

David M. Fahey, *E. Lawrence Levy and Muscular Judaism 1851-1932: Sport, Culture, and Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century Britain Together with "The Autobiography of an Athlete"*. Foreword by Malcom Dick. (Lewiston, NY and Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014).

The Edwin Mellen Press must be scolded for the price of this book. David M. Fahey's *E. Lawrence Levy and Muscular Judaism 1851-1932: Sport, Culture, and Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century Britain together with "The Autobiography of an Athlete"* is absurdly expensive, even in an age when scholars are accustomed to costly books, with a suggested price of £145 (\$240 in the United States).

While a formidable volume, comprising a substantial introduction followed by a fascinating and highly unusual memoir, its outrageous price makes it unlikely that this book will find a home in libraries worldwide--where it certainly belongs. (As of January 2016, according to search-engines *Worldcat* and *Copac*, not a single UK library has it.) Along with rendering the book inaccessible, the mind-boggling price is exacerbated by below-par production. The paper quality is poor. Most of the black and white illustrations, though possibly from imperfect originals, are unclear--especially photo three, a cartoon from *Phil May's Christmas Annual*, 1892. The three colour plates are all of a dubious standard that would not have passed muster with a conscientious press. One can only assume that Fahey did his best.

In contrast to the poor quality reproductions mentioned above, the photograph of Levy that graces the cover speaks volumes. Levy, a weightlifter and gymnast, is shown bare-chested, with his arms folded. He is bald, and not a young man, with a bushy mustache. He wears glasses. Levy is indeed muscular--not quite a body-builder type from the mid-twentieth century, but revealing powerful arms and well-defined muscles on his shoulder and neck. From this picture alone he deserves the moniker of a 'pocket Hercules'. Above all, he is calm and dignified, a man--who happens to be a Jew in a place not notable for being hospitable to Jews--supremely comfortable and confident in his own skin. He was apparently not religiously observant (on the Jewish spectrum) but an active member of his local Jewish community, originally coming to Birmingham from London to teach at a Jewish school. He promoted Jews' inclusion in athletics before Jews in sport

came to be increasingly organised under the rubric of assimilationist, ethnic, and proto-national bodies, as recently examined in the scholarship of David Dee. In Levy's memoir, Malcolm Dick's pithy foreword, and Fahey's introduction, there is no mention of the evolution of Jews and sport in London, Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester, and the substantial Jewish presence in boxing, notably the spectacle of Daniel Mendoza in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Yet despite these and other gaps, Levy's story is an excellent source for exploring sport, leisure, music, and politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which includes uncensored comments now understood to be ethnic slurs, racist, and sexist. (430, 441) Levy was, however, ahead of his time in promoting sports for girls (102, 198-99, 220) and he attempted to uphold the notion of a universal brotherhood of athletes to a considerable degree. (101, 315-6)

Most readers of this journal will be concerned with the detailed discussions of weightlifting, which occupy a substantial portion of Fahey's introduction and Levy's autobiography. The sections on the Olympics and other tournaments are also highly informative. It is difficult to image a more thorough description of weight lifting competitions of this period. Personally Levy was not shy about his achievements: an appendix to the autobiography is entitled: "How I won the international amateur weight lifting championship, and broke the world's amateur records March 28th and 30th 1891, International Hall, Cafe Monico, London." (463) Levy is fond of relating (sometimes through quoting others) his affectionate reception by fans, such as being "warmly greeted" at the Cafe Monico "not only by the strong Birmingham 'corner'. . . but by all those present. Mr. Levy, a very short man, standing 5ft 4 1/2 in., and presenting a bald head, with a heavily bearded gold-spectacled face, certainly did not strike one as doing great things." (469) At a competition the next year he "was greeted with hearty cheering from all parts of the hall." (483) There were some men who found him obstinate (288), but Levy was nevertheless widely lauded and appreciated.

His own athletic performances, preparations, and training and coaching other athletes formed a significant part of Levy's life. He helped establish sports columns in the provincial press (222), and influenced how athletic clubs and competitions came to be run and regulated. He was on the losing

side, however, of the attempt to vanquish the "knock-out" from boxing. (241) His diverse pursuits show him as a very energetic man with tremendous resolve. He established a school, led and participated in a number of plays, concerts, and operas, was a keen Freemason, active in Tory circles, and put himself forward as both an impresario and entertainer in a number of capacities. As an advocate for pubs, who appeared before temperance and missionary societies typically unfriendly to Jews and wary of their prominence as purveyors of spirits, he promoted the notion "that alcohol is no bar to physical fitness." (424) Levy also might be seen as a pioneering stand-up comedian, regaling us with his jokes and even the theory behind his humour: "My experience is, that an audience will always take to you if you depreciate yourself or say something at your own expense. Refer to your bald head, for instance, if you are lucky enough to have one, and your are *en rapport* with your audience at once." (432)

Levy concludes his life story asserting: "I am only a middle-class man. I have no money, never had and never shall have any. But, happily, what I have seen, what I have achieved, much of my happiness in life, has been obtained, thanks to--'*Dumbbells, twopence a pound.*' Our worldly happiness, the success we attain is fortunately not dependent upon pounds, shillings, and pence." He repeats, for emphasis: "*Dumbbells twopence a pound.*" (449) There might be a subtle, defensive Jewish subtext here, especially given how well he knew Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*: money was not the most important thing to Levy. There is no doubt that the brimming confidence evident in all Levy's endeavours derived in no small part from the pride and prowess he cultivated in weightlifting and other athletic pursuits. Fahey correctly states that Levy "was much more than a weight lifter. . . . in every sense of the word a strong man." (79) A reviewer of one of Levy's plays charged, however, that he "sought to crowd too much on to so small a canvas." (404) In the presentation of this dynamic and creative man in this precious volume, whose Jewishness formed a sizable part of his self-image and how others saw him, there is much to be gleaned about sporting history and many other social, political, and economic matters.

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