

# A Jewishness So Unfamiliar

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD

OUR SOUTHERN LANDSMAN. By Harry Golden. 241 pages. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$7.95.

Harry Golden, the Jew from New York who went South more than 25 years ago and, through his Carolina Israelite, dispensed his pickle-barrel khukhmas, or accumulated wisdom, to the cracker-barrel country, has never lost the sense of wonderment that seizes the provincial New Yorker on his forays beyond the city line.

Southern Jews, indeed! Speaking in those accents so un-Jewish, so unlike our own rasping New York throatiness, so different from the familiar intonations of Minsk, Bukovina and Kovno that are our local staples. Mr. Golden has trumpeted the glories of New York Jews in books past. He has written about the South from his home in Charlotte, N. C., and



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has never hesitated to speak out on the shame of the nation, its history of race relations with its blacks. When he writes, it is with a tinge of humor and a sense of faith in man's innate virtue, admittedly a down-deep resource that is difficult to mine. Because he doesn't bludgeon, there's a tendency to shrug him off as a combatant, but, in truth, a New York Jew who can sound off as a liberal out of town and still maintain friendships in all directions is not to be sneered at.

## A Sense of Identification

This rambling account of Jews in Dixie, for all of its failings either as literature or as history, serves as a reminder of the virtue of ethnic histories. Some historians have rather cavalierly sniffed at the ethnic history because it presents one group or another out of proportion for its role in general history. My son recently confessed that in his early years he believed the Revolution had been won by Haym Solomon (Hebrew School) and Crispus Attucks (public school).

But ethnic history does something beyond the ken of caviling historians. It gives a group a sense of identification with the past of the general community, a feeling that it should get what it deserves from its part in the shared experience not as a gift of tolerance by the faceless majority. Even more recently, we are now learning that one group's experience should be made the common knowledge of all.

"Our Southern Landsman" introduces Jewish compatriots who live south of the Mason-Dixon line. It's a far cry from "Only in America" and "For 2c Plain." Here are the Jews, as he notes, who grew up with-

out pastrami sandwiches, without benefit of rye bread. And, whichever way you slice them, they are a colorful lot.

This is an easy book to fault. It maunders, it repeats, it belabors. It is by no means a historical or a sociological portrait in depth. If you know anything about Jewish history in America, you will not learn much new here. Yet, for all this, it does entertain and, if you are not already knowledgeable, it does inform. Above all, it does have a viewpoint, which is Mr. Golden's and comes across in his own witty terms.

"Our Southern Landsman" (landsman, as if you didn't know, is the Yiddish word for compatriot, and it is pronounced, sir, as lontsmon) is, in many ancient cases, about Southerners who were Jews rather than about Jewish life in the South. Later, with the same sort of immigration that came to New York, the Jewish community came into its own and identified with Jews elsewhere, but, by and large, that was later.

There are rare birds here. Abram Mordechai, born in Pennsylvania in 1755, served in the Continental Army, later married an Indian and set up a cotton gin and store on the site of what was to become Montgomery, Ala. It was a tough neighborhood, and he was beaten up by the Creek Indians—but he held on.

## Confederates and Proslavery

Forty Jews from England were among early settlers in Oglethorpe's Georgia in 1733. In 1915, Leo Frank was lynched in Atlanta, after he had been convicted for the murder of a young girl, even though the murderer was known to be someone else. During the Civil War, the South had its proslavery rabbis, just as the North had its abolitionist rabbis. Three Jews rode with John Brown. A number of Jews served the Confederacy and, when it seemed the cause was lost, there were those who exploited anti-Semitism as a reason for defeat. The Cherokees called Jewish peddlers "jew-wedge-du-gish" or "egg-eater," because they would not eat nonkosher food, and carried a good store of hard-boiled eggs with them.

In addition to this treasury of exotic Judaica, Mr. Golden also describes modern Jewish communities, their golf clubs, their generosity to charities, Jewish and otherwise, and their general willingness to go along with the social and racial attitudes of the white majority.

"One of the points I am at pains to convey to Jewish readers is that during this black revolution they are getting a free ride," Mr. Golden writes. "Usually I make this point when I am asked about black anti-Semitism. A black anti-Semite, I explain, is about as convincing as a Jewish white supremacist. The two luxuries of Western civilization, anti-Semitism and Negrophobia, are denied us."

That is vintage Golden, with the bubbles still in the seltzer even after all this time.