



The "Antisemitism of Men"

A chapter from The War and the Jew, 1940

There are two distinct forces at work within the general phenomenon called Antisemitism: the one is a subjective repulsion, strong enough and permanent enough to become anything from a hobby to a religion; the other is an objective state of things which tend to ostracize the Jew almost independently of whether his neighbours like or dislike him. We shall call the first category "the Antisemitism of Men," and the second "the Antisemitism of Things." For a study of the former, the best field of observation is Germany; of the latter, Poland. In the present chapter we shall deal with Germany.

At the moment of writing, there are supposed to be some 200,000 Jews in Germany of the Versailles frontiers, 100,000 in Austria, 100,000 in Bohemia and Moravia, 130,000 in Slovakia and 2,000,000 in the parts of Poland occupied by the Nazis.* These figures are largely guesswork rather than reliable estimates; moreover, they are bound to be considerably affected by the transfers of population effected by the Nazi government – some already carried out, and others planned for the near future. Finally some may "hope" that a considerable proportion of all these Jews will die out before the war is over, so that the problem facing the managers of the future reconstruction will be appreciably facilitated. Nevertheless, it is sure even so to present a formidable problem.

* The number of Jews under Nazi domination has greatly increased since then. It comprises not only the entire Jewish population of Poland (3,250,000 in 1939 but also the Jews of the Baltic States (250,000), the Balkan countries (100,000), the Lowlands (60,000), Occupied France (approximately 50,000), and Occupied Russia (perhaps 2,000,000 – the Majority of Russian Jews). All in all, some 7,000,000 – the bulk of European Jewry – are now under the yoke of Nazi oppression.



The author assumes as an axiom that the war cannot end without the liquidation of the Nazi regime. Its collapse will be followed by the restoration of sovereignty of all or most of the annexed territories, and by the establishment everywhere of constitutions as liberal and democratic as possible in accordance with the best Allied or American advice. And finally, the creation of something like a new and very much improved edition of the League may be expected. It would be futile now to attempt any guess at the details, even at the broader and more essential details, of that future; but the final political outlook may be described as essentially bright, and the writer very firmly believes in its reality.

Furthermore, he believes that all these oppressed peoples, restored to security and sanity, will honestly try to devote themselves to sober reconstruction. He believes that they will cherish a suppression of war; he hopes that they will, for at least a generation, discard all thought of armed revanche; he expects them to give much more active support to the new League of Nations, or the European Federation, or whatever else it may be called, that was ever enjoyed by the old Geneva League. True, one point is not quite clear yet, even to a trustful believer, and that is, how the nations will settle all those prickly questions of ethnically mixed provinces in such a way as to satisfy all and to stamp out irredentism; but so fervent is his desire to believe that he prefers not to think of the prickles. Everything, in short, will somehow get adjusted in time, with a great deal of labour, but without any further disasters. Some people may find this optimism absurd: but this the author denies; his most sanguine expectations are soberly and moderately realistic. *Credo, quia NON absurdum.*



There is, however, one aspect of such optimism which even the most sanguine should discard utterly and ruthlessly: namely, the belief that the cancer of Antisemitism can be cured by such means as liberal constitutions and League supervision. No doubt, all the suitable provisions will be duly included in these constitutions, and in the League's new Covenant, ensuring the inviolability of equal rights for all. But the enforcement of these constitutions will have to be left, in every country, in the hands of national governments; and democratic electoral methods will ensure that those governments will be as representative of the true attitude of the masses as possible. It is therefore on the attitude of the masses that the actual operation of any clauses relating to equal rights will depend, so far as the Jews' rights are concerned. It is otherwise in the case of other minorities: they live for the most part in close territorial clusters, in districts or even cantons, and they can to some extent look after themselves. The Jews live scattered throughout predominantly Gentile towns and villages: at every step, in the street or in public or private life, they are exposed to the impact of the good or ill will of the local majority. To pretend that under these conditions any essential results can be ensured by law is childish. *NON credo quia absurdum.*

This aspect of the matter will be the better appreciated if the reader recalls that the principle of equal rights to the Jews, even in East-Central Europe, is nothing new. On the contrary, in almost every one of these states the legal recognition of this principle is just as old as the state itself. Only Austria-Hungary was older than its Jewish equality law, which was inscribed on her statute book in 1867. When the German Empire was created in 1871 its imperial constitution established equality for all, irrespective of creed or origin. When the treaty of Berlin (1878) definitely delimited the frontiers of Roumania, Serbia and Bulgaria, it was guaranteed by the same treaty that in all these countries all citizens would enjoy equal rights. When the peace treaties of



1919 created Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic States, special minority clauses were solemnly inserted to ensure equality, and the League of Nations was to supervise and guarantee their execution. To tell once again how all these Provisions proved ineffective would be tedious; the only fact that may not be widely known is the pre-war Roumania, which never took the equality clause seriously, and openly treated her Jews as "foreigners," never had any trouble on that account with any of the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin – one of whom was Great Britain and another France.

Strangely enough, the formidable past history of German antisemitism seems to be rapidly sinking into oblivion. In the democratic countries a myth is being created to the effect that the evil has originated with the advent person called Adolf Hitler, who was born in 1888, so that if he can be removed it will disappear. But the truth is that Hitler has just as much to do with the origin of this evil as Napoleon had with the invention of gunpowder. Napoleon did not invent gunpowder; he only made magnificent use of it; and when he was gone, others arose who surpassed him.

Germany – and in this respect Austria was one with her long before the *Anschluss* – has ever been the paramount workshop of modern antisemitism. There and not elsewhere was the discovery made, and the principle proclaimed, that the objection to the Jew is not religious but racial, and he must therefore be persecuted even if baptized. There and not elsewhere was antisemitism sublimated to the rank of a scientific philosophy. In no other nation was Jew-hatred as a mode of thought openly adopted by so many really prominent men, some of them even of the first eminence in the various walks of spiritual leadership: Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, Dühring, Treitschke, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, to achieve success in antisemitism, had to settle in Germany. In Germany, too, not elsewhere, was the practical aspect of antisemitism



modernized and perfected: what had been a mere tendency to desultory street-rioting was by German initiative promoted to a political system. Stoecker and Ahlward founded the movement in Berlin, bringing into the Reichstag, about 1893, the first bunch of deputies to be solemnly (and quite democratically) elected as the *Antisemitische Partei*; and in Vienna, two years later, Lueger triumphantly conquered the Vienna Town Hall on platform whose main, or rather only "plank" was hatred of the Jew, was elected burgomaster amidst scenes of the wildest mass-enthusiasm, and kept his seat for decades. Such things had been happening for three-quarters of a century before the Nazi Party was ever thought of.

It is nonsense to pretend that the Germans are manifesting antisemitism only by order, so that when the order is annulled by the liquidation of Nazism they will forget all about it. Germans abroad, who run no risk if they choose to disobey orders from Berlin, have amply and repeatedly shown that Nazism can win them by its own powers of fascination, and not through their fear of the Gestapo. The clearest proof of this was the Saar plebiscite of 1935, held under ideally democratic conditions, with British police ensuring the fullest freedom of propaganda, of conscience and of franchise: out of 525,000 valid votes, 477,000 were cast for incorporation in Nazi Germany. Perhaps even more significant are the impressive proportions of the Germans in Italy, Latvia and Estonia who have accepted the call to return to Germany: all but autochthonous, the descendants of conquerors and settlers of centuries ago, they left their often comfortable homes and respectable social positions for the pleasure of breathing the Nazi atmosphere. To top it all, there is record of the frank and vociferous delight displayed by all classes of the Vienna mob, in the first weeks after the *Anschluss*, when "Jewish ladies in fur coats" were ordered to scrub pavements and *ganz Wien* flocked to watch and yell with joy. And mothers lifted their babies over their neighbours' heads so that they should not



miss the lovely sight. "By order?" Of course there must be an order to unleash the innermost brute: but the main point is the presence of the brute underneath; and what a multitudinous brute!

Antisemitism is traditionally and organically endemic in Germany; not in Germany alone by any means, but in no other country more than in Germany. Here again, being neither a sociologist nor a student of psychology, the author will not attempt to explain the phenomenon: but only a fool or a liar would deny it.

The collapse of Nazism can bring no essential remedy to this endemic disease. One must, of course, be realist enough to allow for the so-called swing of the pendulum: when Hitler goes, there may be some kind of popular scurry to atone for the antisemitic orgy, partly for opportunist reasons, but partly also, no doubt, out of genuine disgust at the sub-human, beastly forms which the persecution has assumed. Moreover, there will be these equality-clauses in the peace treaty and the new constitution. And further, there is not the slightest doubt that many Jews who were forced to leave Germany after 1933 will then be most eager to return, and ready to forgive and forget: some because of discouraging experiences while in exile, some out of genuine attachment to the German land and civilization. That much we all admit. But all superficial optimists should be warned that the result of this backwash will be – almost immediately, perhaps within a few weeks only of the new *édit de Nantes* which will have opened the new era – a venomous recrudescence of the incurable evil.

One shudders to think how venomous it would be. Apart from racial idiosyncrasies, sheer material interest will constitute a formidable charge of high explosive. The value of Jewish property in Germany which, in one form or another, had passed into German hands, is in the vicinity of 25 billion marks.



At a conservative estimate, since 1933 in Germany and since 1938 in Austria, over 300,000 Jewish breadwinners of all kinds have been affected by the Nazi regime; most of them (and the proportion is constantly increasing) have been altogether deprived of their employment or profession, while a dwindling minority is still clinging to some sort of job. All that they have lost has been grabbed by the "Aryans." That "all" includes myriads of commercial and industrial positions, from director to typist or shop-assistant, thousands of professional jobs from panel doctor to journalist, while a comparatively important percentage of civil servants, from school teacher up to judge and chief constable, were Jews. These were posts filled by the middle class, the intelligentsia, the *haute bourgeoisie* – that is, by the most conspicuous, most vocal and most sensitive strata of modern society. To the members of these classes the return of Jews would mean a vast influx of extremely dangerous competitors, in many cases far better qualified than the usurpers, and they would be faced, as a rule, with the alternative: "reconquer or starve." In all cases they would be morally entitled to the redress of an admitted grievance, an intolerable injustice.

The kind of welcome which would await them may be imagined, I do not presume to foretell how soon it would rise to the pitch of direct persecution, or how the inevitable *de facto* denial of "equal rights" would be disguised to suit the constitution and the peace treaty; but it should be remembered that under a democratic constitution parliaments and governments are bound to be powerfully influenced, firstly, by the endemic idiosyncrasy of which I have spoken, and secondly, by the menace of competition, more desperate than ever before. Nor should anyone be misled by the pleasant recollection that in the good old days of Bismarck and Wilhelm the Last, the principles of antisemitism were put into practice without any ugly and disorderly brutality, but with due restraint and moderation; so that the new after-war régime, under



which all brutality will be strictly prohibited by protocol, may in the end prove "not so bad," or at all events, not so bad for the Jews, who, after all, must not forget that they cannot be choosers.... The recollection is irrelevant: in the interval the brute has been unleashed and has tasted blood.

To make the outlook yet clearer, one may ask the reader – supposing him to be a Gentile – to forget that beggars cannot be choosers, and to imagine that a similar prospect is offered not to us, but to him and to other Englishmen: the prospect of living at the mercy of a ninety-nine to one majority trained for generations to abhor the English, under the sole protection of paper paragraphs and the supervision of Geneva, or the substitute for Geneva; and to work for the Allied victory with unfaltering zeal, though all it promises him is – just this prospect.