

CEDARS OF LEBANON

HOW SHALL WE KNOW THE MESSIAH?

MAIMONIDES

It is only fitting that this department should often turn to the writings of Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher and sage, who was born in Cordova, Spain, in 1135. This month we publish an extract from Chapters 11 and 12 of the Book of Judges (Book XIV) of the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah), concerning the Messiah and the Messianic Age. Be it noted that Maimonides regards the Messianic Age as one, not in which the Law is superseded and overthrown, but in which Israel can "be free to devote itself to the Law and its

DO NOT think that King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, revive the dead, or do similar things. It is not so. . . . The general principle is: this Law of ours with its statutes and ordinances [is not subject to change]. It is for ever and all eternity; it is not to be added to or to be taken away from. [Whoever adds aught to it, or takes away aught from it, or misinterprets it, and strips the commandments of their literal sense is an impostor, a wicked man, and a heretic.]

If there arise a king from the House of David who meditates on the Torah, occupies himself with the commandments, as did his ancestor David, observes the precepts prescribed in the Written and the Oral Law, prevails upon Israel to walk in the way of the Torah and to repair its breaches, and fights the battles of the Lord, it may be assumed that he is the Messiah. If he does these things and succeeds, rebuilds the sanctuary on its site, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is beyond all doubt the Messiah.

But if he does not meet with full success, or is slain, it is obvious that he is not the Messiah promised in the Torah. He is to be regarded like all the other wholehearted and

wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it."

THE text given here is taken from Dr. A. M. Hershman's translation of the Book of Judges, Volume III of the Yale Judaica Series, under the general editorship of Julian Obermann, Louis Ginzberg, and Harry A. Wolfson; it is reprinted with the kind permission of the Yale University Press. The third, fourth, and fifth paragraphs below do not appear in the body of the text of the Yale edition, but in Dr. Hershman's introduction.—ED.

worthy kings of the House of David who died and whom the Holy One, blessed be He, raised up to test the multitude, as it is written: *And some of them that are wise shall stumble, to refine among them, and to purify, and to make white, even to the time of the end; for it is yet for the time appointed* (Dan. 11:35).

Even of Jesus of Nazareth, who imagined that he was the Messiah, but was put to death by the court, Daniel had prophesied as it is written: *And the children of the violent among people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall stumble* (Dan. 11:14). For has there ever been a greater stumbling than this? All the Prophets affirmed that the Messiah would redeem Israel, save them, gather their dispersed, and confirm the commandments. But he caused Israel to be destroyed by the sword, their remnant to be dispersed and humiliated. He was instrumental in changing the Torah and causing the world to err and serve another beside God.

But it is beyond the human mind to fathom the designs of the Creator; for our ways are not His ways, neither are our thoughts His thoughts. All these matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmael-

league, a township official, says. "And he ran his office his own way, he never appointed a deputy Supervisor." While Pinc was Supervisor the county Republican party was strong and well organized, as it remains today, and the Democratic party was small and apathetic and seldom nominated important candidates. Pinc campaigned for reelection, and won effortlessly on five occasions, frequently running without opposition. Twice, in 1947 and 1951, he was mildly challenged by the Democratic nominee, Harold A. Roose of Pomona. Roose, a middle-aged local businessman and vice-chairman of the county Democratic party, campaigned on a "reform" platform. He declared that the county government was antiquated, that the county and townships and villages didn't require overlapping services, that the need was for a county-wide administration. He charged that the GOP refused to consider streamlining the county government because it would eliminate many jobs, much patronage. Pinc ignored these charges, decided to rely on his own popularity and his party's strength for reelection, and was reelected each time by a clear majority—in 1947 by 4,632 votes to 1,510 and in 1951 by 4,392 votes to 1,652.

While Supervisor, Pinc continued to live quietly but comfortably. He and his wife lived in their house over the store even after he had sold it to his son. He enjoyed going to the movies and watching baseball on television; occasionally he went fishing with other township officials or, with his wife, to conventions in Rochester, Buffalo, Saranac Lake. Meanwhile his children finished school, went into business and married—two married Jews. (He had seven grandchildren, three boys and four girls, before he died.) Max was graduated from Norwich University and became an insurance broker in Hillburn, near Suffern; Martha and Blanche attended Teachers College in Oneonta, New York, and both later married and went to live in Haverstraw; Hazel was graduated from New York University and became a

grade-school teacher in Spring Valley. Harold, who bought the store, was educated at the Chauncey Hall School in Boston, and in 1944 returned to live in Ladentown after working ten years in Nyack for the Rockland Light and Power Company and serving for two years in the Air Force. Today Ladentown is a green, sleepy place, and trade is usually slow in the store. Housewives chat and buy groceries, children scamper in for candy and ice cream, slamming the screen door, truck drivers stop for gas and cigarettes. A neighbor requests a paper to be notarized or a fire permit to burn some brush.

DURING the election of 1951, though Pinc was reelected Supervisor, the GOP lost control of the county and of the Board of Supervisors for the first time in eighteen years. The Democratic party won contests in three of the five townships—instead of two as they usually did—and as a result Pinc, the Republican chairman of the Board, was replaced by a Democrat; soon after, he was the guest of honor at the first of several testimonial dinners at which his party and other groups eulogized him with speeches, gifts, and scrolls.

That same fall, five years after the death of his wife, Pinc remarried, wedding his wife's sister, a widow living in Haverstraw. Then, less than a year later, on October 26, 1952, a tragedy occurred in the Ramapo Mountains which shocked and upset him deeply. Two men, Robert Nugent, town clerk of the township of Ramapo, and Charles E. Simpson, a banker of Saddle River, New Jersey, were found murdered in Sterling Forest where they had gone hunting. They had been shot to death. Pinc joined the police investigating the double murder (which still remains unsolved), suffered two heart attacks within the next ten days, and died in a local hospital on November 14. "Pinc was given a very big funeral in Spring Valley," one township official recalls. "A thousand people attended, and it tied up traffic on Main Street for two hours."

ite (Mohammed) who came after him, only served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord, as it is written: *For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent* (Zeph. 3:9). Thus the Messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics—topics of conversation (among the inhabitants) of the far isles and many peoples, uncircumcised of heart and flesh. They are discussing these matters and the commandments of the Torah. Some say, "Those commandments were true, but have lost their validity and are no longer binding"; others declare that they had an esoteric meaning and were not intended to be taken literally; that the Messiah has already come and revealed their occult significance. But when the true King Messiah will appear and succeed, be exalted and lifted up, they will forthwith recant and realize that they have inherited naught but lies from their fathers, that their prophets and forebears led them astray.

LET no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course. The words of Isaiah: *And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid* (Isa. 11:6) are to be understood figuratively, meaning that Israel will live securely among the wicked of the heathens who are likened to wolves and leopards, as it is written: *A wolf of the deserts doth spoil them, a leopard watcheth over their cities* (Jer. 5:6). They will all accept the true religion, and will neither plunder nor destroy, and together with Israel earn a comfortable living in a legitimate way, as it is written: *And the lion shall eat straw like the ox* (Isa. 11:7). All similar expressions used in connection with the Messianic age are metaphorical. . . .

Said the Rabbis: *The sole difference between the present and the Messianic days is delivery from servitude to foreign powers* (B. San. 91b). Taking the words of the Prophets in their literal sense, it appears that the inauguration of the Messianic era will be marked by the war of Gog and Magog; that prior to that war, a prophet will

arise to guide Israel and set their hearts aright, as it is written: *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet* (Mal. 3:23). He (Elijah) will come neither to declare the clean unclean, nor the unclean clean; neither to disqualify those who are presumed to be of legitimate descent, nor to pronounce qualified those who are presumed to be of illegitimate descent, but to bring peace in the world, as it is said: *And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children* (Mal. 3:24).

Some of our Sages say that the coming of Elijah will precede the advent of the Messiah. But no one is in a position to know the details of this and similar things until they have come to pass. They are not explicitly stated by the Prophets. Nor have the Rabbis any tradition with regard to these matters. They are guided solely by what the Scriptural texts seem to imply. Hence there is a divergence of opinion on the subject. But be that as it may, neither the exact sequence of those events nor the details thereof constitute religious dogmas. No one should ever occupy himself with the legendary themes or spend much time on midrashic statements bearing on this and like subjects. He should not deem them of prime importance, since they lead neither to the fear of God nor to the love of Him. Nor should one calculate the end. Said the Rabbis: Blasted be those who reckon out the end (B. San 97b). One should wait. . . .

The Sages and Prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over the heathens, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of life in the world to come.

In that era there will be neither famine nor war, neither jealousy nor strife. Blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all. The one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the Lord. Hence Israelites will be very wise, they will know the things that are now concealed and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost capacity of the human mind, as it is written: *For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea* (Isa. 11:9).

ON THE HORIZON

WHERE YIDDISH THEATER LIVES ON

The Quickening Influence of Its Style

GEORGE ROSS

A GALA NIGHT is not an occasion for presenting *King Lear*, nor is it a time to look for sustained performance. A celebration is at best a gathering of interested people who have come together to mark a significant date with nostalgia and affection. The Yiddish Theater Diamond Jubilee on June 10 was held for just this purpose, and an hour before the doors opened an audience largely of first-generation immigrant Jews collected under the marquee which still advertised Rumshinsky's *Girl of My Dream*. They came to buy Israel Bonds, to meet friends, and to recall the Yiddish Theater. Yiddish audiences are, by now, used less to going to the theater to see a play or a performance than to attending a benefit, hearing a little Yiddish spoken, and having a good laugh or a good cry.

What they saw inside was no great event in theater history. None of the "greats" of Yiddish dramatic literature—David Pinski, Perez Hirschbein, S. Anski, Sholem Asch—

TAKING as his point of departure the celebration of the Yiddish Theater Diamond Jubilee a few months ago, GEORGE ROSS tries to evoke the special qualities which have given the Yiddish theater vitality even when it has not reached a high artistic level, and which, finding their way by devious routes into the general American theater, have made a distinctive contribution to American drama. Mr. Ross is an actor and writer who was born in New York City in 1919. His article "Death of a Salesman' in the Original," a review of Joseph Buloff's Yiddish production of the Arthur Miller play, appeared in our February 1951 issue.

was represented, but Avrum Goldfaden who founded the Yiddish theater in Rumania in 1876 was, and so was Jacob Gordin who was responsible for its effective beginning in this country in the early 1890's. The sketches, songs, and plays of Goldfaden and Gordin, crude and commercial as they were, nevertheless were the real beginning of the Yiddish theater as an institution and in a sense represented its present too; and this audience was the same "average" audience which has always supported it. Goldfaden and Gordin wrote nothing that can be called literature, but they left authentic Jewish characters whose names are part of the Yiddish language. When Jacob Kalich, as the master of ceremonies, announced *Shloimke Sharlatan*, by Jacob Gordin, or *Shmendrik*, by Avrum Goldfaden, there was applause of recognition. Most of this audience had seen these pieces years ago, or in any case had absorbed these names and characters into their culture at least to the extent that Americans have absorbed "Charlie Chaplin" or "Throttlebottom." And if there were any present of my own generation (I didn't see any) who were seeing these selections for the first time, they had certainly at some time in the family heard of "Shloimke" and "Shmendrik."

We might have wished to see some of the brighter lights among Jewish actors, just as we might have wished for something from the more developed years of Jewish playwriting, but we had a delicious moment of Molly Picon, a tantalizing minute of Aaron Lebedeff, and a glimpse, albeit only a glimpse, in the acting of Nathan Goldberg, Hannah Hollander, Celia Adler, and Men-