

Three Centuries
of Growth

THE AMERICAN JEWISH
COMMUNITY TODAY

by C. BEZALEL SHERMAN

Published by

LABOR ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA—POALE ZION

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FOREWORD

This pamphlet is an outgrowth of an address delivered by its author, C. Bezalel Sherman, the keen student of American Jewish life, to the 29th National Convention of the Labor Zionist Organization of America, held in Philadelphia, Pa., on June 26-28, 1954. A resolution on the Tercentenary adopted by the Convention states in part:

“American Jewry will this year celebrate its Tercentenary at the peak of its political integration, material wellbeing and social progress . . . If the spiritual growth of the American Jewish community is to keep pace with its material advancement, it must make the Tercentenary celebrations the occasion for a soul-searching reexamination of its communal assets and liabilities, to the end that its resources may be creatively utilized and its forces constructively arrayed. . . ”

This pamphlet is, therefore, published as a modest contribution to the evaluative processes which the Tercentenary observance should stimulate among all Jews who are concerned with applying the knowledge and experiences of the past to the strengthening of present Jewish group life and to the enrichment of its content.

Coming of age in World War I, the American Jewish community has been called upon to assume responsibilities for Jewish survival that no other Jewish community in the Diaspora has ever had placed on its shoulders. These responsibilities it has had to carry out in conditions which were in many respects different from anything Jews had experienced in other lands—and within a relatively new general American society which was itself struggling to achieve maturity. That it has in a large measure discharged its responsibilities in so brief a time-span is a tribute to American Jews and to their ability to adjust themselves to the new opportunities their adopted homeland has offered them.

The first Jewish settlement was established here three hundred years ago, but the vast and widely ramified Jewish

community we know today is really the product of the last three generations. Moreover, it is primarily in the past thirty years, since the cutting off of the stream of immigration, that American Jewry has entered on a period of crystallization in every area of its group life—a process still going on and one that is likely to continue for some time to come.

We must not be swept along aimlessly by these developments. If we are determined to harness the tides into positive and creative channels, we should diligently assess the course we have taken thus far, chart the direction in which we are headed, and clearly define the objectives we must strive to reach. A spirit of sober self-appraisal must permeate our celebrations.

The Tercentenary coincides with the 50th Anniversary of the Labor Zionist Organization of America—Poale Zion. From its inception, in 1905, the Labor Zionist Movement has had before it the totality of Jewish life. Integrally a part of organized Zionism and the Jewish labor movement, it has been the bridge linking the national aspirations of the Jewish people with the social ideals of progressive mankind. Labor Zionism has also devoted its energies to the furtherance of Jewish education and culture, and to the establishment of democratically constituted Jewish communities in this country.

It is our hope that this pamphlet will whet the appetite for further study and thought and stimulate a desire for greater participation in the multifaceted affairs of the Jewish community as well as in the larger American community.

In addition to the Convention address already referred to, the material in this pamphlet is also based on two articles by Mr. Sherman that appeared in the *Jewish Frontier* and *The Reconstructionist*. To the editors of these publications we are indebted for permission to incorporate the essays in the text that follows.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
LABOR ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF
AMERICA-POALE ZION

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Three Centuries of Growth

The American Jewish Community Today

More than six decades have elapsed since Frederick Jackson Turner threw a bombshell into American historiography by advancing his famous thesis which conceived of the Frontier as the fountainspring of American uniqueness and the cradle of the distinctive features of American democracy. It is now generally recognized that Turner underestimated, even as the pre-Turner historians overestimated, the impact of the European heritage on the molding of the Old World influences the white man has brought over from other lands and the conditions he has created for himself in the process of conquering the New World. This blend of old and new is especially noticeable in the development of the American Jewish community. Unlike the frontiersman, whose struggles were waged against the hostile forces of the wilderness, the Jewish pioneer fought for a place in an established social environment. Both had only their own initiative and ingenuity to rely upon—the frontiersman in his clashes with nature, the early Jewish immigrant in his desire to preserve his identity. American Jewish history is thus the history of the efforts of Jews to strike a balance between the Jewish spiritual legacy and the requirements of their economic, political, social, and cultural accommodation in this country.

At each decisive turn in this history the effects of the interplay of positive and negative forces were manifested. In their totality, those forces constituted the cast in which the American Jewish community has been formed both as a branch of an old tree and as an entirely new plant.

Jewish life in America is a combination — not yet a synthesis — of specifically Jewish influences and general American experiences. The outline of the new attitudes and folkways American Jewry is creating is already discernible in so far as form is concerned. With respect to content, however, everything is still blurred. Whatever hopes one entertains regarding the future of American Jewry, he cannot ignore the factors which have led to the convergence of traditional Jewish values and newly absorbed American attitudes into one community setting.

Some of those factors, assuming particular pertinence in the celebration of the Tercentenary, of the Jewish settlement in America, will be discussed in the following pages.

I

Political Integration and Social Otherness

The twenty-three Jews disembarking from the St. Charles in September, 1654 were not met with open arms. On the contrary, it required no little pressure on the part of the authorities of old Amsterdam in Holland to enable Jews to settle in New Amsterdam in America. Peter Stuyvesant resisted the pressure as long as he could; when forced to yield, he tried to restrict the Jewish newcomers in their civil rights. This time the Jews resisted — and this is one of the milestones in the development of the American Jewish settlement.

We can only speculate as to the turn Jewish history would have taken if, instead of coming from Holland — in some cases via England, — the first Jews to step foot on the North American mainland were to have come from Eastern Europe. Arriving as social outcasts from despotic lands where their physical existence was in constant danger, they probably would have found it the better part of wisdom not to be too militant about equality in the new home. Not so the Spanish-Portuguese Jews. They made their greatest contribution to American democracy by refusing to accept *ersatz* civil rights and by insisting on being accorded all the rights, and allowed to discharge all the duties, of full citizenship.

While it is true that Jews did not enjoy full political freedom during the Colonial Period, and were not accorded political equality in all States even after the Revolution, it is also true that they have never found themselves in a status of outcasts in this country. The political restraints that faced them in their early history in this country were not aimed at them alone; Catholics and Protestant dissidents were also victims, and for the most part to an even greater degree, of the same disabilities. Suffice it to mention the persecutions of the Quakers in the Colonial days and the anti-Irish riots in the middle of the nineteenth century. Jews were not restricted by laws as to

residence or occupation; no legal ghetto ever existed for them here.

American Jews were practically born to political equality. They refused to accept a position of second-class citizenship or to acquiesce in compromises which, while granting them practical equality, left their legal standing in doubt. When Asser Levy demanded, three centuries ago, that he be treated as a full-fledged burgher of New Amsterdam, he blazed a trail of firm insistence on full equality before the law from which American Jews have rarely deviated ever since. The Jews of Richmond, Virginia stuck to this trail in 1845, when they refused to agree to a law which introduced Sunday as the official Sabbath of that city. Northern Jews followed this trail during the Civil War, when they fought for the revocation of the anti-Jewish order issued by General U. S. Grant and demanded that Jewish chaplains be employed to serve Jews in the military forces. The same trail was followed by the entire Jewish population of the United States in the struggle which resulted in the abrogation, in 1912, of the trade treaty with Czarist Russia because of the latter's discriminations against Jews traveling with American passports.

But the ledger also has a debit side. The remarkable political integration has not brought with it a corresponding integration of the Jewish population in the larger American community. It was the view of Vernon Louis Parrington that the political history of America could be interpreted as a struggle between the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, which is primarily concerned with the rights of man, and the spirit of the Constitution, which is more concerned with the rights of property. Carrying this thesis a step farther, we may interpret the relationships between majority and minority groups in the United States in terms of the lag that has been created between the democratic precepts of the American State and the undemocratic prejudices that affected the behavior and attitudes of important segments of American society. This lag has given rise to the American Dilemma of which Gunnar Myrdal spoke in his great work on the American Negro. The same lag has been responsible for the social discrimination that Jews had to contend with throughout their life in this country. Noteworthy in this connection is the fact that, while they opposed with all the power they could muster disabilities that emanated from the government, Jews have tacitly accepted disabilities

that had their roots in community moods. In other words, the Jew did not recognize group privileges in relation to the State, but he did allow for differences of position in relation to society. He refused to pay a higher price for his place in the political organism of the United States than that which members of other groups were taxed with, but he was not averse to paying a special membership fee for maintaining a distinct Jewish group within the framework of American society.

The membership fee was of dual nature: one part of it, the one which stemmed from his loyalty to Jewish spiritual values, he paid freely and voluntarily; the other part was exacted from him by a Christian majority which frequently denied him the *de facto* equality in social life that he enjoyed *de jure* in political life.

The contradiction between full equality in political matters and partial inequality in social relations has not seriously prejudiced Jewish development because the creation of religious, social, philanthropic and cultural institutions was not inconsistent with the political patterns of the State or the social fabric of American society. As an entity within that society, the Jews operated in a sphere which has been the domain of private effort and in which the various group differences have found their expression. This is to say that Jews have reacted to the phenomena of American life in much the same manner as have other groups, only more so. This "more so" contains the key to Jewish development in this country.

For Jews are, at one and the same time, a community which resembles the many groups comprising American society and one that differs from them in many basic respects. Their peculiarity derives from the fact that the distinguishing features which delineate other groups — national origin, religion, "race," etc. — do not altogether explain Jewish otherness. Due to this peculiarity, the American Jew has been able to gain full political integration while retaining a considerable amount of social separateness. The separateness has satisfied his need for communion with fellow Jews without isolating him from the mainstream of American life. It has made possible the preservation of his distinctiveness without falling into apartness.

Economic Adjustment

The economic development of American Jews was also shaped by the reciprocal influences of the traditions Jews have brought over from other lands and the opportunities they have found here. At no time have those influences pulled at cross purposes. On the contrary, the experience Jews had accumulated in the course of centuries of wanderings and adaptations was of great help to them in the search for a place in the American economic sun. In their native lands they went through an apprenticeship which prepared them for the role they were subsequently to play in the economic life of their new home; and this country could use the training they had acquired.

The Sephardic Jews brought with them a mercantilist background which they proceeded to put to good use in domestic business and international trade. This was of considerable value to the young colonies, which needed an independent economy at home and commercial outlets of their own abroad before they could be knitted into a nation.

Jews did not open any new geographic frontiers, but they contributed substantially to the integration of the new frontiers into the economic processes of the land once those were opened. The Jewish peddler, an immigrant from Germany, who followed, pack on shoulder, the covered wagon during the middle of the 19th century has not been given the credit due him in the annals of the westward trek. Turner characterized the frontier as the point where savagery and civilization met; the appearance of the Jewish peddler helped overcome savagery and expedited the consolidation of civilization. His mission remained the same after he exchanged his pack for a warehouse and his horse and buggy for a store. He moved with the economic current and carved a niche for himself among the middle classes at a time when they were becoming a significant factor in American economy.

Mass immigration from Eastern Europe began at a time when the technological advance was assuming revolutionary proportions in this country. Millions of newcomers were thrown into the American labor pool, which seemed to be a bottomless pit. Industry swallowed up all the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labor-power immigration had to offer and asked for

more. Jewish immigrants joined the procession. Their economic adjustment during the last generation of the 19th century and the first generation of the 20th century took on the coloration of the period; they were drawn into the ranks of the proletariat in huge numbers. According to Nathan Goldberg, Jews were the most industrialized ethnic group in the city of New York at the turn of the twentieth century.

The center of Jewish proletarianization was the production of wearing apparel, and this was no accident. Old World traditional ways of breadwinning combined with modern trends in the New World to make the needle trades almost synonymous with the industrialization of Jews. There was a high percentage of tailors among the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe; and they came here at a time when the style habits of the country were undergoing a radical change as a result of the growth of the cities. The production of clothing became the Jewish economic frontier — the only industry which Jews could both pioneer in and extend. The sweatshop, despite its merciless exploitation and stark misery, was in some respects the only industrial school the newcomer had during his early years in this country. Here he was with people like himself; here he was learning the values of a union; and here too he was finding out how to become a contractor or manufacturer himself.

The fact that the setting up of a waist or pants shop did not require either large capital or contacts with the non-Jewish world raised the sights of the worker and kept his spirits up. At the same time, the sweatshop tempered the ambitions of the more advanced workers and dissuaded them from joining the "capitalist class" — seeing that the "bosses" were only a few steps ahead of the proletarians in financial stability. This encouraged the class-conscious workers to persist in efforts to unionize the industry despite the heartbreaking disappointments and frustrating setbacks they suffered.

Manufacturing, jobbing, and contracting in the clothing industry were not the only economic pursuits that the Jews who dropped out of the working class entered. Many went into trade, and others found their way to the professions and white-collar occupations. The immigrant who failed to make the transformation himself saw to it that his children were prepared for a career that was more rewarding than the craft in which he was engaged.

Since the middle of the nineteen twenties, when immigration from Eastern Europe was no longer large enough to replenish the depleted ranks of the Jewish proletariat, American Jewry has been reverting in increasing measure to the traditional position of a middle class community. About 50 per cent of all gainfully employed Jews were engaged in trade in 1940, according to the best available estimates, as against 21 per cent for the population as a whole. Twenty-eight per cent were engaged in industry, compared with 32 per cent for the entire population. More than 10 per cent were in the professions, and the rest were scattered over a multitude of occupations.

The tendency toward greater participation in trade has marked the development of all segments of the American population. The proportion of people engaged in agriculture dropped from more than 47 per cent of all the gainfully employed in 1870 to 17.5 per cent in 1940. During the same period, the proportion of those engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries dropped from 27.7 percent to 26.3 per cent, while their number in absolute figures rose from three-and-a-half million to nearly fourteen million, for an absolute increase of 300 per cent. As for trade, we have the following interesting figures based on United States censuses: In 1870, less than 600,000 persons were occupied in trade, representing 4.6 per cent of the gainfully employed; in 1940 the number was 7,277,574, representing 13.8 per cent of the total number of breadwinners and indicating an absolute increase of 1,168.8 per cent. In the clerical occupations, which have come to play a very important role in the Jewish occupational structure, the growth was even more spectacular, with the total rising from 311,889, or 2.5 per cent of the total gainfully employed, in 1870, to 5,521,297, or 10.5 per cent of the gainfully employed, in 1940, representing an increase of 1,670 per cent. In the light of these figures — and they could be multiplied to embrace the entire producing populace of the country — we observe in the drift from shop to trade, from manual labor to white collar professions, and from strenuous physical work to crafts requiring a greater mental capacity, a trend that flows naturally from the American economic processes. The difference between Jew and non-Jew in this area is one of degree rather than of kind. Both move in the same direction, only the Jew frequently moves at a faster pace. And for obvious reasons: the drift entails a

greater measure of urbanization and a higher education — and the Jew has both.

This fact is frequently overlooked in attempts to paint the economic portrait of American Jewry. Much is made of its geographic concentration, but it is overlooked that this is a phenomenon which is not peculiar to Jews alone. In 1880, over 70 per cent of the population in the United States lived in rural areas (settlements of less than 2,500 each); in 1940 the urban population represented 56.5 per cent and the rural no more than 43.5 per cent of the total. A glance at the record of the various ethnic groups will be in order in this connection. There were in 1940 more than thirty-four million people of the so-called white foreign stock which, according to the definition of the Census Bureau, consists of 1) immigrants, 2) native born Americans both of whose parents were immigrants, and 3) native Americans with one parent born in this country and the other coming from abroad. Except for one group, they were all a city folk in their vast majority, with the rate of urbanization ranging from 91 per cent for the Greeks, to 88 per cent for the Italians, 86 per cent for the South Irish, 81 per cent for the North Irish, 74 per cent for the British, 67 per cent for the Germans, and 65 per cent for the Swedes. The one exception was the Norwegian group, whose population was evenly divided between the rural and urban areas. Viewed against these figures, Jewish urbanization, reaching an estimated degree of 98 per cent, does not look so lopsided as it is generally represented.

Moreover, if it should be suggested that, in the distribution of the Jewish population, we are also witnessing what Jacob Lestchinsky calls a process of "metropolization," i.e., a tendency to crowd into a very limited number of industrial cities, the answer would be that this too is a characteristic of all ethnic groups. New York and Chicago, the two cities where half of the American Jews live, were also the home of 15 per cent of all the Germans of foreign stock in 1940, of 25 per cent of the Irish, of 26 per cent of the Poles, and of 29 per cent of the Italians. When we consider that in the case of Jews we are dealing with the total population, and not only with those who are part of the foreign stock, we must again arrive at the conclusion that the difference between them and the others is one of tempo and not of tendency.

Although there were about 200,000 Jews in this country in 1875, the present Jewish community is the product primarily

of the "New Immigration" — the immigration since the last quarter of the 19th century. Like all immigrants, Jews started from the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder when they arrived, and moved to higher rungs as they found the secret of economic adaptation. All immigrants followed the same pattern; but, for reasons mentioned above, Jews were able to skip some rungs and get to the middle of the ladder faster than the others. This brought the Jew — as regards cultural attainment and penetration in trade, white collar work and in the professions — closer to the position of the so-called "Nordic" groups of the "Old Immigration" than to the one held by the non-Jewish groups from Eastern and Southern Europe whose arrival in this country coincided with Jewish mass-immigration from that part of the world. The rapid economic advancement of the Jews has not been overlooked in anti-Semitic propaganda.

To say that anti-Semitism is created by the peculiarities of the Jewish occupational distribution, is to put the cart before the horse. Whatever is abnormal in the Jewish economic structure is the result, rather than the cause, of the social and political disabilities Jews have had to endure. The very suspicion with which Jewish economic pursuits, in themselves perfectly acceptable and honorable occupations, are viewed even in this country is part of these disabilities. There would be anti-Semitism here, as elsewhere, regardless of what Jews did in the way of breadwinning; but there is no gainsaying that their geographic and economic concentration makes the work of the Jew-baiter easier by offering a convenient target for his poisoned arrows. Various polls taken at different times and by different methods, indicate that a very sizable segment of the American population accepts at face value the legend that Jews have too much economic power and wield too much political influence in this country. What is ignored in this connection is the fact that, while Jews move faster than others from the lower positions in the socio-economic scale to the middle positions, the tempo of their progress is cut down perceptibly when they try to move from the middle positions to the higher ones. This is not to say that successful Jewish businessmen cannot amass as much wealth as their Gentile prototypes; they certainly can and do. But where Jews are concerned, accumulated riches will not bring the prestige and economic influence that non-Jews of equal financial standing enjoy. "Probably," Professor Donald Young writes, "no other white minority group

which has sufficient money and cultural polish to fit into the accepted standards of vacation life is absolutely barred from the ordinary summer resort."

Money alone will not buy social status; and Jews find it even more difficult than others to crash the gate of the financial elite. More often than not, even intermarriage does not help. Another observation of Dr. Young's is worth quoting:

. . . The Nordic is continuing to intermarry quite freely and without social ostracism with all of the white stocks except the Jewish. When the Jewish and the colored groups are involved, but with the exception of the Indian, caste is lost by intermarriage, and the offsprings are denied majority membership.

It is possible to determine at what point advancement will be blocked for the Jew by measuring the distance between that point and the social and economic aristocracy in the United States. The assertions of the anti-Semites notwithstanding, Jews are not to be found in the higher echelons of American economic leadership. On the contrary, the more a financial enterprise comes under the attention of "Wall Street," the farther it is removed from Jewish control. "The slightness," Ismar Elbogen comments in *A Century of Jewish Life*, "of Jewish participation in the colossal development of finance, commerce, and industry, is striking. In these fields, which were elsewhere recorded as the special domain of the Jews, the Jew of the United States never reached the front ranks."

A survey carried out by the magazine *Fortune* in 1936 found no more than 30 Jews among the 420 directors of the 19 banks which were members of the New York Clearing House in 1933. Of the thirty, 15 were on the boards of two banks in which Jews had heavy investments; the others were scattered over 17 banks. The situation has not improved since then, and it is even worse outside New York.

The same study also exploded the fallacy of identifying the number of Jews engaged in trade with their relative weight in American commerce. The term "trade" covers a wide territory; it includes stores like Macy's and Gimbel's as well as a soda-water stand, and the enormous super-market as well as the push-cart on Orchard Street. What is basic to an understanding of the role Jews play in the totality of the American economy is the fact, pin-pointed by the *Fortune* study, that only 5 per cent of the chain stores were in Jewish control in the nineteen-

thirties. The same situation obtained in industry, leading *Fortune* to the conclusion that:

If the Jews have a subordinate place in finance, which they are often said to control, they have an even more inconspicuous place in heavy industry.

The participation of Jews in the control of business institutions is greatest where the institutions carry on as independent enterprises and cater to the consuming public. To the degree that an enterprise becomes part of a trust, Jewish ownership or management is eliminated even in establishments in which Jews pioneered. The movie industry is a case in point; in proportion as the influence of the large financial interests increases in the production of films, Jewish control decreases. Department stores may be cited as another example. They were largely under Jewish management not so long ago; today Jews are a diminishing minority among their governing bodies.

It is this growing divorcement from a controlling voice in big business that has made so many large Jewish capitalists members of the middle class in terms of social prestige. Their experience in this respect has been the exact reverse of the experience of the Gentile. The rich of the other ethnic groups used their wealth as an admission ticket to institutions identified with the American elite and were, for this reason, the first to drop out of their respective ethnic colonies and to assimilate. Jews, on the other hand, have encountered anti-Semitism precisely at the moment when they were rich enough to attempt to enter those institutions. They were, therefore, forced to organize country clubs of their own, to open *Jewish* golf courses, and to go to resorts with an almost exclusively *Jewish* clientele. In other words, their very financial success impelled them to form social and recreational ghettos. Pressure from without has retarded the process of assimilation among the most assimilable group within the Jewish community, confirming left-handedly Leo Baeck's brilliant observation that one of the secrets of Jewish survival was their ability to turn their problems into tasks.

What is true of Jews in the upper financial brackets is also true of Jewish professionals and white collar workers. Next to the social institutions of a recreational nature, discrimination against Jews is most pronounced in the colleges and universities and in the professions; which explains in part why the Jewish intellectual is also less prone to assimilate than the non-Jewish ethnic of similar standing. Jewish lawyers and

doctors, several investigations have conclusively demonstrated, derive their income chiefly from Jewish clients and patients. Here we have the other side of the coin so far as Jewish geographic concentration is considered. While it increases Jewish conspicuousness, it also creates a Jewish market and stimulates a material interest in the preservation of the Jewish community. Thus we find that Jewish economic progress is marked by the same duality that is so characteristic of Jewish life in general in the United States: Jews are fairly integrated in the economy of the country, but they have not lost the aspect of a distinct economic group.

The distinctiveness is sharpened by the mistrust and prejudice with which so many people view the economic wellbeing of the American Jew. This attitude is best expressed in the words of the late Dr. Raymond Kennedy:

The success of the Jews in business or the professions is not generally praised; rather it is regarded as a threat. They are not said to have "made a success of" the clothing business and the cinema industry; they have "got control" of them.

Discriminatory practices are far more prevalent in the area of economics than in the field of politics. Jews have encountered more discrimination than others, but they have also had more training in combating and counteracting discrimination. They have suffered setbacks and faced hardships, but their economic march has been steadily forward just the same.

III

Inner Consolidation

During all the time the American Jews have faced the problem of adjusting themselves to a Christian environment. they have also gone through a process of adapting themselves to a new Jewish environment.

This last process has been a rather painful affair, since Jews came here from all over the world, spoke many languages, and, prior to their meeting in America, had been removed from one another by hundreds of years and thousands of miles. There may be differences of opinion as to whether America is Diaspora, but there can be no doubt about the American Jewish settlement constituting a Kibbutz Galuyot, an "Ingathering of the Dispersion." Numerous Jewish groups which had had no contact

with one another got acquainted for the first time on American soil. The internal and external reasons that compelled them to seek a common home here have prevented the rift among them from cutting deeper and the estrangement from becoming permanent. In order to withstand the onslaught of the assimilatory processes from without, they had to assimilate to each other from within; and to avoid losing themselves in the general melting pot, it was necessary for them to burn the barriers that separated them in their own melting pot. As a result, the old lines which fragmentized the Jewish settlement into *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim*, into German Jews and Polish Jews, etc., have all but disappeared. The gulf between Reform Jews and Orthodox, between the neo-Orthodox and Conservatives, and between religious and secularist Jews has been largely bridged. Paramount in contemporary Jewish life is that which unites the Jewish community, not that which divides it. If one will look closely, he will notice that the divisive factors which linger on mostly belong to the heritage Jews brought over from former lands, while the unifying factors stem from the values they have created or acquired in this country.

The American version of Kibbutz Galuyot has also had the effect of keeping Jews here in the most intimate individual touch with Jews in other lands; and this has made a tremendous impact on the relationships between American Jewry and the Jewish communities in the rest of the world.

There is nothing new in a Jewish settlement of one country coming to the aid of Jewish settlements in other countries. What distinguishes the relief efforts of American Jewry, however, is the scope of the aid it has been called upon to raise in this country and the unparalleled place this aid has occupied in the totality of Jewish life. Here indeed we may speak of quantity turning into quality. Never before in Jewish history has one Jewish community been asked to shoulder almost single-handedly the relief burdens of the entire Jewish people. Nor has the assistance American Jews have extended to their less fortunate brothers and sisters been only of a material nature; it also included moral and political reinforcement. American relief activities have not been motivated by philanthropic considerations alone; they entailed an affirmation of and spiritual identification with the Jewish collectivity as well. There was also in the relief effort the recognition that, by helping Jews in

other lands, American Jewry was improving its own position and safeguarding its own status.

No wonder it was always easier to unite American Jewry in action in behalf of Jews in other parts of the world than on issues bearing on its own life this side of the Atlantic. From the Damascus Affair in 1840, when American Jews made their first appearance as an organized community, down to the latest efforts in the cause of Israel, there has extended in their work an unbroken chain of preoccupation with the fate of the Jewish people as a whole. This chain, linking up American Jewry with Jewish generations of all times and with Jewish communities of all lands, has also stimulated concerted action in matters pertaining to their local Jewish needs.

Because of the individual contacts American Jews have maintained with friends and relatives abroad, there has been in the aid they have rendered to Jews in other parts of the globe less of that condescending and contemptuous attitude which other prosperous Jewries displayed in dispensing relief. A comparison between the policies pursued by the Alliance Israelite in France or the Hilfsverein in pre-Hitler Germany on the one hand and those followed by the American Joint Distribution Committee and the United Jewish Appeal on the other hand will show the effects of the personal stake American Jews have had in raising funds for relief purposes. During the wars and at the height of the Nazi fury one could help his kinfolk in Europe only by helping all other Jewish victims in the same areas. A community of interests has thus been established which transcended old divisions and in which the concern for one was merged with the concern for all. The circumstance that not for a single day during three centuries of residence in this country have American Jews been completely free from obligations to Jews in the rest of the world has been of determining import in the shaping of the Jewish community in the United States.

IV

Ideological Trends

Each immigration wave has poured into the internal Jewish melting pot something that was peculiar to the life, traditions, and views of the Jews in the lands of emigration. Out

of the melting pot has come something which, while bearing the imprint of the contributions all immigrant groups made, does not resemble a single one of them. This makes the American Jewish settlement so unique a phenomenon in Jewish experience. In order to comprehend this phenomenon it is necessary to trace the ideological road American Jewry has traveled.

Reference has already been made to the fact that the main contribution of the *Sephardim* lay in their struggle for full political equality; they must also be given credit for introducing Jewish religious activity in this country.

They took their Jewishness for granted, asking no questions and offering no new answers as to its inner meaning or universal significance. To the Sephardim Judaism was the faith of Jews and Jews were the repository of Judaism — and here the matter rested. The synagogue was central in their Jewishness, and all Jewish activities outside the synagogue were merely subsidiary and peripheral. If ever there existed in this country something that had the appearance of a Jewish church, it was during the period when the Sephardim were the predominant factor in Jewish affairs. To be sure there was no Jewish Pope and no authoritarian direction in organized Jewish religion but, as regards all-inclusiveness, rigid discipline, and strict regulations against backsliding members, the Sephardic congregations had more than an accidental resemblance to the Catholic Church. This explains in part why Reform made relatively little headway among Sephardic Jews although intermarriage and apostasy were no rare occurrence in their ranks.

Jewish classical Reform was primarily an importation from Germany. What was truly revolutionary in it was not the abandonment of some vital Jewish traditions nor the innovations it has introduced into the Jewish ritual, but the fact that it was the first religious movement to draw a line of demarcation between Judaism and the Jewish people. The Pittsburgh Platform, adopted in 1885 and for nearly two generations the credo of American Reform Judaism, declared Jewish nationhood at an end and ascribed to Jewry the status of a religious sect. By one of the ironic twists with which Jewish history is replete, German Jews who denied the American Jewish community a secular *raison d'être* also supplied the most important architects and builders of Jewish institutional life outside the synagogue. They failed to draw the logical conclusions from the fact that Jewish

religion, even if interpreted in broadest universalist terms, accentuated Jewish distinctiveness and stamped Jews as an ethnic group. Throughout the three centuries of Jewish life in this country, the Jewish faith has been a segregating force *vis-a-vis* non-Jewish society and a unifying force within the Jewish settlement itself.

Conservative Judaism has recognized this dual role of Jewish religion and restored the concept of Jewish peoplehood to its historic place in the scheme of Jewish being. A Jew in this country was at one and the same time an integral part of the American nation and a member of K'lal Israel. Conservatism thus reunited Judaism with the Jewish people dialectically, even as the two were always united metaphysically in Jewish Orthodoxy.

As the political integration and economic adjustment of the Jews proceeded, certain sociological similarities have emerged which blunted the edges of the theological differences among them. The inner melting pot has modified the precepts and attitudes of the denominational groups to such an extent as to make a rapprochement between them not only possible but also inevitable. The American principle of the separation of church and state has clearly defined the area in which the synagogue was to function, leaving a wide field for the secular groups. As a result, Orthodoxy, Reform and Conservatism have come closer to a consensus on community problems than would seem conceivable at the beginning of the present century. On the basis of this consensus, organized religion has found a common ground with Jewish secularism.

Not until the closing decades of the nineteenth century did a secularist trend appear on the American Jewish scene. True, a number of philanthropic and community institutions not directly tied to the synagogue were organized during the German period, and even among the early *Sephardim* there were some clubs and benevolent societies which functioned outside the synagogue. But those were all ancillary agencies which retained autonomy in administrative matters and submitted to religious authority in spiritual affairs. A *philosophy* of Jewish peoplehood — one based on the proposition that Jewish survival was not necessarily bound up with, and was in some respects actually antagonistic to, organized religion — was first evolved under the impact of mass-immigration from eastern Europe.

The various social and cultural movements which have arisen on the crest of that immigration — diverse and mutually exclusive though they were in many respects — all had one common trait in that they based their programs on mass action rather than on efforts of individuals. The Jewish labor organizations, the Zionist groups, the Yiddish literature, press and theatre, the Hebrew literature, the Jewish literature in English, etc., were all produced by Jewish mass movements in the past three quarters of a century. The paradoxical situation of economic and social conflicts paving the way for ethnic consolidation is what distinguished Jewish development in this country from that of any other ethnic group. Had not the various social, religious, and cultural segments of the Jewish population originally embarked on a program of building institutions to serve their individual ideological ends and meet their peculiar organizational needs, there would have been no basis, in later years, for the rise of all-inclusive central Jewish agencies. Out of the social and ideological differences that marked American Jewish life there emerged the edifice of the present Jewish community with all of its power and shortcomings.

V

Zionism

The secular movements which arose at the end of the nineteenth century moved in two directions. Some were dedicated to the rejuvenation and normalization of Jewish national life on the basis of Jewish statehood in Eretz Israel, others sought to alter the structure of the existing social order on the basis of a classless society. The most important movement among the former was Zionism; the most important among the latter, socialism. Labor Zionism was the only sector on the Jewish ideological front which linked up the two movements in one program of action.

The impact of Zionism — and we are here concerned only with the part it has played in Jewish development in this country — has been tremendous, although it got off to a slow start and did not hit its stride until the end of World War I. By gaining the sympathy and support of at least ninety per cent of

American Jewry, Zionism has proved to be the most consolidating influence in Jewish life. No other movement — religious or secular — has done more to break down the barriers that separated one Jewish group from the other. No other movement has caused the reentry into the sphere of Jewish collective endeavor of so many Jewish individuals who had lost interest in Jewish affairs. Zionism is the one ideological movement that has cut across all social differentiation and class division among the Jewish population.

Zionism has strengthened immeasurably the urge of the Jewish individual to give tangible form to his Jewish identity — an urge stimulated by developments at home as well as events abroad, the latter culminating in the Nazi holocaust on the one hand and the proclamation of the State of Israel on the other.

The Hitler tragedy has reenforced the community bonds between American Jewry and the Jews in other lands at a time when the ties of individual kinship were becoming looser. It has also enhanced the sense of responsibility that Jews in this country felt for Jewish wellbeing the world over. For the first time in history the survival of the Jewish people was literally placed in the hands of American Jewry. And then, too, for the first time in its own experience did the American Jewish settlement make the shattering discovery that anti-Semitism was not something that could place its own security in jeopardy.

Then came World War II. Never before have Jews in the American armed forces been engaged in a struggle in which Jewish survival was so inextricably interwoven with the defense of their own country. Many saw action in Europe, Africa and in the Far East, and there came in direct contact with Jewish communities of which they had known next to nothing. The Jewish people as a worldwide entity ceased being an abstract concept and became a living reality. This was both a terrifying and heart-warming experience, whose impact has followed the ex-GI's in civilian life.

Even more profound was the impact of the emergence of the State of Israel. The State came into being at a crucial moment in the life of American Jewish youth and young adults. They had reached a crossroad in their search for emotional and moral anchorage. Pressures from without sharpened in them the need for identification with the Jewish community, but there had as yet not crystallized the inner striving to give real

meaning to this identification. Arising at the time it did, the State of Israel turned Jewish "belongingness" into a voluntary act. The American Jew, given the choice, elected to remain a Jew because he wanted to be one and not because he was driven to it by rejection from without.

VI

The Jewish Labor Movement

The mass-base of Jewish socialism was the Jewish labor movement. Made up of new workers without an agricultural background, lacking a proletarian tradition or industrial experience, composed of laborers employed exclusively by Jews, representing an isolated island in the sea of American economy—the Jewish labor movement, at its inception and during its most prosperous years, manifested two contradictory tendencies with regard to social philosophy. One denied the existence of a Jewish people, rejected the notion that the survival of the Jews as a people was something with which the labor movement need concern itself, and considered participation in general Jewish affairs on the part of organized workers a betrayal of the class-interests of the proletariat. The other recognized the existence of a Jewish working class and considered the Yiddish language and the modern secular Jewish culture the most important mental weapons at the disposal of the Jewish labor movement in the process of strengthening its class positions within the Jewish community. Paradoxically, the same Jewish labor movement which forged the most important contemporary cultural links connecting American Jews with Jews in other lands, was also the only labor movement in history to be devoid of national moorings at the time of its formation.

During the first decade of the present century the Jewish labor movement took definite shape. Its main pillars were the Jewish unions, most of which were affiliated with the United Hebrew Trades, the Workmen's Circle, and the Jewish Daily Forward—the latter, representing the Socialist groups. Whatever opposition the labor leadership of the movement encountered emanated from two sources: from the anti-labor forces in the Jewish community, and from the more radical groups

within the labor movement itself. Not until the first World War, however, was any serious exception taken by rank and file workers to the *Jewish* views their leaders were holding and to the policies the latter were pursuing *vis-a-vis* the Jewish community. To be sure, there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction among workers who adhered to Socialist-Zionist conceptions on Jewish problems, but this caused hardly a ripple on the surface.

The undercurrent was turned into a roaring stream, however, during World War I. For the first time the leaders were faced with a serious challenge not on issues of social philosophy or organizational procedures, but on the specific forms in which this philosophy and these procedures were to be applied in the Jewish habitat and integrated into the struggle of Jewish survival. The whole proposition of a Jewish labor movement turning its back on the attempts of the Jewish people to reconstruct its national life was attacked; and the attack gained momentum as the Jewish workers, protected in their economic rights by stabilized unions, were beginning to pay more attention to the issues facing them as Jews. No amount of theorizing about the class-struggle could convince the workers that the alleviation of the plight of Jews in the war-stricken areas was no concern of the Jewish labor movement in America. And the Balfour Declaration, with the resulting emergence of Palestine as a haven of refuge for homeless Jews, followed by the rise of a labor movement in that country, brought to the average Jewish worker a realization that Zionism was not the reactionary dream he had been told it was.

This trend, coupled with the increasing activization in American affairs, revolutionized the relationships between the Jewish labor movement and the Jewish community. Beginning with the war relief activities which brought the Joint Distribution Committee into being, the Jewish labor movement has increasingly participated in all undertakings of a general Jewish nature.

As the only organization in which Zionist philosophy was synthesized with socialist ideology, Labor Zionism has played a significant role in the social reorientation of the Jewish labor movement. Through that movement Jewry has probably made its greatest contribution to the welfare of the American people and the extension of American democracy.

VII

The Present Jewish Community

The emergence of the American Jewish community as a decisive factor in Jewish world affairs coincided with the appearance of the United States as a determining factor in the international arena. In World War I the United States came to full flower as a world power; during the same War American Jewry came of age as a community.

But Jewish community organization has not kept pace with Jewish growth in the United States. Structurally, the Jewish community still has the appearance of a reversed pyramid. The various Jewish institutions and agencies are still so many loose rings. Not until they are linked into a chain will the American Jewish community be in a position to fulfill its historic mission as the most important Jewish center outside the State of Israel.

It is fortunate that the present crucial moment in world Jewish history has found the Jewish settlement in the United States so firmly entrenched in American life. To be sure, American Jewry does not have the Jewish national zeal, the social passion, and the deep rootedness in Jewish culture that pre-Hitler eastern European Jewry had; but on the other hand it also does not have the sense of insecurity and inferiority which was so characteristic of western Jewry since the Emancipation. Assimilation here is an objective process rather than a conscious movement; and it is precisely for this reason that the clash between the positive and negative forces that enter into Jewish survival will probably become sharper as time goes on.

The American Jewish community rests on a foundation of voluntarism. It has no police power and no authority other than that which flows from the good will of its members, and it is guided by a spirit of give and take. It respects difference of opinion and tolerates conflict of views. It derives its strength from the fact that it is not wedded to outworn forms of organization and that it has not bought its integration in American nationhood at the cost of disaffiliating from Jewish peoplehood.

However in its very strength also lies its main weakness. Emboldened to embark upon new ventures as a community, it runs the risk of drifting away from the Jewish communities

in other lands. There is the danger that increasing preoccupation with the concrete issues of living in this country may becloud the vision of the American Jew, so as to cause him to lose sight of the world aspects of the Jewish question. Disquieting tendencies toward isolationism are already making themselves felt in some influential Jewish quarters.

There is a sundering potential in every significant facet of Jewish communal endeavor. In proportion as the various Jewish groups are drawing closer to each other here, they tend to move away from their counterparts in other lands. To the extent that American Jews succeed in evolving their own new mores, they incline to loosen their devotion to the old Jewish folkways. This tendency is to be noticed in religion which, while experiencing a considerable upsurge among the new generations of American Jews, is developing here into something that does not look like the religion other Jews practice. The same tendency is to be observed in the social welfare institutions which are gradually stripping themselves of their Jewish moorings and are, in consequence, impelled to resort to dubious social rationalizations to justify their existence. A similar tendency is to be detected in the work of our community relations agencies which, seeking to shorten the distance between Jew and Christian in this country, contribute to the lengthening of the distance between Jew and Jew worldwide.

No one knows what the future holds in store for us as we enter into the fourth century of our life in this country. Of one thing there can be little doubt however: the tragedy of the breaking up of the Jewish people into isolated tribes will be averted only by the concerted efforts of American Jewry now celebrating its tercentenary and the State of Israel now in the seventh year of its rebirth. Mutually fructifying relationships between the two Jewries now holding the fate of the Jewish people in their hands will not spring up automatically; they will have to be forged on the anvil of social planning, political action, and cultural creativity.

VIII

Conclusion

American Jewry has produced more than its share of outstanding individuals—men and women who created enduring values in the arts and sciences, in philosophy and education, in politics and public welfare, in industry and commerce, as well as in labor organization. But the American Jewish community is not the child of great individuals; it is the collective creation of millions of simple men and women who came to this country from the four corners of the earth to escape oppression and persecution and to build a home for themselves in peace and security. Desperately poor, they were no spiritual paupers, having brought with them a legacy which has sustained them and helped them retain a moral equilibrium in their psychological and mental transplantation. The weak fell by the wayside, the faint of heart deserted from the battlefield; but the vast majority stood fast in their love for their adopted homeland and in loyalty to the Jewish heritage. These humble Jewish folk, who toiled in the sweatshops and doubled up under the weight of the peddler's pack; who time and again saw their fondest hopes shattered and yet found the courage to make their dreams come true; who in the face of insurmountable difficulties emerged victorious in the struggle to preserve their identity; who, despite tragic disappointments, did not lose faith in either American freedom or Jewish national redemption—they are the real heroes, mostly unsung, of American Jewish history. It is they who made possible the *conscious* conversion of problems into tasks.

Their trials and tribulations have given rise to a new Jew. For better or for worse, he will be different from Jews of other generations and lands. Without the old cultural wellsprings that have sustained Jewish life in this country for three centuries, and without new waves of immigration to reinforce the American Jewish community, he will have only his own dynamism and the stimulating energy that the State of Israel will engender to broaden his horizons. And he will benefit by the spiritual values Israel will create only in proportion as he will be able to absorb them and make them meaningful in his own life.

Heretofore American Jewry has advanced largely as a result of spontaneous and unorganized processes. As it enters into the fourth century of its existence, a radically altered situation obtains. Further progress will depend on the ability of the Jewish community to plan its life and to bring its organizational structure in line with the responsibilities Jewish destiny has placed on its shoulders.

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