

amount of self-confidence and enthusiasm.

The increasing recognition which osteopathy is winning from the public and the medical profession, the high level of opportunity extended to members of

minority groups, the good potential income, the opportunity for rendering service—all these factors may appeal to qualified young people casting about for a challenging career.

## From Generation to Generation

HAROLD U. RIBALOW

**F**OURTEEN YEARS AGO, I MET LOUIS BEHRMAN, founder of Behrman's Jewish Book House, and talked with him about his intense love for and appreciation of books. He was then 71 years old, gentle, mellow, a genuine bibliophile. He had gladly given over a half-century of his life to books, their publication and their distribution. He had started with Bloch Publishing Company as an errand boy in 1886. In a decade he had become an integral part of the firm, but in 1920, he went into the book business for himself. Speaking in carefully chosen words, delicately, warmly, he had said, "I wish I were younger so that I might publish more than ten new books a year, that I might publish Jewish books for young men like you."

I felt the presence of Louis Behrman, knowing I had met a rare and artistic soul, a man to whom books were holy and writers valuable men and women. Sainte-Beuve once said—and Louis Behrman seemed to bear him out in the very philosophy by which he lived and produced books—"Nothing is more painful to me than the disdain with which people treat second-rate authors, as if there were room only for the first-raters." Louis Behrman published everything lovingly, with admiration and with pride. "If I cannot create a work of art," he said, and he meant production-wise, "I might as well not be doing this at all."

Today, Louis Behrman sits quietly in his Brooklyn home, a venerable sage, watching with satisfaction as his son Jacob maintains the standards of the firm, now called Behrman House. Jacob Behrman, at 32, is something like his father. He is soft-spoken yet eloquent on the subject of Jewish books and, like his father, slaves lovingly over each volume which bears the Behrman House imprint. Behrman does not publish ten books a year, but those he does issue are distinguished for their appearance—which is unusual in Jewish book publishing. Today, too, Behrman House is a modest firm, operating from a tenth-floor office in mid-Manhattan.

It was Louis Behrman who originally told me that his books, like all Jewish books, had a limited audience. The American Jewish scene has changed in his own time, but it may be illuminating to quote him as he once analyzed Jewish book possibilities. "You see," he observed, "there is no Jewish reader as we understand the term 'reader.' The educated Jew, steeped

in his culture, reads Hebrew. Other Jews read Yiddish. Who reads the books we publish? Rabbis and teachers. A rabbi likes a book, recommends it to his congregation and a few volumes are sold. A teacher tells the president of his school that a Jewish library should be started. Then some of our books are sold. Without these Jews we should never make a living. Please say that—tell your readers that the rabbis and the teachers keep Jewish culture in the English language alive and vital."

America has changed since then and the new generation is aware of it. Jacob Behrman expands on his father's earlier analysis and in so doing illuminates his own viewpoint on the future of Jewish publishing. "There is," he says, "a far broader knowledge of the Jewish heritage among young Jews than there used to be. There is now an inner security and there is a feeling of relaxation over the fact that they are Jewish. There is a clear return to Jewish values," and by saying this he implied that the future is bright, brighter, at any rate than Louis Behrman foresaw in 1940. Since that date, Hitler and his murderers instilled an awareness of Judaism into indifferent Jews and the establishment of Israel kept that flame alive and burning brightly.

**F**OR EIGHT YEARS NOW, Jacob Behrman has been publishing books, keeping intact the family heritage, just as Louis Behrman maintained before him the ideal of servicing the Jewish community in America. The older Behrman had stated with pride that he kept alive Marvin Lowenthal's *A World Passed By* and Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Last Days of Shylock*, issuing new editions after their trade publishers permitted these titles to go into discard. Jacob Behrman has done the same with Meyer Levin's *The Golden Mountain* and with Milton Steinberg's *As a Driven Leaf*. The father quoted proudly the sales figures of Elma Ehrlich Levinger's *Story of the Jew*, which in fourteen years had attained a figure of some 50,000. The son tells that the Levinger book remains a steady and lucrative seller. As he spoke, I remembered his father telling me that he had pursued Mrs. Levinger for two years to write the book. It was apparent that the firm was being handled in much the same fashion as it had been run in the past—with discrimination, with love and with modesty.

In its existence, Behrman House has issued some 140 different titles in practically all categories, including poetry, fiction, drama as well as history juvenalia and theology. Both Behrmans are proud of having published the one-volume *Encyclopedia of Jewish Knowledge*, edited by the noted Zionist Jacob De Haas. As it was originally issued in 1935, it is obviously out-of-date and a prominent Jewish historian is working on a revised edition of this standard work.

There are today other new and valuable titles issued by Behrman. Dr. Azriel Eisenberg's *Bar Mitzvah Treasury*, a handsomely published, creatively edited volume, has become in less than two years something of a classic in its field and has sold more than 9,000 copies. Mordecai Kaplan's modern Haggadah, which elicited a storm of comment upon its initial publication, was a history-making Behrman book and now sells some 5,000 copies each year. Other Mordecai Kaplan books, all valuable additions to Jewish scholarship and theology, have been issued or reissued by Behrman House. Edmond Fleg's *The Jewish Anthology*, translated by Maurice Samuel, is also a significant Behrman reissue.

Unlike other Jewish publishers, Jacob Behrman does not say that he is unwilling to publish fiction, although he concedes that his firm is not geared for the high-pressure promotions necessary to put across a fiction title. Where other Jewish publishers imply that they have enough to publish without gambling on so uncertain a product as fiction, the younger Behrman says, "I would be proud to publish good Jewish fiction." However, it would surprise him if an established novelist were to bring him a novel if he can get it published by a house prepared to promote and distribute it more widely than he could.

He told me the story of a book by a rabbi which has since made publishing history, having been on national best-seller lists for years. The book was originally offered to Behrman who said that he would be happy to publish it, but that if he did, it would be unfair to the author, who might easily create a sensation with it if he took it to a top publishing house. The author took Behrman's advice—and made that history which Behrman had predicted he would make. "But do not make too much of it," Behrman asked me. "It isn't important." I thought it was, although I was willing to accede to his wishes to the extent that I would omit the name of the author and his famous book.

Like so many other Jewish houses, Behrman nowadays publishes more juveniles than anything else. He says that the teen-ager is no longer "a captive audience" and, consequently, it is more difficult to publish books for them which can compare with the hundreds of books on non-Jewish themes that they want or are required to read. He has published books on Theodor

Herzl (by Deborah Pessin), on Henrietta Szold (by Elma E. Levinger) and a few others, but his experiences have been less happy than with juveniles for younger children. Recently he published a series of dollar books on Abraham, Adam, Hannukkah, the Sabbath and Israel which have been among the finest—both artistically and technically—of all Jewish juveniles. He constantly experiments but, unhappily, cannot afford to issue more than a half-dozen titles a year.

**B**EHRMAN HOUSE is a bookshop as well as a publishing firm. It sells as many books by other publishers as it does of its own titles. Apparently no Jewish publisher (with the possible exception of the Jewish Publication Society which is in part subsidized) can get by simply on the sales of the books it publishes. Behrman faces the further disadvantage of not having its store on a floor, or street, level. Thus, Behrman's steadiest customers—synagogues, sisterhood groups, men's clubs, and rabbis—have to seek out Behrman. He sends out circulars and an annual catalogue to a large mailing list. He does little advertising of his own titles in book media because, he says—and here he is borne out by all other Jewish publishers—that the ads simply do not pay off. The rates are high, particularly when you are trying to sell books to a specialized audience. Ads, he believes, are placed for three reasons: to keep the authors happy, to inform the booksellers of your product and to tell the ultimate consumer of your books. There are few Jewish booksellers; general booksellers sell too few Jewish books to stock them in bulk or with frequency, and while publishers like to keep authors happy, it is too expensive to do so. Of course, all publishers like to tell the consumer what books they are publishing, but again sometimes it simply cannot be done, and so it isn't.

Louis Behrman could say, with Montaigne, that books "relieve me from idleness, rescue me from company I dislike, and blunt the edge of my grief, if it is not too extreme. They are the comfort and solitude of my old age." His son, Jacob Behrman, now looks at the present and to the future. His aims are limited and modest. He wants to publish good books and when he finds a manuscript he likes he studies it with an intensity that astonishes most authors. It is obvious that he has been influenced by his father, and that is a development which not only must please the founder of Behrman House but must in time yield books of value to the American Jewish public.

*This is the last of four articles on American Jewish publishing houses. The earlier articles dealt with Bloch Publishing Co. (February 1 issue), Hebrew Publishing Co. (March 15), and the Jewish Publication Society (May 10).*