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EMPHASES IN JEWISH HISTORY*

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EVERY generation writes its own history of the past generations. This truism has served as a means of disparaging historic research and writing. If history is so pliable, it has been argued, as to serve the needs of every generation; if the same objective facts lend themselves to so different, often contradictory interpretation, what then is the value of history as an objective review of these facts? Others, however, have found therein a primary strength of historiography. The main purpose of history, they have held, is not to restate isolated facts and not even to correlate them into a consecutive narrative, but to serve as a *magistra vitae*, as a teacher and guide in meeting contemporary situations. It is precisely that elasticity of history which makes its lessons so easily applicable to new situations and establishes its position not only in the realm of theoretical studies intended for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, or for the amusement of pastime readers, but as an applied social science, as one whose lessons are of practical significance to statesmen, leaders and the intelligent public at large.

From time immemorial a controversy has likewise been raging over the question whether history is a science or an art; whether it is primarily based upon a re-statement of objective, coolly analyzed non-controversial facts, or whether its aim consists above all in the artistic, often intuitive, recreating of the totality of human destiny upon earth or of that of

any of its significant parts. Few historians will wholeheartedly agree today with Macaulay's definition of history. "History, at least in its state of ideal perfection," wrote this renowned exponent of the discipline more than a century ago, "is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents." But hardly any other definition of the mutual relationships between history, poetry and philosophy will meet more universal and wholehearted approval among the teachers and practitioners of these three branches of human endeavor. Far be it from me, therefore, to suggest at this juncture definite solutions for these perennial difficulties and conflicts of opinion.

II

There are a few specific approaches to general and Jewish history, however, which may merit more general attention. In the first place, present day scholarship is confronted anew by the age-old problem concerning the relations between history and chronology. Evidently the most important single factor in history is its chronological sequence. If one searches for a fundamental concept which would be as germane to history as is, for example, the idea of justice to the domain of law, one can hardly find, it appears, any better concept than that of development. I consciously avoid the term "evolution," and I should still less like to employ the term "progress." Both these latter terms introduce the feeling of evaluation, of an assumption that history unfolds a certain progression from something low-

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er to something that is higher, which may or may not have been the meaning of human history. But no historian, however *wertfrei* his personal attitude, can visualize the past of man or of any group of men without conceiving it in terms of a certain line of development from one stage to another, from one peculiar form to another.

Such development naturally takes place in time, and chronology has, therefore, become an integral part of all historical treatment. It is also understandable that historiography originally grew out of historic chronicles, which used to hand down to posterity the record of events in their strict chronological sequence. Of course, even these chroniclers could not always avoid completing the description of a certain chain of events before proceeding to the narration of some other development which took place simultaneously. The more historiography emancipated itself from the mere registering of events and became an interpretation of past developments, the more had the rigid chronological shackles been cast off in favor of a consecutive analysis or relation of events and trends which, for one reason or another, appeared to the historian as belonging to the same whole. The next step frequently, though still rather timidly, taken was that of the so-called annalistic type of historiography in which a compromise was struck between the dictates of chronology and the necessity of grouping intrinsic developments in their respective units. The annalists of ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy described, often with great brilliancy, the events of each particular year. Within that year any series of happenings which showed a certain inner relationship to one another and which could be explained in the light of the particular author's philosophy

of history were brought together in one consecutive account. But each narrative had to stop at the end of the year, giving way to another, often unrelated, series of happenings, until all the developments which appeared significant within the framework of that particular year were exhausted. Only then could a thread of an earlier description be resumed insofar as any one of a specific series of happenings found its continuation in the subsequent year or years. A military campaign or international negotiations, a court intrigue or a love affair, biological incidents in the careers of kings, writers, generals or artists, all had to be interrupted, say, at the end of December and resumed after a long interval in another chapter dealing with a subsequent year.

With the progress of historical thinking and writing the annalistic chains became too heavy to bear. It was one of the great achievements of modern historiography to have thrown off the shackles of this type of approach. No one is writing annals today, unless it be writers of surveys of the events of a year, just past, for the current consumption of readers of a year-book or journal. Historians have come to lengthen more and more the periods under discussion in each particular section of their works, if the underlying currents which they attempt to describe happen to be of longer duration. In this respect, too, the progress of recent historiography from a primarily biographical and military-diplomatic to a preponderantly social orientation has tended to lengthen the periods reviewed in their inner relationships. As long as the biographies of leading individuals, as long as dramatic turns in military campaigns or diplomatic exchanges of notes occupied the

focal position in the historic narrative, so long could historians adhere to the chronological sequence of these happenings with somewhat greater consistency. When the emphasis was shifted, however, to the underlying social events, it was easily recognized that certain basic movements took decades, if not centuries, to generate, grow and decay. The analysis of each such movement often had to be isolated in treatment and completed before one could try to interpret another contemporary development in a similar narrative extending over a period of many generations.

Illustrated in Jewish history, we can pursue this evolution from Zacuto's Ibn Verga's and Joseph Hachohen's annals, through Jost's and Graetz's more chronological and, therefore, briefer periods, to Dubnow's more extended epochs of the successive hegemonies of distinctive Jewish centers. From their respective points of view both Graetz and Dubnow were right: the former in adhering to a close chronological scheme and Dubnow in severely criticizing him for the "confusion" arising from the "synchronistic" treatment of political, socio-economic and literary developments in various countries within the confines of the same chapter. The writers, on social history, on the other hand, from Guedemann through Berliner to Abrahams saw themselves forced largely to abandon the chronological pattern and to choose a topical division for their chapters.

Topical discussion naturally has its dangers. Medieval Jewish history, particularly, presents an enormous multitude of local variations of a basically uniform, universal theme and must be viewed against an ever-changing background in the Christian societies of the Mediterranean and the northern lands. Its treat-

ment in the fashion of Israel Abrahams' *Jewish Life In the Middle Ages* is, therefore, likely to blur the contours of a multi-colored, often sordid reality and to offer instead a somewhat distorted, because oversimplified and often idealized generalization. With greater skill and lesser bias, but unfortunately also at the expense of brevity and lucidity, Abrahams might have been able to avoid some of the pitfalls of the topical arrangement. But all the genuine merits of his fine presentation would have been completely lost had he chosen the other extreme of closely adhering to a chronological or geographic sequence.

It was out of the consideration of this undeniable trend in modern historiography that, although not without hesitation, the title *History* was deliberately chosen for my particular analysis of the social and religious experiences of the Jewish people. In trying to describe the influence of socio-economic developments upon the Jewish religion, and mutually the influence of religion upon society, attention had to be paid primarily to those basic forces in both society and religion which, operating over a period of often countless generations, influenced one another in a demonstrable form. The history of the Jewish people along these broad lines had to be divided mainly into the three long epochs of Israel's career upon earth. Without reference to the otherwise noteworthy Krochmal-Graetzian scheme of the successive cycles of growth and decay in Jewish history, three major phases stood out in the historic evolution of the Jewish people: that of ancient Israel, from its beginnings to the Hellenistic period; that of Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism, from Alexander the Great or the Maccabees to the seventeenth century, and that of modern Judaism during the last

three centuries. In the history of ancient Israel, the periods of the socio-religious developments roughly coincided with the chronological sequence of Israel's origins, the era of the Monarchy and the period of Exile and Restoration. After that time the chronological sequence became less and less important and, for example, the history of the Jews under Islam, medieval as well as modern, had to be separately treated from medieval and early modern Christendom. The story of the rise and developments of Hasidism had to be told in conjunction with the evolution of the Kabbalah and popular ethics within the general make-up of the medieval and early modern ghetto. At the same time the chronologically preceding influences of the Protestant Reformation on Jewish history had to be treated in a subsequent chapter as an integral factor in the transformation of modern Europe and the ensuing emancipation of the Jews. As a matter of fact, I felt obliged to apologize in my Preface for having divided the long, basically homogeneous Pharisaic-rabbinic period into two major sections of three chapters each, roughly corresponding to the millenium preceding and following the rise of Islam.

III.

More important than this chronological problem, the solution of which, under the exigencies of each particular type of inquiry, will necessarily be left to the more or less arbitrary decision of the individual historian, are questions arising from the divergent approaches to history. Since Buckle, the problem of the *natural* foundations and limitations of human history have become the topic of unceasing controversy. No one denies that history occurring in space, as well as in time, is definitely bound to certain limited areas and cannot but be influenced by the clim-

atic, meteorological, hydrographic, geological and other natural phenomena associated with the geography of that particular area.

No one has, nevertheless, thus far attempted to write a history of the Jews from the exclusive point of view of the influences emanating from their habitat in various periods. Such an attempt as undertaken by Buckle for English civilization would evidently fail in helping to reconstruct the history of a people which for millennia has been divorced from its own soil and has tried with varying success to acclimatize itself to the changing geographic environments. It can definitely be shown, however, that the geography of Palestine has played a very decisive role in the shaping of the destinies of the Jews in antiquity and through them profoundly influenced also succeeding generations. One certainly cannot complain of a dearth of either geographic or historical material. A mere glance at the five volumes of Peter Thomsen's *Bibliography of Palestine* will easily convince the interested reader that within the last half century more books and articles have been written on Palestine than on any area on this globe comparable to it in size. Certain basic geographic phenomena have also been examined with respect to their possible influences upon history. The contrast between the sea and the eastern desert, it is now generally conceded, was undoubtedly co-responsible for the millennial conflicts between the sedentary and the Bedouin populations. The natural division of the country into some forty single geographic units certainly was a contributory cause in the rise of tribalism, provincialism and separatism which have so largely determined the course of Palestinian life since the establishment

of the Canaanite city states, as it now seems, under the impact of the Hyksos domination. The curious socio-economic and political phenomena resulting from the geological preponderance of limestone; the effects of the frequent deficiency of rainfall and the ensuing excess of evaporation over precipitation upon agriculture and population density; the irretrievable damages inflicted upon Palestine by the constant process of deforestation and soil erosion, in particular under the mismanagement of the successive Muslim administrations; the losses of life and property sustained during the recurrent earthquakes—these and other elements of the eternal interplay of geographic and historic factors have been rather well scrutinized. It appears, nevertheless, that a closer examination of the available archaeological material will help further to clarify these interrelations between man and nature within the confines of ancient and medieval Palestine.

The influence of geography upon Jewish history in the Diaspora offers a much more difficult, altogether unique problem; as unique, indeed, as is the Jewish dispersion. A thorough investigation of the Jewish settlements in various periods and of the forces emanating from their respective natural environments would undoubtedly help elucidate a number of otherwise unexplainable phenomena in the history of many Jewish communities. Such topographical studies are unfortunately available only for a few countries and, while having undoubtedly pioneering merits, can hardly be classified as sufficiently comprehensive and searching. Ancient Babylonia, the cradle of the Talmud, has found investigators such as Neubauer and Obermayer who have at least tried to identify the place names mentioned in the Talmud and es-

tablish a few bare geographic essentials. Certain western lands have produced works of the type of the *Gallia Judaica* and *Germania Judaica* which give a general description of the recorded Jewish settlements in these countries. A few topographical studies have analyzed the location and other physical characteristics of various Jewish quarters in the middle ages and early modern times. But much more will have to be accomplished before any intelligent attempt can be undertaken to correlate the geographic and historical data in these and other regions and to draw tentatively valid general conclusions.

Of course, the individual scholar's philosophy of history and perhaps even contemporary biases will color his ultimate decision even with respect to this problem. Those, for example, who are extremely Palestino-centric, who believe that the Jews have never had any real history outside of Palestine and that, except for the remnant which will be saved in Zion, Diaspora Jewry is doomed to extinction, will naturally focus their attention upon the geography of Palestine as the primary factor, and disparage the influence of the physical background of diaspora history. Others will argue, from an opposite angle, that the significant historical developments of the Jews on Palestinian soil were limited to but a few centuries, that the Jews had had a diaspora even before Moses and once more began to settle in foreign lands not later than the eighth century B. C. Throughout the Second Commonwealth, it cannot be denied, the Palestinian center was confronted by Jewish communities extending over a vast area from Egypt to Persia, the aggregate population of which consistently outnumbered the Jewish settlements of the mother coun-

try. Most scholars and teachers will undoubtedly take the position in the middle that a clear analysis of every facet of physical life affecting both Palestinian and Diaspora Jewry is of supreme significance for the understanding of Jewish history in its entirety.

These remarks are not to be construed as an advocacy of the extremist Bucklean views on the influence of the geographic factor in Jewish history. On the contrary, in the present author's opinion, the history of the Jewish people offers a supreme example of a group, attempting (and to a certain extent succeeding) to live in despite of nature; of a nationality gradually divorced from state and territory, which has consequently become somewhat immune to the influences emanating from the soil and its derivatives. It is no mere accident, indeed, that no Jewish historian has ever attempted to write a Bucklean history of the Jews. Such an attempt, opposed to the very core of Jewish history, would naturally have been doomed to utter failure. Nevertheless, a better understanding of the influences emanating from the physical factors which have consistently threatened to submerge the people's conscious endeavor to emancipate itself from the forces of nature, will greatly help to clarify the successive relapses of various groups of Jews into a state of acquiescence with the dictates of nature, and the serious handicaps encountered by the people as a whole in its main historic procession.

IV

Much more important for Jewish history has become in recent years the *economic* approach. In the first place students of Marxism and exponents of socialist ideologies have tried to reinterpret the history of the Jews in terms of the basic changes in their economic structure

and the class struggle within the Jewish community. Quite a few bourgeois economists, Jewish and non-Jewish, have explained the main contributions of the Jews to western civilization along certain lines of economic endeavor. Werner Sombart and his disciples, as well as opponents, following the example set by Wilhelm Roscher, Max Weber, Lujo Brentano and a good many others, have paid special attention to the alleged or real affinities between capitalism and the Jewish spirit. Others, beginning with Levi Herzfeld, the unduly forgotten founder of modern Jewish economic historiography, began to collate the available facts concerning the economic activities of the Jews in various periods and to correlate them with the non-economic aspects of Jewish life in the past.

It must be borne in mind, however, that so far neither the Marxist nor the other economic interpreters of Jewish history have succeeded in producing a general synthetic work on the entirety of Jewish experience. The contributions of these schools, some of them undoubtedly of great value, are limited to but fragmentary explanations of certain phases of Jewish history. The periods most extensively discussed are either that of ancient Israel, in which the Soviet scholars N. M. Nicolsky and M. Lurie (more recently "purged"), as well as Abram Menes in Germany and France have made significant contributions; that of Jewry in medieval Europe, in which the comprehensive works of Caro and Schipper have been effectively supplemented by many monographic writings; or else the last two or three centuries in the life of the Jewish communities in Russia and Poland. While many of these studies have shed new and illuminating light on certain stages in the history of the Jew-

ish people, no attempts have as yet been made to extend these researches into other equally important phases of Jewish history, and to correlate their findings into a continuous historical account of the career of the people as it unfolded itself under the stimulus of preponderantly economic factors, if not altogether under the dictates of economic determinism. The few generalizations found, for instance, in Karl Marx's essay on the Jewish question; the investigations of one of his outstanding disciples, Karl Kautsky, on the Jewish "race" and the "foundations of Christianity," or the recent dire prophecies of the forthcoming "decline of Judaism" by Otto Heller, have been clearly controverted by the facts of Jewish history with which the authors had not been familiar.

Even more sadly neglected has been the history of the changing Jewish views on economic behavior from antiquity to the present. Besides illuminating a significant element in the world outlook of the successive generations, such a history would shed new light upon the changing economic realities, both in their conformity and non-conformity with the regnant economic theory. It would also furnish the relatively most solid bridge to cover the gap between these economic realities and the dominant ideologies of the various periods and thus open new vistas for the understanding of the economic factor in the entire evolution of the Jewish people. In writing the section on "Rabbinic Social Philosophy," the present author was, none the less, at a loss to indicate any scholarly literature on the subject. There is really none deserving this name. Most investigations thus far have been carried on in conjunction with the examination of certain juridical elements in the Talmud or medieval law in which the

purely economic factors were but incidentally treated. Basically jurisprudence dealing with the normative, with what ought to be, cannot satisfactorily answer the main economic inquiry of what is or what was. Nor can it really explain the leaders' attitude to such domains of economic life which are not regulated by law; indeed, frequently devised to evade and, hence, to coexist with the contemporaneous law. It is, for instance, well known today that not only in medieval Europe, but also in the countries of Islam, many pious Jews, often leaders of the Jewish community, engaged in extensive money-lending activities and charged interest to Jews as well as to non-Jews. Some of them charged interest to their own, ever more deeply indebted communities. At the same time the actual law prohibited, as verbal usury, even the expression of thanks for the extension of a loan. Life had simply devised many new types of business transactions to circumvent the law and made it possible to obtain perfectly legitimate unearned income from capital. A few economic data are given also in the none-too-rich and none-too-profound literature on Jewish ethics. But hardly any extensive researches have ever been undertaken to study Jewish economic teachings as such, either from the standpoint of economic theory or economic history.

The present shortcomings need not be discouraging to future researchers of and writers on Jewish economic history nor do they, by themselves, disprove the validity of a basically economic approach to all history. Much new information is yet to be expected not only from the lifting out of obscurity of the large mass of relevant economic-historical material, hidden away in libraries and archives, but also from the elucidation of the influences

exercised by the economic forces upon the totality of Jewish life in each particular period and country. However, we feel no less strongly that among the histories of the different human groups, that of the Jews will most stubbornly resist any full explanation which may be advanced for it exclusively on the basis of the progressive changes in the means of production or of any other economic transformations.

V.

It is no mere accident that it is the *idealistic* type of historiography which has dominated Jewish historical writing for centuries; in fact, for millennia. There need not be recognized any vital distinction between the ancient theistic view of history and some of the modern idealistic approaches. For the biblical historians, those marvelous writers of history who may lay claim to the title of "fathers" of historiography, it was God's will, humanly comprehensible even though supernatural, which has guided the destinies of mankind and of Israel. Under this scheme almost all happenings could be interpreted in the light of the moral-religious behavior of the Jewish group, however small its numbers. This theocratic view of history was carried on, with minor or major modifications, by the ancient and medieval authors for whom, of course, the experience of Exile and the ensuing need for apologetics became of paramount importance. With messianism looming large as the ultimate goal for Jewish as well as human history, the Jewish writers on historical themes were long satisfied with this generic explanation.

In modern historiography it was the more humanistic type of the "spirit of Judaism" which took the place of God as the determining factor. With all its variations from Krochmal and Zunz to Geiger,

Graetz and Guedemann, the underlying concept, nurtured from the overpowering forces of Hegelianism and the German idealistic philosophy in general, was, in more than one respect, but a continuation of the old doctrine. Did not Hegel himself still visualize all history as a gradual unfolding of a divine plan? "God lets men direct their particular passions and interests as they please; but the result is the accomplishment of His plans, and these differ from the ends sought by those whom He employs." The basic outlook of the nineteenth century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was to see in Jewish history the gradual progression of the Jewish religious or national spirit in its various vicissitudes and adjustments to the changing environments. To be sure, the accusation frequently heard that, for instance, Graetz had laid exclusive stress upon the biographies of rabbis and the story of anti-Jewish persecutions is clearly contradicted by his own programmatic formulation of the "national character" of the entire history of the post-Talmudic period. "As the history of a national entity [Volksstamm], Jewish history is far from being merely a history of literature or of individual scholars into which it is turned by the nature of the records and the one-sidedness [of the investigators]. On the contrary, literature and the religious evolution, as well as the extremely tragic martyrology of this nationality or community are but single incidents in its historic evolution. They are by no means its root essentials." Notwithstanding this clear-cut reservation the distinguished historian could not himself escape the impact of those records and of that one-sidedness in his own treatment of history.

Even the positivists among the Jewish thinkers such as Ahad Ha-am and Dubnow essentially accepted the primacy of

such "inner" factors. They set up a sort of autonomous national will which was the driving force in shaping the destinies of the people and which, in the supreme interest of national self-preservation, made all the necessary adjustments required in the different periods and regions. Today, too, a great many Jewish historians still will follow one or another of these "idealistic" methods of interpretation. Some will perhaps concede the shortcomings of such an approach to the history of any other nation, but will none the less insist that in the case of the Jews, whose general psychological and social make-up throughout history was so largely determined by their own religion and by the religious attitudes of their neighbors, no other explanation can do equal justice to the specific nature of the subject. Some will, somewhat more reluctantly, adopt one or another idealistic approach out of the practical consideration that the principal records left behind by Jewish leadership throughout the ages are of an almost exclusively religious and literary nature. If one wishes to remain true to the spirit of the authors of these records, such scholars might argue, one cannot avoid accepting, in some degree, the underlying philosophy of these writings which is outspokenly idealistic. In short, the Jewish people, having been, at least until the last two or three generations, primarily a religious body of men; there never having been any empiric Jewish group which would have proved its ability to survive without religion; the position of the Jews outside of the mass settlements of eastern Europe down to the World War still having been visualized by Jews and non-Jews alike as that of an exclusively religious group; the preponderance of the idealistic type of historiography, whether or not it substituted na-

tionality for religion, becomes self-explanatory. It is, moreover, to this general approach to Jewish history that we are deeply indebted for the most extensive as well as intensive investigations of the Jewish past in both its totality and its larger or smaller subdivisions.

It cannot be denied, however, that the idealistic approach no longer satisfies our present generation of scholars and students. There is a growing feeling that the historic explanations of the Jewish past must not fundamentally deviate from the general patterns of history which we accept for mankind at large or for any other particular national group. To be sure, every unbiased investigator will admit that general methods necessarily must be adapted to the requirements of each particular subject and that, for instance, no one can deal with the history of the United States in exactly the same way as he would investigate the history of China. There is, nevertheless, a growing sentiment abroad that the differences in methods must needs remain limited to such an indispensable adaptation of one and the same fundamental approach.

VI

The "*sociological*" approach to Jewish history has, therefore, become so very fashionable in our day. Unfortunately the term sociology itself has from its inception been so ambiguous as to cover an endless multitude of sins. There probably are nowadays as many "sociologies" in the world as there are distinguished sociologists. When applied to history this term has become even more equivocal. Simon Dubnow in his *Weltgeschichte*, hitherto the only major professed attempt to explain the history of the Jews in sociological terms, has programmatically proclaimed in his *Introduction* the need for a sociological interpretation. But in his

actual description of the Jewish past he has no more succeeded in realizing his program than had Graetz in avoiding the pitfalls of the *Leidens-und Gelehrten-geschichte* which he had so bluntly denounced. Except for his artificial attempts at periodicization, his forced quest for hegemony centers in various periods and, due to his own political "autonomism," his special attention to Jewish self-government, one finds in Dubnow's otherwise remarkable attempt at a new synthesis of Jewish history little that is a substantial advance over Graetz's still unsurpassed Jewish history. Other sociological approaches to Jewish history have likewise been tried. But with the exception of Max Weber's *Religions-soziologie*, with its very suggestive analysis of the ancient Israelitic religion in the author's own sociological terms, we have but a few monographs on specific subjects which really deserve the attention of modern scholarship.

The following remarks are intended neither as a full definition of, nor as a program for, a new sociological approach to Jewish history; they merely wish to suggest a few integral elements for such an approach which seem to hold out great promise for the near future. Much specialized research as well as analytical thinking will yet be needed before these issues will have been sufficiently clarified to make possible a more definitive systematic treatment.

The importance of the *biological* approach to history can hardly be over-estimated. No reference is here made to the racial ideologies, now propagated especially by German National-Socialist historians, who view the history of mankind primarily as the perennial battle ground of warring races. One need not altogether deny the importance of racial

characteristics for human history and nevertheless admit that our knowledge of what constitutes a race is still in its pre-scientific stage. Unceasing racial mixtures, moreover, have been so preponderant upon the historic scene, and the peculiarities of each race in the physical and psychological sense are so arbitrarily defined, that an attempt to construe basic historical developments on this foundation is like building skyscrapers on quicksand. Anthropology will have greatly to improve its own methods of research, to accumulate and sift infinitely more material and to obtain at least some tentative agreement among its leading exponents, before it will become a valid instrument for general or Jewish historic research. So far we must be satisfied with a few interesting side-lights thrown by anthropology and comparative ethnology upon the life of ancient Israel in the early stages of its historic evolution and upon the complex problems of contemporary Jewish readjustment.

Much greater promise is held out by an analysis of all important population developments in their bearing upon the general history of the Jewish people. It must be admitted that this aspect of human history has been sadly neglected, and the history of the Jewish population has naturally suffered from this general neglect. The present author hopes, some day, to write an extensive work on *Jewish history in the light of numbers*. A small instalment of this work was published in Hebrew some years ago in the form of a preliminary essay on *The Israelitic Population under the Kings*. No one is more fully aware of the enormous difficulties confronting such an undertaking which probably vastly exceeds the resources of present-day scholarship. Nevertheless, an attempt must sooner or later

be made to find out the various stages in the growth and decay of the numerical strength of the Jews throughout their recorded history; the rates of Jewish natality and mortality in different periods; the varying age and sex distribution in each generation; the numerical division between the urban and the rural groups; the extent and the biological effects of polygamy in various Jewish settlements; the frequency and effects of intermarriage, whether officially more or less tolerated or outlawed—are all problems of vital significance for the understanding of the economic structure, the social relationships, and even of certain cultural and religious developments of the Jewish, as of any other, people. Undoubtedly there are long stretches of Jewish history in which the evidence concerning these basic facts is either too limited or altogether non-existent. Even where extant sources have preserved some sort of statistical material, their reliability is subject to grave doubts. The predilection of many ancient and medieval authors for exaggeratedly high numbers, the total indifference of many others to the factual background of their figures and the greater likelihood of errors in the transmission of numbers than in that of almost any other parts of ancient texts, present tremendous obstacles to detached investigation. On the other hand, population and other censuses and compilations of lists of taxpayers were much more frequent and searching in antiquity and in certain medieval countries than is generally known today. In any case the time seems overdue for the marshalling, at least, of all the available information, and for its utmost exploitation by statisticians, sociologists and historians. That is why the present author has felt justified in his *History* in calling, briefly, and in

many ways tentatively, to the attention of the public the great influence exercised by these biological factors on the other phases of Jewish social and religious life in the crucial periods of ancient Israel, before and after the second fall of Jerusalem, and during the last three centuries.

Another significant approach may perhaps be styled the *normative-factual* approach. Thereby is meant an examination of the predominantly legal and ethical sources and contrasting them with the known facts of the Jews' socio-economic and cultural life. The importance of law and ethics especially for Jewish history has long been recognized. Was not law the very core of the Jewish religion and culture? Was not "ethical monotheism" Judaism's major contribution to civilization, on which modern Jews have frequently prided themselves, not without apologetic exaggeration? However, we must realize that even in such a generally law-abiding and ethically-minded community as that of the Jews, actuality never fully corresponded to the norm.

In fact the norm itself changed its significance with the changing realities. One characteristic illustration will suffice here. Judaism may pride itself on having introduced for the first time into the history of the legal systems the protective principle of *ona'ah* whereby both parties to a contract were protected against overreaching and misrepresentation, if the price exceeded its normal level by but one-sixth. The Roman *laesio enormis*, enacted several centuries later, probably under the direct or indirect influence of Jewish law, more reluctantly granted such protection in the case of damages reaching to some 50—100 per cent. It should be noted, however, that under the original conditions of agricultural Palestine, the transactions involving the sale of land,

slaves and deeds were exempted from the operation of this law. The reason for these exemptions is clear. Land was anything but a sheer commodity in ancient Palestine. It was held for many generations in the same family. Voluntary transfers were so exceptional and so much the result of a particular farmer's urgent need to dispose of his property that a severe limitation of the permissible price range would, as a rule, have handicapped rather than protected the person in whose behalf it had been enacted. Slaves, too, were primarily acquired for domestic service with a view toward their permanent association with the households of their respective masters. The sale of a slave by a Palestinian farmer or artisan was likewise in the nature of an exceptional, more or less forced disposal of property, which called for no stringent limitation of the right of free contractual price-fixing. Deeds served at that time merely as instruments of evidence and had by themselves practically no commercial value.

Centuries later the Jews found themselves increasingly transformed into a mercantile nation, living under the advanced semi-capitalistic civilization of the medieval Caliphate. Commercial transactions involving the sale of land or urban real estate became a prominent feature of Jewish commerce. Jews were frequently found among the leading slave merchants of the period. The transfer of deeds and negotiable instruments of all kinds became a primary branch of business of the Jewish bankers and merchants in the Orient. Evidently the retention of the three exemptions from the protective laws against misrepresentations at that period, simply meant that three large domains of economic endeavor were exempted from legal regimentation and

placed under the full operation of the liberalistic laws of supply and demand.

It is evidently not enough to know the text of the law, and even to learn that over a period of many centuries it was neither repealed nor modified. In order to know what it actually meant we must place it in the framework of changing reality. We must come to learn that there is not only a constant transmutation of meaning in words and concepts, but also in the superficially unchanged legal and ethical norms, legal and ethical constitutions. Frequently Jewish law was "adjusted" to life simply by *not* having undergone any formal change. Only a full analysis of both theory and practice may enable the historian to comprehend the institutional growth of any civilization, and especially of such an intrinsically "normative" civilization as the Jewish, marching under the flag of its eternal and divine, but nevertheless profoundly adjustable, Torah.

Another integral element of historic sociology ought to be the *communal* approach to Jewish history. By that term we wish to designate an analysis of the changing aspects of Jewish communal co-existence in different environments, and of their influence upon the daily life of the masses as well as upon the conscious formulations of the leaders. Even in the period of Israelitic monarchy, it appears, the life of the great mass of Israelites was much more affected by the happenings in the numerous towns, hamlets and villages and by the municipal administration, judiciary and priesthood than by the events which took place at the royal courts, the high army commands or the temples of either Jerusalem or Samaria. Undoubtedly due to the inherent weakness of Israelitic monarchy and the small size of the two capitals which between them

never seem to have harbored more than five or six per cent of the Israelitic population, the local forces far transcended in importance those of the central agencies of both state and religion. We must guard ourselves against being misled by the sources, mostly written in these central points, into over-estimating the significance of the centers as against that of the local agencies, the recorded history of which unfortunately is very meagre.

This experience of the ancient Israelites was duplicated on a world-wide scale in the Jewish communities of the dispersion. Here the control was further divided between the central and local powers of the non-Jewish state and the central and local management of the Jewish community. Only a proper balance between these centripetal and centrifugal forces, between the influences of the non-Jewish monarchs or cities and of the inter-territorial, provincial and local Jewish leadership (exemplified in the Palestinian patriarchate, the Babylonian exilarchate and gaonate, the provincial ethnarchate, negidut, synod or council and the individual Jewish community) can furnish the proper perspective for the understanding of the most vital developments in Jewish life.

The need for refining the peculiar methods required for the investigation of Jewish communal history may perhaps best be illustrated by the age-old problem of "democracy" in the Jewish communal structure. While there undoubtedly existed certain democratic forms in many Jewish communities, a great many others possessed decidedly aristocratic, if not monarchical, features. On the one hand, we possess records of communities with direct elections, in the case of many Spanish communities as well as of Leghorn during a brief period in the eighteenth

century even of the extremely democratic elections by lot. On the other hand, we find innumerable communities whose officials were appointed by an exilarch, a nagid or another provincial leader. The local *dayyanim* appointed by the exilarchs in many communities of the Near East over a period of several centuries were not only the official administrators of justice, but as the main tax collectors for the benefit of the community as well as of the state, wielded enormous power in all communal affairs. The rabbinate, as a permanent salaried office, was not yet developed and the local elders, even where such were elected, hardly counter-balanced the accumulation of power in the hands of these appointed officials. The haham-bashis of the Ottoman Empire likewise were powerful executives exercising vast control over the life of the bulk of Sephardic and oriental Jewry in modern times. However, their life-long tenure of office at least depended on their election by the communal leaders in Constantinople (often with the collaboration of representatives from other communities), and was not hereditary for countless generations as was the office of the Babylonian exilarchs. Even those western communities which could boast of theoretically democratic forms of government were frequently dependent, politically as well as economically, upon a leading court-Jew. His whimsical desires had to be respected by his fellow members, because the residential rights of the entire community frequently depended on the privileges granted to him personally or at best upon those of a small coterie of such influential chiefs.

In almost all communities, moreover, the non-taxpaying members were excluded from the exercise of electoral rights. One might argue that such res-

triction became necessary to prevent the numerous Jews supported by the community from influencing the elections in a spirit of excessive liberality towards themselves. This argument has become familiar to the American newspaper readers in connection with the alleged misuse of relief and WPA funds to influence elections in the United States. Whatever the reason, it cannot be denied that substantial sections of the community were thus barred from voting. In some communities only the taxpayers who contributed a higher than average tax were allowed to vote. More important still, according to the traditional concepts of orthodox Jewry, women were always excluded from voting and from taking any other part in the public life of the community. The rabbinic interpretation of an innocuous Psalm (45, 14) operated, like the Catholic *mulier taceat in ecclesia* as an insurmountable bar to women's active participation in communal boards. Even today orthodox leaders desperately fight to keep out women from communal leadership in Poland, Palestine, etc.

On the other hand, a much more profound type of "democracy" was achieved through the common ideals and practice of education. Every father was obliged to provide education for his sons; the community was responsible for the education of all, especially the poor. Through education one could attain the highest position of power and eminence in Jewry. There was also an inherent solidarity in the life of a struggling minority which transcended the class differences and still more, the relatively minor distinctions in electoral rights. In short, democracy in the Jewish community is not a myth. But to understand its role properly one must bear in mind that no strictly political form can correspond to the essentially

non-political type of organization as represented by the ancient or medieval *kehillah*. The Jewish people had in its millennial evolution so far progressed along the road of emancipation from both state and territory, had developed even in its substitutes for a state so many new non-political features, that it is quite erroneous to look in its communal structure for organizational forms taken from the strictly political fields of state power.

We may be permitted, finally, to make mention of the *socio-religious* approach to Jewish history which a good many readers seem to have detected in our recent presentation. It will be well to bear in mind the fact to which the reader's attention has repeatedly been called, that this social and religious treatment of Jewish history arose out of a specific interest in the interrelations between society and religion in the entire historic experience of the Jewish people. The author's warnings against the generalization of this approach, primarily determined by the theme, seem to have remained unheeded even by quite a few critics. It is evident, moreover, that religion could generally be classified as just another social force, and that a socio-religious approach would only be the equivalent of a general sociological approach with some specific emphasis upon religion. Such specific emphasis, it must be admitted, is entirely warranted in the case of the Jews. There is no doubt that among the various social factors, population, economics, community, secular culture and religion, the latter has held the most conspicuous place, at least in the consciousness of the Jews, throughout the three and a half millennia of their existence. In no other people's history has the impact of religion been so strong, continuous and comprehensive as in the history of the Jews, especially

in post-biblical times. It is consequently but the unavoidable and intrinsically justified adaptation of the general method of sociological interpretation to the peculiar problems of Jewish history when the element of religious experience is given its due large share within the totality of the social forces. In this sense, and in this alone, we may agree to calling this particular variation of the general sociological method, a "socio-religious" approach to Jewish history.

VII

In conclusion we may be allowed to add a few remarks on the application of these methods to the *teaching* of Jewish history. The effects of any change in approach and methodology upon the higher education and the professional training of young historians is self-evident. However, one must never lose sight of the warning, sounded by Theodor Mommsen, that "it is a dangerous and pernicious illusion when a professor of history believes to be able to train historians in the same fashion as one would train philologists or mathematicians at a university. With greater justification than in the case of the latter one must say of the historian that he is not being trained but born, not being educated but educates himself." And Mommsen undoubtedly was one of the greatest teachers of history, who succeeded in instilling in his students both a reverence for and a critical attitude toward the ancient sources, and in teaching them to correlate disparate incidents into a great whole. Nevertheless, the recurrent raising of such methodological issues, the discussion of their general aspects and, even more fruitfully, the pointing out of their specific application to particular subjects under discussion in an advanced seminar, will undoubtedly help the younger adept

of the historical sciences to clarify these issues in his own mind and to make those vital decisions for which he may or may not have been "born" in the ultimate sense.

Of no lesser significance is such methodological clarification for the teacher of history to the non-professional mass of students. Whatever one's personal opinion may be about the desirability of the school functioning as an indoctrinating agency, one must admit that the viewpoints impressed upon youth in its formative age have lasting effects. Not only the totalitarian governments, communist as well as fascist, have recognized the extreme importance of indoctrination in the primary and secondary schools, but also a democratic country such as France has raised generations of citizens upon a *Weltanschauung* deeply colored by a historical tradition nurtured from the springs of French nationalism and the new democratic institutions. The newspapers recently reported that after prolonged negotiations between representative groups of French and German teachers of history, an agreement was tentatively reached concerning many controversial issues of historic tradition and a closer harmonization of the French and German textbooks in history. A widely accepted, though frequently exploded, view of the American Revolution has similarly colored the outlook of generations of school children and adults throughout the United States.

Indoctrination of such a type has undoubtedly been one of the essentials of Jewish education throughout the ages. The forces of survival of the Jewish people were greatly strengthened by the prevailing view of general and Jewish history which, instilled in the early years of childhood, was steadily re-impressed upon

the minds of the adults through oral and written preachments. One wonders whether the Jews could have altogether survived the medieval persecutions without the philosophy of history which emphasized the temporary as well as purifying character of the Exile, and its ultimate disappearance in the messianic age. It cannot be denied that some of the vitality of the Jewish people has been sapped in recent generations by the loss of such a comprehensive, generally accepted philosophy of history, and the ensuing lack of indoctrination of the entire people in a common interpretation of its past.

We shall all realize, therefore, the practical dangers of historic iconoclasm. The undermining of traditional beliefs effected in the minds of many pious young Jews, as well as Christians, through the historic "higher" criticism of the Bible may serve as a warning with respect to the removal of other "idols in history." It was, consequently, not without hesitation that the present author undertook some years back, and has ever since continued to reveal the historic foundations as well as the inadequacies of what he called "the lachrymose conception of Jewish history." He still recalls the shock he received, when after the publication of a preliminary essay on this subject, the representative of a leading publishing house in New York suggested to him that he write a book "debunking" the Jewish middle ages. Time and again he also had the perhaps tragic-comic experience of finding the Jewish public as it were enamored of the tales of ancient and modern persecutions. It was enough for him to deny, for example, that any large-scale pogroms had taken place in the territories of ethnographic Poland before 1936 in order to evoke an instantaneous storm of protests, not against the alleged

perpetrators of such massacres, but against himself for venturing to deny them. Quite evidently this lachrymose conception of Jewish history has served as an eminent means of social control from the days of the ancient rabbis, and its repudiation now might help further to weaken the authority of Jewish communal leadership.

On closer analysis, however, we can easily perceive that such weakening is the cause rather than the effect of the new historic orientation. The generations which have become ripe for biblical criticism have long before begun to cast off in practice the "shackles" of the biblical tradition. We now see more and more clearly that the great transformations in religious history usually begin with changes in the ritual and religious observance rather than with those in dogma and religious theory. As a result of the economic, social, intellectual and ultimately also political emancipation, there had started a complete disintegration of Jewish communal control long before the nineteenth century when the "science of Judaism" began its memorable process of "cutting down the plantations" of the accepted theory. So, too, in our own days the absence of a common interpretation of Judaism and of an agreement as to the essential criteria of Jewishness, brought about by the disparate socio-economic interests, cultural backgrounds and factional struggles within the various groups of Jewry, militates against the very possibility of indoctrinating Jewish youth in a convincing, because uniform, view of the Jewish past. That is why, it seems, the removal of outworn historic conceptions is not only dictated by the scientific conscience of the investigator and by the quest for truth of the genuinely interested public, but may also,

in the long run, pave the way towards the formulation of a new philosophy of Jewish history which would more closely correspond to our own modern social needs and our new intellectual requirements. A comprehensive, generally accepted emphasis in and explanation of Jewish history will, in any case, have to await the return

of a certain stability in the social and cultural structure of the Jewish people. The new effective social control of the community, confidently to be expected in that new "universalist" age, would easily devise its own new full-fledged philosophy of history and the means of instilling it in its own youth.