

New York and the Real Jew

The First of a Series of Articles on
"The New Hyphenism"

- Rollin Lynde Hartt -

FOR the thousandth time, Lucille Rogers sang "Eli! Eli!"—"My God! My God!"—before a Ghetto audience on New York's East Side. As usual, there was a frenzy of applause, but not a Jew among her hearers recognized that anything exceptionally dramatic had occurred.

It had. "Eli! Eli!" is the wail of a Jewess crucified by Anti-Semites, and on the day when the East Side prima donna sang "Eli! Eli!" for the thousandth time, Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* made Anti-Semitism a reality in America by accusing the Jews not only of having caused the unrest that has followed the war, but of plotting to overthrow this and every other government and rule the world—a monstrous charge, very nearly as shocking to Jewish-American sensibilities as a pogrom in East Broadway.

During the past few weeks Jews have talked of little else. In Orchard Street the pushcart merchants gasp "Eli! Eli! Persecuted—here—in 'free' America! Oi, oi, oi, what a country!" Half way up the Metropolitan Tower, in the offices of the American Jewish Congress, Mr. Bernard Richards said to me one morning, "Isn't this a shame? Thruout the war we all pulled together. Now we are pulling apart." The Jewish newspaper row fringing Seward Square seethes with wrath, and there are evidences of distressed apprehension. Jew-baiting has begun. Where will it end?

Meanwhile *Facts*, a Jewish brochure, cries, "Henry Ford, you are a liar, a self-confessed traitor, and lower than an anarchist!"—apparently with the intention of goading him into suing for damages, as then a court of justice would announce its decision regarding the forged "Protocols of the Learned Elders in Zion," upon which his wholesale accusations against the "formidable sect" are chiefly based.

Happily there are Jews who can laugh. Over their pot

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known as Trotzky, is war minister in Russia. One Jew. One—count him! But the mass of formerly prosperous Jews in Russia (they belonged to the bourgeoisie) have been stripped of their all if not butchered outright. Formidable, are we? Look at us here in New York. See how harmless we are and on the whole how helpless!”

A point well taken. With its 1,500,000 Jews, New York is the world's greatest Jewish city. Nearly half the Jews in North America live there. Nearly 10 per cent of all the

Jews on earth do. From “Coheney” Island to “Kike’s Peak” and beyond, they swarm. Every fourth New Yorker is a Jew. There are five times as many Jews in New York as in any other municipality under the sun, and more Jews than were ever before gathered together in a single place. Columbia University is one-third Jewish, the City College 97 per cent Jewish, the Washington Irving High School, with its 6000 pupils, almost wholly Jewish. Jews monopolize the real estate business, the ready-made clothing business, the theatrical business. There are Jewish policemen. There are Jewish firemen. A famous bridge has been rechristened “the Jewish Passover.” But are these Jews in New York a formidable sect? Are they a power financially, even? When Zangwill was asked to write on “Why Jews Succeed,” he replied, “They don’t,” and the New York Jews agree with him. Note what happened when the great Zionist drive (slogan, “Rebuild the Jewish homeland now”) undertook to raise a mere matter of \$10,000,000.

Apart from coteries who declare, “We are not a race, but only a religious sect,” and from other coteries who assert, “Nationalism is narrow and evil; what the world needs is universal brotherhood,” all good Jews are Zionists. Two hundred and fifty Jewish volunteers from New York—the

first Jewish military unit in 2000 years—fought under Allenby, with the seven-branched menorah on their caps and the shield of David as their standard. When Palestine became a Zionist state, innumerable New York Jews paraded, cheering. Ghetto shops display maps of Palestine, with the names in Hebrew letters. Zionist calendars

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appear in Jewish homes—gayly lithographed affairs, showing the Goddess of Liberty draped in the Stars and Stripes, while before her a Jewish maiden waves aloft the blue and white flag of Zion with its six-pointed blue star.

At Zionist headquarters in Fifth Avenue I met young Jews who were on the point of emigrating to Palestine. Quite a few have already gone. A Palestine Tools Campaign Committee supplies agricultural implements. The Red Mogen David of America promotes "the welfare of Jewish legionaries for Palestine and their families and the transplanting into the land of Israel of orphans from the war-stricken countries." Recently Mr. Nathan Straus gave \$100,000 to found the Medical Research and Health Department of the University of Jerusalem. From of old every good Jew has recited a Hebrew prayer bewailing the Dispersion and begging for the Restoration; now that the prayer is answered, Zionism has emerged from its merely sentimental phase and become a passion. Yet how fared the great Zionist drive? Demanding \$10,000,000, it got \$2,000,000. The reason? Jews lack money.

Nothing is more pitifully absurd than the alleged wealth of New York's Jewish population. Here and there some Straus or Schiff or Baruch amasses riches on a grand scale, tho seldom on the grandest. Frequently, because of their oriental instinct for display, Jews appear splendidly prosperous. Thanks to their native generosity, impressive buildings house their Mount Sinai and Beth-Israel hospitals, their Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, their Y. M. H. A., and their Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Asylum, while a few Jewish centers of worship—notably the Temples Beth-El and Emanu-El in Fifth Avenue—lead the undiscerning to conclude that in general the New York Jews are rich. Whereas, the bulk of them (witness the throngs that block your way on the clothing district sidewalks at the noon hour) have with incredible suffering barely attained the sweatshop level of existence and shudder lest they drop from that. Formidable? About as formidable financially as they are politically!

אמעריקאנער קאנסטיטוציאן

און די

אונאפהענגיקייט דעקלאַראַציע

אין ענגליש און אין אדיש

טראַנסלירט אין איינפירענס סט

רעובן פינק

פארפאסער פון דעם "אמעריקאנער בירגער"

THE

CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

AND THE

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

IN ENGLISH AND IN YIDDISH

Edited and Translated by

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One of the announcements of a local publisher in New York's lower East Side

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Irish Boston has its Irish mayors. Jewish New York has had no Jewish mayors, and just now the president of its board of aldermen is a Mr. La Guardia. A member of that board voted against granting the freedom of the city to Professor Einstein, Jewish savant, and Dr. Weizmann, successor to Dr. Hertzl as leader of world-wide Zionism. Police authorities in New York fearlessly enraged every Jew by forbidding the sale of Passover wine. And even when Jews find themselves in a position to become "formidable," they decline to. Of the great New York dailies, two are Jewish. See if in either the *World* or the *Times* you can trace the machinations of a "formidable sect."

Far from scheming to overthrow [Continued on page 672] the established order of things, anywhere, Jews are phenomenally adaptable. Carried away into Babylon, they forgot their Hebrew and returned speaking Aramaic. In China, according to Ross, "the Jews of Kaifêng-fu lost their language and their religion and became Chinese in all but physiognomy." In Abyssinia today there are 50,000 black Jews. Next to his ambition to learn English, a Jewish immigrant's most earnest desire on reaching New York is to master every paragraph in Cushing's "Manual of Citizenship." He takes a Yiddish newspaper, it is true—the *Day*, the *News*, the *Forward*, or the *Jewish Times*—and very foreign it looks to us, with its Jewish-German text reading from right to left and printed in Hebrew characters with all the vowels left out; but more and more the Yiddish press is conforming to American standards, in spirit as well as in make-up. Then, too, our newly arrived Jew seeks amusement at a Yiddish theater, the People's, or perhaps Thomaskewsky's or Gobel's—where serious drama is admirably presented. But more and more the Yiddish players borrow their "script" from Broadway, translating and adapting it, while frequently an English phrase or sentence survives intact. And, despite his supposed conservatism, the Jew is soon tempted to discard his religion.

Uptown you are told that large numbers of Jews now attend service at the Church of St. Thomas. Still larger numbers affiliate with Unitarians, while thousands are agnostics. In the Ghetto, "chop sueys" appear, and "chop sueys" are not "kosher." On

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the lower East Side you will find an establishment "for the re-conversion of Jewish youth to Judaism." The other day I amused myself by asking Jews what proportion of the Ghetto was Orthodox. One said, "Three blocks." Another said, "All of it; on the great Jewish holidays, twice a year, the only sound is the creaking of new shoes." The fact lies somewhere between—a fact so serious that there might seem to be a promising field for evangelization, and would actually be, had not Christians persistently oppressed and tormented Jews, the world over, for upward of nineteen centuries.

Several months ago, in a solidly Jewish neighborhood well sprinkled with wurst-fabriks and little synagogues and places where wedding gowns are offered for rent and shops filled with Talmuds, Jewish prayer-books, seven-day candles, manoras, Pentateuch scrolls, embroidered wrappers for scrolls, and long-fringed, purple-striped prayer-shawls, a Jewish theater displayed a film called "The Birth of a Race." I believe I was the only "goy" there. We saw Eden. We saw the flood. We saw Moses lead Israel out of Egypt. Loud was the applause. Then followed the story of Christ, from Bethlehem to Calvary. It sounds incredible, yet those New Testament episodes called forth from Jewish spectators applause no whit less enthusiastic than the outbursts that had greeted the Old Testament episodes. It is not the Christian religion that repels Jews; it is Christians—the Christians of bygone ages, and frequently those of today.

To be entirely frank, the Ghetto has not a particularly exalted idea of Gentiles. In Second Avenue a few evenings ago, Abie was telling about his sweetheart, and a friend of mine overheard. Said Abie, "Yes, she's a Christian, but when you go in her house it's clean." Well, consider. Twice annually—just before Passover and just before New Year's—every Jewish family cleans house. On what occasion, pray, do the Perciatellinis of Hester Street clean house? Judging Gentiles by the Gentiles they observe at close range, Jews naturally enough regard themselves as superior and as not merely in a scrip-

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Imagine, then, the deep indignation among Jews when an American, duped by European Anti-Semites—Mr. Ford's sham "Protocols of the Learned Elders in Zion" were fabricated abroad—accuses the Jews of base intentions? Imagine their resentment the other day when somebody connected with the Department of State was reported to have classed Jews with Armenians and Persians as "undesirable immigrants!" On historic grounds, if on no other, the Jews claim a right to come here. Jewish settlers first established themselves in New York in 1654. Jews helped to finance Columbus. Five Jews sailed with him on his first voyage. His mother was Jewish—or so the Ghetto declares—nor has the Ghetto forgotten that a Jew advanced \$600,000 to General George Washington. During the recent war, as you will be informed at the Jewish War Records headquarters in Union Square, more than 200,000 American Jews put on khaki. Three thousand five hundred died in France. American Jews brought home 180 Distinguished Service Crosses. Two won the medaille militaire, three received Congressional Medals of Honor, 174 the Croix de Guerre. What the Jew then did he is ready to repeat. He has the grit. He has the bodily toughness.

In New York you are still told that Jews lack physique and dread physical toil. Absurd! Rare, in the Ghetto, is the Rembrandt Jew, with his "Ghetto bend." Thanks to the Jewish dietary, to Jewish temperance, and to sixteen days of complete repose every year, plus the splendid start in life vouchsafed to breast-fed babies, the Ghetto has evolved a hardy type, with a minimum death-rate and a huge avidity for exertion. New York Jews are crowding into the metal trades, into furriery, into cabinet-making and shoe-making. Young Jews play basketball with fury. Benny Leonard, Soldier Bartfield and Battling Levinsky are pugilists.

"I'd rather talk of Jewish poets and musicians," said the Jew from whom I obtained these illustrious names, and thereby hangs a tale. In order to learn about "Eli! Eli!" I had gone to the National Winter Garden, a Jewish

he had just finished reading Mr. Wells's "Outline of History."

"Jack Shargel knows about 'Eli! Eli!'" he said. "Wouldn't you like to watch the show till Shargel is thru for the evening?" I declined, begging to wait in the office and discuss Schopenhauer and Wells, and then began a feast of reason such as I had not enjoyed since the days when I used to hobnob with Harvard dons in Brattle Street, Cambridge. Wonderful! Glorious! Religion, ethnology, metaphysics, history, literature—in the office of an East Side burlesque show! Two Jewish friends of the managers joined our pow wow, each contributing a wealth of erudition. And finally came Shargel—burlesque comedian adored by the East Side. I took him out to supper.

He talked religion. He was for realities, not forms, and decried the occasional Jewish over-insistence upon "piety wigs" for women and earlocks and unshorn chins for men. This, he argued, could engender hypocrisy. "Better a Jew without a beard than a beard without a Jew." And he talked Bolshevism—most unsympathetically, for, with rare exceptions, the New York Jews scorn Lenin and Trotzky. "Why fool with Bolshevism when you can have an ideal order of society merely by enforcing the laws of this country?" What a fellow—by trade a clown, by instinct a philosopher!

There was nothing extraordinary in that. Barring a few examples of the Potash-and-Perlmutter type, every Jew is an intellectual. Visit Cooper Union and see. Or visit the University Settlement. You will find more thinking in the Ghetto, more study, more conversation of high significance than in any other section of New York, and recognize in Jewish mentality a national asset.

When you come to understand it, you will admire Jewish character. Certain faults, proverbial and ruthlessly overstated by Gentiles, certain Jews undeniably possess. There have even been Jewish gunmen in New York and Jewish promoters of the once-prevalent white slave trade. But saloons never thrive in Jewish neighborhoods. In proportion to the Jewish population only an infinitesimal drop in the bucket

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the Jew, but don't write about Jews; without intending it, you may precipitate the calamity America should be most anxious to prevent—I mean Jew-baiting.”

More than twenty years have since passed. The calamity is here. Jews feel hunted. They tend to become more Jewish at heart, less American at heart. Therefore, write about Jews. It cannot make matters worse. It may make them better—especially if some reader is prompted to stroll the Ghetto and see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears. Try it. Drop in, anywhere, and announce your curiosity. You will be charmingly received. But I warn you. It is hard to get away.

Westport, Connecticut