

# Helmuth Nathan

## *An Appreciation*





Helmuth Nathan



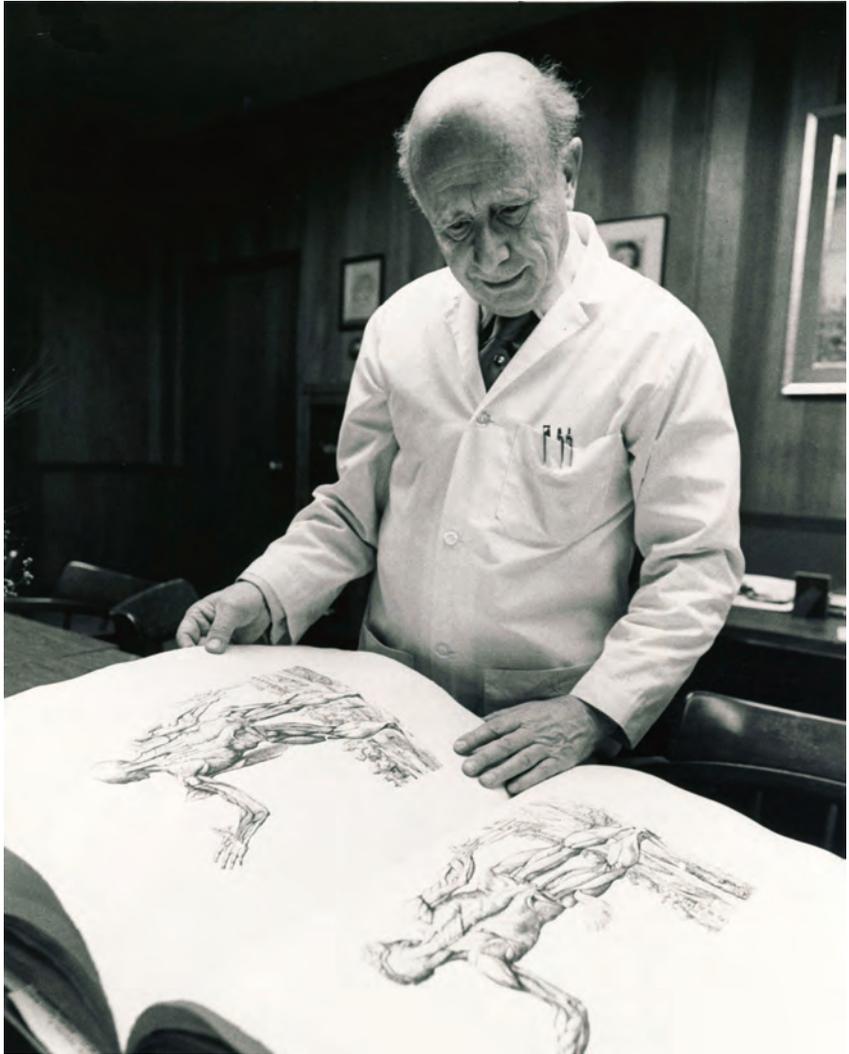
Helmuth Nathan  
1901-1979

Doctor, Artist and  
Humanitarian

An Appreciation

*“To surgeons he was also the Great Artist,  
To artists he was also the Great Surgeon.”*





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## *Opa: An Appreciation*

I always admired my father, but through the research done for this book, I have become more aware of his wide-ranging achievements, which seemed normal for us. Certainly I am not unique in taking for granted the unquestioning devotion, love and sacrifice of a father. Yet it has taken me until now, as an octogenarian, to recognise what an extraordinary humanitarian, scholar, researcher, physician, philanthropist, resourceful surgeon, true healer and consummate artist my father was.

Opa, thank you.

Ruth Norden (née Nathan), 2010



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*Kurt, Regina, Albert, Elly, Helmuth and Neumann (seated)*

## *Life*

Helmuth Max Nathan was born in Hamburg, Germany, on October 26<sup>th</sup> 1901, the third of four children. A city-state of the German Empire and the Hanseatic League, Hamburg had experienced exceptional population growth in the second half of the nineteenth century to approximately 800,000 citizens. Hamburg became Europe's third largest port, 'the gate-way to the world', and the *Hamburg-America Line* was, at the turn of the century, the world's largest transatlantic shipping company.

As an area for the birthplace of artists, turn-of-the-century Germany might not immediately spring to mind. However, Germany has an artistic heritage that now captures the imagination of the whole world, especially from the post WWI era. In the period from 1900 onwards, Germany was to be home of some of the most forward-thinking and inspiring artistic movements

The Bauhaus School in Dessau gave prominence to the beauty of the machine; Die Brücke in Berlin and Blau Reiter in Munich and Stuttgart rebelled against the ruling elite through their expressionism; and Dada appeared between the two world wars rejecting all form and function. German Expressionism



*Neumann and Regina (née Seligmann) Nathan,  
Helmuth's parents*

was another prominent movement at the time. Whilst the art that Nathan was to produce does not fit easily into any of these schools, his birth place need not be seen as a land barren of great twentieth century art – far from it.

Nathan's ancestors (from Rendsburg when it was still under Danish rule) were mainly teachers, accountants and merchants, and apparently his maternal grandfather was the first Jewish officer in the Danish army.<sup>1</sup> One ancestor was an engraver, another painted church frescos. His mother, Regina Seligmann, came from a family of 13 siblings, and there is an



*Albert, Elly, Helmuth and Kurt*

interesting historical connection between Regina's father and Bismarck (1815-1898), the Prime Minister of Prussia.<sup>1</sup> Sadly Helmuth's father, Neumann Nathan, died at the early age of 57 in 1926, but Helmuth Nathan was still to make a sketch of him.

Whilst at school (at the Ober-Realschule Vor dem Holzenthor), there was nothing significant in Nathan's education that would lay the foundations for his interest and enthusiasm for drawing later in life. Perhaps a few basic drawing classes, but it was as a student that he began caricatures and sketches of the teachers he met.



*Schoolboy*

## *Medical Studies*

Helmuth Nathan and Irene Nelson met whilst they were both studying in Freiburg, Helmuth to be a doctor. Irene's mother, Leopoldine, was a music protege who married Jacob, a widower with prior children. Leopoldine's only children were Irene (born in 1905) and Otto, (1908). Helmuth would often spend weekends with Irene's family in Freiburg, whilst he was studying away from home. After returning to Hamburg to complete his medical training,

Helmuth never failed to write a daily postcard to his sweetheart, as well as long letters – often containing little books of poetry, songs, sonnets, and shared experiences and passions.



*Helmuth and Irene in 1925*

Freiburg im Breisgau (near Basle in Switzerland) is situated at the southern-west point of Germany, and has long been known for its military hospital, and also its ancient university which was founded in 1457 with medicine being one of its main disciplines even then. It was the first German university to accept a female student, and before the First World War had over 3,000 students.

In contrast, Hamburg University is one of the younger seats of learning in Germany, established as an official university by the city parliament in 1919 with nearly 2,000 students. Nevertheless, its roots go back further into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it became a centre of learning for specific professions, one of which was medicine. As a result of this, the university developed a large and highly regarded teaching hospital, which grew in the early years of the twentieth century.

Student years also saw Nathan active in wider interests – he joined the Kartel Convent, a large association of Jewish students, and eventually was elected leader of the Kameraden, the German youth movement with liberal socio-political ideals.<sup>ii</sup> A lot of his friends in life were originally from this German youth movement.



*Helmut and Irene on their engagement*

During his student years, Helmuth was exposed to many of the great minds and ideas of the time. He took a wide interest in all areas of academic study, from psychology to art history, archaeology to basic sciences, and he took philosophy under the tutelage of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.<sup>iii</sup>

Obtaining degrees at Freiburg and Hamburg Universities (he received his MD from Hamburg in 1925), Helmuth married Irene on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1926 in Freiburg.



Nathan began practising medicine at the St. Georg Hospital, Hamburg, in 1927, after finishing one year of internship.<sup>iv</sup> St Georg was a quarter of Hamburg, where the ancient hospital which looked after victims of the plague was turned into a general hospital (and is today known as the Asklepios Klinik St Georg).



*St. Georg Hospital, Hamburg*

Nathan's medical career as an assistant took him through a year of surgery at Freiburg, followed by two years of pathology, a year of internal medicine

and then three-and-a-half years of surgery, all in Hamburg. Nathan also worked at the University Medical Centre, Hamburg-Eppendorf, which was founded in 1884. It became part of the university medical centre in 1934.

Among his student friends were two later refugees to England, Sir Ludwig Guttman (becoming a world-reknown specialist in paraplegics at Stoke Mandeville Hospital), and Dr Eric Kann (one of the first non-family directors of *Marks and Spencer*).

During his time in Hamburg, Nathan developed his research into pyemic infections – a form of blood poisoning caused by the presence in the blood of pus-producing micro-organisms. His papers on this topic, a form of septicaemia, led to the hospital awarding Nathan the Deneke Medal in 1932.

### *Persecution*

Helmuth's work at the St Georg Hospital received a mention in a private biography by Rachel Ziekeschuck, herself a Jewish German emmigrant. After outlining the increasing persecution by Hitler and national socialism against the Jews, she narrates how she and her husband Hans decided to leave Germany.

On the night before my departure, fixed for March 27<sup>th</sup> 1933, we had supper with Rudolph and Edith Ascher. A friend of the couple, whose name I have forgotten, was also with us. This young man was to be the first of our acquaintances to suffer from Nazi violence. On April 1<sup>st</sup> his house was broken into by storm troopers, he was thrown down the stairs and suffered a fractured arm. He was taken to St Georg Hospital. The director, Dr Hegeler, known to have been politically liberal, gave him a private room and allowed nobody except for the Jewish surgeon, Dr Helmuth Nathan, to see him. (Of course Dr Nathan was soon dismissed from his post as registrar and became a distinguished surgeon in America. As an intern in Eppendorf he often came to my father and also to our house.)



*Helmuth as a physician scrubbing-in, 1936*

In a 1997 study of German medical professionals that were persecuted by the Nazis, Matthias Andre summarizes what happened to Nathan:

In 1931 he became the head of surgery [at St Georg], a qualified surgeon. His supervisor in the same year extended his employment as there was yet more work to be done, rewarding his outstanding research.

The health board gave notice in writing to Nathan on 30 Sep 1933 without grounds. Whilst writing to the health board supervisory administration on 21 Aug 1933, Professor Ringel mentioned his assistant Nathan as follows:

*A patient recently refused an operation from the above [Nathan] as he didn't want to be handled by a Jewish doctor. Because of this, to avoid future misunderstanding, which perhaps could take place*

*and damage the image of the hospital, this needs to be avoided.*

The documentation for the dismissal cannot be found. He [Nathan] was then active for three years as a senior doctor at the Jewish Hospital in Hamburg.<sup>v</sup>

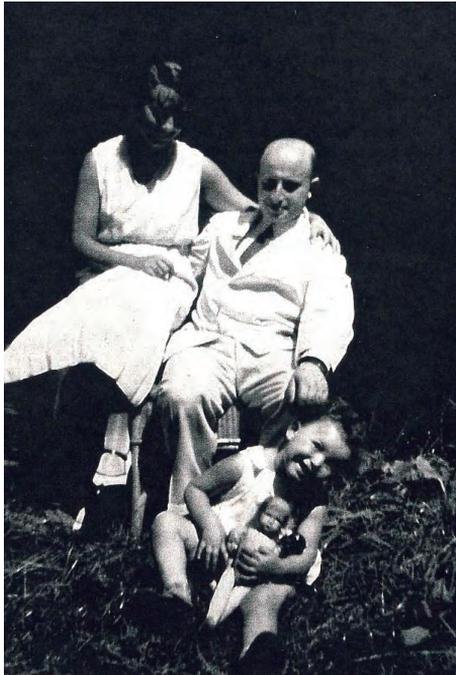
The increasing persecution of the Jewish community, and in particular the removal of Jews from prominent and influential positions, led to the isolation of Jewish professionals. These two accounts illustrate the direct persecution against Helmuth Nathan, one of many who experienced similar challenges in their professional lives – not to mention their other experiences. It became clear to many that unless something drastic happened to the growing National Socialist party, their home might have to be elsewhere.

Before emigrating, his three years spent at the Judisches Krankenhaus (Jewish Hospital) was under Professor Israel Salomon Heine had founded the hospital in memory of his wife Betty in 1839. It was a large and, at the time of its construction, a well-financed hospital – even for wealthy Hamburg. With this establishment, Jews could observe their own religious laws, even during illness and at the time of death. It had space for 120 patients, and its own synagogue on the first floor (which is the only remaining 19<sup>th</sup> century synagogue in the city).

Prior to the start of the Second World War, it had already run into financial difficulties, even before the large migration of its staff in fear of their lives. In 1939 the hospital was signed over by the Jewish community to the City of Hamburg – all assets, the property and the land was given for the city finances, and in return the city waived the debt. Before Nathan left, the Jewish hospital awarded him the Salomone Heine Medal for his clinical work and research.



*On ward rounds at the Judisches Krankenhaus, and below Hel-  
muth and Irene with their young daughter, Ruth*



## *Emigration*

As with many other German Jews, Helmuth Nathan emigrated to the United States in October 1936. The growth of National Socialism, and the impending threat of persecution and then war, led many to make the decision to leave the country before it was too late. His mentors at the Judisches Krankenhaus in Hamburg advised him to consider emigrating, as conditions worsened for the Jews.

In the 1930s, Jews wishing to immigrate to the US needed a visa, obtainable from a nearby US Consulate. However, in order for a visa to be issued, assuming a quota was met, one first had to have an Affidavit from US residents who would



*Standing before the ship that took the family to New York*

United States  
of America

UNITED STATES LINES

County of Westchester  
State of New York

S.S. **Affidavit of Support**

Prepaid Ticket No. ....

I, Charles Hardy  
Pelham Manor (Name)  
City State

residing at 462 Esplanade  
(Street Address)

1. That I was born a citizen of the United States on:

That I was naturalized citizen of the United States on:

That I declared my intention of becoming a citizen of the United States on:

Date December 16, 1920 In the New York State

Date December 16, 1920 In the New York State

Date ..... In the ..... State

City Of ..... (City) State

City Of New York (City) State

City Of ..... (City) State

County Of .....

County Of New York

County Of .....

State Of .....

State Of New York

State Of .....

2. That I am 56 years of age and have resided in the United States since 22 February 1918

3. That the undermentioned alien (s) desire (s) to come to the United States because he desires to establish a medical practice here

4. That the undermentioned alien (s) whose relationship to me is that of wife, husband, mother, father or unmarried children under the age of twenty-one, is (are) in the favored classes under the Immigration law and being an American Citizen I filed Form 683 of the Department of Labor, entitled "Petition for Issuance of Immigration visa" with the Honorable Commissioner General of Immigration in Washington, D. C. under date of ..... OR, that the under-mentioned alien (s) whose relationship to me is that of wife, or unmarried child (ren) under the age of twenty-one, is/are entitled to preference under the Immigration Act of 1924 as amended, I having arrived at the port of ..... and having been legally admitted into the United States for permanent residence. I filed form 575 of the Department of Labor, entitled "Declaration Regarding Last Entry into the United States" with the appropriate immigration officer at the above port, indicating that I arrived via the S.S. ....

5. That the financial status of the alien (s) is/are unknown but supposed to be possessed of sufficient means for prolonged self-support  
(State whether or not the applicant is dependent on you for support)

6. That alien (s) mentioned herein previously resided in the United States from ..... to ..... and departed because.....  
Date

and did (did not) declare his/her/intention of becoming an American Citizen (s).

7. That alien (s) mentioned herein are able to read and write the following language or dialect: English, German, French

8. That my regular occupation is Executive, director of Metallurgical and Trading Co. (Trade) yearly (With) my average yearly earnings amount to \$10000

and I possess property to the value of: Real Estate \$..... Personal \$..... Yearly Income from Rentals of Real Estate \$..... and that the encumbrance on said property, if any, amount to \$.....

9. That my present dependents consists of: wife and one boy; Inez Hardy, 50 years; Charles J. Hardy, 13 years  
(Names and Ages)

10. That it is my intention and desire to have my relatives whose names appear below, at present residing at: 4. Bokernfelder Strasse, Hamburg, Germany  
Give Complete Address

Name of Alien (s)	Sex	Date of Birth	Country of Birth	Occupation	Relationship to Dependent
<u>Dr. Helmuth M. Nathan, mase</u>		<u>Oct. 26 1901</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Surgeon</u>	<u>nephew</u>
<u>Irene Nathan</u>	<u>fem.</u>	<u>Feb. 24 1905</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>niece</u>
<u>Ruth H. Nathan</u>	<u>fem.</u>	<u>Oct. 16 1929</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>pupil</u>	<u>grand niece</u>



(s) mentioned above while they are of them will at any time become citizens of the United States; and that any who are under 18 years old and will not be put to death, mentally sound, to the best of my knowledge and belief, are not threatened with or arrested for any reason by any group or organization whose purpose is to prevent them from becoming citizens to the best of my knowledge and belief.

The affidavit from Hardy (above), and Irene and Ruth in Central Park (left)

vouchsafe the individual so that he or she would not become a financial burden on society. Thus, relatives, friends and sometimes strangers were beseeched for such affidavits. As a young surgeon, Helmuth could not have afforded the necessary trips to the USA to seek an affidavit from a 'rich' uncle, yet he was able to secure a position as a ship surgeon and thus approached his mother's brother, Uncle Hardy, who after a second trip provided Nathan and his family with the necessary affidavits. Hardy had been in the US for a long time (having changed his name from Seligmann), and had established himself as a metallurgist. At the time he was President of Hardy Metallurgical Company in New York where he registered patents and wrote books on the subject.

Upon his arrival in New York City, Helmuth had barely two months to study for his State Board exams – this was crucial, as passing enabled him to practice medicine in New York, whereas failure would have forced him to go through medical school with all its associated delays, before being allowed to work in hospitals. Despite the commitment to study and work, Nathan found time to pen extensive letters to friends and family both back in Germany and in other parts of the globe. The contents of these letters varied, but they contained impressions of his first months in the US, reflections on the opportunities or lack of them, the need to have orderly paperwork to enter the US, and his appreciation of and instant love of Americans.

A letter written less than two months after their arrival in the US at the end of 1936 talks of great homesickness, but is also extremely positive.

If one intends to emigrate from Germany and truly wants to establish oneself and be among like-minded people, of similar intellectual, political and

cultural viewpoints, America is the only land in question. Here we find ourselves at home in a circle of acquaintances of Western culture. ... There is hardly a city as interesting, as beautiful and yet offering opportunities for personal development as New York.

He then discusses the pleasant and positive welcome from Americans, in all circles of life, which he puts down to the fact that so many were once 'foreigners' who emigrated to the new land in the hope of a better life.

One does not have to be ashamed of being an immigrant, and need not deny one's heritage. That is good!

With respect to his own profession, Helmuth has nothing but praise for the hospitals:

Oh, the hospitals, they are a case of their own, worthy of a study in and of itself. ... Mount Sinai Hospital with about 600 beds is considered one of the finest hospitals in the United States.



*The charming start of his letter from New York, which included the briefest of sketches of the city's skyline*

Helmuth's research and publications into sepsis apparently made his entry into the medical establishment that much easier, and indeed he was of interest to the medical world because of this. Nevertheless, this did not stop him having to take a three-hour written examination (which he described as "miserable"). As for his plans?

My goal is to open a joint office in the most elegant district, Park Avenue, with one or two men.

Helmuth praises the cultural life, and the positive schooling experience for "our little girl [Ruth]", and the beautiful Romanesque and cathedral-like edifice of the Temple Emanuel, the synagogue.

As Helmuth settled in New York, he was able to help others upon their arrival – he ensured that when his mother and aunt arrived, they had their own apartment, assisted his brother-in-law and wife who had fled to the US via France and Switzerland.<sup>vi</sup> Regina, Helmuth's mother, came to England just before the Second World War and stayed with Helmuth's brother, Kurt and his wife Else (the political situation looked so serious that many thought that Great Britain would be invaded).<sup>i</sup> It was then agreed by the two brothers that she should go to New York.

Nathan's brother, Albert, had met and married a widow, Cecile Haag Meier, who had two children, Lola and Inge. They emigrated to America two few years after Helmuth, as Lola recalls being met at the boat by Uncle Helmuth, by then already an established surgeon at several hospitals in New York. Inge was to marry Abe Simon in 1943, although sadly she died at the young age of 34. Lola married Ed Backman, and they eventually moved to California. Lola remembers that Helmuth went to her wedding in 1945, that he was a great

man, and “of course, he was always our chief medical advisor for all things that ailed us!”

Ursel, the daughter of Elly (Helmuth’s sister), came to England with the Kinder Transport and spent her holidays with her Uncle and Aunt, Kurt and Else, and most weekends when she was free. When the war ended she emigrated to New York to rejoin her parents, Elly and Arthur von Halle, who had escaped through Norway to Sweden in a bread van and emigrated to the USA at the end of the war from Sweden. Her sister, Ingrid, had two sons, Richie and Jeffrey.

The split up of the family (Helmuth’s brother and sister) was forced through the limited visas available for each country. So Elly and her husband went to Norway, Kurt and Else to the UK, and Albert, Helmuth and Irene to the USA. Each took the first option that was available to them to escape from Germany. Ursel started her life in England in Liverpool, which became a restricted area, and was then sent to Leeds to work at the Guttman Family. Later, in 1943, she joined Dayan Dr Isidor Grunfeld in Shenield (Essex), caring for children without parents as a nursery nurse. This had a deep impact on her future religious training and persuaded her to become an Orthodox Jewess. After the war she emigrated to New York, where she was reunited with her parents and sister.

When Helmuth and his family first arrived in America, they visited the beautiful Temple Emanu-El, the home of a Reformed American Congregation on Fifth Avenue. Helmuth taught a first aid course here to the Ladies’ Auxiliary group. They also attended the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue (Sheareth Israel) until Habonim was created and later it had its own building. Helmuth had a deep love and commitment to this organisation, created by Western European Jews. His daughter, Ruth, and his son-in-law, Peter, were married by the

Habonim Rabbi, Hugo Hahn, whilst their son-in-law's father was President of Habonim.

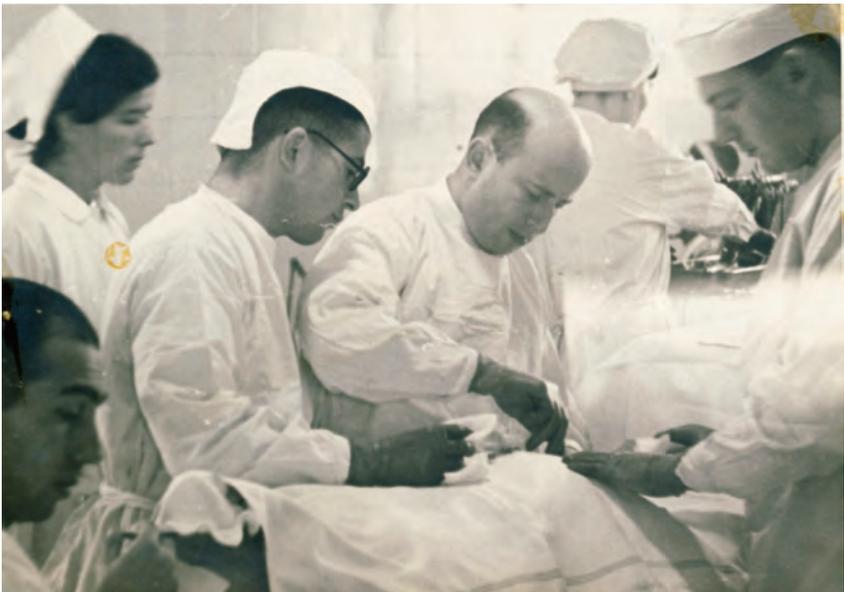
### *American Medical Career*

New opportunities in the United States gave him the position of Cancer Research Fellow at Beth Israel Hospital on an initial salary of \$75 per month. He then became a clinical assistant at Mount Sinai Hospital, and after obtaining a license in 1937 began private practise. Soon to follow was his appointment as attending surgeon at Sydenham and Bronx Municipal Hospitals.

Towards the end of the Second World War, Nathan applied to the Medical Corps of the United States Army, demonstrating his desire to be fully participative in his new home. Unfortunately the War Department refused his application with a letter on 7th April 1944 which declared that,

while your desire to be of service is appreciated, favourable action cannot be taken as you have been found to be physically disqualified for either general or limited military service by reason of coronary sclerosis; hypertension; tachycardia, persistent; waiver not recommended.

The Albert Einstein College of Medicine opened in 1955, the first to be built in New York since the nineteenth century.<sup>vii</sup> Helmuth Nathan was one of the original faculty members, leading an institution that was created by the vision of Dr Samuel Belkin, President of Yeshiva University. From the start, the policy was that there would be no discrimination with regard to race, religion, creed, color, national origin, sex,



*In medical practice*

disability, veteran or disabled veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation or citizenship status. It was an establishment that suited Nathan's character and ideals well. Five years after its foundation, he was appointed Professor of Surgery.

His career at Albert Einstein College then gradually progressed – Emeritus Professor of Anatomy (Visiting) and History of Medicine (1969), and then Emeritus Professor of Surgery and Chairman of the Department of History (1971). At the same time, he received various other appointments, including Professor of Hamburg University (1969), Professor Emeritus of Surgery at Hamburg (1970), Consultant Surgeon at Bronx Municipal Hospital Centre, Hospital of Montefiore Medical Center, and Mount Sinai Medical School (1972). Of several return visits to Germany, one included an invitation (from a Dr Gerhard Bock, who had become a firm family friend) to Tübingen to teach medical procedures. These American skills were all filmed by the university for future study.

### *Clinical Work*

Nathan's medical work covered a wide range of interests and specialities. He published articles on internal hernias, intestinal granulomatosis, gastric surgery, use of nerve blocks in treating strangulated intestines, mesenteric infarctions, and lymphosarcoma. He is also noted for developing new operations, including the first complete removal of the parotid gland with facial nerve preservation. Listing just a few of his publications and articles, which by the time of his retirement numbered more than 60, can show the breadth of his expertise:

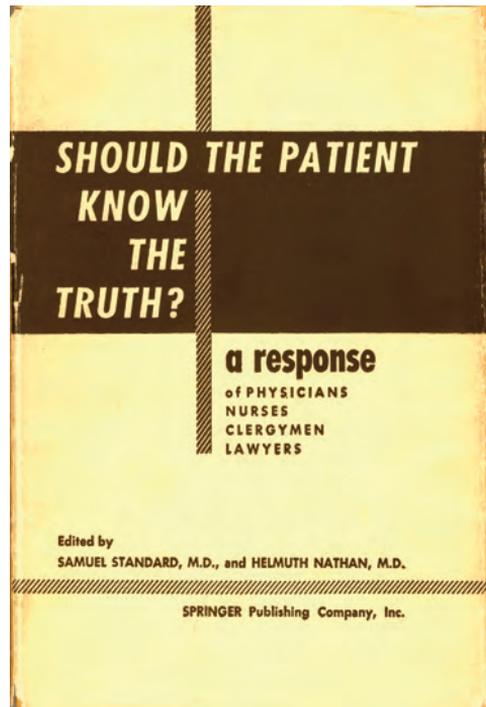
Sugar in Pathological Body-fluids II  
About the Spread of the Primary Intestinal  
Actinomycosis

The Spread of Septic Infections with Metastases  
Total Extirpation of the Parotid Gland with  
Preservation of the Facial Nerve  
Internal Hernia: Postgraduate Lecture with John E  
Moseley  
The Portrait of the Physician in the History of Art

In addition to these works, Nathan published reviews of books on surgery and the history of medicine, and he gave numerous public and special guest lectures across the world, including universities in America, Germany and Israel.

Helmuth shared consulting rooms with Dr Friedrich Brodnitz, who had come from Berlin and was an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. He looked after prominent stage people, especially Opera soloists, and became a good friend.

The main book for which Helmuth Nathan is remembered is *Should the Patient Know the Truth?* During the course of his career, Helmuth had a keen interest in the management and treatment of patients who had life-threatening illnesses. Of course, a central issue in such treatment is the very title of the book, and so with the help of Dr Samuel Standard, Helmuth Nathan brought together the

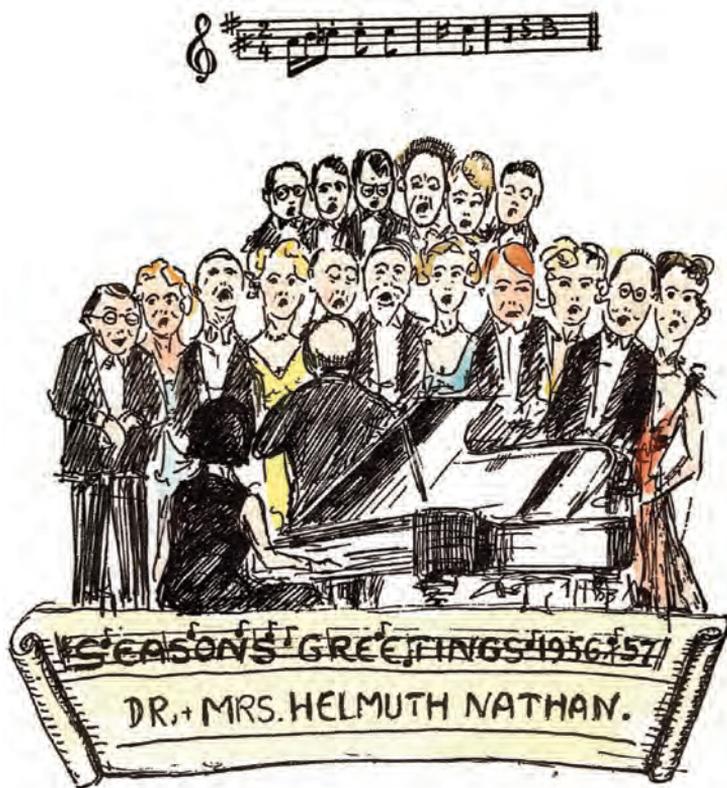


opinions of a wide-range of specialists. Doctors, nurses, clerics and legal professionals contributed to what became a standard text on the subject.

Nathan's medical expertise can be illustrated by his membership of numerous professional bodies, including amongst many others, the International College of Surgeons, the American College of Gastroenterology, and the American Society of Abdominal Surgeons.

Helmuth's medical understanding and care for his patients, however, was not demonstrated simply by accolades and achievements. It extended to the very young, and sometimes beyond the medical issues. One year on the day before Yom Kippur, Helmuth's sister Elly's grandson Alan, who was six years old at the time, required emergency removal of his appendix. Upon visiting Alan after the holiday, Helmuth produced a small toy police car as a present and went on to explain that he had an emergency and had needed to get somewhere quickly. In order to get to his destination the police had taken him, and they had given Helmuth the toy car. It was when Alan was a little older that he realized his Uncle Helmuth had bought the police car himself as a present.

Another example of someone who remembers Helmuth fondly is Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach of the famous Yeshiva Chaim Berlin, who is now a great grandfather many times over. He still recalls that when he was a little boy he had a problem with his arm that no other doctor could diagnose. He went to Nathan who accurately identified the infection and cured him. To this day he maintains that Helmuth saved his life.



*Helmuth's personalised gift card for 1956/57*

## *Character*

One of Helmuth Nathan's prime characteristics was that of integrity. In his medical work, he objected against the practise of fee-splitting, where a doctor referred a patient to a colleague for a fee. On another matter, his wife had a friend who used to visit the family in the US, but because of the husband's Nazi-associations, he made sure that the US State Department was advised never to allow this man to buy US property. Nevertheless, loyalty was also important to Nathan – as a family member, as a colleague, and as a friend.

As a doctor, cleanliness was always of paramount importance, something Nathan insisted upon both in the surgery and in the home. Student doctors were painted up to the elbows before they scrubbed in for an operation so that it could be checked that they had washed properly, and at home the floors had to literally be clean enough to eat off.

Nathan's daughter recalls that whenever they travelled, they would meet people her father knew, and Nathan would delight in entertaining with musical evenings where his mother-in-law would charm the gathered company as soloist or with other musicians in chamber music. It was thanks to his wife's



*Irene and Helmuth enjoy a social occasion together*

managerial skills that Helmuth was able to devote so much of his time to art as well as his medical career.

Together with his wife they were good hosts – she supported him through all his work and pleasures, and had many varied skills herself. It was Irene who ensured that bills were sent to patients, and it was Irene who orchestrated the evenings of dining and entertainment. The couple enjoyed travelling together, and both made attendance at concerts a part of daily life (at the Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Town Hall and more).

The dedication to an article he published in *Postgraduate Medicine* reads, “To my dear Irene, who is generous enough to let me do my work, with love, Helmuth.” Helmuth was devoted to his wife, and they shared so many passions and aspirations, including of course their child.

He adored his two grandchildren, eagerly following their lives and supporting them as and when he could. He and Irene introduced them to travel, art, music, religion, humanitarianism, and intellectual curiosity.

It was his love of concerts that led to one of Helmuth's most prestigious subjects for drawing – performers at concerts. He maintained a box seat at the Philharmonic Hall where he could practically read the music of the violinists, and allowing detailed close-ups of the conductors, pianists and other musicians.

Nathan was an active member of, and actually helped found Habonim, the congregation for Jews who had escaped from Western Europe. His Judaism was never fanatical, but he found comfort in services and observed all the major holy days and holidays at synagogue, as well as the special dinners and celebrations of these prepared by his wife and attended by the extended family and other guests.

When time allowed, Helmuth together with Irene helped out at Tietz House a home to look after Jewish refugees from Germany. Margaret Tietz, a close personal friend of Irene's, founded this and a number of other charitable organisations with which the Nathans helped out extensively. Many of the artists who fled Germany to the United States but subsequently became penniless were treated medically by Helmuth.

Whilst many people looked on at Helmuth Nathan admiringly, and saw a life working on so many different levels, Hilde Marx (a close family friend) was perhaps closer to the truth when she observed this wasn't true – rather, he performs all his functions on the same level: "The unity of multiplicity in Nathan's life is purely, externally visible in every arena of his effectiveness... in his home, in the rooms of his medical practice, in the Einstein College of medicine."

On the occasion of his retirement, Einstein College's Dean, Marcus D. Kogel said:

It has been accepted as Gospel that God was thoroughly satisfied with everything He had done with his creative activities, even saying, "Behold, it was good," and on the seventh day He rested. The actual facts are that He was disturbed when He looked over His handiwork, and He just didn't and couldn't rest. There was something very essential that was missing. It was not until the evening of the seventh day that he determined what was wrong.



*Irene and Helmuth look through some sketch books*



*Helmuth's office decorated with some of his proudest achievements, his medical career and his family*

It hit him suddenly, with a bang, that He still had to give the world Art, and Music, and Gemutlichkeit [‘coziness’]. “I know what I will do,” God said to Himself. “I will give an abundance of these gifts to Helmuth Nathan, including also a terrific vitality – so that, when The Albert Einstein College of Medicine comes into being – he will be able to *badger* the Dean – day and night – until the curriculum of the college is enriched with these wonderful additions.”

So it came to pass, and when The Albert Einstein College of Medicine came into being – this creative, warm, sensitive, exuberant Helmuth Nathan, appeared on the scene, and he brought Culture and

Beauty to the school. For this Bounty he has placed us forever in his debt.

The Lord was full of ideas this seventh night, and He figured that when Helmuth would be ready to retire – with avid enthusiastic students and stimulating teachers – the brilliant faculty of Albert Einstein College of Medicine would have discovered how to manufacture human clones. Thus hundreds of replicas of Helmuth would be provided so that there always would be a Helmuth Nathan. Every member of the college community, both students and faculty, admired Helmuth, honored, respected, and loved him and always will. We are ever grateful for the inspiration he gave us.



*Helmuth with the Dean of The Albert Einstein College of Medicine upon his retirement*

## *Sketching*

Nathan merited a mention in Anthony Heilbut's examination of German refugee artists and intellectuals in America, *Exiled in Paradise*, as an example of the versatility among many refugee academics to the US.<sup>viii</sup> Not merely an accomplished doctor, scientist, social and family man, a major part of Helmuth's legacy is his passion for artistic creation – in particular, caricaturing, sketching and drawing.

Mention has been made of his sketching at concerts, but it was something that he did almost everywhere, with people primarily (but not exclusively) being the subjects of his drawings. Whilst he was adept also at painting, using color and tone quite boldly at times, the sketches show his ability to capture the look and personality of an individual.

Many of the most endearing images that remain are of unknown characters, perhaps people who represent a particular culture or race, or stand out because of their situation. The lines are bold, often swift, but full of feeling and emotion.

Other sketches that are of particular note are those of the famous – politicians, artists, musicians, and other society



*Two occasions where Helmuth was photographed  
with sketch-book in hand*

people of significance. As well as his sketches of famous conductors and musicians at concerts (including Rudolf Serkin, Robert Casadesus and Emil Gilels), Nathan developed an interest in leading politicians. Some of the surviving sketches include fascinating notes, written by Nathan, which reflect something of the history of the person, the occasion of the sketch, and Nathan's own personal reflections on the politicians of the day. It is an intriguing exercise to read the comments, and relate it to Nathan's visual interpretation of the person.

### *Harry S. Truman (1945-1953)*

“Dear Dr Nathan, Thank you very much for the fine pen drawing and the thoughtful inscription. I more than appreciate your kindness, and I am glad you like the picture I sent you.” (Note to HN on 6.12.1956).

“Harry Truman will go into history as one of our great presidents. He does not belong to the sophisticated type of meditating intellectuals. He was a prototype of a practical man, fast in his thinking, quick in his acting. His presidency was characterized by the continuous willingness to accept great responsibilities and not to escape difficult challenges. He could be timid and humble, as he has shown in the moments of Franklin Roosevelt's death. He could be aggressive and arrogant when he had to attack injustice and dishonesty. He could be fighting with strength and was willing to sacrifice his own chances when he felt that he had to defend an idea. Sometimes he gave his opinion very spontaneously, perhaps



Nathan's sketch of the much-maligned President Nixon, 1969

without self-criticism and harmed himself more than others. It happened twice during the presidential campaigns, concerning amazingly two great democratic candidates. Once when Stevenson and Harriman were running and once during John F Kennedy's nomination. Temporarily Truman may have lost some of his old devoted friends and admirers. But he showed his greatness having the honesty to correct himself. The drawing of Truman was made during his attack on Stevenson in 1956. He considered Harriman to be the stronger candidate and wanted him to be nominated. From the letter President Truman wrote to me it is evident that he liked the picture."

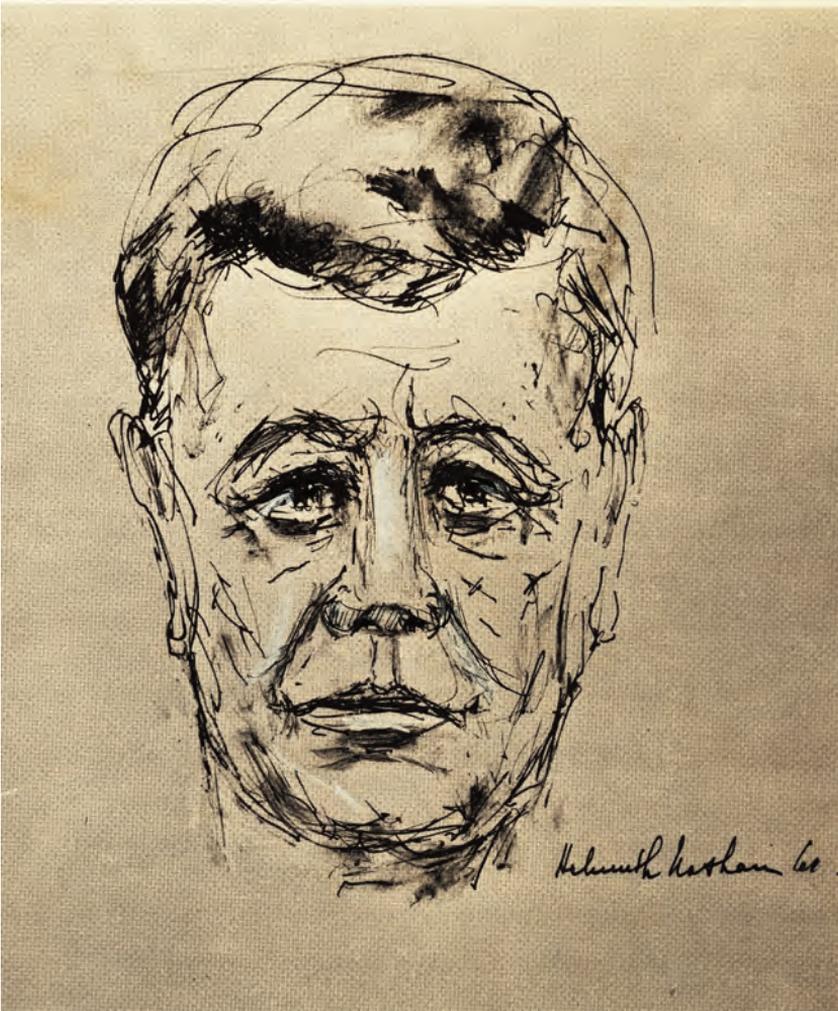
*Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961)*

Sketched during a speech, Nathan sent it to the White House in 1957 for signing, but it was returned as it was Eisenhower's policy not to sign any image except official photographs.

Nathan noted that Eisenhower was elected because of "the great love and admiration of the nation for the victorious leader in a great war." Nathan sent the sketch again in 1961 after Eisenhower retired, and was successful on his second attempt in getting the image signed.

*John F Kennedy (1961-1963)*

In November 1960 the two candidates for the Presidency of the United States presented



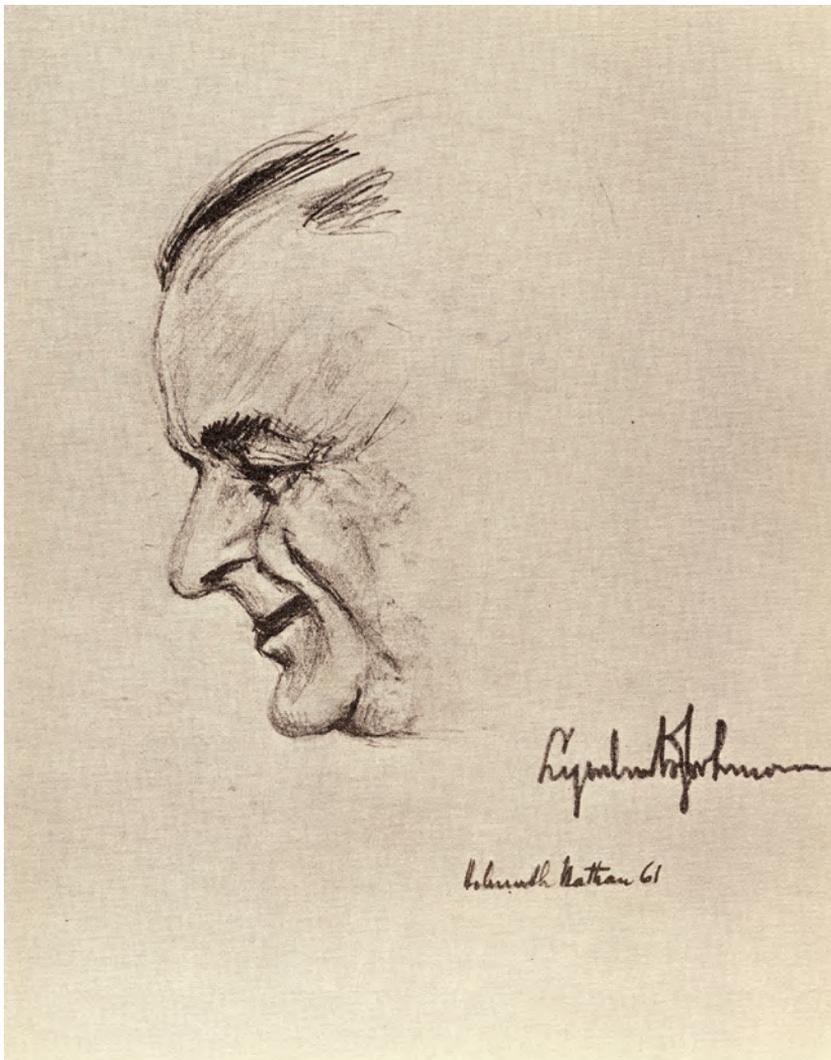
themselves simultaneously to the Nation, discussing the same problems, facing the same audience, surrounded by the same milieu with the same advantages and handicaps of the strange encounter.... On one side was Nixon, matured in 8 years of Vice Presidency, supported by the greatly admired President Eisenhower. A man known as a strong, shrewd, aggressive fighter, looking for the

‘focus of resistance’ of his opponent, experienced in many political fights, full of bitterness and strong animosities. On the other side was the young Senator Kennedy, daring, optimistic, courageous and willing to fight for his conviction. He was supported by great enthusiasm of the younger generation, fortunate in the possession of financial means. He was strong in his religious conviction but tolerant in his understanding of other people of different belief and racial and national background. His face was tense, his eyes deep in his thoughts meditating how to answer, how to counter attack. His intellectuality, his great wit, the impression of his honesty and sincerity was convincing. He does not look like the smiling man as we have known him as president. I made the picture and sent it. I did not receive any answer until February when he sent me the note of thanks and appreciation – and this autographed picture – signed John Kennedy.”

*Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969)*

“Dear Doctor Nathan, Thank you very much for your excellent sketch. It will make a cherished addition to the mementoes I have of my visit to The Albert Einstein College of Medicine.” (Note sent to Nathan on 13.2.1962).

Nathan added his own note: “He appeared as a man of simplicity, quickly establishing a good contact with his audience. In a personal talk he was very friendly, full of good humour and interest in simple matters”



## *Eleanor Roosevelt*

Whilst not a president, *Eleanor Roosevelt* was the widow of a President whom Nathan very much admired, and also of course had great success in her own right. Nathan's notes on her image explain:

In 1955 there was a meeting of the Self Help Organisation, the self-supporting group of European refugees in America. Eleanor Roosevelt was the speaker. We were sitting together. I made the little drawing which she liked very much and signed it. Later on we drove her home in our car. She was a wonderful woman, maybe the most important of our time. Intelligence and feminine warmth, political experience with natural feeling for personal and general needs are united in her character. She had an open eye for the good things in human beings and always finds an apology for human failures. Her influence on the improvement of the social conditions in the world is fascinating. She helped to overcome prejudices, intolerance and frictions among people. Religious and racial intolerance don't exist for her. When I stated that the death of Franklin D Roosevelt was felt by all of us like the passing of one of the nearest member of our family, she answered, "Yes - many people felt like that, because they loved him not as a President but as a simple man and they did it, because he himself always loved people first as people."

It is interesting to note that Eleanor Roosevelt created a committee to rescue Jewish writers and artists who were blocked in France. She sent Varian Fry, a journalist, to rescue,

amongst others, the artist Hans Bellmer, and Alma Mahler, wife of the composer Gustav Mahler.





*Two concert pianists*



*A violinist and a saxophonist*



*Two caricature sketches showing two different styles adopted by Nathan. One uses hard lines and dark shading to emphasise the powerful face, whilst the other has a lightness of touch and is much softer.*



*This sketch shows that Helmuth Nathan also had his humorous side, with this sketch of the eminent photographer, Otto Nelson (Nathan's brother-in-law), looking almost cartoon-like. When shown this drawing at the age of 102, Otto remarked that there was no film in his camera when Helmuth drew the sketch!*



*On this and the next three pages, the examples show how Nathan use color to liven his sketches of unknown characters he observed in the streets and places of New York*



\* Kithen on a rainy day



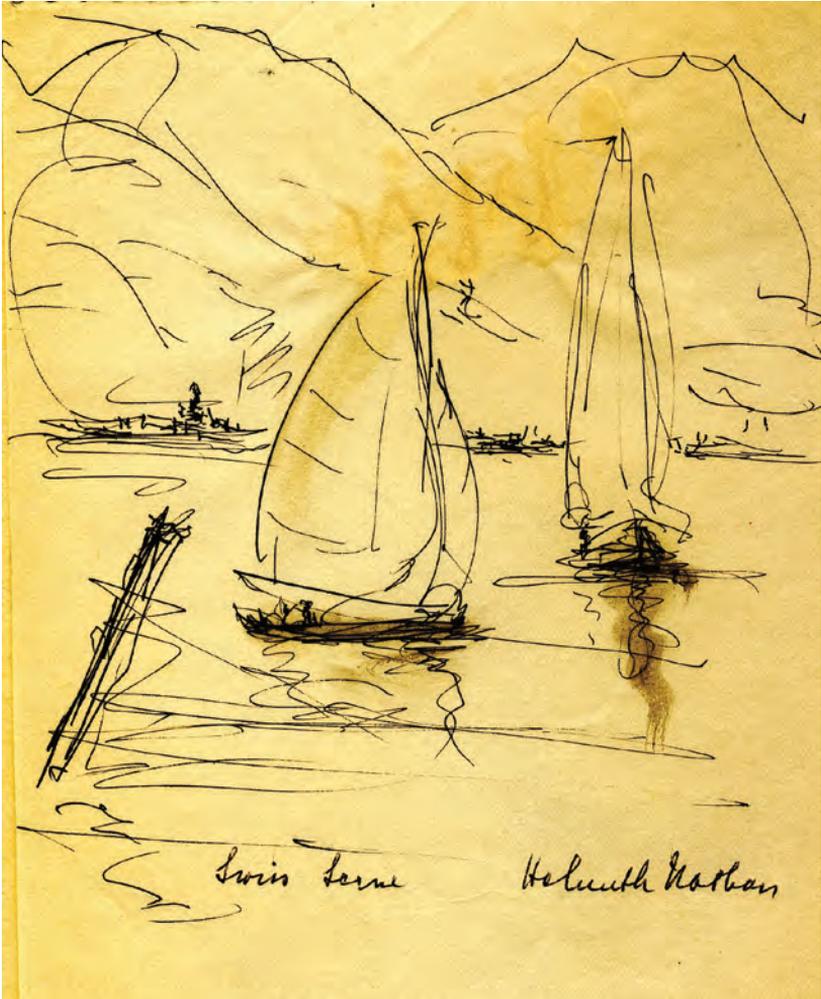




*A series of sketch books from the 1970s illustrate how Nathan could turn his sketching hand to landscapes, in particular the Swiss lakes that he visited on holiday*







## *Medicine, Physicians and the Arts*

Whilst at The Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Nathan earned a reputation as a professional man who encouraged all areas of human endeavour. In an article on Dr Nathan in *The New York Physician*, M Melicow wrote that it was “a unique and gratifying experience to learn that there is ONE Medical School (probably the only one in our hemisphere) in which the ARTS are not being neglected,” a phenomenon “accomplished through the enthusiastic efforts, urging and planning by Dr Helmuth Nathan.”

In the mid 1950s, Nathan orchestrated a course for the school on Art and Medicine, which attracted high numbers of students. The course was a particular expression of Nathan’s integrated approach to life, the combination of the arts with science to a mutual enrichment. The course, however, was not merely for academic stimulation. It aimed to broaden the physician’s understanding both historically and practically, such that students would be better equipped to perform their medical duties with empathy and culture. Nathan wrote about this work in ‘Art and Medicine’, where the stated aims were:

(a) to broaden the physician's horizons through an understanding of art and its relationship to medicine; (b) to demonstrate the dynamic characteristics of art as a form of communication, which reflects normal and abnormal behaviour and the particular qualities of various periods in human history; (c) through the artist's eye to give physicians new insights and perspectives on how people look to each other in health and disease – the fact of the disease of the object frequently not being apparent to the artist; (d) to educate physicians on the incisive perception of the artists' view of their own illness; (e) to encourage the future physicians to enjoy art for art's sake and to stimulate them to do some art work for themselves.<sup>ix</sup>

The article offers a brief history and analysis of the definition of 'art', demonstrating a broad but solid grasp of the history of art, and is graced with a number of the author's line drawings – Eisenhower, J F Kennedy, Vladimir Horowitz and others. Nathan traces the attempt of art to interpret medical facts, and its development as ultimately it integrates psychological facts into the physical composition of portraits. The paper ends with an allusion to his own life and work – "... in the quiet future when we physicians must retire and devote our lives to reminiscing, we should have the blessing of possessing hobbies which will enlighten the evening of our days."

Over the years, Nathan was joined by both other lecturers at the college, and by some more notable artistic voices – José de Creeft, Salvador Dali, B F Dolbin, Fritz Eichenberg, Georg Grosz, Jacques Lipchitz and Eugene Spiro, among others. The final lecture always included a live model, often shocking the young



*Dali takes centre stage at an event organised by Helmuth at The Albert Einstein College of Medicine*

physicians who had previously only dealt with cadavers in their anatomy studies!

After one visit by Jacque Lipshitz to the college, the artist sent Nathan the following note:

Dear Dr Nathan

I looked at your drawings carefully and enjoyed them very much.

What an eye you have and how your hand obeys!  
With such qualities you deserve the reputation of the great surgeon you are.

Cordially yours

J Lipchitz



*Jacques Lipchitz, the cubist sculptor, addresses the students at Albert Einstein college, during the course organised by Helmuth Nathan*

Of course, the special course organised by Nathan was not the only place where the interaction between art and science arose – anatomy lectures have always been a situation where the craft of the artist has enabled the doctor to participate.

The contributions of such old masters as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo to the science of anatomy and their impact in broadening the cultural horizon of future physicians have been reaffirmed in many ways in the years since our students were initially exposed to this form of instruction. (note to Nathan)

The contribution of Nathan on this subject led to the establishment of a faculty-staff-student art show at the college, which put on its first show in 1960.

Nathan's involvement in art was not a mere hobby. His knowledge of the subject was extensive, and he was often concerned to establish his point of view on firm historical footings. A fascinating article, 'The Physician and Death in the Arts', written by Nathan in 1967, explores how artists have portrayed death down through the centuries, with a particular concern for the role of the physician. Nathan opens the paper,

Life is existence, death is non-existence. Between these two absolute stages of worldly being we find the physician placed in a very essential position.<sup>x</sup>

The paper then takes a tour through five millennia of art and its representation of death – from early Egyptian gods, through the 'death dances' of the middle ages, the careful studies of Rembrandt and Michelangelo of autopsies, to the paintings made by Gachet, Van Gogh's physician. He even takes in the drawings of Hogarth and caricatures of Rowlandson. Perhaps it was for this depth and breadth of understanding, that in a tribute paid to Nathan on his 'retirement' in 1978, the Dean of Einstein College, Ephraim Friedman, referred to Nathan as 'Renaissance Man'.

However, for Nathan, writing about death, artists and the physician was not merely an abstract study – it is of course also a window on his own life and experiences. Towards the end of the paper, he observes how he has encountered a few medical students in his time who have given up the profession because of their inevitable repeated encounter with death. Nevertheless, Nathan used the arts as an encouragement to the profession, by concluding:

It will be from the great arts that we learn about the greatness and beauty of our wonderful profession. We have chosen a career to save

people, to help them in their disease, to prolong life wherever possible. Let us be thankful that frequently we are able to be the opponent to master death, and even if we know that death will be the end of every human's life and we ourselves have to be its victim, let's quote Sophocles, "Life is being, death is not being; but nobody will be embraced by death who continues to live in the memory and love of a person."



*Helmut Nathan lectures to his medical students on the physician and the arts*

## *Sculpture*

In 1964 Helmuth suffered a myocardial infarct. It was this interruption, and the subsequent convalescence, that encouraged him to try out his talents with clay and into bronze. Interestingly, it was also the occasion for him to understand his world from the other side of the bed. As he wrote afterwards,

While being a patient at Mount Sinai Hospital forced to inactivity for several weeks, I was blessed with an unbelievable amount of love, friendship and devotion. It was a strange experience to be on the other side of the fence. I learned here the wonderful thing to be rewarded to be sick as a doctor.

The style of the sculptures at times looks like Degas, especially the figure of a running girl which has memories of Degas' dancers. The faces show a great depth of emotion, and their features are often caricatured to accenuate the shapes and lines of the face in question. It seems he had a confident style of his own in which people could see the character of the subject reproduced.

Nathan's bust of Albert Einstein, which occupies pride of place at The Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, attracted the following comment from Margot Einstein, the scientist's daughter:

...the head of father Einstein, that you created. It was an enormous surprise for me. I did not know that you created sculptures. The head is unbelievably plastic, and what you were so incredibly talented in achieving is his expression. That seems to me to be especially difficult to achieve – and most sculptors seem to be unable to accomplish this. I find it especially beautiful that the head looks downward... What impressed me most is the pensive, dreamy look of the eyes, something lacking in so many other portraits.



*Helmut Nathan with 'Best of Show' at the American Physicians Art Association Exhibition, Chicago, 1974*



*Albert Einstein*



*Jose de Creeft*



*Toppel, made famous by *The Fiddler on the Roof**



*English Sailor*



*Italian Widow*



*Don Quixote*



*Running Girl*

One other artistic development which was neither sculpture nor sketching, but which of course employed his drawing skills, was the design and creation of a series of stained glass windows at Albert Einstein College. In these can be seen a simple observation of form and color, but of course one that lends itself brilliantly to the impact that a window can give to a room.



*Stained glass window at  
The Albert Einstein College of Medicine,  
showing the stages of man.*



## *Self-Reflection*

Whilst in art and the general world of illustration, caricature is often seen as a second-class citizen, Nathan was clear of its importance within the artistic world in particular, and in human reflection in general:

Throughout history the human being has been the subject of enduring interest to the artist. The single corporate facet of the human being which we might call his emotional posture has been of particular interest. Man's moods and feelings, his needs, loves and angers, his strengths and weaknesses, his piety and arrogance, his agony and inspiration, and his hope and despair are reflected most often in his face and, with subtler nuance, in what Plato has called "the mirror of his soul" – his eyes. Face and eyes tell us a great deal more about man than do his physical habitus, manner and walk. From the most primitive time onward, the artist has recognised this fact and has transmitted these insights to the viewer wherever and whatever his disciplines may be. This he has done in two ways:

by reproducing the normal form into a portrait and by abstracting the essentials, eliminating the unimportant components, and intensifying basic characteristics in what is called a caricature.<sup>xi</sup>

But what of his own career? How did Nathan view his own life, and in particular the varied fields in which he practised? Perhaps an introduction to an article on Art and Medicine best portrays this:

Nowadays the curriculum for medical students is going to be increasingly overcrowded. Concentration on biological sciences has curtailed the integration of the humanities in contemporary medical education. This is a great omission and has necessitated abandoning other obligations in the general training of the physician. From the beginning of history, the physician was not only the healer; he was simultaneously a leader in philosophy and science, in art and literature and in other fields of human endeavor.

At Nathan's funeral service in July 1979, Rabbi Bernhard Cohn read a eulogy, which gave a specific insight into how Nathan had viewed his own life and accomplishments:

A few summers ago, as he and I walked together through the woods of Isle-au-Haute off the coast of Maine, we talked about living and dying. He told me that when he had his coronary incident years earlier, he was absolutely certain in his own mind that he was not going to survive it. "As I lay in the ambulance on the way to the hospital," he said, "I had a chance to review my life. And I felt that I had fulfilled so many of my plans and dreams, and I

received so much friendship and love, that I was satisfied with the life I had had and was not afraid to die.”

Nathan’s artistic works have been on show in several museums around the world – Hunter College, Leo Baeck Institute, Tel Aviv, Montecatini, Princeton, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Museum of the City of New York, Jewish Museum, Academy of Medicine, NY Medical History Museum, Anne Frank House Amsterdam, and in many private collections.

The awards he has received include, but are not limited to:

Award of the Sculptor Association of the American  
Physicians’ Art Association

Professor Denke Medaille, Hamburg 1932

Salomon Heine Medaille, Hamburg 1936

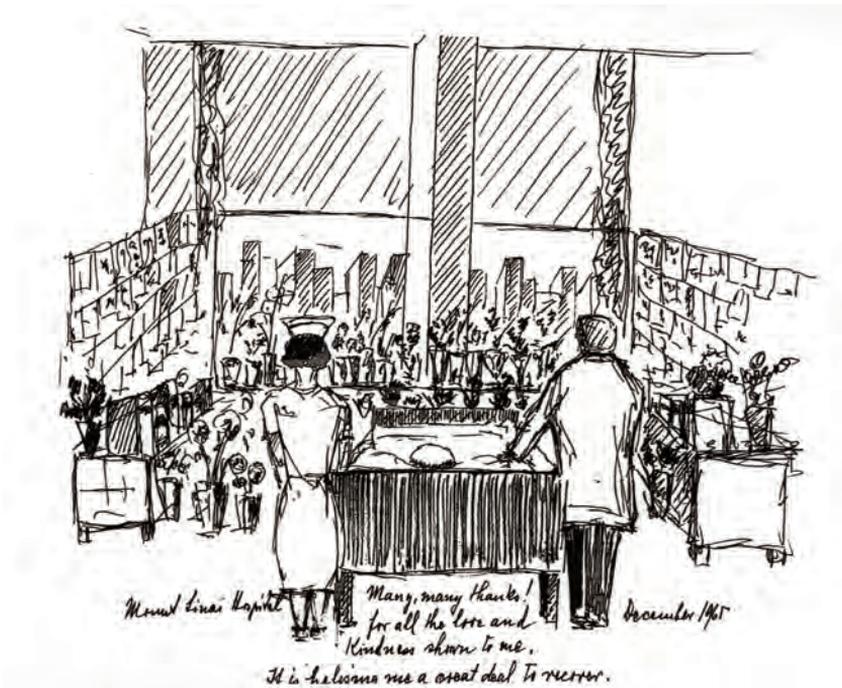
Award of Merit, Pen and Ink Exhibition, 1948

Honorary Member of the New York Society of Medical  
Illustrators

Venia Legendi (1940) retroactively

S Heine Medal

Member of Virchow Medical Society



*Cartoon drawn by Helmuth Nathan as he recovers  
at the Mount Sinai Hospital, New York.*

*The caption reads:*

*Many, many thanks for all the love and kindness  
shown to me. It is helping me a great deal to recover.  
December 1965.*

## *Post Script (1)*

*Linda Norden – Remembering my Grandfather*

OPA, as we called him, was the powerful nucleus of our small, but tightly bound family. I recognized his importance and centrality from the moment I was old enough to be conscious of such things until well after he died. His seemingly boundless energy and multifarious talents set a standard for my mother, and, as a result, for us children. But I think what we responded to most viscerally was the certainty he gave us: growing up as we did in the open and combative sixties, Opa's absolute clarity and conviction on all that mattered to him, his unwavering ability to sort good from bad, right from wrong, were at once frightening and welcome, an antidote to all the uncertainty we had to contend with as kids.

There were downsides to this – it was only after he and my other powerful grandfather died – after I'd graduated from college – that my sister and I came to fully appreciate the enormous wisdom of our grandmothers, for example. (It's probably not coincidental that my older son Luke, now 23, who never knew Opa, but who knew Irene, whom we called Oma, recently told me that my grandmother had much the same

import for him. He said the grandmothers were the ones in the family whose values were most clearly etched in his mind.) But Opa's example lingers as inspiration, as it has for my mother and my cousin, Clemens, and, through our stories, for my children.

This said, like my mother, as I read all that has been gathered through the tremendous research effort here, I realize I was basing my appreciation on only a fraction of the work that my grandfather took on. This book, I'm sure, will offer inspiration to countless others who may not have known my grandfather personally.

What it reveals above all, I think, is not just the sense of responsibility my grandfather felt, or even his creative application of his talents – as brilliant diagnostician and dedicated doctor; as irrepressible artist and chronicler of all that he observed in his daily life and the cultural events he regularly attended; as supporter of countless others, in countless ways; as almost embarrassingly generous purveyor of his gifts; and as the dominant family center and loving father, husband, grandfather he was.

Opa always said that he relaxed in work. What I gleaned from him as a young child was the pleasure he took in all he pursued. He made responsibility not just an obligation or duty, but the reason for living. And he made it seem a joy.

## *Post Script (2)*

*Helmuth Nathan – A Personal Reflection  
by Clemens N Nathan, Helmuth Nathan's nephew*

My late uncle was an incredibly sensitive person, both physically and mentally. He was well known as being able to examine people without causing stress, and several of his patients whom I knew well expressed relief at the way he dealt with them as a surgeon both prior to and after an operation. He, of course, was amazingly skilled with his hands.

He had, however, one or two weaknesses. These were probably a valve to enable him to stay level-headed under the strain of caring for people and being responsible for many life and death situations in the operating theatre. He loved telling risky jokes and sharing these with doctors and closest friends.

He had also a strange need for constant reassurance outside his work. For example, he loved to receive recognition for his art work. He seemed to me to have a terrible inferiority complex, despite his brilliant gifts in every direction, and he needed reassurance time and again.

He was a compulsive sketcher, and I recollect when we were in a restaurant in London his need to sketch was so powerful that he started to sketch on the tablecloth! Why he had to do this I never really understood.

He was absolutely not interested in money, and if it was not for his beloved wife, Irene, I think he would never have had any! She looked after the bookkeeping and finance with the help of his secretaries, making absolutely sure that people paid their bills and that they were charged correctly.

My uncle was extremely annoyed when young doctors made comments about the wealth of a patient, and that they should therefore take longer to operate so that they would get an inflated income. This enraged him so much at one stage that he threw out one young doctor from his surgical team. Afterwards he asked me whether he had done the right thing.

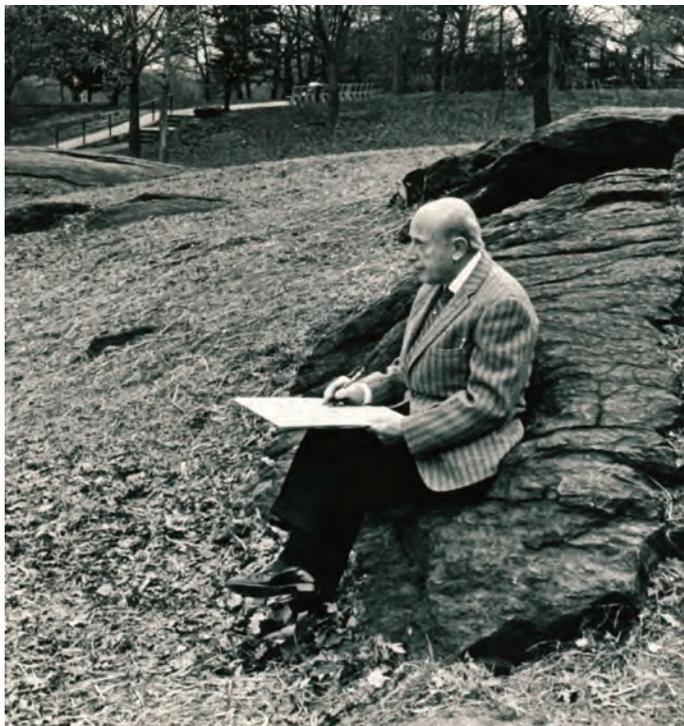
He could only see good in people. Whilst in Hamburg he had been friendly with some of the Police, and in fact the Chief of Police helped my uncle smuggle some possessions out from Hamburg to New York. His admiration for them meant that he was able to overlook some of the worst Nazis working there; unfortunately the Chief was later hung publicly for helping Jews. The horrors of Germany were seldom spoken about in his desire to see the good in people everywhere. Perhaps this was a weakness... I'm not sure.

He thoroughly enjoyed lecturing on Art and Medicine and being active in the Jewish community, as well as being a doctor for the German-Jewish community in New York. He struggled at the beginning to establish himself as a leading doctor in this very tough city – people were not always so helpful to new immigrants, no matter how experienced they had been elsewhere.

However, much later in life, my Aunt used to get angry that wherever they went he was so well known. So when they went on holiday to Switzerland or elsewhere, she hoped that they could be alone with the family without interruption. Again and again they bumped into people they knew from somewhere.

My father admired and worshipped his older brother, and after the death of my father, I looked up to my uncle like a father figure, even though we did not see each other very often.

I am grateful to have known him and to have received his love and admiration.



*Sketching in Central Park, New York*



## *Notes*

- <sup>i</sup> The following is a translation of a letter written by Dora, Regina Nathan's sister from South Africa, to Else and Kurt (the younger brother of Helmuth and his wife):

My dear Else and Kurt

Today I will send you only a few lines. I had a lovely letter from Elle and I can assure you that I want to keep up the correspondence with you. You have been always very, very dear to me and that will always be the case.

Yesterday Rosie and Kurt came to my house. We spent some pleasant hours together and I heard at this opportunity that you, my dear Kurt, have founded a new Jewish community. This shows me that you are following the religion of my dear father and your grandfather Seligmann in your beliefs and loves.

I have a few papers, which I am enclosing in this letter. He never wanted to be on the board of the Jewish community; I suppose he had his reasons. But in Hamburg and Wandsbeck his character was a shining example for Judaism.

What you might not know yet is: grandfather was for 32 years a member of the advisory board of the Wandsbeck Hospital. At the same time he was on the gas commission, on the advisory board of the English Garden and on the advisory board of the Elbschloss brewery. He was not only honoured everywhere but also received general friendship. Every year there was a big feast for the members of the State administration; on one of these occasions Bismarck, the iron

chancellor, was present, and he was seated opposite our father. During a discussion, father had expressed his opinion and when he finished, Bismarck got up, shook father's hand and said, "That is also my point of view." Just think, during those festivities all the officers of the Hussar's regiment were present and then there was a big meal. Father was taking part as well, and the organiser had everything prepared for father. Instead of bouillon he would get a cup of tea, what followed was asparagus etc and none of the other guests noticed it. My ever so dearest mother, your grandmother Johanna, also did such wonderful things. You will find the draft of a letter to the Romanian Queen Silvia enclosed in this letter. At the time there were dreadful pogroms in Romania. Mother didn't get a reply, but an article followed in the newspaper, which was promising help. (*See the draft of the letter opposite.*)



*Martin (Meir Yaakov) Seligmann,  
father of Regina (née Seligmann) Nathan*

When I dare to approach your Royal Highness with this letter, I simply follow a wish that has grown into a burning pain, not only in my heart but in the hearts of thousands upon thousands. It cannot be locked inside anymore, it has changed into such a loud and brave voice, which sounds through the air until it reaches the throne and heart of our Royal Highness. From a short biography of our Royal Highness, which I read in a magazine, I received some insight in your Royal Highness's noble character. I could see from this, that your Royal Highness's noble heart will be able to understand the situation of those of whom I am going to outline a bitter and sad picture. I want to talk of the poor miserable Jews who live in Romania. These people, who want to live, work and achieve like all other peoples have such a miserable existence in the lands of our Majesty. O if our Majesty, whose heart feels for all her subjects, could only make the effort to get to know these poor people as well as their neighbours of other faiths. O, your Majesty would establish a grateful people. Your Majesty would find that these people who are now in such a poor and miserable position would, like any other Romanian of any other confession, be happy to give their blood for the well being of their homeland.

I do apologise for my honest openness, but I have to say what is accomplished by an echo of thousands upon thousands, if I want to reach my purpose. If someone's piece of land on which he calls with all fervour 'home' is not only spoilt for him but he is also treated with mockery and scorn, if everything in his country that makes life worth living like learning, education and achievements are taken away from him, this person won't be able to understand or honour the word 'home' anymore. Doesn't the word 'home' enthuse you our Majesty so much that you write these poems that lighten up every reader's heart? O all graceful Queen, show your honest noble and true heart not only to your Christian but also to your Jewish subjects. That way you could protect the poor people from attacks and persecution from their neighbours. Your Majesty cannot imagine the never ending warmth and gratitude. Your Majesty would raise and educate subjects who are willing to make any sacrifice for you. And all the prayers of gratitude that would be said from the Romanian Jews, they would find an echo not only in Europe, no, they would also sound from all parts of the Earth, far beyond the oceans. Only one thing I need to ask your Royal Highness. Please could your Highness send me a little answer, which will show me that you have graciously received my woe and unspeakably deep plea. I will consider it the most beautiful day of my life, when I know that I have brought my fellow believers close to our Queen and sovereign's heart. *(Translated from the German hand-written Gothic script.)*

- ii Their mission was based on a belief that they could combine German nationalism and culture with Jewish heritage and tradition. In 1932 they recognized that this was no longer possible, and whilst they were not Zionists, they saw the need to prepare for possible emigration to Israel and start a Kibbutz. Despite many of their academic and professional backgrounds, they adapted to become farmers and labourers, and were instrumental in starting a Kibbutz in Israel that by 1972 had 750 members from 22 countries, including 21 families from the USA. Nathan was helpful in bringing about the creation of this Kibbutz and at a later date supporting the creation of their museum.
- iii Nathan's interest in phenomenology must have been stimulated by Husserl, and can be seen particularly in Nathan's article, 'The Physician and Death in the Arts'. Husserl was teaching at Freiburg at the end of his career, and Heidegger took over from Husserl when he retired. Despite their friendship, their philosophies took different paths. In addition, Heidegger's support of National Socialism put him at odds with his Jewish colleague, removing the dedication to Husserl from the 1941 edition of *Being and Time*.
- iv During this year, Nathan assisted Professor Erich Lexer, a physician of note who pioneered mammoplasty (surgery on the appearance of the breast) and other cosmetic surgery procedures. Nathan helped illustrate some of Lexer's work, and wrote a short biography of him in 1973 – Erich Lexer (1867-1937), *Med Welt* 24, 2088-2090
- v Matthias Andrae, "Die Vertreibung der Jüdischen Ärzte des Allgemeinen Krankenhauses Hamburg – St. Georg im Nationalsozialismus," Dissertation zur Erlangung eines Doktors der Medizin am Fachbereich Medizin der Universität Hamburg, Hamburg, March 1997, 67.

- vi Although correspondence shows that apparently the female relative got into a petty squabble over their accommodation, so Helmuth had to step in and offer alternatives to settle their squabbles.
- vii Einstein gave permission for the college to use his name on the occasion of his 74<sup>th</sup> birthday on March 15, 1953. The college was set up as an antidote to the *numerus clausus* against Jewish students in some universities.
- viii P.74
- ix 1968 Phi Lambda Kappa Student Medical Journal, 4-8.
- x Rudolf Virchow Medical Society Lecture, New York, 1969; Vol 27, 143-169.
- xi The Physician in the Caricature, Postgraduate Medicine, 214.



*The Stages of Man*, Stained Glass Window at  
The Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, by Helmuth Nathan