

Reviews of Books

THE WORCESTER ACCOUNT. By S. N. Behrman. *New York: Random House.* 1954. 239 pp. \$4.25

We have been treated, of late, to a goodly number of books with a nostalgia for the Jewishness of yesterday. Some writers approach it from a folkloristic viewpoint with somewhat of a looking down the intellectual nose. Others recall the flavor of mother's soup as the symbol of the beauty of her faith, and one hears in them the sigh of longing for those good old days. S. N. Behrman, in his *The Worcester Account*, falls into neither of these categories. Behrman is known to the cognoscenti as the modern Congreve, and his writings, particularly those for the stage, reveal with subtlety the comedy in the human tragedy. His major talent is the capacity to reduce life to a clever phrase. His plays do not have very long runs on the stage because their appeal is to the more literate of the population.

Behrman grew up on Providence Street in Worcester, Massachusetts. This fact in itself is of no more importance than the one that each of us grew up somewhere. But in this case the fact becomes the instrument for a beautiful account of the life of a Jewish community on a street in a Yankee city of America. Providence Street is a hill, at the foot of which is the "Daitcheshe" shul. (The organizers of it came from a region that bordered Germany.) Then after some three-decker tenements comes the Shaare Torah Shul. This is the big one, where some of the drama of the book takes place. At the top of the hill is the Worcester Academy, a private boys' school situated there since the days when the Yankees had estates in that area. On the same street is St. Vincent Hospital, where Jews are treated with kindness by Catholic Sisters. Living amidst all of these are Jews (all Eastern European), in various stages of economic, political, social, and religious development. Thus far there is nothing distinctive about Providence Street, Worcester, or these Jews.

For the author of *No Time for Comedy* and a number of other sophisticated comedies, Providence Street becomes the stage upon which is enacted many a subtle and lovely comedy. The author's interest is in the esoteric and the paradoxical. His father is a Jew whose whole life is consumed with the "little dots" of the Torah and with the protecting angels. There is the daughter of a famous rabbi,

whose career as matchmaker is a piece of drama in itself. There is the wealthy boor who becomes president of the shul, and Emma Goldman, the anarchist, who sells ice cream to the children of pious Jews. There are young people who are filled with a desire for boating, for love, and for freedom, who must continue to fit their desires into the ecclesiastical climate of Providence Street. The author even introduces us to the *Malach Hamoves* [angel of death], who seems to have played a not inconsiderable role in his life. There is the too obvious pitting of a staid headmaster of the Yankee private school against Yiddish-speaking Jews of a seemingly other world. These, and more, are recorded with charm, humor, and love. Behrman writes well. This is all, and it is enough.

Any attempt to deduce sociological or historical data from this book is doomed to failure. It was not intended for such purposes. Its value lies only in the opportunity which it offers to see a segment of Jewish life through the eyes of a capable writer of modern comedies. This is welcome indeed and is not novel to Jewish writing. Sholom Aleichem has left us a storehouse of humorous writing about Jews in both Europe and America. But Behrman is no Sholom Aleichem, and there lies the pity of it. He is always on the outside looking in, with only one purpose: to see the humor in the situation. He cannot identify himself with these people to give us anything but their part in the comedy. He is unaware of the inner strength and the deeper meaning of what to him seems comic. This is where Sholom Aleichem was at his best. His characters were often foolish, clumsy, egocentric, dishonest, fanatic, poor, rich, sick, and healthy, but they are never limned for us as characters in a comedy. Their lives were very funny, and Jews laughed and still laugh at Sholom Aleichem's writings, but they were of one piece and whole. Behrman's characters are portrayed only partially, only the part which appeals to the author's idea of the comic. The whole person never seems to emerge at any point. Is not this the general characteristic of all his writings? He never comprehends a whole person. His interest is only in the comic.

One cannot quarrel with this book, and Mr. Behrman is too polished a writer to fail in his endeavor. But the reviewer lived in Worcester for a number of years and knows some of the "funny" people portrayed in this book. There is more to them and to Providence Street than comedy.

Dallas, Texas

LEVI A. OLAN

EDUCATION OF AN AMERICAN LIBERAL. By Lucille Milner. *New York: Horizon Press. 1954. 318 pp. \$3.95*

"Liberty is not handed down like the family silver, but must be fought for and re-won by each new generation. The measure of freedom we in America will have depends upon the efforts we make to keep our traditional rights intact." These closing sentences in Mrs. Lucille Milner's informal history of civil liberties, based upon her personal experience of over a quarter century, appear to express the essence of what she derived from that experience.

The daughter of a wealthy St. Louis family, Mrs. Milner became interested in the struggle for civil liberties after an awakening of her social consciousness through welfare work in New York City and St. Louis. Urged on and evidently inspired by Roger Baldwin, she became a member of the directing committee of the National Civil Liberties Bureau, organized during World War I and the first national organization devoted solely to the defense of civil liberties. The Bureau was succeeded by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1920, and Mrs. Milner was its secretary for the next twenty-five years. As such, she had some contact with most of the great civil liberties cases and problems of that turbulent period, which started with the great anti-Red crusade of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and ended with the difficult and perplexing problems of World War II.

With such a wealth of exciting and controversial material to work with it would be difficult to write a dull book, and this book is far from dull. In general, it is interesting and provocative, but it is also puzzling and frustrating. Just as Mrs. Milner's entrance into the realm of social and political struggle was the result of her emotional needs, so the viewpoint which she expresses in this book is essentially emotional rather than intellectual.

There are conspicuous omissions in this story. For example, although Roger Baldwin dominated the ACLU during this quarter century to such an extent that it is often said that he was the ACLU, we find no clues here to his character, work, or influence. The vexing problems involving the attitude of the ACLU toward Communists and Communist organizations, which plagued it even more than most other liberal organizations throughout the thirties and early forties, are barely mentioned. As a result, the reader is hardly prepared for the shocking revelation that, in 1940, members of the board of the

ACLU "hatched a plot" to force the resignation of Harry F. Ward, chairman of the ACLU for twenty years, because of his beliefs, and for the even more startling statement that "the poison which the Dies Committee had instilled into the public mind had now spread into the inner sanctum of the Civil Liberties Union." Dr. Ward resigned in protest against the adoption of the famous resolution of February, 1940, under the terms of which Communists and Fascists were barred from serving on the governing committees or staff of the ACLU. The sponsors of what the author calls the "purge" resolution justified it as being necessary "in order to end the machinations of a group of alleged Communists on the board of directors who were injecting political controversy into the board's proceedings."

The author opposed the resolution on civil liberties grounds and predicted that it would lead to the general use of political tests by liberal organizations. In graphic detail and with frank bias in favor of the accused, she describes the dramatic trial and expulsion of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, prominent Communist Party member, from the board of the ACLU under the terms of the "purge" resolution. She then articulates the still unresolved dilemma of many civil libertarians with these observations: "It was nothing other than a political inquiry by the ACLU. . . . There was no evidence that Elizabeth's removal was based on any act of disloyalty to the Union or its principles. On the contrary, all the evidence pointed to her long years of service to civil liberties. She was removed only because she belonged to a group at the moment hated." Similar sentiments have been voiced during the past several years in the countless cases involving teachers, government employees, army personnel, and ordinary citizens who have fallen victims of our quest for security.

The internal crisis in the ACLU which was evidenced by the passage of the "purge" resolution is still acute, as the controversy continues to rage over the reconciliation of the principles of civil liberties with the conditions resulting from the "Communist conspiracy."

The author's explanation of why she quit the ACLU after twenty-five years is so unsatisfactory that it causes one to wonder whether she has told all the relevant facts. She attributes her resignation to the fact that the situation in the office had become intolerable because a few board members, contrary to the policy adopted by the board, were using the Union's facilities to aid the Nazis and Nazi sympathizers who were under indictment for seditious con-

spiracy. Why the board could not stop this improper use of its facilities, who the offending board members were, and exactly what they were doing are not revealed. Nor does the author explain why her position had become impossible in the face of the fact that she had the support of a majority of the board.

This modest volume does not pretend to provide the solution to the difficult problems of civil liberties in the present period of crisis. It may stimulate some either to devote themselves to work in this vital field or to support those organizations which are carrying the work forward.

Cincinnati

JAMES C. PARADISE

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN JUBILEE VOLUME. Edited by Moshe Davis. Two volumes. *New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America*. 1954. Vol. I, English Section, 549 pp. Vol. II, Hebrew Section, 287 pp. \$25.00

Mordecai M. Kaplan has long been one of the germinal figures of contemporary American Jewry, whose impress has made itself felt in many areas of Jewish life and thought. As the founder and theoretician of Reconstructionism, the "reform" wing of Conservatism, he has profoundly influenced the attitudes and conceptions of many thoughtful Jews, in the Reform as well as in the Conservative movements, and though many of his views remain controversial, none can gainsay their importance in stimulating fresh thought on the religious and sociological problems of American Jewry. For half a century he has been active and productive as educator and philosopher. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the Jewish Theological Seminary, with which he has been associated during this long period, should honor him, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, with these handsome jubilee volumes.

The two-score essays which comprise the work, contributed by distinguished scholars in America and abroad, are personal tributes to his many-sided activities, for they touch upon areas in which he has made signal contributions: education, sociology, theology, Bible, Talmud and rabbinics, and philosophy. Among these, four are directly concerned with the American community.

Kaplan was closely identified with the New York *Kehillah*, whose brief and stormy history Norman Bentwich describes in a chapter

excerpted from his biography of Judah L. Magnes, which has since been published (*For Zion's Sake*, Philadelphia, 1954). At a time when democratic, representative community organization is acknowledged to be one of the foremost desiderata in American Jewish life, this pioneer experiment has a special interest. Bentwich's sketchy account serves to remind us of the lamentable failure of Jewish historians and sociologists to explore so many significant and interesting facets of Jewish experience in America, including the history of the *Kehillah*, which made history during the decade following 1909, when it was founded. It is sobering to consider, in this tercentenary year, when so much attention is being centered on American Jewish history, that there is not a single serious study of the most ambitious venture in local community organization ever undertaken on American soil.

Bentwich's aim, however, is not so much to provide a detailed history of the *Kehillah* as to record Magnes' association with it. This he does adequately, making it clear how much the *Kehillah* depended on this one man for its inception, for its over-all planning and day-to-day guidance, for its liaison between the moneyed German Reform leaders ensconced in the American Jewish Committee and the "masses," and for the steady inspiration and unwavering allegiance which he gave it during its active years. Magnes drew around himself many of the leading figures of his day and fired them with his enthusiasm, but the *Kehillah* remained his creature and expired when his faith in it died.

The immediate incentive for the organization of the *Kehillah* was the notorious assertion that half the criminals in New York were Jews, or rather "Russian Hebrews," as Police Commissioner Theodore Bingham more diplomatically put it. This charge, which appeared in the *North American Review* of September, 1908 (Bernard G. Richards, who was secretary of the *Kehillah* and should know better, in a recent issue of *Congress Weekly* erroneously insisted that the year was 1906), was so swiftly and forcefully challenged that the commissioner retracted it unequivocally on September 16th. One wonders, however, whether the precipitous inauguration of the *Kehillah* in the following months is completely accounted for by this incident. Were there no prior proposals, discussions, plans, consultations?

Bentwich indicates the tension between "uptown" and "downtown," which Magnes more or less skillfully mediated for a number

of years until the democratic Congress movement (and no doubt Magnes' pacifism and sympathy with the Russian Revolution) finally alienated the American Jewish Committee autocrats — and their contributions, which had financed so many valuable *Kehillah* enterprises — and the New York community returned to its former state of anarchy, which persists until today. But he fails to penetrate deeply into the dynamics of the *Kehillah*, or to explore its manifold shortcomings.

Magnes' vision of a united, functioning community was one of his greatest gifts to American Jewry. It deserves the tribute of a full-scale study analyzing the forces which it mobilized, its organizational structure, and its exceptional accomplishments, as well as the weaknesses in leadership and in democratic controls and financing, the conflicts of political philosophy and of class and religious interests, the "vested interests" which fought it, and the circumstances of the period and place which combined in the end to destroy Magnes' faith and its viability. Such a case study would be not only a valuable contribution to American Jewish history but also a very useful guide to an evaluation of the similar problems which confront our own community organization enthusiasts. And, incidentally, what happened to the Philadelphia *Kehillah* which was organized simultaneously?

From 1909 to 1912 Magnes was the leading spirit in another interesting venture, the details of which are disclosed in Moshe Davis' article, "Israel Friedlaender's Minute Book of the Achavah Club." Davis discovered this minute book among Friedlaender's papers, recently turned over to the Jewish Theological Seminary by his widow, and here publishes it in full with a useful introduction and notes. The Achavah Club, founded by Magnes, included a truly extraordinary group of twenty-two of the outstanding "intellectuals" of the Jewish community, among them Mordecai M. Kaplan. Friedlaender's minutes record in some detail the discussions held at the twenty-five meetings, reflecting the widely varied interests of the members and invited guests: nine of these were on Zionism and Palestine, five on religious topics, and the others dealt with Jewish education, assimilation, Jews in politics, anti-Semitism, radical movements, the Jews in France, Russia, Abyssinia, Turkey, etc. It is evident from this record that no single thread or aim unified these meetings, except that the group saw itself vaguely as a Zionist society "restricted to adherents of National Judaism."

What was the purpose of this club? Some of the surviving members to whom Davis put this question related it to Magnes' personal needs. According to Kaplan, "the group was organized by and for Magnes." Louis Lipsky opined that it was intended "to help Magnes solve his problems." Quite probably this was so. Magnes, the rabbi of Temple Emanuel and a founder of the American Jewish Committee, felt the need to familiarize himself with the intellectual currents and personalities of the vibrant and teeming community outside the parochial limits of his "respectable" associations. The Achavah Club no doubt paralleled, on another level, the *Kehillah* as an evidence of his recognition of and allegiance to this wider world.

There is nothing in this record, however, to support Davis' contention that Magnes sought to create, in the club, "an intellectual high command" to help him formulate a philosophy of Judaism for himself and for the *Kehillah*. Whatever personal benefit Magnes derived from the discussions, which were certainly informative and stimulating, they reveal no developmental consistency and no direct concern with problems confronting the *Kehillah*. Far from being "the intellectual counterpart of the *Kehillah*," this was but one of several discussion groups then existent, intended merely to provide a pleasant intellectual evening in the exchange of opinion and information. To evaluate the club as "the first important attempt in American Judaism to merge intellectual leadership with organizational activists" seems very much to overstate its significance. The fact that it petered out so soon is evidence enough that it had no real purpose or function.

The sole surviving organ of the *Kehillah*, its Bureau of Jewish Education (now the Jewish Education Committee), in the founding of which Kaplan had an important role, has had a profound influence on the philosophy and communal organization of Jewish schooling throughout the country. Zevi Scharfstein contributes a gloomy survey of the state of Jewish education at mid-century in his Hebrew article, "At the Crossroads." Sketching quickly and effectively the impact of nineteenth-century humanism, nationalism, and socialism on Jewish attitudes toward traditional education and the effect of mass transplantation in a strange milieu on the traditional school system, Scharfstein devotes the major part of his article to an examination of its "Americanization," against the background of a generally apathetic and uninterested Jewry. The concept of "communality of education," so enthusiastically launched by Kaplan and

Samson Benderly, has been frustrated by the failure to create effective community organization, and in any event cannot of itself revive the will for education. A synthetic philosophy based on the presumed democratic concepts of full personal realization through the preservation of inner group values and of cultural pluralism seems to reflect only a minority intellectual position and to run counter to the strong forces operating to unify American culture. The Deweyan psychology, with its centralization of the child's needs and its emphasis on functional content, has virtually eliminated the major part of the traditional curriculum, and has substituted methodological problems and gimmicks for the basic concern with the transmission of what has become a strange culture. And, most important, the time factor has baffled all efforts to improve the quality and quantity of Jewish education, save for the all-day-school movement, which is generally unacceptable. So Scharfstein concludes this provocative little analysis on a note of pessimistic hopefulness. The auspices are ominous, but a new generation of American Jews, given the will to preserve their heritage, will tackle these problems and in some way solve them. Although there are signs of a new vigor in Jewish life which presage a better future for Jewish education, and although one may quarrel with some of Scharfstein's opinions, the over-all picture which he paints is not far from the reality. What else can a Jew do but sigh — and hope?

One crucial question, however, Scharfstein fails to ask. His premise is that the values of Judaism cannot be transmitted apart from the cultural forms in which they were expressed. In America, the concrete social and personal needs which formerly motivated Jewish studies are no longer felt; the direct relation between literature and life has been shattered. Hence, the writer laments, the languages, the forms, and much of the content of the cultural and religious tradition have no place in the actualities of American Jewish experience. But is a *Hebraic* education, on the elementary level, at any rate, essential to the preservation of these values? Are we obliged to stake the continuity of these values on the traditional *forms*, throwing out the baby with the bath, *lehavdil* [God forbid!], or is it conceivable that the effort to preserve Judaism will strike out in new directions, educationally and culturally, marking a break, perhaps, with the older forms, without sacrificing the essential core? Without depreciating the worth of a direct knowledge of the sources, is it not possible that the attempt to transmit the traditional curric-

ulum in an environment where it has little pertinence has been the major obstacle to the development of an American Jewish school which shall concentrate on the inculcation of Jewish religious and cultural loyalties and interests on the basis of a body of knowledge geared to this specific goal in the American context? This is a heresy, no doubt, which can offer little comfort to those who, like Scharfstein, have devoted their lives to the traditional ideal of Jewish learning, and it entails many subtle and difficult problems of continuity with the past and contiguity with the widespread Jewish present. But if we acknowledge America to be a profoundly "new world" in the Jewish experience, how else but through a new approach can we respond to its challenge?

Samuel S. Cohon's article, "Kaufmann Kohler the Reformer," is a lucid, well-organized, and interesting account of the development of Kohler's ideas and of his influence as a molder of Reform thought and practice. Tracing his career from his early revolt against his Orthodox upbringing in Bavaria, through his spiritual tutelage under Abraham Geiger and Moritz Lazarus, his rabbinic service in Detroit and New York, and his presidency of the Hebrew Union College, Cohon ably delineates the firmness of Kohler's devotion to the spiritual and moral essence of Judaism and to the intellectual force with which he propounded the historical, evolutionary conception of its development. Equally clear is the process by which the rigid doctrinaire of the early years in America, when Kohler seconded Einhorn's radicalism in the struggle between "East and West" against Isaac M. Wise's cautious and even conservative approach to innovation, gradually moderated many of his early views. The main architect of the "Pittsburgh Platform" of 1885, which defined the "classic" position of American Reform (and which, as Cohon points out, was never officially adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis), in later years Kohler fervently affirmed the unity of Israel and Judaism, pleading for a united Israel, urged the substitution of the more positive term "progressive Judaism" for the name "Reform," favored ceremonialism in the synagogue and home and the retention of Saturday as the Sabbath (both of which he had formerly opposed), and, despite his resistance to nationalism, strongly supported colonization efforts in Palestine. His contributions to the formulation of Reform theology in his writings and in the deliberations of the Central Conference of American Rabbis are clearly outlined.

Kohler's intellectual history through the years is a good example of the Americanization of Reform. It would have enriched the merit of this study if Cohon had been able to indicate the intellectual and social forces which prompted the process.

Teaneck, N. J.

JOSHUA TRACHTENBERG

THE JEW IN AMERICA (A Syllabus for Teachers). By Edward A. Nudelman and Zalmen Slesinger. *New York: American Association for Jewish Education. Mimeographed.* 1954. 2 parts. 296 pp. \$2.50

Although this syllabus was prepared as a teachers' guide for the promotion of the observance of the American Jewish Tercentenary, it actually serves a much wider purpose. In a very real sense, *The Jew in America* becomes an introduction to the effective teaching of American Jewish history generally, and there are overtones in the approaches suggested by the authors that can aid in the development of a much more productive Jewish social studies curriculum for today's religious school.

Appearing in two separate parts, *The Jew in America* offers a wide range of contents. Perhaps this is its chief shortcoming, for it may easily become overwhelming to the average teacher. Not many schools offer the resources called for by the authors, nor do teachers generally have the time to devote to the extensive research suggested by the authors. For the sake of greater practical usefulness, the authors might have restricted the area which they attempted to cover and, by means of a more intensive approach, might have provided the teacher with digests of more of the essential information needed for the implementation of these suggestions.

This is not to say, however, that *The Jew in America* does not contain a great deal of worthwhile information. It does, and the encyclopedic nature of the syllabus can be seen from a cursory examination of its contents. Part I, containing 127 pages, starts with a number of general suggestions for the observance of the Tercentenary in the primary, intermediate, and high school grades, and it continues with several detailed units for students of junior and senior high school age, dealing with significant aspects of American Jewish life, such as Jewish migrations and the economic status of the American Jew. Another section is devoted to various activities

for the observance of the Tercentenary by individual classes, departments, the school itself, and the school in conjunction with the Jewish and general community. Part I concludes with a forty-odd page compendium of resources that includes compilations of pedagogical and historical references for the teacher, appropriate audio-visual aids, sources of information on various phases of American Jewish history, as well as names and addresses of book publishers and of important American Jewish agencies and organizations.

Part II is a supplement of 169 pages, incorporating material culled from existing pamphlets and books, and is designed to supply the teacher with specific educational know-how and Jewish background information for use in connection with some of the suggestions made in Part I. In the portion devoted to pedagogics, there are excellent articles dealing with the proper methods for utilizing films, filmstrips, recordings, field trips, story-telling, creative dramatics, the dance, exhibits, current events, *Keren Ami*, charts and graphs, and maps and globes. The section dealing with Jewish information offers the teacher selected material on the migrations of Jews, the size of the American Jewish community and its economic distribution, religious grouping, and communal organization and program of Jewish education.

The Jew in America, then, lives up to its general purpose of providing the teacher with a wealth of ideas and techniques for the commemoration of the Tercentenary. But it can be helpful in other respects. Part I, for instance, can profitably be used as a guide to better methodology for all who teach American Jewish history. In the lessons outlined for students on the junior and senior high school level, the authors have provided the teacher with specific illustrations of the procedures to be followed in unit construction. Here we have several examples of pupil motivation through class discussion, the organization of subject-matter into suitable units, the utilization of class committees, the use of various instructional aids including multiple texts, and provision for creative activities both within and outside the classroom. As for Part II, the pedagogic information contained here could easily serve as the basis for many fruitful teacher-training sessions or teachers' meetings. Teachers might be requested to read one of these selections in advance and then discuss or demonstrate the principles involved at a subsequent meeting.

Perhaps most important of all, the approach employed by the authors of *The Jew in America* has far-reaching implications for the

Jewish social studies curriculum of the religious school. Influenced by the better practices of modern education, it reflects a philosophy of Jewish education which departs significantly from that generally in vogue today, and it appears to contain at least five sound psychological principles: (1) to be effective, education must relate the child's learning to the realities of life round about him; (2) the most desirable kind of teaching is that which involves the student in an "experience-centered mode of learning initiated, planned, executed and evaluated jointly by the teachers and pupils"; (3) more valuable and lasting learning takes place through the medium of units extending over a number of sessions; (4) the proper focus for the education of children is that which emphasizes the pupil's own concerns, problems, and interests, and thereby succeeds in actively involving him in the learning process; and (5) education, especially in the area of social studies, should concentrate upon instilling basic understandings rather than upon imparting factual information for its own sake.

Building upon this educational philosophy, the authors have clearly indicated how many of the glaring weaknesses of the present-day teaching of Jewish history can be overcome. For, through these principles, they are seeking to bridge the wide gulf that separates the experience of the child from the realities of adult Jewish life, and the immediate concerns of the child from the mature educational goals of most Jewish adults. In emphasizing the self-involvement of pupils, the broadening of children's Jewish experiences, the relationship of learning about the past to present Jewish needs, and the use of creative activity as a means of real Jewish growth in childhood, *The Jew in America* becomes another portent of more effective Jewish education for tomorrow.

SYLVAN D. SCHWARTZMAN

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DARKEI HA-YAHADUT B'AMERIKA (The Roads of Judaism in America; English title page: JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS IN AMERICA. AN HISTORICAL STUDY). By Moshe Davis. *Tel-Aviv: Massadah Publishing House. 1953. 153 pp.*

This book is in the main a translation of Dr. Moshe Davis' "Jewish

Religious Life and Institutions in America (A Historical Study)," a chapter in the large collection *The Jews, Their History, Culture, and Religion*, edited by Louis Finkelstein (New York, 1949). In turn, this chapter is to a considerable extent a highly readable condensation of the author's doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University, *Yahadut Amerika Be-Hitpathuta* (The Shaping of American Judaism) (New York, 1951), which has been extensively reviewed (see Solomon B. Freehof, in *American Jewish Archives*. iv, 33-35, and particularly Joshua Bloch, in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XLII, 91-107).

The present work by the provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America will give the Hebrew reader not only a good introduction to the history of religious developments in American Jewry but also insight into the workings of other national institutions and trends, e. g., "roof" organizations, Zionism, education, and scholarship. Covered in somewhat greater detail is the author's own field of specialization, the struggle between the articulate leaders of the Orthodox-Conservative group and the Reform wing at the time of the drive to dominate the community in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The differences between the early Conservatives and the Neo-Orthodox at the time of the separation of these two groups could have been elucidated more clearly. The author has avoided much misunderstanding by using the literal translation of "Conservative Judaism" — *Ha-Yahadut Hamshameret* — rather than *Ha-Yahadut Ha-Historit*. While this wing is somewhat accentuated, the other groups are treated with respect and, on the whole, with a successful effort at objectivity.

The Hebrew — in the main the Israeli — reader could have benefited from a more extensive coverage of the recent trends in Orthodoxy, particularly the activities of the "younger" rabbinical associations and the struggle for the readjustment of *Halakha* ["The Law"]. For instance, the name of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik seems to have been omitted from the book and is not to be found in the index to the Finkelstein volumes. Similarly, the few new pages in the book concerning the relationship of American religious Jewry to Israel, in which Conservative leadership is rather emphasized, should have contained information also on the Orthodox wing. Unmentioned are also the recent impact of existentialism on Jewish religious thinking and the emergence of articulate, bitter anti-Zionism under the guise of the battle against secularism, with

“religious” American Jewry as the supposed spokesman and representative of religion and with “nationalistic” Israeli Jewry as that of secularism. Such omissions, together with the neglect to mention (even in the bibliographical data) the reality of the evolving culture patterns in worship, daily life, and observance with the obvious similarity of the rank and file members and lay leadership of Conservative and Reform congregations (the Orthodox have not been studied), are bound to give a misleading notion concerning the actual state of religion as differentiated from religious institutionalism in American Jewish life. Among the minor shortcomings is the occasional tendency to omit dates, in some cases those of the establishment of institutions (e. g., pp. 41, 52).

Dr. Davis' book is most handy and useful as an introduction and a ready source of reference, and it is to be regretted that it has no index. A similar small-size book in English would be a welcome addition to the literature in the field.

New York City

ABRAHAM G. DUKER

THE RECORDS OF THE EARLIEST JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE NEW WORLD. By Arnold Wiznitzer.
New York: American Jewish Historical Society. 1954. 108 pp. \$3.00

This volume is in effect a corrected offprint, with illustrations, of Dr. Arnold Wiznitzer's article in the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*. That does not make it any the less valuable, for it is extremely useful to have it in this separate form, because of its really considerable significance. The subject matter is the minute books of the congregations Zur Israel of Recife and Magen Abraham of Mauricia, Brazil, between 1648 and 1653, which, on the overthrow of the Dutch Brazilian empire, were taken to Amsterdam, where they lay almost neglected for three centuries. Thus there is a romantic interest in the volume. There is sociological interest, also, for it is one of the very few minute books of an early Jewish community that has ever seen the light in print.

But perhaps the basic importance of the volume is in another direction. The uprooting of the short-lived community in Brazil was of the greatest significance in Jewish history, for the refugees, scattered throughout the North Atlantic region, were responsible for the establishment (or, at the least, for the vitalization) of the Jewish



The J. Clarence Davies Collection, Museum of the City of New York

NEW AMSTERDAM

As It Probably Looked When the First Jews Arrived in 1654

communities all over this area: in Dutch Guiana, in Barbados, in Curaçao, and even in New York, just three centuries ago. Some of them, recrossing the Atlantic, were among the founding members of London Jewry. Dr. Wiznitzer has been able to identify Samuel da Veiga, the last *gabay* of Congregation Zur Israel, with his homonym who figures later among the pillars of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation of London, by a conclusive piece of evidence: their signatures are identical. There cannot be much doubt that the Recife *shohet* and *bodek* [meat inspector], Benjamin Levy, is the same person who, from 1661 on, filled the same position in London. He later entered into the main stream of Jewish history, for from the *Zizath Nobel Zevi* (newly re-edited by Dr. I. Tishbi: Mosad Bialik, Jerusalem, 1954) it appears that he was the London agent for the dissemination of reports concerning the progress of the pseudo-Messiah, Sabbatai Zevi, and I suspect that he was the original recipient of the various English accounts published in London in 1666, so sought after by bibliophiles.

A systematic study of the names in Dr. Wiznitzer's lists in the light of the earliest records of the other communities of the Marrano Diaspora would be a rewarding task. The author is to be congratulated on his first book, which is marred only by his persistent endeavor to discover slips in the writings of predecessors in the field. We all live in glass houses.

Oxford, England

CECIL ROTH

GUIDEPOSTS IN MODERN JUDAISM. By Jacob B. Agus.
New York: Bloch Publishing Company. 1954. 445 pp. \$4.50.

Dr. Jacob B. Agus' most recent book presents us with an interesting survey of the various currents in the three main streams of contemporary Jewish thought. This summary serves as a springboard for his well-executed defense of the interpretation of Judaism which he considers proper for Conservatism, and eventually for the entire Jewish community. The book is composed of articles which have appeared in different periodicals, and covers many subjects. These discussions, however, are dependent for their validity in part or in whole upon Dr. Agus' theory of Judaism. Therefore, it is with this exposition that we shall be mainly concerned.

There is a simplicity in the ultimate Orthodox position concerning

the reasons why one should observe the many ritual commandments of the Bible and the *Halachah* ["The Law"]: God commanded these rituals to be observed, and therefore they are to be kept. In corresponding simplicity is the position of Reform in not subscribing to these commandments: God did not command these laws, therefore they are not binding. The attitude of Reform is not an arbitrary one; it is based upon painstaking study and research, as that of Orthodoxy is based upon faith. The area between these two poles is the province of Conservative Judaism, and it is upon this intermediate situation that Dr. Agus centers his attention. His interest seems to be to secure the place of Conservatism in the realm of theory as it is established in practice, and in order to accomplish this, he finds it necessary to combine elements of the two contrary positions stated above. He accepts the fact that the Bible was not divinely revealed in any literal sense at Sinai, yet claims that the *Halachah* is obligatory *with the force of law* upon the Jew.

We can fully appreciate Dr. Agus' plight. Since the Orthodox Jew will only claim that the ultimate foundation for the acceptance of the *Halachah* is that it is divine revelation, once this foundation is undermined, as it is by the author's refusal to accept a literalistic concept of revelation, what good reason can be given for continuing to maintain it? Dr. Agus attempts to resolve this difficulty by means of a bifurcated view of revelation. A distinction must be made, he says, between "Law" and "laws." The "Law" that is revealed to man "refers to the general, subconscious, spiritual drive which underlies the whole body of *Halachah*, not to the details of the Law." But is such a distinction possible? The "Law," after all, is merely an *aggregate* of the "laws," and if the individual laws are not divine, and therefore not mandatory, is it not inconsistent to the point of absurdity to claim a revealed character for the whole?

It will not do to solve this difficulty by attempting a pragmatic rationale for the *Halachah* through an appeal to an arbitrarily postulated form of "Jewish Piety," namely, "the awareness of the ubiquitous majesty of Divine Law." This means that Jews have served God in the past by observing Law, and that, consequently, they must continue to retain this pattern if they are to maintain the characteristic Jewish way of worshipping the Divine, and thus demonstrate to the world the need for objective forms of piety in religion. But we must not forget that this acceptance of Law in the past was not an arbitrary act to demonstrate the abstract prin-

ciple that a religionist's devotion to God should take on concrete form. Rather, the Jews of that day *believed these laws* to be *God's word*, and it was for this reason that they revered and observed them.

In such an instrumental use of ritual law by Dr. Agus, something of the utmost importance is neglected. What is the truth-value inherent within the *Halachah* itself? What is the organic connection that exists between the many laws and the display of love for a God who never commanded them? Indeed, they seem to have less intrinsic worth than the whistling of the dull-witted little boy, in the tale of the *Hasidim*, who knew only this way to express his love for the Eternal. Dr. Agus does not shrink from this conclusion, declaring boldly: "Thus we arrive at the paradoxical conclusion that what well may be true revelation for any one group may also be totally meaningless and valueless to another group." But is not this relativism a two-edged sword, cutting Dr. Agus off from offering his position to the American Jew as a way of life? For this is the problem of the American Jew, that the *Halachah* does not adequately express his feelings for the eternal objects of religion.

Now if the *Halachah*, when fairly considered, has neither instrumental nor intrinsic value, what is it that really prompts Dr. Agus to foist it upon the American Jewish community? Is it unfair for us to suspect that the reasons offered are either rationalizations for a deep-rooted emotional attachment to these customs, or else excuses for the maintenance of a separate synagogue when no valid cause exists in theory, or perhaps a combination of both? There is, of course, room for customs developed by the Jewish communities of the past, but this does not mean the mass resurrection of the *Halachah*, which would in many instances serve to duplicate civil law. There is a need for customs which still serve a purpose, providing us with modes of behavior in those situations to which the civil law does not extend. Certainly the beginnings of such stabilized patterns are emerging in America in the case of mourning rites, marriage, and other occasions where the civil law leaves room for more spiritual expression than it itself affords. Such customs have intrinsic truth-value, and do not attempt to serve as organically unrelated instruments for attaining communion with the Divine.

At the bottom of Dr. Agus' whole approach lies, in my opinion, a misconception of the nature of Jewish law and history, which results in the overglorification of both. Even though biblical criticism now seems to be generally accepted by Conservative thinkers, they

are unable to rid themselves of their prejudices surrounding the Bible. If the Bible prescribes a softer penalty for a crime than the other ancient law codes, it is because it "boldly carries forward" the tendency toward leniency in them. If, on the other hand, the Bible displays a harsh attitude, as for example when it refuses to let a man forgive his wife her adultery, as is permitted in the Hittite law code, then "the contrast is in spiritual emphasis," with the Bible again receiving the nod for considering the sanctity of the home so great that God cannot forgive the sin. It is intriguing to wonder how Dr. Agus would explain away the fact that the Middle Assyrian laws contain adequate and humane provisions for alleviating the distress of a woman whose husband has disappeared without having previously divorced her (permitting her to remarry after waiting for his return for the period of time prescribed by the statute), thus solving the problem of the *agunah* [a woman who is legally barred from remarriage], a problem with which the Conservative rabbinate is still grappling.

A misconception of the period of the emergence of the *Halachah* is even more critical for the Conservative position. As Reform Judaism presented its case against Orthodoxy by rewriting the history of the biblical period, so it is now required to present its case against Conservatism by disproving its interpretation of this later period. Jewish law is not a response to holiness; it is a response to life. Life requires law, and the Jews living in autonomous communities developed law. And while it is true that Jewish law, like Muslim law, is contained in a theological shell, this shell is only the external aspect, not the kernel. A proper legal analysis would reveal that the fundamental relations of persons and institutions defined in the *Halachah* do not incorporate in any important or substantial manner the ethical considerations promulgated by the pre-Exilic prophets; it does *not* provide the concrete fulfillment of their abstract pronouncements. The religious aspect is embroidery and must not be allowed to obfuscate the primarily secular character of the essence. It is this secular nature of the *Halachah* that justifies the great changes of the Reform movement, and it is now the task of the scientific historian of Judaism to demonstrate this secular core beyond a doubt.

Dr. Agus' manner of treatment of theology is open to question. He presents a reasoned attempt to provide a ground for belief in God (an attempt which requires a separate critique), and he is satisfied

that he has made out a plausible case for "an Absolute Personality representing the highest measure of field-building capacity, [and who] constitutes a pole of being, standing in continual opposition to and tension with the mechanistic universe." But since this is not the kind of deity in which Dr. Agus *believes*, in the very next chapter he leaves behind all his efforts to work out a reasoned belief and simply asserts the concept of God which he does accept. The reader is left perplexed as to why the reasoned attempt is at all made if a belief which the reasoned argument will not support is in the end simply asserted?

All too often the philosophic generalizations are quite loose. Plato's ideas do not exist in "eternity"; they subsist in either the "intelligible place" or the "super-celestial place." Prophecy for Maimonides is not mystical; it is a natural perfection of man and completely rational. Equally disturbing is the habit of philosophical name-dropping in which Dr. Agus indulges, and which brings him to the point of covering much of the history of German thought in the space of a page. For those who have some knowledge of the period, the summary is woefully inadequate; for those who do not, it is unintelligible. And it was not Rabbi Simha Zissel alone of all the heads of Eastern European *yeshivos* who fought for the introduction of secular studies into the curricula of these schools; Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines contributed to this endeavor and suffered hardship for his efforts.

This book, at times brilliantly conceived, fails to prove the case for Conservative Judaism, which it attempts to demonstrate. In the opinion of this reviewer, the latter continues to occupy the never-never land of logical not-being that exists in the excluded middle between Orthodoxy and Reform.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A reply by Mrs. Lucille B. Milner, concerning the review of her book *The Education of an American Liberal*, will appear in the January, 1956, issue of AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES.