



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Five tests of a good book, 1952.

807  
FIVE TESTS OF A GOOD BOOK

December 7, 1952

This month is known as Jewish Book Month. The purpose of this special month, set aside for the Jewish book, is of course to encourage the reading of Jewish books, the acquisition of them, the encouragement of building in each Jewish home a Jewish book shelf. And that, of course, is a very commendable purpose. To come to know the Jewish people you must read Jewish books because the life and the spirit and the history of our people are recorded in books. That is, of course, true of most every people, but it is perhaps truer of the Jewish people than of any other people. The genius of our people poured itself into no form of art as much as in writing. Our people attained high eminence in other artistic fields - art, music - but preeminently its achievements were in the field of literature. It is through books that our people most influenced the civilization of the world.

The very invention of the alphabet is now credited to the ancient Hebrews. Our religion was the first to be channeled through and conveyed to the world through a book, the Sefer Torah - the book of instruction, law. And accordingly, the founder of Islam called us "The People of the Book". The early teachers of our people, following the first destruction, were known as the Sophrim, the book men, the scribes. Even the great teachers who preceded them, the prophets, made provision - careful provision - that their preachments and their prophecies would be preserved and transmitted in written scrolls. Jeremiah had his secretary, his scribe, Baruch, whom he instructed to put his prophecies upon a book, upon a scroll, and when that scroll was burnt at the order of King Jehoakim, Jeremiah instructed his scribe to write a fresh scroll.

Isaiah was commanded by the Lord: "Take thou a great tablet and write upon it in common script."

The Jewish people has a continuous literary history of over 3,000 years, the longest in the history of mankind. More than 1,000 years before the common era, Jews were writing history and poetry and law in the Hebrew language, today, more than 3,000 years



later, they are still writing impressive literature in Hebrew, both in Israel and outside of Israel. And in between these years our people wrote not only in the Hebrew language, but wrote important and world-influencing books in other languages. They wrote great books in Greek - Philo, for example, and Josephus; they wrote tremendously important books in Arabic - ibn Gabirol and Halevi and Maimonides; Spinoza wrote in Latin; and Jews have written important things in nearly every Western European language. The whole science of Judaism in its early days was written in German. Books - that's how our people expressed itself.

Our heroes were men not of the sword but of the pen. The Rabbis say that the sword and the pen came down from heaven wrapped in one package. The Jews certainly did not choose the sword. It is with the pen that our valiant sons and daughters fought the great battles of human liberation. And our religion, Judaism, drew its sustenance from scholars and books and relied on them for survival, not upon philanthropy.

To revere books, to buy books, to treat them tenderly and honorably, to look after their care and their proper binding, not to deface a book - those were instructions given by the book men of our people to us.

There is an interesting testament which was left by Judah ibn Tibbon of the 12th century who lived in Spain. He is known as "the father of the translators" because it was he, Judah ibn Tibbon, who translated the great works of Gabirol and Halevi and Sadia into Hebrew. He wrote a testament for his son, Samuel, who himself became a very important translator. Judah ibn Tibbon was a man of high culture and was an enthusiastic collector of books, and in his testament to his son he wrote the following:

My son, make thy books thy companions. Let thy cases and shelves be thy pleasure grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise; gather their fruit; pluck their roses; take their spices and their myrrh. If they soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. Then will thy desire renew itself and thy soul be filled with delight.



Never refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to purchase books for himself, but only act thus to those who can be trusted to return the volumes.

Take particular care of thy books. Cover the bookcases with rugs of fine quality and preserve them from damp, mice, from all manner of injury, for thy books are thy good treasure. If thou lendest a volume, make a memorandum before it leaves thy house, and when it is returned, draw thy pen over the entry, and every Passover and Tabernacles call in all books out on loan.

Jews were encouraged to acquire books, if they had intention, of course, to read them. The mere acquisition of books was discouraged. They spoke of a man who just buys books to put them on the shelf as "a donkey carrying books". Jews were encouraged to write books if they had anything to say and they knew how to say it. A man who writes a book and leaves a book after him when he is gone, the Rabbis spoke of him as one who "speaks from the grave". But if a man did not have anything to say and did not know how to say it, our teachers discouraged them from writing books. And the Book of Ecclesiastes, you will recall, gives us the famous words: "And above all, be admonished, my son, of making many books there is no end."

This distrust of writing many unnecessary books and of reading many unhelpful books, our people shared with other cultured peoples, of course. The great Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who was himself a famous writer, urged men to free themselves from the thirst for books. Just a feverish thirst for books is not good. And a modern writer, the noted French author, Ernest Dimnet, writes in his interesting little volume, The Art of Thinking,

When people do read, what do they read? Many pretend to read the Bible, but of how few is it true? Today printing has gone mad and the world is in danger of being submerged by the ocean of books. Three or four in a thousand read poets. They regard it with the same surprise, not unmixed with mistrust, with which the poets themselves are considered. What is produced by the gross, what is constantly forced on our attention, trumpeted by publicity and magnified by criticism, is fiction. Novels fill the book shops and suffocate our book shelves. What people read in the country where there is a little time to read are novels; what people pretend to read or skim through in town, when there never is any time, are novels. And the novels are not those great works of fiction since the 16th century have added to our knowledge of mankind, or even their modern successors of such fame that we cannot ignore



them. They are, as the readers know they are, pure and simple trash, the very titles of which will be forgotten in a week.

Now, what shall we select to read out of the mass of available literature? We must first answer to ourselves the question, what do we want our reading to do for us? What need is our reading to satisfy? What do we want out of a book? Do we want a book to be soporific, to help us to fall asleep after a tired day? Then almost any book, I assume, a magazine or a newspaper or a telephone directory would do the trick. That's reading without retention, without profit, without inspiration. Do you want a vicarious, sensual thrill, something that will tickle our prurience - well, there is a veritable stream of such murky books that are today available, some in very convenient pocket editions with lurid covers, calculated to attract the adolescent moron, books which I see our government is beginning to investigate.

But I assume that we do not include these books in the category of good books, books to cherish and to be grateful for and to keep for life as friendly companions. Nor, I believe, are we among those, or should be among those, who are intimidated into reading the "best sellers" just because everybody else is doing it, just because we do not wish to be embarrassed and to look blank when someone asks us, have we read this exciting new best seller. Best sellers, my dear friends, are as a rule dead rubbish in 10 or 15 years. Recently I saw a list of the 20 best sellers a few decades ago. I could hardly recognize the title or the author of more than 2 or 3 of them. Nor, I dare say, would you.

The most unintelligent reader is he who reads only best sellers. Such people are the victims of advertising. In literature the test of a good book is not whether it is old or new. This is a valid test for scientific tests. Here you must look for the most up-to-date, for scientific knowledge, whether in the field of the exact sciences or in history or the social sciences, is cumulative and we want the latest findings and discoveries. This, of course, is not the case in literature or in art or in music. The



latest is by no means the best or the truest, and the most recent may be only the most ephemeral and the least worth while. One should not, of course, exclude the new for everything that is old was once new, but one should, I believe, be partial to book which have stood the test of time, which successive generations of men of varying tastes and cultures and climes have found satisfying and desirable. The mortality rate among books is appalling. If, therefore, a book has survived a century or a millenium, it is certainly not a matter of accident. There is immortality in that book.

And furthermore, we should remember that any book, even if it is two or three thousand years old, is a new book if you haven't read it. It was only this year that I had the opportunity to read the History of Herodotus. I have read selections of it from time to time in my school days, but never had the opportunity to read through it. The history of the Graeco-Persian Wars of the 5th century before the common era, and I found that book far more exciting and rewarding - as it is undoubtedly far more enduring - than Caine Mutiny or Tallulah Bankhead's Tallulah.

What do we want out of a book - that is not purely a text book? What is the test of a good book? Well, I'll give you my judgment in the matter. First of all, a good book should add something to us, something that no one can take away from us. A good book does not end with the reading of it. Something remains of intellectual or spiritual or esthetic value, something which will help us to be what Francis Bacon called a "full man", a mature human being. I am not thinking so much in terms of information; I am thinking rather in terms of formation, something which will advance the culture of my soul, something that will augment me. "There are books which make us more wise even when they do not make us more learned."

I want a book to give me a certain dilation of the spirit, a stretch of the imagination, a view of new horizons. I want a book to feed me, to give me manna. Now, manna, according to the saying of our Rabbis, tasted differently to different people. That is quite all right. Not all people like the same food, but all people must have food. A book that is not food, that does not nourish, upbuild, develop, may be a drug,



may be hashish, may even have an esthetic fascination because of its cold and sterile perfection of style and form. It is not a "good" book.

And second, in my judgment, a good book should take something away from us - some ignorance, some fear, some prejudice, some selfishness, some dimness of the soul. A good book should leave us with a wider sympathy and tolerance for all those about us, for the strong and the weak, for the saint and the sinner alike, and the stranger that is within or without our gates. A good book of fiction or poetry or essays or history or biography should open our eyes to see with a new clarivoyance and to comprehend with warmer insight whatever nature and life puts before us.

A good makes us look at life until what has been commonplace all along becomes magically strange and thereafter and forever companionable and more meaningful and closer. And in the third place a good book should interpret and explain what we ourselves, unaided perhaps, find difficult to understand or appreciate. "Life is short but art is long," is the famous proverb. A great artist can irradiate with the eternal light of his art our brief days. He can shed light into the dark corners of human personality and human relationships. He can help us to understand ourselves and our own problems by unfolding for us and illuminating for us the life and the problems of others, how they stood up to the shocks of life, how they took defeat or failed to take it, what trials and tribulations and temptations, how they grew or failed to grow through their experiences.

In a good book something of ourselves will always appear, something of our own confusion or weakness or groping, for there is something of the universally human in every good book, the universality of character and behavior. A good book will sometimes awaken within us thought which we feared to acknowledge to ourselves, and reach down deep to the very springs of our beings.



There is a famous proverb that the "advice which friends dare not give to a King a book will give him".

A good book is an honest book. The great essayist, Montaigne, introduced his famous collection of essays with the saying: "Reader, thou hast here an honest book."

And in the next place, friends, a good book should set one not only thinking, but should challenge to action. As I read myself into a book, if it is a good book, I unconsciously recreate myself. I am startled into a new awareness and I want to do something about it. It girds me with new strength and resolution. Now, all this does not always resolve itself in action, but sometimes it does, awaredly or more often, quite unconsciously. To a degree a man is remade and redirected and stimulated into conduct by a great and good book.

Finally, dear friends, a good book should give us pleasure, should increase our enjoyment of life. A good book should be a beautiful and pleasurable experience. It should be well written. One should never read a book that bores ones. We owe nothing to a bore but absent treatment.

You might recall the story of a man who came to his physician and said, "Doctor, I am sick." And the doctor asked him, "What is your trouble?" And he said, "Doctor, I talk to myself." And he said, "That's a commonplace thing. That's not a disease." And the man said, "But you don't know what a terrible bore I am."

A heavy tome written in pedestrian style, without form, without lift, without imagination - is a book to be avoided. A good book should evoke not only our reverence, but our eagerness and our joy. Good and great books have survived "the tooth and razor of oblivion", to use Shakespeare's phrase because they delighted generations of men who found deepest satisfactions in reading them. They loved them; they were delighted with them.



Just as in the case of religion - religion survived not out of fear or because of superstitions, but because people loved God and loved his Torah, his law.

"Unless thy Torah was my delight,  
I would have been lost in the poverty, the penury, the emptiness of my life." That is what gave joy to the man of faith, delight. And great books are being preserved by and large, and good books, because they delighteth the tired hearts of men and gave them a sense of joy in the midst of sorrow, gave them solace and grief, gave them inspiration and discouragement, gave them new horizons when the world was imprisoning their spirits and their minds.

Well, there may be other tests of a good book - I am sure that I have not exhausted the subject. To me, at least, that's what a good book should do. Those are the books that one should reach for because life is short. We ought not to waste our time, the little time that we have for reading, upon worthless things, upon books which give us nothing, which take nothing from us, which do not feed us, which do not inspire us and which do not really give us the lasting, the finest satisfactions in life.

There are such books among Jewish books and I would urge you to acquire some such books. Add them to your library. Read them. You will be grateful for the experience/



1) This is Jew. book worth - Purpose to avenue the reading of J. books -  
- to regain them - to build a library -

a commendable purpose - To come to know the J. people - you must  
read J. books - life, spirit & history of our people are recorded  
in books. - Truer & fuller than any other people.

The genius of our people found itself into no form of art  
as much as writing. - Attained high eminence in  
other <sup>as in the</sup> fields - art, music - but pre-eminently its achievement  
was those of literature.

It is these books that our people most in evidence the  
civilization of mankind.

The very invention of the alphabet is now credited to the  
Ancient Israelites.

Our religion was the first to be channeled and conveyed  
than a book - Deuteronomy 32:1-5 - "People, the Book"

The early teachers of our people were known as scribes  
- scribes - bookmen.

Even the prophets made provision that their pronouncements  
would be preserved and transmitted in written  
scrolls. Isaiah had its scrolls - Baruch

whom he instructed to put his prophecies Deuteronomy 32:1-5  
- and when burnt by King Jehoiakim - with a fresh

on -  
Isaiah was commanded by the Lord: Take thee a great  
tablet and wrote upon it in common script.



The J. people has a continuous library <sup>history</sup> of over 3000 yrs, the best (2)  
in the history of writing  
1000 yrs. before common era - the Jews were writing history, poetry  
and law in Hebrew - and to day - they are still writing  
and improving education in Hebrew - in Israel and  
elsewhere.

And in between those years - wrote in other languages  
great books Plato and Aristotle in Greek;  
Manuscripts are preserved in Arabic Spinoza in Latin.  
- Modern West Europ. languages = Science / Just - German Hebrew

2. Her heroes were the men not the money but the pen -  
who - Jews certainly did not chase money!  
<sup>wrapped</sup>  
It is with pen that our valiant sons daughter push  
the great battles of human liberation.

Jews drew its sustenance from scholarship books - not relied  
on them for survival - not philanthropy.

3. To reverse books - to buy books - to keep them honorably  
- look after them care and their binding - not to deface

(1) Judah the Tibbon - 12c. - Hebrew - Physician <sup>for the "translators"</sup> <sup>1133</sup> <sup>testament</sup>  
for his son (Samuel) - man, culture and anthropologist  
collector of books - (Jews p. 63)

② Jews were encouraged to acquire books - if they  
Spinoza - both had interest in reading them - 20000 books in 1700



(3) Encouraged to write books - if they had anything to say - <sup>an end -</sup>  
- and knew how to say it - "Speech from the grave"  
Other wise - they discouraged it. - And above all, he advised -  
- urged, very soon of making many books there is no end;

4/. This distrust of writing (many unnecessary books - and of  
reading many unhelpful books - the people should with  
other cultured people -

(1) An ancient writer - Emperor - <sup>Marcus Aurelius</sup> "Urged men to free themselves  
from the thirst for books"

(2) A modern writer (Ernest Dimnet) - "The Art of Thinking"

(~~Just p. 82~~) "To-day printing has gone mad and the world is  
in danger of being submerged by the ocean of books".  
(Just p. 83)

5/. What shall we select to read? But what mass -  
- We must first answer to ourselves the questions raised by  
Miss. Dimnet. What do we want in reading to do  
for us? What need is it to satisfy?

(Sponfer) To go to sleep on a book? Then, almost any  
book - a magazine or newspaper - will do the trick -  
- reading without retention or profit.

Do we want a vicarious sensual thrill - tells you  
previews - a veritable stream of milk murky  
books as now available - in convenient pocket  
editions - with lurid covers - calculated to attract



the adolescent man - which are now being investigated by our post.

I assume that we do not include them in the category of good books - to cherish - to be grateful for - to ~~keep~~ <sup>use</sup> them like as friendly companions.

61. Now, I trust, are we ~~to~~ away from those who are intruders into reading the "Best Sellers" just because every body else is doing it. ~~Just because~~ we do not wish to be ~~misled~~ <sup>misled</sup> and lost ~~blind~~ <sup>blind</sup> when some one asks us "Have you read that exciting new best seller ... now and so..."

Best Sellers are as a rule dead rubbish in 10-15 yrs. I saw recently a list, the <sup>20</sup> best sellers of a few decades ago I could hardly recognize the ~~same~~ title or the author of 2 or 3 of them - ha, I dare say, would you.

The most unintelligent reader is he who reads only best sellers - they are victims of advertising - and mass psychosis.

In literature, the test of a good book is not whether it's old or new. - That is a valid test for scientific books. Here you must look for the most up-to-date - for scientific knowledge - whether in the field of the exact sciences or in history, and social sciences - scientific accumulation - and one must the latest findings references.

This is not the case in literature, or art, or music.



65  
The latest is not new. The best, the truest, the best  
the latest most recent may be only the most ephemeral - and  
the best worth-while

We should not of course exclude the new - for everything that is  
old was once "new" -

But we should be partial to books which have been tested  
by time - which necessitate preservation of varying  
tastes - cultures & climes - have found satisfying.

The instability rate among books is appalling :: If a book  
has survived a century or a millennium - it is scarcely  
a matter of accident. There is immortality in it.

And, we should remember, that any book - even if it is -  
2 or 3 thousand years old - is a new book - if you  
have not read it.

(6) It was only this year - Herodotus' 'History' (5c. - 4c. -  
Persian Wars (500 - 479 B.C.))

Far more exciting, I assure you - and rewarding - and exciting  
than "Caesar's Writing" - or Telluride Handbooks: -

6/. What do we want out of a book - that is not just a  
text-book? What are the Tests of a good book?

7/. It should add something to us - something that no one can  
take away. A book should not end with the  
reading of it. Something should remain of intellect. or life.



a aesthetic value: Something which will help to make 16  
me, what Francis Bacon called a "full man" - a  
mature human being -

I am not thinking so much in terms of "information"  
- as of formation - something which will advance the  
culture of any ~~soul~~ <sup>soul</sup> - <sup>argument my</sup> <sup>they do not make as new</sup>  
"There are books which ~~make us~~ <sup>men with</sup> <sup>even when they do not make as new</sup>  
I want a book to give me a delight, the pleasure -  
a sketch of the imagination - a new view of new horizons.

I want a book to feed me - manuscript - manuscript  
taught differently to diff. people - That is quite all - isn't it?  
not all people like the same food - But all people  
must have food!

A book that is not food - that does not nourish,  
upbuild - develop - may be a drug - may be harmful -  
may even have an aesthetic fascination because it is cold and  
sterile perfection of style and form - It is not a good book.

8/. A good book, likewise, should take away something from us -  
- some ignorance, some fear, some prejudice - some  
selfishness - some dimness of the soul -  
It should leave us with a broader sympathy for all  
things about us - for the strong and the weak alike -  
and for the saint and the sinner - and the stranger that  
is within or without our gates.







10/ And a good book should set on not only thinking - but shoveled (8)  
Challenging us to action :

As I read myself in a book - if it is a good book - I recreate  
myself - I am stirred into a new awareness - and I  
want to do something about it. (It gives me will  
strength and resolution. It does not always result  
in action. But sometimes it does ~~it really~~ <sup>awaken</sup> - or  
more often - with unconsciousness - To a degree  
we have been remade - and redeemed.

11/ Finally - a good book should give us pleasure -  
should increase our enjoyment of life. (It should be well-  
written & pleasurable.)  
It should be a beautiful and pleasurable experience.  
We should never read a book that bore us -  
we owe nothing to a bore - except about treatment.  
A good book should enrich not only our understanding,  
but our joyfulness and our joy.

~~The~~ Great and good books have survived "the tooth and razor"  
oblivion" - because they delighted generations of men  
who found deepest satisfaction in them.

Prologue .. "I have read the - 'The Great and Good Books' -  
Unless they have had been very delightful - I would have  
been lost in my prison!"



Sermon 807

## FIVE TESTS OF A GOOD BOOK

December 7, 1952

This month is known as Jewish Book Month. The purpose of this special month, <sup>which is</sup> set aside for the Jewish book, is of course to encourage the reading of Jewish books, <sup>and</sup> the acquisition of them, ~~the encouragement of building in each Jewish home a Jewish book shelf.~~ <sup>This</sup> And that, of course, is a very commendable purpose. To come to know the Jewish people you must read Jewish books because the life and the spirit ~~and the history~~ of our people are recorded in books. That is, of course, true of most every people, but it is perhaps truer of the Jewish people than of any other people. The genius of our people poured itself into no form of art as much as <sup>into</sup> writing. Our people attained high eminence in other artistic fields - art, music - but preeminently its achievements were in the field of literature. It is through books that our people most influenced the civilization of the world.

The very invention of the alphabet is now credited to the ancient Hebrews. Our religion was the first to be channeled through and conveyed to the world through a book, the Sefer Torah - the Book of Instruction, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> accordingly, The founder of Islam called us "The People of the Book". The early teachers of our people, following the <sup>exile</sup> ~~first destruction~~, were known as the Sopherim, <sup>the</sup> book men, ~~the~~ scribes. Even the great teachers who preceded them, the prophets, made ~~provision~~ careful provision that their preachments ~~and their prophecies~~ would be preserved ~~and transmitted~~ in written scrolls. Jeremiah had his ~~secretary~~ scribe, Baruch, whom he instructed to put his prophecies <sup>down in a written</sup> ~~upon a book, upon a~~ scroll, and when that scroll was burnt <sup>by</sup> ~~at~~ the order of King Jehoiakim, Jeremiah instructed his scribe to write a fresh scroll.

Isaiah was commanded by the Lord, <sup>to</sup> "take ~~then~~ a great tablet and write upon it in common script."

The Jewish people has a continuous literary history of <sup>more than</sup> ~~over~~ 3,000 years, <sup>perhaps</sup> the longest in the history of mankind. More than 1,000 years before the common era, Jews were writing history ~~and~~ poetry and law in the Hebrew language. <sup>Today</sup>, more than 3,000 years



later, they are still writing impressive literature in Hebrew, both in Israel and outside of Israel. ~~And~~ In between these years our people wrote not only in the Hebrew language, but wrote important and world-influencing books in other <sup>or well</sup> languages. They wrote great books in Greek - Philo, for example, and Josephus; they wrote tremendously important books in Arabic - ibn Gabirol and Halevi and Maimonides. Spinoza wrote in Latin, <sup>Other</sup> and Jews have <sup>wrote</sup> written important <sup>works</sup> things in nearly every <sup>modern</sup> European language. ~~The whole science of Judaism in its early days was written in German. Books -~~ <sup>Through books our people expressed its mind and soul</sup> ~~and uttered its message to the world.~~ <sup>that's how our people expressed itself</sup>

~~Our heroes were men not of the sword but of the pen. The Rabbis say that the sword and the pen came down from heaven wrapped in one package. The Jews certainly~~ <sup>- unless forced upon them -</sup> ~~did not choose the sword. It is with the pen that our valiant sons and daughters fought the great battles of human liberation. And our religion, Judaism, drew its sustenance from scholars and books and relied on them for survival, not upon philanthropy.~~ <sup>the means of</sup>

To revere books, to buy books, to treat them tenderly and honorably, to look after their care and their proper binding, not to deface a book - <sup>careful</sup> these were instructions given by <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~ book men <sup>to</sup> our people. ~~to us.~~

There is an interesting testament which was left by Judah ibn Tibbon of the 12th century who lived in Spain. He is known as "the father of the translators" because it was he, ~~Judah ibn Tibbon~~, who translated the great works of Gabirol, ~~and~~ Halevi and Sadia into Hebrew. He wrote <sup>his</sup> ~~a~~ testament for his son, Samuel, who himself became a very important translator. Judah ibn Tibbon was a man of high culture and was an enthusiastic collector of books, ~~and~~ In his testament to his son he wrote the following:

My son, make thy books thy companions. Let thy cases and shelves be thy pleasure grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise; gather their fruit; pluck their roses; take their spices and their myrrh. If thy soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. Then will thy desire renew itself and thy soul be filled with delight.



Never refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to purchase books for himself, but only act thus to those who can be trusted to return the volumes.

Take particular care of thy books. Cover the bookcases with rugs of fine quality and preserve them from damp, mice, from all manner of injury, for thy books are thy good treasure. If thou lendest a volume, make a memorandum before it leaves thy house, and when it is returned, draw thy pen over the entry, and every Passover and Tabernacles call in all books out on loan.

Jews were encouraged to acquire books, if they had <sup>the</sup> intention, of course, to read them. The mere acquisition of books was discouraged. They spoke of a man who ~~just bought~~ <sup>only</sup> buys books to put them on <sup>a</sup> shelf as <sup>"a book-carrying donkey"</sup> ~~"a donkey carrying books"~~. Jews were encouraged to write books if they had anything to say and they knew how to say it. <sup>The Rabbis spoke of</sup> a man who writes a book and leaves ~~a~~ <sup>it</sup> a book after him when he is gone, ~~the Rabbis spoke of him as one who "speaks from the grave"~~. But if a man did not have anything to say and did not know how to say it, our teachers discouraged <sup>him</sup> ~~them~~ from writing books. <sup>And</sup> ~~the~~ Book of Ecclesiastes, you will recall, <sup>utter the</sup> ~~gives us the famous words~~ <sup>writing:</sup> "And above all, be admonished, my son, of making many books there is no end."

This distrust of writing many unnecessary books and of reading many unhelpful books, our people shared with other cultured peoples, ~~of course~~. The great Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who was himself a famous writer, urged men to free themselves from the thirst for books. <sup>a</sup> ~~Just a~~ <sup>and unsatiable</sup> feverish thirst for books is not good. ~~And~~ <sup>A</sup> modern writer, the noted French author, Ernest Dimnet, writes in his interesting little volume, The Art of Thinking,

~~When people do read, what do they read? Many pretend to read the Bible, but of how few is it true? Today printing has gone mad and the world is in danger of being submerged by the ocean of books. Three or four in a thousand read poets. They regard it with the same surprise, not unmixed with mistrust, with which the poets themselves are considered. What is produced by the gross, what is constantly forced on our attention, trumpeted by publicity and magnified by criticism, is fiction. Novels fill the book shops and suffocate our book shelves. What people read in the country where there is a little time to read are novels; what people pretend to read or skim through in town, when there never is any time, are novels. And the novels are not those great works of fiction which since the 16th century have added to our knowledge of mankind, or even their modern successors of such fame that we cannot ignore~~



them. They are, as the readers know they are, pure and simple trash, the very titles of which will be forgotten in a week.

~~Now~~, <sup>then</sup> what shall we select to read out of the mass of available literature? We must first answer ~~to ourselves~~ the question, what do we want our reading to do for us? What need is our reading to satisfy? What do we want out of a book? Do we want a book ~~to be seporific~~, to help us to fall asleep after a tired day? Then almost any book <sup>for that matter will serve this specific purpose.</sup> I assume, a magazine or a newspaper or a telephone directory ~~would do the trick.~~ That ~~is~~ reading without retention, without profit, without inspiration. Do ~~you~~ <sup>we</sup> want ~~a~~ <sup>some</sup> vicarious, sensual thrill, something that will tickle our prurience - well, there is a veritable stream of such murky books <sup>which</sup> ~~that are~~ <sup>(today available)</sup> some in very convenient pocket editions with lurid covers, calculated to attract the adolescent moron, books which ~~I see~~ our government is beginning to investigate.

~~But~~ <sup>we</sup> I assume that we do not include <sup>such</sup> ~~these~~ books in the category of good books, books to cherish, ~~and~~ to be grateful for and to keep for life as friendly companions. Nor, ~~I believe~~, are we among those, or should be among those, who are intimidated into reading ~~the~~ "best sellers" just because everybody else is doing it, just because we do not wish to be embarrassed and to look blank when someone asks us, <sup>whether we</sup> ~~have we~~ read this exciting new best seller. Best sellers, my dear friends, are, as a rule, dead rubbish in 10 or 15 years. Recently I saw a list of the 20 best sellers <sup>a</sup> ~~a~~ few decades ago. I could hardly recognize the titles <sup>or</sup> the author of more than 2 or 3 of them. Nor, I dare say, would you.

The most unintelligent reader is <sup>the one</sup> ~~he~~ who reads only best sellers. <sup>It is a</sup> ~~Such people are~~ the victims of advertising. In literature the test of a good book is not whether it is old or new. This is a valid test for scientific <sup>texts</sup> ~~tests~~. Here you must look for the most up-to-date; for scientific knowledge, whether in the field of the exact sciences or in history or the social sciences, is cumulative ~~and~~ <sup>we</sup> want the latest findings and discoveries. This, ~~of course~~, is not the case in literature or in art or in music. The



latest is by no means the best or the truest, and the most recent may be only the most ephemeral and the least worth while. One should not, of course, exclude the new, for everything that is old was once new, but one should, I believe, be partial to books which have stood the test of time, which successive generations of men of varying tastes and cultures and climes have found satisfying and desirable. The mortality rate among books is appalling. If, therefore, a book has survived a century or a millenium, it is certainly not a matter of accident. There is immortality in that book.

~~And~~ Furthermore, we should remember that any book, even if it is two or three thousand years old, is a new book if <sup>we have not</sup> ~~you haven't~~ read it. It was only this year that I had the opportunity to read <sup>through in full</sup> the History of Herodotus. I <sup>had</sup> ~~have~~ read selections of it from time to time <sup>since</sup> ~~in~~ my school days, but never <sup>did I have</sup> ~~had~~ the opportunity to read <sup>in its entirety</sup> ~~through it~~. <sup>I found that</sup> ~~The~~ history of the Graeco-Persian Wars of the 5th century before the common era, and I found that book far more <sup>fresh</sup> ~~exciting and rewarding~~ ~~as it is undoubtedly far more enduring~~ than Caine Mutiny or Tallulah Bankhead's Tallulah...

What do we want out of a book - that is not purely a text book? What is the test of a good book? <sup>I will</sup> ~~Well, I'll~~ give you my <sup>thoughts</sup> ~~judgment~~ in the matter. First of all, a good book should <sup>thereafter</sup> ~~add~~ something to us, something that no one can take away from us. A good book does not end with the reading of it. Something remains of intellectual or spiritual or esthetic value, something which will help us to <sup>become</sup> ~~be~~ what Francis Bacon called a "full man", a mature human being. I am not thinking so much in terms of information; I am thinking rather in terms of formation, something which will advance the culture of ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> soul, ~~something~~ <sup>and</sup> that will augment ~~me~~. "There are books which make us more wise even when they do not make us more learned."

I want a book to give me a ~~certain~~ dilation of the spirit, a stretch of the imagination, a view of new horizons. I want a book to feed me, to give me manna. Now, manna, according to the saying of our Rabbis, tasted differently to different people. That is quite all right. Not all people like the same food, but all people must have food. A book that is not food, that does not nourish, ~~upbuild, develop~~, may be a drug,



may be hashish, may even have an esthetic fascination because of its cold and sterile perfection of style and form. It is not a "good" book.

And second, in my judgment, a good book should take something away from us - some ignorance, some fear, some prejudice, some selfishness, some dimness of the soul. A good book should leave us with a wider sympathy and tolerance for all those about us, for the strong and the weak, for the saint and the sinner alike, and the stranger that is within or without our gates. A good book of fiction or poetry or essays or history or biography should open our eyes to see with a new clarivoyance and to comprehend with warmer insight whatever nature and life <sup>place</sup> before us.

A good book makes us look at life until what has been commonplace all along becomes magically strange and thereafter and forever companionable and more meaningful, and closer. And in the third place a good book should interpret and explain what we ourselves, unaided perhaps, find difficult to understand or appreciate. "Life is short but art is long," is a famous saying. A great artist will irradiate with the eternal light of his art our brief days. He will shed light into the dark corners of human personality and human relationships. He can help us to understand ourselves and our own problems by unfolding for us and illuminating for us the life and the problems of others - how they stood up to the shocks of life, how they took defeat or failed to take it, what trials and tribulations and temptations, how they grew or failed to grow through their experiences. <sup>war then's and</sup>

In a good book something of ourselves will always appear, something of our own confusion or weakness or groping, for there is something of the universally human in every good book, the universality of character, and behavior. A good book will sometimes awaken within us thought which we feared to acknowledge to ourselves, and reach (down deep) to the very springs of our being.



~~There is a famous proverb that the "advice which friends dare not give to a King a book will give him".~~

*It will cry and itself to us known, its honesty.*

A good book is an honest book. ~~The great essayist,~~ Montaigne, introduced his famous collection of ~~Essays~~ <sup>works!</sup> with the saying: "Reader, thou hast here an honest book."

~~And~~ In the next place, friends, a good book should set ~~one~~ <sup>us</sup> not only thinking, but should challenge <sup>us</sup> to action. As ~~I~~ <sup>we</sup> read ~~myself~~ <sup>ourselves</sup> into a book, if it is a good book, ~~I~~ <sup>we</sup> unconsciously recreate ~~myself~~ <sup>ourselves</sup>. ~~I am~~ startled into a new awareness and ~~I~~ <sup>we</sup> want to do something about it. It girds ~~us~~ <sup>us both</sup> with new strength and resolution. ~~Now~~ <sup>we</sup> All this does not always resolve ~~itself~~ in action, but sometimes it does, ~~or~~ <sup>awaredly</sup>, or more often, quite unconsciously. To a degree a man is remade, ~~and~~ <sup>activated</sup> redirected and ~~stimulated into conduct~~ by a ~~great~~ and good book.

Finally, ~~dear friends,~~ <sup>if</sup> a good book should give us pleasure, should increase our enjoyment of life. A good book should be a beautiful and pleasurable experience. It should be well written. One should never read a book that bores one. We owe nothing to a bore but absent treatment.

You might recall the story of a man who came to his physician and said, "Doctor, I am sick." And the doctor asked him, "What is your trouble?" And he said, "Doctor, I talk to myself." And he said, "That's a commonplace thing. That's not a disease." And the man said, "But you don't know what a terrible bore I am."

A heavy tome written in <sup>in</sup> pedestrian style, without form, without lift, without imagination ~~is~~ is a book to be avoided. A good book should evoke not only our reverence, but our eagerness and our joy. Good and great books have survived "the tooth and ~~razor~~ <sup>razure</sup> of oblivion", to use Shakespeare's phrase because they delighted generations of men who found deepest satisfactions in ~~reading~~ them. They loved them; ~~they were delighted with~~ <sup>loved to</sup> ~~them~~ preserve them and treasure them.



~~Just as in the case of religion - religion survived not out of fear or because of superstitions, but because people loved God and loved his Torah, his law.~~

← "Unless <sup>had been</sup> thy Torah ~~was~~ my delight,

I would have been lost in the poverty, ~~the penury, the emptiness~~ of my life." That is <sup>survival to faith - love, abiding joy, God too have been</sup> what gave ~~joy to the men of faith, delight, and good~~ books are being preserved by and

large, and good books, because they delighteth the tired hearts of men and gave them a

sense of joy in the midst of sorrow, <sup>in the midst of</sup> ~~gave them~~ solace and grief, ~~gave them~~ inspiration <sup>in</sup> ~~and discouragement, gave them new horizons when the world was imprisoning their spirits~~ ~~and their minds.~~ <sup>had fenced them in.</sup>

Well, there may be other tests of a good book - I am sure that I have not exhausted the subject. To me, at least, <sup>this is</sup> ~~that's~~ what a good book should do. <sup>These are the kind of</sup> ~~These are the~~ books

that one should reach for, because life is short. We ought not to waste ~~our time~~, the little time <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ we have for reading, upon worthless things, upon books which <sup>give us</sup> ~~give us~~ nothing, <sup>to us</sup> which take nothing <sup>away</sup> ~~from us~~, which do not feed us, which do not inspire us and which do not really give us <sup>joy and</sup> ~~the~~ lasting, the ~~finest~~ satisfactions in life.

There are <sup>many</sup> such books among Jewish books, and I would urge you to acquire <sup>them and</sup> ~~some such~~ books. <sup>read them</sup> ~~Add them to your library. Read them. You will be grateful for the experience~~

<sup>enrich</sup> your heart and mind



for  
release

## NATIONAL JEWISH WELFARE BOARD

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS and YM-YWHAs  
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Bureau of Public Information

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1953

### FIVE TESTS OF A GOOD BOOK

For Jewish Book Month And Every Month

BY. DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

This thought-provoking essay was originally delivered by Dr. Silver as a sermon in The Temple, Cleveland, of which he is rabbi. It is a timely reminder on the occasion of the annual celebration of Jewish Book Month. . . . THE EDITOR

This month is known as Jewish Book Month. The purpose of this special month, which is set aside for the Jewish book, is, of course, to encourage the reading of Jewish books and the acquisition of them. This, of course, is a very commendable purpose. To come to know the Jewish people you must read Jewish books because the life and the spirit of our people are recorded in books. That is also true of most peoples, but it is perhaps truer of the Jewish people than of any other people. The genius of our people poured itself into no form of art as much as into writing. Our people attained high eminence in other artistic fields - art, music - but preeminently its achievements were in the field of literature. It is through books that our people most influenced the civilization of the world, and it is to the eternal credit of the Jewish Book Council of America that it has made an imaginative and effective effort in bringing the literary treasures of the past to our attention through the project called Jewish Book Month. The Council is a sponsored activity of the National Jewish Welfare Board, which, as the national association of 350 Jewish Community Centers and YM-YWHAs, has a vital role in the dissemination of Jewish culture in the Jewish community.

The very invention of the alphabet is now credited to the ancient Hebrews. Our religion was the first to be channeled and conveyed to the world through a book, the Sefer Torah - the Book of Instruction. The founder of Islam, accordingly, called us "The People of the Book". The early teachers of our people, following the exile, were known as the Sopherim, book men, scribes. Even the great teachers who preceded them, the prophets, made careful provision that their preachments would be preserved in written scrolls. Jeremiah had his scribe, Baruch, whom he instructed to put his prophecies down in a written scroll, and when that scroll was burnt by the order of King Jehocakim, Jeremiah instructed his scribe to write a fresh scroll.

Isaiah was commanded by the Lord to take "a great tablet and write upon it in common script".

The Jewish people has a continuous literary history of more than 3,000 years, perhaps the longest in the history of mankind. More than 1,000 years before the common era, Jews were writing history, poetry and law in the Hebrew language. Today, more than 3,000 years later, they are still writing impressive literature in Hebrew, both in Israel and outside of Israel. In between these years our people wrote not only in the Hebrew language, but wrote important and world-influencing books in other languages as well. They wrote great books in Greek - Philo, for example, and Josephus; they wrote tremendously important books in Arabic - ibn Gabirol and Halevi and Maimonides. Spinoza wrote in Latin. Other Jews wrote important works in nearly every modern European language. Through books, our people expressed its mind and soul and uttered its message to the world.

The Rabbis say that the sword and the pen came down from heaven wrapped in one package. The Jews certainly did not choose the sword - unless forced upon them. It is with the pen that our valiant sons and daughters fought the great battles of human liberation. Judaism drew its sustenance from scholars and books, and relied on them for the means of survival.

To revere books, to buy books, to treat them tenderly and honorably, to look after their care and their proper binding, not to deface a book - these were careful instructions given by our book men to our people.

There is an interesting testament which was left by Judah ibn Tibbon of the



12th century who lived in Spain. He is known as "the father of the translators" because it was he who translated the great works of Gabirol, Halevi and Sadia into Hebrew. He wrote his testament for his son, Samuel, who himself became a very important translator. Judah ibn Tibbon was a man of high culture and was an enthusiastic collector of books. In his testament to his son he wrote the following:

My son, make thy books thy companions. Let thy cases and shelves be thy pleasure grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise; gather their fruit; pluck their roses; take their spices and their myrrh. If thy soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. Then will thy desire renew itself and thy soul be filled with delight.

Never refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to purchase books for himself, but only act thus to those who can be trusted to return the volumes.

Take particular care of thy books. Cover the bookcases with rugs of fine quality and preserve them from damp, mice, from all manner of injury, for thy books are thy good treasure. If thou lendest a volume, make a memorandum before it leaves thy house, and when it is returned, draw thy pen over the entry, and every Passover and Tabernacles call in all books out on loan.

Jews were encouraged to acquire books, if they had the intention, of course, to read them. The mere acquisition of books was discouraged. They spoke of a man who bought books only to put them on a shelf as, "a book-carrying donkey". Jews were encouraged to write books if they had anything to say and they knew how to say it. The Rabbis spoke of a man who writes a book and leaves it after him when he is gone as one who "speaks from the grave". But if a man did not have anything to say and did not know how to say it, our teachers discouraged him from writing books. The Book of Ecclesiastes, you will recall, utters the famous warning: "And above all, be admonished, my son, of making many books there is no end."

This distrust of writing many unnecessary books and of reading many unhelpful books, our people shared with other cultured peoples. The great Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who was himself a famous writer, urged men to free themselves from "the thirst for books." A feverish and unsatiable thirst for books is not good. A modern writer, the noted French author, Ernest Dimnet, writes in his interesting little volume, The Art of Thinking:

Today printing has gone mad and the world is in danger of being submerged by the ocean of books. Three of our citizens in a thousand read poets. They regard it with the same surprise, not unmixed with mistrust, with which the poets themselves are considered. What is produced by the gross, what is constantly forced on our attention, trumpeted by publicity and magnified by criticism, is fiction. Novels fill the book shops and suffocate our book shelves. What people read in the country where there is a little time to read are novels; what people pretend to read or skim through in town, when there never is any time, are novels. And the novels are not those great works of fiction which, since the 16th century have added to our knowledge of mankind or even their modern successors of such fame that we cannot ignore them. They are, as the readers know they are, pure and simple trash, the very titles of which will be forgotten in a week.

What then shall we select to read out of the mass of available literature? We must first answer the question, what do we want our reading to do for us? What need is our reading to satisfy? What do we want out of a book? Do we want a book to help us to fall asleep after a tired day? Then almost any book, I assume, a magazine or a newspaper or a telephone directory, for that matter, will serve this soporific purpose. That is reading without retention, without profit, without inspiration. Do we want some vicarious, sensual thrill, something that will tickle our prurience - well, there is a veritable stream of such murky books which are available today, some in very convenient pocket editions with lurid covers, calculated to attract the adolescent moron, books which our government is beginning to investigate.

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exciting new best seller. Best sellers, my dear friends, are, as a rule, dead rubbish in 10 or 15 years. Recently I saw a list of the 20 best sellers of a few decades ago. I could hardly recognize the title or the author of more than two or three of them. Nor, I dare say, would you.

The most unintelligent reader is the one who reads only best sellers. He is a victim of advertising. In literature the test of a good book is not whether it is old or new. This is a valid test for scientific texts. Here you must look for the most up-to-date; for scientific knowledge, whether in the field of the exact sciences or in history or the social sciences, is cumulative. We want the latest findings and discoveries. This is not the case in literature or in art or in music. The latest is by no means the best, and the most recent may be only the most ephemeral and the least worth while. One should not, of course, exclude the new, for everything that is old was once new, but one should, I believe, be partial to books which have stood the test of time, which successive generations of men of varying tastes and cultures and climes have found satisfying and desirable. The mortality rate among books is appalling. If, therefore, a book has survived a century or a millenium, it is certainly not a matter of accident. There is immortality in that book.

Furthermore, we should remember that any book, even if it is two or three thousand years old, is a new book if we have not read it. It was only this year that I had the opportunity to read through in full the History of Herodotus. I had read selections of it from time to time since my school days, but never did I have the opportunity to read it in its entirety. I found that the history of the Graeco-Per-sian Wars of the 5th century before the common era was far more fresh, exciting and rewarding than the Caine Mutiny or Tallulah Bankhead's Tallulah. . . .

What do we want out of a book - that is not purely a text book? What is the test of a good book? I will give you my thoughts in the matter. First of all, a good book should add something to us, something that no one can thereafter take away from us. A good book does not end with the reading of it. Something remains of intellectual or spiritual or esthetic value, something which will help us to become what Francis Bacon called a "full man", a mature human being. I am not thinking so much in terms of information; I am thinking rather in terms of formation, something which will advance the culture of our soul, something that will augment us. "There are books which make us more wise even when they do not make us more learned."

I want a book to give me a dilation of the spirit, a stretch of the imagination, a view of new horizons. I want a book to feed me, to give me manna. Now, manna, according to the saying of our Rabbis, tasted differently to different people. That is quite all right. Not all people like the same food, but all people must have food. A book that is not food, that does not nourish, may be a drug, may be hashish, may even have an esthetic fascination because of its cold and sterile architectural perfection of style and form. It is not necessarily a "good" book.

Secondly, a good book should take something away from us - some ignorance, some fear, some selfishness, some dimness of the soul. A good book should leave us disencumbered of certain prejudices so that we may thereafter share in a wider sympathy and tolerance for all those about us, for the strong and the weak alike, the saint and the sinner, and the stranger that is within or without our gates. A good book of fiction or poetry or essays or history or biography should open our eyes to see with a new clairvoyance and to comprehend with warmer insight whatever nature and life place before us.

A good book makes us look at life steadily until what has been commonplace becomes magically strange and forever after more companionable and more meaningful.

In the third place a good book should interpret and explain what we ourselves, unaided perhaps, may find difficult to understand or appreciate. "Life is short but art is long," is a famous saying. A great artist will irradiate with the eternal light of his art man's brief days upon earth. He will shed light into the dark corners of human personality and relationships. He can help us to understand ourselves and our own problems more clearly by unfolding for us and illuminating for us the life and the problems of other people - how they stood up to the shocks of life, how they took defeat or failed to take it, what trials and tribulations and temptations were theirs and how they grew or failed to grow because of them.

In a good book something of ourselves will always appear, something of our own confusion or weakness or groping, for there is something of the universally human in every good book, the universality of character, desires and behavior. A good book will sometimes awaken within us thought which we feared to acknowledge to ourselves. It will reach deep down to the very springs of our being.

A good book is an honest book. It will commend itself to us because of its honesty. Montaigne introduced his famous collection of Essays with the words: "Reader, thou hast here an honest book."



In the next place, friends, a good book should set us not only thinking, but should challenge us to action. As we read ourselves into a book, if it is a good book, we unconsciously recreate ourselves. We are startled into a new awareness and we want to do something about it. It girds us both with discontent and resolution. All this does not always resolve in action, but sometimes it does awaredly, or more often, quite unconsciously. To a degree a man is remade, redirected and activated by a good book.

Finally, a good book should give us pleasure. It should increase our enjoyment of life. A good book should be a beautiful and pleasurable experience. It should be well written. One should never read a book that bores one. We owe nothing to a bore but absent treatment.

A heavy tome written in a pedestrian style, without form, without lift, without imagination is a book to be avoided. A good book should evoke not only our reverence, but our eagerness and our joy. Good and great books have survived "the tooth and rasure of oblivion", to use Shakespeare's phrase because they delighted generations of men who found deepest satisfactions in them. They loved them. They loved to preserve them and transmit them. "Unless Thy Torah had been my delight, I would have been lost in the poverty of my life." That is what gave survival to faith - deep, abiding joy. Good books, too, have been preserved because they delighteth the tired hearts of men and gave them a sense of joy in the midst of sorrow, solace in the midst of grief, inspiration in the midst of discouragement, new horizons when the world had fenced them in.

There may be other tests of a good book. I am sure that I have not exhausted the subject. To me, at least, this is what a good book should do. These are the kinds of books that one should reach for, because life is short. We ought not to waste the little time which we have for reading upon worthless things, upon books which add nothing to us, which take nothing away from us, which do not feed us, which do not inspire us and which do not really give us joy and the lasting satisfactions in life.

There are many such books among Jewish books. I would urge you to acquire them and read them. You will enrich your heart and mind.



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#117 - 11/6/53





GLASGOW'S

## JEWISH BOOK WEEK

Mitchell Library, 6-15 January, 1955

movement which led its adherents straight into accepting Zionism and *Chalutzit* as the only solution for the young Jews of their time. According to the author, the *maskilim* should be regarded as near-revolutionaries who were pre-occupied with the overthrow of the Czar and the introduction of social reforms; failing in both, they decided on the "Ingathering of the Exiles."

In fact, the *Haskalah* started not one, but several movements; it was a source of inspiration equally to the Socialist *Bund* and to Zionism and Socialist Zionism. But it also led a section of Eastern Jewry, particularly the upper strata, to strive for complete assimilation with their surroundings, socially and economically. This strong conservative element were prepared to co-operate with the authorities as long as they could retain their privileges. They sometimes preached the use of Hebrew, but in private life they spoke Russian or Polish; they looked with particular contempt on Yiddish which they considered the "language of servants and cart-drivers." There were, however, others among the propagators of *Haskalah* who, in their urge to reach the ear of the masses with their modern ideas, soon came to realise that to do this effectively, they had to speak the only language these masses understood—and it was they who laid the foundation of a modern and popular Yiddish literature. Although it is true to say that the revival of Hebrew as a spoken tongue is linked with *Haskalah*, it is also true that the same ideas gave birth to modern Yiddish.

### Kibbutz Quarrels

It is necessary to point this out, as this biography of Ben Gurion confirms what has been known for a long time, that the man who, during his struggles, has often switched his loyalties, and who has not considered it inconsistent to revise his ideas, has remained implacable to everything connected with Yiddish, both as a language and as a culture. Whatever has determined Ben Gurion in this attitude, it cannot have been the ideas of *Haskalah* which guided him in his youth.

Nor is it correct to see in *Chassidism* the principal or only counterpart of *Haskalah*. If one disregards the fanatic fringe centred in some miracle-performing Rabbi, *Chassidism*, at the turn of the century, still retained something of its original popular appeal as the religion of the ordinary man, which was not averse to new social ideas. The Chassidic songs the first *Chalutzim* carried with them into their new life and their new land were not their least consolation and inspiration.

## MIXED MARRIAGES

*A PALACE OF STRANGERS*, by SAMUEL YOULD  
(Cassell, 10/6).

*A PALACE OF STRANGERS* has for its theme the small sad world of the mixed marriage, in which the offspring are by default of religious upbringing inclined to agnosticism, and by historic circumstances pin-pricked into an uneasy consciousness of their paternal Jewishness.

Benno Rosenbaum, married to a Liverpool Irish girl just before the First World War drops his Sabbath observance habits when it interferes with rent collecting and his ambition to save up to buy his own business. Mamma is no fervid R.C. either, so that their children, David and Anne, after a few abortive visits to a nearby Methodist Sunday School, grow up with their name circumscribed to "Rose" and those occasional reminders of their half-Jewish background, which schoolchildren drop into a still pool.

### Refugees from Hitler

Benno's brother Isak, living in Berlin as an observant Jew, pays Liverpool a visit and within a year has taken Jinny, a vital Irish lass with a fine singing voice, back to Berlin. By unremitting hard work, both brothers amass a lot of money and their economic progress is marked by the usual outward signs of moving house to better neighbourhoods and so forth.

The coming of Hitler brings Isak back to Britain, one of the first refugees and also one of the first Jews to return diligently to his faith.

But, there comes for the remainder of the book all the problems facing Isak's four children, who have been reared as Catholics by Jinny, their cynicisms, their desires to escape this unwished-for birth-mark. A problem no less grave for their cousin, David Rose, who serves as a British officer and returns to build up a flourishing estate agent's business in Croydon.

The author appears to see no changing pattern in anti-Semitism, and perhaps there is none in the shop-keeping circles in which these two families have their orbit. More's the pity, because it gives this splendidly observed and expressed novel that tiresome existentialist quality associated with that life-long aim—the pursuit of money.

P. N.



## Five Tests of a Good Book — Continued from page i

fiction or poetry or essays or history or biography should open our eyes to see with a new clairvoyance and to comprehend with warmer insight whatever nature and life place before us.

A good book makes us look at life steadily until what has been commonplace becomes magically strange and forever after more companionable and more meaningful.

✕   ✕   ✕

In the third place a good book should interpret and explain what we ourselves, unaided perhaps, may find difficult to understand or appreciate. "Life is short but art is long," is a famous saying. A great artist will irradiate with the eternal light of his art man's brief days upon earth. He will shed light into the dark corners of human personality and relationships. He can help us to understand ourselves and our own problems more clearly by unfolding for us and illuminating for us the life and the problems of other people — how they stood up to the shocks of life, how they took defeat or failed to take it, what trials and tribulations and temptations were theirs and how they grew or failed to grow because of them.

In a good book something of ourselves will always appear, something of our own confusion or weakness or groping, for there is something of the universally human in every good book, the universality of character, desires and behaviour. A good book will sometimes awaken within us thought which we feared to acknowledge to ourselves. It will reach down to the very springs of our being.

A good book is an honest book. It will commend itself to us because of its honesty. Montaigne introduced his famous collection of Essays with the words: "Reader, thou hast here an honest book."

✕   ✕   ✕

In the next place, friend, a good book should set us not only thinking, but should challenge us to action. As we read ourselves into a book, if it is a good book, we unconsciously recreate ourselves. We are startled into a new awareness and we want to do something about it. It girds us both with discontent and resolu-

tion. All this does not always resolve in action, but sometimes it does awarcelly, or more often, quite unconsciously. To a degree a man is remade, redirected and activated by a good book.

✕   ✕   ✕

Finally, a good book should give us pleasure. It should increase our enjoyment of life. A good book should be a beautiful and pleasurable experience. It should be well written. One should never read a book that bores one. We owe nothing to a bore but absent treatment.

A heavy tome, written in a pedestrian style, without form, without lift, without imagination, is a book to be avoided. A good book should evoke not only our reverence, but our eagerness and our joy. Good and great books have survived "the tooth and rasure of oblivion," to use Shakespeare's phrase, because they delighted generations of men who found deepest satisfactions in them. They loved them. They loved to preserve and transmit them. "Unless Thy Torah had been my delight, I would have been lost in the poverty of my life." That is what gave survival to faith—deep, abiding joy. Good books, too, have been preserved because they delighted the tired hearts of men and gave them a sense of joy in the midst of sorrow, solace in the midst of grief, inspiration in the midst of discouragement, new horizons when the world had fenced them in.

✕   ✕   ✕

There may be other tests of a good book. I am sure that I have not exhausted the subject. To me, at least, this is what a good book should do. These are the kinds of books that one should reach for, because life is short. We ought not to waste the little time which we have for reading upon worthless things, upon books which add nothing to us, which take nothing away from us, which do not feed us, which do not inspire us and which do not really give us joy and the lasting satisfactions in life.

There are many such books among Jewish books. I would urge you to acquire them and read them. You will enrich your heart and mind.



## BOOK SUPPLEMENT

## FIVE TESTS OF A GOOD BOOK

by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

THIS week is known as "Jewish Book Week." The purpose of this special week, which is set aside for the Jewish book, is, of course, to encourage the reading of Jewish books and the acquisition of them. This is a very commendable purpose. To come to know the Jewish people you must read Jewish books because the life and the spirit of our people are recorded in books. That is also true of most peoples, but it is perhaps truer of the Jewish people than of any other people. The genius of our people poured itself into no form of art as much as into writing. Our people attained high eminence in other artistic fields — art, music, — but pre-eminently its achievements were in the field of literature. It is through books that our people most influenced the civilization of the world, and it is to the eternal credit of the Jewish Book Council that it has made an imaginative and effective effort in bringing the literary treasures of the past to our attention through the project called Jewish Book week.

The very invention of the alphabet is now credited to the ancient Hebrews. Our religion was the first to be channelled and conveyed to the world through a book, the *Sefer Torah* — The Book of Instruction. The founder of Islam, accordingly, called us "The People of the Book." The early teachers of our people, following the exile, were known as the *Sopherim*, book men, scribes. Even the great teachers who preceded them, the prophets, made careful provision that their preachments would be preserved in written scrolls. Jeremiah had his scribe, Baruch, whom he instructed to put his prophecies down in a written scroll, and when that scroll was burnt by the order of King Jehocakim, Jeremiah instructed his scribes to write a fresh scroll.

Isaiah was commanded by the Lord to take "a great tablet and write upon it in common script."

The Jewish people has a continuous literary history of more than 3,000 years, perhaps the longest in the history of mankind. More than 1,000 years before the common era, Jews were writing history, poetry and law in the Hebrew language. Today more than 3,000 years later, they are still writing impressive literature in Hebrew, both in Israel and outside of Israel. In between these years our people wrote not only in the Hebrew language, but wrote important and world-influencing books in other languages as well. They wrote great books in Arabic—ibn Gabirol and Halevi and Maimonides. Spinoza wrote in Latin. Other Jews wrote important works in nearly every modern European language. Through books, our people expressed its mind and soul and uttered its message to the world.

The Rabbis say that the sword and the pen came down from heaven wrapped in one package. The Jews certainly did not choose the sword—unless forced upon them. It is with the pen that our valiant sons and daughters fought the great battles of human liberation. Judaism drew its sustenance from scholars and books, and relied on them for the means of survival.

To revere books, to buy books, to treat them tenderly and honourably, to look after their care and their proper binding, not to deface a book — these were careful instructions given by our book men to our people.

There is an interesting testament which was left by Judah ibn Tibbon, of the 12th century, who lived in Spain. He is known as "the father of the translators" because it was he who translated the great works of Gabirol, Halevi and Sadia into Hebrew. He wrote his testament for his son, Samuel, who himself became a very important translator. Judah ibn Tibbon was a man of high culture and was an enthusiastic collector of books. In his testament to his son he wrote the following:—

"My son, make thy books thy companions. Let thy cases and shelves be thy pleasure grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise; gather their fruit; pluck their roses; take their

spices and their myrrh. If thy soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. Then will thy desire renew itself and thy soul be filled with delight.

"Never refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to purchase books for himself, but only act thus to those who can be trusted to return the volumes.

"Take particular care of thy books. Cover the bookcases with rugs of fine quality and preserve them from damp, mice, from all manner of injury, for thy books are thy good treasure. If thou lendest a volume, make a memorandum before it leaves thy house, and when it is returned, draw thy pen over the entry, and every Passover and Tabernacles call in all books out on loan."

Jews were encouraged to acquire books, if they had the intention, of course, to read them. The mere acquisition of books was discouraged. They spoke of a man who bought books only to put them on a shelf as "a book-carrying donkey." Jews were encouraged to write books if they had anything to say and they knew how to say it. The Rabbis spoke of a man who writes a book and leaves it after him when he is gone as one who "speaks from the grave." But if a man did not know how to say it, our teachers discouraged him from writing books. The Book of Ecclesiastes, you will recall, utters the famous warning: "And above all, be admonished, my son, of making many books there is no end."

This distrust of writing many unnecessary books and of reading many unhelpful books, our people shared with other cultured peoples. The great Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who was himself a famous writer, urged men to free themselves from "the thirst for books." A feverish and insatiable thirst for books is not good. A modern writer, the noted French author, Ernest Dimnet, writes in his interesting little volume, *The Art of Thinking*:—

"Today, printing has gone mad and the world is in danger of being submerged by the ocean of books. Three of our citizens in a thousand read poets. They regard it with the same surprise, not unmixed with mistrust, with which the poets themselves are considered. What is produced by the gross, what is constantly forced on our attention, trumpeted by publicity and magnified by criticism, is fiction. Novels fill the book shops and suffocate our book shelves. What people read in the country where there is a little time to read are novels; what people pretend to read or skim through in town, when there never is any time, are novels. And the novels are not those great works of fiction which, since the 16th century have added to our knowledge of mankind or even their modern successors of such fame that we cannot ignore them. They are, as the readers know they are, pure and simple trash, the very titles of which will be forgotten in a week."

What then shall we select to read out of the mass of available literature? We must first answer the question, what do we want our reading to do for us? What need is our reading to satisfy? What do we want out of a book? Do we want a book to help us to fall asleep after a tired day? Then almost any book, I assume, a magazine or a newspaper or a telephone directory, for that matter, will serve this soporific purpose. That is reading without retention, without profit, without inspiration. Do we want some vicarious, sensual thrill, something that will tickle our prurience? Well, there is a veritable stream of such murky books which are available today, some in very convenient pocket editions with lurid covers, calculated to attract the adolescent moron, books which the Government is beginning to investigate.

I may assume that we do not include such books in the category of good books, books to cherish, to

be grateful for and to keep for life as friendly companions. Nor are we among those, or should be among those, who are intimidated into reading "best sellers" just because everybody else is doing it, just because we do not wish to be embarrassed and to look blank when someone asks us whether we have read this exciting new best seller. Best sellers, my dear friends, are, as a rule, dead rubbish in 10 or 15 years. Recently, I saw a list of the 20 best sellers of a few decades ago. I could hardly recognize the title or the author of more than two or three of them. Nor, I dare say, would you.

The most unintelligent reader is the one who reads only best sellers. He is a victim of advertising. In literature the test of a good book is not whether it is old or new. This is a valid test for scientific texts. Here you must look for the most up-to-date; for scientific knowledge, whether in the field of the exact sciences or in history or the social sciences, is cumulative. We want the latest findings and discoveries. This is not the case in literature or in art or in music. The latest is by no means the best, and the most recent may be only the most ephemeral and the least worth while. One should not, of course, exclude the new, for everything that is old was once new, but one should, I believe, be partial to books which have stood the test of time, which successive generations of men of varying tastes and cultures and climes have found satisfying and desirable. The mortality rate among books is appalling. If, therefore, a book has survived a century or a millenium, it is certainly not a matter of accident. There is immortality in that book.

Furthermore, we should remember that any book, even if it is two or three thousand years old, is a new book if we have not read it. It was only this year that I had the opportunity to read through in full the *History of Herodotus*. I had read selections of it from time to time since my school days, but never did I have the opportunity to read it in its entirety. I found that the history of the Graeco-Persian Wars of the 5th century before the common era was far more fresh, exciting and rewarding than the *Caine Mutiny*.

What do we want out of a book, that is not purely a text book? What is the test of a good book? I will give you my thoughts on the matter. First of all, a good book should add something to us, something that no one can thereafter take away from us. A good book does not end with the reading of it. Something which will help us to become what Francis Bacon called a "full man," a mature human being. I am not thinking so much in terms of information; I am thinking rather in terms of formation, something which will advance the culture of our soul, something that will augment us. "There are books which make us more wise even when they do not make us more learned."

I want a book to give me a dilation of the spirit, a stretch of the imagination, a view of new horizons. I want a book to feed me, to give me manna. Now, manna, according to the saying of our Rabbis, tasted differently to different people. That is quite all right. Not all people like the same food, but all people must have food. A book that is not food, that does not nourish, may be a drug, may be hashish, may even have an aesthetic fascination because of its cold and sterile architectural perfection of style and form. It is not necessarily a "good" book.

Secondly, a good book should take something away from us—some ignorance, some fear, some selfishness, some dimness of the soul. A good book should leave us disencumbered of certain prejudices so that we may thereafter share in a wider sympathy and tolerance for all those about us, for the strong and the weak alike, the saint and the sinner, and the stranger that is within or without our gates. A good book of

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GLASGOW'S

JEWISH BOOK WEEK

Mitchell Library, 6-15 January, 1955

EXHIBITION open daily:

9.30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday 2 to 8 p.m.

ADMISSION FREE

OVER 500 JEWISH BOOKS

COVERING

★ Bible

★ History

★ Children's Books

★ Land of Israel

★ Fiction

★ Religion and Philosophy



# EXHIBITION

## THE MITCHELL LIBRARY EXHIBITION

### GLASGOW'S JEWISH BOOK WEEK EXHIBITION

seems to be the finest display of Jewish books ever seen in the city. Among the 500 to 600 volumes on display, recent publications are especially prominent, but the collection includes many older outstanding books and sets of volumes from public and private collections. Jewish Book Week in Glasgow will not be confined to the Exhibition in Mitchell Library; a small mobile display of volumes, accompanied by a lecturer, will tour the various synagogues in the city.

The credit for this fine achievement goes entirely to the Convener, Mr Victor Joseph who was assisted by the combined Men's and Women's Lodges of the Glasgow B'nai B'rith. Assembling an exhibition like this is not the work of a few weeks. Mr Joseph has given unstinted attention and effort to Jewish Book Week for the past ten months. It is interesting to recall that the first Jewish Book Week Exhibition in Glasgow was organised by Mrs Joseph in 1937.† At that time President of the Women's Lodge, she and her committee arranged an exhibition in the McLellan Galleries which is still remembered by many in the community.

Perhaps the most important feature is that the books are on display in the city's magnificent reference library. The Public Libraries Committee and the City Librarian have been most co-operative and have readily made available the facilities of the Library and of its skilled staff. They can be assured that the Jewish community is deeply appreciative of their invaluable assistance. The City Librarian has also indicated that he will purchase for the Public Libraries a selection of books from those exhibited, on the recommendation of the organising committee. A list of these books will be published in the *Jewish Echo* so that the public can take advantage of their availability in local libraries.

### Exhibition Aims

What is the object of the Exhibition? It has two primary aims. Firstly, the Exhibition is intended to keep the Jewish public aware of its heritage in the field of literature. We all know something of the Bible and our other religious texts; but do we all know of the scholarly work that is continually producing new editions and new commentaries on the *Chumash*, the *Tanach*, the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*. Do we all know of the interpretations of Judaism, of fresh work on Jewish History, of new books of instruction in the Hebrew language, that are being written for our benefit?

We all know something about the State of Israel; but do we all know of the books that are being written, in Israel and in the Diaspora, about the growth of the State? Or of the work of the Hebrew University in developing scientific and scholarly research, in educating the young people of Israel and in giving renewed life to the stream of Jewish culture generally?

Jewish life begins in the home and a full Jewish life in the home is not possible without Jewish books. It goes without saying that every Jewish home should have Bibles and prayer books; but it must also have books on Jewish history and literature. We cannot bring up our children as Jews unless we give them a Jewish background in our homes, and that includes a Jewish cultural background. At this Exhibition a special feature is being made of children's books and it is hoped that this and the other sections will show what books are available to parents for their children and for themselves.

The second purpose of the Exhibition is to let the non-Jewish public know that the People of the Book are still a people of books. All too often the non-Jew's knowledge of the Jew is confined to the commercial world. Now, the world of commerce is an important one and there is nothing in the least discreditable in the fact that Jews play a large part in it. It would, however, be unfortunate if non-Jews gained the impression that Jews are interested only in making money. We are glad to show them that we retain our ancient ideals of religion and culture.

That is why it is so especially important that the Exhibition is being held this year in the Mitchell Library. It would be interesting to know what proportion of the visitors will be non-Jewish. It can safely be forecast that many of the regular and casual users of the Mitchell Library will pay the Jewish Book Week Exhibition a visit, and the interest of prominent citizens of the city is exemplified by the Lord Provost's consenting to open the Exhibition himself.

This article is being written at the beginning of this week, so only a fraction of the books which will be on display have arrived. There will certainly be many more volumes of equal to interest to those I shall mention.

### Bible of 1611

The collection is arranged in sections, such as *Religion*, *Hebrew*, *Land of Israel*, *Literature*, *Children's Books* and so on. The excellent stands provided by the organisers of the 1951 Festival of Jewish Arts enable visitors to concentrate on those volumes of particular interest to them.

One section is devoted to *Rarities* and I think most visitors will find something of interest there. Among the antique volumes is a copy of one of the first Bibles printed in this country. It was published in 1611 and the print is still beautifully clear. The Book of Genesis is introduced by a quaint full-page illustration of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Another rarity that is sure to attract attention is the first

### by Dr D. DAICHES RAPHAEL

volume of a Hebrew Bible in Braille. Needless to say, it is a very large tome. On the title page, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is shown with its symbol in Braille. Then there follows the whole of Genesis printed in the embossed dots that enable the blind to read. This work was produced by the Jewish Braille Institute of America. The whole Bible requires twenty of these large volumes. It is an indication of the resources of the U.S.A. and of the enterprise of the American Jewish community that this wonderful project has been carried out there. There are also on show some copies of the *Jewish Braille Review*, likewise printed in Braille characters.

### Encyclopædia Hebraica

One of the chief items of interest from Israel is the *Encyclopædia Hebraica* which is still in the course of publication. The Mitchell Library is lending its copy of this great work which was gifted to the Corporation by the Glasgow Jewish community. Other works of reference on show are the files of the *Jewish Echo* and of the *Jewish Chronicle*. Many people will be intrigued to browse among the volumes of old issues. The *Jewish Echo* has made available the complete set from January, 1928 and the Mitchell Library is providing its own set of the *Chronicle* from 1878.

What about the books the ordinary man can buy in the shops? He will find ample scope for his tastes and more than ample for his pocket. Books, like everything else, are double the price they used to be. Most of us, however, can afford to buy some books though never as many as we should like. Mr Joseph has been in touch with about sixty publishers and all who have books of Jewish interest have sent copies of their current publications. Some have arranged with city booksellers that there should be in the shops displays of books that are being shown at the Exhibition.

First I must mention some of the publications of the SONCINO PRESS, the EAST & WEST LIBRARY and VALLENTINE MITCHELL & Co. These three firms have done a great deal in recent years to further the cause of Jewish book publication. All the SONCINO publications are on show: the great translation of the *Talmud* is hardly a work that the ordinary man can think of acquiring, but the SONCINO Editions of the various Books of the Bible, with translations and commentaries, are the kind of texts much needed in the Jewish home. A new book published by this house is *The Faith of Judaism* by DR ISIDORE EPSTEIN. This should find a warm welcome from the Jewish public.

In the EAST & WEST LIBRARY, I need mention only the illustrated editions of CHAIM WEIZMANN's autobiography, *Trial and Error*, and DR CECIL ROTH's *Short History of the Jewish People* as but two examples of the attractive publications of this firm. They also publish a series of English translations of Jewish philosophical classics.

Two of VALLENTINE MITCHELL's publications have been widely acclaimed by all sections of the non-Jewish as well as of the Jewish press. They are *The Final*

*Solution* by GERALD REITLINGER, and *The Diary of a Young Girl* by ANNE FRANK\*. These two books are among the most moving records of the Nazi terror that have been produced. It is not pleasant to read what they have to say, but unfortunately the life of a Jew is often not pleasant to live. Another publishing house have just put out a biography of *Ben-Gurion of Israel* by BARNET LITVINOFF\*. This study of Israel's first Prime Minister is sure to arouse widespread interest.

Turning now to works of fiction, we find many good examples of this genre. WOLF MANKOWITZ is an author who has shot into fame with his two amusing novels, *Make Me An Offer* and *A Kid For Two Farthings*. These are delightfully illustrated, though one could wish that books of this size might be a little cheaper. In writing humorous fiction about the East End of London, WOLF MANKOWITZ is following the tradition of the great ISRAEL ZANGWILL. It is good to see that there has been a movement to revive the reading of ZANGWILL's novels. There have been two new editions of one of his best works, *The King of the Snorriers*. One of them, published by RODALE PRESS, is a really beautiful example of book production. Paper, type and binding are all excellent; I myself, however, do not greatly care for the illustrations—they are doubtless fine in themselves, but they do not match the particular atmosphere of ZANGWILL's characters.

### Sefer Torah

A new series of publications to match the pocket of everyman is the WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS POPULAR LIBRARY. The first volume in the series, *The Parting of the Ways*, by REV. DR. A. COHEN\*, will be on show, together with information about the LIBRARY's plans for the future. These paper-backed volumes, after the style of the *Penguins*, call to mind literary periodicals. A recent entrant in this field is the *Jewish Quarterly*. The set of this Journal includes the current "Special Anglo-Israeli issue."

But Israel itself gives us a lesson in what a Jewish literary periodical should be like. The Exhibition includes a copy of the third issue of *Israel Argosy*, a literary journal in English, published in Jerusalem. Its format is well up to the standard at which a literary magazine should aim, and it includes a number of excellent illustrations. The contents of this number include a translation, together with the Hebrew text, of a cycle of sonnets by TCHERNICHOVSKY.

Also on display will be two "volumes" that will be unusual to Gentile eyes. Garnethill Synagogue has loaned a *Sefer Torah* and a *Megillat Esther*. No novelty to the Jewish visitor, they cannot fail to intrigue the stranger to the synagogue, with their fine Hebrew calligraphy on a parchment scroll. Few non-Jews realise that these ancient forms of books are regularly used in all Jewish congregations.

I have been able to touch on a very few of the exhibits to be seen at the Mitchell Library. I hope that I have said enough to show that Glasgow's Jewish Book Week Exhibition is something really exceptional.

\* Reviewed in this Supplement.

## A POPULAR JEWISH LIBRARY by JOSEPH FRAENKEL

A JEWISH home without books is like a garden without flowers. No matter how tastefully furnished a home may be, nor how many chandeliers, carpets, pictures and mirrors it may contain—a home without a bookcase is cold, dark and empty, the most gracious ornament in a house is the Jewish book.

A Jew who does not read, is like a barren tree, shrivelled and leafless. Such a Jew may have enjoyed a University education and may boast a string of letters after his name, but, if he never reads a Jewish book, he still remains a *grobber ying* as far as Jewish values are concerned.

The Jews have always been called "The People of the Book." In olden times, there were two kinds of Jews: those who spent their time studying books and those who wrote them. Their thirst for Jewish knowledge was insatiable and they read and re-read the Holy Books day and night and their lives were bound up with The Book. Nowadays, Jews read less, they have little time for old classics and even less time for contemporary literature and belles-lettres, but they presume to know everything, unders and everything, and are quite satisfied with "their" Judaism.

Today, Jews and Judaism, Israel and Diaspora, religion and Zionism are much discussed in Jewish and non-Jewish circles. It is part of every citizen's education to be familiar with the history of the Jews—past and present—and to know of their literature and philosophy. A really good Jewish book represents a weapon against possible attack and a cure for the growing evil of assimilation. Those who are versed in Jewish writings are able to face the enemies of Israel with equanimity and they are the ones who can help to build a better future for the Jewish people.

The Cultural Department of the World Jewish Congress in London has, for some time, envisaged the publication of a series of Jewish writings, to be made available to communities all over the world. These pocket-sized books, comprising about 100 pages each are to be published in five languages—English, French, Hebrew, Yiddish and Spanish—later, possibly, in German. At present, there are 12 books in the course of preparation. These books will deal with

the moral and ethical achievements of the Jews, their history, philosophy and literature, Israel and the Diaspora. The most important events of the past and the grave problems of the present will also be discussed. Contemporary Jewish scholars, historians, writers and poets will contribute to the "Popular Jewish Library." Among those who have already undertaken to write for the "Popular Jewish Library" are Edmond Fleg, Dr. Aaron Steinberg, Dr. Oskar K. Rabinowicz, Jacob Leshchinsky and Dr. E. Mamenyi. The books are scheduled to appear every few months.

The first book in the series, "The Parting of the Ways—Judaism and the Rise of Christianity," by Dr. Abraham Cohen, is now on sale and will be distributed all over the world (published for the World Jewish Congress, British Section, by Lincolns-Prager, London, 1954, price 3/6).

The Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, a scholar of repute, the author of several books on the Talmud and Maimonides, and the editor of the "Soncino Books of the Bible," is also known as a fighter for Jewish rights. He is a faithful Zionist, who was at one time Vice-President of the British Section of the World Jewish Congress. Since 1939, Dr. A. Cohen has been the President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

In his book, Dr. Cohen describes the religious background of the Jews in Babylon, the far-seeing efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah, the fight against the Hellenistic influence in the second century, B.C., the religious teachings of those ancient times and the differences between Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. He depicts the birth and rise of Christianity and its gradual drift from Judaism. Dr. A. Cohen quotes Jewish as well as non-Jewish sources—from the wealthy, though often contradictory literature relating to Judaism and the beginnings of Christianity, in order to present to his readers as objective a picture as possible.

Abraham Cohen undertook a difficult task which has been crowned with success. He will win the reader's gratitude, for he does not attempt to thrust his views upon the reader but simply sets down historical truth.

† *Jewish Echo*, 5th March, 1937, p.4.