



JACOB MANN

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By VICTOR E. REICHERT

The death of Jacob Mann on Wednesday evening, October 23, 1940, in his fifty-third year, deprived America of a foremost Jewish savant and the Hebrew Union College of one of the greatest, most original and productive scholars in the history of that famed institution.

Jacob Mann was unquestionably one of the world's most renowned authorities of our time in the field of Jewish history. He salvaged from the Genizah a vast assortment of worm-eaten documents and pieced together dusty and illegible fragments that would have been the despair of a less assiduous researcher. His immense learning was recognized and appreciated in every civilized corner of the earth where Jewish lore is prized and pursued. His name was a passport and open sesame in every great repository of Jewish manuscripts and books,—in the British Museum, London; the Bodleian, Oxford; the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Library of the Vatican, Rome; the State Public Library, Leningrad; the Hebrew University, Jerusalem; the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.

His scholarly range was prodigious and his original contributions to Jewish lore and letters in a vast array of articles, reviews, brochures, essays and enormous books containing hitherto undeciphered and undecipherable Hebrew documents, cover well-nigh every branch of Jewish studies.

R. Mahler, in a warm tribute to "Jacob Mann's Life and Works" in *Yivo Bleter*, the Journal of the Yiddish Scientific Institute, listed no less than sixty separate items from the indefatigable pen of the tireless scholar. (*Yivo Bleter*, Vol. XVI, no 2, Nov.-Dec., 1940.) This list included five formidable volumes on the Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs, I, Oxford, 1920;

II, Oxford, 1922; Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature, Vol. I, Cincinnati, 1931; II (Karaitica), Philadelphia, 1935; The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue, Cincinnati, 1940; all containing material that had hitherto remained undeciphered in Genizoth or neglected in libraries.

As though that were not enough, Dr. Joshua Bloch, Librarian of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library, gave an addendum to Jacob Mann's Bibliography in the subsequent issue of the *Yivo Bleter*, (Vol. XVII No. 1, Jan.-Feb., 1941), adding fourteen more items that had escaped Mahler's eye,—a total of seventy-four. Further bibliographical investigations may show the list of Jacob Mann's contributions still to be incomplete!

The genius of Jacob Mann was not only that of an extraordinary scientific imagination that enabled him to piece together and make whole the dusty tattered shreds of a forgotten or neglected yesterday. It was the genius of indefatigable and herculean industry, of infinite painstaking care and patience, of heroic self-effacement and enormous singleness of purpose that made him put aside all frivolity or allurements of pleasure and follow the quest for wisdom and truth. To this martyr-like devotion to the Torah, Jacob Mann brought a spirit that was the embodiment of reverence, piety and humility.

Jacob Mann was an intellectual giant in whom knowledge and faith were completely and beautifully fused. His love of truth for its own sake was reflected in every line he wrote, in the almost naked exactness and freedom from fanciful speculation in his meticulously restrained sentences. He frowned upon all glittering generalizations and was impatient of all over-ingenious theorizing. Because he worshipped at the shrine of truth, he hated all sham and pretense. He could not endure the false parade of pompous conceit or vanity. He shunned bluff and hypocrisy as though they were a plague.

Jacob Mann has left us the clue to his own lofty standards of scholarship as well as a hint of the obstacles that stood in the way of the modest, consecrated student of research in these lines penned in the preface to "Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature" Vol. I, 1931:

"All these studies," he writes, "based as they are on raw material, which supplements and illumines the already known, will, it is to be hoped, be appreciated by scholars and students who, like the writer, are averse to fanciful theories spun out as a rule from a minimum of available data — a new type of 'making bricks without straw,' or of rearing castles in the air. Only by a cautious and laborious inductive method and by adding constantly to our knowledge of the actual realities of the Jewish past (as against the speculative imaginings of which we have enough and to spare) can we understand this past fully and truly and ultimately hope to obtain the synthesis that every research worker sets before himself as his ultimate goal. The more the material stored up in manuscripts is made accessible in a scientific manner, the better will the history of Jewish life and activities in the course of the past ages be reconstructed anew. With the widening of the horizon new perspectives are revealed and events, movements and personalities are placed in a different setting and proportion.

"As for those, who in their vaunted superiority condescend to look down pityingly on studies of this kind as consisting of dry minutiae culled from dusty and worn out writings and who either cannot or will not accompany in spirit the seeker for truth in his quest for the evidence of the realities of the past wherever it can be discovered — for such persons research studies of this nature are frankly never intended and their inherent lack of appeal is a foregone conclusion. In the true process of research experience has, however, shown over and over again how seemingly small data become missing links in whole chains of evidence which thereby obtain a significance never realized before."

As stupendous as was his learning, so deep was his religious devotion and personal faith. He revered the memory of his sainted father who had been his first teacher of Torah, and he loved to speak in gratitude and affectionate appreciation of Dr. Adolph Buechler, the late Master of Jews' College, to whom he was indebted for first guidance into the scientific method of scholarly research.

Jacob Mann was a modest and retiring scholar,— modest

almost to a fault. He was one of the shyest men I have ever known. He shunned the glare and parade of cheap publicity and sedulously avoided all occasions for personal glorification. He never made the Torah a spade with which to dig. He was content to give himself to scholarly investigation so that study became for him a mode of prayer and worship.

Jacob Mann was born in Przemysl, Galicia, on the 26th of August, 1888, of humble parentage so far as worldly goods were concerned. His father, Nisan Mann, was a poor *shohet*. But he gave his son the infinitely more precious heritage of a love of Jewish learning and an intuitive piety and faith. Like his illustrious former kinsman, Solomon Judah Rappoport, whose pioneer work in Jewish history and Geonica he was destined to carry on, Jacob Mann was steeped, in his early boyhood, and youth in an atmosphere of Jewish study and worship, uncontaminated by the secular heresies of the outer world.

Coming to England in 1908, from this boyhood, Hasidic home of piety and learning in Galicia, Jacob Mann, an unprepossessing youth of twenty, prepared himself for the rabbinate at Jews' College while pursuing his secular studies at London University. Those were days of loneliness and of penury, but despite the handicaps of unfamiliarity with the language, strangeness in a strange land, and a natural diffidence and shyness with people, he soon gave evidence of the brilliant scholastic achievements that were to bring him international recognition as one of the foremost Jewish savants of the twentieth century.

In 1913, he passed his B.A. examination at London University with First Class Honors. The following year he qualified for the Jewish Ministry at Jews' College.

Jacob Mann rarely spoke of them and you had to pry it out of him, but somewhere in his study, packed to the ceiling with practically all the important and fundamental books of Judaism, there are M.A. (1915) and D.Lit. (London, 1920) parchments, conferred upon this modest,

diffident student for academic achievements of the highest scholastic merit.

The Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr. J. H. Hertz, soon discovered the rare ability of Jacob Mann and employed him as his Hebrew secretary. Dr. Hertz was also helpful in making possible the publication of two volumes which established Jacob Mann's place in the galaxy of stars who have enriched what is known as "the Science (Wissenschaft) of Judaism." These two tremendously important volumes, based upon hitherto unexplored Genizah material, ("The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine Under the Fatimid Caliphs") I, Oxford, 1920; II, Oxford, 1922; were dedicated to Joseph H. Hertz the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire. It is not without interest to record that Jacob Mann was, during those student days in England, also the private tutor of Cecil Roth, one of the most able and brilliant popularizers of Jewish history in the world today.

But even before the publication of "The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine," the learned world had become aware that a new genius had arisen to carry forward the scientific investigations of men like Zunz, Krochmal, Schechter, and especially Solomon Judah Rappoport. In 1917, the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n. s. beginning in Vol. VII and continuing through Vol. XI published a prize essay that Jacob Mann had written at Jews' College on the subject of "The Responsa of the Babylonian Geonim as a Source of Jewish History." Mann explored these sources in a spirit of broader historical investigation than the clues Rappoport had found in them for his biographical sketches.

"The responsa," Mann wrote, "furnish in particular ample material for our knowledge of the internal life of the Jews: their relations to the authorities and to their non-Jewish neighbors, their economic position, their communal organization, and their standard of culture and morality. All this material has not yet been made use of sufficiently; the Jewish history of that period was rather treated as a collection of biographies of the prominent spiritual and communal leaders. Important as this aspect

of historical treatment is, the life of the people as a whole is of sufficient importance to be investigated and understood. Therefore the latter course of historical investigation will be chiefly followed."

In 1920 Jacob Mann came to the United States. He was engaged as instructor of Bible, Talmud and Jewish History at Baltimore Hebrew College and Teachers' Training School during 1921-1922. Then he came to the Hebrew Union College to occupy with distinction the chair of Jewish History which had been left vacant by the death of Prof. Gotthard Deutsch. He served the College faithfully, later adding to his duties the field of Talmud when that place became vacant through the retirement of Prof. Jacob Z. Lauterbach.

In 1927-1928 he was honored by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with an invitation to teach as a visiting Professor. It was during that trip abroad that he gathered much new documentary material in the Government Public Library at Leningrad, in Cairo and elsewhere, which later flowered in his Texts and Studies Vol. I and II (1931 and 1935) of new Geonic and Karaitic investigations.

His few last remaining years were overcast for Jacob Mann by heartbreaking anguish over the calamitous events affecting European Jewry. Suddenly and without warning, his heart gave way. There were long days of pain, lit by the devotion of his remarkable wife, Margit, and by the presence of his two boys, Alfred and Daniel. There was a slow, patient pull out of the valley aided by the indomitable will to finish the great new investigation on "The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue — a Study in the Cycles of the Readings from Torah and Prophets, as well as from Psalms, and in the Structure of the Midrashic Homilies."

Dr. Mann had amassed an enormous amount of new Midrashic material, and had made a discovery, hitherto unknown, of the role played by the *Haftarot* of the Palestinian Triennial Cycle in determining the structure and the trend of the Midrashic homilies.

One of the great joys that came to relieve his days at the hospital and at his home after his first severe heart attack was the knowledge that some of his students, as a small return for the priceless boon that had been theirs to sit at his feet, were raising the funds needed to publish Volume One of this massive work.

"Lo aleha ha-m'lachah ligmor"

"It is not incumbent upon thee to finish the work."

In the midst of these monumental labors on "The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue," Jacob Mann, who brought glory and fame to the Hebrew Union College, and immeasurably added to its place as one of the world's most distinguished academies of Jewish learning, in the prime of his years, at the age of fifty-two, was fatally stricken. He had taught his class that morning, Wednesday, October 23, 1940. It was the last time that his students would have the visible presence and inspiration of his precise mind, his amazing memory and his deep love for Judaism. By nightfall Jacob Mann breathed his last. Like the patriarch Jacob's departure from Beer-Sheba, his passing took with it something of the glory and splendor that he had brought to Cincinnati and to the Hebrew Union College.

In seeking to find comfort and to measure Jacob Mann's prodigious achievements by some better yardstick than the barren dimension of time, we think of a noteworthy Midrash to the Book Ecclesiastes that is read by observant Jews during the week of Tabernacles in which he died. Recorded there is a beautiful allegory spoken by Rabbi Zera upon the death of Rabbi Boon, the brilliant son of Rabbi Hiyya who died in his twenty-eighth year.

There was once a king who possessed a lovely vineyard. He had hired a number of workmen to take care of it for him. Among the laborers, there was a certain man who excelled all the others in his resourcefulness and ability. Seeing this, the king called the talented servant aside and walked about with him chatting for hours. When twilight came and the workmen gathered about for their pay, this

laborer stood with the others and received the same reward as did the men who had toiled all the day. When the workmen saw this, they were indignant and complained bitterly, saying: "We worked from dawn till dusk and he only for two hours; and yet his majesty gives him the same reward."

"Why do you complain?" replied the king. "This man accomplishes in two brief hours what you with all your effort cannot achieve in a whole day."

Al m'komo yovo v'shalom — May Jacob Mann, revered teacher and master, come to his place in peace!