

fails to redress the imbalance, but rather helps the men to perpetuate it. Her lofty position is pointed out to pacify other women. Mrs. Meir's central position in the country's leadership, including her past cabinet posts, did not represent the female sector. If she achieved any position, it was not because she is a woman, but despite being one!

Dr. Weiss also notes that for years there has been no woman secretary of the Histadrut (since Mrs. Meir held her post), and no woman in the Histadrut's Central Committee. There are no women labor council secretaries, hardly any ambassadors (except for Mrs. Esther Herlitz, former Israel ambassador to Denmark) and there are only seven women in the Knesset.

Abba Eban, Minister for Foreign Affairs, took part in the closing ceremony of a six-week course for Latin American Youth Leaders. The course was the ninth of its kind and fourth for participants from Latin America. Forty-two youth leaders, amongst them the son of the Foreign Minister of Venezuela, a deputy-minister in the Bolivian President's Bureau, a number of army officers and youth instructors from Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and the Do-

minican Republic, took part in this year's course.

West bank leaders have finally decided, in spite of the opposition from the Jordanian Government, to set up a university of their own in territory administered by Israel since 1967. The campus of the West Bank will, in all probability, be built in Ramallah, near Jerusalem, and is expected to open its doors in the academic year 1974-1975.

The West Bank founding council, which is about to nominate a Board of Governors, hopes to win the blessing of Jordan or any other Arab state for the project. "But if such help is not forthcoming," said Dr. Salim Nashef, Dean of the Tul-karem Agricultural College and member of the university's founding council, "we can confidentially look to other quarters for funds and endowments that will enable us to construct, equip and maintain the campus."

After the drama of Bangkok from which the members of the Israeli embassy staff were lucky to escape unscathed, I met a lovely Thai girl at the Weizmann Institute. She is Miss Prakong Chobsiang who is studying for her Ph.D. at the Weizmann's Feinberg Graduate School. At 28, she came here three months

ago and hopes to stay for three-and-a-half years. In her lovely and careful Hebrew which she learned at the Feinberg School's ulpan, she told me how worried she had been when the news of the terrorist attack on the Israeli Embassy came from Bangkok. But she is happy that it all ended well. "Sof tov-hakol tov," she added with a big smile, meaning "All's well that ends well."

It is good to know that we still have friends in the world! Mrs. Meir officially expressed her appreciation to the government of Thailand, as well as her hope that other governments would learn from the successful handling of this delicate situation.

General price control, in effect in Israel since the August 1971 devaluation of the pound, came to an end on January 1st. In an effort to head off a rash of wild prices, Commerce and Industry Minister Bar-Lev signed an order on December 31st fixing maximum prices on 125 basic commodities and services. They include bread, eggs, meat, oil, soups, frozen poultry, instant coffee, beer, tea, wines and spirits, fish, flour, rice and other foods.

The new order includes features designed to protect the consumer. Even in the case of non-controlled goods or services, the Minister reserves the right to take action against any manufacturer, vendor or supplier who raises prices beyond a reasonable limit. Prices in Israel have soared by 14% during 1972 in spite of government controlled prices.

One of the main avocations of Israelis is organizing committees to do research on various subjects. Somehow we Israelis feel much better if we "get the figures right" no matter what the situation is. An amusing bit of information which was thought necessary to compile reads as follows: "Noisy discotheques are one cause of hearing defects among soldiers, an army research unit has discovered." (As I recall, when my son used to come home from a few days of "training" to keep up his fitness, I had to shout three times that the food was on the table only to see him look at me innocently and ask: Mother, did you say anything? Was he one of the victims?) This was learned by the Knesset Ecology Committee last

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# BOOK

reviews

## THEIR TROUBLED HISTORY

IN THE REIGN OF PEACE, by Hugh Nissenson. New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 158 pp., \$5.95.

Hugh Nissenson's *In the Reign of Peace* is a small, nifty volume comprising eight short stories. In a very lean, often lyrical, highly polished prose, author Nissenson examines Jews and their troubled history. Now Judaism is a word that ran out of simple definitions decades ago, consisting, as it does, of numerous tangled, often warring, strands. And Nissenson's forté is to take these dissimilar strands and fashion out of them a work of art, one that is, at once, ambivalent, hopeful, searching and despairing. Not unlike the human condition itself. So in *The Throne of Good* we visit Tel Aviv in the last days of the British Mandate. A sixteen-year-old boy has been smuggled into the country from a Cyprus detention camp by the Stern gang; the boy is ill and the narrator—a doctor named Spitzer—is summoned. This Spitzer, we soon learn, is a liberal, the certainties of the Stern gang foreign to him. Immediately, through his eyes, we confront a mosaic of Jewish history. Indeed, the very names that crop up in the tale are indicative of this, coming at us as they do from all angles of Jewish experience.

The boy, we are told, took the name *Zemsta* during the Vilna ghetto uprising. *Zemsta*? It is Polish for revenge. Our Stern gang member is *Rosenberg*, who meets our narrator on the corner of *Tchernichovsky* and *Gan Meir*. Yiddish and Hebrew are spoken by the actors in this drama; English is brought in by the British. "The bloody Yid," one of them says when denied whiskey at a Jewish café. We hear of Germans, Treblinka and the resistance fighter Itzik Beinisch. The boy

*Zemsta*, lying on his sick bed in a cellar of a small abandoned house on Hebron Street, tells of his flight from the Nazis through the Vilna sewers—his home for eleven months—and recites a partisan song in Yiddish:

"*Sligt ergetz fartayet  
Der feint vee a chayeh  
Der mauser, er vacht in mine  
hant. . .*"

Dr. Spitzer, discovering the boy's mission as a political assassin, betrays his hide-out to the Haganah, who hope to "pick him up and put him on ice for a while, on a kibbutz in the Galilee." But the boy escapes. No doubt, to carry out his terrible purpose. The narrator thinks:

"*'He's loose . . .'  
Is it conceivable that any good  
can come of it?'*"

Is it indeed? Nissenson, weaving his various Jewish strands, has created an emotive fabric that poses this question and—obliquely—answers it, yes and no, a familiar Jewish answer. For what the boy wishes to do is, yes, unthinkable; yet given the context of his background, and the situation in which he now finds himself, it is equally unthinkable that he *not* turn assassin. Paradox, ambiguity, ambivalence; the tragic stuff of life itself; the key to Nissenson's art. And a unique art it is. Nissenson tries to touch all the bases. We go to the Lower East Side—a cold-water flat on Ludlow Street—of 1912 and glimpse the author's universe through the eyes of a child. In modern-day Jerusalem, a perhaps not-so-deranged hassid, in *The Crazy Old Man*, failing to leap an unbridgeable generation gap, astonishingly performs a criminal, yet symbolically redemptory, act.

Nissenson's approach, his worldview, is his own. His subject matter is not. It is the well-known repertoire of Yiddish and Hebrew literature. In American author Nissenson's hands, it emerges like an old friend decked out in a strange new costume. How well will it really wear? Nissenson's prose must walk an artful tightrope (of an almost Hemingwayesque leanness), always on the lookout for a stray American idiom that may trip the reader, send him toppling out of a Jewish tale's specific context. Hugh Nissenson deserves credit for undertaking so

arduous and tricky a course, one that will assuredly not be to everyone's liking. But for my money, his technique holds up well enough and often enough to deem his journey through the Jewish landscape a decided plus.

ISIDORE HAIBLUM

JEWES IN REMOTE CORNERS OF THE WORLD, by Ida Cowen. New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 328 pp., \$7.95.

Ida Cowen is heralded as "the woman Benjamin of Tudela" because of her travels to remote Jewish communities around the world. After a sparklingly eventful career as a pedagogue, lecturer and writer, Ida Cowen has finally written an engrossing account of her far-ranging experiences in isolated Jewish settlements in distant corners of the globe. *Jews in Remote Corners of the World* is a fascinating and informative retelling of the status of Jewry in the more obscure areas of the Far East and Middle East. The book is not esoteric in its general approach, though the author has perhaps overstressed the historical aspects of some of the family profiles she sketches.

The volume is nicely illustrated with pictures of unique centers of Jewish striving and endeavor. The author describes the geographical and spiritual underpinnings of nine Jewish settlements—the exotic islands of Tahiti and the Fijis, Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific, the stirring outposts found in India and Japan, and the Jewish cultural lives of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. Readers will learn about the heroic escapades of myriad Jews who weathered the most primitive conditions to gain a foothold in these alien and often backward areas. They will also acquire a feeling of admiration for fellow Jews who continue to hold aloft the banner of a cherished heritage while residing in a religious-social context antithetical to the basic values and traditions of Judaism.

Ida Cowen makes her story stimulating and real by focusing her gaze on personalities who are the symbol of the spirit and motivation of a particular Jewish group. In the chapter on Tahiti, for example, she devotes a large portion to an analysis of the achievements of Alex-