



BOOK reviews

A TRAVEL JOURNAL

IMPRESSIONS OF A TOURIST, by Simha Rubinstein. Israel, Masadah Ltd., 222 p., \$5.00.

Travel literature has earned a most respectable place in Hebrew letters. From earliest times down to current works, travel journals have been a part of Hebrew literature and, in addition, have served as a basic source of information about the life and history of various Jewish communities. This double function challenges the writer not only to observe well and probe deeply but also to display high literary style.

The volume before us is the work of a long and practiced writer of Hebrew. The name of Simha Rubinstein is known to many through his multifaceted activities and publications. Those who had him as an instructor or used his textbooks, which have been standard in secondary schools, know him as a gifted educator. Those who have studied Hebrew letters in the United States will have read his short stories, essays and poems as they have appeared. This latest volume, a collection of essays, reports on his impressions and experiences while he traveled throughout Europe, South America and the Far East.

The quality of the writer as a human being is the decisive element in the success or failure of travel literature. Style is important, of course, but the author must be able not only to describe the sights he encounters but to convey insights to the reader. On both counts Rubinstein's book is a success.

Mr. Rubinstein opens a series of essays to a new area by sketching a background and history of the place, and his references are almost always good basic works which give him a meaningful perspective against which to view his experiences and

permit him to better appreciate what he sees and what he feels. The introduction out of the way, he proceeds to present the thoughtful expressions of an experienced and learned traveler. A general impression does not suffice for Mr. Rubinstein. He dwells upon the colors, sounds and smells of the places that he visits, giving a clear picture of place as well as a graphic description of events. The hand of the short story writer is quite evident. Skillfully he weaves little vignettes, reports dialogues, sketches characters, to enliven the account of his travels.

But what is of great interest to us is that Mr. Rubinstein always reacts not only as a cultured and learned traveler, but as a deeply sentient Jew. No matter what paths he travels—the more trodden ones of European countries: Spain, Portugal, Italy; the less well-trodden, but well-known ones, such as Brazil or Argentina; the more exotic and less oft-visited ones of Taiwan and Singapore—he is always drawn to delve into the spirit of the place, to uncover some aspect of its effect on Jewish life and history. Wherever he goes he seeks out the Jewish inhabitants, visits Jewish synagogues, enters school buildings, talks to natives about the life of its Jewish inhabitants in the past and present. In so doing he permits us to share with him deeply felt, often poignantly moving experiences. For example, he reproduces for us a letter which he came across during a visit to Argentina, written by a son of one of the original colonists settled there by Baron de Hirsch:

As you know, I am the only colonist left, I and the synagogue in our colony. As a result of the heavy regular rains which have washed out the roads, I was forced to move to a different home for the winter. However, with the help of G-d, this summer I will return to the colony to my beloved home and once again be with my synagogue.

For the holiday of Shavout, we went to the colony and prayed as usual, my beloved Esther and I, in that synagogue, and with the help of G-d for the coming high holy holidays, as in the past years, we will have a minyon and pray there.

This historic synagogue must not be permitted to be lost and destroyed, as has happened to all

of the small synagogues which were built in the other colonies and of which no memory remains. Only some 20 out of the 300 original colonists remain, scattered and isolated in various communities, and they, too, one by one leave and disappear. Most of the colonists still continue to maintain their homesteads but usually they have to employ others to do the work. I am fortunate that I have a son who is a true heir to me. He carries on the homestead. But as I have indicated, what will be with the synagogue when I am no longer able to maintain it . . . after all I am only flesh and blood . . . and the end can be foretold.

It is this kind of comment, which gives us a sharp and vivid understanding of what is happening to Jewish communities, which makes Mr. Rubinstein's writing so significant.

Since Mr. Rubinstein has devoted all of his years to education, it is not surprising that his book is filled with comments and insights concerning educational institutions and practices in the lands he visited. His reaction to the disciplined, silent, Japanese students he met on a school excursion, his visit to the Jewish school in Panama City, a review of the educational activities in the North African countries, suggest the range of his observations. Again, Mr. Rubinstein stops to comment, particularly on the education of Jewish children, and his educator's eye and ear once again permit him to share with us deep insights, of which the following is an example: Listening to a discussion of the poem by Bialik "Seer Flee" in a high school class in Argentina, Mr. Rubinstein concludes: "it became apparent that the teacher who was a native of Argentina could not fully grasp the significance of the poet's scolding nor the background of his generation. On the other hand, the students showed amazing mastery of the language of the prophet Amos as the discussion revolved about the prophet and his prophecies."

In addition to the facts which he gives us about Jews in various parts of the world, and keen insights into and understanding of Jewish life, Mr. Rubinstein writes in a flowing and captivating Hebrew style. Sim-

ple, direct and clear, his style makes the work not only a source of information but of pleasure. It is occasionally disconcerting that, except for a periodic internal reference, the dates during which the various visits took place are not given. The inclusion of this information would have made it possible to draw even more significant conclusions about the incidents and impressions reported, but this is a minor reservation of an otherwise highly enjoyable and highly readable contribution to Hebrew letters in the United States.

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WORLD OF THE SHTETL

OF A WORLD THAT IS NO MORE:
A TENDER MEMOIR, by I. J. Singer. New York, Vanguard Press, Inc., 253 pp., \$6.95.

I. J. Singer's *Of A World That Is No More* is a marvelous work; many of Singer's books were—but this one is different from all the rest. It is a memoir of Singer's growing up in Leoncin—a very small backwoods Polish *shtetl*—and the life it depicts is at once beautiful and disturbing.

Singer was born in Bilgoraj, Poland, in 1893, the second of four children. When he was two the family moved to Leoncin. His father, a rabbi, was a dreamer who dwelled only partially in this world. A vastly impractical man, he never managed to learn Russian, an official requirement for rabbis, and so had to hold his post illegally, at a considerable monetary loss. He always believed that somehow God would provide. He calculated the coming of the Messiah from the sacred books and informed the townspeople of the imminent arrival; he planned his life accordingly and was bitterly disappointed at the "error" in his arithmetic. He never lost his faith, although he could lose money at the drop of a hat; it had a habit of slipping through his fingers. Unscrupulous strangers, and even friends, took advantage of him; in fact, often robbed him blind. The rabbi, convinced that the Lord knew all his thoughts and heard his every word, rarely took these mis-

fortunes to heart. His objective was to ultimately arrive in the Garden of Eden unsullied.

His wife was something else again. Equally devout, she was the family adult. Tough-minded, realistic, practical—and a rotten cook to boot—she proved the direct opposite of her ne'er-do-well husband. Had the roles been reversed, the Singer family would surely have been spared much of its poverty and the endless embarrassment that went with it. Being a woman, however, the *Rebbetzin* could only wring her hands in anxiety and humbly advise.

This was the household in which young Joshua grew to adulthood. His mismatched parents were united, at least, in one respect: their piety; one from the vantage point of a warmhearted mystic, the other a hard-bitten intellectual. They each knew a hundred and one ways in which a body might sin, and were constantly on guard against it. Joshua's childhood was a continuous struggle against instinct. All those activities that we would deem natural to youth were viewed with horror by both these doting and well-meaning parents. Playing games, yelling, wrestling, running were all taboo, to be avoided like the plague.

Singer writes:

"I'd glance through the *Book of Morals* and follow its fanatic rantings about vanity of vanities that consumed the world and I would grow deeply resentful. I longed for the outdoors—for the fields, the sun, the wind, the water, and the company of my friends. The world was no pit of iniquity totally riddled with the vanity of vanities but an incredibly beautiful place abounding in indescribable joys. Every tree, every grazing horse, every foal, haystack, stork, goose, and gosling called out to me and filled me with happiness and an appreciation of life. I waited for my parents to close their eyes, then fled like a thief from the prison of the Torah, the one of God and of Jewishness.

"I dashed out into the open, sun-drenched world that, in my eyes, no saint could besmirch. All the dark and ominous warnings served only to render it even more alluring and desirable."

This is the theme of Singer's book. And even in its most joyous,

humorous passages, it is never far below the surface.

At the age of three Joshua was brought to *heder* to begin his studies of the Torah. School hours were a hefty eight in the morning to eight at night. Being a *melamed* in such a school was a rock-bottom, low-paying job, and a succession of misfits, one worse than the next, held sway. Singer describes them minutely, and their antics read like great fun—but the reality for a student was misery.

The memoir is beautiful for its depiction of childhood and the Jewish family in its warmth and cohesiveness. It is disturbing—vastly so—for the life-denying principles that underlied the lives of its most pious characters and haunted the rest. No wonder Joshua sought to escape its constraints at all costs. Ultimately, of course—and the memoir does not take us the full distance—Singer broke his father's heart by becoming a Yiddish writer—the most secular of secular writers, no less.

In Yiddish *Of A World That Is No More* glimmers with an idiomatic richness; the *shtetl* shimmers before our eyes, pulses with life. The name Singer is often associated with this sort of linguistic finesse, but usually it is the younger Singer—Bashevis—being referred to. But I. J., in recreating these scenes from yesterday, surpassed himself. There is an intimacy, warmth, personal involvement here that is often lacking in his more objective novels and short stories. The author was not permitted to finish this work, which might very well have been his crowning achievement. He died of a heart attack at the age of fifty. But he has left us 253 pages of word-magic.

A glance at some of the chapter headings suggests what lies in store for the curious reader:

I fall in love with a married woman twice my age.

A melamed gets the notion that he's an angel of Purim and flies out the window.

The fear of "Green Thursday," when the converts carried a statue of Jesus at the head of the Catholic procession.

It is all there, the *shtetl* at its loving and infuriating best, its characters sketched by a master craftsman, its anecdotes now a part of world literature.

Joseph Singer, the author's son, is

responsible for the English translation. It is a first-rate job and a work of art in its own right. Some of the original's simplicity is passed over, the tone is somewhat elevated, a bit more refined, than in the Yiddish. But the approach works splendidly. And the experience of *Of A World That Is No More* is transmitted in full flavor to the English reader.

ISIDORE HAIBLUM

The Arts in Israel

(Continued from page 17)

whether translated into translucent goblets, opaque tumblers or vases with a patina finish, Israel glass has reached a high competitive standard both in form and finish. One of the 30 gold medal winners of more than 3,000 participants at the International Handicrafts Fair in Munich several years ago, were the Neker Brothers of Jerusalem. The firm has an international reputation for handblown bottles, jugs and vases in splendid colors. Bortal glass in interesting shapes and colors and the decorative glass of Nehemia Meyers are also well known abroad.

Another medium that is having its revival in Israel is that of tapestry wall hangings. The works of talented batik artists are popular decorations in the Israel home and much sought after gifts by tourists visiting here. Unlike paintings and relatively inexpensive, batiks on silk or cotton blend with most everything in a room and are easy to roll up.

Batik material for fashion garments, and textile printing on silk screen and by hand for lamp shades and other decorations are emerging as a new art form.

As one walks through Israeli streets in the large cities, the shop windows aglow with various art objects, or when visiting the artists' quarters and galleries, one must become aware of the renaissance of Israeli art and the exuberance and creativity of Israeli artists.

Diana Lerner is an Israeli newspaper-woman.

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Declaration of Principles of the Labor Zionist Alliance

(Continued from page 2)

The Labor Zionist Alliance will fight for the rights of the Jewish people wherever they are threatened. It will support the battle of our brethren in the Soviet Union, as it will the struggle of all other Jews, to live a free and fully Jewish life.

and Canada to battle for a democratic society, free of exploitation and discrimination, based on justice and the worth and dignity of the individual.

Within the Alliance

The Labor Zionist Alliance will provide for all of its members intensive Jewish cultural and educational activities, an atmosphere of personal friendship, mutual assistance and fraternal benefits, and opportunities for involvement in Jewish and general community affairs.

The World at Large

The Labor Zionist Alliance is committed to the struggle to eradicate racial and national enmity, poverty, suffering and backwardness for all mankind. It will join with liberal forces in the United States

Inside Canada

THE HAMAN OF CANADA

by SHULAMIS YELIN



Shulamis Yelin

Jews, Baruch Hashem, live well in Canada. They enjoy all the bounties of the Founding Nations, the English and the French. As a matter of fact, they arrived together with the English conquerors,—although there is some note of their having arrived as traders before the English. But the Jew, Aaron Hart, who arrived with Lieut. General Amherst to receive the keys to the City of Montreal in 1760 from the French, settled in Three Rivers, and did so much for his fellow Canadians that they named him "The Pope of Canada." His son, Ezekiel Hart, was the instrument which led to the *Jews Magna Carta* (1832), which gave equal civil and political rights to Jews in Canada 25 years before those rights were given to Jews in England. And among the numerous other firsts for Canadian Jews, Henry Joseph, virtually founded the Canadian Merchant Marine in 1801.

Today, as already stated, Jews live well in Canada. The Canadian Jewish Congress speaks for Canadian Jewry to the world and to the rulers of our land and pleads for human rights wherever they are in jeopardy. Jews have prospered economically, multiplied in population, entered into all fields of endeavor, and enjoy all privileges. As example, it was a Jew, Levy Becker, who was selected by his confreres in the Interfaith Council during the Canadian Centenary Year to greet Queen Elizabeth on Parliament Hill, in the name of all the faiths abiding in Canada today.

Which is all to the good, and may it be ever so. But it was *not* ever so.

The Purim season brings to mind that among other iniquities which we have outlived as a people is the iniquity of the Canadian Haman. But Jews must never suffer loss of memory: for memory not only helps to tide us over bad times, but is often a guide for the future.

Among the pages of Canadian Jewish

history, one finds at the turn of the century the names of two Catholics, one Carroll Ryan, the beloved editor of the first Canadian Jewish press in Canada, *The Jewish Times*, and the other L. G. Robillard, the "Haman of Canada."

In 1901, Robillard, "a rare financial and journalistic genius," (all quotes are from the *Jewish Times* editorials by Carroll Ryan) an ostensible devotee of the Church and associate of two Montreal magazines, *Pionnier* and *Monde Illustré*, came up with a scheme to enrich the public. Under the name of *Union Franco-Canadienne*, of whose business funds he, Robillard, was president and manager, he offered the subscriber a life annuity of \$200.00 at the end of twenty years. All the subscriber had to pay was a total sum of \$93.00. The rest was gravy.

The bait was great. Robillard received Church backing and the fact was widely advertised. Thousands of people hastened to share in the scheme which promised security from future misfortune.

But as in the days of Joseph and his Pharaoh, a Jewish interpreter arose. This was the Alsatian-Jewish editor of the Montreal dailies, *La Presse* and *Débats*. Heilbronner questioned the viability of this scheme and had the deal examined by actuarial and financial standards.

When it appeared an obvious fraud, Heilbronner called upon Robillard to explain his system. Instead, Robillard replied in the *Pionnier* with signed articles, lashing out not only at Heilbronner, but at Jews in general with a volley of choice epithets, of which "vile Jew" was only one.

Such a situation could not be allowed to pass unnoticed. Jews, who knew the price of civil and political rights, felt secure enough to denounce the right of anyone to slander them as a people or to hold up Judaism to public scorn.

Robillard was arrested on charges of criminal libel but was allowed out on bail. In time, pleading ill health, he fled the country, and never returned. But in its time this was a major victory for a religious minority, and Jews at that, in

a province where the Catholic Church held sway.

In his editorials of the time, which came out just before Purim of that year, Carroll Ryan, always a fighter for freedom, writes,

Anti-semitism and rascality usually go together. In fact, it is only necessary to point out a man who makes public profession of being a Jew hater, to find a scoundrel. Austria, Germany, France have furnished many examples, and now Canada adds another to this international Gallery of Rogues.

And in the Purim issue of that year, Ryan exults:

Canadian Jews will celebrate the Feast of Purim this year with more than usual satisfaction and rejoicing. We have had our Haman, who, like his prototype of old, sought to ruin the children of Israel and met with a similar fate. . . .

Thus it has been shown in Canada, as many times in the long history of our people, (that many Hamans) have sought the destruction of Israel, only to demonstrate . . . the futility of their hatred, and to bring wrath and ruin upon themselves.

He gives thanks for "Divine favor and protection," and rejoices that now Robillard is a fugitive from justice, his journal, the *Pionnier* is dead, all his former friends have abandoned him, and his name is never mentioned but with execration and malediction.

And he concludes with an appreciation of the Jewish condition in Canada, adding

That Canadian Jews have been given another reason for rejoicing in the festival.

Chag Purim, haverot! And may Jews continue not only to be alert to their own freedom wherever they may be, but may they be a force for justice for all throughout time.

Shulamis Yelin, lecturer and book reviewer, is the recipient of the La Med Prize for creative research, has taught English at the Hebrew University and presented papers on Canadian Jewish history at Canadian and American Jewish historical societies.