

House of Israel. This building was opened for the performance of divine worship in the presence of a numerous congregation and visitors, on the 2nd April, 1844, and the consecration service was performed in a most efficient manner by Mr. Isaacs, the Reader, assisted by Mr. Solomon Phillips and others, and aided by the musical talent of Mr. Nathan."

In June 1846 the *Voice of Jacob* was in difficulty and the editor doubtful of its survival, although a Committee had been formed, headed by HAIM GUEDALLA for the continuation of the Journal. Last number of *The Voice of Jacob* appeared on 11.9.1846 (No. 137) with "A FEW WORDS AT PARTING" by the editor JACOB A. FRANKLIN.

### THREE AUSTRALIAN YIDDISH WRITERS

By I. KAHAN, Melbourne

Translated from Yiddish by S. STEDMAN, Sydney

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Mr. I. Kahan is a Yiddish Writer who has already had two books of critical essays published in Melbourne. He is a contributor to Yiddish publications in many lands. The titles of his two books are, "At The Crossroads" and "Flames and Sparks".

PINKHUS GOLDHAR, HERTZ BERGNER,  
EHOSHUA RAPPOPORT

These three men of letters have won, for Australia, a place on the list of Yiddish World Literature—Goldhar and Bergner through the medium of their novels and short stories, while Rappoport attained prominence through his essay and critique.

#### PINKHUS GOLDHAR

Pinkhus Goldhar was the pioneer of Yiddish Literary Expression in Australia. He arrived in Melbourne in 1928 from Lodze, the second largest city in Poland, a city full of dynamic, pulsating and creative Jewish Life, in contrast to the one Goldhar found in Melbourne. The vast distance separating the Australian continent from the East-European Jewish Life of creative activity has placed an indelible stamp upon Goldhar's short stories.

At the beginning of this century the wide stream of Jewish migration into America often transplanted the whole population of small and large villages from the old to the new world. In Sholem-Ash's book, *Uncle Moses*, one can read of these people meeting in the sweat shops, in the 'Landsmanshaftn', where they recalled the past and spoke of the future. They complained of the difficulties of adapting to the new and strange conditions in the new land. In the intimate company of friends one could, for a while,

forget the grey present and lighten the pressing feeling of isolation. In Australia, the newly arrived immigrant from Eastern European milieu had to search for a little friendly warmth. His loneliness wept within him during the solitary days and nights, a feeling which became more painful during Holy Days. All this found expression in Goldhar's literary works. His first short story, *The Pioneer*, which appeared in the *First Jewish Almanack* published in 1937, showed clearly the restlessness and trepidation of the pioneering Jewish Spirit, the struggle to build a living Jewish Community in which one could find room for creative Yiddish endeavour. In his book, *Short Stories of Australia*, Goldhar painted a picture permeated with pessimism concerning Jewish creative life in Australia. He saw the results of mixed marriages (see his story *The Circumcision*—the demise of the Jewish Community in Ballarat and other country towns). The Gold Rush, which brought people from every part of the world in search of fortunes, brought also Jews to the mining towns. When the mines had surrendered all the gold and no more was promised, the Jewish Community vanished, the people moved to Melbourne and to other cities. Goldhar describes the desperate struggle of the Rabbi to keep his Synagogue open. He hired old men to form a Minyan, but this too failed, and he was left alone in his empty Shule (*The Last Minyan*).

In the big city, too, cruel disappointment awaits the immigrant. They cling to one another, the individual Jews, which, in the end, assumes the character of collective fear and bewilderment.

Even death calls forth such strange feelings of forlornness and perplexity at the grave-side where the act of burial is so different from the one they knew: see the story *The Funeral*, published in *Coast to Coast* in 1944. He noticed the differences, the conflict between the old and the new immigrants, between members of families, between parents and children—these formed themes for his stories. Almost all of them are permeated with a feeling of nostalgia so well known to the uprooted. Goldhar died in 1947, before the mass migration of Jews to Australia began.

These migrants brought with them the spirit of Jewishness and infused a stream of new blood in the slow acting local community. They created new institutions, 'Landmanshaftn', strengthened and developed the communal organisations and the cultural life of the people. They prepared the cultural ground for the young generation.

Of course, this is not enough to give one a feeling of great optimism regarding the future of the Community; but, it is far ahead of what existed during Goldhar's years. Then his mind and heart were filled with fear for the Jewish future, a fear that is reflected in his short stories. For the East European Jews, Goldhar will always remain the pioneer immigrant, the founder of the creative literary effort in the Yiddish Language.

### HERTZ BERGNER

Hertz Bergner arrived in Melbourne shortly before the outbreak of World War II. His literary career had begun in Warsaw in the mid-Thirties with the publication of a book of short stories, *Houses and Streets*. This book appeared in 1935. Immediately after his arrival here, he began to study the conditions under which the immigrant Jews lived and worked. Like his predecessor, Goldhar, he soon became aware of the difficulties and obstacles which lay in the way of the migrant in his endeavour to establish himself in the new land. *The New House* was Bergner's first book, published in Melbourne, in 1941. In the stories he describes local types and paints pictures of Australian landscape, but, in building the "*New House*" he used old bricks. He built with the bricks transported from the Old House in Poland to erect the New House in Australia. In 1947, Bergner had published a second book, a novel, "*Between Sky and Sea*". It was a short novel, but a great artistic work with fully defined and live types, presented in sure outline and vivid colours. In this book one could feel the sure hand of the master. The subject of the story is entwined in the frightful years of war, when ships laden with Jewish victims sought a landing place, but alas! No one offered them that shelter. This book was translated into English and, found warm praise from Australian critics. It was awarded the Gold Medal for "The Best Book of the Year".

At the end of the war, when the curtain was raised revealing the full disaster that had befallen European Jewry, Bergner searched for means to erect a literary monument to Polish Jewry. The result was his large novel, *A City in Poland* (1950). In this book, Bergner painted on a vast canvas the lives, joys and sorrows in the Old Home, the conflicts, ideological divisions among the Jews, describing their daily life with their habits, customs, traditions and beliefs. In 1955 there appeared Bergner's collection of short stories, *The House of Jacob Isaacs*. The theme of the stories used in this book was, the

problem of mixed marriages; the tragedy of a Yiddish writer who lacks a community of readers; his loneliness and isolation, his bitter disappointment; the negative attitude of the people towards the Yiddish Language (*The Yiddish Actor*) which is being neglected by the young generation. His effort was to retain the dignity of Yiddish, which is recognised and acknowledged by the non-Jewish academic world, but, which is disappearing from the Jewish home.

It is being swamped by the waves of assimilation. Most of the subjects one finds in Bergner's stories are closely bound with the people who were transplanted from the typically Jewish atmosphere of Poland into the hard soil of Australian Life. He deals with the dramas of individuals, of men who are trying to create or re-create among the Jews a recognition of the need for a cultural development, for a Jewish *Yiddishkait*. This is very clearly revealed in his books "*Light and Shadow*", "*Where the Truth is*". Here Bergner presents episodes in an atmosphere of stark realism, the lives of individuals and families with a colourful description of the Australian landscape.

Thus Bergner reveals, as in a mirror, the image of the Australian Jew with his problems and the problems facing the Jewish Community. He deals particularly with the migrant and his Yiddish language, which he used in his old milieu, with its peculiarities and idiom. Bergner was, by nature, a "Talker" and was forced to keep a strict control over his works, not to overstep the limits demanded by literary style.

Bergner's literary works are a worthy contribution to the Yiddish literature. Bergner is no longer with us, but he left a rich heritage through which we shall remember him.

## EHOSHUA RAPPOPORT

Ehoshua Rappoport came to Australia with the refugees from Shanghai, and soon after his arrival, he assumed the honoured place in the Community in Melbourne as an essayist and critic.

Rappoport was well known in Yiddish literature before the war. Several volumes of his works were published in Poland. "*On the Roads of the New European Literature*", "*Between Yes and No*", and others. He was very productive in Australia and several books of essays and of literary criticism were published in Melbourne. The most important of his is "*Bible Improvisations*". This book was translated in Argentine. Rappoport's writing was impulsive, com-

pulling the reader to become involved in the problems raised by the author, even when disagreeing with the views expressed. One could not remain passive and not fall under the influence of the writer.

Many people had objections to his harsh treatment of the works of some writers, yet despite themselves, they had to read him. His fiery words were infectious and the reader succumbed under his spiritual powers.

Even the selective reader and opponent wanted to know Rappoport's opinion, the opinion of a professional critic who could penetrate deeply into the creative work through his own writing genius. It seemed as though Rappoport used the written word of others as a means of expressing his own thoughts and ideas; as a canvas to paint his own word-picture. His demands upon writers were severe, unfeeling, and his criticism was like a searchlight trying to discover the faults rather than the virtues, and because of that, Rappoport had very few friends. Herein was the great difference between Rappoport and the well known Yiddish Critic, Shemuel Niggar. Rappoport can be compared to the ancient school of Shamai, Niggar, to that of Hillel. Those who are acquainted with the decisions made by the two schools will understand the difference between the two men of letters of our modern time. Niggar's approach was best expressed by himself, "I seek more (in America) for what it contains than that which it lacks . . ." Rappoport's method was the exact opposite, he saw what it lacks rather than what it had. In his book, "*Bible Improvisations*", Rappoport removed the Biblical heroes from the sacred niche in which they were placed by generations, and introduced them to the present-day world as men and not saints. He revealed them with all their weaknesses and with their strengths. The immortality of the Bible rests mostly upon the fact that it showed its heroes as men with their human qualities and faults, with their triumphs and their failures. Rappoport has written much of what was the work of a publicist, first in the "*Jewish News*" and, later, as Editor of the Yiddish, "*The Post*". Here, too, his articles were full of moral demands and condemnation of our own and of strangers, who, according to his view, did not measure up to his moral standards. His temperamental method served him well in his work as a critic and publicist. The last few years of his life Rappoport spent in deep suffering. This was most painful to a restless spirit which was Ehoshua Rappoport.