

THE JEWISH POPULATION OF GREAT BRITAIN¹

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ONE of the most significant things about Jews in Britain is that we do not know how many there are. It is usually supposed nowadays that they number something like 450,000 in a total population of about 53 millions, but the ways in which estimates of Anglo-Jewish numbers are arrived at involve a good deal of guesswork. (The *Jewish Year Book* gives figures for the Jewish population of various centres and a number of partial surveys have been made.²) Our ignorance of the precise dimensions of Anglo-Jewry springs from the very nature of the society of which it is a part. Nobody has counted the Jews in Britain because, neither as followers of a religion nor as members of an ethnic group, have they any specific relationship to the political system. I do not mean, of course, that the state does not recognize that Jews require special treatment in certain circumstances; the courts of law may support the Jewish religious authorities in the performance of their duties *vis-à-vis* the Jewish public; Jewish dietary needs were accommodated during food rationing; government offices may sometimes make use of Jewish communal organizations; and so on. But always in theory and largely in practice Jews in Britain are simply citizens without any special status such as would call for their separate enumeration. Nor, on the other hand, is there a Jewry in Britain which is so differentiated from the rest of society and so organized internally as to make it possible for Jews to count themselves. The demography of Anglo-Jewry is vague precisely because Anglo-Jewry as a structural entity is vague.

In such social circumstances as are given in Britain one would expect the rather tedious game of defining the Jew to flourish. And indeed it flourishes, bringing out very clearly how Jews see the ambiguity in a term which can never embrace a discrete segment of the population of Britain. Even if there were ritually and ideologically one Jewish 'church' (which there is not), many people calling themselves Jews would slip through the net of a definition of Jewry by religious criteria. Religion apart, there is no such thing in Britain as a Jewish culture involving the greater part of the 450,000 individuals commonly accepted as being

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Jews. There is no general Jewish language. Even among the immediate descendants of the immigrants from Eastern Europe Yiddish has largely disappeared as an unbroken language. Ladino speakers are numerically negligible. Hebrew as a modern tongue is sparsely known and used. Nor, except in a very limited sense, could one say that Jews have developed their own brand of English. Jewish cultural habits there are in plenty, but they are not integrated or widespread enough to constitute a specific way of life peculiar to all or most Jews.

I am not proposing here to play the game of defining the Jews. All that can usefully be said in a short paper is that Anglo-Jewry is a category of people in which every individual shares some Jewish characteristics with many other individuals but which is not uniform in its Jewish properties. In what follows I shall try to show very briefly how this category of the British population is distributed geographically and occupationally and how far its demographic and social circumstances are likely to ensure its survival.

Jews living in Britain are concentrated in the large urban centres. All but about 15 per cent of them are to be found in London, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Birmingham, Greater London by itself accounting for about 65 per cent of Anglo-Jewry. Within the cities they inhabit Jews tend to congregate in certain areas and to create for themselves there conditions which are less than those of the 'ghetto' and more than those of the ordinary Gentile environment. The synagogues, Jewish voluntary associations, *kasher* butcher shops, and Jewish groceries are not the centres of compact Jewish sectors, but rather the nuclei of Jewish populations which live interspersed with non-Jewish neighbours. These areas of concentration may take on a decidedly Jewish flavour, but they are not large Jewish quarters in the same way as the East End of London and some districts of the provincial cities were once Jewish enclaves. The mass influx of Eastern European Jews into Britain in the last decades of the nineteenth century set up the East End and some provincial centres as replicas of the continental compact settlements. At the height of the immigration East London held about 90 per cent of metropolitan Jewry. But the English 'ghettoes' were not to last. As far as London is concerned, early in this century (and especially after the First World War) Jews flowed out of the East End along a northern route which marked various stages in the process of social as well as physical mobility. As they grew more prosperous they moved further north, not, as Dr. H. M. Brotz has correctly argued,³ because they were running away from their fellow-Jews, but because they were seeking a Jewish environment of a higher social standing. In our own day Golders Green, Hendon, and Edgware have marked terminal points of the migratory route from the East End.

If I may linger for a moment more on the general London movement in search of a good address, I should like to stress that the northern

route does not show a procession of 'ghettoes' but a line of Jewish areas which are evaluated partly by their standing in the wider English world. The status of an area depends in large measure on what non-Jews think of it, and if an area becomes too wholly Jewish and loses value in non-Jewish eyes then it ceases to be completely desirable to Jews. One of Dr. Brotz's informants commented on Golders Green: 'Ha! This isn't such a marvellous place any more. You know what they're calling it now? Goldstein Green.'⁴ This is one index of the essential character of Jewish life in Britain: Jews like to be among Jews but not to the extent of cutting themselves off from the wider society, in which they wish to circulate freely and equally.

When the East European Jews arrived in large numbers in the 1880s they changed the complexion of the small Anglo-Jewry which had evolved since the Resettlement in the latter part of the seventeenth century. This long-established Jewry had become anglicized and made for itself many comfortable niches in the economy of the country. The new immigrants were not only exotic; they furnished Anglo-Jewry with a sizeable poor class.⁵ Yet within a couple of generations this poor class had disintegrated along with the East End and provincial 'ghettoes'. Exploiting the business opportunities open to them and making good use of the public education freely available, many Eastern European Jews rose to middle-class status and moved to the new Jewish areas.

I do not, of course, mean that no Jewish working class remains; indeed it does; but Jewry in Britain has as a whole a decidedly middle-class complexion. Moreover, the occupations of working-class Jews rarely fall within the range of those with the lowest income and prestige in society at large. I cannot offer to present a clear picture of Anglo-Jewish occupational structure, because the data are quite inadequate. But I can try to bring together a number of pointers which indicate how the economic life of Jews differs considerably from that of their non-Jewish neighbours.

Jews in Britain are usually thought to be characteristically business men of one sort and another. The popular notion is of course exaggerated, but business, especially on a small or medium scale, certainly plays an important part in the economy of Anglo-Jewry. In the immediate post-war period there was some reason for thinking that between 15 and 20 per cent of gainfully occupied Jews were in trade and industry on their own account,⁶ while another estimate of 'Britain's Jewish traders and businessmen' made them account for about one-seventh of the Jewish male population over the age of 15.⁷ It may well be that these figures are considerable underestimates,⁸ and it is certain that in the smaller Jewish settlements the business men play a prominent role. Certainly, owing to the Jewish attachment to small-scale business, Jews working on their own account are proportionally several times more numerous than non-Jews working on their own account.

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Jewish economic life tends to be specialized, falling largely within the field of the manufacturer and distribution of consumer goods. The role of the Jews as entrepreneurs and workers in the clothing industry, for example, is so well known as to need little stressing. In 1932 there were some 40,000 Jewish workers in the industry,⁹ although this number has declined in recent years.¹⁰

Anglo-Jewry also reflects the tendency for Jews in the diaspora to find their way into the professions when these occupations are open to them and opportunities for training are available. There appears to be a high proportion of Jews studying in the universities, and it is likely that the professionalization of Anglo-Jewry has not yet reached its peak. On the basis of an estimate made in 1954-5 it would seem that, while Jews form less than one per cent of the total population there was one Jew in about every thirty university students.¹¹ Medicine, law, and accountancy attract Jews in considerable numbers, but some also engage in research and teaching in the sciences and humanities. In a paper published after the war, Redcliffe Salaman showed that Jews had gradually increased their proportion of the Fellows of the Royal Society until in 1948 five per cent of the Fellows were people of full Jewish parentage.¹²

I turn now to the demographic aspects of my subject. Up to the present the Jewish population has shown a steady rise in numbers and has managed to increase its proportion of the total population. During this century the percentage of Jews in the total population has doubled. But of course the numerical progress of Anglo-Jewry has been the product of immigration from Eastern and Central Europe. Now Anglo-Jewry can no longer look to a great accession from abroad, and even the few Jews who trickle in merely compensate for the few who leave the country. As the Jews have become a stabilized population without prospect of large additions from abroad, people have begun to wonder whether they can maintain their numbers by natural increase. In her survey of population questions Dr. Neustatter has argued that at least during the last decades the natural increase of Jews has been negligible, 'if in fact there has been any at all'.¹³ Jews in Britain continue to set a high value on the married state (although they seem to marry later than both their forebears and their non-Jewish compatriots in general), but they do not appear to bring up enough children to ensure that the future Jewish population will be able to stand at the same level. The pattern of fertility in Anglo-Jewry follows that prevalent in middle-class Britain in general, but it seems to exaggerate the tendency towards the deliberate restriction of child-bearing. Anglo-Jewry may be on the point of numerical decline. If this conclusion from admittedly imperfect data is correct, then clearly we need some careful research to show us why Jews in Britain have become relatively infertile parents. The reason cannot be simply that Jews are highly urbanized

and middle class, because their urbanization is nothing new and it is possible that they are less fertile than the Gentile middle class. I shall merely mention, without implying that I have any supporting evidence, the possibility that the low replacement rate may be connected in some areas of Anglo-Jewry with a state of uncertainty and insecurity.

The threat of the low replacement rate is a demographer's preoccupation. From the public point of view the menace to Jewish numbers comes from mixed marriages, and there is sometimes lamentation about the extent to which Jews marry non-Jews in Britain. Owing to the emotional implications of intermarriage, people characteristically often confuse the issue of population loss which results, or may result, from marriage out of the faith, with the breach of group integrity which follows even from marriage with converts to Judaism. If intermarriage regularly occurred with converts Jewry would not be likely to suffer a loss. However, partly owing to the difficulties which are put in the way of the Christian who wishes to be converted to Judaism (at least in the orthodox congregations), most Jewish-Gentile marriages are outside the faith as well as outside the group.

As in all numerical matters connected with Anglo-Jewry, we have no exact material on intermarriage, but a number of estimates have been made in recent times. At a conference of Anglo-Jewish preachers in 1953 the percentage of marriages by Jews out of the faith was put at 10 and possibly 12.5.¹⁴ It has been suggested that this proportion is exceeded, sometimes considerably, in the smaller Jewish settlements. By questioning fifty Jewish soldiers in hospital in 1944-5 about their marriages and those of their brothers and sisters, Dr. Eliot Slater found that 17.5 per cent of the unions were mixed.¹⁵ Dr. Neustatter, surveying the thin data on the subject, concludes that 12 per cent is a plausible figure for the proportion of out-marriages in all marriages by Jews in present-day Britain.¹⁶

In Dr. Slater's small sample more Jewesses married out than Jews, but I think we are justified in believing that, in conformity with the general world pattern, Jews in Britain marry out more frequently than Jewesses.¹⁷ We have no studies of the religious and social alignment of the children of mixed marriages, but it is possible that the offspring of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father are more likely to identify themselves as Jews than the children of the opposite kind of intermarriage. When these matters come to be properly investigated people will have to ask themselves about the kinship structure among both Jews and non-Jews to estimate the weight given to the tie between mother and married daughter and the extent to which men are attached to their wives rather than their parents. The children of a mixed marriage may perhaps more readily be thrown in the direction of their mother's than their father's kin.

While mixed marriages apparently occur with some frequency, there

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seems to be little doubt that the sentiment against marriage-out in Anglo-Jewry is general and strong. This sentiment is matched by the emotional resistance to converts which, while it may be given a purely religious justification, is equally an aspect of group solidarity. Marriage is an exchange. Groups may emerge in society which maintain their identity by confining certain kinds of exchanges (especially those of a highly intimate and emotionally charged nature) to their own ranks. People who break the rules and marry out are guilty of allowing precious relations and symbols to leak, so to say, out of the group. For this reason intermarriage is regarded as a threat to group integrity and a cause of its decline. In reality, of course, it is more likely that intermarriage is the result of the decline in group solidarity rather than its cause. Individuals doubtless marry out when their ties to their group are already loosened.

But may we conclude that Anglo-Jewry is falling to pieces because of mixed marriage? The general sentiment against it testifies to the existence of a 'community' feeling among Jews, even though, in the circumstances of British society, the Jewish community is difficult to define and delimit. I fancy that, before we have material drawn from thorough sociological study, we should be wary of reading too much into the estimated statistics such as those I have cited. It seems to me that it would be quite wrong to assume on the basis of our present knowledge that intermarriage has opened a door through which Anglo-Jewry will shortly pass into oblivion. Perhaps the situation really is that people are dropping away from the margins of Anglo-Jewry through intermarriage, and it is likely that the erosion is heaviest in the smallest settlements. It is important to remember that the admission of Jews into positions of power and high status has not depended in modern times on the relinquishment of their Jewishness, and that intermarriage is not a condition of 'assimilation'. In earlier days a mixed marriage might be a step in social advancement; at the present there is less need for a Jew to mask his origin when he pursues high status in his society. Indeed, it is even possible that today mixed marriages are more common in the lower class levels of Anglo-Jewry; Jewish solidarity may be stronger precisely among those Jews who have a wider command of power and prestige in society at large.

Let us assume, however, for the sake of argument that both mixed marriages and a low replacement rate are pushing Anglo-Jewry towards a decline. It does not follow that what is most characteristically Jewish in Britain will diminish in the same degree, because it is possible that the losses of population are taking place on the fringes of Anglo-Jewry where Jewishness is least intense. But what does Jewishness mean in the British context and how are we to assess the persistence of Jewish institutions and ways of life?

Obviously we should look first at the survival of Judaism. The figures

for synagogue membership are by no means easy to compile and interpret, but perhaps some third or more of all Jewish adult men are members of synagogues. (The proportion of Jews who make use of the synagogues is of course much larger than this fraction.)¹⁸ Although the character of Judaism in Britain is generally of an orthodox cast, synagogue membership is distributed over a range of congregations which span the ritual and theological gap between extreme orthodoxy and Liberal Judaism. There is some sort of connexion between the practice of the various forms of the religion and general class position, while the shifts in ritual and theology made in the name of reform are aspects of the process of anglicization. Now of course, from the point of view of an orthodox Jew, the practice of less orthodox Judaism is a mark of Jewish decline; from a sociological angle, however, attempts to 'modernize' Judaism and make its practice easier for Jews caught up in a Gentile environment can be taken as evidence that the religion is surviving by adapting. In Britain the process of adaptation has not been taken as far as in some other parts of the diaspora where a good deal of Jewish religious activity seems to have been emptied of much of its Judaism. The situation in the United States, for example, appears to show that Jewish solidarity can be made in large measure to turn upon diluted forms of Judaism. It may be that in Britain as time goes on we shall see a growing recourse to less rigorous forms of the religion, but if this happens it will be as much a sign of Jewish entrenchment as a decline in the purity of traditional orthodoxy. In Britain the choice between being a practising Jew and a secularized Jew is not an easy one to make, because to be a completely secularized Jew where Jewry has no political significance is in a sense to be no Jew at all. There are of course completely secularized Jews in Britain, but they are clearly in an ambiguous position. Less orthodox versions of Judaism in the diaspora are compromises in the cause of remaining Jewish.

There is another way in which a Jew can be Jewish without practising Judaism. He may be a secular nationalist. Yet in Britain the purely secular forms of Zionism are not very conspicuous. Support for Israel from both religious and not very religious Jews there is in plenty, but there is little evidence that secular Zionism furnishes on any considerable scale the basis for solidarity among Jews devoid of Judaism.

To an outside observer, especially one from Israel, the Jewishness of Jews in Britain must often appear a rather queer amalgam of Judaism and a number of Jewish cultural oddities. Some Jews are caught up in the network of voluntary associations which variously serve the vague thing called the community. The Jewishness of other Jews may seem to rest on nothing more than a preference for spending their leisure time in Jewish company and their holidays in certain hotels in seaside resorts. Certainly, Anglo-Jewry is not remarkable for the intensity of its Jewish life and culture. It is perhaps the very openness and free-

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dom of British society which, by taking the pressure off Jews to be consistently and continuously Jewish, is largely responsible for allowing its Jewry to perpetuate itself with the minimum of Jewish culture. The tolerance of British society both encourages Jews to stay Jewish and allows them to be less Jewish than traditionalists would like them to be. In an important sense Anglo-Jewry is the product of British society. As it has developed within the framework of this society, Anglo-Jewry has come to have little corporate existence, and its lack of cultural vigour may well be the price it pays for its freedom from the external pressure to constitute a political and legally defined body. In its organization and ideas Anglo-Jewry is very much the child of Britain.¹⁹

I should like to end this paper with a remark which no doubt will have already suggested itself in every statement of fact I have made. The demography and sociology of Anglo-Jewry have been so little developed that the Jews in one of the most important settlements in the diaspora are, from the point of view of these disciplines, virtually unknown ground.²⁰ The Jewish minority is well worth investigating as part and parcel of British society; from the standpoint of the diaspora the British variant of Jewry seems to offer some considerable interest; seen from Israel, Anglo-Jewry excites a certain curiosity. It is time that we found some way of getting the demographers and sociologists to work on Britain's Jews.

NOTES

¹ A slightly revised version of a paper read at the Second World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1957, in the section 'Demography of the Jews'. Statements about 'the present' generally refer to the time at which the paper was written.

² See Hannah Neustatter, 'Demographic and Other Statistical Aspects of Anglo-Jewry', pp. 63 ff., in Maurice Freedman, ed., *A Minority in Britain: Social Studies of the Anglo-Jewish Community*, London, 1955. See also S. J. Prajs, 'Statistical Publications on the Jewish Population of Great Britain: A Bibliography', *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. I, No. 1, April 1959.

³ 'The Outlines of Jewish Society in London', p. 148, in Freedman, ed., op. cit. In writing this paper I have also consulted Dr. Brotz's paper, *A Survey of the Position of the Jews in England*. The American Jewish Committee Library of Jewish Information, 1957, mimeographed, now published as 'The Position of the Jews in English Society', *The*

Jewish Journal of Sociology, Vol. I, No. 1, April 1959.

⁴ Brotz, 'The Outlines of Jewish Society in London', p. 149.

⁵ Now, on this subject, see Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, London, 1960.

⁶ N. Barou, *The Jews in Work and Trade*, The Trades Advisory Council, 3rd edn., London, 1948, p. 7.

⁷ Maurice Freedman, 'Jews in the Society of Britain', pp. 217, 221, in Freedman, ed., op. cit.

⁸ Cf. Neustatter, op. cit., pp. 126 ff. Now see a fuller treatment of the whole subject: V. D. Lipman, 'Trends in Anglo-Jewish Occupations', *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. II, No. 2, November 1960, and E. Krausz, 'Occupation and Social Advancement in Anglo-Jewry', in this issue of the *Journal*.

⁹ Barou, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁰ Freedman, op. cit., p. 222n.

¹¹ Based on the result of a survey conducted by the Inter-University Jewish Federation of Great Britain and Ireland

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with the assistance of the World Jewish Congress Cultural Department, under the direction of Mr. Raymond V. Baron.

¹² Cited in Neustatter, *op. cit.*, pp. 131 f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁴ See *The Jewish Chronicle*, 8 May 1953, p. 9.

¹⁵ 'A Note on Jewish-Christian Inter-marriage', *Eugenics Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, April 1947, and 'A Biological View on Anti-Semitism', *Jewish Monthly*, November 1947.

¹⁶ Neustatter, *op. cit.*, p. 94. See also I. W. Slotki, 'Increase of Mixed Marriages among British Jews', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 January 1956.

¹⁷ Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

¹⁸ Cf. Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁹ On this point see especially V. D. Lipman, 'Development of the Community', and Max Beloff, 'From the Other Side', in *The Jewish Chronicle Special Supplement, Tercentenary of the Resettlement of the Jews in the British Isles, 1636-1956*, 27 January 1956. I should also refer to Dr. Lipman's book, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950*, London, 1954, and V. D. Lipman, ed., *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History, A Volume of Essays*, London, 1961.

²⁰ For a recent field study see Ernest Krausz, 'An Anglo-Jewish Community: Leeds', *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. III, No. 1, June 1961.