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## Glorious, Accursed Europe

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## THE GLORIOUS NINETEENTH CENTURY— EUROPE AS PROMISED LAND

*The living, enlightened, edificial time,  
The nineteenth century, praised and sublime.*

YEHUDA LEIB LEVIN,  
“Sheelot Hazman” (Questions of our time)<sup>1</sup>

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*And yet throughout Europe the Jews see the light of  
liberty and live a vibrant, multifaceted life.*

MORITZ LAZARUS,  
*Was heisst national? (What is a nation?)<sup>2</sup>*

Jews were not alone, of course, in appraising the nineteenth century and placing it on the scales for judgment. Once the century had ended, it was possible to reflect and draw conclusions. Some Jews extolled the century, while others regarded it with disappointment; everyone was concerned with the question of what form Europe might take in the new century—would the twentieth century continue along the path of positive and far-reaching changes seen during the nineteenth century, or was the nineteenth century a time of distortions that would only grow more acute and more powerful in the next century? Opinions were divided between optimism and pessimism: where some saw decline, others found reasons for reassurance.<sup>3</sup> “Our nineteenth century,” Karl Marx declared in 1856, was characterized by forces of industry and science that “no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected.” At the same time, however, it revealed signs of far greater decline than those seen in the twilight of the Roman Empire: “in our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary.”<sup>4</sup> In 1849, in contrast, in his opening address to the International Peace Congress held in Paris, Victor Hugo described a vision of a Europe united in peace that would be the acme of the nineteenth century: “the nineteenth century will be—let us say it openly—the greatest page in history.”

During this century the various European nations would, without losing their distinctive qualities and glorious individuality, become “blended into a superior unity and constitute a European fraternity.” According to Hugo, the railroad and steamship contributed greatly to European unification, and through its colonies, Europe would bring not barbarism but civilization to other continents: “civilization will replace barbarism.”<sup>5</sup>

In the following two chapters, we will describe the evaluation of the nineteenth century by Jewish thinkers and journalists at the end of that century. By “nineteenth century,” we mean, of course, the European century; this is the century that was placed on the scales. We will examine Europe’s achievements first, and its failings afterward.<sup>6</sup>

### THE TWO FACES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The intellectual Jewish elite assessed the nineteenth century from both a Jewish and a European point of view—that is, Europe’s fate concerned the elite because it considered itself an inseparable part of Europe. As a Jewish elite, it asked which of the expectations, hopes, and wishes that had occupied it during most of the period in question had been fulfilled, and which had met with disappointment; similarly, it dealt with the question of what might be expected from Europe during the next century. In this context, the Jewish elite evaluated itself as well: where had it been correct, and where mistaken; had it successfully understood the essence of Europe; and might that understanding deepen at the start of the twentieth century?

The portrait drawn of the nineteenth century by the Jewish elite—and by non-Jewish elites in Europe’s various countries—had, as we have mentioned, two sides. One side depicted Europe as the pinnacle of mankind’s achievements, a perfect mix of civilization and culture, of material comfort and moral refinement. “We live in a time that recalls the glory days of the Renaissance and the Reformation,” declares a character in Theodor Herzl’s 1898 *Die Güter des Lebens* (The assets of life).<sup>7</sup> On the other side, the Jewish elite described the century as an age of myriad afflictions and illusions—a world of moral decline, loneliness, and emptiness. From the Jews’ perspective, the nineteenth century was a time in which they were granted citizenship and equal opportunity, but it was also a period that saw the appearance of the incurable plague of modern antisemitism, and one in which profound schisms were revealed that created unprecedented divergence in the Jewish world.

Let us begin with the positive side of the century.

## EMBRACING EUROPE

From the modern Jewish perspective, the nineteenth century opened with soaring hopes and expectations. David Frankel, one of the founding editors of the first Jewish periodical in German, *Shulamit* (founded in 1806), expressed those hopes as follows: the “people of Abraham” were attempting, despite all the difficulties placed in their path, to attain recognition as equals in humanity, and *Kultur* (culture) would enable them to “embrace Europe.”<sup>8</sup> According to this optimistic view of the future, it was not Europe that would embrace the Jews who lived within its borders, but the Jews who would embrace Europe. In other words, it was the Jews who needed to change and improve in order to become worthy of Europe’s loving, accepting embrace.

The longing for Europe’s firm embrace originated in the perception that the European spirit (often represented, as we have seen, by the German spirit) was the pinnacle of humanity: a blessed and welcome combination of reason, intellectual achievement, education (*Bildung*), and aesthetic sensitivity. Earlier we quoted Eduard Gans, who described Europe in Hegelian terms: “Europe is not the work or the outcome of chance which would have been different, better or worse, but the inevitable result of the effort made, through many millennia, by the Spirit of Reason which manifests itself in world history.” Gans expressed his vision as follows: “This, then, is the demand of present-day Europe: the Jews must completely incorporate themselves into Europe’s social and cultural fabric. This demand, the logical consequence of the European principle, must be put to the Jews. Europe would be untrue to itself and to its essential nature if it did not put forth this demand. Now the time for this demand, and its fulfillment, has come.” If so, the Jews must be an inseparable part of European culture; but, he added, Europe was “a plurality whose unity can only be found in the whole,” while the Jews were a “unity which has not yet become a plurality.”<sup>9</sup>

Leopold (Yom-Tov) Lipmann Zunz, one of the foremost Jewish scholars of his time and a distinguished member of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism movement), concluded an 1832 book with a highly optimistic picture: “From now on, the light must shine not from Babylon, but from Germany, our homeland.” “Religious persecutions, spiritual oppression and social disintegration,” he continued, “can no longer withstand the forces of the new era.” According to Zunz, Europe—in particular Germany, rather than France, as Germany was the pinnacle

of culture and civilization, its inhabitants noted for a wondrous blend of patience and energy, wisdom and innocence—had shaken off the last remnants of barbarity and demonstrated a steadfast spirit and sense of compassion. Nothing could successfully oppose “enlightened Europe’s mighty strides” and prevent the triumph of liberty and civilization. The heritage of medieval times had been erased as though it had never existed, and little time would elapse before this European civilization, its conflicts ended, would shed its light on czarist Russia as well.<sup>10</sup> “The injustices of the Middle Ages,” promised Moshe Leib Lilienblum in May 1881, “will never be renewed.”<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Nathan Birnbaum, a Zionist who later moved to the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) camp, declared at the start of the twentieth century that “the Jewish people will belong to European civilization, or it will not exist at all”; this was because the Jewish nation (*Volkstum*) belonged to the great partnership of European civilization.<sup>12</sup> However, as we shall see, his opinion on this subject was not consistent.

The question arises: what inspired this optimistic, even messianic, picture of the future regarding the Jews’ full integration in Europe, and Europe’s readiness to embrace them?

#### **BETWEEN REVOLUTIONARY EUROPE AND THE EUROPE OF ENLIGHTENED ABSOLUTISM**

The late eighteenth-century Enlightenment in Europe impressed the perception upon the Jewish *Haskalah* that a new era was dawning in Europe, one entirely different from its predecessors. This view was expressed to some extent by modern Jews’ orientation toward and rhetoric regarding the future.<sup>13</sup> Historical time was now seen as moving forward, along a path of both material and spiritual innovation that would lead to an age of light. In the few surviving written reactions about the Jewish response to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars as they were taking place, there is a noticeable belief that these were a victory for reason and a joining of hearts that would bring about a profound change in the nature of political rule in Europe. *Hameassef* (The gatherer), the newspaper of the *Haskalah*, published an ode in 1790 to France’s great committee, describing the national assembly as a body laboring to enforce the principle of universal justice, and expressing the author’s hope that the situation of the Jewish people would improve:

O House of Jacob! Fed on sorrow,  
Thou hast fallen terribly, through no sin of your own;  
Be of good courage, for there is yet hope,  
A year of salvation draws nigh  
Your righteousness shall shine forth . . .

Blessed are you who sow justice,  
The generation of your fathers rejoices in you;  
You have constructed a memorial,  
On which the world may perch like the moon . . .<sup>14</sup>

In its early years, the French Revolution was seen as an event that “removed the yoke [of injustice] from Europe’s nations.” The revolution was perceived as disseminating religious tolerance and civil liberty, and therefore as bringing an end to religious fanaticism and the medieval “clouds of darkness.”<sup>15</sup> After Napoleon, “the world and all its ancient laws were overturned and a new land and new order were created under the sun.”<sup>16</sup>

Naturally, there were also doubters. First and foremost was Moses Mendelssohn, who believed that the course of human history was one of peaks and valleys, and that Jews would therefore do well to be wary and not pin their hopes on what only seemed to be invincible progress. Indeed, during the 1820s, the French Revolution, the Reign of Terror, and the Napoleonic wars were already portrayed as a period of chaos—a regime of violent terror and boastful tyranny. The blame was attributed to, among others, the aesthetic philosophers, headed by Voltaire and Rousseau, under whose influence France had become a “dangerous, rabid man” and brought about the deaths of “thousands and tens of thousands in Europe.”<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of the 1860s, Kalman Shulman wrote that the French Revolution had brought “tens of millions of ignorant men, the rabble and dregs of society, who fear neither God nor King” to the historical forefront.<sup>18</sup> In 1869, Lilienblum wrote that after the revolution, European history “overflowed with rivers of blood, and Europe’s nations have become as savage as the beasts of the field.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite this ominous view of European civilization as overflowing with abominations, it is difficult to find evidence of nostalgia for previous generations. The new generation, even with its flaws and maladies, was perceived as the end of Old Europe—in Shulman’s words, that home of “all criminal evil, all murderous killing . . . and all the abominations of Man and God.” Since France was not considered a fitting representative for the new

century, that torch should be passed to another country; Shulman elected Prussia. He described it—despite its wars against France, Denmark, and Austria—as the nation of education and culture: “On the basis of the knowledge that it produces, [Prussia] was praised in all corners of Europe; the Prussians all bent their ears to learning as well, until almost no man could be found in Prussia who did not possess rudimentary education.”<sup>20</sup> He regarded the Prussian victory over France—“this great and wonderful thing”<sup>21</sup>—as a victory over a savage people who were prisoners of fantasy. If formerly Shulman had believed that Prussia was plotting “to extinguish the flame of enlightenment and the brightness of civilization and culture, whose origin is France and its inspiration all the rest of Europe,” he now believed that France was actually the threat to culture.<sup>22</sup> Czar Alexander II was also lauded and described as a “*hasid*” (a righteous man) who had liberated Russia’s serfs, enacted regulatory reforms “based on the foundations of justice and honesty,” and “sounded the horn of enlightenment in such an exalted way that within not many days Russia had ascended a hundred rungs on the ladder of learning and science.” The czar had opened “the gates of all the schools and institutions of knowledge and science” to the Jews, and ushered the whole of Russia through the gates of civilization: “Commerce increased during the days of the exalted Emperor, and agriculture and all forms of labor and industry flourished like a vine. The railroad and telegraph were built and installed across his domain by his word.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, Jewish *maskilim* from Eastern Europe adopted the opinion, born in the seventeenth century, that Russia had ceased to be an Asiatic country and had become part of Europe.<sup>24</sup>

In the eyes of the *maskilim*, enlightened absolutism was perceived as a regime that implemented the Enlightenment’s values of tolerance, suppressed religious fundamentalism, instilled stability and order, and reined in the masses’ radical outbreaks and passions, which were apt to lead to new tyranny. Enlightened absolutism was depicted as an ideal regime, which could effect gradual changes without upheavals or turbulence. Shulman was not the only one who believed in the optimistic picture of the future put forth by Levinsohn during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1851—after the failure of the Revolutions of 1848 (called the Spring of Nations)—Shmuel Joseph Fuenn, another Jewish Russian moderate *maskil*, described the achievements of enlightened absolutism: “Suddenly a gleaming light appeared in Europe’s skies and with the glory of the gentile nations it illuminated the entire land; wisdom and intellect were brought together; justice and peace embraced.”<sup>25</sup> Enlight-

ened absolutism was therefore seen as having brought Europe out of the “darkness of barbarity” and the anarchy of revolutionary mass rule, and into an age of refined, tolerant, and humanistic culture. The absolute ruler was sometimes described in the contemporary literature as the “Cyrus of our times” and as a messiah: “the duty of the Israelite to the King” was, according to the Bible, to “heed him and obey his commands to us with love and faith; to fear him, to love him, and to pray to the Lord God for his health and for peace in his domain.”<sup>26</sup>

From the Jewish perspective, there was no doubt that Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century was a world of stability and progress. Despite all uncertainties and differences of opinion, Jews regarded the period after the Revolution of 1848 as a far better age than any of its predecessors. Everything then considered worthy of emulation by Jews was European. In spite of the cultural differences among its various nations, Europe was perceived as a single world with a common background of values, whose history was a universal history following the course of progress and modernity. The prevailing opinion was that the spirit of Enlightenment had spread throughout Europe and would eventually arrive in other countries, even if it tarried in doing so. In his 1864 programmatic poem *Hakitza Ami* (Awake, my people), Y. L. Gordon wrote that czarist Russia had become an inseparable part of Europe:

Awake, my people! How long will you sleep?  
The night has passed, the sun shines through.  
Awake, cast your eyes hither and yon  
Recognize your time and your place . . .

The land where we live and are born  
Is it not thought to be part of Europe?  
Europe—the smallest of continents  
But the mightiest of all in wisdom and knowledge.

This land of Eden [Russia] is now open to you,  
Its sons now call you “brothers.”  
How long will you dwell among them as a guest,  
Why do you reject their hand?<sup>27</sup>

According to this vision, the concepts of equality that had been born in France would slowly and gradually arrive in Russia as well, and that country was destined soon to become a paradise, integrated with the new European world. The Jews’ woes and travails throughout Europe had not



yet come to an end, but all doors were now open to them, and they could begin to contribute their talents to various cultural fields as in “the best of the European nations.” The day was not far off, Shulman added, when the Jews of czarist Russia would experience emancipation and “become the equals of all the citizens of the land, in all civil laws and in all governmental positions of seniority and authority.”<sup>28</sup> The fulfillment of these tidings of salvation for Russia’s Jews was tied to the westernization of Asiatic Russia.

As we will see in chapter 3, this was not the only forecast. The disillusionment felt by Leopold Lipmann Zunz over the failure of the Revolution of 1848 stirred him to issue doomsday prophecies about the dark, impending barbarism that would oppress or enslave enlightened Europe. Another medieval night threatened to darken Europe’s skies; the days of culture would vanish. The disappointment and disillusionment evident at the close of the century were even greater. After the so-called Southern Storms (a series of pogroms in southern Russia), Gordon amended his optimistic worldview and wrote: “who was wise enough to have foretold that such an outrage would take place in our time?”<sup>29</sup> And the writer and thinker Michah Yosef Berdichevsky, living in Berlin, threw cold water over optimistic predictions when he wrote, following the first international conference on antisemitism in Dresden on August 14, 1891:

Our Russian brothers are building castles in Spain . . . little do they know that in the West, too, life is corrupt and mercenary. Little do they know that here, too, the foundations of society are corrupt, and that the groundwork of morality and decency have been totally eroded! Social justice has been crushed. Instead, the wealthy devour the labor of the poor, who toil away, destitute. Little do they know of the desolation, loneliness, and isolation that prevail here! Little do they know that here, too, people have no qualms about devouring each other alive! That here too everyone is out for himself. Whoever says that the sun shines in the West is mistaken.<sup>30</sup>

During the nineteenth century, there were many events and developments that brought about disappointment and disillusionment: pogroms; the Damascus Affair and other blood libels against Jews; and a new type of antisemitism.<sup>31</sup> Yet despite their disappointments and concerns, it appears that Jews remained optimistic. Europe’s negative aspect was seen as shadows that only occasionally took center stage, or as delusional visions that arose from Europe’s past and invaded its present—not as

characteristic of modern Europe. Most Jews believed that Europe would not return to a medieval darkness, and that progress was inevitable. In his speech at the Third Zionist Congress in Basel in 1899, Max Nordau said: "I openly declare that I do not believe that the catastrophes of our past will be reenacted in the future . . . Today there is a European conscience, a conscience of humanity, limited indeed, but requiring at least the appearance of a degree of honesty and it could hardly tolerate preposterous mob crimes."<sup>32</sup>

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the historian Simon Dubnow expressed his confidence that the rule of religion, which had flooded the rivers of Europe with blood during the Middle Ages, would not return, and he added that "the time is near when the theory of oppressing minorities will be totally repudiated, since it endangers the existence and integrity of the state."<sup>33</sup> In its December 28, 1899, issue, *Der Israelit*, the weekly newspaper of German Jewish Orthodoxy, summarized the improvements in the Jews' situation that had taken place during the nineteenth century as follows: "Since exiting the Ghetto, Jews [had become] partners in creativity in all areas of life" in Europe. Although blood libels and the Dreyfus Affair had placed the stamp of barbarism on the nineteenth century, the Jews' situation in Europe was tolerable. In Germany, they had been granted full equality under the law, and public anti-semitism had disappeared, though it continued to exist covertly among the upper classes. The situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not good, because of internal unrest for which Jews were paying the price. In Russia, some discriminatory laws had been repealed, and these developments raised hopes; in France, the Dreyfus Affair had hurt the Jews' self-confidence; in England and the United States, the situation was excellent, and the Jews had been granted equal rights and had integrated seamlessly into society. The shadows were therefore numerous, but it could be hoped that they would disperse during the following century and that a new age would dawn.<sup>34</sup> The liberal *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* also wrote that the Jews had every reason to look back with satisfaction: the national liberation of Germany meant equality for the Jews, as embodied in political and civil freedom, interpersonal relations, personal treatment, and material situation. The Jews were full of appreciation for these achievements, as well as for the unification of Germany—an achievement for the sake of which they, as well as others, had shed their blood. However, there still existed a great distance between the ideals that had been declared at the start of the century and the de facto situation: equality of rights

was brutally trampled, and in its place rose the accursed antisemitism. This was the curse of the magnificent century, and as it erupted primarily at its close, the newspaper noted: “we therefore expect that during the new century things will change.”<sup>35</sup> According to this analysis, the Jews’ situation depended on the internal political situation of each European country and would be influenced by processes that would take place between those countries and Europe as a whole. In 1899, Emil Lehmann, one of the founders of the German-Jewish Community Alliance, wrote: “The Middle Ages, in which the Jews were persecuted, have passed . . . , and so has the time of all the despicable elements that characterized the age of religious Romanticism . . . The cultured nations of Europe and America have already solved the problem, if religious faith is independent and is not tied to civil or political rights.”<sup>36</sup> In these assertions, the authors echo the optimistic words of the prominent German-Jewish scholar Moritz Lazarus, who noted in a lecture in December 1879 at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin: “throughout Europe the Jews see the light of liberty and live a vibrant, multifaceted life.”<sup>37</sup>

The mood at the end of the nineteenth century was full of hope and confidence that developments would follow a positive trend.

#### EUROPE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND TRADITION

With admiration and excitement, as well as trepidation and concern, the Jewish intelligentsia observed the factor that most influenced Europe’s transformation into a single entity: the enormous achievements of science and technology. The intelligentsia tracked them, reported them to other Jews, and discussed their relationship to ethics and international politics. Technological and scientific achievements and resulting improvements in living conditions were seen as a clear sign of progress<sup>38</sup> and modernity. The telegraph, electricity, steamships, railroads, and many other inventions during the latter half of the nineteenth century were described as the work of man, completing and improving upon God’s creation.<sup>39</sup> So, for example, the moderate *Haskalah* weekly *Hamagid* summarized the first half of the century in a series of articles titled “The Spirit of the Times,” published in December 1858, with the author’s unambiguous conclusion that progress was increasingly taking place throughout the world thanks to Western achievements in science and technology.<sup>40</sup> These provided mankind with the tools to overcome and control nature, and to alter not only values and patterns of government, but the entire human experience of life.

Several other summaries were compiled in this spirit at the end of the nineteenth century. One was written in 1893 by Zvi Hermann Shapira, a rabbi and professor of mathematics at the University of Heidelberg. He noted:

Ours is a generation of industry, a generation of railroads and steamships. Telegraph poles are planted from one end of the world to the other. We capture sunlight and electrical energy, gathering and storing them in vessels like a man drawing water from a cistern. We speak and our voices resound from one end of the world to the other . . . People are amazed by the wonders they see and hear . . . Entire fields of knowledge have sprung up before our eyes and will develop in our hands and spread new light on many subjects that had lain beyond our reach until only yesterday.<sup>41</sup>

The newspaper *Hatzfira*, which was published in Warsaw and sought—according to its motto—to disseminate “knowledge, science, and news about the world and nature,” declared in a December 31, 1889, article titled “The First Good Days”:

How fortunate the future generations! Even a thick and hefty volume will not suffice to contain a fraction of all the advancements in science and industry that have been made in the nineteenth century; and indeed we will be able to take pride in the idea, for even an old man living today has seen more inventions born before his eyes than all the generations of the past two thousand years.

Another article in *Hatzfira*, titled “From the Four Corners of the Earth” and published on December 24, 1889, stated:

If you are traveling in a steam or electrical carriage—if you traverse great waters in a steamship, and gaze at the lights, great and small, at electrical lights that illuminate the night in the big city squares . . . and sit in your bedroom at the telephone and converse with your friend who is seated in another city—when you peer with the aid of rays of hidden light [x-rays] and behold your own skeleton without flesh or tendons, and when you hear your own voice addressing you from the phonograph—you think to yourself and know that merely a century ago all these were but vague ideas and impossible dreams.

Nahum Sokolow, the editor of *Hatzfira*, waved the banner of technological and scientific achievements that would lead humanity toward a

new era.<sup>42</sup> Nachman Syrkin, a Socialist-Zionist thinker, wrote in the same spirit that technology had changed life entirely, and as a result the eyes of all the world were focused on the coming century “with hope and confidence, because it will fortify the human race and imbue it with lofty ambitions.”<sup>43</sup>

These and other articles did not address the question of what factors were responsible for the fact that the industrial, scientific, and technological revolutions had all occurred in Europe. However, it is clear that in the eyes of the authors, the affinity between this revolution and the European spirit was self-evident, just as the profound difference between advanced Europe and the backward world beyond its borders was self-evident. This was also why nearly everyone debated the connections between a civilization’s technological progress and the state of its culture in the context of Europe.

Machines, electricity, trains, and other technological and scientific innovations, which were foundations of the modern world, were not generally perceived as leading to disintegration or decay. “This century,” Herzl wrote in 1895 in his introduction to *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish state), “has given the world a wonderful renaissance by means of its technical achievements.” During the century, new assets were endlessly created, and it “brought us a valuable revival through technological achievements,” which could be utilized in solving humanity’s problems. “At the same time,” he added, “its miraculous progress has not yet been employed in the service of humanity.”<sup>44</sup> Despite Herzl’s criticism of the situation in Europe, his Zionist utopia was based on nineteenth-century “scientific Messianism”—that is, on confidence in the power of science and technology to settle the contradictions inherent in this social reality—and, of course, in their ability to take the Zionist idea from potential to implementation and to shape a new Jewish society in Palestine.

Prior to formulating his plan of action for the creation of a new Jewish society, Herzl revealed an ambivalent attitude regarding the influence of science and technology on society. In several stories and *feuilletons*, he hesitantly described the effect that various inventions would have on the life of the common man. The most famous of these tales is “Solon in Lydia”: in the story, there is free bread for everyone, which emancipates humanity from the need to work. In other stories, Herzl displayed a more positive attitude toward technology and science. In the story “Das Automobil” (1899), he described the effect of automobiles as follows: “Every owner of an automobile has, in the distance, his own small house sur-

rounded by a garden. Life on the main roads is more pleasant . . . The modern lifestyle cultivates a new type of people, in whom the farmers' culture and the urbanites' power are combined." Herzl's optimism came with qualifications. According to him, technological sophistication did not guarantee human sophistication: "How rapid our journey . . . how sluggish our wisdom."<sup>45</sup> Still, after visiting an automobile exhibition in Paris, where he admired "the new American Cleveland automobile," which was powered by electricity, he wrote in his diary on June 21, 1899: "The automobile was created for us. We will have cement roads, fewer rails, and from the start we will install our new forms of transportation."<sup>46</sup> In the 1896 story *Das lenkbare Luftschiff* (The dirigible airship) Herzl again expressed his doubts when he wrote about the new "toys" that were bringing about unexpected changes:

Now the horseless carriages begin to go forth into the world. What changes will they wreak? Every innovation in transportation is likely to bring about enormous and unforeseen changes. Soon enough, and strangely enough, the effects begin to emerge in the lives of the masses, in their successes and in their morals. New diseases are born, though the human race is becoming healthier. Living conditions change rapidly these days that had never before changed at all.

The airship in the story is developed by Joseph Müller, a genius whose inventions also include an automatic brake for trains and a puncture-proof bicycle tire. Müller decides to destroy the airship, claiming that humans were fit for inventions such as corkscrews and gaslights, but not for the ability to fly. The Doctor, one of the characters in this story, approves Müller's decision. If the airship remained in human hands, he says, it would be used as a weapon and bring about great bloodshed; furthermore, it would increase the wealth and pleasure of those who possess wealth and power on the one hand, while spreading new forms of poverty and misery on the other hand. Some of the characters wonder if it should therefore be considered a destructive invention. "The Parisian" supplies an optimistic summary of the discussion: Müller "should not have concerned himself with those living in our times and certainly not with the poor folks around him. Anyone who shapes the future must look forward from the present. Eventually, humanity will become good."<sup>47</sup> Herzl's 1896 pamphlet, *The Jewish State*, is uniformly optimistic; during the 1830s, he wrote, many conservatives had not believed in the railroad, yet now it was established fact.<sup>48</sup>

The relationship between progress and morality thus concerned Herzl, as it did many members of his generation; he saw both sides of the coin. In an article in August 1893, he compared the suffering of machinists in factories to the suffering of the Jews, and wrote that it was not revolutionary socialism's misleading eschatological rhetoric that would bring the workers salvation, but rather the scientific revolution. However, it was also possible that their creations would create new troubles.<sup>49</sup> Yet on June 8, 1895, Herzl wrote in his diary: "My view is that socialism is a purely technological problem. The distribution of nature's forces through electricity will eliminate it. Meanwhile our model state will have come into being."<sup>50</sup>

On March 21, 1897, Herzl sent a copy of *The Jewish State* to the aging British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and requested his opinion. In a letter he included with the book, Herzl wrote that once a Jewish state was created, it would be possible to see "how the beginning of this undertaking was reflected in the great mind of Herbert Spencer."<sup>51</sup> Here Herzl was referring not to social Darwinism, with which Spencer was associated, but to Spencer's belief in progress arising from the power of scientific thought and achievement—a belief that made Spencer very popular in Central and Eastern Europe, where his views became important weapons in the struggle against autocracy. Spencer's influence on Herzl is evident in statements such as: "We know, after all, what phases the human race has passed through from its primitive to its civilized state. Its progression tends ever upwards."<sup>52</sup> Herzl was one of the great believers in social progress and innovation through all the modern methods. Like Spencer and other liberal thinkers, he believed that a liberal industrial society was a prerequisite for peace, love for mankind, and happiness. In order to convince others that his plan of a Jewish state was realistic, Herzl repeatedly emphasized that by means of science and technology—in particular, trains and electricity—Palestine could be transformed into a modern country. The modern technology of the present and the future would provide the tools necessary for realizing the Zionist enterprise. On June 17, 1895, Herzl wrote in his diary that the difference between him and Shabtai Zvi was that "in the last century it was impossible. Now it is possible—because we have machines."<sup>53</sup> *The Jewish State* begins with the declaration: "The world now possesses slaves of extraordinary capacity for work, whose appearance has been fatal to the production of handmade goods. These slaves are the machines." The steam engine, he added, had crowded workers into factories, while electric power would liberate them

and create better working conditions. In a lecture he gave in London's East End in July 1896, he enumerated the advantages of modern society:

And there is another advantage in modern civilization that will make the terms of our new migration unique and without any model in history. The results of geographical surveys, of sea travel, of research, of engineering and steam-locomotion, will serve our new migration . . . Our people, an intelligent people, will adopt the most modern methods.<sup>54</sup>

In his 1902 utopian novel *Altneuland* (Old-new land), Herzl described the fulfillment of this idea: modern Palestine was well stocked with all the accoutrements of comfort and all the technological innovations needed both to develop and modernize the land—thanks to electricity, the “old new land” was transformed into a flowering garden—and to create a model society. “The nineteenth century,” claims the novel’s protagonist, David Litwak, “was an oddly lame age—one foot far forward, the other dragging behind . . . At the beginning of that curious era, the most muddle-headed visionaries were taken seriously while the most practical inventors were regarded as mad.” Nonetheless industrialization, which led to the creation of the exploited industrial proletariat, also led to the creation of a futuristic nation. According to Litwak, social planners had never before had access to such technical powers: “Even at the end of the nineteenth century technical methods were already advanced. We only had to take the inventions of the Western world and use them.”<sup>55</sup> The assets of technology and science that the Jews brought from Europe to Palestine and the knowledge amassed in all of the cultured nations—including turbines, generators, electric power, steam engines, and railways—enabled them to exert control over nature, develop the land, and fulfill the “springtime of humanity”; the power that science provided did not trample the Jews, but launched them forward. “In short, we needed the entire yield of the year 1900”—the yield of modern civilization’s accomplishments. These achievements, Herzl wrote, created a unified world: “With regards to science and art, all the borders have already vanished.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus there is no doubt that Herzl’s outlook on the subject was shaped by belief in human willpower, supported by science and technology. Humans could raise cities from scratch: “Will is what raises a city. I might point anywhere and say ‘Let there be a city here!’ and a city will rise,” he wrote aboard ship in his diary on September 30, 1898, as the Dutch capital, The Hague, came into view.<sup>57</sup> In contrast to the chilling picture painted



by H. G. Wells in his 1899 novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*, which describes the world in the twenty-second century as a cruel and awful megalopolis, albeit brimming with technological inventions—a world which made the nineteenth century seem like the Stone Age—Herzl described the city of the future in *Altneuland* as a modern and humane place.

In his Zionist writings, Herzl was therefore distant from the depressed mood of the *Kulturpessimismus* (the culture of pessimism) and from the consciousness of decadence and the “craving for gloominess” which it created, in Max Nordau’s words. Herzl did not regard the processes of urbanization and industrialization with terror, nor did he describe them as creating a hell on earth.<sup>58</sup> Despite profound and copious criticism, he did not accept the “impassioned image of little old Europe.”<sup>59</sup> On the contrary, he believed it was possible to create a modern, sophisticated, and just society of the future. In this, his vision of the new era resembled that of the positivists and utopianists of his time (some sixty utopian works were published between 1850 and 1900):<sup>60</sup> this was an age of material comfort, freedom, and moral conduct, and the growth of knowledge and the advancement of technology would make the twentieth century even better. Herzl agreed with the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, a contemporary of Darwin who had also developed a theory of evolution based on the principle of natural selection. In his 1898 *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and Its Failures*,<sup>61</sup> Wallace summarized the achievements and inventions of the nineteenth century and their positive effects on people’s lives, though he did not ignore the gap between technological progress and the state of morality.<sup>62</sup> Herzl’s almost childlike amazement at the abundance of new inventions was expressed in passages like the one he wrote in his diary on June 8, 1895: “A department of innovations, with correspondents in Paris, London, Berlin, etc., immediately reports on all novelties, which are then tested for their usability”; and he stated elsewhere, “what one man discovers belongs to the whole world an hour later.”<sup>63</sup>

More than a decade earlier, on June 19, 1882, the Istanbul office of Bilu—the elite group active in the First Aliyah (immigration to Israel)—composed a circular to European and American students that was never sent out. Its substance was that Bilu intended to create a model settlement in Palestine that would inject “the neglected Jewish economic reality with new foundations according to the latest conclusions drawn from the science of our times and according to the latest word of European culture in our generation”<sup>64</sup>—that is, of the culture of Western Europe. Bilu’s members therefore shared Herzl’s belief in the importance of industry and of

scientific messianism. A worldview that stressed the role of science and technology in the formation of the future was also held by other members of the Jewish elite at the end of the nineteenth century, bourgeois and revolutionaries alike. However, there is no doubt that of all the Zionist leaders and businessmen, it was Herzl—a journalist and author—who devoted the most profound attention and accorded the most central position to science and technology, and he extended his enthusiasm for the achievements of science in general to the Zionist context.

The philosopher Martin Buber was profoundly critical of Herzl's "scientific messianism": Herzl "loved to think in technological terms. When he began to explain his plan [regarding] the time of technological conquests, which brought us those 'mighty slaves,' the machines, he said it had thus brought us 'a wonderful renaissance.' He, who always knew how to choose his words appropriately, did not even sense how mistaken he was in seeing technological progress, even great amounts of it, as a renaissance, a cultural revival."<sup>65</sup> Buber, an idealist, considered Herzl's enthusiasm for science and technology an obsession, but he was mistaken in describing him as a materialist, aloof to the spiritual and cultural contents of a society. Herzl was deeply interested in the spiritual and cultural content of modern Jewish society.

Max Nordau, who shared Herzl's vision, was also deeply critical both of such pessimists and of the phenomenon of deterioration in Europe and its literary culture. In his books *Entartung* (Degeneration, 1883), *Die Conventionalen Lügen der Kulturmenschheit* (The conventional lies of our civilization, 1883), *Paradoxe* (Paradoxes, 1885), and *Die Krankheit des Jahrhunderts* (The malady of the century, 1887), he described them as the symptoms of a pathological culture. Nordau was a great admirer of European bourgeois culture, in which he saw the embodiment of normal European values.<sup>66</sup> He believed that the decadent and naturalistic literature and art produced by European modernism dealt with sick and abnormal phenomena, and that they steered European society away from rational, universal values and toward nihilism and political demagoguery, from which he, like Herzl, recoiled; this led to antirationalism and anti-intellectualism, and from there to nationalism and antisemitism, until Europe would resemble a large mental institution. At the same time, Nordau, again like Herzl, saw science—the clear product of rational thought—as the antithesis of and cure for theology and metaphysics. He too raised the key question: how would mankind utilize science? His response was that the common man was a creature of deep-rooted and sturdy optimism, who knew how to

use the achievements of science and technology in order to cure Europe of the “malady of the century”—a term coined by the French poet Alfred de Musset in the 1830s. Nordau distinguished between scientific pessimism and practical pessimism, and he believed that optimism was man’s basic outlook that expressed the human life force: *dum spiro, spero* (while I breathe, I hope). Only such belief could form the basis for Nordau’s view that the Jews were an inseparable part of the positive layers of European culture, and that to drive a wedge between them and Europe would be impossible.

However, as we will see in chapter 3, Nordau too was not exempt from the apocalyptic inclination:

Europe will not be able [for] very much longer to escape a great and violent rending asunder of its nationalities . . . The twentieth century can hardly come to an end without seeing the conclusion of this drama in the world’s history. Before then a considerable portion of Europe will see much distress and bloodshed, many acts of violence and crimes . . . People[s] will be raged against and races pitilessly crushed; side by side with tragedies of human baseness will be played tragedies of lofty heroism; hordes of cowards will allow themselves to be emasculated without resistance; and brave armies will perish gloriously in fight. The survivors, however, will then enjoy the full possession of their national rights, and in word and action will always and everywhere be able to be themselves.<sup>67</sup>

In the same chapter, he prophesies a European struggle for existence, over the course of which Europe’s population would spread to other continents until “the entire earth will be subject to the plough and the locomotive of the sons of Europe.” However, the tables would eventually be turned. He concludes: “And then? Yes, what will be then I do not know. Here a black future will become still blacker; I am utterly unable to distinguish anything more, and therefore am compelled to bring this tale to an end.”<sup>68</sup>

The late-nineteenth-century doomsday prophecies and visions of an approaching battle between good and evil,<sup>69</sup> which we will examine in chapter 3, arose from a feeling of discomfort with the condition of society and culture in Western Europe and from lack of faith in science and technology. In the pessimistic climate at the turn of the century, many prophecies emerged of cultural decline (*Untergang*), and of decadence that would commit crimes against the entire fabric of life and transform Europe into

a diseased entity and eventually an invalid whose death would quickly approach. In spite of this mood, the intellectual Jewish elite considered the Europe of the “long nineteenth century” (which extended to 1914) a world of material and cultural progress. Urbanization, industrialization, global trade, and the like did not inspire the same fears of modernity among most Jews that they did among the European petite bourgeoisie and rural population.<sup>70</sup> From their perspective, nineteenth-century Europe was a reality that should be embraced warmly, and they hoped that it would continue to embrace the Jews.

It is thus no wonder that from the perspective of the gloomy 1930s, the none-too-distant past of the previous century was seen through rose-colored glasses. The shadows of the nineteenth century were forgotten. It was depicted as an enchanted century—as “the good century,” *la belle époque*, a shining period, and a lost paradise,<sup>71</sup> and as the century in which the flag of political and creative freedom was raised and a recognizable improvement in the quality of life began. However, even during the 1930s, when Europe approached the most profound schism in its history and revealed its monstrous side, it was impossible to ignore the fact that the previous century had been one of cruel imperialism, exploitative and oppressive capitalism, and national militarism. It was indeed a century of dishonor, but—as Jabotinsky wrote in 1937—despite all of its flaws, the twentieth century was in comparison a “swindling century,” a century that betrayed all the values and ideals of its predecessor. The twentieth century was one in which “all the forces of unenlightened reactionism form a powerful and giant army.”<sup>72</sup> Still, despite their great disappointment and fear of what was to come, Jabotinsky and many other Jews still believed at the end of the 1930s that the moral and aesthetic nineteenth century could be revived, and that the dark, opposing trends they faced did not represent the true nature of Europe and Western culture.