

## Reviews of Books

BERENSON, BERNARD. *Sketch for a Self-Portrait*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1959. 185 pp. \$1.50

*The Passionate Sightseer*. New York: Simon and Schuster and Harry N. Abrams. 1960. 200 pp. \$10.00

When Bernard Berenson died in 1959, the world was surprised to learn that this notable of Jewish birth had converted to Catholicism at an early age and that his funeral was conducted in a Catholic church in full accord with Catholic rites. Like another famous Jew, Heinrich Heine, almost a hundred years earlier, Berenson had converted to Christianity in the hope of furthering his academic career in a society hostile to Jews. Heine, who spent eight torturous years on his mattress grave in Paris, deeply repented his baptism and effected at least a spiritual return to Judaism. He wrote: "I see now that the Greeks were only handsome youths, while the Jews were always men — powerful, indomitable men — who have fought and suffered on every battlefield of human thought." Berenson, however, always remained outside of the Jewish fold and sought no reconciliation. His *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* affords us an excellent look at Berenson, the man.

Born Bernhard Valvrojenski, in a small Lithuanian village in 1865, Berenson and his family emigrated to Boston when he was ten. Having obtained an education at Boston's venerable Latin School and then at Harvard, the ambitious young man found that the snobbish Brahmins of Boston were not receptive to Jews and barred his way in his chosen profession. Even after Berenson had attained success, Henry Adams, paladin of Boston's social and intellectual élite, considered him as belonging "to the primitives" and "still reeking of the ghetto." Though rejected by most patrician Bostonians, however, Berenson was fortunate enough to obtain the support of Mrs. Isabella Stewart Gardner, and eventually succeeded in building up his own "society" at the villa I Tatti outside of Florence, Italy. There he presided like a Renaissance prince, and there the élite paid him homage.

In *Sketch for a Self-Portrait*, Berenson romanticizes his humble ghetto origins by claiming that his childhood had been "spent in an aristocratic republic and, though under Russian rule, all the more aristocratic for being

Jewish." Though his father was nothing more than an immigrant peddler in Boston and had worked as an ordinary lumber and grain merchant in his native Lithuania, Berenson tried to exalt his family's pedigree by claiming that they were "among the first, if not the first," in the ghetto. He deeply resented his lowly background, and stated in his *Sketch* that "to this day I avoid people who might regard me as an inferior, not because of their merit but through official and social rank."

Berenson's attempt to escape his Jewish origins was rendered difficult by Hitler and by others who made him conscious of his past. They would not let him forget it. To negate his Jewish past, the lord of I Tatti derided it. He cites in his *Sketch*, for instance, the anti-Semitic forgery known as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and tries to lampoon his *heder* background by relating legends like the one which — so he claims — his rabbi told him about Pharaoh who had given himself out as a god and therefore should not have had to respond to the calls of nature. Pharaoh began to hate Moses, when Moses discovered him defecating by the banks of the Nile.

Berenson had not always been so inclined to heap ridicule on the Jewish heritage which he had abjured, nor to extol the faith to which he had attached himself. As a younger man, he evinced a measure of ambivalence in his attitude both to Judaism and to Christianity. In his essay, "Contemporary Jewish Fiction," published in the *Andover Review* in 1888, Berenson had owned himself among the "forced admirers" of the Jews, and six years later, in *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance*, he had spoken harshly of "the hypocrisy of a Church whose chief reason for surviving as an institution was that it helped Spain to subject the world to tyranny."

The older he grew, the less ambivalent he seemed to become, and in his *Sketch* (1959), Berenson saw Christianity as "the best and highest religion to which the white race could attain." He numbered himself, in *The Passionate Sightseer* (1960), among "us Christians both begotten and formed by Christianity . . ." In *Sightseer*, he even allowed himself an invidious, if amusing, comparison between a humble Trapani optician who deftly repaired Berenson's spectacles gratis and "a Jewish migrant mechanic" who charged a German friend of Berenson thirty zlotys in the Polish Corridor for fixing his car by knocking it with a small hammer:

"You only gave a few knocks with your hammer!" "Ten zlotys for having come and twenty *für gewünsst wohin* — for having known *where* to knock." But my Trapani optician friend would not accept any payment for having known *how* to bend my spectacles.

Safely hidden in the villa of a diplomat friend, while millions of his fellow Jews were being butchered by Hitler, Berenson uttered no outcry, made no attempt to help his Jewish brethren. Instead, comfortably settled in an armchair, he narcissistically admired his own accomplishments by writing about himself. At best he could say that the Jews, "like the ants, never lose faith in life." In his *Sketch*, he reflected after the holocaust that he had come "through it spiritually unharmed and physically undamaged, although aged and enfeebled." This lover of beauty and culture did not raise a finger to defend the freedom of the Western Civilization which he so prized and about whose art he wrote so eloquently in the finely illustrated book, *The Passionate Sightseer*. Instead, he viciously aspersed his ancestry by intimating that "not a little of Nazism runs parallel with, if it is not copied from, the meanest kind of ghetto Judaism."

Tortured all his life by *Selbsthass*, Berenson regarded himself as a failure, despite his worldly success, and felt that his lucrative work as a connoisseur had degraded him and caused him great "spiritual loss." The contradiction that he felt between his striving for financial rewards and his desire for the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself plagued him throughout his days. Perhaps he unconsciously considered the acquiring of money a Jewish occupation and hence unworthy of him. Yet he desperately needed money for the status and security which he craved.

In all fairness, it must be said, Berenson's shortcomings as a man should not diminish his great accomplishments as a connoisseur. Even though "the death of a noble cypress or mighty oak" affected him more than the death "of all but a few men and women," he taught us truly to see and appreciate the arts. Creating singlehandedly what might be called the art of Renaissance connoisseurship and charting paths where there had previously been only a trackless chaos, he left us eternally in his debt.\*

Haunted by irreconcilable contradictions, Berenson tried to excuse his professional activities and religious conversion by comparing himself — significantly — to two other Jews, Paul of Tarsus and Baruch Spinoza. Like "Paul with his tent-making and Spinoza with his glass-polishing," he said, "I too needed a means of livelihood." What Berenson neglected to see was that Paul and Spinoza had remained poor and had not used their profession as "a spade to dig with," that their break with the ancestral religion had stemmed from deep spiritual conviction, not from social con-

\* For an analysis of Berenson's artistic contribution, see Alfred Werner, "Berenson's Achievement," *Chicago Review*, XIV (1960), 95-102, and M. Schapiro "Mr. Berenson's Values," *Encounter*, XVI (1961), 57-65.

venience. In large measure, however, Berenson did share with Paul and Spinoza the true zeal of the pioneer, for he, too, opened new vistas for man to behold. Just as Paul, the real founder of Christianity, assured man of salvation in the world to come through a blind, irrational faith in the redemptive power of Christ crucified, and just as Spinoza daringly challenged the authority of traditional texts and beliefs by establishing the sovereignty of reason, so Berenson, the founder of the art — or, shall we term it, the science? — of Renaissance connoisseurship, tried to teach the life-enhancing qualities of all the arts, in which he felt lay man's best assurance of a humanized society.

*Cincinnati, Ohio*

JOSEPH GUTMANN

Dr. Joseph Gutmann, Assistant Professor of Jewish Art and Curator of the Jewish Museum at the Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, is the author of *Jüdische Zeremonialkunst*.

NIZER, LOUIS. *My Life in Court*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company. 1961. 524 pp. \$5.95

The first time I met Louis Nizer was on Irv Kupcincet's television show in Chicago. It was the week which saw the publication both of Nizer's *My Life in Court*, and of *The Muckrakers*, the book which my wife and I edited.

Kup's program goes on the air after midnight on Sunday morning and runs until the participants' conversation ebbs.

At one point, Kup turned to me and said: "Arthur, you've written a book about a lawyer, Clarence Darrow.\* How does Louis Nizer compare with Darrow?"

I answered: "All I really know about Mr. Nizer is what I have been able to learn from his book. In what I have seen, Mr. Nizer has not been the 'attorney for the damned' that Darrow was."

Mr. Nizer responded to the effect that this was true — "I like to think that I have been the attorney for the blessed."

I met Mr. Nizer again about a year later. He had come to Chicago to participate in the Parole Pardon Board hearings of Paul Crump, who was facing the electric chair.

The Crump case had become a *cause célèbre* in this city. All evidence

\* *Attorney for the Damned*.



*Courtesy, Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, Cincinnati*

Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cincinnati  
The Great Entrepôt of the Ohio Valley

(see p. 121)



proved that since his incarceration Crump had become a rehabilitated individual, while waiting to be executed as the result of his conviction for the murder of a guard in a local plant.

Friends of Paul Crump asked Nizer to join Donald Page Moore in the Crump presentation, and Nizer agreed to do this on a volunteer basis.

"Mr. Nizer," I said, as we greeted each other before the proceedings, "I see where you have finally become the attorney for the damned."

He smiled and said, "Yes, that he is."

What followed in the day-long session was a beautiful presentation by Moore and Nizer. Nizer in his plea to the jury sounded almost like Clarence Darrow:

"The hope of all society and all civilization and the reason for punishment," said Mr. Nizer, "is the hope of rehabilitation. It brings the hope for a better civilization, a better society . . . If with all the evil in the world, rehabilitation is not the hope for a better society, then what can be?"

But the Crump case is a different type from that found in *My Life in Court*.

The book takes the reader into a jam-packed era of courtroom drama, examinations and cross-examinations, ranging from issues involving libel to plagiarism to divorce to medical malpractice to a proxy battle — with casts of characters including celebrities as well as ordinary citizens.

Nizer explains the intricacies and the different aspects of the law. Then he takes the reader into the courtroom.

Quentin Reynolds' libel suit against Westbrook Pegler takes up a major part of the book. For this case alone, in all its drama, intrigue, and tragedy, the book is worth its while. Just to see Nizer deflate the ego of Pegler — to see Pegler cringe as he twists and turns in his attempt to escape from the half-truths, lies, and innuendoes which he had published about Reynolds — this could almost make one sympathize with Pegler because of the doom awaiting him.

The case of Professor Friedrich Foerster versus Victor F. Ridder is another libel case — this time a professor striking back at a newspaper publisher.

The newspaper publisher and his two brothers were signatories to "A Christmas Declaration," which appeared in a New York newspaper in December, 1942. "We remind the German people," read the advertisement, "of the mercy and forgiveness that are present in the hearts of people for those who turn against evil."

To Professor Foerster, this declaration was a plea for a soft peace, and so he published an "Open Letter" in pamphlet form.

The professor contended that though the declaration contrasted the Nazi system with the ideology of the German people as if they were fundamentally different, "the situation is just the reverse. Hitler's system constitutes only the terrible fulfillment of a century of German nationalistic lawlessness."

Ridder answered the pamphlet with another pamphlet in which he charged Professor Foerster with "malicious falsehoods." He went further, engaging in various attempts to deprive the professor of his livelihood.

The professor sued Ridder for libel and asked for punitive damages, and so came about the libel case in which the issue was actually "Nazism in America."

The trial resulted in the professor's being awarded \$15,000.

The professor, writes Mr. Nizer, was "only academically interested in the struggle over the size of the verdict. He looked upon the entire judicial proceeding as a unique opportunity to wage war on Pan-Germanism in a civilized and intellectual forum."

*My Life in Court* is a fascinating, fast-moving, interesting, enlightening book about the courtroom experiences of one of today's great trial lawyers.

*Chicago, Illinois*

ARTHUR WEINBERG

Mr. Weinberg is the author of the best-selling *Attorney for the Damned*, and (with Mrs. Weinberg) of *The Muckrakers, Verdicts Out of Court, and Instead of Violence*.

## ANNOUNCING

the publication of the

INDEX TO VOLUMES I-V (1948-1953)

of the

American Jewish Archives

*compiled by*

ABRAHAM I. SHINEDLING and STANLEY F. CHYET

## Brief Notices

BARUCH, BERNARD M. *Baruch: The Public Years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1960. xii, 431 pp. \$6.00

In this sequel to *My Own Story*, his first volume of memoirs, Bernard M. Baruch recalls his participation in national and international affairs during the past five decades. Of particular interest are Baruch's impressions of major figures like Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Georges Clemenceau.

BEN-HORIN, MEIR, BERNARD D. WEINRYB, and SOLOMON ZEITLIN, Edited by. *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman*. Leiden, Holland: E. F. Brill for the Dropsie College, Philadelphia. 1962. xiii, 652 pp.

Thirty-three scholars, many of them of international reputation, have contributed to this handsome *Festschrift* for the President of Philadelphia's Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning. The volume includes an introductory biographical sketch of Dr. Neuman by Professor Zeitlin.

BERKOWITZ, DAVID SANDLER. *Bibliotheca Bibliographica Britannica: or, Bibliographies in British History*. Waltham, Mass. 1963. Mimeograph. xviii, 627 pp.

This work by Dr. David S. Berkowitz, Professor of History at Brandeis University, will be of great interest and value to researchers in the field of British history. It is, as its subtitle indicates, "a manual of bibliographies of bibliography, and of bibliographies, catalogues, registers, inventories, lists, calendars, guides, reference aids, directories, indices, &c." Included are materials on "The Former American Colonies" and on "Other Areas in the American Hemisphere."

CAHAN, ABRAHAM. *The Rise of David Levinsky*. New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1960. xii, 530 pp. \$2.45

First published in 1917, Abraham Cahan's impressive novel about the women's garment industry went out of print in 1943, and remained out of print until its recent revival by Harper & Brothers in the Torchbook series. As John Higham observes in his introduction to this new edition, *The Rise of David Levinsky* is "the unrivalled record of a great historical experience" — the Americanization of the East European

immigrant. The book, says Higham, "belongs not only in the genre of immigrant fiction but also among the best novels of American business."

DIMONT, MAX I. *Jews, God, and History*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1962. 463 pp. \$7.50

The author tells us in his preface to this one-volume history of the Jews that his book is "a popular history . . . written without bowing to orthodoxy or pandering to anti-intellectualism." The work, he goes on to say, "is designed to entertain, to inform, and to stimulate." It seems likely to achieve its aim — though the works of historians like Graetz, Grayzel, Dubnow, Elbogen, Sachar, Roth, Margolis, and Marx need fear no displacement. Mr. Dimont has provided his book with a bibliography and an index.

EPSTEIN, BENJAMIN R., and ARNOLD FORSTER. "*Some of My Best Friends . . .*" New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. 1962. xii, 274 pp. \$4.50

Benjamin R. Epstein, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith, and Arnold Forster, the A. D. L.'s general counsel, have collaborated to produce a book designed to "lift the veil . . . on patterns of anti-Jewish discrimination in many places throughout the country — in social relationships, in education, in housing, and in industry." The book includes an index and a foreword by Henry E. Schultz, the A. D. L.'s National Chairman.

FRANK, FEDORA S. *Five Families and Eight Young Men*. Nashville, Tenn.: Tennessee Book Company. 1962. 184 pp. \$3.95

The author undertakes in this volume to trace the beginnings of Jewish life in Nashville, Tennessee, and to tell the story of Nashville Jewry between 1850 and 1861. Mrs. Frank adds to her seven well-documented chapters a list of the heads of Jewish families in Nashville in the decade before the Civil War, a list of Congregation Mogen David's officers between 1853 and 1861, and a bibliography of manuscript material, family records, periodicals, and public documents. Her book, which contains a preface by Professor Jacob R. Marcus, is also provided with an index.

GOLDSTEIN, ISRAEL. *Transition Years: New York-Jerusalem, 1960-1962*. Jerusalem, Israel: Rubin Mass. 1962. 241 pp. \$4.00

Dr. Israel Goldstein, rabbi emeritus of New York City's venerable B'nai Jeshurun Congregation and a former president of the American

Jewish Congress and of the Zionist Organization of America, took up residence in Jerusalem at the end of 1960. In this book, he offers a number of addresses delivered shortly before and after his retirement to the Jewish State. Among them are "The Organization of the American Jewish Community," "Trends and Potentials in American Jewish Life," "The Role of Religious Leadership in American Jewish Life," "An Evaluation of the American Rabbinate," "The Zionist Movement in America," "Americans in Israel," "American Jewry — Israel Dialogue," and "The Keren Hayesod in Chile."

GROSSMAN, ALLEN. *A Harlot's Hire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Walker-de Berry, Inc. 1961. 55 pp. \$1.45

These thirty-eight poems by a member of the Brandeis University faculty are filled, as the late Ludwig Lewisohn might have said, with human voices and human woes. Themes of specific Jewish interest dominate some of these memorable poems — "The Sands of Paran," "The Law," "Samson," "The Discourse of Shemaiah and Abtalion," "A Meditation of My Grandfather Harry," "The Secret Religionist," "The Breaking of the Law," and "The Jew at Calvary," among others.

GWYNN, FREDERICK L., and JOSEPH L. BLOTNER. *The Fiction of J. D. Salinger*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. 1958. viii, 59 pp. \$1.50

Jerome David Salinger, born at New York City in 1919, is, the authors tell us, "the contemporary American writer of fiction most popular with the younger generation." In this essay, they set out "to discover just what is good and what is bad about his work." The essay's value is enhanced by a check list of Salinger's fiction from 1940 to 1957 and a list of critical studies of his work.

HERTZ, RICHARD C. *The American Jew in Search of Himself*. New York: Bloch Publishing Company. 1962. xv, 209 pp. \$3.75

Subtitled "A Preface to Jewish Commitment," this volume by the rabbi of Detroit's Temple Beth El is intended "to crystallize the religious yearnings of the thoughtful American Jew seeking understanding of himself, his situation in America, his hopes for meaningful religious experience out of Judaism and Jewish identification." The book is divided into four parts — "Towards a Religious Philosophy of Judaism," "To Survive as Jews," "The Relevance of Reform Judaism,"

and "Integrating the Jew in American Democracy." Dr. Hertz has also supplied a useful bibliography.

HYMAN, STANLEY EDGAR. *Nathanael West*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1962. 48 pp. 65¢

The author, a well-known staff writer for the *New Yorker*, surveys the work of Nathanael West (*né* Nathan Weinstein), whom he calls "a true pioneer and culture hero" in the development of the American symbolist-fantast novel. This essay — "University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers: Number 21" — also features a selected bibliography of works by and about West, who died in 1940 at the age of thirty-seven.

*Jewish Book Annual: Volume 20*. New York: Jewish Book Council of America — National Jewish Welfare Board. 1962. 235 pp. \$4.00

Appearing under the editorship of A. Alan Steinbach and Philip Goodman, this valuable reference annual contains eighteen essays by such notable scholars as Steinbach himself, Joseph Leftwich, Sol Lip-tzin, Herbert C. Zafren, Charles Angoff, Menahem G. Glenn, Jacob Kabakoff, Getzel Kressel, Milton R. Konvitz, Leo W. Schwarz, and Theodore Wiener. English, Yiddish, and Hebrew materials are re-presented, and there are also useful bibliographies of new books.

LUDWIG, JACK. *Recent American Novelists*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press. 1962. 47 pp. 65¢

"The novel is not dead. Nor is it moribund," writes Professor Jack Ludwig, of the State University of New York. Among the writers who have made the novel "the American literary form most alive, and thriving," Ludwig, himself a novelist of note, cites Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger, and Bernard Malamud — all of them considered in some detail by Ludwig. *Recent American Novelists* is Number 22 in the "University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers" series.

MARANS, HILLEL. *Jews in Greater Washington*. Washington, D.C. 1961. 143 pp.

In addition to a preface, Mr. Marans' useful work includes nine chapters, ranging from a historical outline of Washington Jewry to a discussion of occupational distribution, congregational and societal activity, and cemeteries. Particular attention is given to "the plain

people who came to Washington from Eastern Europe . . . their struggles, their joys, and their sorrows during the period 1900-1960." The monograph is properly subtitled "A Panoramic History of Washington Jewry for the Years 1795-1960."

REZNIKOFF, CHARLES. *By the Waters of Manhattan: Selected Verse*. New York: New Directions — San Francisco Review. 1962. xi, 113 pp. \$1.50

Charles P. Snow, who wrote an introduction for this extraordinary volume, finds in Charles Reznikoff's poetry "the Jewish loneliness, the Jewish delight in God's gifts, and the Jewish triumph." The poems assembled in this book were originally written by Reznikoff between 1927 and 1959.

ROSENFELD, ISAAC. *An Age of Enormity*. Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company. 1962. 347 pp. \$5.00

Chicago-born Isaac Rosenfield, who died in 1956 at the age of thirty-eight, was a brilliant literary and social critic whose work was well-known during the 1940's and 1950's to readers of magazines like *Partisan Review*, *The New Republic*, *Commentary*, *Nation*, *New Leader*, *Kenyon Review*, *Midstream*, and *Jewish Frontier*. Theodore Solotaroff has selected fifty of Rosenfield's best pieces, edited them, and supplied an introduction. There is also a foreword by Saul Bellow.

*The Sentinel's History of Chicago Jewry: 1911-1961*. Chicago: Sentinel Publishing Co. 1961. 256 pp.

The Chicago *Sentinel*, which first appeared on February 4, 1911, marked its golden jubilee by devoting its issue of December 7, 1961, to what the editors call "the first comprehensive picture of what Chicago Jewry has accomplished to be published since 1924," when the Jewish Historical Society of Illinois brought out Hyman L. Meites' *History of the Jews of Chicago*. The *Sentinel's* jubilee issue includes thirty-four detailed, and often illustrated, articles on Chicago Jewry's contributions to American life and culture, on religious life and Jewish education in Chicago, and on the Chicago community's organization.