

BOOK REVIEWS

Commentary on the Pentateuch, translated and explained by Rabbi SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, rendered into English by Dr. Isaac Levy (Genesis — London, 1959; Exodus — London, 1956; Leviticus, Parts I and II — London, 1958)

Reviewed by Simon Langer

S. R. Hirsch's commentary on the Pentateuch has been hailed as a classic since the publication of the first volume, *Bereshit*, in 1867. According to the author, the goal of the commentary was to expound the text by ascertaining the exact meaning of the words, their etymology and origin, and to establish, on the basis of halakhic and agadic interpretations, the Jewish *Weltanschauung*.

As many as six editions were published until the rise of Hitler when Jewish life in Germany came to an end. These attest to the importance of this monumental work which has enriched the libraries of many orthodox and even non-orthodox homes. It has immeasurably enhanced the study of the Chumash. As a fountain of inspiration for young and old, it has

deepened the understanding of, and love for, Torah.

It may be stated, without exaggeration, that no other commentary published in our times, whether in Hebrew or any foreign language, has achieved such wide popularity, and this in spite of the peculiarly complex style characterizing the work. Hirsch reveals himself not only as a brilliant commentator, he is also a thorough-going exegete, a forceful preacher, and a sagacious teacher who solves inherent difficulties or apparent contradictions in the text in a masterly fashion. Thus, the most difficult passages become clear and understandable. His commentary gives eloquent evidence to the reasons why S. R. Hirsch has become the foremost modern exponent of Orthodox Judaism.

His monumental work has now been made accessible to English-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

speaking Jewry in the expectation that its appeal will be as great to them as it was to German-speaking Jews. The translation is by Dr. Isaac Levy of London, a grandson of Hirsch, to whom we owe a lasting debt of gratitude for this singular effort.

It is not within the scope of this review fully to evaluate Rabbi S. R. Hirsch's philosophy or his views on Bible criticism, or even his system of etymology which is based on the interrelation of sounds and which makes his commentary unique. All this has been done in masterly fashion in the profound, searching preface contributed by Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld of London, who is justly considered as the outstanding exponent and connoisseur of Hirsch's writings. The sole purpose of this review is to evaluate the possible impact of Hirsch's commentary, in its present form, upon the modern English reader, and the meaning of his exegesis for our time. Our discussions will be illustrated by some relevant examples.

There can be no doubt that Dr. Isaac Levy was faced with a most difficult task. Indeed it is quite impossible to translate Hirsch literally, since his language is an altogether original blend of prose and poetry. On the other hand, a mere general translation will never give the zest, the flavor, and the pathos which are the ingredients of this commentary and which account for its appeal to the masses.

Hirsch's insights reflect the deepest core of human experience, and his commentary is therefore as relevant to our contemporary scene

as to antiquity. The outer garbs of the classic past and the shifting present may differ, styles of thoughts and fads of practice may change, but man's struggles with his primitive drives, his environment, his conscience, and his basic pattern of behavior are the same in all eras. A sympathetic appraisal of these conflicts involves a perceptive understanding of man's very essence rather than his changing modes of life. The proper understanding of antiquity, therefore, sheds an illuminating light on the present. Hirsch's sensitivity and his ability to gauge deeply the feelings of the various personalities of the *Chumash* invests his commentary with perennial value and timeliness. Hirsch's approach is often so original that the reader is constantly astonished at his profound understanding. Hirsch can elicit, almost casually, a wealth of meaning from simple words and phrases. A nuance of a word, an inflection of a sound, and a seemingly unimportant deviation of syntax, often endow the text with new meaning, perspective, and revelation.

A proper appreciation of Hirsch's unsurpassed qualities as a commentator may best be gained by an examination of his analytical approach to family relationships. In some passages Hirsch's analyses of familial love and power struggles are at least as penetrating as, and probably more sound than, present theories on parent-child relationships. Hirsch was especially concerned with the emotional behavior of parents and children as highlighted in some chapters of *Bereshit*. In order best to comprehend

Book Reviews

the author's gift as a savant of the soul, particularly the Jewish *neshamah*, we ought to make special reference to some crucial biblical texts.

His view of the Jacob-Esau struggles is typically original and daring. The author prefaces his interpretation with the principle that our Sages do not refrain from revealing the errors and limitations of our ancestors since they all provide instruction and guidance for us. As the patriarch Jacob is openly criticized for favoritism toward Joseph, Isaac and Rebecca are taken to task for their educational policies. In the great emphasis on the nuances of language characterizing Hirsch's exegesis, the phrase *va-yigdelu ha-nearim* serves as a point of departure for his views:

As long as they were little, no attention was paid to the slumbering differences in their natures. Both had exactly the same teaching and educational treatment, and the great law of *chanokh le'naar al pi darko*, meaning that each child must be treated according to its own potentialities with an eye to the latent tendencies of his nature, was forgotten.

Although all of Abraham's descendants were to be bearers of the same ideal — the dissemination of justice and righteousness — each was to fulfill his destiny in a fashion proper to his personality and endowment by nature or inheritance.

Strength and courage, no less than brain and lofty thought and fine feeling, are to have their rep-

resentatives before God, and all, in the most varied way of their callings, are to achieve the one, great common task of life.

This principle, Hirsch maintains, was overlooked by Isaac and Rebecca. Had Esau been allowed to develop according to his own innate abilities and propensities he might have become a different man. (Our Sages believed in the finer side of Esau's temperament as evidenced in their criticism of Jacob's hiding his daughter Dinah from his brother. Rashi mentions the possible rehabilitative effects on Esau that might have resulted from his marriage to Dinah [Gen. 32:22].) Some may disagree with Hirsch's conclusions, because heredity also plays an important role, yet his conclusions are original and ring true.

The relevance of this historical and psychological analysis to our own day is manifest. All readers know of many instances where children are coerced by well-meaning parents into studies for which they have no capabilities, or into professions for which they are unsuited. Such an attitude may result in a life-long self-reproach by parents and at a lasting dissatisfaction and burden for the children.

Let us take another example: the dissenting individual in society. Hirsch's unique analysis of Abraham's debate with God, regarding the righteous men in Sodom, is most pertinent. Through Abraham's efforts Sodom and Gomorrah might have escaped their terrible fate, had there remained within the cities some righteous men. The usual interpretation is that God

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

would have spared the wicked cities for the sake of the righteous.

Hirsch, however, has a different interpretation. He states that the progressive development of depravity had not yet reached its lowest depth in a society where righteous and good people are merely derided, but still tolerated. As long as public tolerance is accorded to the righteous, evil is not absolute. Only when the practice of goodness is forbidden as a crime against so-called public welfare does a city plumb the depths of wickedness. The sin of the Amorites was not complete as long as an Abraham and his household could publicly erect an altar to God, to truth and goodness. Thus, the presence of some righteous individuals in Sodom would have prevented the latter's destruction because *tolerance still prevailed in the wicked cities*, and they therefore merited some leniency. (To a certain degree this may be relevant to our own time, where in a democracy one may ideologically freely differ with the majority without being exposed to retaliation, while the same attitude is unthinkable and punished in a totalitarian regime.)

This idea is further clarified by Hirsch's analysis of the righteous man in the "*midst of the city*." Relying on talmudic sources, Hirsch differentiates between a man concerned merely with his own salvation and the Abrahamitic approach of standing *be'tokh ha-ir*, "in the *midst of the city*." The truly religious person is one intent on improving the lot of his fellow citizens and their spiritual welfare rather than standing in splendid isolation

of self-righteousness and the contemplation of his own perfection. The truly religious Jew should be concerned not with his own micro-cosmic universe, but with the welfare of society as a whole. He constantly has to strive for what is good, decent and righteous, even if the ideal materializes only when he is no more.

Hirsch's psychological insight is apparent in another passage dealing with the future of Israel as a nation. His comments on the words *chessed ve'emet* (love and truth) in Gen. 47:29, sounds like a sermon which is as timeless as it is timely. It is an exhortation to Jews everywhere in the *Galut* not to forget their Jewish destiny once they have been well established for two, three, or more generations in the country of their adoption, and to be always mindful of their homeland. Thus, Hirsch teaches, Jacob did not doubt that his son Joseph would bury him with great honors and thus fulfill towards him the obligation of *chessed*. Yet, he begs him not to overlook the *emet*, for his concern was not to be buried in Egypt. The patriarch was well aware that his request would make a bad impression upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for it would be an indication that Joseph and his brothers did not consider themselves citizens of the country which had given them asylum, and that they still have retained a nostalgia for their homeland Canaan. Therefore he asked Joseph to swear that he would bring his body back to Machpela. But the motive for Jacob's demand might still be deeper, Hirsch adds. During

Book Reviews

the seventeen years of his stay in Egypt, Jacob became fully aware of the profound influence which Egyptian life had exercised upon his descendants. He was afraid that they would more and more substitute the Nile for the Jordan, and no longer look upon Egypt as a land of *Galut*. To him, Jacob, this alone was reason enough to insist upon burial in Canaan, as a solemn reminder to his descendants that this, and not the evanescent glitter of Egypt, was their homeland, their future. (See Gen. 47:29.) What a lesson for present-day Jews in many countries!

Hirsch's comment on that portion of Jacob's blessing directed to Simon and Levi (Gen. 49:7) is of perennial importance. Without individual and national standards of morals and ethics, no decent and peaceful living is possible. The heartless principle, "the goal justifies the means," is often the guide in many realms of life, in business and in politics. In his comment on the above verse, Hirsch attacks such an attitude with the utmost vigor, and warns his people against it. It is of the greatest importance, S. R. Hirsch writes, that at the very beginning of the history of the Jewish nation any breach of ethics and morals, be it even in the general interest, was severely and absolutely condemned. Nations often claim the right to flout, for the sake of so-called higher interests of the state, commandments and principles for which an individual would be punished or might even forfeit his life. There can be no double standard of ethical behavior,

one for the individual and the other for the state. Judaism, right at the outset, condemns the use of cunning even in the interest of a good purpose and has laid down for all times the immutable principle that societies and individuals alike must pursue clean goals and employ clean means to realize them.

Hirsch's comment on the first chapter of *Shemot* (Exodus) has been tragically vindicated in contemporary history, particularly in Hitler-Germany and the countries which were enslaved by this scourge of mankind. In his analysis of the words *asher lo yoda et Yosef* ("Who knew not Joseph" — 1:8), he states that anti-semitism was at first non-existent among the Egyptians, but was imported by the new ruler of foreign origin who had usurped the throne. He used Jew-hating as a political weapon against a helpless minority, making it a scapegoat to divert the attention of the masses from the difficulties which the change of regime had brought about. When the seed of hatred had taken sufficient root, it became easy to deprive the Jews of their civil rights, and to subject them to unbearable, heavy taxes. Hirsch translates *sarei missim* as "fiscal agents," deriving the word *missim* from *mas*, taxes (see Esther 10:1). Thus the stage was set to declare the Jews as slaves of the state. There is truly nothing new under the sun, and — except for the crematoria — Hitler imitated Pharaoh's pattern.

We may conclude that these examples chosen at random illustrate concepts which are as relevant today as they were in Hirsch's days

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

and in antiquity. Hirsch's gifts as an exegete, thinker, philosopher, theologian, and psychologist render his work as fresh and dynamic to American Jewry as it was to European Jewry a hundred years ago. His commentary is a wide panorama of experience rather than a constricted, telescopic view of the *Chumash*.

The present English version may not be considered a perfect translation. In addition to technical errors and shortcomings, including faults in grammar and syntax, what we have is a word-for-word translation from the German rather than a happy transposition from the

idiom of German to that of English. It seems that the translator was so inspired by the laudable goal of making this wealth available to Anglo-Saxon Jewry, that the necessary care for continual revision was sometimes overlooked. Still the translation is usually clear, notwithstanding some awkward passages. For the translator had an immense task in converting a complex German style into correct English, and conveying the classic explorations of the human and divine spirit to the English reader. All this can be amended in future editions which, we fervently hope, will soon become necessary.

The Psalms, translation and commentary by Rabbi SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, rendered into English by Gertrude Hirschler (New York: The Samson Raphael Hirsch Publication Society — Philip Feldheim, 1960)

Reviewed by Fabian Schonfeld

I recall very vividly that when during certain tragic moments in my life I sought refuge in the songs of David I felt as if King David had written his words not for himself but for me, not about his life and his troubles but about mine. It is this personally inspiring quality of the Psalms that Hirsch was able to perceive and to clothe in his inimitable, beautiful flow of poetic language. Perhaps the greatest achievement of Hirsch is the fact that his insight into the Psalms was so keen and so clear that David's themes and songs take on new

meaning for our present age of confusion. They contain a message for the scientist and for the thinker, for the scholar and for the artisan, for Jew and for Gentile. They are addressed to the human being in the throes of despair and to nations threatened by grave dangers.

One or two examples will perhaps serve to illustrate the manner in which Hirsch treated his commentary on the Psalms. For, as he points out in his own introduction, to Hirsch the Psalms were the emotional, spiritual, and moral complement to the Pentateuch itself, at once objective and subjective.

Book Reviews

etive, emanating both from the mind and the soul of King David.

His comments on the first verse of the opening chapter are replete with a full understanding of human emotions and the psychological conflicts that rage in man's soul. His interpretation of "nor stood in the way of sinners" is especially noteworthy. Pointing out that David did not say *lo halakh* — "nor went" — but *lo amad* — "nor stood" — Hirsch shows that no human being can truly say of himself that he never found himself in the way of the sinners. No one can truly avoid being involved in evil. But it takes great strength of character to decide not to *remain* in that path. God does not expect of man *lo halakh* but He does expect of man *lo amad*. Society makes demands upon us which bring us in contact with evil, wrongdoing, malice, and temptation, both in the narrow and in the wider sense, in our personal as well as in our national and international life. We must, by mere force of circumstances, "walk" in the way of sinners. But certainly it is our sacred obligation not to remain standing on that road, not to tarry on that path.

Yet the great danger lies not so much in being confronted with our adversaries as in spending our moments of leisure with them. In our professional life, in our daily business activities, in our day to day contact with the rest of society, we cannot help being in close proximity with those who are in the opposite camp. Hirsch is enough of a realist to concede this point. What is one to do, however? The answer

is given in the words following: "nor sat in the seat of the scornful." There is no rule of society that can compel us to waste our precious moments of leisure in the company of those who live a different life. This time belongs to us, to be utilized for the purpose of study, reflection, and self-improvement. Surely in these uncertain times this admonition of Hirsch has great significance.

A subject of heated controversy is verse 12 in chapter 2. *Nashku bar* has been rendered in various ways. The best known, perhaps, is "kiss the son" which is the official Christian translation and which has implications and insinuations that surely do not need to be spelled out in detail. Hirsch sees in this entire chapter a warning to the world at large that only through a great moral re-armament can mankind be saved from impending disaster. What does *nashku bar* mean? Very simply: Gird yourselves with purity. Hirsch has excellent source material to prove that his translation is not only correct in the grammatical and philological sense but also in the context itself. Again, his insistence upon moral re-armament is most relevant.

To what may we ascribe the moral deterioration which plagues mankind at such frequent intervals? Hirsch has this to say "the wicked (*naval*) says in his heart: there is no God." Hirsch points out (chapter 14 verse 1) that *naval* means "to fade." When man's spirit withers and his moral strength fades the result is atheism in its many facets. Hirsch's treatment of this entire chapter is most inspiring.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

The human heart is a tremendous battlefield of emotions and feelings and the struggle that goes on within it leaves its mark upon the soul of man. Hirsch displays his understanding of the conscience of man in his commentary on 16:7, *af leilot yisruni khilyotai*. In the dark of night, when man's lusts and desires strive to gain the upper hand, the battle is joined and its outcome depends upon the measure of strength and courage which he is able to summon. Only a man of the calibre of Hirsch could write in such manner, full of sympathy and understanding of man's innate frailties, but yet firm and stern in his admonition.

In chapter 19, which is well known to us through our Sabbath liturgy, Hirsch has a message for our space age scientists and the common people whose fortune or misfortune it is to be part of that new era in human history. A finer exposition of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* is hard to find.

Suffice it to say that looking at the Psalms through the eyes of Hirsch is a religious experience unequalled in contemporary Jewish literature. Not only is his commentary as such inspiring, but his word for word translation of the text bears the hallmark of religious genius.

In view of what has been said, it is unnecessary to state that translating both his commentary and his own original translation is a task of near-herculean proportions. Hirsch himself, in his introduction, speaks of the impossibility of adequately translating the Hebrew text. The Samson Raphael Hirsch Publica-

tions Society must be complimented, therefore, for having the vision and courage to sponsor this translation into English. All translations suffer from the loss of originality. This is the danger that any translator must face. In this case Miss Gertrude Hirschler had to resort to all her literary skill and talent as a translator of great experience in order to present the American Jewish public with this work. She has done so with admirable patience and has demonstrated her deep understanding of Hirschian thought and philosophy. Her effort in the total picture is successful and certainly laudable. While, one must concede, the thrill of Hirsch's majestic speech could not possibly have been rendered perfectly into English or any other language, Miss Hirschler has been able to convey his ideas and his thinking in very lucid fashion and in clear and concise form. Above all, she has shown great courage in taking certain liberties with the original German text. Thus while the word *kelayot* is rendered even by Hirsch as *Nieren* (kidneys, reins), Miss Hirschler has quite rightly translated it as "passions"; this is fully in accord with Hirsch's interpretation of that term. For this and similar deviations she has been taken to task by certain Hirsch enthusiasts. Unfortunately, they do not realize that it is the message of Hirsch which must be brought to the attention of the reading public in America and that a misplaced, pious adherence to the literal text will only do violence to that which he endeavored to teach. One might

Book Reviews

have wished, however, that some of the style be a little less archaic, especially with regard to the use of thou, thee, etc. There is also evidence, in at least one instance, of careless copying of original errors. Thus in his German comments on 16:7, Hirsch refers to his own comments on 7:11, when it obviously should have been verse 10. This same error is carried over into the English translation. However, in an undertaking as gigantic as is

this, such criticism becomes quite insignificant.

One other note of criticism that comes to mind is the omission of Hirsch's notes on the Accents of the Psalms to which he attaches a great significance and which are not included in the present translation. It is to be hoped that they will find their way into the second volume, the appearance of which we anxiously await.

Religion in Israel Today: The Relationship Between State and Religion, by JOSEPH BADI (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959)

Reviewed by Lawrence Kobrin

Both the title and subtitle of this book may well lead readers to believe that the work contains a more or less objective and informative presentation of an important facet of present-day Israeli life, religion, and religious institutions. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Regardless of the usefulness of the appendices, or the range of quotations and material cited, the author's bias and animosity is so great that it leads him to distortion and falsification. As a result, the book presents to the American public little more than a tirade against the political and quasi-political aspects of religion in Israel.

This last comment serves to indicate one of the disservices which Mr. Badi has accomplished. He per-

sists in confusing political activities of religious parties with all religious and spiritual activity, political and otherwise. Granted that much can be said with respect to the participation of religious parties in partisan political life. This does not serve, however, as justification to degrade all religious activity or all statements by religious figures to the status of disputation. Mr. Badi does so, and in the process has reduced all statements of opinion of religious leaders to a two-fold lowest common denominator. On the one hand, statements made in an obvious political context are made to stand as statements of general religious and spiritual outlook and presented as apparently all that can ever be "expected" from religion. On the other hand, statements made by non-political but ultra-religious groups are inter-woven in

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

the narrative to give an impression of general religious political radicalism and anarchy.

Such a presentation not only lacks objectivity; it is as irresponsible as it is inaccurate. Specific examples cannot completely convey the general tone of bitterness and invective in which this book is written. Perhaps a few illustrations will serve, however, to indicate the author's approach.

We are told categorically that 85% of Israel's population is "not religious." (p. 25). No support or even definition of this classification is ever given, but the "fact" is assumed. The author ignores the facts that neither the combined religious party vote in Knesset elections, nor the proportion of children enrolled in religious-trend schools, nor the other available statistics on religious outlook support his bald assertion. Instead, the claim remains unsupported but unchallenged, and underlies much of the discussion that follows.

In the next breath, the author states that "there are not many instances of callous indifference to the sensibilities of religious Jews" (p. 25). Again, the lack of any definition or clarity is misleading. One is left wondering just what the author means by "many" or "callous." His own recital of protest activities of various groups at various times must indicate that at least someone's "sensibilities" were offended.

Other examples of an enthusiasm which overrides accuracy abound. The reader familiar with the present or historical facts will realize that many of his statements are

nothing more than a parody of reporting. Thus, the statement that Bar Ilan University's existence dictates the need for a "progressive" and reform religious movement is a hopeless *non sequitur* (p. 28). An attempt at describing the views of Prof. Lebowitz and Rabbi Goren is at best ludicrous (p. 54). The random discussion of various incidents concerning religious participation in military service in Israel (p. 58) bears no relation to the present-day facts and certainly disregards the kind of activity that Rabbi Goren represents.

No listing of single errors can convey the flavor of this book which fairly bristles on each page with innuendo, mis-statement and half-truth. The value of the book, in a negative sense, lies in the presentation of an anti-religious cast of thought in a most advanced stage. Almost one-half of the book's pages are devoted to appendices of some usefulness containing English texts or translations of various relevant Israeli laws or legal sources. The bibliography, however, is neither complete nor objective. Aside from legal source texts, it offers a random mixture of treatments in no particular sequence. The omission of Rabbi Rackman's work [*Israel's Emerging Constitution*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955] and of any mention of the symposium which appeared in *Sura*, edited by Prof. Samuel K. Mirsky, both Orthodox authorities and spokesmen, is obviously the result of the author's bias rather than any decision as to merit of source.

Often as disturbing as the au-

Book Reviews

thor's bias is his trying syntax and style. These lead one to believe, incidentally, that the book may well have been originally written in Hebrew and then translated into English, no doubt as a "public service" to the American community. To mix the historical present, past, and perfect tenses all in one sentence, not to speak of one paragraph, is confusing and annoying. To speak of the "observation of the Sabbath" (p. 41) leads one to wonder if perhaps this is not one of our real problems: too much "observation" of the Sabbath and not enough "observance."

Equally disconcerting is the author's attempt to "prove" his case by endless quotations from partisan newspapers and political organs. Such sources, regardless of their persuasion, are not noted for their objectivity or reliability. The quotation of a series of views from religious party publications, quite possibly wrenched out of context, followed by an attempt to "counter" these with equally impassioned anti-religious editorials, is not the process best designed to reach an understanding of the truth. One be-

gins to suspect after several pages of this diatribe (pp. 42-49), that the author is more interested in building a "case" than in any other goal.

In a sort of last-gasp effort at objectivity, we are presented with an almanac-like listing of statistics (pp. 55-57) and then a numbered series of "problems" and "conclusions" (pp. 57-61). Neither numbers in the thousands, nor singly, can bestow upon a one-sided presentation an aura of scholarship or repertorial accuracy.

It is indeed unfortunate that the presentation in book form to the Anglo-American public of the subject matter of this work while cast in a pseudo-objective form (and reviewers in other publications have apparently accepted it at "face value") offers so biased and misleading an outline. The book jacket promises further efforts in a series of books by Mr. Badi dealing with Israeli law and legal documents. A greater degree of objectivity will have to be shown by the author before the general public can accept his efforts as accurate analysis.

Judaism as a Philosophy: The Philosophy of Abraham Bar Hiyya, by LEON D. STITSKIN (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960)

Reviewed by Hayim Donin

In a refreshing departure from recent tendencies to present Judaism in mystical and existentialist terms, Dr. Leon D. Stitskin in his

Judaism As A Philosophy reemphasizes the rational basis of Jewish doctrine. It is the central thesis of the author that the philosophical approach of Abraham Bar Hiyya (1065-1143), medieval Jewish sci-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

entist, scholar, and philosopher, is indigenous to the Torah and the Hebraic tradition, and harmonizes with many current philosophical notions.

The contents of the book, a doctoral dissertation published by the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University, can be divided roughly into two basic components, interwoven by the author. The title and subtitle indicate these integrated elements. One consists of a highly creditable and original bit of research on the life and philosophy of Abraham Bar Hiyya, his writings serving as the primary source for this analysis. The other deals with a projection of Bar Hiyya's basic philosophy as one which is timeless in scope, applicable to every generation, and useful to meeting the philosophical challenges of our own day and age.

The importance of the first part can be judged by the contribution it has made in highlighting the hitherto little known but major role played by Bar Hiyya in Jewish philosophy. According to Stitskin, Bar Hiyya was the first Jewish thinker to reject the basic doctrines of neo-Platonism and to combine the Biblical-Hebraic tradition with Aristotle's philosophy. Bar Hiyya considered the conceptual terms of Aristotelian philosophy as sound biblical doctrine, accepting them as an organic part of the Hebraic tradition. In this he preceded both Ibn Daud and Maimonides, both of whom drew upon the principles laid down by Bar Hiyya.

The strength of Bar Hiyya's philosophical approach lies in the fact that he did not use the Bible

simply as a book into which one could read all sorts of metaphysical concepts, or upon which one could graft all kinds of philosophy, but rather as the standard to which to compare and analyze the validity of other philosophical notions. "Our authority is the Bible," he says, "and we must test the views of the philosophers by the teachings of the Bible." "For the Torah is the embodiment of all truth, including philosophic truth, and the errors to which our beliefs and practices are often exposed are due in part to a miscomprehension of the biblical concepts, which may be veiled in secrecy, requiring a thorough knowledge of the sciences to unravel them. This can be accomplished not through some mystical or intuitive apprehension, but only through an intellectual discipline born of a knowledge of existing things as well as of their transcendental implications and ethical ends." To Bar Hiyya, a "religious philosophy is really not an investigation of phenomena per se as it is a refinement of concepts already explicit in the Torah."

An interesting assertion by Bar Hiyya is that the specific contribution of the Prophets were the concepts of repentance and *acharit ha-yamim*, rather than the doctrines of social justice and ethical ideals which are also to be found in the Pentateuch.

The book takes up in great detail Bar Hiyya's concepts of reality, first cause, soul, matter and form, potential and actual, the universe, time and space, etc. showing their similarity to Aristotelian ideas. At the base of these theories is the re-

Book Reviews

jection of the Platonic doctrine of the reality of heavenly incorporeal entities (ideas), and the acceptance of Aristotle's combination of form and matter as the essence of reality.

As scholarly a contribution as this might be to the history of philosophy, it seems to this reviewer, however, that the second part of the book succeeds much better in arousing the interest of the modern reader who is not a student of the history of philosophy but who has a deep interest in the philosophical challenges currently facing religion in general and Judaism in particular.

These challenges are no longer phrased in Aristotelian terms, or concerned only with questions that troubled the ancients. And Dr. Stitskin has increased the usefulness of his dissertation by discussing Bar Hiyya's philosophy in modern terms.

According to Stitskin, Bar Hiyya anticipates the philosophic notion of personalism — the stress on the development of man's immortal self. There is great merit and strength to Stitskin's argument that this approach is indigenous to biblical thought and Hebraic philosophic modes. The distinct nature of the Hebraic world scheme, he says, is a consideration of man as the crown of creation. In addition, "no higher responsibility rests upon the philosopher than that of involving himself in the search for ways of expressing the meaning and purpose of life." Reality in the Hebraic world scheme is rooted in personalism. "The Torah is essentially not a document of man's concepts about the Divine as of God's pre-

cepts for man's progressive spiritual development."

Three important ideas flow from the notion of personalism as expounded by the author. In the first place, man's central position in the universe is derived not from the organic structure of his being, but rather from the limitless possibilities for his creativity and self-development. The stress is on an optimism of possibilities and man's infinite capacities to learn and understand and ultimately control rather than on the tragic dimension of life which is often underscored by contemporary thought. The existential activity of man is future directed — the *acharit ha-yamim* of the prophets and the final cause of Aristotle.

Second, if man's task is to realize his capacity for immortality, the latter is not simply a reward bestowed by grace or faith but the actualization of a potentiality. This is accomplished through the striving for an intellectual excellence by means of ethical and religious perfection. The *mitzvah* in this scheme serves as the basis for the uplifting of a crude act into a consecrated deed which ultimately has an effect upon our perceptive and conceptual qualities.

Third, a philosophy of personalism challenges us to actualize our inner divine potential — the *Tzelem Elohim* — and thus establish evidence of the reality of God's presence. For an "awareness of our unique nature and exalted destiny brings into focus the image of a living God as the Author and Revealer of our infinite capacities to move into a state of moral and in-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

tellectual perfectibility . . . The infinite capacities inherent in man's psychic apparatus to discover his immortal self and move on to a state of divine perfectibility bear testimony to God's presence . . . What God is He proves not in a vacuum but as He communicates with man and acts as man's partner by implanting within him a spark of His divinity — an evolving soul with limitless possibilities for actualization."

Stitskin touches upon the assertion by Dr. Samuel Belkin that Judaism essentially expounds a philosophy of purpose. "For in Judaism," says Dr. Stitskin, "every biblical *mitzvah* is related to some commanding purpose." He attempts to substantiate this thesis on philosophic grounds.

The notion of the absolute expounded by Dr. Stitskin deserves also serious attention. He asserts that "the absolute in the Hebraic view is not a theory but an activity . . . in this context the first inquiry of man is not, *what can I know?* but *what can I do in order to know?*"

Though Stitskin may be right when he says that "the challenge of classic Greek philosophy still remains the basic concern of Jewish thought forms," this reviewer questions the need to stress the compatibility of Aristotelian philosophy with the Hebraic scheme, especially since Aristotelian cosmology (and Bar Hiyya's as well) has long been considered obsolete in the modern scientific age. Bar Hiyya's philosophy of personalism, when applied to modern philosophical problems, is of sufficient merit and stature to stand alone, without having to lean on the Greek philosophers.

Judaism As A Philosophy is a well-written, stimulating, and scholarly volume. Its copious footnotes add many interesting details. The exposition of a philosophy of personalism is especially challenging and deserves serious consideration by every student of philosophy. The volume as a whole serves as a valuable contribution not only to the history of philosophy but also to modern Jewish thought.

The Zaddik, by SAMUEL H. DRESSNER (New York: Abelard-Schuman Press, 1960)

Reviewed by Israel Tabak

Hasidism has become very fashionable of late. It is the subject of numerous lectures and essays, and nearly every Jewish publication has devoted considerable space to the theme. But most of these efforts

have been of a superficial character, more in the popular vein. Very little has been done on a scholarly level in this country, and the field of serious research has remained comparatively barren.

It is, therefore, gratifying to see a serious student of Hasidism ap-

Book Reviews

plying himself to the subject with particular devotion. For *The Zaddik*, by Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner, gives evidence of painstaking effort, and it constitutes an important study in the field. (It is based upon a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Jewish Theological Seminary several years ago.)

The Zaddik deals with the life and work of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoy, one of the most faithful disciples of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, and the most authoritative interpreter of his doctrines. It dwells with particular emphasis upon the theme of the Zaddik in the writings of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, author of the classical *Toledot Yaakov Yosef*, and several other significant works on the subject. The central concern of early Hasidic literature is, indeed, the Zaddik and his place in the religious teachings of Judaism.

It is evident that the author does not write with detached and cold objectivity. His attitude towards his subject is strongly sympathetic. He even writes like a Hasid, as is evident from the fact that he has dedicated his work to his "Rebbe," Dr. Abraham J. Heschel, whom he terms מורי ורבי — צדיק הדור.

He endeavors to describe the Zaddik in the world of Hasidism in careful and varied detail. He covers such subjects as the Zaddik as the source of holiness; as a channel bringing heaven down to earth; his willingness to suffer for his people; his insight into the needs and suffering of the masses; his eager-

ness to elevate his people; and as the answer to the crisis of the time.

Yet it is difficult to reconcile the reverence with which Dresner approaches his subject with his characterization of Hasidism as "a veritable revolution." No true Hasid would ever refer to Hasidism as a revolution. Neither would he describe the movement a "a rebellion of religious energy against petrified religious values." An authentic Hasid readily understands that the Hasidic tendency in Judaism is not only not "revolutionary," it is not even a new movement. It is merely a shift of emphasis, a rejuvenation of a philosophy of Judaism which is as old as the Torah itself.

Indeed, the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples, and particularly Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoy, constantly refer to biblical and talmudic authority in support of their ideas. True Hasidim know that *niglah* (the exoteric) and *nistar* (the esoteric or mystical) have been the two sides of the golden coin of Judaism since time immemorial.

From the time of Rabban Shimeon bar Yochai of the ancient world, down through the Ramban of the Middle Ages and Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed, the Hasidic tradition has in one form or another been an integral part of Judaism. Whether it was known as *Kabbalah*, as *Torat ha-Emet*, as *nistar*, or as mysticism, it was part of the great stream of intuitionism which has flowed along parallel lines with the majestic river of intellectualism.* It is,

*See the article on "Two Aspects of Judaism" by Zalman M. Schachter in this issue. — Ed.

TRADITION: A Journal of Orthodox Thought

therefore, incorrect to refer to Hasidism as a revolution.

The reader who is familiar with the subject is struck by a number of other inaccuracies. Thus the author quotes Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz as follows: "Of the books that have been written in the past seventy years, none are altogether truthful, except the works of the Rabbi of Polnoy. There is no book in all the world which can compare to them" (p. 74). Anyone acquainted with the work and attitude of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, and with the high esteem in which he held the classical halakhic works of his contemporaries, will readily question the authenticity of this statement. The author of *The Zaddik* has been helpful in giving us the original passage in his notes (p. 260):

כל הספרים החדשים שנתחברו בתוך שבעים שנה אינם ע"פ אמת לכד ספרי הרב דפולנאה שאמר עליהם שאין ספר כמותם בעולם — לכד מספר „אור החיים" לר' חיים בן עמר.

The mistake now becomes clear. Dresner failed to realize that אינם ע"פ אמת in this instance means "are not written in the spirit of Kabbalah" and not, as he translates, "none are altogether truthful." This is evident from the fact that the *Or ha-Chayyim* is equated with the works of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, since the *Or ha-Chayyim* too has interspersed his commentary to the Torah with kabbalistic interpretations and references.

The author of *The Zaddik*, moreover, translates certain talmudic passages which occur in hasidic writings in a manner that is strangely misleading. Instead of the

original *peshat*, he gives us the translation as interpreted by the hasidic authors, without informing us that this is *hasidut* or *derush*, and not the primary meaning of the passage.

Thus the statement in the Mishnah (*R.H.* 29): זה הכלל כל שאינו מחויב בדבר אינו מוציא את הרבים ידי חובתן is translated by our author several times as follows: "only he who is himself guilty can help remove the guilt of others" (p. 192). This interpretation is a fine hasidic nuance intended to drive home the idea that the Zaddik must descend to the level of the people and share in their wrongs, in order to be in a position to lift them out of the depth of transgression and help them achieve repentance.

The reader gets the impression that this is a talmudic statement, when actually it is a hasidic *teitch* of that passage. Its true meaning is: "He who is not required by law to fulfill a certain *mitzvah* (such as sounding the Shofar), can not serve as the representative of the Congregation in discharging that particular *mitzvah* for them." This is a basic law covering many regulations as to who is eligible to conduct religious services for the Congregation, and why women are not so eligible. Is it possible that our non-Orthodox brethren have accorded certain religious prerogatives to women because they have overlooked the halakhic implications of this Mishnah?

Notwithstanding these oversights, Rabbi Dresner's work is a distinct contribution and a welcome addition to the field of hasidic literature. One must agree with the

Book Reviews

author that Hasidism "was the last great flowering of the Jewish spirit . . . and brought a renewed sense of God's presence." But we cannot

go along with the verdict that this God-intoxicated movement "has now disappeared."

The Faithful City: The Siege of Jerusalem, 1948, by DOV JOSEPH
(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960)

Reviewed by Louis Bernstein

The rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948 is the most important event in two thousand years of Jewish history, and the defense of besieged Jerusalem was one of the most important chapters of that epic event. Saving the New City of Jerusalem was more than a military victory over the Arabs. It was also a victory over the British and United Nations, who either actively aided the Arabs or placed obstacles in the paths of Jews. The battle could not have been won without the heroic endurance of Jerusalem's civilian population, which suffered food and water shortages as well as the consequences of war that civilians on the front line must endure.

Dov Joseph was the military governor of Jerusalem during the siege. He is splendidly equipped to write the story of the siege by the centrality of the role he played as well as by his educational background. Although any history written by a person intimately involved with the subject must be regarded with a degree of suspicion, Joseph has succeeded in reducing the personal factor in many areas of the book.

However, on the controversial

section on Old Jerusalem, Joseph ventures into the speculative. The fall of the Old City has always been a delicate subject. Just as history has not conclusively indicted those responsible for the Pearl Harbor debacle, similarly we may never learn the true story of why the Old City fell and why it was not recaptured when the fighting flared anew in the period between the armistice agreements.

It is evident that there was no single factor. Certainly Arab superiority in manpower and arms were of major importance. At the same time, it is equally apparent that military leadership was not what it might have been. Apparently, the Haganah in the area did not attach sufficient importance to the Old City.

During the break between the truce periods, the Haganah concentrated on broadening its corridor to the sea. The assault on the Old City was a hurried operation. Five and one half hours were allowed for the operation prior to the cease fire. Circumstances were against the Israelis. For example, a chance shell blew up an ammunition vehicle destroying thousands of bullets. Perhaps, as Dr. Aaron Barth, of blessed memory, pointed out, the Jews

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

are not destined to recapture the site of the Temple until they will be spiritually worthy of rebuilding it.

When future historians will delve into the role of the United Nations, they will refer to Joseph's book. The first call for the United Nations to establish peace was in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Under such difficult circumstances, impartiality is a primary requisite. Partiality to Arab and British policy destroyed the value of the United Nations as an effective force for peace. We see in *Faithful City* the beginnings of a policy in which the United

Nations is interested in *projecting* itself rather than in *accomplishing* a mission. It becomes embroiled in the conflict determined to enforce its own policy rather than to bring about peace. In the dozen years since, especially in the tragic Congo situation, it has become evident that this policy has matured into disaster.

The *Faithful City* is certainly worth reading. It will help all of us understand and appreciate the events of the last dozen years in which Jerusalem was a focal point.

The Life and the Works of Chatam Sofer, by LEON KATZ. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1960)

Reviewed by
Gilbert Klaperman

Much of present day Jewish scholarship has too readily permitted itself to be channelled into the exclusive study of the ancients. Consequently, the significance of our immediate forebears who stand nearer to us not only chronologically but in similarity of intellectual, religious, and social climate, is frequently overlooked. This is a sad oversight, because their experiences and halakhic decisions are of particular value as guides to us at the present time. The problems and challenges of the early Nineteenth Century were, if not exactly like ours (for how can two centuries be precisely similar?), qualitatively more akin to ours in character and urgency than, for example, those

of the Golden Age of Spain.

Moreover, by neglecting the more nearly contemporary figures we have permitted the Conservative and Reform movements to picture the last century and a half as their own. Because of our default, the Jewish lay community which normally does not engage in the study of *chiddushim* and *teshuvot*, is flooded with works extolling, describing, and perpetuating the lives and accomplishments of non-Orthodox Jews and giving the impression that Orthodoxy ended with the flowering of Mendelssohn and his successors. The research on all the Orthodox rabbis in America in the last 100 years represents considerably less than the books written on Isaac Mayer Wise alone. It is true that there were few Orthodox rabbis in the United States a century

Book Reviews

ago, yet Illoway has been left begging and Leiser, who was the doughty champion of traditional life, has been claimed by the Conservatives as one of their own, in a sleight-of-hand pre-dating of history. Certainly there were some brilliant figures since the turn of the century who merit consideration. The once vibrant European Jewish life may too soon be forgotten, unless we research it intensively and memorialize its religious heroes in writing, the world will know only what has been written by the non-Orthodox segment of Jewry.

It is for this reason that the recent appearance in Hebrew of *The Life and the Works Of The Chatam Sofer* by Rabbi Dr. Leon Katz is most welcome. The *Chatam Sofer* — Rabbi Moses Sofer, popularly called by the name of his *magnum opus* — dealt with the pressing issue of Reform and synagogue changes. He was concerned with the settlement of the Land of Israel as a real rather than as an academic problem. The emerging needs of his day motivated him to give proper perspective to the place of secular knowledge and studies in the life of the Jew. These problems, together with many daily problems that every rabbi has to face, are part of the legacy of the *Chatam Sofer*, so that a good study of this great teacher has additional practical significance as well as abundant academic value.

Furthermore, this book is welcome because it is another one in the few but growing number of scholarly works being produced by American-educated Orthodox rab-

bis. Of the four volumes in the series on *Gedolei Yisrael* published by Israel's *Mosad Harav Kook*, of which the volume under review is one, three were written by American Orthodox rabbis — all, incidentally, ordained by Yeshiva Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, who had written their works as doctoral theses at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University. This is in addition to other works by American trained rabbis already published by *Mosad Harav Kook* and other publishing houses in Israel and at home.

On the outskirts of Bratislava, Czechoslovakia (the modern designation for Pressburg, Hungary) stood the ancient cemetery where Rabbi Moses Sofer was buried in 1839. When the Germans overran the city during World War II, the land was filled and graded, and an *autobahn* built over the sacred ground. Strange, however, is the fact that today, in the midst of the opposing lanes of traffic that rush busily over it, there is an island with a metal trap door which leads down to the original level of the cemetery. There the crypt that is formed protects the final resting place of the *Chatam Sofer*.

What could have led the bestial Nazis to protect the grave of the *Chatam Sofer*, when they destroyed even the living? According to the explanation offered to this writer by the leaders of the Jewish community of Bratislava several years ago, the grave of the *Chatam Sofer* was spared by the Germans because of the great respect and profound holiness his name evoked. Truth or legend, this explanation re-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

veals the great reverence in which the *Chatam Sofer* was held. Who then was the *Chatam Sofer* whose influence was so great and name so holy?

Rabbi Moses Sofer stood at the crossroads of modern Jewish history. Born in 1762 in Frankfort-on-the-Main only two years after the death of the Baal Shem Tov, his life overlapped that of the Vilna Gaon and Mendelssohn and bridged that of Samson Raphael Hirsch.

He lived during the age when the dissolution and crumbling of ghetto life, which had strengthened and crystallized the tradition of Torah, catapulted the Jew into a variety of problems, temptations, attractions, and heresies with which, because of lack of sophistication and preparation, he could not cope. While the Reform movement was the *Chatam Sofer's* immediate opposition, there were other distracting influences that tore at the time-honored traditions of Jewish life. The rise of the secular Enlightenment and Jewish Haskalah, the ebb and wane of the ideals of the French Revolution and Napoleon's promise of emancipation, the havoc wrought by the Napoleonic wars in Austria, the burgeoning tide of nationalism against the newly enunciated doctrine of the rights of man, the fluctuating conditions of Jewish rights — all formed a kaleidoscopic background of frothing and conflicting currents in which Rabbi Moses Sofer towered like a beacon light above the swirling waters of religious, political, and economic change that threatened and confused the Jewish community of his

day.

Rabbi Moses Sofer was a genius in the tradition of Rashi and other great scholars who illuminated his family tree. At the age of sixteen he had already completed all of the Talmud. In addition to genius, however, the *Chatam Sofer* also possessed great discipline and dedication. For years, for example, in addition to his regular "learning" schedule, he would study, from Saturday nights until Monday nights, soaking his feet in cold water to keep awake and allowing only a slight interruption for one meager meal. Rabbi Moses Sofer found such concentration necessary in order to maintain his high standards of Torah scholarship because his days were filled with the endless problems of the great, and with voluminous writing that made him one of the most prolific authors of the first quarter of the 19th century. He left about 100 volumes in manuscript including his *derashot* on the Torah, the Five Megillot, and the Haggadah; his commentary on the Ramban's Bible commentary; his novella *Chiddushei Torah Mosheh Sofer* (from which the name *Chatam Sofer* is derived); comments on the *Shulchan Arukh*; historical notes; and, most important of all, his *She'alot U'Teshuvot* which involved massive correspondence with co-religionists in Germany, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, Palestine and, of course, Austria-Hungary.

In 1860, having served as Rabbi of several communities, he was called to Pressburg to assume the pulpit of one of the most important congregations of Austria and

Book Reviews

Hungary. There he spent the last 23 years of his life, directing and teaching in the famous yeshivah of the city, preaching to his beloved congregation, and writing his halakhic works.

In dealing with the life and works of the *Chatam Sofer*, Rabbi Katz follows the classical form of exposition. His book is divided into 8 major divisions: a resume of his life, his attitude towards *Eretz Yisrael*, his attitude towards the Hebrew language, his battle with Reform, his attitude towards secular learning, his conception of the individual and society, and an invaluable index to the responsa of the *Chatam Sofer*. Each of these sections is well thought out and reveals profound scholarship and extensive research into the extant material on the rabbi of Pressburg.

Until Rabbi Katz's illuminating volume appeared, Rabbi Sofer was identified as an extreme rightist in the matter of change and interpretation of Halakhah. The *Chatam Sofer* had himself proclaimed a clear challenge to all innovators in enunciating the overriding principle of *chadash assur min ha-Torah* — that all that is new is prohibited by Torah. However, while it is true that the *Chatam Sofer* rejected change, his dictum was particularly directed against those who sought to employ change not within the framework of Halakhah but for the purpose of destroying Judaism. As the leader of Orthodox Jewry, and because of his own overflowing and energetic devotion to Torah, it was inevitable that the *Chatam Sofer* should become the outspoken and militant enemy of Reform. He

considered the Reform philosophy an extension of the rationalism that was popular in his day. It agitated against the historical and religious heritage that acknowledged differences between peoples, and it moved towards the abolition of all distinctions between nations as the guarantee of equal rights for all. His opposition to Reform, therefore, was based not only on the immediate perceptible breaches which the new movement was making in the structure of traditional Judaism, but on the insight, soon to be vindicated, that by eliminating the unique and peculiar religious and national qualities of Judaism, Reform was leading to assimilation. It followed, therefore, that because the Reform movement attacked the very substance and essence of Judaism, its adherents should be regarded as dissenters and heretics. Rabbi Sofer equated them with the Zadokites and the followers of Boethus, advocating their complete isolation from the body of Israel ("If their destiny was in my hands, I would separate them completely from our midst . . ."), and prohibiting marriage with them ("We should not give our daughters to their sons . . . They should be by themselves and we by ourselves . . .") for "there is no compromise in matters of the soul."

It was in order to strengthen the quarantine of Reform that he pursued the principle of *chadash assur min ha-Torah*, ruling against variation in the Siddur, prayer in the vernacular, the use of musical instruments in the service, prayer with uncovered head, mixed seating of men and women during religious

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

services, and the removal of the center *bimah* from the Synagogue. Where the integrity of Jewish law and practice were concerned, the *Chatam Sofer* would yield not an inch to change. "No single Jew even if his stature be like the tallest cedar . . . may remove the least of the customs of Israel . . . To-day he will hold this view and publicize it and tomorrow someone else will say the reverse . . . in the end they will permit a violation of the Torah itself." Similarly he denounced the "free lancers," preachers of doubtful credentials who passed as rabbis, and the rabbis who failed through laxity or inadequacy to fulfill their sacred obligation. In several extreme instances he revoked the *semikhah* of rabbis who had not discharged their duty according to the law.

But in other religious matters, his voluminous legal opinions reveal warmth, kindness, and gentleness in his approach to human problems. For example, he inveighed against the Burial Societies which extorted excessive fees for their services, on one occasion saying "I find for the orphan (who was being charged an exorbitant amount) . . . and if they (the *Chevra Kaddisha*) will not agree . . . I will hire men from out of town to bury the dead . . ."

In the vexatious problem of the *agunah*, he rendered liberal decisions accepting the notification of the military authorities as valid evidence of the death of a Jewish soldier in order to establish his wife as a widow and, therefore, free to remarry.

In the matter of providing a

quota of conscripts for the army, which was one of the abhorrent tasks that each *kehillah* had to fulfill, the *Chatam Sofer* expressed shock and consternation that a community deferred *shomrei mitzvot* and sent the non-religious Jews to the military. This he found to be a kind of kidnapping and not to be tolerated.

Similarly he was lenient in allowing Jews to remove their beards so long as a razor was not employed in the process. He points out dryly that "there were times when both Jews and non-Jews wore beards and there were times when both did not . . . so why the great excitement against those who have removed their beards . . ."

In still other issues of Halakhah the *Chatam Sofer* was modern, open minded, and resilient, using personal research and experience to determine precisely the measurements referred to in the Torah and Talmud. To help clarify Passover questions, he conducted his own experiments with grains of wheat to demonstrate the rate of speed of germination. He also employed anatomical models of the male and female human figures to facilitate instruction for his students in the laws of *taharah*.

This modernity was reflected in the *Chatam Sofer's* defense of secular learning, generally unheard of among the rabbis of his day. In this respect Rabbi Katz differs strongly with Weiss, Dubnow, and others who maintained that Rabbi Sofer was against secular learning. Rabbi Katz quotes the following enlightening statement by the *Chatam Sofer*: "All secular knowledges

Book Reviews

are doorways and gateways to Torah . . . Without the knowledge of anatomy [dissection] one cannot know the laws of *terefot* properly. And the sciences of mathematics and geometry are necessary for [the study of] *sukkah*, and so on . . .”

The *Chatam Sofer* placed only one reservation on secular studies, that they be recognized as secondary to Torah and not as ends in themselves to the exclusion of Torah as the Haskalah had proclaimed.

The *Chatam Sofer's* bitter battle with Reform Judaism was not confined only to the arena of religious observance and ritual. Reform had in principle separated the idea of *Shivat Zion* from the formal content of its religious structure and denied the centrality, and even validity, of Jewish nationalism and Eretz Israel. *Shivat Zion*, for Reform was a manifestation of nationalism that had no claim on the loyalty of the new “Germans of the Mosaic faith.” It placed its confidence, rather, in the saving power of emancipation as a substitute for the national aspirations of the Jews. Reform willingly embraced the gift of equal rights together with its implicit denial of Zion, thereby exchanging the age-old hope of *Shivat Zion* for a tenuous promise of political freedom and local citizenship.

The *Chatam Sofer*, however, defined the Love of Zion as an integral part of Torah observance. *Shivat Zion* was a *mitzvah* as bind-

ing as any other, and its fulfillment was protection against the “*Galut* which is like a grave” for “the *galut* threatens the very existence of our people.” The *Chatam Sofer* bravely seconded the assertion of Moses Hess that “if it were true that Jewish emancipation in the Diaspora conflicts with Jewish nationalism, then it was the duty of Jews to sacrifice the first for the second.” Rabbi Sofer’s justification for even the theoretically possible surrender of emerging equal rights was based on the belief that “wherever we may physically reside, we dwell spiritually on the soil of Eretz Israel and the loyalty to Eretz Israel take precedence over all others.” So strong was his love for Israel that he agreed fully with Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalisher in the denial that the coming of the Messiah was a prerequisite to the settling of the Holy Land. On the contrary, he urged wide *aliyah* and active effort and support in behalf of the burgeoning ideal of Zionism. For himself he prayed “May the Lord bless me with the privilege to be among those who return to Zion.”

The Life and the Works of the Chatam Sofer presents a clear and complete picture of one of the greatest of our *Achronim*. Rabbi Katz had made an excellent contribution by including, in addition, the will of the *Chatam Sofer*, excerpts from his diary, a valuable list of his religious customs, *minhagim*, and an extensive index to his responsa.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

A Jewish Child is Born: The History and Ritual of Circumcision, Redemption of Firstborn Son, Adoption, Conversion and Choosing and Giving Names, by NATHAN GOTTLIEB (New York: Block Publishing Company, 1960)

Reviewed by
Immanuel Jakobovits

If a man can be judged by the friends with whom he consorts, the character of an age can be assessed by the popular books it produces. Not so very long ago "Rashi Chumashim" and the Talmud ranked high on the Jewish best-sellers list, indicating a high level of Jewish literacy. Then the wars "filled the earth with violence" (*va-timalei ha-aretz CHaMaS*), and the Jewish classics to be found in most homes were reduced to *CHumashim*, *Machazorim*, and *Siddurim*. Now even these books have largely disappeared, to be replaced by elementary guides and manuals of a "Judaism Without Tears" type.

A Jewish Child is Born is the latest addition to the growing literature of this genre. In a simple style, the book describes important items, such as the principal laws on circumcision and the redemption of the firstborn, along with trifles like the text of invitation cards to a *Berit Milah* and the menu to be served at the festivities (complete with chick peas!). Scraps of rabbinical counsel on such complex procedures as adoptions and conversions intermingle merrily with irrelevancies like the long dissertation on the quaint custom in some isolated places ceremoniously to cut a boy's hair at

the age of three years and to give the equivalent of its weight in coins to the poor. Nothing is left to chance. The book even spells out how the mother is to greet her newly-circumcised son: "Mazel-tov; you are a little Jewish boy now," though elsewhere the author rightly states that circumcision "is not a sacrament which inducts the infant into Judaism." The volume also includes the texts of blessings and prayers (some transliterated in English characters), but their selection seems quite arbitrary. Why, for instance, the *Shema* and Psalm cxxi (which have nothing to do with a *Berit*) should be featured in full when the special benedictions following the ritual and the grace-after-meals are omitted, is difficult to understand.

The main emphasis, however, is duly placed on the rite itself, together with its religious, historical, and medical significance. While the author rightly points out that "the medical endorsement is not the glory of Judaism; it is a footnote," he mentions the interesting facts that the prothrombin level (the substance necessary for blood clotting which, if low, predisposes to free bleeding) reaches normal limits only by the eighth day and that, according to some recent research, circumcised men and their wives are almost immune to certain types of cancer. Useful, too, is the fairly

Book Reviews

comprehensive list of male and female names in Hebrew and English (with their etymology) occupying the last fifteen pages of the volume.

The heart of the book (in more than one sense) is devoted to the insistent and repeated plea of the author, himself a professional *Mohel*, that parents engage not physicians but licensed *Mohalim* to perform the operation. For the rite is to be of the greatest religious, not medical, significance. Even the presence of a rabbi cannot turn an act performed as surgery into a deeply religious symbol. In order to strengthen their confidence in the *Mohel*, the frightened parents are painstakingly assured that the religious practitioner, "constantly progressing in skill and knowledge, has rendered circumcision an art of flawless perfection." This is of course true, though hardly because "all instruments in use for circumcision today were invented and perfected by those who practiced *Milah* as a profession." The superiority of a ritual over a surgical circumcision (acknowledged by many doctors themselves) is simply due to the fact that the ritual act is performed in accordance with divine instructions, and that the traditional *Mohel* has nearly four thousand years of experience more behind him than the modern surgeon. In fact, as timely and important as the advice to prefer *Mohalim* to physicians would have been a

warning against "ritual circumcisers" employing untraditional methods and new-fangled instruments which may be religiously objectionable and of questionable medical value.

In the absence of any rival books on the subject, Rabbi Gottlieb's presentation will doubtless remain the standard work in the field until superseded by another effort. It is to be hoped, however, that any new edition of the present volume will eliminate such exasperating howlers as "There was a time when gold coin was used (for the redemption of the firstborn), but since . . . the United States went off the gold standard, silver coins have served the purpose" (in fact, gold coins were never used, since the Bible insists on silver currency), and "The rabbis of the Middle Ages did not especially favor continuation of redemption of the firstborn . . . They could not abolish it. But they limited it by providing that the ceremony need not be performed if the mother was the daughter of a Kohen or a Levite" (this is nonsense; the "limitation"—far from being a medieval innovation—is implied in the original biblical legislation and clearly set forth in the Talmud [*Bekhorot* 13a, 47]). The addition of a bibliography, listing books and articles for further reading, would also enhance the work as a handy guide to parents and educators.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Tomer Devorah, by Rabbi MOSES CORDOVERO, edited by Nissan Waxman, with notes and supplements (New York: Shoshanim Publishing Company, 1960)

Reviewed by Nathan Drazin

Rabbi Moses Cordovero (usually abbreviated *ReMaK*) was born in Safed, Palestine, in 1552. He studied under two famous masters: Talmud and law under Joseph Caro, author of the *Shulchan Arukh*; and Kabbalah under his brother-in-law, Solomon Halevy Alkabetz, author of the popular Sabbath hymn, *Le-khah Dodi*. Cordovero's magnum opus, *Pardes Rimmonim* ("Garden of Pomegranates"), hailed as "the clearest and most rational exposition of the main teachings of Kabbalah," has been reprinted many times. Parts of it have also been translated into Latin.

The work under present consideration, *Tomer Devorah* ("Palm of Devorah"), is a treatise on Jewish ethics and morals. It is based wholly on the doctrine of *Imitatio Dei*, that man ought always walk in the ways of God (Deut. 11:22) by imitating His attributes of lovingkindness, justice, and mercy, which emanate in boundless measure upon all creatures, including the undeserving. The work may be said to consist of two parts: the first chapter deals with the thirteen attributes of God as found in Micah 7:18-20, and includes practical suggestions on how man may emulate each of these lofty attributes; the second part consists of nine chapters that deal with the ten *Sefirot* or emanations of which the Kabbalah speaks. Each of these *Sefirot* sug-

gests an ethical ideal to which man may aspire in order to be God-like. While this second part of the work is primarily based on the Kabbalah, the kabbalistic terms are held down to a minimum, so that even one entirely unfamiliar with the Kabbalah may derive great profit from this work, an outstanding classic in Jewish ethical literature.

Rabbi Nissan Waxman's chief contribution in this publication is that of making available a well-edited and beautifully printed copy of the work. To appreciate his painstaking and devoted efforts, one need only compare the present volume with any of the numerous editions of this work that have appeared in the past. The difference is immediately apparent and striking. In addition, Rabbi Waxman has contributed extensive notes, helpful indices, and a biographical sketch of the author and his times. Moreover, he also contributed a specially compiled "Symposium on Lovingkindness" consisting of five essays from the ethical teachings of five saintly rabbis and leaders of the past two generations, most of whom Rabbi Waxman had the good fortune to have as his instructors and mentors. The editor also included three other interesting supplements of his own that relate directly or indirectly to Cordovero's treatise.

This is the second volume that Rabbi Waxman has edited in the last fifteen years. In 1946 he edited,

Book Reviews

together with Rabbi Michel Feinstein, *Maalot ha-Torah* ("The Virtues of the Torah") by Rabbi Abraham Ragoler of Vilna. Rabbi Waxman obviously feels that good ethical literature is both appropriate and desirable for our present generation. One senses this conviction especially in the present volume in the inspiring quotations, stories, and experiences he relates in his notes of the immortal Chafetz Chayyim and others; these show how the wicked may be more effectively influenced with love and kindness than with zealous chastisement and reproach. In our age of ideological conflict it is well to ponder this book's teaching unlimited love and mercy. Rabbis and educators would certainly act wisely in utilizing this work as a text in special study groups.

The present reviewer would like to offer a few suggestions for future editions. A brief supplement to explain the Kabbalistic terms employed in Cordovero's treatise, that may be taken in part from Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's *General Principles of Kabbalah*, would certainly contribute to the greater appreciation of the work by the less advanced student. Also, the very fine interpretation on pages 95 to 97,

primarily based on Isaiah 6:8, 9, ought also be credited to *Binah la-Ittim* of Rabbi Azariah Pigo (1579-1647), chapter 62.

Moreover, the reviewer would like to see the volume include discussion of the reason or reasons that prompted Cordovero to name his work *Tomer Devorah*, taken from Judges 4:5. Was Cordovero influenced by the fact that the Hebrew pronunciation of *Devorah* has common elements with his own surname? Or was he influenced by the talmudic comment on *Tomer Devorah* in *Megillah* 14a, in which he saw the possible elaboration of an important kabbalistic notion that is the kernel of all ethics? Or was this treatise intended only as a seventieth part of a much larger work that Cordovero was contemplating, *The Seventy Palms* (Exodus 15:27 and Numbers 33:9), as indicated by the report of his contemporary Rabbi Moses Basullah, quoted on p. 2 of the present volume?

Despite these minor omissions, Rabbi Nissan Waxman has produced a magnificent little volume for which he deserves the gratitude of all lovers of Hebrew literature in general and particularly students of Jewish ethical literature.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

RABBI LOUIS BERNSTEIN, the spiritual leader of Young Israel of Windsor Park, Long Island, teaches at Yeshiva University's Talmudic Academy and serves as the editor of the Rabbinical Council of America's *Record*.

RABBI HAYIM DONIN is a rabbi in Detroit, Michigan who contributed the article on *Havdalah* which appeared in the last issue of TRADITION.

RABBI NATHAN DRAZIN, rabbi of Shaarei Tefilah in Baltimore, Maryland, is the former vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and presently chairman of its Committee on Family and Marriage.

RABBI IMMANUEL JAKOBOVITS is department editor of our Halakhic Review column and rabbi of New York's Fifth Avenue Synagogue.

RABBI GILBERT KLAPERMAN, rabbi of Congregation Beth Sholom in Lawrence, Long Island, is the author of several Jewish history textbooks.

LAWRENCE KOBRIN is a practicing attorney in New York City who is currently serving as Editorial Assistant of TRADITION.

RABBI SIMON LANGER was rabbi in Paris, France from 1924 to 1940. He served as a chaplain in the French Army during World War II and is now the spiritual leader of Congregation Orach Chaim in New York City.

RABBI FABIAN SCHONFELD, who received training in the rabbinical schools of London, is now a rabbi in Kew Gardens, New York.

RABBI ISRAEL TABAK is the spiritual leader of Congregation Shaarei Zion in Baltimore, Maryland. He holds a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University.

DEPARTMENT EDITOR: *Sidney B. Hoenig*

CONTRIBUTORS TO "BRIEFLY NOTED": Abraham N. AvRutick, Louis Bernstein, Harry Bloxenheim, Aryeh Nirbock, Meir Shmueli, Louis M. Tuchman.