

THE POSITION OF THE JEWS IN ENGLISH SOCIETY¹

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I. THE CIVIL STATUS OF ENGLISH JEWS

THE CIVIL STATUS of the Jews in England, both in theory and in practice, is similar to, if not identical with, that of the Jews in the United States. There are no important sore spots as far as civil rights are concerned. The Jewish community, when it was re-established in England in the seventeenth century, was a tightly-knit, enclosed society which exerted a great deal of control over its members, not only in religion but also with respect to those things done by Jews which might provoke anti-Jewish feeling and action. The community was not, however, a ghetto on the model of those existing in the continental absolute monarchies of the time, that is, involved in a net of legal and customary arrangements that would require a major political upheaval to undo. Its status, by contrast, was vague, an ambiguous mixture of medieval and modern practice. This made it possible for the Jews to acquire civic equality through *ad hoc* judicial decisions or acts of legislation.² Still, this process, which was by no means a continuous and even development, took about two hundred years. Full civic emancipation was preceded by the gradual rise of modern political philosophy, a change in the aspirations of the Jews themselves (which, of course, was largely a result of the former), and the development of social relationships between Jews and Gentiles in high places. What is crucial in all this is that once the goal was attained, the opposition surrendered completely. There has never been since then a responsible proposal to deprive the Jews of their civic rights.³

From the point of view of personal security there is the same legal protection as in the United States and a similar quality of enforcement of the law. Illegal or extra-legal violence or defamation, particularly from hooligans, may, in fact, be somewhat greater in the United States. (For example, there is probably more desecration of Jewish graveyards in America than in England.) In any event, this is under control in

[This paper is the first of a series in which national Jewries will be commented on by writers who are not members of them.—EDITOR]

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England.⁴ The British police act with dispatch and efficiency in such cases.

Further, there is no danger from organized political groups with anti-Jewish views. Before the war the government, by a single act of legislation, effectively prevented the transformation of the British fascists into the kind of private army which wrecked the Weimar Republic in Germany. The Public Order Act of 1936 forbade the carrying of offensive weapons and empowered the Home Secretary to forbid political processions and to close provocative meetings. When, shortly after the war, the British fascists had a brief resurgence and began a series of processions into the heart of Jewish districts in London, with considerable disorder, the Home Secretary revoked their permit to march.⁵ Thus, in England, which is by no means an unfree society, the concern for civil liberties has never become the doctrinaire obsession which has been so paralysing to some modern democracies. The Jewish community, for its part, enjoys excellent relations with the police in the surveillance and control of fascism. Partly because of the support which it gets from the society at large, partly because of relative freedom from the 'it can't happen here' delusion, the Jewish community has never been frightened into abject cowardice. In short, the security of Jews, individually and as a community, is in no danger.⁶

What is more, Anglo-Jewish society maintains itself in a benign and altogether decent atmosphere. The Jewish community, as an organized entity, is treated with respect; and the non-Jewish society is prepared to accommodate itself in a variety of ways to the requirements of religious practice where careless collision might otherwise take place. During the war, for example, Jews who desired to observe kashruth were given special ration arrangements. (So were vegetarians.) At a few of the public schools there are provisions for kosher food. And, in general, blatant anti-Jewishness would not be regarded as 'good form'. Further, yet, the entry into leading political and social positions of Jews who are identified as Jews and who are under no pressure to convert is relatively greater and altogether a much more normal phenomenon than in the United States. The proportion of Jewish Members of Parliament is more than five times as high as the proportion of Jews in the population. And, it must be borne in mind, there is no Jewish vote.⁷ Since 1886, when Rothschild was created the first Jewish peer, Jews have been regularly elevated to the House of Lords; and for some time before that they had already been granted the distinctions of baronet and knight. A Jew, Lord Samuel, is the leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Lords; there are Jews who are heads of Oxford and Cambridge colleges; a Jew has been elected to the board of governors of Eton; Jews, though in small number, are present at all the great public schools, which are crucial institutions in the social class system of England; Jews are members of leading London clubs.

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In fact, though discrimination exists, the attitude of 'no Jews admitted' is more characteristic of the middle class (such as in the suburban golf and tennis clubs) than of the upper class. Their entry into the upper stratum of English social life, small though it may be, is still significant enough to make the situation of English Jews considerably different from that of American Jews.

II. THE NATURE OF ENGLISH SOCIETY AND CULTURE

England is a country which combines the spirit of aristocracy with the political forms of democracy.⁸ Besides such visible marks of aristocracy as the cult of the horse, aristocratic conceptions pervade the heart of the educational system. These embrace not only a belief in unequal capacities but also a respect for standards of excellence which extends throughout the entire nation. A rigorous classical education and the apprentice system fit together in the same society. But what is most significant in this discussion is that the aristocracy in England is still, to a great extent, a ruling class. Not only does politics have great dignity and importance for the members of the titled and landed classes themselves. Aristocracy, in addition, has provided a model for the whole of the civil service and, in general, for the democratic elements in English political life. In fact, if one examines the direction of the egalitarian changes which have been taking place in England in recent times, one finds that the attack upon the position of the landed classes, in so far as it has been these and not the capitalist system as such that have come under attack, has been aimed less against aristocracy as such than against caste—to use Tocqueville's distinction—and against those gross forms of privilege that derive from inordinate wealth.⁹ The gentleman, which is the aristocratic conception separable from caste, is still regarded as the ideal type of man in this society. He is expected to, and does, find the natural outlet for his leadership in holding political office.

The United States presents a wholly different set of facts. The absence of a powerful landed gentry, particularly in the new areas opened up by pioneers, enabled the triumph of democracy to be much more complete than in England and to penetrate far beyond mere outward forms. Aristocracy, which increasingly came to mean plutocracy in America, was eclipsed in politics, which it subsequently came to despise and seek to control only from behind the scenes. Authority, in other words, split into its two components of power and honour, which then became separate elements in the society. Deprived of the natural outlet for leadership, namely, the open exercise of political authority, the vanity of those who consider themselves to be the leading men is by this very fact inflamed. In so far as they resign themselves to the political situation, their vanity is thus led to find a refuge in social things—for example, an obsession with ancestry or social

exclusiveness. In America it is in this social sphere that the aristocracy has taken its revenge upon the democracy. Having been forced to retreat to a sector which by its very nature can only be peripheral to the centre of gravity of the political community, they have invested it with an importance out of all proportion to good taste, let alone political reality. In England, by contrast, the question of dignities and honours is settled. The regulation of ranks and distinctions by the monarchy assures widespread respect for them (though it is of course possible for a monarch deliberately to cheapen the value of a title by distributing it almost *en masse*). Thus, in England, the desire for recognition and status does not have to create its own, essentially private symbols of distinction, but can aim at honours that are universally acknowledged.¹⁰

It is no accident that in a democracy snobbishness can be far more vicious than in an aristocracy. Lacking that natural confirmation of superiority which political authority alone can give, the rich, and particularly the new rich, feel threatened by mere contact with their inferiors.¹¹ This tendency perhaps reached its apogee in the late nineteenth century in Tuxedo Park, a select residential community composed of wealthy New York businessmen, which, not content merely to surround itself with a wire fence, posted a sentry at the gate to keep non-members out.¹² Nothing could be more fantastic than this to an English lord living in the country in the midst, not of other peers, but of his tenants. His position is such that he is at ease in the presence of members of lower classes and in associating with them in recreation. It is this 'democratic' attitude which, in the first instance, makes for an openness to social relations with Jews. One cannot be declassed, so to speak, by play activities.

Furthermore, the English aristocracy, having never been displaced from power by a violent revolution, and having thus had a long experience of responsible administration, have all the characteristics of political maturity: reasonableness, good sense, and freedom from romantic reaction. Prepared to bow gracefully to their gradual eclipse, and themselves in large measure the very agents of the alteration of the class structure, they neither feel threatened by democratization nor would be predisposed to react to these changes by harbouring desires and plans for revenge. Hence they are not the logical carriers of an anti-Jewish political programme. (This freedom from reaction is, one might add, a distinguishing feature of British politics in general.)

But what is perhaps the most important fact about the stratification of English society is that its upper class is a stratum of gentlemen. Now in speaking of a gentleman, one must consider the natural marks as well as those conventional marks of social status, such as accent, which vary from one society to another. The first would include such things as pride and a sense of dignity, freedom from pettiness, courteousness towards inferiors, a responsible concern for the public life, etc. Though by no

means every member of the English upper class is a gentleman in this precise sense—one has only to think of the international set—such qualities are sufficiently present in this class to distinguish it from almost all continental aristocracies. These qualities are, of course, developed by a specific type of training and education—non-technical and non-co-educational—such as the public and the grammar schools provide. To be sure, these schools are intertwined with the conventional usages of the upper class. These are, of course, if not indispensable, at least convenient places for learning the style of life, the cultural habits, and what Hobbes called the ‘small morals’ of the peculiarly English gentleman. But what is in fact more important to emphasize is that these schools, and the wider social fabric of which they are a natural part, have a great deal to do with the formation of those qualities that compose a gentlemanly character. They do not always succeed; but this is, by and large, their explicit goal.

As I have said above, the gentleman is a conception that is separable from caste. What relationship is there, then, between family background and this ideal and the class structure in general? This is the age-old question of birth versus breeding that has occupied the writers of manuals on the gentleman at least since the Renaissance. Observation shows that wise men can beget fools, which is enough to dispel the absolute pretensions of heredity. But awareness of great descent can act upon one as an obligatory standard, just as awareness of inferior descent can make one ashamed, nervous, and too anxious to impress. In so far as it affects one’s pride and ease, not to mention the chances for education and leisure, family background evidently limits the individuality of the gentlemanly ideal. Then, also, it would be beyond reason to expect that in a society with a family system, caste-like snobbery would be altogether abolished. None the less, the English upper class is the most open aristocracy in the world, free of that obsession with blood and quarterings which marks the continental aristocracies (with whom, to be fair, the English could hardly compete in this respect).

These characteristics of the English aristocracy taken together—their established position, their adherence to the gentlemanly ideal, and their political maturity as peers amongst a free tenantry who are not peasants, let alone serfs—explain a number of facts, including the ease, in contradistinction to all European aristocracies, with which the English aristocracy has been able to assimilate the bourgeoisie in general. On the one hand it has been prepared to trade social acceptance for the right to govern and mould a society whose wealth is, in fact, commercial.¹³ On the other hand it has had the good sense to be willing to form family alliances with the business class to replenish fortunes and even to send its younger sons into commerce.¹⁴ The aristocracy has never had that thoroughgoing contempt for commerce which might have permanently sundered aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Unthreatened, pro-

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vided the bourgeoisie were willing to surrender themselves at least potentially to the aristocratic ideal, the aristocracy have not only looked with amusement upon the ambitions of those who would buy social position but have also openly engaged in the selling of the prerequisites.¹⁵ It has been much easier to buy one's way into society (including titles) in England than in the United States.¹⁶ If 'first-generation peer' is a term of derision, it at least suggests future possibilities.

All this was true in the heyday of the aristocracy. Today members of the gentry enter business (though typically managerial positions in large corporations) as a matter of course. And even though the security that great wealth could confer is rapidly disappearing with the attrition of inherited fortunes, one thing remains to fix the social pre-eminence of the aristocracy: the monarchy and the activities of the court around it.

Respect for the rights of the Jewish community as a corporate entity and fair treatment for Jews by government officials are logical consequences of rule by gentlemen. The malice of the German and Austrian civil servants, who gave the Jews absurd surnames, is lacking in their English counterparts. Even where a civil servant might privately have anti-Jewish sentiments, he would not allow these so to obtrude upon the conduct of his administration as to make him deviate from the impartiality required of his office.

Finally, the position and outlook of the aristocracy explain their willingness to associate as social equals with Jews who have acquired the specific cultural traits of the gentry. These are signs by which one gentleman recognizes another.

Altogether one may say that in a society like the English, with a relatively firm aristocratic structure, it is paradoxically easier to move up the social ladder than in a democracy like the American. In the United States there has been no lack of opportunity to get rich, as the achievements of poor immigrants have impressively shown. But is this not as much a testimony to the wealth of the country as it is to political and social equality? In England, at any rate, provided one has brains, one can be *selected*, by virtue of the scholarship system at both public schools and the ancient universities, for admission to those institutions. And with the fixed place that they occupy in English society, anyone who has attended them is at once granted the standing of a gentleman as well as endowed with a skein of connexions—for jobs, clubs, political life, social life, etc.—that serve to solidify his social position for the rest of his life. Furthermore, once one has this standing it is not easily lost, as it does not depend exclusively on wealth. Thus, where there is a fixed class structure, provided it does not freeze altogether into a caste system, there can be great opportunity for personal talent.

Thus a Jew who goes to one of the leading public schools has a wide entry into high places in English society. This entry may also be won, but with less certainty, through attendance at one of the ancient universities, Oxford and Cambridge. These are larger and socially more heterogeneous than the public schools; and associations formed there are obviously not of the same character as those that develop between adolescents. It is the extraordinary durability of the relationships between boys away from their families which makes the public school such an important social institution in English life. But it is well to recall that the gentry, by the most mannered application of class distinctions, can appear extremely cruel to 'pushers' lacking in the subtle qualifications of the class to which they aspire.¹⁷

The Jews on the whole did not play a direct part in the classic industrial revolution. Wealthy Jews before this century were merchants, brokers or bankers. They were thus outside the strife which emerged, for example, between miner and mine-owner in times of depression. The trade unions, for their part, have been motivated in their demands less by ideological considerations (such as characterized, for example, Nazism or Marxism) than by a haunting fear of unemployment. Their objectives have been concerned with matters like wages, hours, and production quotas. Their conservatism in this respect, one might add, is a serious problem for the efficiency of British technology.

In so far as Jews became manufacturers in the textile and furniture trades, they were until this century owners of small-scale shops, whose workmen, besides, were overwhelmingly Jewish. It is only recently that Jewish ownership—for example, in industry and department stores—has faced a really sizeable body of non-Jewish employees. There is no problem of anti-Jewish feeling in this sphere. In fact, a firm which has perhaps the most benign policy of labour relations in England is not merely Jewish but is distinctively known as such.

What about the business class itself? The Jews had the good fortune to be supported in England by political men like Cromwell who, themselves not businessmen, regarded commercial activity as a source of national strength. It was they who not only were in favour of the resettlement of a Jewish community of traders but also were prepared to grant them increasing freedom from civil disabilities. From the beginning, however, these political men had to cope with and placate the intransigent anti-Jewish opinion of the Corporation of the City of London, who feared the Jews as competitors. Until 1831 the City, which jealously guarded its prerogatives, excluded Jews from the right to engage in retail trade within its boundaries and opposed every effort to grant the Jews full civic rights.¹⁸ It seems reasonable to conclude that if the City had dominated the government, the Jews would not have been readmitted to England as early as they were.

Whatever light this throws upon the mentality of the business class,

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it must be borne in mind that the guild organization of the City merchants, with their ability to speak politically as a corporate group, was distinctive in the modern commercial scene. (Perhaps the nearest equivalent is the trade union, the voice of which has been effective in influencing immigration policy.) Nowhere else, including the area adjacent to the City walls, did the Jews encounter effective opposition to the right to do business. It is also true that after 1831 the City's opposition to further Jewish emancipation dwindled quickly; the first Jewish M.P., Baron Lionel de Rothschild, was in fact elected from the City of London. And the acquisition of civic rights gave the Jews the means for protecting themselves against a resurgence of the selfishness of the City or any other special-interest group.

The Jews won all their civil rights during a period when British power and prestige were reaching their zenith. What would happen if Britain were to experience a profound collapse would be difficult to predict. The one blot on an exemplary record in the treatment of Jews occurred during the early part of the last war, when the German Jewish refugees, who by and large had not yet acquired British citizenship, were interned as enemy aliens. In Australia, where many of them were transported, it is said that they would have been interned in the same cantonment with German non-Jews if native-born Australian Jews had not protested vigorously. But this blemish in the English record may have been a result of momentary panic; it does not indicate how the government would behave with people who felt themselves fully possessed of the rights of Englishmen.

In summary, English society is marked by the absence of any powerful group that either is actually threatened by Jewish success or would be predisposed to use Jews as a scapegoat. There is a remarkable wholeness to the fabric of the society, which has its most visible manifestation in the public order which prevails. The police, as everyone knows, are unarmed in the ordinary course of their duties. Underlying this fact is the great public trust which exists. There is no general fear of internal subversion, and this in turn rests upon the high level of public life and upon an absence of deep class conflicts, or of narrow and rigid selfishness, or of corruption generally. It is therefore readily understandable why the elements with anti-Jewish propensities are politically a fringe group.

III. MANNERS AND TRADITIONS: THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE

Religion.—The outstanding fact about Christianity in England is that it is weakest in the decisive respect, belief, and strongest and most attractive essentially in its ceremonial. To exaggerate only somewhat for purposes of clarification, one may say that throughout the whole

range of English society religion is for marriages, funerals, and coronations. Anglicanism, more nearly than any other modern branch of Christianity, would seem to approximate the status which paganism had for the educated classes in antiquity. The upper classes are simply bored by doctrinal controversy, and the workers' abandonment of the church is the obverse side of Orwell's observation that a key change in the England of this century is the passing of the general belief in immortality. Hence the possibilities of an anti-Jewish outlook or programme grounded on Christian doctrine are limited to tiny coteries of intellectuals amongst converted Catholics and Anglo-Catholics. The anti-Jewishness of such people is probably greater than that of any other group in England. Although they seem to take religion seriously, no one, of course, can tell exactly in what way. It is plausible, however, and even suggested by their own statements, that their attraction to a hierarchical and ritually elaborate religion rests upon an ultimately utilitarian consideration: religion is a prop for a romantic conservative outlook hostile to commerce and democracy. The Jews, from this point of view, are not so much the enemies of Christ as the purveyors of mass-produced vulgarity. This, of course, is hardly the stuff out of which a mass movement is made. Nor would these individuals (at least in the Anglo-Saxon world) lend their support to palpable enemies of civilization.

In so far as Christian belief was a living force in the English past, as for example during the seventeenth century, it was imbued with a Puritanism based on the Old Testament that made for a strange kind of philo-Hebraism.¹⁹ (To this day Hebraic scholarship is highly esteemed in English academic life and is of a high calibre.) The same philo-Hebraism was true of Presbyterianism, the established religion in Scotland, and of all the Non-conformist sects. The resettlement of the modern Jewish community under Cromwell was made possible in part by the sympathy which the Puritans of the time gave to Menasseh ben Israel's religious petition. From that time to this many Englishmen have seen the Jews as the wondrous people of the Biblical drama.²⁰ This may still be so in Scotland.²¹ There has also been an interesting kinship between Unitarianism and Reform Judaism.

Politeness and Fairness.—Throughout the whole of English society there is a diffusion of the gentlemanly ideal and the political habits it embraces. As Max Weber noted, the gentleman, amongst the variety of types of men which societies regard as ideal, and in sharp contrast to the standards of the Prussian Junker, is intrinsically capable of being imitated.²² This must be slightly qualified. The gentleman is essentially an aristocratic, unegalitarian conception which embraces a sense of pride and dignity that is in practice incompatible with the performance of many degrading activities that have to be performed in every society. If there is, however, this natural limit to *successful* imitation of the

gentlemanly ideal, the things that are ordinarily understood today by the terms politeness and courtesy are capable of vast democratization.²³ It is with respect to these that the essentially *civil* ideal of the gentleman has so widely penetrated the manners of the English.

Then too, like those of the Dutch, English manners have been sweetened by several centuries of commerce. The English lack great warmth and are rather distant from one another, but they are polite. In fact, below the upper class and particularly in the lower middle class, it is very common to see an almost servile sort of over-politeness: what the upper class derides as 'refaynment'. The crucial precipitate of all this, in more specifically political terms than the word polite nowadays connotes, is reasonableness. In this the English have attained a style. One can explain one's point of view to an Englishman. One does not have to cringe before a civil servant.

This reasonableness coalesces, furthermore, with the ideal of fair play, that canon of a liberal society, which is buttressed by the English passion for sports. It is extraordinarily easy for anyone to assert and obtain his rights under this code. I have seen this countless times in such public situation as queues, where someone—probably inadvertently—got ahead of his proper place, was asked to 'play the game, old boy', and became terribly embarrassed and conceded without further ado.

Individualism.—English liberty, with its emphasis on rights, has produced a heightened sense of what is one's own private business. The respect for privacy is further buttressed by the Englishman's attitude towards his home. To invade this improperly is very offensive indeed. In addition, the English conduct themselves with fantastic restraint and reserve; and it would be as much a violation of the standards which this imposes to do things which are casually done in the public square in Latin countries—one hardly ever, for example, sees a child slapped in public—as it would be to stare. Altogether, as a German Jewish refugee put it, 'The English are a decent people. They leave you alone.'

In the upper classes in particular the eccentric is not merely tolerated, he is admired. When John Stuart Mill wrote his famous essay *On Liberty*, he feared that social pressure emanating from the rising middle classes would extinguish the open display of any deviation from prevailing custom. Though there is pressure towards conformity in England as in America, the full measure of Mill's fear has not been realized. Either he underestimated the number of cranks which English life produces so prolifically, or else he failed to see the possibilities of protection for individuality which an admirable sense of humour confers. If the British perceive something as 'dotty', it is safe.

When the Jews first began holding public services in the seventeenth century, the synagogue was frequented by visitors.²⁴ It is my impression

that Judaism in England to this day derives protection from being viewed in the light of something exotically interesting.

Humanitarianism.—The humanitarianism of Victorian England seems to have been a blend of political ideas and a religious impulse. Into the democratic theory and ideology of the Enlightenment was infused the enthusiasm of the Non-conformist sects, in particular, for salvation. Tempered by all the virtues of English politics, humanitarianism never seriously approached revolutionary dimensions. The result was the spirit of reform: a sense of sympathy for oppression and suffering, and a determination to correct abuse by public action.

Much must be made of the part that women began to play in this society, for it was in essence a woman's conscience that attacked the slave trade and the brutal criminal code. This spirit gradually prevailed to such a degree that agitation about impersonal causes and voluntary organization in their behalf became a normal political phenomenon. It can, of course, reach cranky proportions. There have probably been more bequests to cats in England than in any other civilized society and there was an organization of ladies called the M.A.B.Y.S.—the Metropolitan Association for the Betterment of Young Servant Girls. A most solid achievement, however, lay in the quality to which the standards of public life were raised. This was the period that witnessed the formation of the most humane and efficient civil service in the world, the disappearance of corruption from English politics, and the transformation of the raw oligarch of the eighteenth century into an educated, public-spirited gentleman.

The abolition of all civil disabilities for Jews, Dissenters, and Catholics, which occurred long after the real religious issues had been settled and which was spearheaded by the Liberals, drew for its success upon the support of this educated, humanitarian opinion. Sir Moses Montefiore's personal action in alleviating the distress of foreign Jewries had not only the sympathy but also the semi-official support of the British Government.²⁵

Untheoretical Inconsistency.—The English are a curious blend of gentleness and toughness. On the one hand, the anti-vivisection society is strong enough to be a perpetual nuisance to biologists; on the other hand, corporal punishment is more prevalent in English schools than anywhere else. One aspect of this toughness is a kind of bluntness in the very way in which Englishmen speak of Jews, and of other minorities as well. The 'dumb' Englishman does not have any of the restraint his American equivalent might have in publicly referring to a Jew as a Jew, a restraint imposed in America by the necessity felt in a democratic and ethnically heterogeneous environment to play down minority labels. This bluntness, even where it reaches vulgar forms, must not be uncritically identified as Jew-hatred. (A Jewish army officer overheard one of his men saying to another, 'The b—— Jew is all right.') Blunt-

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ness of this kind is not seated in deep emotional involvements. Nor, what is more important, is it part of a theoretical stance that seeks perfect consistency.

The English, who pride themselves on their practical wisdom and good sense, properly despise the intrusion of theory into the domain of politics; they boast about the fact that their constitution is unwritten and have a low opinion of intellectuals altogether. As practical men their main concern, in resolving political differences, is to find an area of agreement in which compromise is possible, and they would be reluctant to press discussion to those intellectually clear-cut extremes where irreconcilable conflict is explicitly spelled out and from which retreat is difficult. They would therefore hardly be disturbed by the inconsistencies to which we are necessarily impelled by genuine political life. Though this practical, gentlemanly point of view has grave consequences for the quality of theoretical reflection, it protects them within the sphere of practice from the disastrous effects of ideology.

The intellectual anti-Semite is not at home in this milieu. Jewish 'theoreticians', for example, have only just ceased worrying about the accusation of 'dual loyalty' which, they felt, unqualified support of Israel must necessarily bring about, taking pains to define Jewry, as a 'religious, not national' group. Their fears were simply beside the point. Most Englishmen would be amazed (as well as amused) to learn of their very existence.

A corollary of this attitude is the absence of ideological support for Jewish-Gentile harmony or good relations. Groups working for these ends exist. But the English, in general, regard such talk as cant; and, as in America, it has little effect on actual social relations.

IV. THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Anglo-Jewry altogether is relatively smaller than American Jewry. To take London alone, which is roughly equal to New York in population, the 250,000 Jews of London are only one-eighth as many as the Jews of New York. Though there are large enough concentrations to give a Jewish cast to certain districts of London (as well as to one or two resort cities and districts of some provincial cities), Jews do not make a visible impact at the centre of things. Then, too, because of both the small size of the Jewish community and the more restrictive, 'party manners' atmosphere of England, English Jews, even among intellectuals, would not, for example, feel as free to use Yiddish expressions in the presence of non-Jews as American Jews would in comparable circles here. The degree to which comedians in America freely use occasional Yiddish words, which surely must account in great measure for the penetration of several such words into the general vocabulary, is not equalled in England. (English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish dialects,

of course, are very much a part of the British comedian's stock in trade.) Absent from the English radio are those minority-group family serials, such as the 'Rise of the Goldbergs', which make their appearance on the American radio and television partly as a matter of right.

This is related to certain underlying political facts. Jews are neither a political bloc nor one of a number of minority blocs with whom they are roughly equated in the public eye. Minority-group politics does not exist in England. Though Jewish M.P.s may speak in behalf of Jewish interests, they do not control a Jewish vote. Both the small size of the community and the centralized party structure make it impossible for Jews to control strategic levers in the electoral machine. The government is therefore not responsive to Jewish opinion or interests as a force that must be placated. The recent shift in British policy towards Israel was wholly independent of calculation about Jewish interests in these terms.

Thus Jews entering politics are more or less forced to transcend the boundaries not only of the Jewish community but also of the minority group as such. In fact, the significant aspect under which the Jewish community is treated as a corporate entity is in its character of a religious group—for the most part on ceremonial occasions. The Chief Rabbi from time to time is commanded to have an audience of the sovereign and would be invited to coronations.

All this very much suited the old Anglo-Jewish leadership, who deliberately avoided the publicity of parliamentary procedures. Following in the path of the traditional *shtadlan*, they preferred to act quietly, out of the public eye, in their dealings with government officials with whom they had patiently established personal connexions of long standing.²⁶ In the split which occurred within the Jewish community over Zionism, the Zionist mass came to depreciate this preference as cowardly and wrested control of the chief representative institution, the Board of Deputies, away from the old leadership. The public resolution then began to be an instrument of the Board's activities. In part the disdain for the old quietness had a demagogic character, heightened by the first flush of a great enthusiasm, but more fundamentally a difference about aims rather than method caused the breach. With the establishment of the State of Israel this whole issue has expired; and in any case personal relations between *shtadlanim* (who are coming more and more to be salaried officials of the Jewish community) and governmental officials have remained and will remain a characteristic feature of minority life.

In general, English Jews in high places, throughout the history of the modern settlement, have avoided becoming controversial public figures. There is no English equivalent of the hatred which Léon Blum aroused in certain French quarters.

All this points to what cannot be a too flattering observation. This is

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that Anglo-Jewry has slumbered beneath the visible surface of English life. With the one exception of Disraeli, who is altogether atypical, the Anglo-Jewish community has not dazzled, to cause either admiration or resentment in the non-Jewish world. It has not made a mark upon this world. Its inner life, too, exhibits a similar lack of brilliance. What accounts for this?

First and foremost, there is the character of the leadership of Anglo-Jewry, the men who set the tone of the community's outlook and way of life.²⁷ From the days of the resettlement (and earlier in Holland, as well), there was a marked change from the standards of what we may loosely call the traditional Jewish community. Authority passed from the learned rabbi to the businessman. Early in their history the London Jews had acquired the reputation of being interested only in business.²⁸ This is not quite correct. They also wanted to be gentlemen. It is the hybrid ideal of the gentleman and the businessman that defined the spirit of the Anglo-Jewish community and which can be summed up in one word: respectability.

Absorbed in commerce, which was just beginning to enjoy the prestige it has in the modern world, English Jews could in full propriety look down not merely upon heroism (as did their non-Jewish counterparts) but also upon the impractical matter of Jewish scholarship as well. As gentlemen, too, they disdained the passionate immersion in study that constituted the way of the Jewish scholar. The sphere of religion proper thus became restricted to the practice of formal, un-fanatical piety. As gentlemen, they had to take themselves seriously; the gentleman does not mock the conventions of his society. And so they lost that Jewish sense of comedy which is derived from a transcendence, if not of all conventions, at least of those concerned with pomp and circumstance.

Their sphere of public life was the Jewish community, in the administration of which they conducted themselves like gentlemen. Though later accused by immigrants from the Russian ghetto of being cold and of looking at matters from a businessman's point of view, they were, none the less, charitable, humane, efficient, loyal. Son followed father in a family tradition of voluntary communal work. In their business activities and in their conduct generally they sought to comply with a high standard of integrity to protect the good name of Anglo-Jewry. This led to inevitable collision with Jews coming from Eastern Europe, whose outlook was in many ways wholly at variance with that of the long-established English Jews. But if as a result community leaders indulged themselves in the snobbery of Anglo-Jewish ancestor worship, they never developed the kind of contempt which the German Jews had for the East European Jews. Apart from the charity they extended to the immigrant Jewish poor, their reaction to these aliens in their midst was to help them become 'anglicized' or 'established'. The Jews'

Free School and the many youth clubs in East London, which were founded and directed by individuals from old Anglo-Jewish families, owe their origin to this beneficent impulse.²⁹

Besides the character of the leadership, other factors influenced the nature of the minority life. Chief among these is that the English Jews were never under the despotic control of a master. To be sure, the Jews before full civil emancipation had to seek protection in high places—both from Cromwell and from Charles II³⁰—but they were far removed from the *servi camerae* of the Middle Ages. Brought over to increase the wealth of the nation by trade,³¹ they did not achieve a degree of economic power that would make a monarch dependent upon them, and, because gratitude can be painful, dangerous to them. They were thus not attached to the society in one singular respect as were the medieval moneylenders, who were displaced when Christians developed their skills.

Then, the English Jews, modelling themselves on their hosts, were not intellectuals but businessmen, bent on living well, who avoided coming into open collision with prevailing opinion. It is also plausible that a high rate of intermarriage can provoke the enmity of non-Jews when, from the point of view of the non-Jews, it may appear that the Jews are marrying the most desirable spouses. In this respect the situation in England has never been comparable to that in Germany or urban Hungary, where the rate of intermarriage was very high. Nor has Jewish criminality in England ever exceeded those limits within which it could be successfully repudiated and even suppressed by the responsible members of the community. Perhaps the one occupational sore spot was the moneylender; aristocrats who gambled and borrowed were said to be 'in the hands of the Jews'. But this hardly had serious effects.

All told, the Anglo-Jewish community has been obscure and dull, but, in a manner of speaking, it saved itself by this very obscurity and dullness. Its historians have noted with evident pride how, in contrast to the situation on the continent, its most assimilated (or anglicized) members did not desert the community.³² Although the Reform movement in English Judaism was begun and led by individuals from old Anglo-Jewish families (for example, Claude Montefiore), it is a striking fact that the community is at its heart Orthodox in religious practice and is led by families which are both anglicized *and* Orthodox.

But if the more benign atmosphere of England has permitted them to combine both worlds, to combine in other words the gentleman and the Jew, this has not been possible without some restriction of what are, perhaps, the highest human potentialities. It has not been an atmosphere to sustain the pinnacle of Jewish life, namely great Jewish scholarship. Nor has English Jewry lived in an atmosphere like that which prevailed in Catholic and aristocratic Vienna before the First

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World War, where the educated, assimilated middle-class Jew, having deserted the synagogue but not being accepted socially by the non-Jews, lived in a kind of *demi-monde* with other Jews of his type. Living in this *demi-monde* may not have permitted them to go unnoticed as Jews, but the compensation was that their thought was uncontrolled, particularly by such social demands as a gentlemanly code. They were free to develop not only psychoanalysis but other lines of thought and art as well.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Anglo-Jewry is a minority and is thus, in some more or less tangible respects, a separate group within English society.³³ There are no barriers to assimilation; and if the members of the community had wished to do so they could have gradually fused with the general population, like the Huguenots. That they wished to remain distinct, which means not only for the practice of Judaism but also for the maintenance of a somewhat autonomous communal life, is manifest by the very survival of the community to this date. That they wish to do so in the future accords with the sentiments not only of the mass of Jews, who lead a highly enclosed social life, but also of those anglicized Jews who enjoy a much greater degree of intimacy with non-Jewish society but who remain linked with the Jewish community, and are in this fundamental respect honest with themselves.

To compare briefly the position of Catholics and Jews, the former may almost be said to have something of the status of political traitors, people who have lapsed. If one looks at the extreme expression of this attitude, as it exists in Ulster, Catholics are regarded with a mistrust and even hatred far beyond anything that Jews normally would experience. Upper-class Englishmen have recalled that in their school days what seemed to matter was not whether a person was a Jew but whether he was a Catholic.

This relative blindness permits the Jew a great deal of freedom pleasantly to penetrate English social life and to feel accepted as an individual. But the fact cannot be gainsaid that the Jew as such is something of a stranger. The non-Jew will take note of this fact, if only to avoid the very use of the word Jew in the presence of Jews in that casual way which connotes distance or difference—e.g. the term 'Jew-tailor'. This distance, which is the result of group consciousness, must be distinguished from two things which may be included in it but which are not intrinsic to it. The first is Jew-hatred, which is to be encountered in England, but which is not so great or so organized as to be a danger to the community; the Jewish community, as Mr. Salomon has noted, is properly vigilant about the growth of anti-Jewish sentiment but would agree with the contention made here. The

second thing is the distance which is the result of different tastes. There are some Jews who would never be at home in certain non-Jewish environments, and *vice versa*.

But wholly apart from the last two phenomena, so long as Jews are a separated group there will be a limitation upon the degree to which Jews will be accepted in a society. This limitation is quantitative rather than qualitative. As Lessing indicated in *Nathan the Wise*, love and friendship, let alone the idea of humanity, freely cross religious lines. Furthermore, there is no discernible limit upon the height to which a Jew, openly professing Judaism, could rise, short of the monarchy itself, the subordinate world of the Court, and, obviously, the leadership of the Church. If the fact that Disraeli was baptized is cited against this contention, it can be replied that there have been few of his calibre, Jew or Gentile, since his time.

The quantitative restriction is another matter. This refers to a numerical preponderance of Jews in *leading* positions of a society: politics, the professions and social life. Psychoanalysis in England is crowded not merely with Jews but with German Jewish refugees, who are objects of the not inconsiderable xenophobia that exists in England above and beyond anti-Jewish sentiment; but because psychoanalysis does not have high standing in England, the concentration of Jews does not cause resentment. The same can be said for trade generally and for those particular lines of business which Jews dominate. They are below the pinnacle of the society and therefore do not enter into conflict with any powerful interest. Placed against this fact, the significance of propaganda attacking the Jews for being in trade is small.

For the leading positions, however, it is fair to say that by and large a tacit *numerus clausus* exists in England. But because, with certain exceptions, its limits have not been approached, it has never become explicit; and this makes for a genuinely pleasant atmosphere. There are four reasons for this state of affairs: first, the relatively small size of the Jewish community; second, the tenacity of English life and social institutions, particularly amongst the upper class, which makes it possible for one to accept a Jew without even conceiving of the possibility of being 'invaded' by the Jewish community; third, the stratification of English society, which overlaps with that within the Jewish community, and which makes possible the development of genuine bonds between all who have had a gentlemanly education; and fourth, the proclivities and preferences of the Jews themselves, most of whom do not regard a separate Jewish social life as any kind of hardship.

Certainly, the situation of the Jews in England is desirable in many ways. A number of the minor irritations that befall an American Jew—as, for example, in taking a vacation—are absent in England. Denied in many typical instances the possibility of anonymity by the larger society, an American Jew sometimes finds it hard to avoid having to

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associate with people not congenial to him—vulgar people, for instance—merely because they too are Jews. It is possible but he must check beforehand. Though vulgarity of the *nouveau riche* sort—an almost complete renunciation of the traditional Jewish virtues—exists within Anglo-Jewry, yet the few older Anglo-Jewish families, who have had several generations of inherited wealth and English manners, are still a force in setting a tone of propriety for the community. Just as vulgarity is less dominant and brash in England than in America altogether, so does Anglo-Jewry have more polish than American Jewry.

But what choice is available to those English Jews to whom the life of the spirit is almost life itself? It seems to be, mainly, a choice between vulgarity or pedestrian decency, wrapped up in the administration of communal affairs which, though necessary, are nonetheless pedestrian and dull. It is no wonder that such people have few to talk to. The really vulgar can evoke nothing but distaste (or, perhaps, a benign amusement); and in so far as the Anglo-Jewish upper class are interested in intellectual activities, it is typically in Anglo-Jewish history, the gentleman's hobby, and without passion.

The American community, by contrast, has much more intellectual vigour. In part this difference is due to the greater size of American Jewish communities. But of greater importance is the fact that American Jewry can turn more freely and naturally within itself, into its own intellectual tradition, without a concern that by so doing it is violating the canons of good taste.

What is at issue here is the age-old question of assimilation. Certainly the Anglo-Jewish leadership were not crude assimilationists and prided themselves precisely on the fact that while achieving a balance between the two worlds, they remained fully loyal Jews. It is the quality of this balance, which rested essentially upon an opposition of the gentleman ideal to the ghetto, that one must question. In so far as they set themselves against the narrowness of the ghetto—uncritical contempt or fear of the non-Jewish world and an illiberality of spirit in relations even with other Jews—they were only opposing the best of one mode of life to the worst of another. But to go further and to deride the very fullness of what it means to be a Jew as the narrowness of the ghetto is a mistake, for this fullness is not narrowness. Every people, to have pride, dignity, inner freedom and, hence, contentment, must have an attachment to a tradition that is something of its own. And is the Jewish tradition, with its answer to the question of how man should live, merely just another tradition? The alternative is an obsessional concern with the approval of the non-Jewish world, with all the emptiness of life in a glasshouse.

In this respect immersion in communal work and even piety itself are only parts. In attachment to the gentleman ideal they have been capable—though not necessarily—of precluding that genuine respect

for, not to say devotion to, the Jewish intellectual tradition which is the source of the fullness I have mentioned. This may have flourished in the ghetto, but to regard it as something that could be produced only there is to commit a grave historical error.

Perhaps those Jews of England who wished to be Jewish gentlemen went further than they had to even to capture the virtues of the gentlemen, let alone to save the community.

NOTES

¹ This study is part of a longer report prepared for the Library of Jewish Information (American Jewish Committee). I should like to thank the Library for its generous support. I am particularly indebted to Mr. Milton Himmelfarb for his able assistance in planning the inquiry.

² Native-born Jews, for example, were not assured of their right to own land until 1718, when this was settled by a decision of the Attorney General: Albert Hyamson, *A History of the Jews in England*, London, 1908, p. 262.

³ For further details of the history of the community from the Resettlement to the Emancipation period see Hyamson, *op. cit.*, Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, Oxford, 1949, and James Parkes, 'History of the Anglo-Jewish Community', in M. Freedman, ed., *A Minority in Britain*, London, 1955.

⁴ A few years back there was a sign in the London buses which was chronically written over by hooligans so as to become offensive to Jews. Complaints to the London Transport brought about a change in wording which eliminated this provocation.

⁵ This was done, in fact, by a ban on all processions. Mr. Sidney Salomon in his pamphlet *Anti-Semitism and Fascism in Post-War Britain*, London, 1950, is of the opinion that the Act could be so interpreted as to be restricted to a provocative type of procession.

⁶ Cf. Salomon, *op. cit.*, which sums up the security situation very well.

⁷ The significance of this observation must be slightly qualified. In England Jews are proportionally more numerous in national politics than in the United States; but American Jews would appear to be more active in local political affairs, which are much more important in the United States than in England.

⁸ A. de Staël-Holstein, *Letters on England*, 2nd ed., London, 1830, pp. 115-39.

⁹ A. de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime*, tr. M. W. Patterson, Oxford, 1947, p. 88: 'Wherever the feudal system established itself on the continent of Europe it ended in caste; in England alone it returned to aristocracy.'

¹⁰ H. L. Mencken has an interesting description of the misuse of English honours and titles in the United States during the nineteenth century in his *American Language*, 4th ed., New York, 1946, pp. 271-84.

¹¹ A historical account of social pretension in the United States is to be found in Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, London, 1937. See also Cleveland Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, New York, 1947, and *The Last Resorts*, New York, 1952.

¹² Amory, *Last Resorts*, pp. 98-9.

¹³ Tocqueville, *op. cit.*, p. 91: 'The English aristocracy . . . was prepared to stoop to conquer.'

¹⁴ Staël-Holstein, *op. cit.*, p. 125: 'The younger sons of peers daily engage in trade without any idea of derogation entering into their minds.'

¹⁵ This deference to the aristocracy has sometimes been regarded as a source of weakness for English capitalism (as compared with the United States). There is at least one enclave, the City of London banking families, which has not been willing to surrender and which is disliked by the aristocracy.

¹⁶ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, London, 1889, vol. ii, p. 620: 'In England great wealth can, by using the appropriate methods, practically buy rank from those who bestow it: or by obliging persons whose position enables them to command fashionable society, can induce them to stand sponsors for

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the upstart, and force him into society, a thing which no person in America has the power of doing.'

¹⁷ Compare the stories and novels of Saki.

¹⁸ Hyamson, op. cit., pp. 259 f., 274.

¹⁹ Hyamson, op. cit., pp. 164-6. Fantastic Judaizing proposals emanated from such Puritanism, e.g. a suggestion to adopt Hebrew as the national language.

²⁰ Cecil Roth, *Anglo-Jewish Letters*, London, 1938, pp. 49-51, Letter of Henry Oldenburgh to Menasseh ben Israel.

²¹ David Daiches has a vivid account in *Two Worlds: An Edinburgh Jewish Childhood*, New York, 1956, of what it was like to grow up as a Jew in Edinburgh. When he was absent for Jewish holidays, the Christian schoolchildren would ask him whether it was 'a feast or a fast'.

²² Max Weber, 'National Character and the Junkers', in Gerth and Mills, eds., *Essays from Max Weber*, New York, 1946, p. 391. Tocqueville also, op. cit., p. 90, discusses the democratization of the word gentleman, but shows that in the process it changes its meaning.

²³ It is in this somewhat vulgarized sense that the term gentleman is ordinarily understood in the United States outside of the South.

²⁴ Roth, op. cit., p. 55: John Greenhalgh, curious about all the sects of the time, approached a Jew in the street, who arranged for him to visit a service. This he describes in his letter.

²⁵ For details about the Damascus affair, see Hyamson, op. cit., pp. 335-6.

²⁶ This was particularly true in foreign affairs. There has been no lack of out-spokenness in openly combating domestic fascism.

²⁷ I have dealt with this in further detail in 'The Outlines of Jewish Society in London', in Freedman, ed., *A Minority in Britain*, pp. 153-9.

²⁸ Roth, op. cit., p. 180. In a letter to his brother in Frankfort, the eighteenth-century Chief Rabbi Tevele Schiff complains: 'I have no colleagues nor pupils to study with, and no one even to whom I can talk on these [learned] matters. . . .'

²⁹ V. D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950*, London, 1954, pp. 30-1.

³⁰ Hyamson, op. cit., p. 218.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176. The part which Marrano merchants were playing in the commercial rise of Holland was very much in the forefront of Cromwell's mind.

³² Cecil Roth, 'The Collapse of Anglo-Jewry', *Jewish Monthly*, July 1947.

³³ See Brotz, op. cit., pp. 165-97.