

MEANING OF HALACHA

By LEON ROTH

In His Image: The Jewish Philosophy of Man as Expressed in Rabbinic Tradition. BY SAMUEL BELKIN. Abelard-Schuman, 25s.

At last we have a book, and an excellent one, on Halacha as the concrete expression of basic moral ideas. Dr. Belkin's book is erudite, although not burdensomely so; a bit heavy in style, perhaps, but so after all is its subject; written from conviction (a valuable asset, this) and full of meat; and doubly important because of the common fashion to seek for the basic ideas of Judaism not in Halacha but in Aggadah. The trouble with Aggadah is obvious. It not only includes much folk-lore which is not peculiar to Judaism, it is a very mixed bag, and if taken quite wrongly, of course) as one whole, infinitely self-contradictory. Halacha, whatever one may think of it, is distinctive of Judaism and relatively self-consistent.

Alien terms

Dr. Belkin disapproves violently of what is offered us as Jewish theology. He complains that "modern Jewish scholarship has tried to explain Judaism in terms which are alien and do not apply to it," and he offers examples to show how far some of our scholars are prepared to go in order to force it into the "moulds of current sociological and economic theories." But can the matter be so easily dismissed? How otherwise is one to set about the task of explaining, or even describing, anything? Any description, if it is not to be a mere repetition, must be given in other terms, and all other terms are in a sense "alien," that is, taken from another context. Since this is so, is it not more sensible to use terms which are accepted currently? Did not the Torah itself "speak in the language of man"? What is true, and what Dr. Belkin is really pleading for, is that our theologians should not assume that because a set of concepts worked in the case of, say, Christianity or Hinduism, therefore it will work in the case of Judaism too.

Individual personality

The irony of the situation is that Dr. Belkin himself seems to have fallen into the trap he is warning us against. Take some of his own favourite formulae: for example, the sacredness of the individual personality. Are not all the terms of this phrase "alien"? Even on the narrowest philological plane can they be traced naturally into Hebrew, whether biblical or rabbinic or philosophic? Dr. Belkin understands the "Jewish corpus of practice as divine law designed for the protection and defence of the individual" (p. 18). Is not the word "individual" alien to Judaism even Ibn Libbor had trouble with it, and is not our cult of it a modern and more especially an Anglo-Saxon disease? Moreover, is not Dr. Belkin's fondness for the word "democratic" drawn from a climate of thought which is "alien"? Is he not reading the Pentateuch and Talmud through the spectacles of the Declaration of Independence and of the "The New York Times"?

The point is not only one of words.

BOOK BRIEFS

Oil Pioneer, by A. Bezby-Thompson (Sidgwick & Jackson, 42s.), gives a fascinating account of sixty years' professional experiences in all parts of the world, including activities in Palestine and Jordan.

Inside Pictures, by Ernest Betts (Crest Press, 21s.), is an essential work not only for the student of the cinema but for all those who appreciate a ray glimpse of some of the inner workings of the motion picture industry as seen through the eyes of an expert journalist.

Britain's New Towns, by A. C. Duff (Pill Mill Press, 10s. 6d.), gives a brief but useful outline of information about Bournemouth, Crawley, Harlow, Hemel Hempstead, Letchworth, Welwyn, and others here.

The Student's Guide Through the Talmud, by Z. H. Chajes and translated by Jacob Stricker, has been published in a second edition by Philipp Feldheim, New York (English Distributors, J. Lehman, Gatehead, 40s.).

I take the first book from my shelves and, opening it at random, read:

"The people had no voice in the Hebrew commonwealth; law was dictated to them by the inspired prophet, the consecrated priest, or the anointed king; authority was not only the basis of their social order, but it entered into the minute detail of all their institutions; that confession of faith which every believing child of Abraham learns to lip in his cradle commences with a divine command for implicit submission and obedience. 'Hear, O Israel' is not the beginning of a creed suited to the partisans of a democracy."



Dr. Samuel Belkin

Wild horses will not drag from me the name of the author of these sentences; but it is curious to observe that, although he too quotes the Talmudists and Maimonides, he seems to have come away from Holy Writ with an impression entirely dissimilar from that of Dr. Belkin.

Dr. Belkin may be right in thinking that Jewish theology has been bungled till now, but it is an urgent and vital necessity for our generation. The essential task which awaits the theorists of Judaism in our day is precisely to make its theology a living concern, that is, to think out a framework of clear and distinct ideas for the invaluable material assembled by Dr. Belkin and his colleagues. I only pray that a scholar with the profound knowledge and thorough mind of Dr. Belkin will attempt it. Could he perhaps be persuaded to undertake it himself?

FAMOUS ORCHESTRA

By H. C. STEVENS

The Hallé Tradition: A Century of Music. By MICHAEL KENNEDY. Manchester University Press, 35s.

The famous names associated with the Hallé are innumerable, and among them are many honoured Jewish ones. Hallé himself was not a Jew, but Louis Spohr was his patron and violin teacher, and Hallé was devoted to this Jewish composer's music all his life. But probably the Jew who had the most lasting influence was Adolph Brodsky, for some years leader of the orchestra, and then for many years Principal of the Manchester College of Music. As a member of the Management Committee he was able to give expert advice, and no little contribution was his supervision, as Principal of the college, of the many talented artists who graduated from the college to the orchestra. Raymond Cohen may be singled out for mention, as having the still unchallenged distinction of joining the orchestra in pre-war days at the age of 15; the youngest-ever member. Another record probably belongs to Joachim, who played no less than 42 times at Hallé Concerts.

Two Jewish conductors (apart from Brodsky, who also conducted occasionally) who in diverse ways had some part in the Hallé history were Sir Landon Ronald and Sir Frederic Cowen. Ronald helped greatly by his readiness to conduct at times when the orchestra was financially in low water, but Cowen's contribution was more ambiguous at one stage: when certain of the Management Committee were working to secure Richter as conductor after Hallé's

Under the Yoke

By CHARLES LANDSTONE

The Occupation. ANONYMOUS. Blond, 16s.

This is an imaginary picture of England under a supposed Nazi occupation in the 1940s. It is not quite clear whether this book is meant as a satire, an allegory, or merely straight melodrama.

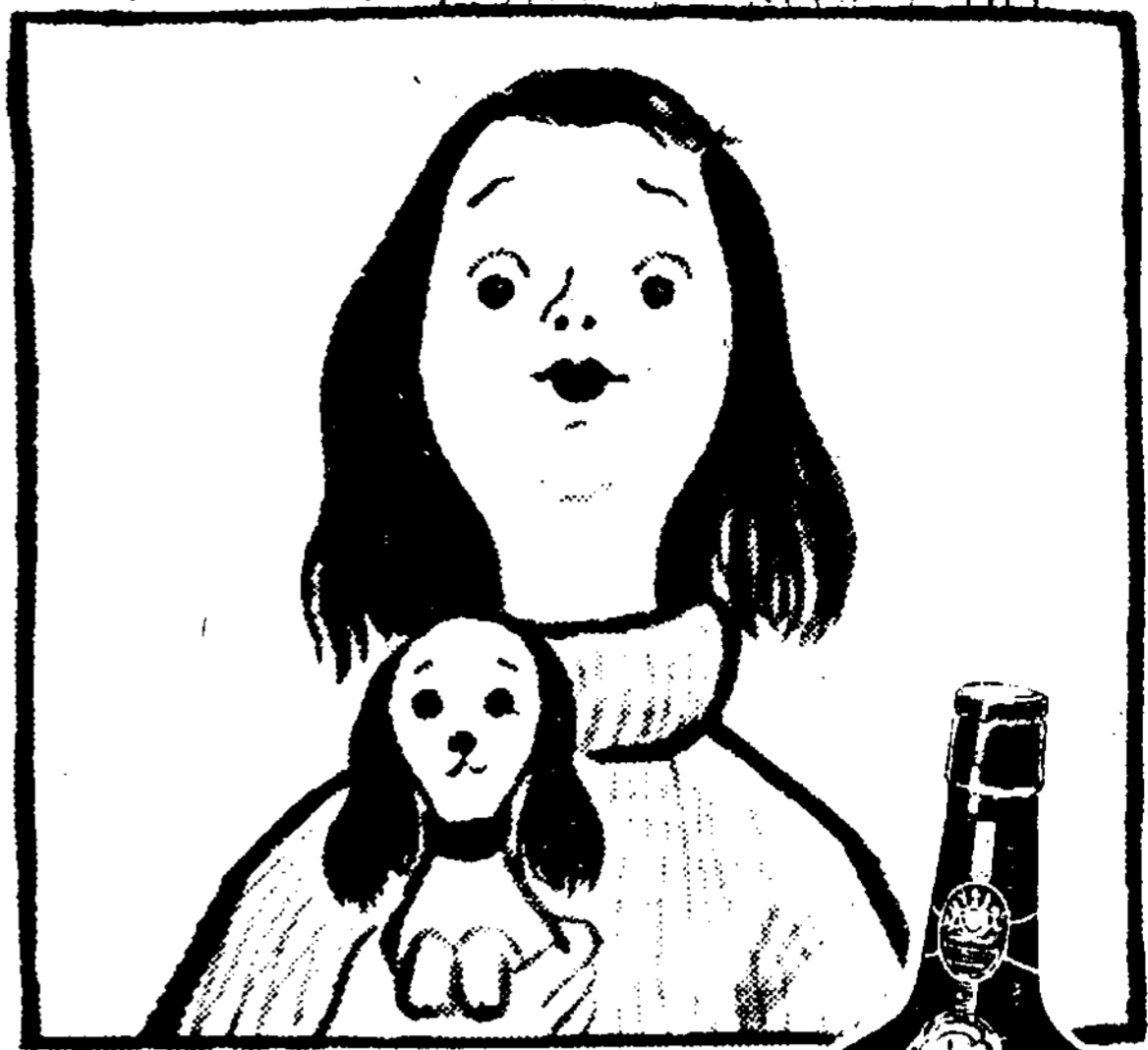
We are introduced to the Resistance, where Communists and other groups bicker among themselves, although united in the same cause. At first, collaboration with the invader is not wanting and the Germans are lenient, but the Resistance is active behind the scenes and soon things begin to happen. An unsuccessful attempt is made to assassinate the collaborationist Prime Minister, and after that the pace becomes hot.

Internment camp

The Jews have been interned in Welwyn Garden City, where they are popularly supposed to be having quite a pleasant holiday. Then, at a cock-fighting match, a massacre takes place. This sport has been recently revived, as the other sports—cricket, football, racing—no longer fit into the pattern of life. It is at this fight that the cry of "Down with the Jews" causes uproar, massacre, and carnage. It turns out afterwards that this has been organised by the Communists, in the hope of involving the German troops, and causing a thrill of horror throughout the country against the invaders. But the only result is that the Military Governor in London receives a dispatch from Ribbentrop, to say that the Führer is dissatisfied with the state of affairs in England, and that everything must be tightened up.

Strichner, the head of the Gestapo in England, has taken as his mistress a Jewish sculptress, who leads him by the nose and gets all she can out of him. She eventually escapes to Ireland.

The book ends with the Liberation Parade, when the British Contingent from Canada arrives as the vanguard of the American divisions. Taken as a leg-pull, the book is quite readable, but surely this work of an anonymous author is not meant to be taken seriously.



...but everyone has a 'double' when it's Vat 69



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