

Preface

In writing this account I have had to rely, especially in connection with the earliest years of my life, on my memory, which was practically the only source of information about what I felt and did, and what happened to me, in my first ten or fifteen years. Since this forced me to contemplate problems presented by the unevenness of my memory, manifested in such occurrences as its alternation between total recall and total oblivion, I inevitably became interested in the phenomenon of memory itself, and could not keep myself from occasionally sidestepping into a consideration of the nature, the characteristics, the workings of memory, as I could ascertain, or at least glimpse, them, from delving into my own head, so to speak.

As this whole book testifies, in writing it I was again and again bemused and puzzled by memory as a psychological function. Repeatedly, in the course of writing these pages I was prompted to marvel at the seemingly arbitrary selectivity of my memory, at its retention of what appeared to be insignificant little events and details and, conversely, at its letting the waters of Lethe swallow up other events and sequences that I *know* must have happened and must have influenced the course of my life, and yet of which I have retained absolutely nothing. As the number of examples of this contrary behavior of my memory multiplied, I became more and more aware of it, was more and more puzzled by it, and began to suspect that the workings of memory must have their own rules, even if we, or at least I, do not understand them. But I did recognize this much: if one's memory retains an incident, a feeling, a place, a face, the mere fact of such retention endows those items with a significance that must not be doubted even if it is not readily apparent.

In pondering this issue I found that the fact of remembrance itself supplies the most reliable yardstick with which to measure the significance of such past occurrences, and especially those of a life's distant past. If an event, an utterance, a scene, a feeling manages to

embed itself in one's consciousness to the extent of maintaining itself there in the form of a distinct memory-fragment, and over a time-span of fifty or sixty years, then it inevitably follows that, in order to accomplish this feat, it must have had considerable intrinsic meaning for the psyche of the person concerned, and has therewith earned the right to full disclosure.

In addition to my memory, and in supplementation of it, I relied on written sources, both printed and surviving in manuscript, in the reconstruction of the story of my apprentice years in Budapest. This often meant the necessity of making a mental jump—from delving into myself and trying to bring up from the depths of the mental files I carried in me things that had lain dormant and hidden for many decades, to the very different world of the present with its books, catalogs, files, letters, and papers, to peruse the like of which had been my *métier* for many a decade. Occasionally I felt that the manner in which I presented the two types of information, one next to the other, made for rough transition, and that the two types of sources resisted melding, so that the resultant narration turned out to be patchy; but I could not help it. On the positive side, I think that in every case the more systematic factual data I dug up by research in the libraries and in my own personal archives significantly supplemented the more haphazard bounty caught in the net of my memory, and this justified the occasional inclusion of the former, even at the cost of interrupting the flow of the latter.

I wish to thank, as I did on many a previous occasion, Dr. Leonard Gold, head of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library, and his knowledgeable staff for their unfailing courtesy in helping me locate hard-to-find sources in the vast holdings of that invaluable treasure house. I owe a different kind of indebtedness to members of my family. My sister, Mrs. Éva (Évi) Koigen, of Givatayim, Israel, with whom I repeatedly discussed our common childhood experiences, passed away in February 1987. Shortly before her death she interviewed for me our cousin, Mrs. Judith Molnár-Zaran, of Ramat Gan, Israel, about the last years in the life of our grandparents in Budapest, which she witnessed. My brother, Saul Patai, of Jerusalem, Israel, read most of the manuscript and made several valuable corrections where his memory was more accurate than mine. My elder daughter, Jennifer, of Tucson, Arizona, took keen interest in the story of her ancestors and the early years of her father, providing a

great stimulus for working on this book and giving me the feeling that I was writing something that ultimately could be a link tying her children with their remote Jewish forebears in faraway Europe. My younger daughter, Daphne, despite being deeply involved in writing her own books, read the entire manuscript and made many suggestions that I subsequently incorporated into my text. I am also grateful to the staff of the University of Utah Press, whose enthusiastic readiness to undertake the publication of this book before even seeing the manuscript greatly encouraged me to persevere in working on it.

At the age of seventy-six no man can be sure of how much more time he has to accomplish additional works. Should I be granted a few more years, I shall try to write another book about the fifteen years, 1933–1947, that I spent in Palestine. I intend to title it *Journeyman in Jerusalem*.

Raphael Patai

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