

world of the N.S.W. Bar becomes involved in the case affecting the personalities of the Judge and the rival advocates in the courtroom tensions. The conflicts of the legal drama extend beyond the walls of the court. As a reviewer has noted, the writer presents us with an image of a profession now under increasing public scrutiny and challenge. But the story, as the writer says in his Prologue, is wound back to the "halcyon" days of 1965 and beyond, when the profession was still rooted in traditional attitudes and practices, before social changes began to overtake it. He shows that below the smooth appearance of a conservative professional group, there were inner convulsions that would come to the surface, depicting some of the reality that was less known and seen by the general public. Certain of the incidents in the novel would appear to have had some basis in the author's own experiences.

JOHN MONASH

by

Geoffrey Serle

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600 pages, \$27.50*

The Melbourne City Council at its meeting on 9 October 1918 passed a special resolution conveying to Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash their appreciation for his "skill resourcefulness and valour" in his decisive victory at the Battle of Montbrehain on 5 October. It was this victory in battle that led to the eventual German collapse and Armistice a month later.

The achievements of Monash in battle have been recorded by a number of writers, of note perhaps C. E. W. Bean, the official War Historian, but there is little doubt that 5 October, 1918 was the day that established for all time Monash as an Australian hero.

John Monash was born in Melbourne in 1865. As a small boy, in 1875, he moved with his parents to live in Jerilderie in New South Wales and there came under the influence of a young schoolmaster, William Elliot. It was Elliot who first noticed his fine academic abilities and suggested to Monash's parents that they should take him to Melbourne where he would be able to obtain a more advanced education. An outpost in the Riverina district was hardly the stimulatory atmosphere for such a young boy.

As both his parents were German Jews, John Monash was brought up in a bilingual speaking home and many of the attitudes of his family environment were those of contemporary German Jewry. For his education he was sent to Scotch College in East Melbourne, then under the headmastership of Dr. Alexander Morrison. He progressed well. For his religious education he attended the East Melbourne Synagogue and studied

under the Rev. Isidore Myers. He sang in the Synagogue choir led by Louis Pulver. At this period he lived with his mother and two sisters in Richmond and walked both to school and synagogue.

One of the special attributes of John Monash was that from his early boyhood he regularly kept a diary and meticulously recorded much of his early life — he listed his barmitzvah presents: from his parents, a microscope, a Shakespeare and uncle Graetz's History of the Jews in a French translation, autographed; a gold watch from Uncle Max and gold studs from Aunt Ulrike; a chemical set from Albert; Haydn's sonatas, a stamp album, a knife. It is Monash's great effort to record so much of his life in his diaries and to retain his correspondence that has allowed Geoffrey Serle to intimately depict the life of a young Jewish man in Melbourne around 1880. In fact the author portrays much of the story of three Jewish brothers, Louis, Julius and Max migrating to Melbourne and trading first as merchants and then as needs required moving to the frontier towns of the Riverina to establish their stores, in the hope of making an adequate livelihood to provide for their families. The very ambition of these families in an alien culture and in a harsh hinterland gives a picture of the environment of John Monash's early life. At Scotch College he followed his scholarly pursuits and for the first time in 1881 we see something of his brilliance when Dr. Morrison asked him to return so as to excel at the University matriculation exams — John Monash was Dux of Scotch College in 1881. This was his first major achievement.

As a University student he gathered around him a group of fine young men who later were to attain much success in their careers — he found a new pursuit and joined the University Company, Victorian Rifles on 8 July 1884, and for the next 30 years was to have an active career in the citizen forces.

By 1890 the young engineer was a "man about town" interested in both literary and social activities, military training and bush walking. Likewise, he was involved in a number of love affairs with varying fortunes. Eventually, John decided to marry Victoria Moss, born in Melbourne in 1870, of Anglo-Jewish parents. Her family were associated with the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and it was Rabbi Dr. Joseph Abrahams of that Congregation that was to marry them in the Freemason's Hall, Collins Street on 8 April 1891. Their only child, a daughter, Bertha was born on 22 January 1893. Vic., his new wife was very different in character to John. Serle writes that she was materialistic, engrossed in superficial social life and flirtatious. This section of the book relates an enormous amount about the early years of John Monash. His background was not indeed the norm of young Australian Jews growing up in the latter part of the 19th century. His German environment was strong in his personal character — endurance, music, militarism and less emphasis on materialism. At this period in Australian Jewish history a young man seemed to seek materialism, traditional Jewish values and in many cases — Australian nationalism — the Commonwealth came into being in 1901. Geoffrey Serle has depicted what is without doubt a very fine character interpretation of Monash and his background. Current generations of Australians should clearly look at the steadfastness of character and

courage necessary to succeed in that earlier generation. The Monash papers have enabled Serle to create a deep understanding of a young Jew. The portrayal is not the norm. Monash had not grasped normal Australian Jewish attitudes — not a sportsman, religious adherent or nationalist — but twenty years later at Montbrehain he clearly stood on the pinnacle of Australian national achievement — he had risen to be one of Australia's greatest sons.

In the years that followed the birth of his daughter, John Monash endured a wavering marriage and an innovative professional practice that was difficult to establish. All this made great demands on his personality. After about twenty years his business interests were commercialised, leading to some sort of material independence. In 1911 he bought a "Berliet" motor car when cars were just beginning to gain popularity. In 1912 he acquired "Iona", a substantial residence in St. George's Road, Toorak that was to be his lifetime home. In these years of success he and Vic. became part of the social life of Melbourne.

After the outbreak of War, in October 1914 he was given command of the 4th Infantry Brigade, A.I.F. and sailed for Egypt soon afterwards. He served on Gallipoli, in England at Salisbury and then during the 1916 Offensive in France. His real glory was achieved at Hamel and Montbrehain during the months of August to October 1918. He was knighted in the field by King George V on 9 August 1918. After the Armistice, Monash left for England. Geoffrey Serle tells of "The Blare and Blaze of Fame" thrust on John Monash before his return to Australia. In England he was feted among the great Anglo-Jewish families. He dined with Sir Herbert Samuel, Sir Adolph Tuck, Waley Cohen, several of the Rothschilds and the Montefiores, Sir Philip Magnus, Lord Swaything, the Earl of Reading, Sir Frederick Nathan, Sir Herbert Jessel and their families. Lady Monash and his daughter joined him in London but unfortunately Lady Monash died soon after their return to Australia. It was being suggested that Monash should become the first Governor of Palestine but such Office did not interest him.

He had a very active life in the years at home. He identified with many patriotic efforts for returned soldiers and was for a decade Chairman of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria which he organised, established and led with outstanding success, albeit the petty politics in between. Serle sees him in these years as an Australian patriot, Jew and a National leader. He was universally respected for his greatness. In Sydney, on 11 March 1923 he signed the Charter of the New South Wales Jewish War Memorial jointly with a long list of distinguished Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Francis L. Cohen, John J. Cohen, Ernest L. Davis, Orwell Phillips, Alroy M. Cohen, John Goulston and Arthur Hyman. It was one of Monash's many active associations with the Jewish community. His friendship with Lizette Bentwich is covered in the latter part of the book at length. She was a member of the Australian branch of a noted Anglo-Jewish family. She was a resident in London for some years, and in her personality John Monash found a woman who was a conversationalist with a wide range of interests to match his great intellect. Anyhow, she accompanied him for a whole decade and shared much with him during his years of achievement.

Some twenty years ago, Sir Robert Blackwood, Chancellor, when opening Monash University described Sir John as "one of the two or three of the greatest of all Australians". To be privileged to write on such a public figure is indeed an honour and reward to an historian. Geoffrey Serle had an excellent advantage of access to his subject's extensive personal papers. He has compiled a wonderful social history of a Jew and has very rapidly grasped an understanding of Jewish values and a deep appreciation of both ethnic attachment and religious conviction in Australian Jewish life. It is a very fine insight of a personality and the author has shown his marked literary abilities. He is to be complimented for this very full biography — a must for any real student of Australian Jewish history — indeed up front for anyone interested in reading about the character development of a national personality — in every way John Monash has gained an imperishable place in the niche of fame.

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"DINKUM MISHPOCHAH"

by

Eric Silbert

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In the interests of the collection and recording of Australian Jewish history, here is a rich store-house of communal, social and political history in its developmental stages. The autobiography is a genre of literature to be welcomed by historical societies. This work, begun as a letter to the author's children, was later extended into history, written autobiographically, for the public. Thus, it is rich in detail, written with the easy fluency of one familiar with his subject, and writing a letter to his children. The style is to be recommended for those who "have a story to tell".

Having said this, though, it is necessary to add that one could have wished for a more positive analysis of the events of history. Eric Silbert's family (through the marriage of Abraham Silbert to his niece, Fanny, at the turn of the century), and his wife, Joan Tate's family, have been closely associated with the history of Western Australian Jewry, and particularly that of Perth, for almost 10 decades. Much of this story is recorded in detail in the approximately 340 pages of the book. The reader is given a full account of families whose communal and synagogal involvements the author attributes to the fact that "A vital part of the way of life of both my grandparents was their Jewishness . . ." The grandparents, Abraham and Fanny Silbert and Joseph and Bella Masel, and their descendants, and the families inter-linked are set out in the accompanying family tree. Besides