

Reviews of Books

ARONSON, DAVID. *The Jewish Way of Life*, revised edition. New York: The United Synagogue of America. 1957. x, 227 pp. \$3.75

The Jewish Way of Life is a comprehensive, popular presentation of normative Judaism — Talmudic, medieval, Hasidic, and, to a lesser extent, modern. A readable synthesis designed for the Jewish layman and perhaps also for confirmation classes, this book covers the Jewish way of life as it manifests itself in the Jew's relationship to God and the Jewish community, in justice and charity, in the approach to social problems, and in the role of the Jewish people in history. This synthesis is too simple and unproblematic, however, to satisfy the thoughtful layman, too lacking in intensity and religious fervor to inspire those young people who ask whether, after all, there is a Jewish way of life that can call forth their highest allegiance.

If the first chapter, "Experiencing God's Presence," is an excellent statement of man as co-creator with God, the second, "Why Evil, Suffering, Death?", falls short both of the urgency of the problem and of the profundity of Jewish tradition. Rabbi Aronson's "answer" to Job's question is "the divine plan" whose "progressive pattern" man may glimpse in history: "What may appear evil for the moment may prove to be good when the whole plan is revealed." Like Alexander Pope, Rabbi Aronson assumes that "whatever is is right" — a sentiment worthy of the eighteenth century, with its vision of Newtonian harmony, but hardly of our era of genocide and global war!

In general, the author summarizes but does not probe, raises issues but quickly moves on to others. As the middle way between leaving too little room for the living present and failing to respect the authority of the past, he offers "a conscious evolution" in which we "study the experiences and accumulated wisdom of the past" and also "give due consideration to the spiritual and moral needs of the present." In actual fact, all three branches of American Judaism represent, each in its own way, a combination and interaction of the present and the past, and the adherents of each hold that their branch alone has the right combination. Yet Rabbi Aronson makes this central paradox of modern Judaism a simple matter of moderation, needing only a few happy phrases to produce a working harmony! The reader could never discover from this book either that there are important distinc-



Courtesy, B'nai B'rith, Washington, D. C.

The B'nai B'rith, founded in 1843, dedicated its new national headquarters, in Washington, D. C., in 1957

tions between traditional and modern Judaism or that there are fundamental divergencies between the various branches of modern Judaism. The attempt to reach a synthesis has often resulted in the synthetic, as in the blending of quotations from the medieval Jewish philosophers and the Hasidim, from Mordecai M. Kaplan and Abraham Heschel, as if they were really essentially the same or part of a common approach.

One wonders why the author is so modern and specific when dealing with labor problems and Zionism, when in all other areas, from Judaism to the relation of religion to science, he is content to summarize the tradition with none or only the most general applications to modern situations. "Law and justice must be enforced against groups as against individuals," he writes, and the test of whether this attitude is being abused by a nation that makes war against another "is not difficult to apply": "The nation which plans, when victorious, to accept no spoils of war, and demands no privileges for itself which it is not willing to grant to others — that nation is motivated by a righteous cause." In the light of modern history, this attempt to dismiss the most agonizing problem of our time in a pat phrase appears naive and myopic. The relation of Judaism to other religions is treated with a similar superficiality: the essence of all religions is simply defined as bringing man into communion with the Deity and setting up an ethical rule of life, while the differences between religions are explained away on the basis of the accidents of birth and history. "It is the manner in which the religious impulse realizes itself in him; and to him, therefore, it is a true religion." This easy relativism makes truth itself a subjective matter and divests it of its essential meaning. Religious impulses do not "realize themselves," moreover. Religion is a relationship between man and God or it is *nothing*. To reduce it to the merely immanent makes God merely a means to some higher independent goal, such as "self-realization" or "happiness."

In his treatment of the chosen people, the author waters down the meaning of Israel's "chosenness" to a general moral ideal, one, moreover, which is not really concerned with the people's becoming holy *as a people*. This book, in fact, seems really less concerned with the covenant between Israel and God than with the "group personality that constitutes the sense of peoplehood and the experience of nationhood." This Reconstructionist approach permeates the whole of the book and is the real key to its synthesis. This mystique of a "group personality" may help us understand how Rabbi Aronson, an American, identifies himself with the sovereign political State of Israel to the extent of speaking in its name. But by what right does a *rabbi* identify the State of Israel with the Zion of the prophets

without placing a single critical judgment or demand on that state? If "the great need of our generation is a leadership endowed with prophetic vision and courage," as Rabbi Aronson suggests, there is little of it to be found in this book. The criteria which Mordecai M. Kaplan points out for the progress of Judaism and which Aronson advances in his epilogue — "continuity," "individuality," and "organic character" — are really no criteria at all but facile labels that anyone is free to apply to his own selection of Judaism. There is no reason on the face of it why "identification with Jewish Peoplehood" should, as Professor Kaplan and Rabbi Aronson hope, "presage that brotherhood of the nations which will mold this world of ours into the Kingdom of God." And on the basis of this book, there seems still less chance of realizing the hope placed in American Jewry by Milton Steinberg and quoted by Rabbi Aronson in his conclusion:

An American Jewry standing four square by Judaism's great moral ideals, sharpening them into the keenest contemporaneousness, applying them boldly, imaginatively — so that the name Jew is a synonym for the practice and advocacy of justice, compassion, freedom and peace.

Would that it were so!

Bronxville, New York

MAURICE FRIEDMAN

GLAZER, NATHAN. *American Judaism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1957. xi, 176 pp. \$3.50

This volume appears in a series entitled *The Chicago History of American Civilization*. It is a historical presentation of Jewish religious experiences and institutions in America. The author is a competent sociologist, and writes very well. He has made good use of published materials on American Jewish history, and has even gone to a number of unpublished studies, including several dissertations by graduates of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. He has also had the advantage of consulting with specialists in the field of American Jewish history.

The result is a book in which there are few misstatements or distortions of fact. Much of importance is omitted, but then, of course, one can not include everything in so short a summary. The tone of the book is thoughtful, judicious, and not unsympathetic. Yet it leaves this reader, for one, profoundly dissatisfied.

The reason is that the author, so far as one may judge from his book, has no positive Jewish convictions of his own. He gives little evidence of

hostility to religion. One gets the impression at times that he would be happy if he did have some Jewish religious beliefs. But though he writes without apparent animus, he writes likewise without an iota of real affection or ardor.

Our author, for example, has a good deal to say about David Einhorn and about the inclusion of material from Einhorn's prayer book in the *Union Prayerbook*; but he does not convey anything of the deep and positive piety that breathes forth from some of Einhorn's original prayers. Indeed, he does not seem to be aware that Reform and Conservative congregations contain some genuinely religious personalities, both in pew and in pulpit. The fact that such personalities are not excessively numerous is beside the point: profoundly pious men and women have never been plentiful.

Dr. Glazer discusses at considerable length the dual character of Judaism: as the life of an ethnic community, and as a religion. He is at some pains to explain the peculiar character of the Jewish social group. But he gives only the vaguest account of the Jewish religion at any stage of its development. He properly points out that Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed; but this action appears as little more than tribal custom. A reader with no previous knowledge of Judaism could hardly guess that there are basic theological and ethical principles upheld by all believing Jews, orthodox or modernist. Nor would he suppose that Judaism has anything of positive value to contribute to American life. And yet organized Jewish life in the United States has exercised a constructive influence for social betterment and improved philanthropic practices. In many communities, the Temple or Jewish Center has been the civic forum and the citadel of liberalism. Prayers from the Jewish liturgy have been added to Christian manuals of worship. And surely Dr. Glazer should have mentioned the important contribution made initially by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in its struggle to keep sectarian influences out of the public schools, a struggle which has more recently been carried on by the secular defense agencies.

Our author reports the vast sums raised by American Jewry for the United Jewish Appeal, without pointing out to the casual reader that this act of generosity has no parallel in the entire history of philanthropy. He makes no mention of the interesting phenomenon of Jewish sobriety; and he dismisses in a few dry sentences the fact that Jews present a high level of family stability and a low percentage of crime and juvenile delinquency. He does not take note of the positive religious results that have been obtained in the youth organizations of national Jewish bodies, or of the

increasing proportion of boys from Conservative and Reform homes who are preparing for the rabbinic office in their respective denominations.

As an honest man, our author confesses that quick and facile sociological explanations of the Jewish revival of the last fifteen years are not easily achieved. He senses that factors which he cannot fully identify have a bearing on the survival of Judaism. Yet he has no confidence in the future; and when he comes to speculate on the possible sources of continuing Jewish religious life, his eye falls with faint and uncertain hope on Williamsburg!

Such a book, though informative and stimulating, can hardly either encourage or challenge the Jewish reader. As for the Christian reader, he must surely be convinced that Judaism has no future, and that a large-scale effort to win the Jews for Christianity is long overdue. The same set of facts could have been presented with equal candor, yet with utterly different effect, by someone who believes in Judaism and is ready to give his life to it.

New York, N. Y.

BERNARD J. BAMBERGER

PESSIN, DEBORAH. *History of the Jews in America*. New York: The United Synagogue of America. 1957. 317 pp. \$2.75

In the past few years, the United Synagogue of America (Conservative) has intensified the production of texts for its religious schools, and by and large these constitute a fine contribution to the field of Jewish education. Eminently readable, attractive in format, and geared more adequately to the level of the children who read them, volumes such as Sadie R. Weilerstein's *Jewish Heroes* and Deborah Pessin's *The Jewish People* are already widely used in non-Conservative religious schools as well. In the process, a thirty-five-year-old pattern of Reform hegemony in the area of Jewish history texts is slowly coming to an end, although it must be pointed out that the texts of the United Synagogue of America still adhere to the basic curriculum of the Reform movement.

The United Synagogue's newest publication is Deborah Pessin's *History of the Jews in America*. Beautifully designed and illustrated, this volume is most appealing. Moreover, its organization into five overall, logical units, its lively anecdotal style, and the skillful treatment of social, political, and economic forces operating in the making of the American Jew all contribute

to the readability of the text. Happily, too, the author has avoided two major pitfalls of history-text writers: inundating youngsters with oceans of facts, and ignoring the readers' emotions. She has made good use of selectivity, and has attempted to tell her story with some excitement and enthusiasm. Hence, *History of the Jews in America* is bound to be an improvement over its predecessors in this field.

The volume is, however, not without shortcomings. In the first place, it is by no means an objective presentation. In general, its orientation is toward Conservatism, and this becomes evident in the treatment of the Hebrew Union College, to which it devotes a single sentence, whereas the Jewish Theological Seminary of America receives several pages. Another example is the touting of Maimonides College, founded in 1867, as the first American rabbinical seminary, despite the fact that Zion College was organized by Isaac Mayer Wise in 1855 for the express purpose of educating American Jewish "ministers," as Wise put it in one of his editorials in *The Israelite*.

But there are other weaknesses. One is the temptation of the author to succumb to "lists" when it comes to Jewish contributions to America, as in the case of the Jewish heroes of the Civil War (pages 143-45) and the all-too-familiar catalogue of American Jews in the arts, sciences, and entertainment field (pages 262-63). It is unfortunate, too, that under the heading of Unit Five, "New Responsibilities," the author did not include the area of Jewish religious needs. For one concerned with Jewish *religious* education can hardly agree that philanthropy, Zionism, and contributions to American life constitute the whole of the "new responsibilities" which the American Jew of the twentieth century faces.

From the educational standpoint, the volume presents two serious problems. The first, certainly, is the age-range for which the book is intended. In the main it appears to be directed to pupils in the sixth and seventh grades, but in certain instances — as in the case of the discussion of "cultural pluralism" — it calls for a much higher maturational level, perhaps around the ninth grade. Secondly, for the most part the volume fails to make contact with the everyday American Jewish experiences of the child, and the author leaves it strictly up to the reader to discover the connection between the incidents which she describes and his own current Jewish life. Sadly, as we know from experience, many of our children never bridge this gap, and for them Jewish history remains an amalgam of irrelevant facts.

Summarizing, then: while in many respects *History of the Jews in*

America represents a marked improvement over previous volumes, it is by no means the final word in American Jewish history for the modern religious school.

*Hebrew Union College - Jewish
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SYLVAN D. SCHWARTZMAN

POSTAL, BERNARD, and LIONEL KOPPMAN. *A Jewish Tourist's Guide to the United States*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. 1954. xxx, 705 pp. \$5.00

We become bored, we academicians, with the continual need to explain the difficulty of writing a final, definitive history of the Jews of the United States: too much raw research has to be done in hundreds of different fields, too many basic questions need to be answered, too many problems have not even been explored. Until all this basic academic activity takes place, we keep saying, it will not be possible to write a definitive history.

We have been thinking, of course, in terms of a connected narrative. It did not occur to any of us that the entire problem could be avoided by compiling a directory of known material on the local and state level. So the professional historians continue to deal with national trends in a somewhat ponderous and confused manner — while few of us have ever really come to grips with the real problem: whether it will ever really be possible to tell a full, connected story of American Jewry, because of the very nature of American Jewish life. Meanwhile, two journalists, unencumbered with academic apprehensions and paraphernalia, have shown what can be accomplished in terms of a directory of local and state Jewish history.

This was not actually the aim which Bernard Postal and Lionel Koppman had in mind when they set about compiling their *Tourist's Guide*, but it is what came out of their immense card files and folders of correspondence. Without footnotes, references, or citations, they have assembled in one volume more reliable, authentic data on Jewish history as it has been lived at the real level, in the towns, villages, and cities of the land, than can be discovered in any encyclopedia or other reference series. The test of the usefulness of such a volume is not so much the finding in it of facts which the reader knows, as the discovering in it of facts which he never knew. Every student of American Jewish history will relish the zest of uncovering something new as he turns the pages of this book (which too few will want to read page by page, although the lack of a "plot" ought, in this case, to be overlooked). Here one finds the record of the rich con-

tributions in every state and major city (and many a minor town) which Jews have made to the life of their neighbors. Here one finds the story of early Jewish settlement in every state in the land. Here one finds odd bits of information that are fascinating in a suggestive sort of way: the windows in the Episcopalian Church in Newport, Arkansas, memorializing members of a Jewish family which was generous to the church, while remaining loyal to Judaism; the gift of Beethoven's piano to Yale University by Morris Steinert of New Haven; the fact that Frederick Delius, the well-known British composer, was organist to the Jacksonville (Fla.) congregation in 1882-84; the fact that the first well-planned, brick school building in the entire state of Mississippi (constructed in 1888) was named for Rabbi Judah Wechsler of Meridian, who led the campaign for a bond issue to finance the school; the enormous contribution of Dr. Raphael Zon who, as head of the Lake States Forest Experimental Station, developed the concept of the "great Plains Shelterbelt," a belt of trees 100 miles wide and 1,000 miles long.

Of course, there are mistakes in the book. So huge a volume, the first of its kind, is bound to contain errors. But the authors are constantly revising their text, and it may be hoped that future editions of the work will be forthcoming. One improvement that may be suggested is this: whenever a congregation or institution is named, its date of founding ought to be included. Such data will further enhance the book, and now that the Tercentenary celebration has stimulated the publication of numerous pamphlets and brochures containing local historical material, perhaps the names of such publications could be listed as bibliography for each town, city, or state in turn.

The historical profession must always be indebted to Messrs. Postal and Koppman for cutting the Gordian knot and producing this endlessly fascinating, eminently useful volume.

Philadelphia, Pa.

BERTRAM W. KORN

Brief Notices

BIGMAN, STANLEY K. *The Jewish Population of Greater Washington in 1956*. Washington, D. C.: The Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington. 1957. xix, 173 pp. \$5.00

This lengthy and detailed study of the capital's Jewish community by the Project Director, Division of Research of the American University, contains chapters on the size and distribution of the Jewish community, its economic, social, institutional, and religious life, its experience of intermarriage, and the like.

LEWIN, ISAAC. *In the Struggle Against Discrimination*. New York: Bloch Publishing Co. 1957. 148 pp. \$2.75

Dr. Lewin, the well-known spokesman for Orthodox Jewish causes, has gathered together eight addresses delivered by him before the United Nations and United States Congressional committees in the struggle against discriminatory regulations and practices. The book, in addition, documents the official records which pertain to recent issues of Jewish concern such as the United Nation's Calendar Reform Plan and the United States Congress' deliberations about the banning of *Shechita*.

RICH, JACOB C. *60 Years of the Jewish Daily Forward*. New York: The Daily Forward Association. 1957. 38 pp. 25¢

A brief history of the New York newspaper, described by the author as "materially the most successful newspaper in the Yiddish language," the democratic socialist *Forverts*.

RICHMOND, HARRY R. *God on Trial*. New York: The Bond Wheelwright Company. 1955. 156 pp.

A selection of sermons delivered by the author, a Reform rabbi, in connection with a series of Interfaith Chapel Hour Programs broadcast over radio station KFH in Wichita, Kansas.

SCHNEIDERMAN, HARRY, Edited by. *Two Generations in Perspective: Notable Events and Trends 1896-1956*. With a Foreword by Louis Finkelstein. New York: Monde Publishers, Inc. 1957. xxii, 458 pp. \$7.50

Dedicated to the Zionist leader, Rabbi Israel Goldstein, this volume chronicles important events and developments in world, especially American and Israeli, Jewish life during the past sixty years. Included

are essays by prominent people like Nahum Goldmann, Mordecai M. Kaplan, Robert Gordis, Channing H. Tobias, Pierre van Paassen, and Israeli President Itzhak Ben-Zvi.

STOLNITZ, NATHAN. *Music in Jewish Life*. Toronto, Canada: Morris Printing Co. 1957. 62 pp. (English), 266 pp. (Yiddish).

This volume deals with Jewish music and *hazzanuth* particularly in the United States and Canada. It has some English chapters, but the greater part of it is in Yiddish. The Yiddish section includes, among others, chapters on music in Israel and the Diaspora, *hazzanuth* in Argentina, Ernest Bloch, and Jewish *n'ginoth* in world music.

TOBIAS, THOMAS J. *The Hebrew Orphan Society of Charleston, S. C., Founded 1801: An Historical Sketch*. Charleston, S. C.: The Hebrew Orphan Society. 1957. viii, 61 pp. \$3.00

A short sketch of a charitable association whose lengthy history of service has been interrupted only by the Civil War. Also included are appendices relating to the Society's members, its Act of Incorporation in 1802, and its constitutions of 1867, 1887, and 1949.

Benjamin Index

The American Jewish Archives has recently acquired a card index to I. J. Benjamin, *Three Years in America, 1859-1862*, Vols. I and II, translated from the German by Charles Reznikoff (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956).

This index, prepared by Samuel Sokobin of Atherton, California, is available for reference purposes at the Archives.