

as experiencing some populist anti-semitism. It is, indeed, doubtful that a remote community of only 5000 can survive indefinitely without genuinely heroic efforts. There have been some positive developments, especially the growth of Jewish day schools in Auckland and Wellington, and the existence of a surprising range of communal institutions, but in general the picture is not sanguine. On the other hand, recent censuses of religious affiliation have shown some growth, and any prognosis about the future of New Zealand Jewry, and of the community in general, is probably not as dark as was the case twenty or thirty years ago. Levine's discussion of the institutions of New Zealand Jewry, and of the community in general, is written with great skill and sophistication, and shows a remarkable command of highly specialised institutions. It provides an important supplement to the history of the community written in 1958 by Rabbi L.M. Goldman, to the two-volume collection of essays on this subject edited by the Gluckmans (1990 and 1993), and to other writings on New Zealand Jewry, especially by Ann Beaglehole.

The obvious comparison which should be made in any account of New Zealand Jewry is with Australian Jewry, on which there is now a large and often impressive literature. Levine has, regrettably, only occasionally drawn any comparisons between the two, which would certainly show enormous differences. Australian Jewry is, in essence, everything that New Zealand Jewry is not: vigorous, growing, self-assured, and successful. Apart from the size difference (105,000 *versus* 5000) between the two communities, the reasons for this centre heavily in the effects of the considerable wave of Holocaust refugees and survivors who went to Australia, especially their foundation of what may well be the most successful Jewish day school system in the Diaspora. A careful examination of the evolution of the two Jewish communities which grew up under the British flag and the Southern Cross may well facilitate a much wider understanding of Diaspora Jewry than might be supposed. Dr Levine is also correct in his assertion that Australian Jewish academics had virtually no contact with their New Zealand colleagues. For instance, I never heard of Dr Levine when I lived in Australia and was closely connected with such bodies as the Australian Association for Jewish Studies. This is obviously very regrettable, and further evidence of the contrasts between the two Jewish communities.

William D. Rubinstein

STRONGER THAN FICTION: JEWS AND CHRISTIANS ARE NATURAL ALLIES

Mark Braham (London & Syd: Minerva Press, 1999; xiv + 417 pp)

For many years Mark Braham has been one of the stormy petrels of Australian Jewry, enunciating a strident Strictly Orthodox Judaism which is probably best-known for its aggressive attacks on 'secular Zionists' and Jewish supporters of Israel who lack an Orthodox religious centre to their identities. *Stronger than fiction* is Braham's autobiography, charting his life from Jewish London to Sydney and from Anglo-Orthodoxy to Strict Orthodoxy. Interspersed with

this account of his life are Braham's typically pungent pronouncements on Judaism, Jewish history, the Holocaust, and a range of matters from homosexuality to the Demidenko affair. Rather curiously, despite the book's subtitle, there is relatively little on Jewish-Christian relations. This mixture will not please everyone, and one or another (or all) of Braham's views are sure to antagonise virtually everyone; many will be continuously infuriated. I am personally much more tolerant of Braham's views than a decade ago, when I too scathingly reviewed a collection of his essays in this Journal. Indeed, I am acknowledged by Braham (p. i) to be the instigator of his autobiography, since, as the result of an exchange which grew out of my review, I invited him to publish an autobiographical account of his career in this Journal, which he did in November 1991.

The first part of *Stronger than fiction* concerns Braham's life in England and is the most straightforwardly autobiographical part of the work. Apart from any other feature, it contains a historically important account of his war service in the British army in Italy in 1945 when the highly controversial handover of 70,000 Cossacks and anti-Tito Yugoslavs to the Soviet army and to Tito's Yugoslav partisans took place. Most were executed. Many years later, these events led to one of the most famous libel cases of modern times, that between Lord Aldington (the Tory politician Toby Low) and Nikolai Tolstoy, the historian. Tolstoy accused Aldington, in 1945 a brigadier and chief of staff of the British 8th army, of being a 'war criminal' for facilitating the handover of these persons. After an exceptionally controversial trial in the early 1990s, Aldington won and was awarded damages of no less than 1.5 million pounds. (A full account of these events, highly critical of Aldington, may be found in Ian Mitchell's 1998 work *The cost of a reputation*). Braham, who was there at the time, has consistently supported Aldington's view that he had no choice; Braham also regards many of those handed over as pro-Nazi war criminals 'who got far less than they deserved' (p. 157). Braham's first-hand testimony has figured in several accounts of these very controversial matters.

The second half of the book, presenting Braham's views on religion and politics, will, for many Australian readers, make very uncomfortable reading. On pp. 175–179 he prints a lengthy extract from Reb Moshe Shonfeld's *The Holocaust victims accuse* which states that '... the most and the best (*sic*) of the Jewish people found themselves under the thumb of the accursed Hitler and his allies ... But the insane Jewish nationalists and Zionists stood up in their safe, convenient dwellings, especially in the United States, laughed at Hitler and thereby incited him ... To a large extent, it was they, themselves, who drove this mad dog Hitler to the ultimate in insane meanderings (*sic*) ...' by failing 'to employ the tried and true method of using humbleness and soft words'. Let me say that anyone who thinks that 'using humbleness and soft words' would have deterred Hitler knows literally nothing whatever about the Nazi regime; this passage, cited with apparent approval by Braham, is utter nonsense from beginning to end, and appears to shift the blame for the Holocaust from the Nazis, who actually carried it out, to Western Jewry. This section of Braham's book is full of almost equally appalling pronouncements on virtually

every subject; intermixed with it, however, are some highly pertinent and perceptive remarks about Jewish survival and Jewish identity. I do not necessarily agree with them, but they are intelligent and, in the context of Australian Jewish life, require considerable courage to make. A statement such as Braham's observation (p. 323) that 'in the context of Jewish history the Holocaust is neither more nor less awesome and tragic than other major tragedies of Jewish history. Indeed, we read in the Book of Lamentations of events not even matched in the Holocaust ...' would probably not be made by anyone in the Jewish mainstream in Australia, although it is a fair summary of the Strictly Orthodox view of the Holocaust and may well be true. Braham deserves very considerable commendation for having the nerve to put his views, on a wide variety of subjects, without being cowed by 'political correctness'. It is, for instance, difficult to believe that the majority of Australian Jews do not agree with Braham's consistently hostile views on homosexuality and the 'gay lobby', but Braham is virtually the only Australian Jewish writer to put them frankly. It is also gratifying to see that he has apparently modified some of his more extreme views about the alleged evils of 'secular Zionism', at least compared with his fiery pronouncements of the past. Braham is an Australian original, and ought to be respected for this. His intellectual journeyings also remind us how ambiguous Jewish identity has been in the modern period, with the exception of the forty years or so after 1945 when an unprecedented consensus prevailed: paradoxically, the precise opposite of what he believes.

William D. Rubinstein

