

THE JEW IN HISTORY AND IN THE PRESENT

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ANTI-SEMITISM dates from the forcible dispersion of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar in 536 B. C. This is the first time that the Jew, as Jew, mingles with other people. He had lost his identity as part of a self-governed people in his own land. Thanks to his religion, however, he stoutly maintained his nationality. He was in the Gentile world, but he was not of it.

During the reign of Alexander the Great and his successors, the dispersion of the Jews was encouraged, at times even enforced. Thus, before the Roman domination, colonies of Jews were to be found in all the great cities of Persia, Asia Minor and Egypt. The Caesars also encouraged this dispersion. Like Alexander, they regarded the Jew as a connecting link between their people and the barbarians, and during this period Jews settled in all the leading centres of the Roman Empire. Many thousands were in Rome. According to Philo, not fewer than a million dwelt in Alexandria. Mommsen thus describes the place of the Jew in the world of the Caesars:

How numerous even in Rome the Jewish population was already in Caesar's time, and how closely at the same time the Jews even then kept together as fellow-countrymen, is shown by the remark of an author of the period that it was dangerous for a governor to offend the Jews in his province, because he might then certainly reckon on being hissed after his return by the populace of the capital. Even at this time the predominant business of the Jews was trade. At this period, too, we encounter the peculiar antipathy of the Occidentals towards this so thoroughly Oriental race and their foreign opinions and customs. This Judaism, though not the most pleasing feature in the nowhere pleasing picture of the mixture of nations which then prevailed, was nevertheless an historical element developing itself in the natural course of things which Caesar, just like his predecessor Alexander, fostered as far as possible. . . They did not, of course, contemplate placing the Jewish nationality on an equal footing with the Hellenic or Italo-Hellenic.

But the Jew who has not, like the Occidental, received the Pandora's gift of political organization, stands substantially in the relation of indifference to the State; who, moreover, is as reluctant to give up his sense of national idiosyncrasy, as he is ready to clothe it with any nationality at pleasure and to adapt

himself, up to a certain degree, to foreign habits—the Jew was, for this very reason, as it were, made for a State which was to be built on the ruins of a hundred living polities, and to be endowed with a somewhat abstract, and, from the very outset, weakened nationality. In the ancient world also Judaism was an effective leaven of cosmopolitanism and of decomposition.

But nowhere in the ancient world were the Jews liked. On account of their intrusiveness, they were more than once banished from Rome by the emperors (*Acts*, xviii). They were frequently the objects of the ill will of the native population. Where they were more numerous, as in Syria and Egypt, there were they the most hated. At the same time they were never as hardly treated by the Romans as by the Christians. Lecky in his *History of European Morals* declares that this was because the Jewish religion was essentially conservative and unexpansive. There was no spirit of proselytism in this sect. The Christians, on the other hand, were ardent missionaries; they did not hesitate to denounce pagan religions. The Jews simply despised other sects.

Nor were the Jews a whit more popular with the Moslems. These refused them all rights of citizenship, and held them in even greater contempt than the Christians. Mohammed and his successors persecuted and despoiled them most unmercifully. In modern days the Mohammedan Arabs of Palestine have been up in arms against Zionism and the repatriation of Jews in that country. Even British official opinion, as a result of a study of the situation, offered strong opposition at first to the idea of a Jewish National Home in this land of their forefathers. Yet despite discouragement, Palestine, in the last few years, has become the largest country of Jewish immigration. At this moment it is singularly prosperous, showing no signs of the otherwise world-wide depression.

But to return to the historical background—

There is perhaps no more significant commentary on pagan tolerance and Christian intolerance than the treatment of the Jews by Caracalla (211 A. D.) and Constantine (315 A. D.). The former gave equal rights to all freeborn inhabitants of the empire; the latter penalized heretics, pagans and especially Jews. The early Christian Church was then their bitter enemy and oppressor. When it was strong enough to sway the Roman State, laws were made which closed both the military and civil service to the Jews, forbade the erection of new synagogues, circumcision of Christian slaves and the like.

This period of severe restriction and oppression continued with little or no variation till the time of Charlemagne and his successors.

Harassed by persecution, they had small opportunity to settle down to productive occupations even when and where this was permitted. In self-defence they turned to trading and money-lending. Manual labour in almost all its forms well-nigh disappeared among the Jews. This is a most important fact, as it has had much to do with the passion and prejudice of Europeans down through the centuries to the present day.

Though the Carolingians treated them with consideration, the Church continued to exercise its influence against them, as is plain from the canons of that time. Slavery, which was still maintained under the Christian dispensation, and in which the Jews had been engaged from the time of their dispersion, was one of their greatest sources of wealth. During the eighth and ninth centuries after Christ, they seem to have made remarkable progress in parts of Russia. One legend that has come down to us says that at one time it was a question with the Russians whether the Jewish or the Christian Faith should become the national religion. No doubt this proselytism accounts in part for the great number of Jews in Russia at the present day.

In Germany, which is so strongly anti-Semitic to-day, the Jews were, on the whole, well treated during the period that followed the fall of Rome. Foreigners were judged according to the laws of their own land. This enabled the Jews to live peaceably in their own communities; indeed it gave them a sort of autonomy. The rulers of these lands, following the example of the sagacious and tolerant Charlemagne, looked on them as a very valuable source of revenue, and as indispensable in various connections. Thus they enjoyed the protection of the authorities, and amassed wealth.

The period from 700 to 1100 A. D., though not free from persecution of the Jews, has been termed the "golden age of Judaism". At no period since the fall of Jerusalem has there been such a high level of culture among this people, especially in Spain. Indeed it has been maintained that the Jews of Spain were at this time the representatives of the world's greatest culture. But ere long the clouds began to gather. Their superiority in business, their increase in wealth and prosperity, their stern refusal to be Christianized excited hatred and cupidity. Perhaps the Jews themselves helped to stir up opposition. It was said their wealth had made them insolent and arrogant, at times even tyrannical.

Agobardus Lugdunensis (779-840 A. D.), one of the most tolerant and enlightened ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages, takes occasion to write a treatise entitled *De Insolentia Judaeorum*. Manifestly there were two sides to this Jewish situation. Un-

doubtedly owing to their financial power, and their consequent influence with the ruling classes, the Jews displayed a conduct in business dealings with the common people, on very many occasions, which brought down upon them undisguised abhorrence. On the other hand, it must be remembered that these aliens had been very hardly treated. Prompted by the priesthood of the Christian Church who were firmly convinced they were carrying out Divine judgment, because Christ was crucified by this accursed race, the masses, in many instances, inflicted terrible punishment upon them. In the later Middle Ages, the Crusades superinduced a situation that resulted in wholesale massacres of this unfortunate people. The fury of these Crusaders was not satisfied by bloody battles with the Saracens: in the course of their expeditions they turned upon these other enemies of Christianity. The fact, too, that the Jews lived in separate communities in the various cities of Europe and led a life of isolation induced the most outrageous charges against them, which were only too readily accepted by the superstitious and ignorant multitude. They were accused, as the Christians had been during the Roman period, of stealing children to be slaughtered in connection with their ritual practices. Moreover their wealth was always an object of envy, and oftentimes this induced organized mobs to engage in pillage and spoliation.

The imperial laws against them, which had been so long in abeyance, were revived and endorsed by the Church. Henceforth the Jews were denied the privilege of purchasing or working the land, either directly or indirectly. Again, they were forbidden to engage in any of the productive occupations. They were excluded from every honorable profession and handicraft. And it is notorious that such stipulations, in varied degrees, still hold a place in some of the countries of Europe. Writing recently of present-day Judaism, a Jewish publicist points out that, as late as 1917, Russia prohibited Jews from living in agricultural villages or working on the land. In Poland and parts of Eastern Europe the mass of the people of Jewish stock are forced to engage in petty trading or small handi-work.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, because of the severe restrictions and dreadful persecutions, the social status of the Jew sadly deteriorated. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* is a faithful representation of the spirit displayed by the European of this period to the Hebrew. The Aryan Christians make a virtue of their contempt for the Semitic Hebrew. Antonio, so noble and beloved, sees no uncharitableness in his behaviour to Shylock. He voiced but the spirit of the age, which had become habit, when he

called Shylock unbeliever, cut-throat, dog, and spat upon his Jewish gaberdine. Yet how mutual is the dislike, and how similar the reasons for this dislike! The Christian hates the fawning of the Jew, and Shylock hates the noble merchant for "a fawning publican". Truly we must understand Burns's lines in the largest sense, would we really know ourselves. We must study to see ourselves not merely as others see us, but as other nations see us. Perhaps the way out is a new and a higher education to break down the middle wall of partition—to wit, the jealous nationalism, so divisive in the world of to-day.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Jews throughout Europe, more especially in the East, were compelled to wear upon their breasts a round or square yellow badge. They were not only shunned by the Christians, but they were even forced to separate themselves from the Christian population. For more than two centuries they had to live in Ghettos and *Judengassen*. During these years the law forbade them all trades but that of buying and selling old clothes. They could not engage Christian servants, nor become members of any of the numerous trade guilds. Special taxes were levied upon them. Some towns excluded them altogether. Others limited their numbers. They were even forbidden to marry "except under restrictions designed to check the growth of the Jewish population". In a word, in the later mediaeval times, the Jews enjoyed practically no rights or privileges in the Christian States of Europe. Moreover, they had oftentimes to endure the consequences of popular outbreaks. From these they suffered much, especially as we have seen during the Crusades and at the time of the Black Death (1348-50). But despite religious prejudice and all manner of restrictions, the Jew had a greater financial control in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than he has at the present day. The fact that the Christian Church forbade its members to demand interest played unwittingly into the hand of the Hebrew. From the date of the promulgation of the decretal of Innocent III anent interest (1215 A. D.), the Jews stand forth as the great money-lenders of the western world.

In several countries in Europe the national feeling against them became so overwhelmingly strong that they were literally swept before it. Thus in 1290 A. D. England drove out the Jews by decree. They were not re-admitted till the time of Cromwell. France followed England's example in 1395 A. D. Spain deported them in 1492 A. D., and Portugal rid herself of them in 1495 A. D. These exiles found their way to Germany, Austria, Poland and the adjoining countries.

What, it may be asked, has been the effect on the Jew of the removal of political restriction and a closer communion with modern thought? The effects have been noticeable, but not radical. The Jew is ready to learn, but not to be nationalized. He may be born and brought up in a foreign land, his education may be in the national schools and universities, the product is nevertheless in the main Semitic. He speaks of the people of the country in which he was born and bred in the third person. It is not "We Germans," "We French", but "The Germans" and the like. If we look back for a moment to the quotation from Mommsen's *History of Rome*, we will find many arguments which are to-day being urged against the Semites. That very cosmopolitanism, and indifference to the State in which he lived, is to-day, as of old, a striking characteristic of the ubiquitous Jew. This is in part a basis of anti-Semitism now.

It may be difficult to decide, definitely, the exact causes of feeling against the Jews, but it cannot be denied that the majority of the Caucasians everywhere have been and continue to be consciously or unconsciously anti-Semitic. This, primarily, is due to the psychological background—the effect wrought by centuries of difference in education, environment and appreciation.

Exclusiveness and isolation were essential characteristics of Judaism. Because of its fanatical belief in a supreme destiny as a chosen race, it was governed by an inextinguishable sense of superiority, a fierce patriotism and an undisguised hostility toward the Gentile world. And because the first Christians were of their own race, they regarded them as apostates and traitors. After their dispersion many found place in the Christian countries of Europe. Wherever they went, they had to endure indignity and reproach. Such unfair treatment but served to quicken their inborn contempt for Occidental Christians and Christianity. But besides this deep-laid psychological background, there are factors, more or less peculiar to Germany, that have kept the smouldering fires of antagonism alight. When the Baur-Strauss School and its successors initiated Higher Criticism of the Old and New Testaments and their sources, they contributed, quite unwittingly to be sure, to the spirit of Anti-Semitism in their Fatherland. Proud of a purely German philosophy developed by a Fichte, a Schelling and a Hegel, this Teutonic people were no less proud of their disciple who startled the Jewish no less than the Christian world by a searching and sceptical study of what was termed Semitic Scripture. This so impressed the eminent Jew, Disraeli, that we find him

describing the attitudes of these Higher Critics as the titanic effort of the Teutonic genius to overpower the Semitic.

The splendid flights of philosophical thought and speculation had produced the idea that Teutonic people could attain their great destiny, their aims and ideals by pure reason, but it must have free course—free from the trammels of any accepted or uncriticised authority, moral or religious. This attitude cast reflections on Christianity, a religion not born or bred among Nordic races, not even a product of the life and thought of Europe.

At a later date Nietzsche indirectly influenced Germans against the Jews. His fierce onslaught on the gospel of mercy and self-sacrifice, and his glorification of might as right, typified in Thor and the Pantheon of the Norsemen and the Teutons, stirred the youth of Germany profoundly. They began to question Christian teaching as something foreign which had been grafted on their parent stock. It came from Jerusalem and Judaea. These disturbing elements were present in Germany before and up to the time of the Great War. The present writer oftentimes heard discussions of such topics in German university centres.

For lack of space this rapid survey must suffice as an outline of conditions as they are closely or remotely related to a smouldering Anti-Semitism up to 1914-1918. Following a disastrous war where the German nation was suffering; where savings were gone, and money was valueless; where defeatism, depression, and despair were universal, an unknown Austrian, Herr Adolf Hitler, appeared on the scene.

To understand the rapid rise of Hitler it is necessary to note what happened in Bavaria following the Great War. Communism gripped this part of Germany for a season, and the ringleaders were a few irresponsible Jewish scribes. Their activity and stern methods stirred up the first wave of Anti-Semitism. A war cry was required and quickly supplied. A simple formula was fashioned: "The world capital is Jewish: Marxism is Jewish: Marxism and capitalism are responsible for the desperate straits the world is in. Therefore, down with the Jews! The world's salvation depends on the destruction of the Jews".

A leader was needed. A leader presented himself in answer to the tumult—one Adolf Hitler.

He intensified this antagonism by decrying the Jews and their power, past and present, in the commercial world, particularly in the world of business in Germany. He knew the feeling in his native land and in Europe generally: he was aware that in all the larger urban centres of that continent among professions, the

merchants and traders, the artisans and unskilled workers, there were very many who were opposed either openly or secretly to the Jews. It was his passionate and prolonged exposition of the influence, the wealth, the position, the control of industry and business on the part of this alien non-Teutonic people that won him a hearing wherever he went.

In his lust for power he did not scruple to play on the baser instincts of his hearers. He pointed out how well off Jewish capitalism had been, despite the distress and depression of the years since the Great War. He showed how some had even battered on the broken fortunes of a patriotic people that had sacrificed their all for their Fatherland. He reawakened in the war veterans and the rising youth a slumbering hostility, as he fulminated against the Israelite who had steadily resisted all efforts to be Germanized. It is fair to say that despite the constructive factors of Hitlerism, its driving dynamic depends, most of all, on savage Anti-Semitism. The civilized world resents this policy, not only as an offence against common justice, but as a long slip backward. It is to recall and revive the Europe of the Dark Ages, a period of ignorant prejudice, of lawlessness and violence. No man and no nation can outrage the sentiments of present-day world public opinion with impunity.

The World History is the World Tribunal, and despite all that the Jews may have merited in their uncompromising isolation, it must be remembered that the peoples that have mercilessly ill-treated this tragic race have been destroyed or have disappeared.

The Jews, probably the most pertinacious type the world has ever known, still continue to play a most prominent part on the world arena. Does it mean that this survival has some deep significance for human history?