a Jew—and an Orthodox observing  
Jew at that.

Unconsciously there is a benevolently irritating, patronizing note of overemphasis on the fact that Levitan succeeded in spite of being a Jew. To make the biography more vivid, there are too many imaginative fill-ins. This is inexcusable biography where the author knew his subject personally, and where there is no end of authentic material available at hand. It is, however, a very full, kindly and human presentation of the life of one of the strong personalities which built America. It is more than another Horatio Alger success story. It is real American national political history for over fifty years and a real contribution to American historical Judaica.

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