

CURRENT OPINION

April, 1922

p. 500

A

JEWISH EXPLANATION OF JEW-HATRED

A STRIKING and original contribution to the discussion of the Jewish question is made by Rabbi Joel Blau, of New York, in an article, "The Modern Pharisee," which is given the leading place in a recent issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. It is Rabbi Blau's contention that the troubles of the Jews are mainly due to "wrong contacts." He sees a "progressive deterioration of the Jewish type" caused by constant and age-long association with stronger races. This deterioration, while it does not justify anti-Semitism, explains it, and suggests that the Jew's salvation depends on his rediscovery of his native integrity. Rabbi Blau looks for a "gradual repatriation of the Jew in Palestine." Incidentally, he gives us a new definition of Pharisaism.

The problem of the Jew, he tells us, is twofold: from without and from within; and the two methods of approaching the problem correspond with two eternal types of Jewry. These two types are "the introverted Jew" and "the extraverted Jew," and the ancient prototypes of the introverted and extraverted Jew are found, respectively, in the Pharisee and the Sadducee. The Pharisee has ever been intent on the spiritual problem of the Jew. The Sadducee has been less spiritual, more worldly, more yielding to the lure of environment.

In the eyes of the extraverted modern Sadducee, the Jewish problem is social, philanthropic, economic and political. To the introverted modern Pharisee the Jewish problem is chiefly spiritual. His solution is internal. "He would cry out, not so much against the world that wrongs the Jew, as against the Jew who wrongs himself. He would save the Jew; and, in saving the Jew, he would save the world from the nightmare of anti-Semitism." For "anti-Semitism endangers not so much the Semite as the anti-Semite; and the modern Pharisee would redeem the world from the age-long curse of a hatred which has brutalized the hater more than the hated."

JEW-HATRED

The modern Pharisee, with whom Rabbi Blau identifies himself, scorns the apologetic methods usually adopted by the Jew. He refuses to boast of his patriotism and to harp on Jewish achievement. These methods, he holds, are vulgar, if not bankrupt, and they fail of their intended effect. Nay, "they act boomerang-fashion: they serve as a handle to the anti-Semite." Rabbi Blau goes on to argue:

"Of old the stars in their courses fought against Sisera; but to-day the foe of Israel would fight the very stars for yielding the secret of their courses to a Jewish scientist. The earth is too small a battleground for anti-Semitism; the battle-lines must be flung far into space. Such is the venom of *cultural* anti-Semitism, deadlier than the economic, social or political species. In Hungary, where Jews assisted in creating the national Magyar literature, Jews have been driven from the universities and learned professions. It has come to such a pass that Jewish litigants do not retain Jewish lawyers, for fear of prejudicing their case.

"In Germany, conditions are no better. The presence of the Jew in the literary and scientific world is regarded an intrusion,—worse than his presence in a high-class American hotel or fashionable residential section,—and, by that token, the greater his achievement the greater the offense. The soul even more than the body of the Semite is the objective of the attacks of the anti-Semite. The latter cries out in alarm—often honest enough—at the infiltration of the ubiquitous Semitic spirit into the national art and culture, arguing that it mongrelizes the national spirit."

The best way for a Jew to counter the criticism of his people, Rabbi Blau contends, is by himself engaging in it. He will probably start with the word "prejudice," but the word in itself explains nothing. "By some inner or outer fatality, the Jew was never beloved of mankind. Jew-hatred harks back to the beginnings of the Jewish people—it is as old as the Jew. It necessitated the first Ghetto in Goshen; but traces thereof are found as early as Abraham's time. The Jewish Bible is the oldest record of anti-Semitism as of Semitism. In the face of the curious fact that we have through timeless time been a target for the hatred of a world, to say that all this was caused by 'prejudice,' unfounded, unreasoned, blind, is to beg the whole question. The charges leveled against us by Pharaoh or Ford (the first famous for his chariots, the second for his automobiles) are indeed false; but what is back of them—the relentless hatred—remains with all its dark flowering of passion. Why? Surely, the time is ripe for the searchings of the Jewish heart."

JEW-HATRED

Rabbi Blau answers his own question by declaring that while the Jewish nature is strong on the intellectual and moral side, it is weak on the esthetic side. "The Jew lacks form. And form is, if not everything, a great deal." He continues:

"It is the graceful touch that lessens the natural human impact of personality upon personality; that makes a man acceptable to his fellows in spite of his defects, nay, in spite of his virtues. Superiority is a cardinal sin; to atone for it one must possess this grace. Even morals are made tolerable only by manners. Lacking this grace, one becomes a source of vague but persistent irritation. The Jew seems to be a cause of irritation and unease everywhere. It is the mark of the gentleman, not only that he possesses ease, but, chiefly, that he knows how to put others at ease. This is an inimitable faculty; and to its absence must be attributed most of the social discrimination the Jew complains of.

"The Jew is, himself, not at ease. Even the most emancipated Jew has something in his eye, something the Ghetto eye is never without—the look of a deer at bay. In no costly bronze or marble was written the grim story of the Jew, but in the cheaper yet more enduring material of Jewish flesh and blood (is there anything cheaper?); in nerve-fiber and brain-cell; in the dumb unvoiced dreams that live below the threshold of consciousness; in gestures and glances—in all the instinctive mimicry of a past that refuses to die. Hence this atmosphere of unease which the Jew carries about him, and which he communicates unwittingly to his surroundings. The loudness and vulgarity he is often charged with are but extreme manifestations of this unease: the Jew's way of 'whistling to keep up his courage.'"

Passing on to consider what he calls "the heart of the entire problem," Rabbi Blau makes the statement that Jewish individuality, in contact with other national individualities in every land on the face of the globe, has been warped and distorted. He instances Russia, where Jews are regarded as rabid enemies of wealth, and America, where they are blamed for being plutocratic. Then he asks: "Is Jewish Bolshevism in Russia other than Jewish intensity in contact with and perverted by Slav morbidity and mysticism? And what is the crass Jewish materialism in America, if not Jewish intensity in contact with and perverted by Yankee business acumen?"

Rabbi Blau does not try to conceal from himself or from others that Jewish decadence, especially on the spiritual side, is "appalling." He thinks that, so far as the Jew is concerned, political emancipation has failed and failed miserably. He is equally emphatic in asserting that the synagogues are beyond resuscitation, that the old

JEW-HATRED

ceremonial law is more honored in the breach than in the observance, and that "the Saturday Sabbath is all but gone." Philanthropic Judaism, too, is pronounced all but dead.

If we ask, What remains? the only reply that Rabbi Blau vouchsafes is this: "The Jew must be led back to the discovery of the Jewish soul":

"One is bound to observe that, great as is the tragedy of the Jew, greater still is the tragedy of Judaism. What greater tragedy than the life of a people that has lost its God? The greater tragedy is the fate of a religion that has been the suffering mother of religions, pierced by more than seven wounds, forsaken by her own.

"But when we search for the cause of this tragedy, this martyrdom of a living spirit, we find it to be the same that underlies other phenomena of Jewish maladjustment already referred to—hybridization through wrong contacts. The Jewish spirit, as history attests, is deeply religious. Tolstoy exclaims somewhere in his writings: 'I have never seen a non-believing Jew.' Tolstoy should have been in New York or Chicago. However, it cannot be that, in the short space of a generation or two, Jewry should lose all religious instinct, except in consequence of a temporary aberration that is but a passing incident in a long and perilous history. The task, as the modern Pharisee sees it, is to bring the Jew back to himself; to aid him in self-recovery; and self-recovery is conditioned upon self-discovery. The Jew must be led back to the discovery of the Jewish soul.

"The modern Pharisee's argument, then, is simple. If, looking both within and without—but particularly within—we find this unnatural perversion of Jewish individuality through promiscuous contact with diverse civilizations, then the best solution for the Jewish problem is to separate the Jewish type from 'entangling alliances,' restore it to its pristine character, and give it full play to develop in keeping with its own inner law. And this means the gradual repatriation of the Jew in Palestine. The cure for all Jewish ills lies in geography."

Rabbi Blau's article is the subject of comment by several writers in the Jewish press. They praise his style but dispute his conclusions. Dr. Isaac Landman, editor of the *American Hebrew* (New York), tries to show that the contact of Jew and non-Jew, so far from being an element of weakness in Judaism, has contributed to all that is best in the Jewish genius; while the *Chicago Israelite* says that Rabbi Blau takes too much for granted:

"The substance of the argument is along familiar lines, but there is one statement so obviously fallacious that it can not be allowed to pass unnoticed. This statement is that the Jews have deteriorated spiritually and ethically by living

JEW-HATRED

among Christian peoples. He puts it baldly that, like the negroes of Africa or the Kanakas of the South Sea Islands, the contact has led them to acquire the vices of Christendom, and not its virtues. Like all Zionist propagandists, Rabbi Blau takes for granted very much that remains to be proved. His assumption that the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish State and form of government very similar to those of Rome prior to the unification of Italy and the loss of temporal power by the popes, would improve that status of Jews the world over, is only an assumption. The article, however, repeats, tho, in bolder and braver tones, the cry of the Jew for justice at the hands of the Christian world. And in this lies its value."

OldMagazineArticles.com