

On the Watchtower

By JOSEPHUS

The simultaneous consecration of the memory of Herzl and Bialik offers a sinister temptation to reflect on Jewish psychology.

For this solemn commemoration offers an interesting study in posthumous appreciation. Posthumous praise is perhaps not altogether a Jewish characteristic. In this respect as in others the Jew is just like other people—only more so. But the Jew does seem happier in honouring the dead than in paying a tribute to the living. While other peoples have divinised their great men in their lifetime, the Jew has always shrunk from so concrete an adoration. Among the Jews the ideal has never degenerated into the idol, and indeed the Jew's great devotion to the ideal always puts such a strain on the bearer that he often succumbs to the ideal which he himself has conceived but which his ardent followers render so difficult of accomplishment as to make its burden insupportable.

This seems to have been the fate of Herzl. For Herzl who became poignantly aware of the hostility of the non-Jewish world, found his early death in the Jewish world, thus proving that the way from Assimilation was as fatal as the way to it.

For the standards of life are different in the two worlds and one cannot live in the one by the standards of the other. The difference seems to lie in the Jew's worship of the ideal rather than of the idol. The Jew is no respecter of persons. From Moses downwards Jewish leaders have always found it a great trial to lead this stiff-necked people from the wilderness into the Promised Land.

Herzl was an idealist, yet he died for his realism—a realism which was unacceptable to the fanatic followers whom he fired with his ideal. He tried to solve the Jewish problem as a Realpolitiker, but he succumbed to the sentimental idealism of the dreamers who would rather dream than live. It is now when the real Herzl has merged in the ideal he represented that the Jew finds it easy to pay homage to his memory. He will even worship his realism—as an ideal. He will revere him as a symbol after having destroyed him as a man. This deference to his memory is now free from any danger of idolatry for his memory has now its place wholly in the domain of ideas and

ideals, it is free entirely from the personal devotion that savours of idolatry.

This joint commemoration of Herzl and Bialik is in itself peculiarly Jewish. Other peoples would find it incongruous to bracket their statesmen and poets in a common devotion. For in the non-Jewish mind the poet and the politician are poles asunder—they are almost antithetical, for the one lives in a real world, while the other lives and moves and has his being in a symbolic world; the one deals with life, the other with art.

Among the Jews the boundaries do not seem to be so clear cut. For the Jew is a curious mixture of idealism and realism and the two domains often merge in his life without any seeming incongruity.

Perhaps the link between the ideal and the real is the symbol—the symbol that is transparent and shows the idea behind it, unlike the idol which is opaque and is worshipped as a fetish, the idea behind it having been dimmed or forgotten. As transparent symbols both Herzl and Bialik seem to represent the same idea and ideal, even though they approached their problem from opposite ends. While Herzl began with reality and in his death and transfiguration attained the serenity of a symbol, Bialik who worked with symbols reached reality, and his work is as real a strand of the Jewish fabric as the realistic scheming of his peer.

The two perhaps, it may be said, constitute the warp and woof of the Jewish fabric, the prose and poetry of life—of Jewish life. But here again, in Jewish lore, there is no clear-cut line of demarcation between prose and poetry. It is difficult in Jewish literature, such as that of the prophets, to distinguish between the two. A greater rush of spiritual impulse, a more pressing burden of the message, and prose overflows into poetry without any perceptible change in rhyme or rhythm, with but a spiritual intensification of the divine impulse.

So the realistic prose of Herzl's political strivings rushed with a death-leap into the poetry of the symbol, while Bialik suddenly stopped weaving his symbolic fabric to contemplate the world of reality—of Jewish reality, and remained entangled in its web without being able to live again wholly in that symbolic world in which non-Jewish poets build their lives.

Both Herzl and Bialik seem in some way to have fallen victims to this discrepancy between the real and the ideal, between the actual and symbolic in Jewish life. While Herzl, impatient of a purely cultural Judaism, sought to give it a political basis, Bialik, finding purely symbolic beauty unsatisfying to his spirit, relinquished the song of love and nature to bear the burden of his people. Both are thus for us real and ideal—poignantly beautiful and infinitely tragic, and we may thus embrace them in a common prayer for the dead—for the living.

Ernest Bloch wins American Academy Award.

New York.

One of the greatest living composers, Ernest Bloch, who has written many compositions with Hebrew themes, has been chosen as the first composer to receive the gold medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Walter Damrosch, President, announced here.

In awarding to Bloch the Academy's highest award, which has been presented only five times in history, the last one in 1930, Damrosch said: "Bloch is certainly one of the most distinguished composers in the United States to-day. His music is highly idealistic and individual in character and brilliant in development. He is not influenced by any other composer or controlled by any school. Always it is Ernest Bloch who speaks from the pages of his scores. The Academy is proud to single him out for the highest honour it has to offer."

Bloch was born in Geneva, Switzerland, sixty-one years ago. He is an American citizen and is considered one the greatest Jewish composers in history.

Hebrew University Establishes Centre for Physical Culture.

Jerusalem.

A further extension of the activities of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem through the establishment of a "Centre for Physical Culture and Sports," was announced here at a Press Conference by Dr. Eliezer Riger and Dr. Emanuel Simon.

It was also announced that the University was going to open special two-years' courses for the training of physical culture instructors for the Palestine Jewish schools. "Physical culture," Dr. Simon declared, "will henceforth occupy a prominent place in the Jewish educational system."

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BARMITZVAH.

FRIDMAN,—Nathan Mordecai, eldest son of Chazan A. Fridman and Mrs. Fridman, will read his Maffir and Haftorah at the Beth Hamedrash D'Ponevez, 45, Maynard St., Cape Town, on Saturday Morning, 25th July, 1942. "At Home," Sunday afternoon, 26th July, at 10, Virginia Court, Virginia Ave. Relatives and friends are cordially invited.

FUTERAN.—Barry elder son of Mr. and Mrs. M. Futeran, 6, Pelican Park, Muizenberg, will read a Portion of the Law at the Muizenberg Synagogue on Saturday, 25th July, 1942. Brocha at Mountain View Hotel, Muizenberg.