

strike. Within his thousand days, Kennedy expanded the long-range missile arsenal by nearly 2000 percent—from about twenty-five weapons to five hundred. This decision, moving well beyond the more modest Eisenhower program, receives overly friendly treatment from Mandelbaum, who explains that Kennedy could not resist the demands of the Joint Chiefs for a huge arsenal.

The Cuban missile crisis is, for Mandelbaum, “the landmark in the evolution of nuclear diplomacy.” It marked the beginning of successful, formal diplomacy to establish the rules of the international system. He is correct in offering this familiar interpretation. What is new and dubious is his claim that the negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev, to end the crisis, were “between [near] equals.” Such an interpretation misses the fact that Kennedy made relatively minor concessions (a hedged statement not to invade Cuba and a hedged, private promise to withdraw missiles from Turkey) while Khrushchev promised publicly to withdraw the missiles from Cuba. Khrushchev was humiliated, and the Soviets expanded their missilery to prevent such defeats in the future.

Moreover, Mandelbaum seems too sanguine about the stability of the international system during the missile crisis. What would have happened if, for example, Dean Acheson, Truman’s former secretary of state who was then advising Kennedy, had been controlling American policy? During the early deliberations with top officials, Acheson proposed an air strike to destroy the Soviet missiles in Cuba. When asked how the Soviets would respond, he said, “I think they will knock out our missiles in Turkey.” What should the United States then do, he was asked. “Under our NATO treaty . . . , we would be required to respond by knocking out a missile base inside the Soviet Union.” What then? “Well,” said Acheson, “that’s when we hope cooler heads will prevail and they’ll stop and talk.” As one Kennedy aide complained, “that was rather chilling [advice].”

FORTUNATELY, KENNEDY did not follow that advice. But we will never know whether, as Attorney General Robert Kennedy later claimed, the President would have soon attacked Cuba and thus killed Soviet soldiers at the missile sites if the Soviets had not promised on Sunday, October 28, to withdraw their missiles. The night before, the attorney general warned the

Soviet ambassador that an attack was imminent. Did this American threat—backed by conventional superiority in the Caribbean and international nuclear superiority—compel Khrushchev to yield so speedily?

Perhaps there is a somewhat different explanation, for Castro had unexpectedly interfered and moved the superpowers closer to war. Unlike the Americans, the Soviets knew that the Cubans had seized the surface-to-air missile site (SAM) that had shot down an American U-2 on Saturday morning. That evening, Robert Kennedy warned the Soviet ambassador that another shoot-down of a U-2 would provoke an American attack on Cuba. Learning of this threat, Premier Khrushchev, probably fearing Castro’s actions, decided to concede and withdraw the “offensive” missiles in order to cool passions and avoid escalation. If Cuba had shot down another American plane, and Kennedy had attacked Cuba and killed many of the 15,000 to 20,000 Soviet soldiers there, how could Khrushchev have acquiesced? In ways that Mandelbaum does not understand, the superpowers came perilously close to war.

Having approached the nuclear abyss, the superpowers recognized the peril and moved toward defining some of the rules of the nuclear system. The test ban treaty of 1963 was the most notable result. It symbolized a new understanding and opened the way for SALT. Though the two powers have continued to escalate the arms race, they have so far avoided perilous confrontations.

In 1977, Jimmy Carter declared, “In the nuclear era, we can no longer think of war as merely a continuation of diplomacy by other means. Nuclear war cannot be measured by the standards of ‘victory’ or ‘defeat.’ This stark reality imposes on the United States an awesome and special responsibility.” Unfortunately, such chastening counsel still allows for the incredibly expensive arms race and the quest for new technological breakthroughs that may bestow a powerful advantage. These are not problems that greatly distress Mandelbaum, for he does not seem to foresee a technological breakthrough that would destroy the current system of deterrence. His ultimate conclusion seems designed to mute the dialogue on MX, cruise missiles, neutron bombs, or new guidance systems, for he believes that deterrence will continue to work. What could shake the confidence of Mandelbaum and his fellow optimists? □

HOW WE LIVED: A Documentary History of Immigrant Jews in America 1880–1930, by Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo. Richard Marek Publishers, 200 Madison Avenue, New York 10016; 360 pp., \$22.50.

In a land without a czar

WILLIAM NOVAK

IN ONE OF THE SEVERAL hundred excerpts from newspaper articles and personal memoirs that make up this volume, a former socialist recalls being taken to join a progressive club with the intriguing name of The Adler’s Young Men’s Independent Association, Number One. Why, he asks, does a group with so long a name feel the need to use the additional phrase “number one” when in fact it is the only organization with that name? This was done, he is told, because the members of the club took it for granted that a break-away faction of dissidents was inevitable, and they wanted to ensure that everybody knew which was the *real* Adler’s Club.

How different things are in the Jewish community today, when American Jewish organizations are so fearful of diversity and so careful to smooth over the various nuances of Jewish opinion in an effort to speak with a united voice. It’s good to be reminded that there was a time, not only in Europe but also here in America, when the Jewish community was not only more tolerant of the multiplicity of viewpoints in its ranks, but actually thrived on political and ideological pluralism. This occurred, to be sure, in a very different era—especially the years between 1880 and 1920, when millions of Jewish refugees from Europe and Russia arrived on these shores to build a new life. It was a time when Judaism had not yet been accepted as one of the three civil religions in America, and before some of its contemporary adherents chose to make of it a political ideology.

This book is a sequel to Irving Howe’s *World of Our Fathers*, which, when it was

WILLIAM NOVAK, who writes frequently on Jewish affairs, is the author of *High Culture: Marijuana in the Lives of Americans*, published by Alfred A. Knopf.

published in 1976, became an unexpected and formidable best seller, a kind of *Roots* for America's Jews. In that book, and again in this one, Howe bends over backwards to present a revisionist view of New York's Lower East Side. Currently, as he and Kenneth Libo maintain in the preface to *How We Lived*, there is "the impulse to prettify the immigrant experience, a wish to make the past seem all quaint and 'colorful' with our own little fiddlers on the roof."

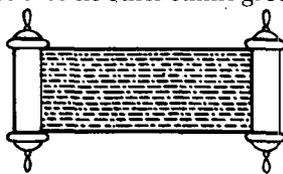
The point is certainly well taken, but one grows uncomfortable as Howe and Libo hammer away at it while declaring their own lofty intentions to present the past in "unvarnished truth," and "free of prejudice and sentimentality." They protest too much, and some readers of *World of Our Fathers* have criticized its author for simply replacing one romantic view of the period with another: that of the New York socialist intellectual. So here, instead of a case study in community, piety, goodness, and charm, we see the darker side of life: the grinding poverty, horrible working conditions, and poor health. Against this backdrop there is a fair amount about reform movements, politics, and especially trade unionism. But, in the authors' defense, it must be said that they make a good case for this version's being closer to the truth than the one we have been accustomed to hearing.

This is not to suggest that the story, as told here, is devoid of charm and personality; quite the contrary. Despite the word "documentary" in the subtitle, *How We Lived* is comprised mostly of personal testimonies, by eyewitnesses and journalists, of daily life on the Lower East Side. The story begins, as it should, with a brief glimpse of the Eastern European heritage that gave birth to all this, a culture in which, as one man recalls, "even if there was no running water in any house, people never ate without previously washing their hands." But for the Jews, life in Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Rumania, Hungary, and Austria was becoming too impoverished, and, more important, too dangerous. There were random acts of violence, there were pogroms, and there was military conscription that meant young boys were kidnapped and often never seen again. But above all, the Jews made the perilous journey to the New World because, as one immigrant wrote to his family in the Old Country, "there is no czar in America."

In a fine chapter called "The Shock of America" we get a vivid picture of how the new immigrant must have felt on his

first day in the New World, where people he recognized from home spoke a new language in loud, confident tones; where previously religious men were walking about without hats and working on the Sabbath; where everybody was involved in business—or so it seemed. We read testimonies of small but moving experiences: the first ice cream, the immigrant sleeping in a jail for want of better accommodations, the life of the boarder who lived in the spare room, a fifth wheel in a family with more than enough problems already.

ALTHOUGH THE PREDOMINANT image of the book is one of industrial exploitation and the social problems that follow in its wake, it turns out that the new immigrants spent an astonishing amount of energy on cultural and educational concerns. Unlike the case of some other ethnic groups, the



writers and intellectuals in the Jewish community did not stay behind in Europe, and they were the spirit behind the literary societies, the discussion groups, the debates and lectures, and, above all, the Yiddish theater.

The Jews of the Lower East Side did not attend the theater to see dramatic realism, for there was already more than enough of that in their lives. They wanted escape, and escape is what they got. Here is a description of the Yiddish theater from a man who had just attended his first play in English. "The play is passable," he writes in 1915, "but the theater! It is not like our Jewish theater. First of all I found it so quiet there . . . that I could not hear a sound! There were no cries of 'Sha!' 'Shut up!' or 'Order!' and no babies cried—as if it were no theater at all!" After complaining that he could find no apples, candy, or soda ("just like in a desert"), the visitor does concede that "there are some Gentile girls who go around among the audience handing out glasses of water, but this I can get at home, too."

For most Jews today, the Yiddish theater is no more than a dim, if relatively recent, historical memory. But other institutions created on the Lower East Side are still going strong. Summers in the ghetto must have been particularly uncomfortable, and before long, anybody who could afford it would spend a week or two in the mountains. The gran-

diose resort hotels that now cover the Catskills began as simple farmhouses taking in boarders who wanted some good food, and, most important, fresh air. And the complaints about the region that are so common today are hardly new. A newspaper report from 1904 lamented that there were twelve girls for every boy, and that instead of enjoying the fresh air, "the women sit on the porch like a fashion show, each one showing off her clothes and jewelry."

But these were diversions from the business of life—which was first of all, making a living, and then, somehow, learning to adapt to the radically new society. For this reason, the real hero of this story—at least Howe and Libo's version of the story—is not a person, but, rather, the *Forward*, the famous Yiddish newspaper begun in 1897 and still publishing today.

The *Forward* was keenly interested in human problems and human drama, and has always published a wide variety of material including, to this day, the new stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Always responsive to the needs of its readers, it instituted in 1906 a new department called the *Bintel Brief*—the bundle of letters. Under the editorship of Abraham Cahan (whose own memoirs are liberally used in this volume), the *Forward* began publishing a new kind of letter to the editor in which the writers talked not about the news of the world but of the news, and the problems, of their own lives. Often they sought advice, especially on family matters and the tricky process of maintaining Jewish traditions in an alien environment. Marital and romantic problems were especially common; the immigrants, accustomed to a tradition of arranged marriages, felt helpless in these matters. "I am a young man of twenty-five," one letter reads, "and I have recently met a fine girl. She has this flaw, however—a dimple in her chin. It is said that people who have this lose their first husband or wife. I love her very much. But I'm afraid to marry her lest I die because of the dimple." Ann Landers herself could not have improved on the editor's reply: "The tragedy is not that the girl has a dimple on her chin but that some people have a screw loose in their heads."

It was the *Forward*, too, that documented the exploitation of workers, and was running investigative articles long before they became popular elsewhere. And it was the *Forward* and Abe Cahan who were at the center of every controversy, and who lent a wealth of support to the new arrival, urging him to

learn English, urging her to meet her children's teachers in the public school, and, in general, aiding the process of acculturation without in any way endorsing assimilation, and without selling out. The *Forward*, in other words, could be trusted.

There is much more in this book—on politics, on the struggle between the religious and the secular Jews, on the lives of children, on women. But there is also something lacking, which is harder to express. Perhaps it is that *How We Lived* looks and reads like a textbook, with several hundred brief entries that don't always add up to a comprehensive picture, even when illuminated by the intelligence of the authors. But more likely it has to do with its predecessor, *World of Our Fathers*, which took these documents—and many others, and wove them into a complete, thoughtful narrative. This book sends us back to that one. And the reader of *How We Lived* might well ask himself: What is the point in my wading through these assorted documents and trying to make sense of them when no less a talent than Irving Howe has already done it for me? □

A PILGRIMAGE OF PASSION: The Life of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, by Elizabeth Longford. Alfred A. Knopf, 480 pp., \$15.95.

Aristocrat against empire

PETER STANSKY

FAMOUS IN HIS OWN time—the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—as poet, anti-imperialist and political gadfly, Sussex squire, horse breeder, and amorist, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt is scarcely known any longer except to specialists. Consider, for example, the downward slide in his reputation as a poet, the guise in which he was perhaps most

PETER STANSKY has recently published a short biography of Gladstone. His Orwell: The Transformation, written with William Abrahams, will appear this spring.

familiar. In the 1900 edition of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, Quiller-Couch included eight of Blunt's poems; in the 1939 "new" edition, he cut him down to four; and in the current edition (1972), Dame Helen Gardner, succeeding Quiller-Couch, has omitted Blunt altogether—so much for the "posthumous fame" he had hoped for and expected. But to be no more than minor or marginal—measured against, say, a Wellington or a Victoria or a Byron—hardly disqualifies someone as interesting and provocative as Blunt for a biography, and we are in Elizabeth Longford's debt that she should have turned from the "great" figures we customarily associate with her, and undertaken to rescue him from comparative obscurity.

Through the good offices of Sir Sydney Cockerell, Blunt's sometime secretary and subsequently director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Blunt's "secret" diary had been kept under seal in Cambridge, not to be opened until 1972, fifty years after his death. A ban of this sort, a "secret" archive, the hint of the scandalous, is bound to start up rumors and hot up expectations: One is prepared for the worst. When the day of revelations arrived, so to speak, the Syndicate of the Fitzwilliam Museum and its director, Michael Jaffe, commissioned the present biography and made available to Lady Longford the two tin boxes of secret papers. But now that the biographer is free to tell all, it turns out that "all" is in the nature of an anticlimax. Two substantial volumes of Blunt's diaries were published toward the end of his life, suitably expurgated. He himself had decided that his "secret memoirs" were, in Lady Longford's phrase, "too hot for publication"; hence, the ban. "Indiscreet," though, would more precisely sum up the case, or else, "embarrassing," in the sense of naming names.

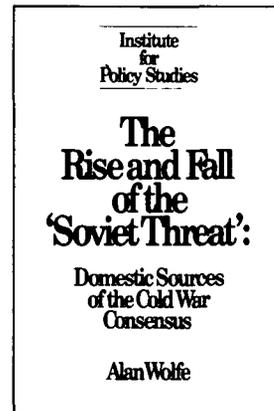
Blunt in his time went in for a lot of bedding with a lot of women. He had a taste for the well-born, favoring virgins of sixteen or matrons of thirty-two, the latter generally bored with their marriages or somewhat estranged from their husbands. But he appears to have described his conquests in a temperate manner and with a curious absence of specific detail. As quoted or paraphrased by Lady Longford these secret diaries are not likely to find a high place in late Victorian erotica.

Nor are they especially interesting for what they tell of Blunt's career as an amorist: It becomes rather difficult to distinguish among his sexual partners—in a pilgrimage of passion, one popula-

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