

## Reviews of Books

GOLDEN, HARRY. *Only In America*. New York: The World Publishing Company. 1958. 317 pp. \$4.00

With good reason the reading public has taken *Only In America* to its heart. Works of self-revelation and self-exposure are always popular with readers who spend their lives wearing masks, hiding behind spurious social façades, wearing countless social disguises. It is a mark of their insecurity, of their vulnerability and their cowardice.

The sage of Charlotte, North Carolina, who doubles as editor and publisher of *The Carolina Israelite*, has faced himself and his world with disarming candor, with whimsy, with gentle good humor and rib-tickling satire. He has in addition that rare and greatly envied gift of *total recall*. The scenes of his childhood, the people who inhabited his unique world, the incidents which made its poignant drama and its hilarious anecdotes, are presented with vigor and clarity, without apology or regret.

*The Carolina Israelite* (from which *Only In America* is largely culled) has brought its tongue-in-cheek discussion, its laughter and derring-do, its social appraisal of knotty regional problems, its clinical analysis of a thousand and one fears and subterfuges, shams and scandals, into some 14,000 homes. Its editor seems to have insinuated himself into the hearts and the esteem of many notables. Carl Sandburg calls him "Friend of Man." It is an elite group, an eclectic company, numbering Adlai E. Stevenson and Thomas E. Dewey, Earl Warren and Bertrand Russell, William Faulkner and Fannie Hurst. The *Chicago Tribune* acclaims him as a pen pal of O. Henry and serializes his book in its Sunday Magazine. Only one sour note has been sounded, and that by the *Jewish Forward*. It accuses Harry Golden of exploiting the word "Israelite," and finds nothing specifically Jewish in his paper which, by tackling problems of a regional nature like segregation, has become a target for the anti-Semite and the rabble-rouser.

There is, then, much of personal memory and experience here. It is all to the good. But there is almost none of what the revered Simon Dubnow called the "sum of historical memories, recollections of what in the course of many centuries the Jewish people experienced, thought, and felt in the depths of its being." If the *Jewish Forward* would cavil, let it do so because Golden has not painted the whole picture. He has not shown the true life of the Jewish intellectual or idealist in the labor movement. He

is a stranger — again the phrase is Dubnow's — to “this Israelitish conception of life.” Here are cartoons and anecdotes. Here are caricatures and thumbnail sketches to provoke a guffaw or a belly laugh. Here are after-dinner tales that are earthy and rollicking. That is excellent — as far as it goes. Let us enjoy the narratives. But let us remember that Jewish life in America is more than a pungent side show. Let us warn the historian of the future that, while Harry Golden may indeed have happened “only in America,” the anatomy of Golden is not the anatomy of American Jews.

*Winnetka, Illinois* ANITA LIBMAN LEBESON

LEOPOLD, NATHAN F., JR. *Life Plus 99 Years*. New York: Doubleday & Co. 1958. 381 pp. \$5.50

On March 13, 1958, a small group of Clarence Darrow's friends gathered at the Clarence Darrow bridge in Jackson Park, Chicago, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the famed lawyer's death. At ten o'clock that morning, a wreath was thrown into the lagoon under the bridge.

At exactly the same time on that day, two friends of Nathan Leopold met him at the prison gate of Joliet penitentiary. After almost thirty-four years of a “life plus 99 years” sentence, Leopold walked out of the prison, a man on parole.

At his trial before Judge John R. Caverly, Darrow told the judge: “They may have the hope that as the years roll around they might be released. I do not know. I know that these boys are not fit to be at large. I believe they will not be until they pass through the next stage of life, at 45 or 50 . . . . I would not tell this court that I do not hope that some time, when life and age have changed their bodies, as it does, and has changed their emotions, as it does — that they may once again return to life.”

“They” were, of course, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, his co-defendant in the murder-kidnapping of young Bobby Franks. Richard Loeb is dead, killed in a prison fight by another inmate twelve years ago. Leopold at the time of his parole was fifty-three years old.

The case and trial of Leopold and Loeb during that hot, sweltering summer of 1924 in Chicago made national and international headlines. First, because of the background of the defendants. They were sons of wealthy, respectable Chicagoans. Loeb's father was a vice-president of Sears, Roebuck and Company; Leopold, Sr., was a retired businessman. Second, both boys were brilliant students. And, finally, onto the scene

came Clarence Darrow, who had devoted his legal mind and long legal career to the defense of the poor and the weak, to the men who toiled, to the defense of the damned. He insisted, in explaining his entering the case, that "even the rich have rights." To him, the case also provided an international platform from which to present his argument against capital punishment.

In his book — *Life Plus 99 Years* — Leopold reveals for the first time that, up until the time he heard Darrow deliver his impassioned plea to Judge Caverly, he himself wanted to be hanged. "But Darrow made one convert that day. Even I was convinced that I should not be hanged," Leopold writes.

The book, a great human document, starts with the moment after the murder was committed. It is a portrayal of life behind bars and how a "notorious" inmate adjusted himself to his new environment for more than a score and ten years. It was not an easy adjustment: Leopold was "hot," in prison terminology, and this alone would have made it harder.

Leopold in his autobiography is a man trying to be honest and sincere with himself. This is not an easy task, for there are few people in or out of prison who accomplish this. Prison life tends to destroy. A system of real rehabilitation has not been fully developed. There are nights of near madness; hatred; days of despair and frustration; unjust and unmeaningful punishment; thoughts of suicide and death. Leopold rose above all this. He did not let prison destroy his body, and above all his mind. He used his "time" to help his fellow inmates: he established correspondence schools for the prisoners; he reorganized the prison library; he worked on a scientific study of parole predictability; he aided scientists with malaria experiments conducted in the penitentiary, and he also was a guinea pig in one of the experiments, which eventually led to Governor Adlai E. Stevenson's commutation of his sentence.

The book recounts the murder trial, and the thoughts of the two brilliant University of Chicago students who tried to commit the "perfect crime." But this is a small part of the book. It is the background, the prologue, to the study of what prison life does to the individual. The book describes the almost insurmountable odds that Leopold had to overcome in his attempt to lose himself among the mass of "cons" in prison.

Much is disclosed in the book for the first time — the fact, for example, that Leopold was the writer of a number of scientific papers, including one on "Parole Prediction as Science" which appeared in the *Journal of Criminal Law* under the by-line of William F. Lanne. The book at times becomes almost a cold, scientific treatise on such topics as mathematical

formulations, malaria experiments, and parole predictions. But this is more than counterbalanced by his warmth of feeling toward members of his family, toward some of the convicts, for a pet lark, and toward Dick Loeb, of whom he writes: "He had been my best pal . . . also the greatest enemy I have ever had."

Dick Loeb, writes Leopold, possessed "more of the truly fine qualities than almost anyone else I have ever known. Not just the superficial social graces . . . . But the more fundamental, more important qualities of character, too, he possessed in full measure. He was loyal to a fault. He could be sincere; he could be honestly and selflessly dedicated.

"How," I mused, "could these personality traits coexist with the other side of Dick's character? It didn't make sense! For there was another side of Dick. Dick just didn't have the faintest trace of conventional morality. Not just before our incarceration. Afterward, too, I don't believe he ever, to the day of his death, felt truly remorseful for what he had done. Sorry that we had been caught, of course. And truly remorseful for the grief he had caused his family. That was as genuine as could be. But remorse for the murder itself. I honestly don't think so.

"I could see his bad points all too clearly . . . . But with all I knew about that side of his character, there still was no blinking the wonderful traits that were his."

Leopold, still to face a parole board for his limited freedom, was nevertheless ready to defend his "best pal" and "greatest enemy." He explains this in his book, offering the human philosophy: "The simple truth is that we cherish even when we don't emulate."

Erle Stanley Gardner, in his introduction to the book, points out that "juvenile murderers were considered fiends incarnate in 1924. They were a puzzling problem in 1952. They have ceased to be a novelty in 1957. The murder of Robert Franks wasn't the crime of the century. It simply drew attention to the first muddy trickle of water in the stream of juvenile murders, a stream which was destined to become a torrent."

But just as the murder was the "first muddy trickle," so Nathan Leopold today has become the symbol of prison rehabilitation. His life in prison, in many instances, has been more fruitful than that of many a man on the outside. At this writing, it is almost a year since he left prison for Puerto Rico. There, on that little island, Nathan Leopold lives and works. Respected. Extremely well-adjusted to his new environment: teaching Spanish classes, running the pharmacy and the X-ray laboratory of the Brethren project, and making speeches in a fund drive for a new hospital.

*Chicago, Illinois*

ARTHUR WEINBERG

THORNE, FLORENCE CALVERT. *Samuel Gompers: American Statesman*. New York: Philosophical Library. 1957. xi, 175 pp. \$3.75

At the turn of the century, New York City's Lower East Side was a ferment of intellectual activity. The recent immigrants who inhabited its streets lived meagerly on the poor fruits of their labors in the sweatshops. In this economic jungle they dreamt of a new social order which would return to a man a decent standard of living for his labor.

During this time, the garment unions and the United Hebrew Trades were born, and while their leaders fought for pennies in the shops, they were motivated by a broader vision of a Socialist society. The voice of these dreamers was the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward*, an articulate voice that reached and guided most of the inhabitants of the area.

One man not reached by the voice of the *Forward* was destined to become the best-known labor leader in America. An English Jew by birth, a cigar maker by trade, and president of the American Federation of Labor by profession, Samuel Gompers early turned his back on the Lower East Side and his Jewish heritage. The American Federation of Labor's successor, the AFL-CIO, and indeed the entire American labor movement, with their Becks and Hoffas, are poorer today because of the rapid assimilation that Gompers sought and attained early in his life.

The adulation of Florence Calvert Thorne's biography fails to hide the narrow viewpoint adopted by this "statesman." In her foreword to the volume, she writes of Gompers' secretary that "she permitted herself to see only his virtues and great service to mankind." This, basically, describes the shortcomings of *Samuel Gompers: American Statesman*. It is a mere report of random observations and actions of a man who led without a long-range program. While the author purports to picture "a powerful personality in action as he would like to be recorded," we see all too often a prejudiced and unfeeling man.

Gompers' only formal education took place in a talmudic school; with this background, it is difficult to determine the basis for his anti-intellectualism and his scorn of educators. Further, his blind prejudices could not have had a talmudic background. Two contacts with Judaism are mentioned. In each instance, Gompers adopted an attitude that, in a Negro, would be best described as "Uncle Tomish." On one occasion, he appeared before a group of Jewish leaders, to encourage their support of the First World War. His motivation had no moral basis; rather he asked that they would not call attention to themselves as a group by opposing the policies

of the Administration. Before entering the conference, he donned a skull-cap in order to identify himself with the rabbis for the moment. Upon revoking the charter of the United Hebrew Trades, he urged the organization's members to "become citizens of this land, to adopt its customs and ways and . . . to turn their backs on the Old Zion and the old conceptions . . . ."

A man of open contradictions, Gompers was motivated in many instances by blind prejudice rather than reason. While urging the removal of all prejudices against minority groups, he displayed a curious and perverse prejudice against Chinese. Referring to them as "cheap men," he said that they could neither assimilate nor coexist with the white race. Although an immigrant himself, he worked fervently for the exclusion of immigrants and proposed a literacy test to insure that they would be able to assimilate.

Gompers vilified and bitterly opposed the radical movement in America, whether it worked within the labor movement or the Socialist Party. His opposition especially to Eugene V. Debs was a great disservice to a leader of vision, with a large and devoted following. Debs prevailed when his Socialist ideals became the platform and program of the New Deal, but these long-needed reforms were delayed nearly a half century by such pedestrian thinkers as Gompers. "Pure and simple" trade unionism as advocated by Gompers still left the worker at the mercy of economic upheavals over which he had no control.

It is paradoxical that the same Lower East Side which nurtured Morris Hillquit and other visionaries was also, for a time, the home of Samuel Gompers. Gompers left his home, realized his ambition of becoming assimilated, and attained a measure of lofty mediocrity.

*Long Branch, N. J.*

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