

About Books

THE JEWISH FAITH

By LEON ROTH

The Religion of Israel. By YEHEZKEL KAUFMANN. Translated and abridged by MOSHE GREENBERG. Allen & Unwin. 42s.

Professor Kaufmann has been known to all serious readers of Hebrew ever since, in his Golah VaNechar, he submitted the concept of the Diaspora to a close and invigorating examination and demonstrated the fundamental place of Judaism in the historical survival of Jewry. His volume of collected essays on public affairs (BeHavlei HaZeman) combined an unusual sanity of outlook with an unexpected crispness of style; and any fresh article of his in the periodical press, whether on general issues or on more narrowly literary questions, is eagerly read and widely pondered. During his early years in the Yishuv he was senior literature master in the well-known Beth Sepher Reali in Haifa and a constant fighter for sound principles in education. Since the lamented death of Umberto Cassuto he served, until his recent retirement, as one of the Professors of Bible in the Hebrew University.

Unique concept

The book under review is a translation and abridgement of the first seven volumes of Kaufmann's monumental Toldoth HaEmunah Ha-Yisraelith. The word Emunah (not Faith) in the Hebrew title is important. It reminds us of Abraham; and Kaufmann's use of it suggests already his main thesis that the "Jewish Religion" is not a late product in Jewish history but an original conception which stands at the head of Jewish history and determined Jewish history. And just as it was not the end of a process of prolonged internal evolution, so it did not derive from outside. It has no antecedents or sources or analogues elsewhere.

This is a bold position to take and it needs weighty substantiation. Most scholars would violently disagree. So Kaufmann set out to prove it. But he found on the way that, in order to prove it, he had to confute most of the accepted corpus of Biblical

criticism. This fact makes the early volumes of the book heavy going for the ordinary reader. Kaufmann is nothing if not thorough. Every error had to be nailed down, every mistake corrected; and since new errors and new mistakes appear with every new book, every new publication had to be scrutinised and set right. So volume succeeded volume. The eighth, and so far the last (and indeed the best, because by then Kaufmann had removed most of the obstacles in his way), was published in 1956 (the first appeared in 1937); and although Kaufmann is now unfortunately in poor health, he is still working away. My own hope is that he will be spared to turn his attention to the rabbinic, and even to the medieval, period. These mines have not yet been sufficiently worked. But whether he reaches them or not, he has the credit of having laid the foundations of an independent, and Jewish, school in Biblical criticism.

Monotheistic message

Not that we of the wider public need worry overmuch about that. For us the importance of Kaufmann lies in the fact that he has vindicated in our generation the uniqueness of Jewish monotheism. He lifts us out of the heady excitements of Sabbath microphones and mixed dances, and shows us that Judaism has a rational content which is worthy of attention. He actually implies that Judaism means something! He may be wrong, of course, and our rabbis and scholars will doubtless have the last word, but in the interim let us hope that he is right.

So far as I can judge, Dr. Greenberg's condensation of the first seven volumes is done well. The translation reads adequately, and I hope we may assume that it is to be followed by the translation in full of volume viii. I could have wished that the American publishers had used a more handsome type and that the English publishers had chosen a more satisfactory method of reproduction. The binding, too, is more solid than pleasing. But these are minor cavils at the externals of a major effort.

TORAH COMMENTARIES

By K. KAHANA

2 vols. By RABBI M. MEIR. 17 Linthorpe Road, London, N.16.

These books are the first part of an encyclopedic digest of many Hebrew commentaries on the Pentateuch. They contain the first three Sidrot of the Bible. The author has not limited himself to the Talmudic and Midrashic commentaries and the classic medieval writers, but has included works of modern authors. The sources cited and the notes increase one's understanding of the text and add to the value of the book.

The judicious selection of the material and its careful arrangement often enables the reader to discern fresh and original ideas. For example, on Genesis xvii, 7-9, the idea is developed that, though the Canaanites had possession of the land, their right to it was that of usufruct, but the real ownership (or dominium) was vested in Abraham

and his descendants. For this reason God told Israel that, though the Jewish people would go into exile, when they did return it would be to their own land. Here the words "an everlasting possession" are used for Israel's right. The idea that the Land of Israel belongs legally to the Jewish people in perpetuity is developed by quoting four authors, and it well accords with the text.

The introductions to the volumes are interesting and informative studies. In them the author asserts the great need of strengthening faith in our times. He explains how a true understanding of the scientific position today would make us realise not merely that science does not contradict religion but in fact strengthens it. Modern science confirms what religion has always taught: that it is the invisible which is the really powerful force in nature. Hence, through science, we learn of the might of the Creator of the universe.

By birth and by choice

By ERNST SIMON

Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929): Guide of Reversheimers. By STEVEN S. SCHWARZSCHILD. Hillel Foundation, London. 2s. 6d.

Rosenzweig in a nutshell! That is an audacious venture, but Dr. Schwarzschild has succeeded with it. Born in Germany, a student of the Hochschule in Berlin, and a graduate of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, the author is one of the more prominent younger rabbis in the United States of America. His way to Judaism has been similar to that of Rosenzweig himself. He is still in a productive development which brings him nearer to traditional Judaism every year, if not every day.

His booklet deals with Rosenzweig's "Period of Doubt," "The Return," and "The Final Years," concluding with an "Assessment" as to his positions to religion and Statehood, Judaism and Christianity, and Jewish learning. There are no less than 162 short notes, in the best Continental scholarly tradition.

The author feels that American and English Jewries, which are still very young, are now only in their third generation, that could and should be a generation of return. Rosenzweig can become of great importance for them. His political position was "beyond the established fronts of Zionism and Assimilationism," but even for Zionists and Israelis his warning against "State idolatry" seems to be rather topical.

"Star of Redemption"

Schwarzschild gives a short but excellent extract of Rosenzweig's philosophical magnum opus, "The Star of Redemption," and describes very vividly his Free Jewish House of Learning at Frankfurt-on-Main. Rosenzweig's minor works, which are still of the highest importance, e.g. his translation of Yehuda Halevy with his theological notes, his co-operation with Martin Buber in the translation of the Bible into German, and his essays about its principles, are duly evaluated.

There may be some doubt whether the author's assessment of Rosenzweig as "perhaps the last great theologian of Israel in Exile" would have received Rosenzweig's consent. I, for one, do not think that such predictions can be made, particularly not on a religious basis. Be that as it may, the little book is highly instructive. Especially valuable is Schwarzschild's well-based statement that Rosenzweig saw Judaism and Christianity as two ways to God, neither of them absolute, but not as possessing equal validity. The point made by Schwarzschild that Rosenzweig's Jewish position was threatened by racialism but that he broke through it in admitting personal, though not solicited, conversions, is also very important.

The booklet should be read by all intellectual Jews who wish to become Jewish intellectuals.

REMBRANDT

Rembrandt, the Jews, and the Bible, by Franz Landsberger (Jewish Publication Society of America, \$3.50), is a welcome second edition of this important work which was first published in 1946. The bibliographical material has been brought up-to-date, and the availability of better paper has made it possible to present the 66 plates in a more attractive form.

Tarbiz, March, 1961, the quarterly for Jewish studies published by the Hebrew University, includes an article on "The Religion of Israel before Sinai," by the veteran Hebrew scholar, M. H. Segal.

Zion in Jewish Literature, edited by Abraham S. Halkin (Herz Press, New York: \$2), comprises six lectures on Biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern writers, ranging from Abraham to Agnon.

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Illustration from jacket of "Rizpah"

A BIBLE HEROINE

By DAVID PATTERSON

Rizpah. By CHARLES E. ISRAEL. Macmillan. 21s.

For the writer of historical fiction the Bible offers an inexhaustible mine of thematic material. Not only do the countless episodes and stories possess the very considerable advantage of wide familiarity, but their very brevity, their tantalisingly enigmatic economy, simply cry out for dramatic expansion and elaboration. Uninhibited by any imitable limitation to historical fact, the historical novelist can give free rein to his imagination to fill in the whole range of detail relevant to characterisation, plot, and setting which the Biblical narrative is so careful to omit. Moreover, a sensitive creative writer may sometimes grasp intuitively a significant shade of meaning lurking behind a puzzling fragment of some Bible story, and dramatically endow it with new life. In both respects Mr. Charles E. Israel's novel is unusually successful.

Saul's concubine Rizpah is mentioned only in two passages of the Second Book of Samuel, but both instances are dramatically relevant to the struggle for succession to the kingdom waged between David and Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul. In the third chapter she is depicted as the cause of Abner's defection to David, while in chapter 21 her two sons together with the five sons of Saul's daughter, Michal, are hung in order to expiate Saul's crime against the Gibeonites, because of which three years of famine had ravaged the land.

The latter passage gives the sole intimation of Rizpah's character, but it is striking. In order to protect the hanging carcasses of her two sons, Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night" (v. 10). That her courageous

action was not lost on David is clear from the succeeding verses.

Upon this slender evidence Mr. Israel has built the central character of her book, as seen through the eyes of her clever and devoted companion, a Philistine woman called Egrep. In the depiction of his heroine the author has allowed free rein to his imagination, quite uninhibited by any lack of evidence. But the main interest of this very readable story stems from the author's interpretation of the triangle of relationships between Samuel, Saul, and David.

Bitter struggle

Starting from the premise that the Biblical narrative stems from a source favourable to David, and inimical to Saul, the author has attempted a readjustment of perspective. The result is a very shrewd and, indeed, fascinating reappraisal of the three central figures in the drama. The harsh, commanding personality of Samuel, Saul's courageous struggle with insanity, and the ambivalent character of David, fluctuating between loyalty and personal ambition are all portrayed with an uncanny and revealing insight. But in addition, the author has penetrated deeply into the background of his period, conjuring up an authentic picture of the bitter struggle waged by the tribes against their many enemies, particularly the Philistines, and revealing the social forces of one of the formative periods in Israel's history.

Although the author has allowed himself, on a number of occasions, to take considerable liberties with the information to be derived from the Biblical narrative (compare, e.g. page 427 with II Samuel ii. 14), Mr. Israel's novel may well provide his readers with a deeper understanding of the subtle hints and implications lurking beneath the surface of the disarmingly straightforward Biblical account.

CURRENT EVENTS

Britannica Book of the Year, 1961 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ltd.: from five guineas, according to binding), covers the events of 1960. With its authoritative articles and splendid illustrations, this is an indispensable reference book. The article on "Israel" is written by Jon Kimche, and that on "Jewry" by Israel Cohen. Edward Atiyah writes the articles on "Arab League," "United Arab Republic," etc. Some dozen Jews figure in the selected list of "Obituaries" of prominent persons who died during the year.

GERMAN BOOKS

Wegweiser Durch Das Schrifttum: Deutsch-Juedisches Schicksal (Joseph Meizer Verlag, Cologne), comprises a valuable bibliography of all Judaica and other books directly or indirectly of Jewish interest published in the German language in recent years. Altogether, 1,112 works are listed. The subjects covered include Jewish theology, history, Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, antisemitism, concentration camps, war crimes, and resistance literature. Significantly the vast majority of the authors are not Jewish.

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