

ART IN ISRAEL

Continued from page 11

the founders of Dada and still painting as vibrantly as ever; he is very concerned with the Israeli scene and paints Arabs and wounded soldiers with equal affection.

Many of the very young painters have attempted of late to follow in the abstracts' footsteps. Those with a natural feeling for abstract composition are in the minority—outstanding among them is a young woman, Hagit Lalo. Kalman Hack and Yehuda Ben Yehudah (who recently worked in London) are two promising young abstract painters to watch.

None of this abstract painting can be considered "Israeli"—the single biggest influence in Israeli painting is today's School of Paris, from Dubuffet to Bazaine and Soulages. But some of the younger painters are turning to work of specific Jewish content, and without any concession to realism. Shmuel Bonnet and Naftali Bezem, both not yet thirty, paint hieratic and formalised versions of festivals, biblical incidents, and the symbols of Jewish rites. One of the most "painterly" of the younger men is Yosi Bergner, who exhibited in London over a year ago.

Rather surprisingly, some of the most interesting and characteristic formalisations of the modern Israeli countryside of white houses and railway crossings have been rendered by a talented Colombian visitor, Emma Reyes. The two outstanding landscape veterans of the Yishuv, Reuven Rubin and Nahum Guttman, have remained true to their effective, original, personal styles.

Many young Israeli painters have been or are now working abroad—in Paris, London, Florence, and Mexico City. While abroad they all are, one hopes, becoming better painters. The Israeli tradition, if any, may come later.

BOOK OF THE QUARTER

A Modern Maimunist

By D. D. RAPHAEL

THIS MUST surely be the most stimulating book on Judaism that has appeared for many a day. It is the kind of book for which we have been waiting. "My purpose," Professor Roth begins, "is to promote fresh thinking on the nature of Judaism and, since Judaism is the prototype of the monotheistic religions, to offer material for reflection on the nature of religion in general."

Fresh thinking about Judaism is badly needed. Too many expositors give us dry bones, and the shell of something that once was a vivid force but whose present claims are solely those of piety to the past. At the same time, those who wish to break with the past are not offering us Judaism; for Judaism, and all religions that follow the Jewish prototype, are essentially historical. Professor Roth indeed makes the interesting point that the historical character of religion is what distinguishes it from metaphysical philosophy. He gives us history but not antiquarianism.

Consider the title of his book. It seems an odd title, does it not? Why call an account of a religion a portrait? In fact the word is apt. It explains in a nutshell how this book is different, why it is the book we have been waiting for. "A portrait," writes Professor Roth, "is not a photograph or a systematic survey. It is an attempt to catch the spirit of a living thing."

* Judaism, A Portrait. By LEON ROTH. Faber, 25s.

The dry bones of the past are infused with a living spirit. The historical treatment is selective, with an eye to what lives on, what makes the central tradition, what counts.

What does count? In the first place, obviously, the Bible, and hardly less the Oral Law. In dealing with these, however, Professor Roth refuses to pretend, as people so often do, that the Oral Law is simply exegesis of the Written. On the contrary, he argues that the rabbi who "interpreted" the Scriptures often knew perfectly well that they were making radical changes. The form of exegesis was retained in order to preserve the sense of historical continuity; it is a sign that we are dealing with religious rather than philosophical thought.

Apart from this refreshingly frank attitude to rabbinical exegesis, there is of course nothing particularly distinctive among Jewish exponents of Judaism, in stressing the Oral Law. The distinctive feature of Professor Roth's exposition is the stress laid on Maimonides. His version of Judaism is Maimonidean. Now at this point the reader might think that the book is, after all, just another rehash of an ossified past; Maimonides' Judaism is medieval, not modern, a portrait suitable for the twelfth century, not the twentieth. That at any rate is what I myself have been inclined to say about Maimonides; and I have also been prone to think that Maimonides' introduction of Aristotelian ways of thinking marred the pure tradition of Judaism. Professor Roth has convinced me that this attitude is mistaken. He manages to do so because here, as elsewhere, he

catches the living spirit. He does not hide those aspects of Maimonidean Judaism (detailed theological dogma, for instance) which are out of keeping with the main tradition, but he places them in the background of his portrait. (He does the same with Cabbalistic and later mysticism, relegating it courteously but firmly to the edges of the canvas.) By judicious highlighting, he shows us a Maimonides who looks forward to the post-medieval world and whose thought is very relevant to our own needs.

Science and Religion

The main point is that, through the work of Maimonides, science becomes "the door to religion." Knowledge of God is reached not through miracles—but through knowledge of the regular order of nature, the unity of the creation showing the unity of the Creator. "Religion is now in principle at peace with science. From now on 'wisdom' is seen to include not only the text of Scripture and a tradition of the elders, but also the book of nature and its interpretation by the human mind. . . . Respect for science and the work of the human mind became, in spite of all opposition, an overt part of the religious heritage of Judaism, and a notable feature in the life of Jewry."

The importance of this is obvious. Modern man is a scientific animal, and religion cannot have much significance for him unless it makes science a part of itself. It will not do to say that the modern world and its ideas represent a decline from earlier times, or that what was good enough for our fathers is good enough for us. That

goes straight against the tradition of Judaism. The Oral Law, like the Bible itself, is a record of historical development.

Religion is not, however, merely or even chiefly the acquisition of knowledge. For Judaism at least, morality holds the first place. Maimonides' "Guide," says Professor Roth, has two master-themes, one the vindication of science, the other the vindication of disinterested morality. Maimonides' account of the relation of interested to disinterested morality is pretty well known, but it bears repetition, for it shows great insight.

To this second master-theme Professor Roth adds what is, I think, largely his own synthesis of religion and morality, paralleling the synthesis of religion and science. He interprets the unity of God as implying a universal law for man. The doctrine that man was created in the image of God makes all men equally of infinite worth. Professor Roth identifies idolatry, the cardinal sin for Judaism, with anthropomorphism, and creating of gods by man, gods who are described in the image of man. Monotheism describes man in terms of God. As a description of man, this must be an ideal, man as he should be; and so it implies an ethical imperative. Taking up rabbinic discussion, Professor Roth adds that it is the highest of ideals, going beyond "Love thy neighbour as thyself," for it teaches us that the moral status of man is to be measured by a standard higher than ourselves.

Printed and published in Great Britain by The Jewish Chronicle Ltd., 32 Finsbury Street, London, E.C.4. February 10, 1961. © The Jewish Chronicle Ltd.

"A great nation without a home is not right"

—Arthur James Balfour

POLITICAL history is made by the interaction of men with opportunities. Twice in our generation—first in 1914-17 and then in 1947-48—the Jewish people has found a chance to transform the pace and direction of its journey. Both opportunities were difficult, elusive and dependent on narrow margins of probability. They arose in the special field of international diplomacy; but their effects were to touch the Jewish people in every area of its emotion and experience. Those who led the struggle moved in a sublime tension, inspired—and sometimes haunted—by the sense of contrast between a glittering prospect of success and the inevitable consequences of failure.

by ABBA EBAN
Israel Minister of Education

David Lloyd George Chain Weizmann Arthur Balfour Herbert Samuel



THE TURNING POINT

National Home in Palestine. But in legal terms there was no such thing in 1917 as a "national home"; no such country as "Palestine" (there was only Southern Syria); and no unit juridically identifiable as the "Jewish people." There was also the awkward fact that the country about which Britain was making the commitment happened to be under the rule of the Ottoman Turks.

Despite all this, the purpose of the Declaration was destined to be accomplished; and Mr. Leonard Stein, after many years of patient research, now comes to investigate and explain this staggering tour de force.

It has always been easier to analyse the effects of the Balfour Declaration policy than to define its motives. Many threads come together in the texture of this event, and Mr. Stein shows them in all their tangled variety.

World support

By 1947 Jewish statehood in Palestine had for thirty years been a recognised international prospect. Moreover, something like a State was virtually in existence. A largely autonomous Jewish community in Palestine displayed the main attributes of a sovereign nation. Thus reason and pragmatism were our allies in 1947.

No such positions of strength lay at the disposal of the Zionist leaders, who began to seek international support for their cause in the early years of the First World War. All calculations of reality seemed to argue against their success. The Jewish population of Palestine numbered less than 70,000. By no stretch of argument could this be described as "a State in the making."

International law contained no instrument in which a political connection between the Jewish people and Palestine had previously been recognised. It was difficult to prove that those who benefited from their decision; certainly no armed divisions would have been needed to enforce an anti-Zionist judgment.

In these conditions, when a Zionist leader came to argue his case in the ears of European statesmen he stood a good chance of being regarded as having lost his reason. This, in fact, was what Asquith thought of Herbert Samuel and many British leaders of Dr. Weizmann, when they suggested an international policy for converting Palestine under British commonwealth.

The Balfour Declaration, of which a superbly authoritative history now lies before us, marked the triumph of a visionary ideal over the normal routines of political thought. It spoke of British recognition of the rights of the Jewish people to reconstitute a

Deep in the Western consciousness the conviction had long been implanted that the central highway of Jewish history would again pass through its original and ancient route.

The prospect that the vision might be realised opened up early in the war. Mr. Stein's book gives Herbert Samuel a more crucial part in the victory than previous historians have acknowledged. In January, 1915, as President of the Local Government Board, with a seat in the Cabinet, he had engaged Lloyd George and Edward Grey in earnest conversation and circulated a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, and his principal Cabinet colleagues. Asquith found it incredible that such a wild fantasy could emerge from Samuel's "well-ordered and methodical brain."

Even Lloyd George was surprised to hear the vision expounded by a highly intellectual statesman suspected of "atrophy of the heart." The Jewish leaders assumed, without asking, that a Jew of Samuel's eminence was bound to be against them. Weizmann himself could hardly believe his good fortune when he found that his cause had already been advocated inside the very citadel which he was trying to storm.

The Jewish interest had been promoted by the correct and effective working of the Cabinet system. A Minister had transcended his departmental responsibility in order to address his colleagues on a central international issue, and his initiative had been seriously and courteously received. "We look to you," wrote Weizmann to Samuel in March, 1915, "and to your historical rôle which you are playing and will play in the redemption of Israel."

From this starting point Mr. Stein traces Weizmann's astonishing itinerary across the bright constellation of British leadership—arguing, pleading, advocating, charming, piercing his way by sheer

attrition through every barrier of scepticism and opposition. The central figures of the Balfour Declaration are presented in a vivid gallery. Of these, Lloyd George, especially after his accession to the Premiership, was the most constant in the temper of his enthusiasm.

His motives were complex. They included a calculation that a British statement on Zionism would prevent Palestine from going to the French, as well as a streak of Biblical romanticism which he managed to combine with a lack of enthusiasm about some of his Jewish adversaries. "The question," according to Mr. Stein, "was decided on strictly rational grounds, but it does not follow that in Lloyd George's personal approach to it sentiment played no part."

Great ideas

A similar duality of approach marked Balfour's contact with Zionism. "There may have been an element of sheer intellectual curiosity, but there was also a tinge of emotion out of keeping with the generally accepted view of his character and temperament." He proclaimed that the Jews are the most gifted race that mankind has seen since the Greeks of the fifth century; and that their restored homeland would be "a radiant nurse of science and the arts."

A man who can use such phrases as "a radiant nurse of science and the arts" is manifestly open to the invasion of great ideas. Mr. Stein points out that Balfour had a certain ambivalence in his feeling about the Jews. "Because they possessed in a marked degree distinctive characteristics which commanded respect, it was for that very reason uncertain and uncomfortable about their place in a Gentile general society."

Clearly, the British philosopher-statesman had understood the inner truth of the Jewish malaise which the Anglo-Jewish aristocrats were frantically trying to suppress. There is a profound historic justice in Balfour's languid and smugged signature on the Declaration.

This, at least, is certain," concludes Mr. Stein, "that of all the British statesmen directly responsible for the Declaration, none had so sensitive a grasp of the problem, had probed into it so deeply or had given it such anxious thought." The narrative shows one statesman after the other falling like ninepins under Weizmann's subtle assault. Now and again it pauses to focus its light on other Zionist leaders. Of these, only Sokolow is acknowledged as having played a leading rôle at Weizmann's side.

The chief merit in the partnership lay in the readiness of the older man to subordinate his efforts to those of his younger colleague. At the time of the Balfour Declaration Sokolow was approaching 58, Weizmann 44, and Sokolow was more advanced in the official

Moving with precision amid a forest of papers, footnotes, and official sources, Mr. Stein hardly finds time to pause in wonder at the scale and impact of the accomplishment. The fervour which swept the Jewish world echoes but faintly through these austere pages. The book ends abruptly with little attempt to summarise the total result. But the latent emotion sometimes overpowers every attempt to hide it from view.

The reader is left with an impression of having participated from close at hand in a process of swift historic change. The Western world had shown respect for Jewry's aspirations, on the basis of a generous appraisal of Jewry's strength. Starting with an absolute minimum of bargaining power, lacking the protection and facilities of international status, burdened by the competing force of other and graver preoccupations, Weizmann had riveted the eyes of the world on his people's central interests. A road was opened up which had many pitfalls, but from which there would be no turning back.

Here we have a key to the mixture of impulses which brought the Declaration to birth. On the one hand there was a genuine movement of the Western mind towards the pursuit of a higher justice. "A great nation without a home is not right," said Balfour in one of his rare descents to monosyllabic prose. "But this was not all. In the mind of every decisive figure—Lloyd George, C. P. Scott, Grey, Milner, Cecil, Smuts, Wilson—the Jewish people appeared as a potent force which any prudent government would do well to have on its side. To this assumption was added another—that the prospect of national independence in Palestine would galvanise the Jewish heart and stir it to gratitude and action."

Heavy guns

The climax in the winter of 1917 has been portrayed before. The Declaration was adopted at the third attempt. The first assault was blocked by Edwin Montagu's vehement resistance on Jewish assimilationist grounds. The pro-Zionists brought up heavy guns. The Cabinet summary after the September 3 meeting stated: "It was decided to communicate with President Wilson, informing him that the Government was being pressed to make a declaration of sympathy with the Zionist Movement and seeking his views as to the advisability of such a declaration being made."

Wilson had other things on his mind, and Brandeis entered the scene in majesty and strength. By the end of an October filled with feverish activity the Cabinet was ready to consider Milner's draft with a more favourable opinion from Washington in its hands. On October 31 the Declaration was approved.

The doubts of Jewish assimilationists and of cautious statesmen, including Curzon, had diluted its language; but it had become the Charter of a people's renaissance, secure in the lineage of history's revolutionary documents.

Prophet or saint

It is no wonder that the Jewish people surrounded the architect of this transition with an atmosphere of awe which clung to him through all the succeeding years. And when the book is laid down it is Chaim Weizmann's image that towers into view. The picture is painted without idealisation. "Even at the height of his fame, when his ascendancy was established and unchallenged, he remained somewhat aloof. . . . He could rise to the majesty of a prophet, but he had none of the meekness of a saint. . . . If he had personal dislikes he made no great effort to conceal them." But with all this, Mr. Stein rises to an inspired level of writing when he looks back upon a vision of greatness. "If Weizmann was seen a little larger than life, it was not because he struck heroic poses. He was far from being austere or otherworldly. In his good moods—for he had a mercurial temperament—he could be highly companionable, witty, informing, hilarious. He enjoyed the pleasures of life and was well endowed with worldly wisdom. In appearance he was striking rather than handsome; but a certain elegance which distinguished his work both in science and in politics was reflected also in his bearing, his manners, and even in his dress. . . . If he inspired a certain awe, it was not because he exerted himself to be impressive, but because it was impossible in his presence not to be conscious of his reserves of strength or to resist the enchantment of his magnetic eyes. Man of the world though he was, or became, he preserved inviolate an inner sanctuary. It was the mystical element mingled with his realism which gave him his charismatic quality and was the hidden source of his power."

Books for PURIM Gifts and Prizes

Life stories of FAMOUS JEWS for Young People

DAVID BEN-GURION
Barnet Litvinoff

ALBERT EINSTEIN
Gillian Freeman

THEODOR HERZL
Arthur Saul Super

SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE
Josephine Kamm

MOSES MENDELSSOHN
Jacqueline Pinto

"I hope that these books will become the most regular of prizes. They will be treasured." — Neville Laski

From all Booksellers

VALLENTINE MITCHELL

37 Farnival Street, London, E.C.4

12/6 each

The Balfour Declaration, by Leonard Stein, Valentine Mitchell, 1960.