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ABOUT BOOKS

NATIONAL RENAISSANCE

By ELIAHU ELATH

The Goodly Heritage. By AVRAHAM YAARI. Abridged and translated by ISRAEL SCHEN. Jerusalem: *Youth and Hechalutz-Department of the Zionist Organisation.* London: *Jewish Agency.* 15s.

Mr. Avraham Yaari has long established for himself a solid reputation as a scholar, his special field being the relations, through the centuries, between the Jewish people and the Holy Land. To this subject he has devoted more careful and studious attention than almost any other Israeli scholar, and he has set down his findings lucidly and systematically. He is the publicist and interpreter of all those travellers and pilgrims who have maintained, through the centuries of the Dispersion, an unbroken, if tenuous, link between Palestine and the Jews of the world outside. Their letters, memoirs, and diaries give first-hand evidence of the tangible links they forged, and of the messages of solidarity which they brought from the Diaspora communities to the tiny Jewish community of Palestine.

From Many Lands

"The Goodly Heritage" follows a chronological plan, and carries the reader through the successive evolutionary processes of the Jewish renaissance in its various aspects, and in different countries. It was the vision and self-sacrifice of men like Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (who revived Hebrew as a spoken language), like A. D. Gordon (who preached the return to the land as an individual human and ethical necessity, as well as a national one, for the Jewish future); like the founders of Hashomer (who saw it as a moral, no less than a security, obligation for Jewish settlers to be able to defend themselves, without relying on Arab watchmen), which built up, through the years, the nucleus of the Jewish State—not only its instruments, but also its substance. From Hashomer, we can trace the direct line to Haganah, and to the present Israel Defence Army.

Hero of Tel-Hai

The book reached its climax with one of the most heroic and symbolic stories of the immediate post-Second World War period: the story of Joseph Trumpeldor, who fell defending the isolated northern settlement of Tel-Hai with a handful of settlers against a much larger and better-equipped Arab force. His words: "It is good to die for our country" have become part of Israel's national folk-lore—something like Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death"—and are still an inspiration alike to our pioneers and our defenders.

I would just like to mention here one or two minor slips in the text, which should be rectified in future editions.:

On page 175: In the caption to the photograph of the Zionist Commission of 1918, the person described as "S. Marks" is actually Israel Sieff, who was the Secretary of the Commission

On page 207: There are various views as to the origin of the melody of "Hatikvah," but the closest on record is a piece of Smetana's.

On pages 269 and 274: Schweiger is called Dov on page 269, and Bereleh on page 274. Dov is the Hebrew translation of Bereleh, but Schweiger was mostly known to his friends by the latter name.

On page 285: "Chayim Becker's hotel" should be "Chayim Baruch's hotel."

In page 295: I feel that, in dealing with A. D. Gordon, the author might usefully have enlarged a little on his teaching and philosophy, which had a great effect, not only on his own friends and followers, especially in Hapoel Hatzair, but also, in later years through the Gordonia Movement in the Diaspora.

Joseph Trumpeldor

On page 335: The murder was *by* Yigal, not of Yigal! Yigal is still alive and flourishing.

On page 398: In discussing the working of the Allied Intelligence, the author should, I feel, give precedence to Aaron Aaronsohn over the rest. He was the organiser and brain of the Nili.

SEPHARDI STUDIES

אוצר יהודי ספרד ב׳, edited by Itzhak R. Molho (P.O.B. 390, Jerusalem; £1), is a review devoted to the history and culture of Sephardi Jewry. The current number includes contributions by President Itzhak Ben-Zvi and Rabbi J. M. Toledano, Israel's Minister of Religions, as well as a sixtieth birthday tribute to Dr. Cecil Roth. Of special interest are articles on the history of Greek Jewry, particularly the communities of Salonica and Rhodes. Among other topics in this comprehensive survey are researches on Yemenite Jewry's attitude to Karo's Shulchan Aruch; on Spanish Hebrew poetry; and on Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis.

Faiths of Man

By Rabbi Dr. I. EPSTEIN

The Faiths Men Live By. By FRANCIS POTTER. *The World's Work.* 6s.

This work, first published in 1955 and now offered in a cheap and popular paper-covered edition, claims to present, according to the publisher's blurb, "the dramatic, moving story of more than fifty different religions." While the number of religions covered in the volume falls far short of the given figure, the work provides a useful introduction to the history of man's unceasing quest for the Power behind the Universe. In a matter of about 100,000 words the author gives a brief and compact account of the various faiths of mankind and of their present membership and strength, interweaving with his narrative the story of their respective founders, together with a selection of some of their principal teachings, practices, and usages.

The most informative chapters are those dealing with Christianity, and its various divisions and denominations, to which the author devotes about two-thirds of the book, as against the other religions which he compresses in the remaining one-third. Included in the volume is a short chapter on Judaism, of which he writes with sympathy and understanding, as he does, indeed, of all other religions that pass under his review. At the same time the Jewish reader will not be able to suppress, here and there, a smile at the author's description of some of the Jewish religious observances. Should the author contemplate a further edition of the book, he might be well advised to seek the help of a Jewish scholar in the revision of that chapter.

אמנה ב׳ (Beth Hillel, Jerusalem), comprises a summary of lectures and discussions at a conference held last year in Jerusalem on "Jewish consciousness" and the Israeli way of life.

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About Books—(contd.)

MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

By LEON ROTH

The Old Testament: Keystone of Human Culture. By WILLIAM A. IRWIN. *Abelard-Schuman.* 21s.

The writer of this volume was one of the team from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago assembled by the late Henri Frankfort to produce the remarkable volume "The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man" (University of Chicago Press, 1946), part of which was reprinted here as "Before Philosophy" (Pelican Books). Professor Irwin's contribution was on the "World of the Hebrews." This was not reprinted in the Pelican volume, but it was so good as to be specially translated into Hebrew and to be published as part of "The Old Testament Conception of God, Man, and the World" (Massadah, Tel Aviv, 1957), selected and arranged by Dr. Zvi Adar, now Director of the Department of Education in the Hebrew University.

Hebraic Thought

The present volume is a revised edition of an expansion of the original essay which appeared in 1952. It covers the Hebrews in their world; the Hebrew thought of God; the Hebrew doctrine of man; God and man; the theory of law; history and nature; nation, society, and politics; and the Hebrews and the Bible; with an appendix on suggested further reading which will be of great value to the ordinary man. As the author has spent a lifetime in Biblical study and has occupied chairs of Bible in three universities, there is no question of his professional competence; but his method of treatment of his material presents one most refreshing aspect which deserves special comment.

Professor Irwin, unlike many Biblical scholars, is more concerned with unity than with difference. He treats the Bible as one whole. Although the author of a volume on the problem of Ezekiel, he does not tie himself to any one Biblical author but ranges over them all; and he does not split authors (or chapters or verses or parts of verses) into fragments each one representing a different opinion or slice of opinion. On the contrary he seems to hold that, basically, the whole Bible is a unity and is saying one thing; or rather, perhaps, that although many different things are preserved in it, the Bible is, in intention, one. There are, in fact, fundamental conceptions common to legislator and prophet and priest and psalmist and sage alike.

It is these which he is concerned to trace, and he is concerned particularly to point out their reasonable character and their importance for history, whether for the history of the past or for the history which, he is convinced, is yet to come. Professor Irwin rightly sees the ideal as the most important of facts; and those who, on reading the book (and it is emphatically a book to be read by every man) think that they have read it all before and that it all goes without saying, should be reminded that it is just that which goes without saying which needs to be said again and again.

Personalities

אנציקלופדיה לחלוצי הישוב ובוניו, ר׳. By David Tidhar. P.O.B. 475, Tel Aviv.

This is the tenth volume of a valuable work of reference comprising short biographies of several thousand Zionist and Israeli personalities, both living and deceased. It combines factual accuracy with a vivid style, and includes photographs of every personality mentioned, ranging from the President and Prime Minister of Israel to veteran kibbutzniks and Zionist workers in the Diaspora. Many of these individuals are relatively obscure; yet at this time when their work is having such decisive effect, the activities of these humble, dedicated men and women are of historic significance. As new names are constantly coming to the fore, it has not been possible to keep the entries in alphabetical order. However, a comprehensive index in each volume enables any item required to be easily found.

Books From Warsaw

By MOSHE ABERBACH

Several interesting Yiddish books have recently been published by the "Idisz Buch" Company of Warsaw. אונדזער שלום עליכם, by Nachman Majzyl, issued for the centenary of Sholem Aleichem's birth, includes essays on the life and work of the great Yiddish humorist. מענטשן פון מיין שטעטל by L. Olicki, is a volume of reminiscences on the township of Trisk, in Volyn (formerly Eastern Poland, now Russia). וואָרט און ניגון, by J. Zonszajn, comprises poems on a variety of subjects—all devoted to the memory of the author's family killed by the Nazis. Significantly, the sad list of his murdered relatives displayed at the beginning of the book is headed by the lettetrs תנצבה initials which suggest a religious connotation. לינטשערײַ, by the late Joseph Opatoshu, is a story of lynch law in the deep American South.

While these books are of a type one has come to associate with the Warsaw "Idisz Buch" Publishing Company, the Kleine Bibliothek series of three books on ancient and medieval Jewish history is to the best of my knowledge unique in post-war Eastern Europe. Biblical and Talmudic studies as well as medieval and modern Hebrew literature have been utterly neglected by what has remained of the Jewish intelligentsia in Eastern Europe. The current publication of books on ancient and medieval Jewish history is, therefore, not only a welcome sign of intellectual liberalisation, but reflects the indomitable desire of Polish Jewry to retain its spiritual heritage.

Ancient History

Like all intellectual endeavours after a lengthy period of neglect and sterility, these new first-fruits of Polish Jewry's ancient and medieval historic works are by no means faultless. This is particularly noticeable in the first book of the series, געשיכטע פון יידן אין אלטערטום by Michal Astur. One would have expected an original sociological or Marxist approach to this period of history. With one or two exceptions, however, the attitude of the writer is that of an old-fashioned militant *Maskil* who has just discovered the Higher Criticism of the Bible by Wellhausen or Gunkel. While more recent discoveries are not entirely ignored, the book is certainly not up to date, and some of its conclusions are questionable, to say the least. The Exodus from Egypt and the whole Biblical account of the desert migration and settlement in Canaan are conveniently dismissed as a seventh-century B.C.E. myth whose sole historic kernel is the Hyksos domination of Egypt. There is also a certain lack of balance in the selection of the material. While space is found to inform us that Gideon and Jerubbaal were presumably two different heroes who were wrongly identified with one another by the Biblical writer, the prophets Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha and their mementous work in the religious, social, and political spheres, are not even hinted at.

Pioneer Effort

Despite these drawbacks which are rather faults of omission than of commission, the book as a whole is not too bad, particularly when one bears in mind that in present-day Poland it represents a pioneering effort, which must have required some political-moral courage to produce. Its chronological successor, די יידן אויפן נאענטן מזרח, by A. Wajn, which deals with the history of the Jews of Palestine and Babylonia from the period of the Bar Kochba rising to the decline of the Gaonate in Babylonia, is considerably better and more accurate. It is written lucidly, impartially, and without tendentiousness. Only in his comments on Hivi Al-Balchi, the ninth-century Bible critic, does Mr. Wajn permit himself an over-tendentious admiration for those who "fought the prevailing Talmudic and financial aristocracy."

No such flaw is to be found in Mr. Wajn's second book (the third of the Kleine Bibliothek series), די יידן אין שפאניע which comprises a short history of the Jews in Spain. The great Spanish-Jewish personalities such as Yehuda Halevi, the Iben Ezra family, and Maimonides are described with a sense of admiration and even reverence. Surprisingly, Halevi's "Zionism" is given due emphasis and there is no attempt at Marxist denigration of medieval Hebrew and "Zionist" literature.

UNDER THE ROMANS

By HUGH HARRIS

Josephus: The Jewish War. Translated with an Introduction by G. A. WILLIAMSON. *Penguin Books.* 5s.

It is one of the paradoxes of history that the Romans who destroyed the Jewish State were originally invited to intervene in its affairs by the Maccabean patriots who established the independence of Judea. For a century the Hasmonean rulers welcomed the friendly aid of the Romans. Then in 63 B.C.E., through their own fratricidal quarrels in politics and religion, the Jews became subject to Rome.

Under the oppressive rule of Herod and other Roman nominees, faction and violence continued to prevail. The culmination of this national tragedy came with the Jewish War, which began in 66 C.E., and ended with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70, and the capture of Masada in 73. This time of tension and ferment saw the activities of famous rabbis, of Pharisees, and Sadducees, of Essenes and Zealots. It witnessed the momentous conflict of Judaism with Roman paganism and Greek culture. And in this period of revolutionary change occurred the events recorded in the Christian Gospels.

Roundel designed by Berthold Wolpe for the cover of "The Jewish War" in the Penguin Classics series

The subject-matter of "The Jewish War" is thus of extraordinary human appeal. Nor does this history lose its human interest because it was written by a renegade Jew who deserted from the Jewish Army early in the war and then sided with the Roman forces until they had destroyed his native land.

In the pay of successive Emperors, Josephus later lived at ease in Rome and wrote his well-known apologetic works in the endeavour to reconcile his Jewish and Roman loyalties. His "Jewish War" sought to justify his own treachery and the terrible Roman atrocities in Judea. However, no modern reader can fail to see through its perversities and distortions, and to understand and sympathise with the Jewish sufferers under the Roman oppression.

Greek Text

"The Jewish War" was written in an elegant Greek which has considerable literary merits. For long it was available to English readers only in the pioneer but heavy-handed translation of William Whiston. Since 1927-28 there has been available for scholars—it is now in course of reprinting—the excellent bilingual edition of H. St. John Thackeray in the Loeb Classics. Mr. Williamson has now rendered a valuable service by providing the general public with this new and vivid English version together with a useful introduction. At times it is rather a free paraphrase in the modern idiom than a precise translation, but it is always eminently readable and admirably designed to interest the general reader.

Singing the Torah

By the Rev. GERSHON BOYARS

Biblical Chant. By A. W. BINDER. New York: *Philosophical Library.* London: *H. Pordes.* 35s.

In the brief introduction to his book the author has managed to compress most skilfully a vast amount of historical information on the development of the Cantillations of Néginoth (known also as Ta'amim, Ta'amei Hanéginoth, and Né'imoth). He tells us how and why they came into existence, and when they were first introduced into our liturgy. We are told in the Talmud that the Bible should be read in public and made more easily understandable to its hearers in musical and sweet tunes; a deep understanding can be attained only by *singing* the Torah. Tradition attributes vocalisation and accentuation to Ezra, but it is certain that the oral transmission of proper pausal stops and musical declamation is still more ancient, and the written signs date from the second half of the first millennium C.E.

Confusion

There is, however, a great deal of confusion as to the exactness and correctness of the melodies, both in the past and nowadays. Each country has its own particular settings, and different communities their variants. Dr. Binder's renderings, as they appear in this book, differ radically from those used in England, and would, with few exceptions, not be acceptable here. On the other hand, he illustrates the most varied combinations of tropes or notations, which should prove a great help to both teacher and student. There are also illustrations of all musical "detours," or festive tropes, in Pentateuchal cantillation, such as certain pasages in the "Shirah," the "Journeys," the endings of each of the five Books of Moses, as well as for Simchat Torah (Vayehi Erev, etc.). Blessings for the Parasha and Haftara are also given—the latter being rather dull and uninteresting compared with our own rich and splendid traditional rendering.

One is astonished at the omission from the Bibliography of a number of important contributors to this subject. The late A. Z. Idelsohn, Professor of Jewish Music at the Hebrew Union College of America, is justly famed for his profound researches and writings in this field. Cantor Abraham Baer gave a very valuable table of transcriptions in his great work, the "Ba'al Tefillah" (pp. 30-42). The late Rev. Woolf Stoloff, my predecessor at the Hampstead Synagogue, published a number of excellent little books on Néginoth; and the late Rev. Asher Perlzweig's full text and traditional cantillations of "Megillat Esther" (1923) is a real masterpiece of its kind.

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