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About Books—contd. from p. 14 OCCULT LORE

Oriental Magic. By SAYED IDRIS SHAIH. Rider. 25s.

Reviewed by
Rabbi Dr. A. E. SILVERSTONE

The author of this book has collected a mass of data, covering the use of Egyptian amulets, the doctrines of the fakirs, Indian alchemy, spells to obtain a wife or husband, and the ritual to be followed in calling up the spirits of the dead. In many cases the magician drew a circle round him and wrote the name of God in the centre in chalk on the ground. Strangely enough he would frequently write: *Agla—Elohim—Adonay* (p. 94). *Agla*, which the author does not explain, is a Hebrew word made up of the four initial letters of the Hebrew sentence *Attah Gibbor Le-olam Adonay* (Thou art mighty for ever, O Lord); and is a well-known cabalistic sign used as a talisman. Drawing a circle for the greater effectiveness of a petition, is, of course, well known in Talmudic literature. A saintly man, Choni, was asked by the rabbis to pray for rain. He drew a circle, stood in the centre, and prayed, adding that he would not move from the circle until his petition was granted (*Taanit* 19a).

The chapter on Jewish magic is rather sketchy. The author has failed to make adequate use of the vast rabbinic and cabalistic literature on the subject. It is well known that in Talmud times the people believed in evil spirits: they were invisible. "If the eye could behold them, no one could exist because of these destructive demons" (*Berachot* 6a). The masses were full of superstitious beliefs; they were afraid of the evil eye, and they were bidden to exercise great care to avoid arousing jealousy and thus incurring harm from the evil eye of the jealous person.

Cabbalists' Belief

The author is not always accurate: "One belief among Jewish cabbalists was that the elusive Most Great Name, the puissant Word of Power, was *Schemhamphoras*" (p. 16). He appears to think that this is a proper name. It is not; it is *Shem Hamphorash*, "the distinctive Name," i.e., the Tetragrammaton. This Name was pronounced only by the High Priest in the Temple. Others were not permitted to utter this Name: it was the ineffable Name of God.

From the Arab philosopher, Al-Ghazzali he reproduces the magic square for easing childbirth (p. 82). The numbers, horizontally, vertically, and diagonally add up to 15. The author does not explain the significance of the number 15. But, curiously enough, the same magic square, with Hebrew letters, is known in medieval Jewish communities. It was written on kosher parchment and placed on the woman's head. It occurs to me that the magical quality of 15 lies in the fact that, in Hebrew letters, it adds up the name of God: *Yod He* (which is numerically equivalent to 15).

There is already a vast literature on the subject of magic. In addition to the authorities mentioned in his bibliography, the author could have consulted with profit Dr. Edward Langton's "Essentials of Demonology"; and, for his chapter on "Jewish Magic," he would have gained a deeper insight from reading the chapter on "Folklore" in Dr. A. Cohen's "Everyman's Talmud." However, "Oriental Magic" does make a solid contribution to the fascinating study of occult lore.

BOOK BRIEFS

Let Us Forget, edited by Adolf Rudnicki (Polonia Foreign Languages Publishing House, Warsaw), is a poignant anthology of the Jewish cruelties perpetrated in German concentration and extermination camps. Particularly gruesome are the revelations of German psychology as shown in the behaviour of the Nazi torturers and murderers.

The Road to Peace and to Moral Democracy, by Boris Gourevitch, with a foreword by Prof. Robert M. MacIver (International Universities Press, New York, 2 vols., \$20), is an encyclopedic work on international affairs, and includes a section on the Jewish problem and on Israel, both of which are discussed in a very sympathetic manner.

Fabric and Clothing Trades Index, 1956 (299 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1; 21s.) is an indispensable reference guide for those engaged in the trades concerned.

THE 'CHEREM' ON SPINOZA

Some reflections by LEON ROTH

Three hundred years ago today (July 27) Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), the famous philosopher, was excommunicated by the rabbis in Amsterdam for "heresies." The writ of excommunication, dated the sixth of Ab 5416 (July 27, 1656), written in Spanish, is still to be found in the synagogue archives in Amsterdam.

DELVING recently in the Quaker literature of the seventeenth century, I came across a letter (published from the Swarthmore collection by Henry Cadbury) written by the Baptist minister and Quaker, William Ames,



Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)

a former officer in Cromwell's army, who settled in Amsterdam in 1657. The letter is addressed to Margaret Fell (afterwards the wife of George Fox), of Swarthmore Hall, and reads in part as follows:

"There is a Jew at Amsterdam that by the Jews is cast out (as he himself and other said) because he owns no other teacher but the light, and he sent for me and I spoke to him and he was pretty tender and doth own all that is spoken; and he said that to read of Moses and the prophets without was nothing to him except he came to know it within."

The letter is dated April 17, 1657. Spinoza's excommunication took place on July 27 (Ab 6), 1656; but since he stayed on in Amsterdam writing a defence of himself against his traducers and since he became closely connected with a local pietistic sect the tenets of which were not far removed from those of the Quakers, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the visit Ames paid and reported on to Margaret Fell was to Spinoza.

Danger to Community

The terms of the report are interesting. There is no mention made of communal or political considerations, only of the opposition between "within" and "without" and of the Inner Light. But perhaps Ames, as a recent convert to Quakerism, had an eye and ear only for these Quaker ideas. It is generally held that the excommunication was on political grounds, and I understand that Dr. Teicher, of Cambridge, has in the press some interesting new material on this aspect. The position of the newly admitted Jewish community in Amsterdam was so precarious that it could not afford (we are told) to keep within its ranks overt "atheists"; and any person known to hold unorthodox views was almost of course dubbed atheist and thus became, for the community, a political risk.

On the conventional political ground, therefore, of *salus imperii* the excommunication, we are told, was justified, and personally I am prepared to believe it. Indeed, I should prefer to believe it. For political conditions are by their very nature temporary, evanescent; and I should like to think that this famous case of Jewish excommunication arose out of the passing local situation. If justified, it was justified only then and there. It

is no precedent for here and now.

I have remarked that Spinoza did not take the excommunication lying down. He prepared a Defence; and students of his writings have thought that traces of this Defence are to be found in some chapters of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670). This notable book, which exercised a profound influence on European thought for at least two centuries, is remarkable for pointing out, among other things of more general importance, that a prime cause of the collapse of the original Jewish State was what we should now call its clericalism. It was brought to its ruin internally by the priests. The priests did not offer a religious (that is, a moral and spiritual) leadership. They became a trade union of authoritarian ecclesiastics concerned with the continuance of a cult. They were an organisation, serving the powers that be. They recked nothing of the ideals of the prophets. Theirs was not a faith but a profession.

Any student of the contemporary Jewish scene may suspect that something similar is happening today. In every Jewish centre Jewish religious organisation would seem to be killing religion. The recent stir about the Tercentenary Service at Bevis Marks Synagogue, and the feelings manifested in the correspondence it provoked in the public press, suggests that it is a good thing that in this country at least the power of excommunication has been formally withdrawn. I forbear to give other examples from this country, or examples from elsewhere.

When Professor Klausner, of the Hebrew University, declared in a public address in Jerusalem many years ago that the ban on Spinoza was lifted, he was giving expression not to a legal decision but to a social and moral aspiration. So far as the present State of Israel is concerned, it was also a prophetic warning. He was repeating

the lesson which Spinoza himself was concerned with and which he expressed in the sub-title of his *Treatise*: that toleration is not only compatible with the existence of ordered society but is the very condition of its well-being. In theory this is now an accepted political principle. In practice it is only accepted within limits; and sometimes, as we have seen in our own day, the limits are very narrow indeed. Speech and publication have been allowed only if they have agreed with governmental decrees or coincided with ministerial needs.

But our concern here is not with politics in the sense of the right ordering of the affairs of society in general, but with the "All-or-Nothing" school in religion. "Moses and the prophets" mean much, but was it not they who insisted that their teaching should not be practised only "without" but should primarily be felt "within"? Is our official community really wise in organising itself so exclusively and in such strait laces as to have no room for those who deviate from the "pure" tradition; and is there, indeed, a "pure" tradition? And was not the sage of Berlin right when he affirmed that religious principles are matters of persuasion and conviction and admit neither of compulsion nor of bribery?



Exterior of the house in which Spinoza lived in Amsterdam

The idea of reversing the excommunication on Spinoza, even if technically possible, would seem to me to be ridiculous. But even if it were possible, or if we could just wish the historical fact away, I for one would be averse from doing so. On the contrary, I think it should stand and be remembered. If it stands and is meditated on, it might serve to remind us how foolish it seems to us now, and how foolish are those who behave as if they would, if they could, imitate it. If only we could learn from it the necessity of putting up with one another in peace, Spinoza's excommunication would not have been in vain.

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ISRAEL'S WATER PROBLEM

By LORD STRABOLGI

ONE of Israel's most popular folk-songs, often heard in the kibbutzim, has the refrain, "mayim, mayim, mayim." It did not take me long to find out the meaning of this word. Water is Israel's most pressing problem, for the country has no regular rainfall. The long summer is hot and dry; only during the winter months from November until April is there rain. In some years this is below average. For example, in 1955 there was almost a drought. Certain areas have local water, but they are exceptional.

For irrigation Israel relies on her rivers. The mountainous north has sufficient water, but the amount of cultivable land is limited. In contrast the south has large areas of land that could be made fertile, but there is not sufficient water to irrigate them.

The need for additional water is most pressing as the acreage of cultivated land under irrigation has trebled, and Israel's population doubled, since the establishment of the State.

During my recent visit I made a close study of Israel's great irrigation plans: the Yarkon-Negev Scheme and the Jordan River Scheme. The first is already in operation and nearing completion; the second remains in suspension for political reasons.

Israel has only two important rivers: the Jordan, of which 73 miles flows through Israeli territory; and the Yarkon, at Tel Aviv, which is 16 miles long. At present the Yarkon is supplying nearly all the water for the Negev. A great pipeline 65 miles long was completed in June, 1955. This supply will increase the area of irrigable land by one quarter.

The Negev contains more than half of Israel's territory and a quarter of all land estimated to be suitable for farming. Formerly semi-desert, it is now being opened up; already 50,000 people live there. In the next few years it is planned to settle an additional 100,000 people. A second

Yarkon-Negev pipeline to bring water to the eastern Negev will be completed in 1958, when two-thirds of the water from the River Yarkon will be diverted to the Negev. The remaining third will supply Tel Aviv's requirements and also ensure the preservation of this beautiful river in its present form.

This scheme is a brilliant example of engineering skill, but it is not enough. The whole Negev has to rely on water from this small river.

At Israel's present rate of expansion, the Yarkon has only sufficient water to supply the Negev for a few more years. It is for this reason that the Jordan Scheme is so important. Indeed, any large-scale development in Israel must ultimately depend on water from the Jordan, her greatest river.

The Jordan Scheme was originally proposed by Professor Walter C. Lowdermilk, America's leading authority on soil-erosion and irrigation, who is now head of the Agricultural Engineering Department at the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. From his experience of similar problems in other parts of the world Professor Lowdermilk conceived this master plan for Israel.

To the north of Lake Tiberias in Northern Galilee lies Lake Hula, in what a few years ago was an uninhabited area. On the northern shores of Lake Hula stretched a great malarial swamp. The Jordan seeped its way through this swamp and a great deal of its water was lost in descent through evaporation.

Now great channels have been dug through the swamp and the river bed across the lake deepened. The swamp has been drained and soon Lake Hula itself will no longer exist. This drainage of swamp and lake and the canalisation of the River Jordan will result in a 20 per cent increase in the river's natural flow. It will provide an area of more than 15,000 acres, where vines, fruit, and grain will grow, and there will be pasture land for cows and sheep.

A great pipeline will bring the Jordan waters to reservoirs in Galilee and then right across the country to

join the Yarkon-Negev pipelines at Faluja in the Negev. This Jordan pipeline is under active construction and most of it has been laid. But where the pipeline will join the Jordan at B'Not Yaaqov the area has been demilitarised, although the Jordan flows here through Israeli territory on both her banks.

In 1951 Syria raised strong objections to the drainage of Lake Hula. These were rejected by the Security Council. In 1953 Syria again objected to the construction of the pipeline in the demilitarised zone. The Soviet veto prevented the Security Council from taking action, although Israel received a majority of votes in her favour. Israel suspended work voluntarily in view of the Security Council discussions.

President Eisenhower sent Mr. Eric Johnston as his special ambassador to mediate between the Arab States and Israel and to see if a regional plan might not be devised to use the Jordan for their mutual benefit. The result was the Johnston Scheme whereby the Kingdom of Jordan, and also Syria, would obtain Jordan water through a tributary of the Jordan, the Yarmuk, as had always been envisaged by Professor Lowdermilk.

Work Suspended

Since then, Israel has suspended work pending an agreement with the Arab States, who refuse, however, to co-operate in this scheme although by doing so they would benefit.

The Arabs refuse for two reasons. First, they prefer to deny themselves the use of the Jordan waters in order to deny them to Israel, and thus hold up her rate of progress. This refusal is part of their economic embargo. Secondly, the Arabs do not wish to co-operate in the scheme because they feel that this would imply their recognition of Israel.

Arab intransigence has meant a complete hold up for nearly three years of Israel's most important irrigation scheme.

Israel has no aggressive intentions towards the Arab States; indeed she has always wished to co-operate with them over the Jordan Scheme.

In the interest of the whole area this matter should receive the early consideration of the Security Council.

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