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Anti-Semitism

An Essay in Social Science

BY ELISHA M. FRIEDMAN

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THE discussion of anti-Semitism is to a large extent futile. It is not a new problem. In the days of ancient Alexandria, Josephus wrote a reply to Apion's "Treatise Against the Jews." Heine and Börne had their say on anti-Semitism a few generations ago; Herzl, in his discussions of the Jewish problem, discoursed on it with a thoroughness and finality that defy amplification, and Nordau and Zangwill have illuminated the field in their brilliant style. The sole justification for attempting to supplement the vast amount of material listed in the bibliography of anti-Semitism by the late Joseph Jacobs is the fact that in the past twenty years the sciences of psychology and sociology have made great strides, and throw a new light on the diagnosis of this running sore of society.

Anti-Semitism does not deal with what the Jew does, but rather with what is done to him, and what is said of him. The prejudice against the Jew is confined to no one country. In America he is ostracized socially and thereupon stigmatized as clannish. In Western Europe he is discriminated against and thereupon hated. In Eastern Europe the Jew is ghettoed, and thereupon beaten. In the newly established states of Europe he is subject to a fierce mob passion. The nationalities which have recently realized their aspirations are jealous of their new status. The younger countries of Europe are more destructive in their attitude toward minor nationalities, just as freshly generated or "nascent" oxygen is extraordinarily active in chemical reactions. The Jews are having a hard time in the succession states of the old Austrian empire. Again, in the countries worsted in the World War, the Jew has been the scapegoat of a sullen and thwarted populace, and in the victorious countries a psychological reaction has exposed the Jew to all that is mean in human nature. The brotherhood that prevailed among the several elements of the belligerent nations during the war was fostered by the motive of self-preservation of the group. After victory was assured, all the lofty aspirations and the generous enthusiasms were relaxed and were replaced by their antitheses. The tide ran out after its full flood and it exposed minorities and weak elements in the population to the fury and rancor of tired "patrioteers."

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Current Causes of Anti-Semitism

THE current forms of anti-Semitism are not different from its antebellum phases. The primitive man's fear of the tribesman outside his clan was manifested with but a thin disguise in European society before the war. No doubt an important cause of anti-Semitism is the existence of the Jews as scattered minorities. Prior to the exile from Palestine, anti-Semitism was unknown. It became manifest after the destruction of the first commonwealth. Any unabsorbed social group generates the ill will of the majority in much the same way as unabsorbable material in the body produces a reaction in the surrounding tissue. Sociologists tell us that it is characteristic for the superior culture to absorb the inferior; the dynamic to overwhelm the static. For this reason the Jew remained practically unabsorbed until the modern age of enlightenment, and for this reason also is assimilation increasing so rapidly in western lands. The flourishing and dynamic culture of the civilized countries is absorbing the static culture of the ghetto. The Jew, having such a high social self-consciousness, or being more highly charged with his spiritual tradition, amalgamates more slowly than other elements of the population. The seeming slowness of this movement is an irritant to the non-Jewish world and the persistence of the Jew as a distinctive cultural group is resented by the dominant group. It is an implied challenge to the supremacy of the culture of the lands where Jews dwell.

Again, in the United States, where the national spirit is not fixed, as in Europe, but is evolving, the culture of the immigrant cannot be admitted on equal terms with the dominant culture of the country, and therefore the natives have contempt for the immigrants, the successive groups of whom were dubbed "Mickies," "Heinies," "Norskes" and "Dagoes." The Jewish immigrant shares this ascription of cultural inferiority. Our age sets up material standards, whose superficiality forms a basis for a simple judgment. The daily bath and shave are the criteria rather than the beauty of the spirit. Yet the garb of the dirty immigrant may clothe the grandson of Isaiah. Neatness of dress and personal cleanliness subsequently dispel much of the aversion to the new arrival.

Not least of the causes of anti-Semitism is the world's ignorance of the Jew. In the Middle Ages mystic powers were ascribed to him. Because the Mosaic code of diet and of hygiene spared him from the Black Death and other plagues, the Christian world charged him with being the miraculous instigator of the epidemics that visited Europe. The tissue of lies propagated by the clergy and the ecclesiastical edicts forbidding intercourse with Jews perpetuated this ignorance. With the age of enlightenment, the ascription of supernatural powers to the Jew became less frequent, except in benighted Russia, from whose murky intellectual life the original "protocols" issued, and except upon the part of an occasional

infantile mind such as that of the Detroit tinker. Enfranchisement and intermarriage, the cultural assimilation and biological fusion of the Jew, have dispelled many fictions concerning him, and thus to some extent softened the blows of anti-Semitism.

As the Psychoanalyst Sees It

THE effects of anti-Semitism have been twofold. On the negative side the Jew has at times accepted the anti-Semite's rating of him. As a result there has developed, according to the psychoanalysts, an inferiority complex. The attitude of the partly assimilated Jew toward his less favored brother has been tinged with the anti-Semitism of the non-Jewish world. A peculiar example is the remark of a Jew who has reached high distinction in his calling: "If the Jews have produced a Jesus, they have also had their Shylocks." The speaker was unconscious of the compliment he paid the Jewish people in being able to go to history for its heroes and being compelled to go to fiction for its villains. This inferiority complex was particularly evident during the patriotteering mania, when so many of our Jews suffered from an attitude of over-compensation. They were not willing to be merely 100 per cent American or pro-Ally but felt they must profess a 150 per cent loyalty. They leaned forward so far as to appear ludicrous to the rest of the community. This inferiority complex has a peculiar effect on the psychology of the partly assimilated Jew. He is like a frightened hare, and is ever eager with significant suddenness to prove his Americanism, his broad-mindedness and his indifference to the influence of his spiritual tradition. In stressing the continuity of the history of the Jewish people, in reviving its group consciousness, and re-awakening its productive capacities, Zionism restored to the Jew his self-respect and his dignity. It resolved his mental conflict and dispelled his complex.

As a result of the Jew's accepting the anti-Semite's rating of him as an inferior, the tendency toward intermarriage is accelerated. It is a peculiar circumstance that, for example in Germany where statistics of marriage are classified by religious groups, the percentage of men that marry outside the Jewish faith is far greater than of women, and the reason is that in our man-made civilization the male has the initiative in choosing. Another circumstance is that the Jewish mate in these marriages usually has qualifications, either of wealth, intellectual capacity, or social position, which offset the stigma of being a descendant of the prophets.

Another effect of anti-Semitism is that repression makes the Jew the underdog of society. He therefore joins heartily in all movements which promise a more tolerant day. He is in the forefront of the movement to ameliorate the unhappy lot of the negro in the United States. For a reason other than the Biblical, "For ye were strangers in a strange

land," he obeys the injunction to deal kindly with the downtrodden. By reason of persecution or ostracism, the Jew has acquired a social sympathy and has become spiritually attuned to the harmonies of a juster social order. Outlawed in some countries and ostracized in others, he becomes objective, less the creature of his environment than its moulder. As a critic of our civilization, he aids in its true preservation, for society is in stable equilibrium between the opposing forces of progress and inertia. To the extent that anti-Semitism supplies the world with a group of critics, it is a positive force for good in the evolution of a better world.

Anti-Semitism an Incentive to Genius?

ACCORDING to the psychoanalysts, an inferiority complex is frequently the mainspring of creative genius. The defects of Demosthenes and Beethoven, it is held, prompted their effort to triumph over their difficulties. Who can say but that the repression of the Jewish people by the non-Jewish world and the Jew's feeling of inferiority have resulted in the development of the geniuses in the several sciences. Hounded for centuries and handicapped to this day, the Jew is running his race on his second wind. In the language of William James, he has tapped new reservoirs of energy and effort after conquering his first fatigue. It may not be purely an accident that so many Jews have become distinguished for their achievements in science and social welfare. The imposition of a handicap is often the incentive to achievement, and perhaps in our own country the relatively slight anti-Jewish pressure may result in unusual national service by the Jew. In other words, anti-Semitism may have contributed to make the Jew a pioneer and a pacesetter. However, such contributions to civilization are achieved without doubt at great psychic expense to the Jew. Running on his second wind, he is often hypersensitive to stimuli, lacking in reserve and poise, and more frequently subject to nervous collapse. The funds of such progress are costly to the Jew.

One cannot dogmatize about the prospect of the Jewish people, or compress the effects of anti-Semitism into a formula. Both through the pressure of anti-Semitism and through increasing tolerance the Jews will be assimilated in part. Differences of degree of anti-Jewish pressure in Poland and in Argentina may result in a new dispersion and a re-segregation in new centers of population. Perhaps part of the stream of immigration will be diverted to Palestine, for the love of the land and of its traditions may attract considerable numbers. The widespread diffusion of the Jew would normally make for his more rapid assimilation, but as a result of his oppression and misery in Eastern Europe, his more favored brothers in other lands rally to his aid. Common action

by them strengthens their Jewish ties. When Poland oppresses the Jews she not only deepens their own group consciousness but in addition that of the Jews of other countries, who rally to help. The relief of East European Jewry forms the common bond of international Jewry; by a sort of social telegraphy, the key that operates in Poland transmits a message of Jewish life which is relayed to the Jews of other lands. The varieties of environment among which the Jews live would normally be disruptive of their common life, but group consciousness is strengthened whenever it is attacked from without, and the disappearance of the Jew from the world's stage is being retarded everywhere by anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, perhaps Jewish communities may continue to live as segregated groups in Western Europe and America. The possession of a keen social self-consciousness, the awareness of a mission and of a social purpose are prerequisites for such life. And there are precedents. The few thousand Quakers near Philadelphia have maintained themselves as a distinctive religious and cultural group for over two centuries. They have their own customs and traditions, their own educational institutions and above all, now, a message to their country and to the world. Because they regarded themselves as a moving force, they lived, and like some subterranean stream which emerges in the desert, the Quakers' potentiality of service has been brought to realization by the World War, by the starving of the Austrian children and by the Russian famine. Most truly Christian of sects, they have attempted to heal the wounds of a most un-Christian war. Similarly, a living functioning Jewry may survive and enjoy the respect of the world. An apathetic Jewry will not survive and will be hated in the process of disappearing.

Finally if the Diaspora Jewry should disappear and a small Palestinian Jewry remain, anti-Semitism will probably cease, for while anti-Jewish sentiment may persist, it will not be of the form now known as anti-Semitism, but will partake rather of the nature of a national "phobia," such as Anglophobia and Germanophobia now prevalent, say, in France, or the envy of the ancient Jewish commonwealth by some of its neighboring peoples. If the Palestinian Jewish community attains a population of one million souls or more, it should then be in a position to absorb modern culture and yet live, as the hitherto static Chinese people have absorbed it and yet maintained their national identity. Perhaps this is one of the implications of Palestine to the Diaspora, that should non-Palestinian Jewry be absorbed and cease to be, its disappearance should not result in the dissolution of an historic people which still has great capacity for service to mankind. Furthermore, a center of progressive culture and historical development in Palestine may recharge the remnants of non-Palestinian Jewries.

Is Assimilation the Answer?

WHAT shall be the response of the Jew to the thrown gauntlet of anti-Semitism? How shall we meet it? Shall we send telegrams to the Fords, challenge them to debates and spread ourselves over our weekly Jewish magazines and stimulate our detractors by the publicity they seek, or shall we ignore their jeers and let the storm beat? Shall we make common cause with our kinsmen overseas, who vicariously assume for us our measure of persecution? Or shall we envisage the place of the Jew in American life, constitute a positive social force to spread the idea, now rejected and despised, of the brotherhood of man, as Israel once did the fatherhood of God, and live our lives *sans peur et sans reproche*?

Is assimilation to be our answer to the challenge? Suffer and smile benignly: the solution is for the ages—such is the opinion expressed to the writer by one Jew, a leading research man in his field in the United States.

In a recent and sympathetic presentation of the problem in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Paul Scott Mowrer writes, "Until there is evidence of a rapidly increasing assimilation, the Jewish question, with its attendant fervor of anti-Semitism, will continue to occupy men's minds." In brief Mr. Mowrer and other friends of the Jewish people say, "If you would cease to be hated, die." The Jewish people need no such prescription. Mr. Mowrer and the assimilationist Jews, who are impatient at the rate of intermarriage, are using the wrong standard of measurement. We measure the inter-stellar spaces not with yard sticks but with light years, and we should measure the rate of assimilation of a people not by years of an individual's life but by the generations of a nation's history. By such a standard the Jewish people are being rapidly absorbed. In the Scandinavian countries, in Italy and in Spain, the Jewish group has practically ceased to be. The Spanish and Portuguese Jews who came to the United States in the 17th and 18th centuries are no longer in our midst. Their distinctive names appear now and anon in purely Christian circles. Intermarriage can not be forced. As Leroy-Beaulieu said, the Jews have withstood centuries of fierce persecution but may be unable to withstand the warm sun of tolerance.

Indeed one has but to trace three generations of the typical Jewish family in the United States—the immigrant either steeped in Talmudic learning, or at least cherishing its traditions; the children, who in the competition of interests of our tense American life, neglect their Jewish studies, without which an appreciation of Hebraic values is impossible; the grandchildren, who frequently marry out or else are mentally prepared to do so.

Besides, artificially stimulated assimilation is a poor protection

against anti-Semitism. The wife of a Budapest physician, who took refuge in America, told of a sad but amusing case in point. At the beginning of the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Hungary scores of Jews became baptized, in the hope of escaping the lot of their co-religionists. After venting its fury on the avowed Jews, the mob turned to those who had become converted and even sought out the unfortunates whose parents or grandparents were Jews and visited upon them the penalty of having one-half or one-quarter Jewish blood in their veins.

Or coming nearer to our own shores, of the Jews who occupied high places in government circles during the war, those that had married out were not for that reason spared in the ranting of the French newspaper correspondent, Stephane Lauzanne, in his denunciation of the Treaty of Versailles, nor did Ford's anonymous yellow dog refrain from barking at them. The study of Professor Drachsler indicates that the consummation so devoutly wished—that the melting pot should melt—is, historically speaking, being realized rapidly. To foster the process would be cowardice, to hasten it would be contemptible. A deliberate repudiation of the past would be a taunt to our fathers. Even those Jews, who most desire the disappearance of the Jewish people, would not have it make an unseemly valedictory. They insist that the exit from the stage of history be graceful.

The Only Consistent and Effective Answer

THE reply of the Jewish people to the challenge of anti-Semitism should not be consciously and cannot be courageously intermarriage. That process is inevitable. Mingling in the same circles professionally or socially young people at the threshold of the great adventure of life are not likely to heed restrictions. The Jews' response to the challenge of anti-Semitism should be aggressively spiritual. They should translate up to the spiritual level the reply of Foch at the Marne, "My right is turning, my center recedes, I shall attack."

After sixty generations of persecution and of continuous intellectual application the Jewish people today is the end product of an historic experiment in biological selection, and is capable of great service to the world. Furthermore, scattered in many lands and of a culturally maturer people the Jew, is in a position to translate into deed some of the finest conceptions of internationalism, and to be the apostle of a higher order of human society. It was his ancestors, the prophets Malachi and Isaiah, who uttered the lofty conceptions, "Have we not all one Father, hath not one God created us all," and "My house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples." Internationalism, before the war a blessed word, has become a term of opprobrium in a day when all the meanest passions

rule. If the Jew would live true to his spiritual tradition he should, despite the attacks of petty minds, consistently and courageously reaffirm the international ideals which were flouted in the recent Carthaginian peace, ideals which are ignored in the promulgation of trade restrictions in the new states of Europe, and which remain unsensed by a vision narrowed to petty political boundaries. In recent international conferences the world has seen how frequently "patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels."

To ask the Jew to respond to the challenge of anti-Semitism as an individual by practising restraint of material expression is to give gratuitous advice. We mould our character and conduct not by resolutions but by the service of a cause greater than ourselves. By losing himself in service the modern Jew will find his soul. Anti-Semitism is a challenge to Jewry to revivify its traditions and ideals. It is a challenge to the ministry, a call to more earnest and significant effort, not that it will dispel the hatred of the non-Jewish world, but that it will steel the hearts of Jewry to face contumely as our fathers did, with fortitude and faith. Anti-Semitism is a challenge to Jewish scholars to think and to write on the problem. Such works as those of Berkson, Drachsler, and Dushkin on the problem of the Jewish cultural adjustment to the American environment are invaluable in developing the scientific approach to Jewish communal problems. Our problems are sufficiently numerous and perplexing to make the School for Jewish Social Welfare a living, functioning body. Anti-Semitism is a challenge to Jewish philanthropists to support these studies and these efforts. Is it too much to hope that some one will establish a fund in memory of the late Professor Friedlaender, whereby American Jewry may be recharged from that wellspring of our spiritual lives, East European Jewry, that distinguished scholars may occasionally come to our shores to revive the soul of the native Jewry of America, to teach, guide and inspire it, that Israel may contribute richly in service to American life and to the development of international amity and understanding?

Whatever be the ultimate racial composition and cultural character of the American people, American Jewry should be true to the vision of Dr. Charles W. Eliot, that America should not aspire to a dead level of uniformity and standardization, an aggrandized Gopher Prairie and an enlarged Main Street, but that each of the group heritages be developed to the enrichment of our common life, that America be a pattern for the world of a single political commonwealth with a common culture, yet not devoid of the nuances imparted by the diverse origin of its constituent peoples. From such a conception, let no anti-Semitism stampede us.

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