

THE EUTHANASIA OF ANGLO-JEWRY

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HAPPY is the minority that has no history. The Jews of Britain, Dr Neustatter shows in this book,¹ are impossible to count with any accuracy. They carry no identity cards, fill no special column of the census, have no special status defined by law. Once, at the beginning of their community in the seventeenth century, they would have wished for such a status. Luckily for themselves, they were never given it. They have had to contend, says Dr Parkes, with conservatism rather than official hostility or formal anti-semitism. They have increased, flourished, and absorbed what has sometimes been a trickle and sometimes a flood of new immigrants. There were 350 Jews in Britain in 1690, 35,000 in 1850, 350,000 in the late 'thirties, 450,000 in 1950. One European Jew in 27 was British in the 'thirties, one in six, after the Hitlerite massacres, in 1951.

Naturally, there have been times of difficulty. The great flight from Russia from the 1880's to the first World War, which filled up trades like tailoring and the classic Jewish quarters of the East End, threatened to associate Jewry in the public mind with sweating, overcrowding, and undesirable aliens. But the crisis was handled skilfully and passed, thanks partly to the good sense and qualities of the immigrants themselves and partly to the cohesion, good management, and readiness to pay of the Jewish community previously established. The Jewish immigration as a whole has brought great economic benefits to Britain. Perhaps I see these through too rosy spectacles, for who is a Montague Burton Professor to bite the Chair he sits on? But look at commerce alone, think of a few of the Jewish names which have become household words, and it is obvious what the gain has been. Montague Burton is one: Marks and Spencer another: Lyons a third. These are the giants. At lower levels, we in the Catholic social movement have always had a special interest in the Small Man who stands on his own feet, owns his own tools, and operates his own business. Six per cent of men in the general

1 Maurice Freedman (ed.) *A Minority in Britain*, Valentine, Mitchell, and Co., 1955. 21s. xvi + 267 pp. Sponsored by the *Jewish Chronicle*.

population do so, but 69 per cent of those in the *Jewish Chronicle's* sample. We sometimes complain of the rising tide of married women who work; we might reflect that Jewish married women are much less likely to do so than others.

As confidence has grown and the Anglo-Jewish community has settled down, its culture has become steadily more open, that is assimilated to the British culture surrounding it. Zionism has much support, but very few British Jews have chosen to exchange British nationality for that of Israel. Yet within the British culture they have kept a quality of their own, expressed in religious, social service, and political institutions which in many ways are a model for other minority groups, such as Catholics. And they have livened up British life with other less formal qualities such as the 'Potteresque technique of Machmanship', which 'Mr Witriol has with much wit', happily notes Mr Freedman, defined . . . 'as the art of getting elected to Synagogue Boards of Management without Actually Asking People to vote for you.'

And yet over this story of success there hangs, if this study is right, the shadow of death. I am not thinking of such relatively minor matters as the persistence of a degree of social, as apart from official, anti-semitism, as to which Dr Eysenck's studies are here quoted and criticized. I mean quite straightforwardly that on the indications here given, the Anglo-Jewish community could very well, in a few generations, pass painlessly and indeed luxuriously away. Its reproduction rate seems to have fallen, on an admittedly weak sample, to the fantastically low level of 0.46, less than half what is needed to keep up the population unless new waves of immigrants come in from sources yet to be revealed. Mixed marriages have multiplied in this generation to the point where they too represent a serious net loss to Jewry. What of it? one might say. I who write this am not a Jew: am I to deplore this loss? Yes, even a non-Jew must deplore it. For what is happening is not that Jews are turning to what I would regard as a truer view of life. It is that the Jewish religion and the Jewish population are being undermined by the same forces which are also undermining Christianity and taking away from Christian peoples their will to create and live.

What is a Jew? asks Dr Parkes, The answer, he and Mr Freedman conclude, can be given only in terms of a history, from Israel of old back to Israel today, and a religion. British Jews seem by

and large to be too fully identified with Britain to share fully in what Israel nationalism has meant to Jews elsewhere in Europe. There remains their religion.

'The synagogue and the related educational institutions still are, and must continue to be, the central institutions of the community. . . . Those Jews who do not support religious life but who desire some group activity as Jews are, so to speak, parasites upon the inner core.' (p. 197.)

But it is precisely the religion of Jews which is crumbling, though not necessarily faster than that of Christians. It is cracking at the core. Once, 'the criterion of the self-sufficiency of a community was the quality of its rabbi's learning' (p. 189). Now, Talmudic learning is not quite so much in the foreground: a rabbi may well succeed more by public relations, less by learning in the Law. And practice is falling off. Within the last century the Jewish population has increased thirteen-fold, Synagogue membership only seven-fold. Little over a quarter of Jewish men are Synagogue members, and in the Inter-University Federation of Jewish Students—note, a specifically Jewish body—a sample study suggests that religious indifference may have doubled or trebled from the last generation to this. As religious belief and respect for learning go down, interest in conformity to the non-Jewish world goes up, and (p. 193) 'the emphasis on wealth has got out of hand'. Wealth was respected in the more traditional Jewish community in so far as it served as a basis for charity, hospitality, and the community's public service, or provided the leisure for scholarship. Today it may rather be a case of valuing wealth for its own sake, and even of 'the spurning of scholarly activities among some on the ground that they are unprofitable' (p. 193).

But the cohesion of Jewry has never rested solely on the synagogue. It has been helped somewhat by hostility from outside, and more—much more—by kinship and a highly developed system of social and political, or better 'representative', institutions. If the rot is now to be stopped, what is to be the new target? Are Jews to aim simply at being Englishmen of the Jewish faith? Or are they to retain, or intensify and revive, their character as a distinct community with their own institutions? Mr Freedman raises the question on the last page of this book and leaves it open: for the book as a whole is quite frankly intended as the opening of a discussion about minorities in Britain, not—even as regards the

Jewish minority—its conclusion. The question is one which applies as well to a Catholic community as to a Jewish, and it is one on which Catholic communities are divided. A Dutch Catholic will answer in favour of communal institutions, an American in favour of assimilation nearly all along the line. Admittedly, the question is posed for Catholics in rather different terms. Our aim is not merely survival but conquest: we wish to transform the world around us, whereas one of the most striking features of this book to a non-Jewish reader is the absence of any such intention on the part of the Jews. The accent is on maintaining the Jewish community, not expanding it: converts are not welcome. Nevertheless, there is much in the case of the Jewish minority from which the Catholic minority can learn. As I follow in these pages the record of a community in which brothers do indeed bear one another's burdens, solve their problems for themselves, and stand shoulder to shoulder in their dealings with the outside world, I find the picture undeniably impressive. There is force in that way of running a community, as well as warmth and mutual support. We English Catholics sometimes accuse our Dutch brethren of being ghetto-minded. Looking at Anglo-Jewry, I wonder whether the Dutch may not be right after all.