

that U Thant is not even mentioned, though the Secretary-General was under heavy criticism in Israel and abroad for removing the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) from the armistice line in the Gaza Strip and Sharm el Sheikh, an action that preceded—some believe brought on—the Six-Day War. David Ben-Gurion is one who thinks this.

In the array of pictures showing Dayan with his family and public figures, including Arabs and prime ministers, not one is of him with his beloved mentor, Ben-Gurion. The oversight is, at least, interesting.

## Paragons

*Jews, Justice and Judaism*, by Robert St. John (Doubleday 390 pp. \$6.95), stresses the egalitarianism of the Jews since antiquity. Robert J. Milch, an editor for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is the author of "How to Be an American Jew," to be published next month by Thomas Yoseloff.

By ROBERT J. MILCH

A USEFUL WORK ON THE JEWS in America might take several forms: it could be a comprehensive narrative of the origins and development of the Jewish community in this country; or it could be an analysis of the role Jews have played, for good or ill, in the evolution of American society; or it could be a look inside American Jewry, showing how Jews and Judaism have responded to their American environment, and why distinctive changes in the fabric of Jewish life have occurred here.

Unfortunately, *Jews, Justice and Judaism*, by Robert St. John, successfully manages none of these things, and as a result, though well written and often interesting, particularly in its colorful account of the early centuries of American Jewish history, it is a book of little value, marred by defects both of content and of viewpoint.

First, there are numerous factual errors, some admittedly minor, revealing that the author's grasp, despite his many previous writings on Jewish subjects, is not equal to his ambition, as is also indicated by the meager list of sources listed in his bibliography. To cite only one example: In almost every European country Christian ecclesiastics in the Middle Ages and later initiated or condoned the censorship and burning of the Talmud and other Jewish texts; it is simply untrue to assert, as St. John does, that non-Jews never interfered with Jewish Talmud study.

Even more serious are a number of curious omissions. A capsule biography of Morris Hillquit, for instance, does not mention that he was one of the fore-

most leaders of the American Socialist Party. A biography of David Dubinsky does not mention his part in founding the Liberal Party. A superficial account of Conservative and Reform Judaism hardly comes near explaining the origins of these major American Jewish denominations, while Orthodox Judaism, Jewish socialism, Jewish secularism, and an ethnic conception of Jewish peoplehood, especially in its connection with Zionism, are almost ignored, except as peculiar aberrations among newly arrived immigrants. For that matter, there is no mention at all of the problems confronting the present-day American Jewish community and of the terrible banality that characterizes so much of middle-class Jewish private and institutional life. Partly, it would seem, that is all to be explained by St. John's theory of what the Jewish people are and how they ought to be described, a theory that he supports even to the extent of twisting evidence, as in his distortion of an anecdote from the Midrash on Lamentations to demonstrate the antiquity of Jewish advocacy of racial equality.

Robert St. John is certainly a friend of the Jews, but he seems to think that the Jewish people are a kind of non-sectarian fellowship of freethinkers and intellectuals who down through the ages, despite adversity, have dedicated themselves to the sole task of keeping the Democratic Way alive. Using criteria inferred from this book, one might conclude that Thomas Jefferson was a Jew but one couldn't be too sure about, say, Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism. In this light St. John's claim that the Jews were fighting McCarthyism a thousand years ago, whatever that means, is not surprising, nor is his apparent assertion that quasi-democratic guarantees of free speech in ancient Israel protected the right of the prophets

to preach unpopular doctrines, which is demonstrably false, and, moreover, an illegitimate application to the past of a relatively modern ideological concept.

Had this work been written by a Jewish author it would, very likely, be described as complacent and self-serving, and its bland picture of Judaism would be castigated as unnecessarily defensive. In short, it would be seen as typifying a genre of Jewish literature more familiar a few decades ago, when some Jews eagerly sought to prove that they did not differ in any significant way from other Americans, except in being more fervently American, and implied that they were, in fact, not Jews at all, as the word Jew had been known for centuries, but a "purified" new breed perhaps best described by a term like "Americans of the Mosaic persuasion." In this connection it is worth repeating St. John's comment on the arrival in the United States in the 1930s of numerous German-Jewish scientists and intellectuals: "... these immigrants could not possibly be a source of embarrassment for anyone."

St. John's eulogy of the Jews is warm and admiring but it is not history. However well intended, his treatment of the Jews as paragons does little honor to their diversity as individuals and to their humanness. He glosses over Jewish failings, for reasons I am sure that are both high-minded and wrong; does not discuss much that is good in the Jewish achievement; and seems blind to the full dimensions of the Jewish genius. Without implying that Jewish standards of law and justice and Jewish contributions to American jurisprudence and egalitarianism are any less than what St. John shows them to be, it is not carping to suggest that there is more to the Jewish people than he ever hints at, and that the real Jewish experience is much, much richer than anything in his pages.

## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by David M. Glixon

### GERMANGLISH

Each of the missing words is the German for the word at its left, as well as an English equivalent of the word at its right (for example—left: LINK: connection). Dora M. Hertz sends us this workout from Mannheim-Feudenheim, W. Germany. Antworten on page 75.

shop _____	burdened	skirt _____	boulder
burden _____	final	good _____	intestine
beer _____	coffin stand	letter _____	short
light _____	underworld	has _____	headgear
am _____	container	lay _____	linger
eleven _____	sprite	day _____	label

# A Milestone for Children's Books

By ZENA SUTHERLAND

**Y**ES, OF COURSE you all know by now that the National Book Committee has established an award for a children's book and that the first winner was Meindert DeJong for *Journey from Peppermint Street* (Harper & Row, \$4.50; SR, Nov. 9). It is a small news item to most readers, but to those of us who are in love with children's books it is a milestone.

For years there had been discussion of the possibility of a prize that would admit children's books as a part of the national literature, supplementing—rather than competing with—the distinction conferred by the Newbery and Caldecott awards. It was, therefore, with a shock of pleasure but not surprise that I learned of this addition to the National Book Awards. Along with the eminent poet John Ciardi and Virginia Haviland, head of the children's book section of the Library of Congress, I received an invitation to judge the candidates for the honor.

Our way was made smooth by the indefatigable organizational ability of the committee's executive director, Peter Jennison, and by the executive director of the Children's Book Council, John Donovan. The award was to be given for "a children's book by a U.S. citizen, originated in the U.S. and published in the calendar year 1968." The judges were to select a book whose distinctiveness of thought or spirit was reflected in its literary expression; there were no limitations of genre or of reading level. Publishers submitted titles, although we were free to choose others, and a prolific correspondence ensued, of which the Xerox Corporation was the immediate beneficiary. By the time Virginia Haviland and I met in Washington in January for a conference call with John Ciardi, we were ready to pick the finalists—not without rueful thoughts about other books.

Came the dawn. Like the other NBA judges, we met in New York to arrive at a final choice, and were asked to compose a citation for the winner. Deep thinking, furious scribbling. Each of us made the same comments, we discovered, but there was no question about whose version to use. (Maybe writers write better?) John Ciardi said, in part, "Mr. DeJong has the gift of summoning child-marvelous experiences to his narrative, yet of containing them in his sure sense of childhood."

The citation was read by John Lorenz, Deputy Librarian of Congress and master of ceremonies for the occasion, on March 12, as Meindert DeJong joined the six other NBA winners on the stage of Philharmonic Hall. He didn't say so, but when he went to Europe to receive the Hans Christian Andersen Medal, an international award, it was a visit to Wierum, his birthplace in the Netherlands, that inspired *Journey from Peppermint Street*. What Mr. DeJong did say was, "Certainly, in terms of adult experience, the child's world and the world of children's literature are limited worlds. But it is in that very limitation that the writer for children finds his joy and his challenge and his untrammelled creativity." Quoting Braque, he added, "Limitation of means determines style, engenders form and new form, and gives impulse to creativity."

**N**OW that children's literature has gained a new kind of national recognition and has received long-merited status, one hopes that someday there may be a prize for children's poetry or for biography for young people. It was gratifying to see the cordiality with which the other finalists (Lloyd Alexander, Patricia Clapp, Esther Hautzig, and Milton Meltzer) congratulated Meindert DeJong and to recognize the pride expressed by many editors both in the establishment of the award and in its first recipient.

"What's left?" Maurice Sendak, who has illustrated many of DeJong's books, teased the winner. "Poor man, you've already won this, and the Newbery, and the Andersen." "Happens every seven years," said the ebullient DeJong, and shoved a paper napkin over. "Give me my first drawing lesson—there's still the Caldecott."

**The Birth of Sunset's Kittens.** By Carla Stevens. Photographs by Leonard Stevens. Scott. 44 pp. \$3.95. Especially good for the child who has never seen the wonderful process of animal birth, this simple, accurate book depicts the beginning of life for four wet, bedraggled kittens. The illustrations show the mother cat tenderly caring for her litter, while the text explains with neither sentimentality nor coyness what is happening; the young have been in the uterus, they emerge in the amniotic sac, the cat grooms them and disposes of the afterbirth. In some of the photographs an absorbed child is watching, but the pictures are unposed. An excellent job of straightforward treatment. Ages 5-8.

**The Fish from Japan.** By Elizabeth K. Cooper. Illustrated by Beth and Joe Krush. Harcourt, Brace & World. 32 pp. \$3.75. Disbelief needn't be suspended here, but a small sagging of the credulity barrier will help. Would a classroom full of children really think an empty glass jar had a fish in it? They do think so, because they convince themselves that the fish from Japan which Harvey had been promised by an uncle is in the jar. Harvey, who had expected a real fish and received a paper kite, calmly foists the fraud in a moment of inspiration; the teacher, with knowing eye and understanding heart, says nothing. The story has a bubbling humor, the children couldn't be more real, and the handling of an imaginative child's stretching of the truth is tactful. Ages 5-8.

**Jake.** By Tamara Kitt. Illustrated by Brinton Turkle. Abelard-Schuman. 40 pp. \$3.75. Although the more familiar versions of the Epaminondas story are in a flowing style that is better for reading aloud and for storytelling, this adaptation for the beginning reader is not without appeal. Aided by the engaging illustrations, the book has a sprightly humor, and the rhyming text is shown in balloons. Jake, sent by his mother on various errands to his granny, takes literally every instruction that mother gives. Scolded for squashing a cake and told he should have carried it on his head, the agreeable little animal, a skunk brings back some butter the next time. On his head, and completely melted. This can be read aloud to very young children, but is primarily for ages 6-7.

**George Washington's Breakfast.** By Jean Fritz. Illustrated by Paul Galdone. Coward-McCann. 44 pp. \$3.75. You wouldn't think it was possible to make a story about the problems of historical research interesting, much less funny, but Jean Fritz does it. As Washington's namesake, George is bent on acquiring all the information he can about his hero. He asks his grandmother what G.W. ate for breakfast. "Search me," says that sprightly lady. "That was before my time." But she agrees to cook a Washingtonian breakfast if George can find out what it comprised. The whole family and the local librarian get involved, and eventually Grandma gets stuck with making a reasonable facsimile of hoecakes—in the fireplace. The historical details are precise, the style is yeasty, the illustrations are lively, and Grandma is a living doll. Ages 7-10.

**A Girl Called Al.** By Constance C. Greene. Illustrated by Byron Barton. Viking. 127 pp. \$3.95. "Al is a little on the fat side, which is why I didn't like her at first . . . Al says she doesn't love her mother that much . . . She has a very high I.Q., she says . . . She's not my mother's cup of tea, whatever that means." The friendship between two seventh-grade girls is cemented by their common admiration for Mr. Richards, the assistant superintendent of the building and a man to add to your list of Unforgettable Characters. Blossoming in the warmth of Mr. Richards's grandfatherly kindness, Al begins to relax the rigid defenses she has erected. The writing style is delightful, the characterization deft, and the