

Interesting Books for Young Readers

By DEBORAH BRODIE

Sharing books with young people is a pleasure that outlasts the eight days of Hanukkah. Books given as gifts to younger children will retain their appeal long after dolls have been discarded and battery-operated toys have disintegrated. For teenagers, a gift of books can mean recognition of their maturing interests.

Recently-published books with Jewish content cover a wide range of subjects.

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Two of these books introduce young readers to the treasured Yiddish literature.

When my parents didn't want me to understand an adult conversation, they whispered in Yiddish. "Who cares!" I thought then. Now I do care. Yiddish has remained the language of secrets; the richness is lost to me. My own children are poorer for this lack.

The Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe were not all the same; they did not think and feel alike. Nor were they wholly "spiritual." At times they were petty, funny, or businesslike. These very human qualities are reflected in two new books.

I. Ten stories by I. L. Peretz are newly translated and adapted by Esther Hautzig in *The Case Against the Wind* (with drawings by Leon Shtainmets, Macmillan, 1975, 96 pp. \$6.95, ages 10-14). Too few of us have grown up with these stories and can say with Mrs. Hautzig:

"Peretz's people—Bontche and Schmerrel, Basia Gittel and Tovy—are still with me, not a day older, still dear and true friends."

The hopes and dreams, the sudden miracles of "Peretz's people" touch something deep within a child. Anything was possible in a world so firmly rooted in faith; perhaps anything is possible for me, right now. The child's imagination will absorb the mood of these tales into his own dreams and creativity.

The "Explanatory Notes" do not interrupt the flow of the stories, but are organized at the end of the book. More than dictionary definitions, these notes provide a perspective on concepts and rituals of Jewish tradition. In these notes, as well as in the Foreword on the life of Peretz, a balance is achieved between basic information and the details that contribute to the understanding of facts. Jewish and non-Jewish children, those well-versed in traditional observance and those peripherally involved in Jewish life will enjoy, learn and remember these stories.

II. *The Shtetl Book* by Diane K. Roskies and David G. Roskies (illustrated with photographs and

maps, KTAV, 1975, 327 pp. \$10.00, paperbound \$5.95, ages 12-15) was compiled by "two people who never saw a *shtetl* and never will." Reading this book is the next best thing to growing up in the no longer extant market town of Tishevits. No trace of sentimentalism mars the composite portrait of daily life in a representative *shtetl*.

First-person accounts reveal the games and jokes of children, the privileges of community life, the economic hardships and festive celebrations, religious disputes and folk sayings of people who were indeed "poor in one respect, rich in another." Many of the photographs have never been published before; brief captions point out details the reader would not want to miss. The glossary makes it possible for a non-Yiddish speaker to grasp essential phrases and concepts and even to pronounce them correctly.

The Shtetl Book, vivid and real, can open the treasures of our heritage to our children, making them "Raykh Vi Koyrekh, literally: as rich as Korah; meaning, as rich as a king."

III. A familiar *shtetl* personage was the *badchen*, a professional entertainer and chronicler of family festivities. In Yuri Suhl's *The Merymaker* (illustrated by Thomas di Grazia, Four Winds, 1975, 45 pp. \$5.95, ages 7-10), the *badchen* is a bit of a rascal. His cheerful rhymes and involved "business" dealings

bring unexpected joy to a young boy and his family.

IV. Digging deeper into the resources of our past that enhance our life today, we give our children the gift of the Bible. Not cradle stories, but an understanding of the inherent meaning of the stories, is the basis of *A Child's Introduction to the Early Prophets* by Shirley Newman (edited by Louis Newman, illustrated by Lucille Wallace, Behrman, 1975, 128 pp. \$3.95, ages 8-10). Historical background illuminates the people and events in the Books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel. The beauty of the original is not slighted in this readable presentation with an explanation of the stories as "probably partly true and partly imaginary."

V. In *Stories from Our Living Past* by Francine Prose (edited by Jules Harlow, illustrated by Erika Weihs, Behrman, 1974, 128 pp. \$3.95, ages 7-9), Biblical stories and folk tales convey a joyous extraction of Jewish values. "The Binding of Isaac," so often a frightening story for children, is presented so simply and clearly that the essential moral point will not be missed or misinterpreted.

VI. The implicit values of Jewish family life contribute to a warm and loving story of Russian immigrants on New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the century. In *Waiting for Mama* by Marietta Moskin

(illustrated by Richard Lebenson, Coward McCann, 1975, 91 pp. \$5.95, ages 8-10), Becky plans a surprise for Mama and is surprised herself by the realization that she has become a real American girl.

VII. the factual foundation for learning about values can be reinforced by a good reference work, such as the newly-revised *Junior Jewish Encyclopedia* by Naomi Ben-Asher and Hayim Leaf (Shengold, 1974, 352 pp. \$10.95, ages 11-13). This is the eighth edition of the concise and authoritative book on many aspects of Jewish life.

VIII. Readers with a special interest in stamp collecting can enjoy a new slant on Biblical themes and background in *The Bible Through Stamps* by Ord Matek (KTAV, 1974, 230 pp. \$7.50, ages 11-14). Stamps from all over the world are described in this well-designed book, unfortunately without color illustrations.

IX. The serious reader of high-school age will find stimulating reading in two new books on the Holocaust. In *How Democracy Failed* by Ellen Switzer (illustrated with photographs, Atheneum, 1975, 176 pp. \$7.50), personal histories add vitality to the impeccably-researched history of Germany during the Hitler years.

X. A fictionalized account of the

same period in Poland is constructed by Yuri Suhl in *On the Other Side of the Gate* (Watts, 1975, 149 pp. \$5.95). The underground helps smuggle a Jewish baby out of the ghetto in this novel of intrigue and suspense.

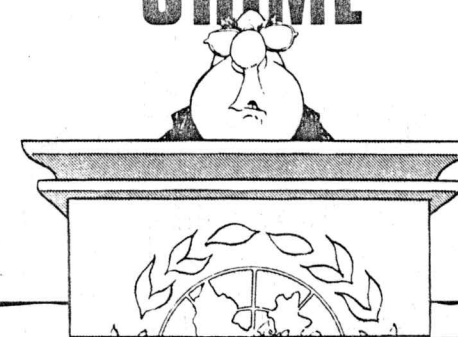
XI. An equally serious subject, the effects of the Six-Day War on a border Kibbutz, receives enjoyable treatment as a romantic novel. *The Time of Anger* by Thelma Nurenberg (Abelard-Schuman, 1975, 207

pp. \$6.95, ages 11-13) depicts the problems of adjusting to life under the constant threat of war. The conflicting loyalties of Israeli Arabs, rarely discussed in books for young people, is a topic clearly delineated in this book.

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From these new books, an appropriate gift awaits a young person you care for. Let a Hanukkah gift book add to a bright and enjoyable holiday—and afterward, too.

UN CONFERENCE ON CRIME



"NOW I'M GOING TO TURN MY BACK AND I EXPECT WHOEVER SWIPED THE MICROPHONE TO RETURN IT!"