

Mixed Blessings

By Isidore Haiblum

ceivable stumbling-block in the pathway of Jewish aspirations for a Jewish National Home. But he gives well-deserved praise to non-Jews, such as General Allenby, Colonel Patterson, Orde Wingate and others. He also quotes Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, who in a letter to Prime Minister Lloyd George, dated March 25th, 1919, supported the Jewish cause from the standpoint of British interests. "The Jews," he wrote, "have, moreover, proved their fighting qualities since the Roman occupation of Jerusalem. The Arab is a poor fighter, though adept at looting, sabotage, and murder." Events have deplorably proved the correctness of this judgment, but the Israelis continue to face the consequences of this lawless and inhuman behavior by the guerrillas of today and their advocates.

Elias Gilner has placed this generation, together with succeeding generations, in his debt, by chronicling with loving care and devotion the annals of the positive and constructive forces in 20th century Zionism. He has told us, at first hand, of the men of modesty who placed service to Jewry above all other considerations. They gave no attention to personal material advancement, but thought only of service to their people and its future. *War & Hope* should be read by every lover of the Jewish cause and every advocate, non-Jew and Jew alike, of the State of Israel. Non-Jews, reading Gilner's book, will be given a decisive insight into the nature of multitudes of Jews in our era, and an accurate understanding of the basic motivations and impulses of the Zionist movement—the movement that figures in virtually every broadcast and telecast of our day. On March 12, 1920 Jabotinsky wrote to Weizmann that he would "try once more to convince you that everything in the Land of Israel revolves around one problem—that of a military contingent." Fifty years have passed, and the words of Jabotinsky, and the deeds of the men who labored and fought under his command, have been proved correct. We are grateful to Elias Gilner for having reminded us of the true builders and protectors of the Commonwealth which the prophet himself did not live to behold, but which we, his heirs, are privileged to see and know at first hand. □

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YIDDISH LITERATURE: ITS SCOPE AND MAJOR WRITERS. By CHARLES A. MADISON. Frederick Unger. 540 pp. \$10.

THE MATURING OF YIDDISH LITERATURE. By SOL LIPTZIN. Jonathan David. 282 pp. \$6.95.

YIDDISH literature is about us.

It can be sad and poignant and sidesplittingly funny and profound. It can be heart-breakingly tragic. It can be first-rate, second-rate and even worse. It can soar and it can plummet. It can do all the things expected of a modern literature and then some. And in the end it is about us. Whether we speak the language or not, whether we desire this bond or not, it is there and it is inescapable. For to be born a Jew in our time is to be touched by this spirit: the heritage of a thousand years of Ashkenazi Jewry; to stem from the East European milieu—even if one or two generations removed—is to grow out of the culture. Our antecedents are plainly there and that is one reason this literature merits our attention. Another is that it is beautiful. Either one would be enough.

Two new books propose to tell its story: Charles A. Madison's *"Yiddish Literature: Its Scope and Major Writers"* and Sol Liptzin's *The Maturing of Yiddish Literature*, but neither is a total success; both are marred by errors of commission and omission. All that can be done in this space is to offer some brief notations.

About Isaac Bashevis Singer, Madison writes: "In 1961 Singer published another volume of stories, *The Spinoza of Market Street*, both in Yiddish and in English, a procedure that became standard." The Yiddish volume that Madison refers to was published in 1963, not 1961, is called *Gimpel Tam un andere dertsalungen* (Gimpel the Fool and other stories) and contains 24 short stories that are scattered throughout four English collections. As for "standard procedures" only five Singer books have appeared between hard covers in Yiddish. Neither *Shadows on the Hudson* (1957), nor a *Ship to America* (1968)—two major Singer novels that have (so far) seen print only in Yiddish in *Der Forverts*—are even mentioned.

Professor Liptzin also fails to mention Singer's *Shadows on the Hudson*

and *Ship to America*. *The Manor* is listed only in the bibliography, and *The Estate* is not listed at all. Both volumes were serialized as *Der Hoyf in Der Forverts* as early as 1953.

Critical judgments? Liptzin knocks I. B. Singer for "a distorted demonic view" of Jewish life. Madison blasts Singer's *Satan in Goray* for "... cynicism (that is) all the more devastating because it is barbed with the sharp-edged refinement of fictional art." Since Singer is readily available in English the reader can make up his own mind. He will have scant opportunity to do so with most other Yiddish writers. Few of the authorities representing different viewpoints are cited.

Many of the figures (e.g., Allquit, Lutzky, Kulbak, Goichberg, Weinreich) discussed in these books are unknown to English readers. Unfortunately, the Madison-Liptzin treatment simply fails to do them full justice. The presentation of a good many others is equally open to question. Both authors, it seems, have relied too often on memory, have not bothered to check (or recheck) their sources, haven't always kept up with the field. And what is perhaps even worse, both fall short in conveying the sweep, spirit and beauty of Yiddish literature: endless, copious summaries of works turn out to be all but unreadable.

And yet with all their faults, one must be happy that these books were produced. They are a starting point, and bring together a great deal that was previously unavailable in English. Liptzin's is the second volume (covering 1914 to 1939) of a projected trilogy emphasizing literary movements. Madison deals largely with major figures (devoting 14 of 19 chapters to individuals). Aside from A. A. Roback's outdated and sketchy *The Story of Yiddish Literature* (1935), this is all we have in English (and for that matter, rather surprisingly, no comprehensive history of modern Yiddish literature has appeared—as yet—in Yiddish, either).

To get an idea of what it's all about, however, Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg are probably best. Their "Treasures" of Yiddish stories and poetry not only place the Yiddish word in the context of world literature, but supply us with examples—in fine translations—of the literature. □