

BRIEFLY NOTED

Jewish Horizons by S. RAPPAPORT
(Johannesburg: B'nai B'rith,
1959)

Jewish Horizons is a *mélee* of Jewish thought, ethics, learning, and history—nothing original, but well compiled and comprehensive. It runs the gamut from Josephus to Cremieux, from the legacy of the Maccabees to Einstein's faith, and from the erudition of Louis Ginzberg to that of the gentile Travers Herford. The Hebrew essays deal with Plato, Goethe, Schiller in Hebrew literature, and humor in the Aggadah. The purpose of this volume by a South African rabbi is to reveal the light of Jewish thought throughout the ages, offering breadth for what it lacks in depth. A picture of Jewry in South Africa and its social struggles, such as race relations, Apartheid, Boer War, will also give the reader a new perspective of the problems confronting our brethren across the seas.

What Everyone Should Know About Judaism by MORTON M. APPLEBAUM (N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1959)

As a guide to Reform Jews, or to non-Jews who are interested in learning Reform ideology, this short book is satisfactory. However, with regard to tradition or traditional observances, the author shows complete unawareness of some of the fundamentals, and, much too often simply disregards the traditional point of view. Certain statements are entirely false. Thus his statement that circumcision can be performed by either a Mohel or surgeon, or that traditional Jews today have decided upon using the "black ribbon" rather than to rend their garment, or that one cannot be a good Jew unless he attends worship services, etc. This little volume cannot be recommended to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who wants to get a *true* picture of Jewish life.

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The High Holy Days by HERMAN KIEVAL (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1959)

The first volume of *The High Holy Days*, a commentary on the prayerbook of Rosh Hashanah, deals with each service separately, denoting the origin of the prayer and its context. It is a thematic appraisal rather than a philologic or halakhic one. The major portion of the book consists of brief and illuminating homiletic interpretations, ancient, Chasidic, and contemporary. It is a valuable addition to our prayerbook literature.

Faith In The Night, by SHUBERT SPERO (New York: The Spero Foundation, 1957)

A bedside companion for the sick, this booklet is well-conceived but poorly executed. The introduction attempts to cope with the complex problem of evil in a manner that is all too simple. Though stylistically well written, it stands in need of better editing. The remainder of the booklet is a valuable compilation of psalms and prayers in Hebrew and English translation, with commentary selected from the writings of the *Malbim*. The title is a bit misleading as the booklet also contains prayers for the woman after childbirth. It is a brave attempt at a difficult job.

Journey Into Light, by SHUBERT SPERO (New York: The Spero Foundation, 1959)

This booklet on the laws of mourning was written for presentation to the survivors. Its intro-

duction is an essay on the Jewish philosophical and psychological analysis of death and its effect upon the survivors. Written simply and clearly, it fills a crying need of the modern community. One would have hoped for a more pertinent explanation of the laws, especially as they apply to the American Jewish reader, and, what is most needed, an evaluation of the modern innovations of the funeral directors. Rabbi Spero deserves our thanks for this work.

The American Jew by ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1959)

Though this series of four lectures by Dr. Feldman on historical backgrounds of the American Jew was written for adult minds, the book can easily be read by eleven year olds in Hebrew School. The author dilutes his material to the point where all national backgrounds look nearly the same. We are taken from Rashi to Kaufman-Kohler in three short pages, from Maimonides to David Belasco in the same space, from Maharshal to Bialik in three paragraphs. After diluting the essence, he adds pounds of sugar. What should be an apology for abridgment the author states as a philosophy of history: ". . . any people, any group, has an inherent right, when it is being judged, to be judged by its best and not by its worst characteristics." This is hardly a historical approach. "America should be judged by its Wilsons, its Elliots, its Roosevelts." It is not true, but it looks good. The book is too short and much too sweet.

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Seminary Addresses and Other Papers by SOLOMON SCHECHTER, With An Introduction by LOUIS FINKELSTEIN (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1960)

The author disarms us by his first statement, "Speaking is not my metier." However, the material in the book was written to be spoken. As spoken matter, the author further tells us, it cannot contain depth of scholarship. We are therefore left with what we have, a book of comfortable speeches which may be read with some profit for their value, but much more so for an understanding of the cultural problems of Professor Schechter's times. Fundamentally, they are not much different from ours.

Yadahut Ha-Torah ve'ha-Medinah by A. GITLIN (Jerusalem: 5719-1959)

The pamphlet is a concise statement of the anti-state views of a small segment of Orthodox Jewry. Although the author denies any political affiliation, it appears from the text and from the fact that the pamphlet is obtainable in the offices of *Hakol*, that the views are similar to those of Pagi, the extreme Agudah wing in Jerusalem. The author asserts that Israel is a Zionist state and therefore by definition it runs counter to the beliefs of Orthodox Jews. It necessarily follows from this premise that all of secondary manifestations of Zionism and statehood, such as the Hebrew language, clash with Torah. The glaring omission in the author's pattern is that Israel was created essentially out of burning need for a haven for the survivors of the

European holocaust and that Zionism was but the means to this end. It is not for the State to seek a *modus vivendi* with those who have never accepted it, as the author suggests, but for the latter to give thanks for the haven that Israel affords to all Jews. If for no other reason, they should realize the divine mission of the State of Israel.

Herzl Year Book, Vol. 2, ed. by RAPHAEL PATAI (New York: Herzl Press, 1959)

A most stimulating volume containing many articles on the origins of Zionism, this book reveals, for instance, that at first "Zionism" was used by Birnbaum as a translation of *Chovevei Zion* and *Chibbat Zion*. Also interesting is the article on Herzl's return to Judaism and the story of the Hindenburg Declaration in order to win over the Russian Jews. Honorable Edwin Samuel's essay on immigration explains also the reasons for emigration from Israel, declaring that it will ultimately be an effective channel through which Israeli ideas will percolate to the Diaspora. The articles, in general, will serve as a storehouse of valuable information of the historic forces that moulded Zionism and the many struggles and problems in the Diaspora before the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948.

The Israeli Worker by FERDYNAND ZWEIG (New York: Herzl Press and Sharon Books, 1959)

This volume is a compact handbook of Israel's economic conditions as known by the common man

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in Israel and as studied by an economic expert. The author analyzes the Histadrut and the types of workers in the land, showing that Jewish socialism is in a state of contradiction. It began with Marxism, became cooperative, and is now in the status of charity. The myth of socialism itself is now being weakened, and the Histadrut must ultimately yield to the State. Objectively written, the book criticizes the present arrangement. The author finds underdevelopment of industry and agriculture with an overdevelopment of services. The problems of monotony, ethical struggles, and favoritism loom before the laborer. The confrontation of Israeli-European socialism with the Middle Eastern world, and the effect of American capitalism on the future of the Israeli worker, will bear watching. The book fortunately gives a truer picture than that usually obtained through emissaries to America or from UJA speakers. It will be most beneficial for those who plan to settle in the Holy Land.

Israeli Poetry In Peace and War
by GABRIEL PREIL (New York: Herzl Press, 1959)

Gabriel Preil's analysis of the poetry of Uri Zevi Greenberg and Sh. Shalom in this pamphlet by the Herzl Institute are most welcome portrayals of the dynamism of the former and the mysticism of the latter. Coupled with this is a description of the war poems, written by the new generation of Israelis after the war of liberation. The reader is struck here by a pessimistic atmosphere and the lack of a spiritual climate. The religious pathos of a *Song of Deborah* or the

devout victory-cry of the Maccabees are flagrantly absent in the writings of the Israeli youth. Perhaps in time a prayerful tone will be introduced. The author apparently hints at this in concluding his booklet with Hayim Guri's "A Prayer."

Faith and Love by ALEXANDER ALAN STEINBACH (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959)

As a rabbi who sees fundamental values obscured of late, A. A. Steinbach, in his 37 two-page essays, seeks to re-establish these by his own discourses. *Faith and love* are to him the two instruments capable of rejuvenating mankind. In a poetic style, with beautifully balanced phrases, with every sentence bearing a maxim and without excessive rabbinic exegesis, the author touches upon such subjects as "duality of human nature," "every man is a world," "a song and a groan," "alone with a new soul," "man's creating a mansion of perseverance for himself." In general the volume contains homespun philosophy and is an ethical guide for those who seek to live according to moral teachings as culled by a rabbi from his personal and practical experiences.

A Light Amid The Darkness: Medieval Jewish Philosophy by ISAAC UNTERMAN (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1959)

This little book was probably written for young people seeking their first taste of medieval Jewish philosophy. Despite some errors of commission (*Emunah Rabbah* instead of *Emunah Ramah* for Ibn

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Daud's work) and some of omission (no mention of the *Yesod Mora* in a whole chapter on Ibn Ezra; also a misunderstanding or lack of explanation of Neo-Platonism), this will serve as a fairly good guide for beginners, particularly students of Yeshivot. The author's approach is strictly traditional. A certain well-intentioned naivete compounded by sloppy editing, however, mars the book's value. Nevertheless, it offers a needed corrective for the usual "liberal" interpretation, especially for the novice.

A Dictionary of Thought by DAGOBERT D. RUNES (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959)

The prolific editor of Philosophical Library herein presents aphorisms and stray thoughts distilled from the over twenty books published by him so far. The volume is fairly uneven, as any work of this kind must be, with a goodly sprinkling of sharp insights clearly expressed. Some gems: "The thought of Life seldom occurs but at the time of death." "It isn't the lack of inhibitions that distinguishes man from man but rather the choice of inhibitions. The lack of inhibitions merely distinguishes animal from man." Or, "... familiarity with the so-oft-repeated pronouncements of the prophets has estranged us. Perhaps the sayings of our fathers should be translated into a foreign idiom and then brought back as a rare find, in order to be listened to again." There is an occasional error—perhaps a reflection of the author's humanist bias—such as identifying the *Shekhinah* as "the spirit of man." The ultimate vice of trying to capture wisdom in a verbal nug-

get is revealed in his comment on "Words": "Only confusion is complicated, truth never." An oversimplification if there ever was one.

Pictorial History of Philosophy by DAGOBERT D. RUNES (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959)

Over 400 pages of pictures and text in large format, this volume has much to commend it. No one will, of course, learn world philosophy from the captions under photos, but one will satisfy his curiosity as to how the great thinkers looked or appeared to gifted artists of later generations. Of special interest is Runes' detailed attention to the false image of Neitzche as an anti-Semite, an illusion fostered by the philosopher's cunning and malicious sister, as recently revealed by Prof. Karl Schlechta. However, his treatment of Judaism, with which the book begins, cannot be regarded as satisfactory. The giants of Jewish philosophy, such as Halevi, Maimonides, Crescas, etc. get each about half a column. Spinoza and Uriel Acosta together rate six pages. Some medieval thinkers whose impact on Jewish and general thought is comparatively trivial are included at the expense of much more significant sages. "Judaism in the Modern World" includes only Mendelssohn, Hess, Hermann Cohen, Ahad Haam, and Buber. Krochmal is represented by two pictures, no text. Rav Kook is disposed of with an undistinguished etching and the gracious comment "As rabbi in growing Palestine, he greatly influenced the youth of Israel." The complete omission of Samson Raphael Hirsch is most regrettable, and an indication of the author's ideological prejudice.

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Sheeltot De Rab Ahai Gaon (Genesis, vol. I) by SAMUEL K. MIRSKY (Jerusalem: Sura and Mosad Harav Kook, 1959)

The earliest known post-talmudic literary creation has finally appeared in a critical edition with a direct, clear, expository commentary. The discourses of the *Sheeltot* arranged according to the Sidrot bridge the gap between Halakhah and Aggadah. A comprehensive introduction, variant readings, and two additional commentaries published from early manuscripts all contribute towards making this edition a historic accomplishment in the field of rabbinic literature. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. S. K. Mirsky, outstanding scholar and distinguished professor at Yeshivah University, we can now expect a resurgence of interest in this classic Gaonic work.

The Composition of the Talmud by TIBOR H. STERN (Mexico City, Mexico: Hanan Foundation, 1959)

The book purports to be "a complete analysis of the relationship between the Babylonian and the Talmud Yerushalmi." The first part analyzes the writing down of the Oral Law, the differences between Halakhah and Mishnah, the text of the Mishnah and its variations, and the *Yerushalmi* in the making. The author supports the view that Rabbi Johanan composed the *Yerushalmi*, that the Babylonians had knowledge of it, that the Babylonian Talmud was known to the scholars of Israel, and that Rashi knew of the *Yerushalmi*. He maintains that interchange of messages between the two countries was done with the

intention of creating one set of Talmud and not two or more. The second part of the volume deals with the Emissary Scholars, and the author analyzes 26 subjects of the Babylonian Talmud which were influenced by Palestinian colleagues. This volume is not written in a manner or in an English that is comprehensible. The peculiar transliterations and spellings, the mode of citing original sources, and the confused style show that there is no clear scientific approach. Despite the author's vast erudition, his theory that "both Talmuds were composed in unison" is unconvincing. It is likewise hard to accept that the historic rift between the Hillelites and the Shammaites was due to the Palestinian-Babylonian conflict of ideology. A glance at Salo Baron's Volume VI will show the interplay of the two Talmudim and Rashi's knowledge of the *Yerushalmi* has already been fully probed, as noted in that volume on page 346, note 57.

Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion by MOSES HADAS (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959)

A major work on the interplay between oriental civilization and Spartan culture, the author's analysis of Greek-Jewish relationships bears closer scrutiny. His main theme is that Judaism borrowed heavily from Hellenism. From rabbinic dialectic to individual prayers, from the Book of Chronicles to the *shemoneh esreh*, the Greek influence, according to Prof. Hadas, is direct. Fascinating as it is, the "influences" theory can be overdone, as it here is, when parallels

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are dismissed in favor of direct copying. The author's identification of Sanhedrin with *Gerousia* is clearly erroneous. His assumption that the Qumran community was Essene is still a matter of scholarly debate.

Jews In Music by ARTHUR HOLDE
(New York: Philosophical Library, 1959)

At times an extremely interesting, quick survey of Jews in the field of music from late seventeenth century to 1958, this book is more often a mere listing of Jewish contributions to music, some lengthy, some sketchy. Omitted altogether in the chapter on *chazzanim* is Moishe Oisher, one of the outstanding *chazzanim* of the last half century. Mr. Holde does not usually comment or analyze; he tells where, when, and what—but rarely why. It is unfortunate that when he does, it is sometimes in an area outside music. He seems to condone conversion by Mendelssohn and Mahler. When discussing the Chasidic movement the author unjustly implies that more than a few of the Tzaddikim set up mercenary “dynasties,” exploiting music for its emotional power in order to increase the splendor of their “courts.” Such waverings create an unbalanced book and consequently tiresome reading.

A Cat In the Ghetto by RACHMIL BRYKS
(New York: Bloch Publishing, 1959)

This slim but powerful book is a collection of four “novelettes” about

the true but absolutely incredible events in the Lodz Ghetto and Auschwitz camp. It tells in direct, curt, unembellished but striking style, the horrors and indignities that fathers, mothers, boys, and girls suffered before they were put to a martyr's death. The narrations of the suffering of the children are almost unbearable to read, but we are driven by our sympathy to complete every tortured page. Perhaps these stories are now familiar; certainly they are still uncomfortable, but like *Eilah Ezk'rah* and *Ekhah* they must be retold again and again. Indeed, the novellette called “Sanctification of God's Name” might be read on Tisha B'Av, as we sit low, hungry, and comfortless. This is a book that will be stained with our tears.

The Haggadah by CECIL ROTH
A New Edition with English Translation, Introduction, and Notes
(London: Soncino Press, 1959)

The Soncino Press is to be highly commended for its 1959 reprint of Professor Cecil Roth's *Passover Haggadah* for American use. With a successful endeavor to preserve “the music and rhythm of the Hebrew,” the translation conveys “the spirit of the original.” Especially of value are the copious comments and notes wherein every aspect of the Seder and its ritual are presented in historical perspective. For him who seeks not merely to *recite* the Haggadah but above all to *understand* its treasures, this edition will be invaluable.