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## ALEXANDER the Corrector

*The Eccentric Life of Alexander Cruden*

## The Jewish Past and the Modern Jew

THE MAKING OF THE MODERN JEW.  
By Milton Steinberg. Indianapolis:  
The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS I. NEWMAN

**R**ABBI MILTON STEINBERG of the Park Avenue Synagogue, New York City, has admirably explained the making of the modern Jew in a book which is an expansion of two articles published in the *Atlantic Monthly* last summer: "How the Jew Did It: The Mystery of His Survival," and "How the Jew Does It: Why He Is What He Is." His volume is intended primarily for non-Jewish readers, and for those Jews who are little informed regarding Jewish traditions and problems. After posing the riddle of Jewish survival, Rabbi Steinberg traces the itinerary of Israel among the nations since the destruction of the Jewish State in the year 70; he describes in vivid and inspiring fashion the nature of his heritage, the way of his law, and the inner light which illumined his difficult path. In the period of transition from the old world of the "Judengasse" to the new world offered him by civil and social emancipation, Rabbi Steinberg portrays

the dilemma which the modern Jew faces: the dissolution of balance between his own collective life and the demands of his non-Jewish environment, the imminence of self-destruction, and the necessity of choosing the new sanctions whereby the people and the faith may endure.

It is regrettable, by reason of authoritative and vigorous presentation of his material, that Rabbi Steinberg should have ended his interpretive study of modern Jewish history with a question-mark. He adopts the role of an impartial student, seeking to trace the consequences of events in the group life and individuality of the contemporary Jew, and he has divested himself of the garb of the Rabbi, who is and must be essentially an advocate. But he has given his study an emphasis which many of his ardent Jewish readers will consider false, and he has turned out of shape historical facts and interpretations which, if otherwise presented, would lead to a different conclusion.

In the "Epilogue" Rabbi Steinberg narrates a fable from the works of Mordecai Zeev Feiwel which dramatizes his query: can the Jew survive in the modern world? "The inscrutable future gives no clear answer. The Jew must gamble," writes the author, "on one choice or the other—on the possibility that he can rebuild his shattered group life, or on the chance that, if he destroys its last traces altogether, he will, for all the world's reluctance, win the surcease of assimilation." But the young Feiwel died in 1899, two years after the first Zionist Congress in Basel, and the question raised by Rabbi Steinberg belongs rather to the end of the nineteenth century than to the year 1933. Moreover, Rabbi Steinberg, in a brilliant chapter entitled: "Dusk Children," remarks concerning Chaim Nachman Bialik, the "faithful spokesman" of the generation to which he gave the descriptive name:

He rose from doubt to affirmation; he transcended vacillation into a positive philosophy of Jewish life. To follow him into his new phase would be a fascinating adventure. Unfortunately, such an excursion is irrelevant to the task before us—the description of the pain attendant on the dissolution of the old Judaism.

But why should an interpretation of the new Bialik be omitted in a work by a writer who can speak so enthusiastically of the new Palestine? Cannot Rabbi Steinberg also substitute the mood of affirmation for uncertainty, and his own fine convictions of the pulpit for the questionings of the printed book?

This fundamental flaw almost vitiates the value of Rabbi Steinberg's excellent and timely study of the forces operating in present-day Jewry, at least in the eyes of those Jews who are resolutely determined that the acids of modernity shall not dissolve their fellowship and their ideals of life. Even the question: can the Jew survive in the Diaspora, if in Palestine, his commonwealth and culture are reborn? is answered by Rabbi Steinberg himself when he says: "The renaissance of Hebraism in that one land (Palestine) has led to a corresponding renaissance in all lands." His conclusions are particularly to be deplored by reason of the noble chapter on "Programs," wherein Rabbi Steinberg has given an exposition of Judaism as a civilization, the unique culture of the Jewish people, with an organic complex of a literature, language, religious outlook, folk-ways, group-hopes, aspirations, ethical values, and esthetic judgments: "in this living whole, religion is at once the driving motif and the most ideal expression, but it is by no means the whole or the largest part." This view-

point, of course, is an outgrowth of the essays which Professor Mordecai M. Kaplan wrote in the *Menorah Journal* several years ago. Rabbi Steinberg makes acknowledgment to the great Master of whom he is a deeply appreciative disciple, and we share with him the hope that Professor Kaplan's *magnum opus* will soon be published. Rabbi Steinberg's epigrammatic style, with passages which possess almost the quality of lyric poetry, afford to Professor Kaplan's sociological-philosophical approach to the Jewish question a general and popular appeal of immense value. It is doubtless this desire for a medium, not too heavily academic in character, which has prompted him to include only a few bibliographical references.

Though Rabbi Steinberg himself is one of the most capable organizers and executives in the American Jewish pulpit, it does not appear that he has given sufficient consideration to the role of the synagogue, both as an institution, and as a powerhouse for Jewish energies and influence in the Diaspora. Instead, he declares:

The Jew is rapidly arriving at a point where he will be completely de-Judaized without being assimilated, where, without becoming anything else, he will cease to be a Jew. He threatens to be an undigested element within every land, alienated in spirit from his past, and denied full entrance into the present. He continues to suffer as a Jew, to be slighted, ostracized, handicapped, and suppressed, though his Jewishness may have lost all meaning for him. This is the abyss towards which the Jew moves today, the catastrophe of a Jewishness which cannot be escaped and which is nevertheless empty of all satisfaction.

If Rabbi Steinberg had qualified this generalization by writing not of "the Jew," but of "some Jews," it would be acceptable, except for certain defeatist and impolitic sentiments it contains. Those Jews who are without Judaism are numerous, but, even if modern Jewry were reduced to a mere "remnant," Judaism, as it is voiced by the great standard-bearers of our day—Israel Zangwill, Ludwig Lewisohn, Edmond Fleg, Stephen Wise, Mordecai Kaplan, and others, would still be a potent factor in the life of Jewry and the world. The rumor of Israel's demise is once more grossly exaggerated, and I would recommend to Rabbi Steinberg, whose book in many respects deserves the highest praise, the line on the Moabite Stone, to which Rabbi Sidney S. Tedeschi recently called attention: Mesha, King of Moab, 2900 years ago, inscribed on the monument: "And I destroyed Israel with an everlasting destruction." I would remind Rabbi Steinberg that the emancipation of the modern Jew may have resulted in the assimilation and desertion of multitudes, but the Jewish population today is several times larger than in 1791. Moreover, the Zionist Congress and other great philanthropic and collective instruments of Jewish self-help, are all the product of the release of national and individual energies which freedom, despite anti-Semitism, the dissolution of balance, attempts at group-suicide, and the rest, has made possible. If Rabbi Steinberg had omitted the Epilogue, or had included its material at various points in preceding chapters, and, if he had ended with the comparison of Israel in Palestine to the giant Antæus, who, every time he struck foot on Mother Earth, was filled with tenfold strength, this review would have been radically different in mood.

Mr. Newman is a member of the faculty of the Jewish Institute of Religion of New York, as well as rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Shalom.

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# The New Books

## Art

**THE BAROQUE PAINTERS OF ITALY.**  
By Arthur McComb. Harvard University Press. 1934. \$5.

The baroque, which for nearly a generation has profoundly interested German, Italian, and English scholars, makes a tardy entrance into American scholarship in this excellent illustrated monograph of Professor McComb's. It exemplifies the academic virtues of cautiousness and thoroughness, and as well extra-academic virtues of the author—brevity, clearness, and a happy touch in miniature criticism. Its necessary ballast of footnotes and bibliography is carried lightly, and it is, barring a venial lapse or two, written in a sound and eminently readable English. Its objective is presumably the upper-class elective, but it will be equally welcomed by the intelligent, unenrolled reader. Here and there the latitude and longitude of its composition assert themselves in a singular detachment. The author apparently does not know that upwards of two years ago the Metropolitan Museum acquired a fine example of one of his favorite painters, Domenico Feti. Most inadequate is the list of baroque paintings in America. In the interest of students we offer a few additions. The old Wiltach Collection in Philadelphia is a treasure house of this art. The collections of the New York Historical Society comprise a considerable group by A. Carracci, not to mention Domenichino, Piazzetta, and others. The most important landscape in America by Salvator is in the odd Moorish country house built by F. E. Church at Rhinebeck-on-Hudson. Princeton has two Salvators, Caravaggio, A. Carracci, Domenichino, Sebastiano Ricci, Piazzetta, and Tiepolo. A little inquiry and consultation of museum catalogues would greatly increase these addenda.

The book is uncommonly well made.  
F. J. M.

## Biography

**THE LETTERS OF ROMAIN ROLLAND AND MALWIDA VON MYSENBURG.**  
Translated from the French by Thomas J. Wilson. Holt. 1933. \$2.50.

These letters were exchanged during the years 1890 and 1891 by a young man of twenty-four and a woman of seventy-four: by a woman old in worldly experience, who had been the friend of Wagner and Nietzsche, and a young man, just then discovering the world, who was to become the author of "Jean Christophe" and the most Olympian of war-time pacifists. We have here the earliest phase of a correspondence which endured unbrokenly for thirteen years, until it was terminated by Malwida von Mysenbug's death in 1903. It is a strange correspondence, and, in view of the ages of those concerned, it is a curiously emotional relationship which stands revealed. The value which the individual reader will place on the letters will vary in direct proportion to the value which he places on Rolland as an author, for their chief claim upon our interest is that they show Rolland in the bud.

B. R. R.

## Fiction

**TREELESS EDEN.** By Francine Findley. King. 1934. \$2.50.

"When people come to a new land like this, they always call it Eden, then start gobblin' up everything in sight. They fergit all about the Tree in the midst of the Garden an' go on actin' like they ain't no such of a tree. The tree of knowledge of good and evil. But pretty soon the mouths begin puckerin'. Fer the fruit of the tree thereof is mighty bitter fruit, Seline."

So Cap'n Jacox reminds his wife on the Sacramento ranch as she sets about her life campaign of possession.

Selina's philosophy is the winning one, as the author traces California history from ranching, gambling, claim-jumping, the fever of greed and optimism of the '60s, through seventy-five years of anarchy down to the Roosevelt régime. The dishonors are divided between the rapacious pioneer spirit, the capitalist system in general, and one Jim Jacox, self-made man, whose life-time spans the novel.

This is a sure enough, good enough, American novel, but there is a persistent imperfection about it. The author, whose philosophy is vague, mothers her characters. They are switched from the side of the devil to the side of the angels because they are hurt, sick, or lonely. The reader,

emotionally spent, loses the author's original idea. Jim Jacox, on his death-bed, ceases to be the villain he has been all his life, and Selina has long since become lovable. Between the lines of the last page Miss Findley murmurs "De Mortuis..." which is all very well in its place, but "Treeless Eden," as the title indicates, started out to be a story with a jutting moral.

The structure of the novel has its own imperfection, a curiously national one, typical of Lewis, Dreiser and the poetry of Whitman, an imperfection which can be partly attributed to the massive on-rushing nation these men write about. In an effort to time her book to the rapid pace of history, and to stuff the meaning of that history into a few type characters, Miss Findley fails in the first job of any artist, harnessing one's material, however fierce, and riding it as master, however swift. She whips up her story to a certain momentum, and half way through the horse shies and gallops along byways to a place one is certain the author never saw on the map when she started.

E. C.

## International

**THE SPIRIT OF MODERN FRANCE.** By Helen Hill. New York: Foreign Policy Association. 1934. \$50.

This little pamphlet, for it is no more, is nevertheless extraordinarily interesting and valuable reading. It is written by a woman who has had evident opportunity to study France at first hand both as a country and as a nation dealing with other powers at Geneva. In very simple fashion she indicates, first, false ideas in France about America and vice versa. Then the curious social and economic structure of the French race which makes it so difficult for us to understand their reactions to political or financial complications; and afterward with still more penetration she points out the division in France between what might be called the followers of Descartes and the followers of Pascal. On this basis she proceeds to describe the French parties, the difference between democratic France interested in its home problems and imperial France concerned chiefly with a tightly held empire; and concludes with an illuminating discussion of the alternatives confronting France in Europe which seems to be departing further and further from the ideals of French life. It would be difficult to find anywhere else in English so concise and at the same time so deep-going an analysis of contemporary France.

## Miscellaneous

**TATTOO.** By Albert Parry. Simon & Schuster. 1933. \$3.

Tattooing is an old and widespread human practice, indulgence in which can be explained by any one or several of the large selection of motives, ranging from a desire to signify one's loyalty to the dead to using pigmented prickings as an insecticide. To treat it as a curiosity is the easy privilege of one surfeited with the blinds and blandishments of modern civilization. Yet how much of this vaunted civilization is rooted in the artificial pigmentations of the human skin neither the tattooers nor the vast majority of the tattooed know or care to know. A very extensive literature exists on the subject. Mr. Parry's book is probably not intended to be taken as an important contribution to this literature. Rather it appears to be the effort of a feuilletonist who has chanced upon what to him seems a curious and striking custom.

The author touches upon very few of the elements in tattooing that have little to do with sex. In this he has taken the cue from Westermarck who stresses the connection of body-marking with sexual impulse. To be up to date, however, Mr. Parry has incorporated some of the Freudian complexes which are still fashionable among the specializing non-specialists.

He rejects the reason given for tattooing by many of the needle artists and their patrons, namely to secure a life-long and unending means of identification. He knows that the true motives are "deeper" and "darker." True, he wishes the reader to believe the statement of the tattooers that when newspapers carry scare headlines about the kidnapping of a baby, parents come in droves to have their children skin-marked. But even here, Mr. Parry assures us, the real aim is to provide an

(Continued on next page)

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