

## THE DISPERSION OF GERMAN JEWRY

Tremendous changes have overtaken the Jewish people in the last 20 years. European Jewry has virtually disappeared, and the hegemony of Jewish life which, for many centuries, had been vested in Russian and German Jewry, has shifted to two new centres, both the result of Jewish emigration from Eastern and later from Central Europe during the last 70 years: to America and Israel.

When this emigration started in the eighties of the 19th century, the bulk of the emigrants went overseas; some hundred thousands remained in Western Europe, including England, but the majority went to North America, and later partly to South America. Everywhere emerged new groups of Eastern Jews, with their "heimische" culture, with the Yiddish language and a strong sense of cohesion. A trickle went to Palestine, which was Turkish at that time; most of these were actuated by ideological or religious motives: they did not want only to improve their material and political status, but also to gain a feeling of homeliness, to be in the land of an age-old Jewish dream.

Jews were dispersed in many countries even before this new emigration from Russia and Roumania began; but from that time at the end of the 19th century the Jewish Diaspora, especially in colonial countries, acquired a specific character, as these Eastern Jews, though often arriving almost penniless, dominated the scene, first as objects of philanthropy and social work, care for immigrants, etc., later as a rising class in many trades which they partly imported into the new countries. They always regarded themselves as a great family, spread over all parts of the globe but bound together by the same nostalgia, by their loyalty to the atmosphere and the customs of their East European Shtetel.

Nevertheless, these new Jewries overseas were subordinated in rank to the Jewries of the old European centres, even when the new immigrants, often in the second generation, attained wealth and a strong economic position, and when, for instance in America, Jewish philanthropy began to set new standards by its immense contributions to charities of all kinds. There was also no suggestion, up to the forties, that Palestine Jewry should be leading in Jewish life, except as a subject of Zionist propaganda for the future. But Russian Jewry, alas, disappeared as a coherent and indigenous body after the Bolshevik revolution. Though, even then, Russian Jews remained a leading group in Jewish life, they now appeared as (geographically) French, English, American, even Palestinian Jews. At some time, there was Lithuanian and Latvian Jewry. Polish Jewry, of course, always played an important rôle, especially in the twenties and thirties during the short 20 years of the Polish Republic, but it never attained the position of the former Russian Jewish aristocracy and was never held in such universal esteem.

The Hitler Era brought about the most fundamental changes. The main fact is, of course, the destruction of European Jewry and of the old centres of learning, culture and tradition. The Hitler Era also brought a stirring up of Jewish feeling and conscience in all parts of the world, wherever Jews lived. Even dormant branches of the Jewish tree were re-awakened. Jewish nationalism reached its heyday when it stood defiantly in the face of bitter insult to the whole race. American Jewry was seized by a fury and resolved to show its might. It is not too much to say that Hitler created a new Judaism; he also created the Jewish State. The last 20 years produced the deepest upheaval ever experienced not only in the outward position of the Jews, but in Jewish consciousness and in the attitude of the world to the Jewish problem.

### A New Jewish Diaspora

Against this background we have to look at the destiny of German Jewry. As far as they had not been exterminated, German Jews entered the mosaic of the new Jewish Diaspora in a way never envisaged or foreseen by our forefathers of the 19th century. German Jewry had a central position in Jewish life which by far transcended its numerical strength. Intellectually, it was closely connected with its neighbours, and often the decisive pattern of Jewish life emerged from Germany: the Aufklärung of Moses Mendelssohn, the Orthodoxy of 'Thora and Derech Eretz,' of Samson Raphael Hirsch, Jüdische Wissenschaft of Zunz and Geiger, Religious Liberalism and Reform, and finally Jewish Nationalism and Zionism. Though not always loved, German (including German speaking Austro-Hungarian) Jewry strongly influenced Russian and East European Judaism and received decisive impulses from there. It is impossible in this context to give a full analysis of the productive relationship of German and East European Judaism during the last 150 years; to a great extent it would require a review of the interconnection of ideas in this period, especially Russian and German, and of the impact of German philosophy on the Russian intelligentsia to which, in the process of emancipation, Russian-educated Jews felt themselves attracted. In any case, both Jewish Socialism in all its brands and Zionism were, in effect, a product of mutual influence and collaboration of Russian and German Jews.

German Jewry was the custodian of an age-long great tradition. But it also developed its own forms of organisation and sense of duty, its own liturgy and form of Service, its peculiar institutions, and, above all, what is now usually called "a way of life." It was a particular civilisation, largely engendered by a special kind of inter-relation between Judaism and the Gentile world. Whether we like to admit it or not, Jewish assimilation in Germany had a stimulating impact on Judaism itself; all the achievements mentioned above, including Jewish nationalism and Zionism, have been the product of what Dr. James Parkes calls the "Gentilism" in Jewish life. German Jews had also adopted a characteristic pattern of moral principles

in everyday life, in business and public life, which was perhaps somehow "bourgeois" and "philistine" but, seen objectively, had undoubtedly its good sides. (This special character of German Jews evoked the nick-name of "Yaেকে.") There can be no denial of the fact that the German Jew represented a Jewish type of his own, clearly distinguishable from the Jewish type which dominated the Jewish scene, namely, the East European Jew who also became the American, Argentine, Canadian, South African Jew, etc.

### **Adaptation to Changed Circumstances**

The dispersion of German Jews, roughly completed before the Second World War, created a whole series of specific problems. There was, first of all, the economic and social integration of the new element into the general environment of the land of refuge, with all the natural difficulties of starting a new life under unfamiliar conditions, acquiring a foreign language and accommodating oneself to foreign customs. It was also a question of economic and vocational adjustment, finding new occupations, making a living. In addition, there is the whole complex of cultural life, necessarily demanding a new assimilation, preferably without abandoning what was valuable in one's own traditions. Finally, there was the special Jewish problem of upholding Judaism and associating with the local Jewish communities. It is well known that the great Jewish organisations and also the organisations in the countries of reception extended most valuable aid and advice to the newcomers. German Jewry is grateful for that. Looking back over the last 20 years, we can state to-day that a large part of Jewish emigrants from Germany succeeded in establishing themselves in various countries, though there were still many who could not strike roots in their new homeland and had to remain a social liability—innocent victims of the great tragedy of persecution and expulsion.

In spite of great individual differences the former German Jews all over the world, at least in this generation, remained something like a family, linked together not only by common reminiscences and to a certain degree by nostalgia, but also by similar material and psychological problems which they had to face in the various countries as the standard-bearers, however modest, of the great tradition of German Jewry. It is, therefore, sensible to draw a balance sheet from time to time, and to examine the destiny of groups of Jewish refugees in various countries. Many German Jews have personal family ties elsewhere and receive their information from relatives and friends. The Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain takes a keen interest in the position of Jewish refugees abroad, and the present volume is an attempt to collect information of this kind. We did not intend to give a comprehensive or exhaustive picture nor did we have in mind a scientific work based on carefully scrutinised statistical material and expert sociological research. Such a work would be highly desirable, but it cannot be the object of an occasional publication. What we set out to do was to obtain a lively description,

however imperfect, of the life, work, worries and achievements of German Jews in other parts of the world. With the unavoidable limitations implicit in this publication we did not proceed according to numerical strength or geographical prominence; on the contrary, there are certain groups which, for one reason or another, are more in the news than their sister-groups and on which much material can be found elsewhere. The most striking example is the formerly German-Jewish group in Israel which is well organised, has a newspaper of its own and its own publications, probably known to many of our readers. There are other groups such as those in the United States which are too large and multi-coloured to be streamlined into an overall description. Our idea was to give prominence also to somewhat remote groups whose fate and experience since their arrival in the new country is not so generally known. We think that this part of the picture is of particular interest. Each of these formerly German-Jewish groups contributes its own note and *motif* to the understanding of this painful and at the same time proud chapter of our history.

### Balance of Two Decades

In summarizing the experience of these 20 years, no generalisation is possible. We all know how different were the destinies of individuals. Those who emigrated with the first wave of persecution, comparatively early, were, generally speaking, more fortunate in establishing themselves abroad, if only because they could take with them more of their possessions and money. On the other hand, many of the very first emigrants went to countries close to Germany, like France, Belgium, Holland, where they were later caught in the Hitler invasion. We do not propose to speak in detail of Jewish immigration to the U.K. as we devoted a special publication, "Britain's New Citizens," a few years ago, to this subject.

In Israel and in other countries young people, on the whole, were better off than the aged. But whatever the language of statistics may reveal, in all countries of refuge there were necessarily some people, a larger or smaller percentage of the whole, who could not find work and could not acquire the necessary knowledge, perhaps because they lacked adaptability to start a new life. In all countries, there were so-called "social cases" which need support from public funds. It is painful to think that most of these would not have been social cases if they had not been expelled; anyhow, pre-Hitler German Jewry with its exemplary institutions had ample opportunity to care for its own destitute, while after the dispersion it was not so easy—though more essential—to do so in foreign lands. The financial means were not available, and many German Jews had to rely on local charity, with the unavoidable embarrassment involved in such a situation. It was one of the grievances of ex-German Jews that their representative body, the "Council for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Jews from Germany," had no say in the allocation of funds resulting from the liquidation of German Jewish communal property which had

been entrusted by the Military Occupation Government to the Jewish Restitution Successor Organisation (JRSO). Only at a very late stage, when the monetary equivalent of most of these recovered assets had been distributed, an agreement about limited allocations from future proceeds could be reached. The organisations of refugees in the various countries tried their best to care for the aged and destitute. Some of the contributions to the present volume tell this pathetic story. As the number of old and unfit people must necessarily increase from year to year, this problem is one of the major concerns of the Societies of Refugees even after most of the refugees have become citizens in their country of refuge and do not regard themselves as strangers any longer.

Apart from this social activity, however, one of the main points of interest is the education of youth. Children are generally educated in State or public schools of their country of residence, where they are assimilated to the population of the country. Many former German Jews wish to give their children an additional Jewish education to make them understand their own past and the special conditions of Jewish life, to make them proud Jews and proud of their German-Jewish ancestry. We cannot say that this problem has been satisfactorily solved, but in some countries the tradition is alive and intensely felt.

#### **A Noble Inheritance**

We know that German Judaism in the sense in which it existed until 1933, and in many respects until 1939, has vanished and cannot be revived. But we cherish the hope that it will not be forgotten. The "Council" has taken the initiative in founding a new institution, the "Leo Baeck Institute" which is to be a centre of research into German Jewish history and sociology, literature and psychology. Such an institution would collect all the material still available about German Jews, past and present, it would strengthen the consciousness of a noble inheritance and would give inspiration and leadership to those German Jews all over the world who consider it worth while to continue this great tradition, and to carry it forward, with all the necessary alterations and adaptations, to be integrated into the Jewish way of life.

We think that the information on the lot of German Jews in distant parts of the world, apart from being welcome to those who have relatives there, may strengthen the sentiment of solidarity and of common interest and purpose in all the problems arising from the past. The present volume may be regarded as a modest contribution to that end.