

In Memoriam

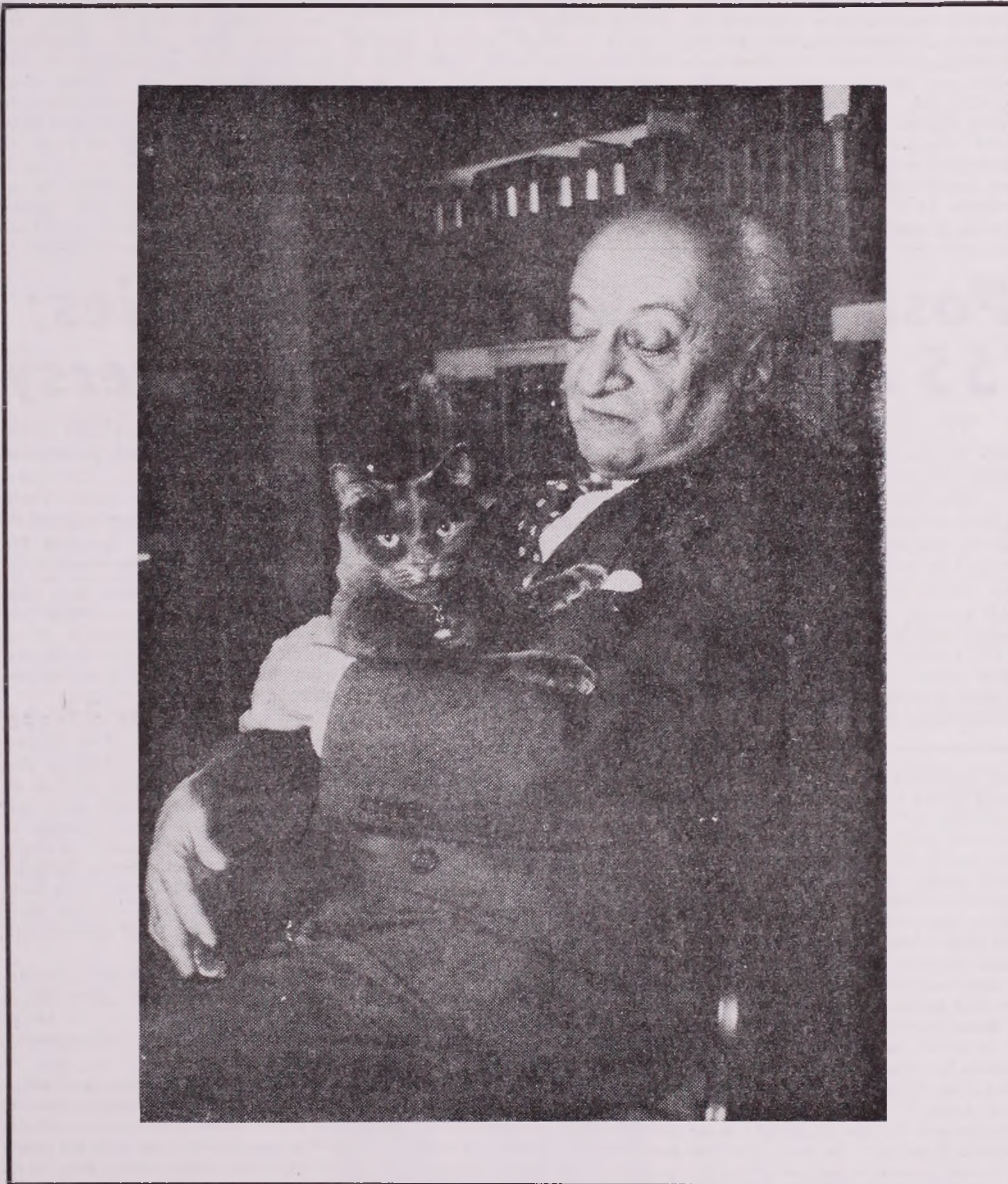
Ludwig Lewisohn

"An ornament to his University, a teacher toward whom youth is impelled, a novelist of deep insight into humanity and of great courage to utter his knowledge; a tireless fighter for the rights of his ancient and venerable people to which he adheres with conscious pride — this scholar and artist is one of the best men to whom the intellectual America of this time can point with pride." The words are Thomas Mann's. The man of whom he speaks is Ludwig Lewisohn, that great and inspiring teacher whose sudden passing from our midst has left us with a feeling of a great and irreplaceable loss.

Ludwig Lewisohn was a man of such breadth and versatility, his influence so widespread for two generations that it is difficult to appraise him justly. His dynamic energy, spiritual and physical, was the source of a profound concern and interest in a multitude of aspects of life and art. And to each he brought insight and distinction, and that deep moral sense which made him stand out in an age of relativism, absence of principles and lack of faith. Often he stood alone; Ludwig Lewisohn never courted the passing fancy of the public. He was an uncompromising fighter for what he believed. Had he been willing to compromise, his gifts were such that he might well have reaped the perishable fruits of popular celebration. But he chose to labor in the vineyard of truth.

To his varied endeavours as philosopher, teacher, novelist, critic and translator he brought a marvelous gift for language. I am choosing my words carefully when saying that his literary style was sublime (a word the meaning of which I was privileged to learn from him.) As English prose stylist, Ludwig Lewisohn was second to none in this century. It can be truly said that he never wrote a bad sentence, and in such a work as *The Last Days of Shylock*, the words become pure music. And, in the true sense of "style," the clarity and beauty of expression reflect, are, the characteristic of the thought.

Lewisohn's stature as a critic is underestimated today — perhaps because his standards were not those of the age and the "isms." He was unalterably op-



The picture Lewisohn draws here is of the life in Academia which he refused to bow to:

"People in our time and country are not accustomed to have those who think know anything, and they are even less accustomed to have one who knows try to think. The radicals have read nothing before nineteen hundred; the University men . . . walk humbly in the sight of their trustees and their God."

—THE CREATIVE LIFE

posed to "systematic" writing, to the abstraction of man from his inner nature, to the viewing of life through the prescription lenses of a system of thought. The affirmation of the sanctity of life, the meaning of experience and the elevation of this meaning to a universal plane: These were foremost among his critical criteria. He saw the function of the critic as that of a guide and teacher, an upholder of values timeless and eternal.

He was passionately interested in modern literature, and to the last day of his life he kept his finger on the pulse of contemporary writing. As a drama critic in the first and second decades of this century he was instrumental in winning acceptance for the works of modern French and German dramatists on the American stage. His *Expression in America* is a thoughtful and provocative history of American literature, among the best in the

field. In the related, and often grievously underrated role of translator, Lewisohn is without a peer as a re-creator of German prose styles. Hauptmann, Wasserman, Werfel, Rilke, Morgenstern are among the names which come to mind, not to mention the monumental *Goethes The Story of a Man*, a masterpiece of a very special kind.

As a novelist, Lewisohn reached great creative heights in *The*

Golden Vase, *The Case of Mr. Crump*, and *Stephen Escott*, all of which received wide critical acclaim. They attacked philistinism and conventional morality in the name of love and life. But his great Jewish novels — *The Island Within*, *The Last Days of Shylock*, *The Trumpet of Jubilee* — received hardly a nod. The persistent resistance to Jewish themes in American literature, that is, serious treatment of such themes as distinct from the Woukian variety, caused this studiously casual ignoring of such works by the critical gentry. But the works are here, and it is but a question of time until they will gain the recognition they deserve.

Lewisohn's monumental autobiographical works (*Upstream*, *Mid-Channel*) are a painstakingly honest record of his struggle for self-discovery, the story of a search which was so richly rewarded. This brings us closer to the greatest and most significant role of Lewisohn: As a profound lover and courageous leader of the Jewish people. His detractors have made much of the myth that Lewisohn was a "convert," a penitent Jew. Even superficial understanding of the man and his work prove the utter meaninglessness of such terms. From the beginning, Ludwig Lewisohn was in search of the inner man, the true man — his discovery of Judaism was a rediscovery of that which was himself and of the God of his people. In his struggle for Judaism: For Zion, for the integrity and self-respect of American Jewry, for a meaningful identification with Jewish tradition, for a recognition of the evil of fascism before it was too late and for an understanding of the catastrophe when it was too late (an understanding which is still tragically lacking among Jews today,) for the welfare of the state of Israel, for a Jewish University, for you and me: In this struggle in which he gave unsparingly, unstintingly of himself he rose to his greatest heights.

The man is no longer with us, but in his works he will live on. His magic word will be a continued source of inspiration and comfort for generations to come, as long as Jews seek to live as Jews in *Galuth*.

—Dan M. Morgenstern