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## A FATE APART IN ARGENTINA

From 1933 onwards, there was a steady flow of German-speaking Jews to Argentina, but numbers were not large in the early stages. From the end of 1935 to the middle of 1938 this movement reached its peak, encouraged by an immigration policy which was conceived in generous terms and applied even more liberally. Conditions did not change until August, 1938, when a Government decree made the admission of immigrants conditional upon an invitation by close relatives ("llamada") or specialist qualifications, in particular agricultural training. From that time onwards, the number of immigrants steadily declined.

The number of German-speaking Jews amounts to about 40,000. The overwhelming majority live in the capital, Buenos Aires, or in its suburbs. There are only very few German-Jewish families in the large and medium-sized towns of the interior, with the sole exception of the I.C.A. settlements containing just under two hundred families of German-Jewish origin, i.e. about six hundred people.

From the moment of his arrival, the immigrant has, in some fields, the same rights as those who were born in the country and have long been established there. Residential restrictions, labour permits, compulsory registration: all those regulations applied in over-populated Europe to aliens are practically unknown in Argentina. However, the sphere of politics and political organisation, even, to a large extent, cultural activity are the carefully guarded preserve of the established citizen, born in the country.

Thus the law entitles the immigrant to apply for naturalisation after only two years' residence in Argentina, and the constitution established in 1949 under Juan Domingo Peron, the present president, provides for the automatic acquisition of citizenship after five years' residence in the country. In practice, however, naturalisation papers will only be obtained after a discouragingly long sequence of formalities, and the procedure is not so simple as it appears at first sight.

Even when citizenship has been obtained, however, it does not entail full civic equality. The naturalised citizen obtains the right to vote only after five years' waiting, doubtless a unique phenomenon in constitutional law, and he cannot be elected a national deputy for a further five years and is permanently debarred from election to national senator. His papers, even his passport, show him to be a naturalised Argentinian, and certain public offices, as well as the higher civil service, are inaccessible to him partly by law and partly by tradition.

This explains why so far only a relatively small number of German-speaking Jews have acquired Argentinian citizenship—no figures are available—and why practically no one in this group has obtained the right to vote, except in the case of persons who immigrated before or soon after 1933. Apart from its effects on the immigrant's mind and psychology, this circumstance is of importance, above all, in the passport question. As long as there was no German diplomatic representation in Argentina, a very liberal regulation enabled German Jews to obtain an Argentinian foreigner's passport, when they were planning a trip abroad. As a result of the formal difficulties connected with naturalisation, not a few German-speaking Jews have in the last few years decided to re-apply for German citizenship. This certainly highly debatable attitude is often condemned by other sections of the Jewish community which, of course, have been established in the country for a longer period. It goes without saying that active participation in the political life of Argentina in any form is impossible for Jews from Germany in view of their civic status.

It is, however, not only the political and constitutional sphere which is difficult of access for the immigrant, but also the cultural sphere. An active cultural role in Argentinian life is the almost exclusive preserve of people belonging to the traditional Latin element rooted in the country for generations.

The great liberality of Argentinian life on the one hand, and the restrictions in the civic and cultural spheres on the other, greatly favour the formation of national groups with a life of their own. Just as in other countries of immigration, and perhaps even more so, ethnic, linguistic or cultural links have created communities leading a life apart from that of the Argentinian people in general. There is an Italian, a Spanish, an Arabic and a North American community, as well as many others, each of them self-sufficient, with its own public and social life, often resident in certain districts of the capital or of the interior, with its own institutions, its own forms of social work and a press written in its own language.

Among these communities in Argentina which stand out as a result of their ethnic and cultural characteristics, the Jewish group plays an important, even an eminent part, because it is numerous and highly organised, and within this Jewish group, which, in accordance with the character of the first large wave of immigration, has predominantly Russian-Jewish features, a Sephardic, a Polish-Jewish and, as the most recent member, a German-Jewish group stand out no less clearly.

### Modest Beginnings

In the years before 1940, most of the former German Jews worked in the retail trade, especially as house-to-house agents with their characteristic portfolios—which, in Argentina, constitute a most striking piece of equipment—or small cases containing samples. The articles traded were things of everyday use, and the clientèle often consisted exclusively of one's own circle of friends. Those who had some minor post and could therefore count on a regular fixed income were almost admired and often envied in those years. But even then there were enterprising people who began themselves to produce articles of consumption on a very small scale, generally at home, and those more fortunate people whose specialised technical knowledge, machines or capital which they had managed to bring with them enabled them to open small factories of their own.

Later, however, with a gradual beginning in 1940 and a rapid upward trend in 1943, a change occurred, and five years later the group of German-speaking Jews had reached an economic level far above all expectations. They were not only helped by an undreamt-of economic development of Argentina, favoured by world events, but they contributed their own experience and knowledge, which greatly benefited the country. They understood in time the conditions prevailing in an inflationary economy and recognised the prospects which were bound to await light industry in Argentina. In many cases, ties of family or friendship with people in other countries and continents proved useful. Thus it is not surprising that at the end of this stage of development Jews from Germany and Austria had achieved an extraordinarily favourable position, which they still hold, a position in many cases considerably more favourable than that which they had abandoned in the countries of their origin or had ever felt they could hope for.

To-day, German-speaking Jews are working in many branches of economic life: in trade, in industrial production, as small- or large-scale entrepreneurs or as employees in a leading position, and their achievements in this sphere represent an important contribution to the building-up of Argentina's economy. Large undertakings in the textile, chemical and pharmaceutical industries, in electrical engineering and manufactured goods have been built up or jointly created by Jews from Germany, who thus directly contributed to the economic rise of the country by the introduction of new methods and forms of work. A by no means insignificant part of the Argentinian export and especially of the import trade is in the hands of German-speaking Jews, quite apart from numerous small-scale factories.

It may even be asserted that in certain spheres German-speaking Jews have helped in shaping the economic features of present-day Argentina. Thus the creation of a new type of clothing business, especially of ladies' clothing, offers elegant clothes, made from first-class models, at prices suited to the

pocket of the middle income group. Mention must also be made of the introduction of stores with uniformly priced articles, a type hitherto practically unknown in Argentina, and lastly, and above all: the re-shaping, loosening-up and modernisation of the style of interior decoration, which is due almost exclusively to the achievements of German-speaking Jews.

Compared with people who had a business background or one of business and technology, conditions were of course more difficult for the professions, whose titles and diplomas did not allow them to practise in Argentina. Only very few succeeded in the years before the war in obtaining recognition of a European legal or medical qualification by means of a supplementary examination, or in acquiring an Argentinian diploma by means of repeating a full University course, which in some cases entailed even sitting again for the matriculation examination. At the beginning most of these professional people therefore felt compelled to engage in some sort of business activity or to take up some minor ancillary work in their former professional field, often in difficult circumstances. Later on, some of them found their way back to their own profession. A number of doctors was employed in public hospitals, thus achieving a limited right to practise their profession. Those with legal training generally encountered greater difficulties, but if they were not re-admitted, they found a niche in fields close to their professions as economic and legal advisers, as tax experts or accountants, in restitution work or, sometimes, in important work in insurance. Thus, the integration of professional people is now, after initial difficulties, happily completed.

For those occupied in intellectually creative or interpretative work, of whom there were relatively many among the immigrants, things were much more difficult. It is nevertheless true to say that the Jews from Germany have also made their contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of Argentina. Without any claim to completeness and merely to give an approximate idea of what has been achieved, we shall mention a few names.

### Contributions to Music and Theatre

The most significant contributions are probably those of people of German-Jewish origin to the musical life of Argentina and to its theatre. There are German Weil and his wife, Hilde Heinitz de Weil, founders of the Weil string quartet, known as cello, viola and violin soloists, who have also founded a conservatory with a school for chamber music enjoying a very special reputation. Dr. Erwin Leuchter is known as a practising musician and musicologist, and his wife, the late Rita Kurzmann de Leuchter, distinguished herself as a pianist. Special credit is due to Guillermo Graetzer for his work in organising music lovers in the capital. He founded the Collegium Musicum Society and conducts choruses. One of the most prominent figures in Argentinian musical life is orchestral conductor Teodoro Fuchs, son of Rabbi Dr. Hugo Fuchs, of Chemnitz. More than ten years ago, Fuchs founded the State Orchestra of the province of Córdoba, and to-day conducts large orchestras, including State Orchestras, in Buenos Aires. Hermann Ludwig, too, is a very active conductor. Young Gerardo Levy is employed as a soloist for flute in the municipal orchestra of Buenos Aires, which also plays at the world-famous Teatro Colón. He is the son of German-Jewish parents and received his musical training in Argentina. Walter Selbiger, a young pianist, works at the municipal opera of the town of Eva Peron (formerly La Plata), the capital of the Province of Buenos Aires. The soprano Hilde Mattauch, and the violinist Professor Josef Zimble, from Vienna, achieved distinction in numerous concerts, the latter despite his advancing years. The late Dr. Georg Pauly worked in divers fields: as a lecturer on music and drama, as an actor and producer at the Teatro Colón and at the opera of Eva Peron. Dr. Otto Erhardt has for years occupied an important post as a leading producer at the Teatro Colón. The actress Hedwig Schlichter has founded a widely known children's theatre, for which she writes herself, and she also directs a school of drama. Jacques Arndt also acts in a number of theatres and has lately distinguished himself in the production of television programmes. Martin Eisler, a well-known pioneer in interior decoration, also works on stage sets.

In other fields of cultural life, too, German-speaking Jews have achieved prominence. Above all, mention must be made of Dr. Sigisfredo S. Krebs, who made a name for himself by his excellent translations and who supplied Spanish renderings of almost fifty scientific and literary works by well-known authors for the first time. The late Paul Zech, the poet, did some of his work in Spanish. The writings of Erna C. de Schlesinger on Jewish subjects have found a wide hearing among the general public. In the field of publishing and of children's literature, too, German-speaking Jews have made important contributions. In art, Ignaz Kaufmann, the portrait painter, who is also a well-known art collector, distinguished himself. Pablo Kainz, the bookseller and antique dealer, who specialises in Spanish and French books, is known for his work in this field. The architect Alfredo Gellhorn achieved prominence in town planning and was given a post by the Buenos Aires municipal authorities as a result of his important work. In the field of applied graphic arts, mention must be made of the late Jacobo Hermelin, who played a leading part in the introduction of artistic book wrappers, of Walter Wind and of the late Federico Salender. In law, Dr. Ernesto Krotoschin achieved prominence. He investigated Argentinian labour legislation, which has for some years been developing at a very active pace, with particular emphasis on comparative law, and he was the first to summarise it in systematic fashion. His brilliant work has made him a recognised authority on this subject, and he has already been frequently quoted by the Argentinian Supreme Court. The late Professor Dr. Martin Wassermann wrote a number of publications on trade-mark, mark and patent law. Among the chess players who represent Argentina in international tournaments is Hermann Pilnik. In sport, too, especially in athletics, German Jews have achieved some prominence. German-Jewish teams have contributed considerably to the popularisation of table-tennis, and a number of women, among them the sisters Ruth and Ilse Caro, who have since emigrated to the United States, as well as Inge Melo, have won Argentinian athletic titles and represented the country in international competitions with outstanding success.

### Community Life

Social conditions and the attitude of the surrounding world equally favoured the development of a strongly pronounced community life. However, a retrospective survey of the development of communal consciousness and communal life among German-speaking Jews in Argentina reveals that its impulses, after an initial *élan*, have gradually weakened. It was soon forgotten that the building up of a new Jewish life in a new country is part of the substance of Jewish history, and not its least important part, and that the German Jews had been its protagonists.

Numerically the most important organisation of German-speaking Jews is the *Asociación Filantrópica Israelita*, originally called the *Hilfsverein*. Today, its tasks consist mainly in the care of the old and sick, of special cases whose social integration presents difficulties, and of the children. At San Miguel, near Buenos Aires, it maintains a home for the aged, which is equipped and run in exemplary fashion. An enlargement of this home is planned. A holiday and convalescence home for elderly people and those recovering from illness is affiliated, and the establishment of a special home for permanent invalids is planned. Very important is the day nursery in Belgrano, also an exemplary institution, accommodating children whose parents are both working or who lack proper domestic care for other reasons. There are plans for a children's holiday home outside the town, which is needed the more urgently as hundreds of children are sent to the summer holiday camps that have been organised for many years past. There is also a clothing store.

The *Hilfsverein* owes its origin to the initiative of the Jews established in the country before 1933, and in the first few years of its existence it bore the imprint of that group. There was at that time an understandable social cleavage between that group and the new arrivals, the "emigrés." This may explain a fact which is otherwise difficult to understand: that the *Hilfsverein* has never achieved the popularity due to it, despite its great and generally

acknowledged merits. Social solidarity should have been one of the first duties, if not *the* first duty for the group of new immigrants, who had built up a new life and achieved material well-being so rapidly and so easily. Yet the *Hilfsverein's* membership, even if, at 3,500, much larger than that of any other German-Jewish organisation in Argentina, is surprisingly and incomprehensibly small. Even lower is the number of those who make important donations. It is not inadmissible to judge the communal consciousness of German Jews from these facts.

Unlike the *Hilfsverein*, the other organisations were founded by immigrant circles themselves and due to their own initiative.

The first place, chronologically, in size and in importance for general developments, belongs to the Jewish Cultural Community (*Jüdische Kulturgemeinschaft*), generally called J.K.G., which was formed in connection with the services organised for the high festivals of 1937 by the *Hilfsverein* and owed its origin to the impact of a common religious experience. A kind of "pioneer spirit" dominated the J.K.G. in its early days. The first meeting place was a basement under a café, a room whose shabby modesty has now become legendary for the German Jews of Argentina, accustomed as they are to comfort and elegance. Yet more creative and community-forming impulses were born here than in the other, more impressively equipped homes of the J.K.G. and of later institutions. Cultural needs, which had originally been very great, became gradually less pressing, and in the slow change of generations, moreover, people began to outgrow the traditional ways of German-Jewish culture. Today, the J.K.G., which is now called A.C.I.B.A. (Asociación Cultural Israelita Buenos Aires), is conscious of the tasks it has to fulfil as a guardian of cultural values, especially for the rising generation, but it resembles much more a club than an organisation for the broad mass of the community.

### Synagogues

A small group of strictly orthodox Jews had joined a synagogue in Belgrano consisting of Eastern Jews soon after their arrival and set up their own organisation, as soon as they had become more numerous. This group, which is today known as *Achdus Jisroel*, is led by Dr. Hermann Klein, the orthodox rabbi, who has, for the past year, been assisted by Rabbi Dr. Josef Oppenheimer.

Among the non-orthodox Jews, it was a purely accidental, but unfortunate coincidence which led two groups in 1939 to found a synagogue each, independently of each other and without knowing about each other. Each of these was led by a different rabbi. One of them, called *Culto Israelita de Belgrano*, was formed around Rabbi Dr. Federico Steinthal, formerly of Muenster, who is still officiating there. The other, *Nueva Comunidad Israelita*, was led by two young rabbis who had completed their training shortly before their emigration at the Institute of Jewish Learning in Berlin: Hanns Harf, of München-Gladbach and Guenter Friedlaender, of Hamburg. Friedlaender, however, officiated at the synagogue only in its early years and later on a temporary basis. Rabbi Dr. Hugo Fuchs of Chemnitz, who had made a name for himself in Germany by his writings and by his open espousal of the Zionist cause in the times of the "protesting rabbis," came to Argentina at an advanced age and also remained at the synagogue for a short time only.

Two further organisations founded by German speaking Jews are the Forum Sionista Bar Kochba and the Theodor Herzl-Gesellschaft.

The weekly review of Jewish life, *La Semana Israelita*, is the paper representing the German-speaking Jewish group in Argentina. As a link between the men and women of that group its importance can hardly be exaggerated. It is edited by Dr. Hardi Swarsensky and may be considered the mouth-piece of German Jews in Argentina.

Apart from this weekly, with which other, short-lived papers attempted to compete, there is only one other periodical publication of the German-Jewish group, the information gazette of the *Hilfsverein*, appearing under the name of *Filantropia*.

The first German-Jewish immigrants, from 1933 onwards, were received by the Jews of the country with that sympathy and that interest which their dramatic fate deserved, but when, with the growing number of immigrants, a German-Jewish group was formed, the old prejudices which had divided East and West in Europe were revived, only that the two camps this time met in surroundings bearing the imprint of Eastern Jewry. After a period of argument, however, a *modus vivendi* resulted: the German-speaking Jews created their own organisations, or developed them and became a group apart within the Jewish community of the country.

They share in the work of the central institutions. The overwhelming majority belong to the A.M.I.A. (the general Jewish synagogue of Buenos Aires) and to the charity organisations, and German-Jewish institutions, like all others, send their delegates to the covering organisation of the Jews of Argentina, D.A.I.A. Such participation, however, can hardly be described as very active. A few German-speaking Jews have attained a position in the great Argentine-Jewish organisations and some of them occupy important posts as a result of their personal achievements, but their number is very small in proportion to the total of German-speaking Jews, who constitute an eighth of the Jewish population of Buenos Aires.

One of the greatest and most representative synagogues of the town, the *Congregación Israelita de la Republica Argentina*, located in the centre, has a considerable number of German Jews among its members and has enjoyed a large measure of support from them. It is at this synagogue that one of the most eminent personalities of Argentinian-Jewish life, Chief Rabbi Dr. Guillermo Schlesinger, officiates, who comes from German-speaking Switzerland and is married to a German Jewess.

In the Zionist effort, especially in the work of the Keren Hayessod, the Keren Kayemeth Leyisrael and the W.I.Z.O., as well as in that of the B'ne Berith, German-speaking Jews share by means of special committees working in their own language, which contributed to other factors setting them off from the other Jews as a group apart.

### The I.C.A. Settlements

The inner development in the groups of the German-Jewish I.C.A. settlements ran entirely parallel to that of German-speaking Jews in the towns. The colony of Avigdor may serve as an example. Despite the primitiveness of rural life, there was intense cultural activity in this colony up to 1947. In its heyday, Dr. Alfred Neumeyer, formerly a judge in Munich, one of the most eminent personalities of German Jewry, took an important part in this development. The decline was gradual. Some of the best elements left, and the disappearance of economic difficulties was accompanied by the rise of an often crude materialism. The number of German-Jewish families, originally about 120, dwindled to 80 and is still lower today, with only a tiny element of younger people. Of the once flourishing cultural and organisational life hardly a shadow remains. Developments in other German-Jewish settlements were similar. Economic foundations for their future exist, but human, cultural and Jewish foundations are lacking.

In his way of life, his attitude to his work, his working rhythm, clothing and outward habits, the German-speaking Jew has become largely assimilated. He generally feels linked with his Argentinian environment, has adapted himself to its claims and long become reconciled with his fate. He is content, sometimes self-satisfied and, in essentials, without any inner problems. He does not see, or does not see clearly enough, that the rise of his group is due not only to its own ability, but largely to extraordinary and in every way favourable circumstances, and that he has been able to lead a normal life such as is hardly conceivable or possible in other countries or continents, because since his immigration he has been far removed from the turmoil of our time. A Babbit in his own way, he does not see the limitations, the problematical nature of his life and the ties and obligations which he cannot shake off or shun.

## Achievements and Shortcomings

Assimilation generally stops where the personal and familiar sphere begins. It does not go beyond adaptation in profession or trade and ends, so to speak, at the entrance door to his flat. This applies, among other things, to mastery of the Spanish language. It is hardly surprising that Spanish is spoken by all German Jews with a more or less noticeable accent, which, in a country with so large a foreign population, does not strike people as strange. It is more characteristic that in many cases linguistic knowledge does not exceed the requirements of every-day life, of trade or profession and, possibly newspaper reading.

Jewish ties and the interest in things Jewish are relatively small, and this applies not only to those who keep themselves apart, but also to those who take part in Jewish life. Sociologically, the German-Jewish group is thus a group distinctly apart and clearly set off against others, but it is not inspired by a community idea. Its members have not found access to the Argentinian world, because they could not find it and therefore live in a sort of vacuum without knowing it.

Things are similar and perhaps a shade more serious in the case of the young people. A glance at the few available figures shows that only a few hundred children receive religious instruction from the synagogues and other religious institutions. And only a very few hundred young people gather in the youth groups of the different institutions. There is also a considerable number of mixed marriages among the younger people, but in most of these cases, the wife is not Jewish and adopts the Jewish faith before marriage. Only an infinitesimal number of young people are organised in Jewish institutions outside the German-Jewish group.

The Jews from Germany and Austria, facing, as individuals, the difficult problems of adaptation, have shown courage and ability. Greatly helped by the general trend of development in the country, they have attained a secure social position in an astonishingly short space of time and made many a contribution to the progress of their new country. In their career and achievement they have shown themselves worthy of the tradition which they embody. They can be said to have stood the test which fate had prepared for them. But the question remains—and it is part of the eternal Jewish question in the diaspora—whether a time of peace and material well-being cannot also become a time of forgetting, when Jewish consciousness is weakened. This question, which is also the question of the future, has yet to be answered by the German Jews in Argentina.