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Glorious, Accursed Europe

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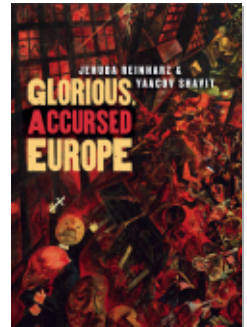
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ANTISEMITISM AS AN INCURABLE EUROPEAN DISEASE

Many have been asking with horror, "Have the Middle Ages returned?" In my opinion, yes!

MOSHE LEIB LILIENTHAL,
"The General Jewish Question"¹

Europe's fate and the swing of the pendulum between enlightenment, tolerance, and progress on the one hand, and decline, degeneration, and cruelty on the other hand, deeply preoccupied the Jewish intelligentsia. However, they were at least as preoccupied with the question of what the future held for Jews in Europe. This future would be shaped primarily by modern antisemitism; indeed, it became clear in the mid-nineteenth century that not only had enlightenment and progress not cured Europe of this affliction, but modern antisemitism was more dangerous than its previous incarnations, combining as it did Christian theological and popular hatred of Jews with neopagan and pseudoscientific hatred. From the Jews' vantage point, then, Europeanness represented not only the positive side of Western culture, but also—and sometimes primarily—anti-Jewishness and antisemitism. From such a vantage point, Europe and the Jews appeared as two distinct entities separated by an unbridgeable and eternal chasm.

It is not our intention to elaborate here on the rich and diverse research literature dealing with the origins of modern antisemitism. Instead, we wish to focus on two questions that have troubled Jews since at least the mid-nineteenth century and trouble them to this very day: Was antisemitism indeed a European illness, incurable and apt to erupt in waves, in various places and guises, but always with similar roots and substance?² And how was it possible to explain the fact that members of the enlightened European culture believed blood libel accusations, adhered to ancient prejudices, and were unable to escape them?

ANTISEMITISM: A MEDIEVAL FICTION?

Throughout 1840, as news of the Damascus Affair—a blood libel against the Jews of that city—spread around the world, many Jews believed it was now clear that those nations that stood at the forefront of enlightened civilization would not come out in defense of justice, morality, or even rationality. For example, Heine wrote on July 30, 1840: “We stand in wonder and ask ourselves: Is this France, the birthplace of enlightenment, the land in which Voltaire laughed and Rousseau wept? Are these Frenchmen, who had once bowed before the goddess of reason at Notre Dame?”³ But the Damascus Affair involved the Orient—not Western Jews—and therefore, even if the arrival on the scene of the Jewish Question as an international problem inspired ideas which flourished only toward the end of the nineteenth century, Western Jews certainly could not forecast their future by its light.⁴

In response to the Damascus Affair, Moses Hess wrote:

The way and manner in which the persecution of the Jews is looked upon in Europe, and even in enlightened Germany, must necessarily cause a new point of departure in Jewish life. This tendency demonstrates quite clearly that in spite of the degree of education to which the Occidental Jews have attained, there still exists a barrier between them and the surrounding nations, almost as formidable as in the days of religious fanaticism. Those of our brothers who, for purposes of obtaining emancipation, endeavor to persuade themselves, as well as others, that modern Jews possess no trace of a national feeling—have really lost their heads. These men do not understand how it is possible that such a stupid, medieval legend, which was only too well known to our forefathers under the name of *Mamserbilbul*, should be given credence, even for a moment, in nineteenth century Europe.⁵

Hess saw Germany as the source of modern antisemitism, since “the sympathetic Frenchman assimilates with irresistible attraction every foreign element . . . The German, on the other hand, is not at all anxious to assimilate any foreign element . . . He lacks the primary condition of every chemical assimilative process, namely, warmth.” To the question of how it was possible that in nineteenth-century Germany people could be tempted to believe in “medieval legends,” Hess responded that Germany was still Teutonic in spirit, reactionary and nationalistic, and that its liberalism was nothing more than a ripple on the water’s surface.⁶

The historian I. M. Jost wrote in July 1840:

Where now is the demi-god needed to fight the Hydra of our times which shoots out its many-hundred heads each with its innumerable hissing tongues? The very spirit of Evil was required to create such a monster; and our century is fighting it . . . all in vain. A poison has entered the very organs of peace and love and who knows for how long it will continue to do its work. What good are the protestations of innocence, the reliance on justice and the confidence in prevailing morality, when innocence is held suspect, when justice is subject to error, and when the masses, so susceptible and barely weaned from prejudice, are deceived by these phantasmagoria which . . . restore the thorns of hatred?⁷

Indeed, it was primarily the antisemitism in nineteenth-century Germany—a nation viewed by many Jews as the pinnacle of European culture—that was received with shock. But Germany was not an isolated case. In the wake of a series of events—including the blood libel in Damascus in 1840; the pogroms during the Revolutions of 1848; the appearance of organized antisemitism in Germany during the 1870s; the pogroms of the 1870s and 1880s; and the Dreyfus Affair in France during the 1890s—doubts arose as to whether the age of rational enlightenment and tolerant liberalism would indeed bring an end to the hatred of Jews. Even those who predicted the explosion of antisemitism were astonished at its intensity. Thus, when Smolenskin was notified of the pogroms in Odessa in 1871, he wrote the following emotional words in the monthly *Hashachar* (The dawn):

Do not believe those who say that this is an age of wisdom and an age of love for mankind; do not turn to the words of those who praise this time as a time for human justice and honesty; it is a lie! Just as murderers in the times of the Crusades and the reign of Isabel in blood-drenched Spain thirsted for innocent blood, so it is during this age.⁸

The Jewish writer Lev Levanda, an explicit supporter of Russification, predicted the pogroms that erupted in April 1882. They would happen, he wrote, because Russians saw the Jews as a power that must be taken into account and that therefore must be weakened.⁹ On April 19, 1895, in the second article of his series about the French intellectual Ernest Renan in the St. Petersburg newspaper *Hamelitz*, the historian Josef Klausner wrote

that he was deeply saddened by the fact that the *fin de siècle*—so proud of its intellectual progress, triumphs over nature, inventions, and lofty ideals—was still home to evil and sinful men. This was a cause for profound despair, because none of the inventions and improvements of the time had proved able to help humanity or overcome its impulse for evil. A day earlier, on April 18, the Paris correspondent for *Hamelitz* had reported on Eduard Drumont's great popularity and wrote that it was hardly surprising, as the Catholic hatred for Jews had existed since Europe's earliest days. More than a few essays toward the end of the nineteenth century cautioned against the threat of German antisemitism and maintained that its goal was to destroy the Jews. We will mention two of these essays here, both pamphlets: *Die Judenfrage und die Zukunft* (The Jewish question and the future), written in 1891 by Gustav Cohen, a Zionist merchant from Hamburg (who later moved to Manchester) and the father-in-law of Otto Warburg; and *Vor dem Sturm: Ernste Mahnworte an die deutschen Juden* (Before the storm: Grave warnings to German Jews), written in 1896 by Dr. Bernhard Cohen, a physician from Berlin. In 1891, the Reform rabbi Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, who had emigrated from Germany to the United States, decided to his despair that the growth of antisemitism in Europe and its appearance in the United States demonstrated that modern antisemitism must be a universal European phenomenon. Its new ideas and motifs flowed easily from country to country, and from culture to culture. The Jews' optimism in the New World was premature, Kohler felt:

How rudely have we all been roused from our dream! How shocking were all the illusions of the beginning of the nineteenth century destroyed by the facts that developed at its close! What a mockery this so-called Christian civilization has turned out to be! What a shame and a fraud this era of tolerance and enlightenment has become!¹⁰

From a historical perspective, these warnings obviously were correct. However, they were outnumbered by other voices that urged calm and depicted the demonstrations of modern antisemitism as a disturbing phenomenon, yet maintained that there was no need to exaggerate their power and influence or raise unnecessary fear. The Jews who downplayed the warnings believed that antisemitism could not delay the process of integration and acclimatization, or the development of new models of autonomous Jewish organization and activity. In this spirit, for example, Herzl wrote in June 1895 to Bismarck, the German chancellor, that the Jewish Question was merely a remnant of the Middle Ages. And to Hess's

question about how it was possible that nineteenth-century Europeans could be tempted to believe medieval accusations of blood libel, Herzl replied that the antisemitism of modern cultures was their attempt to exorcise a “ghost from out of their own past.”¹¹

The belief that modern antisemitism in Europe was a regrettable but marginal phenomenon that would not delay the victory march of tolerance, integration, and acclimatization triumphed over the view that antisemitism was a permanent phenomenon and an inseparable part of Western culture. The question of whether the latter opinion arose from self-delusion or temporary blindness was much discussed in the years after the Holocaust, but by 1935, the Jewish German intellectual Ismar Elbogen had already proposed the following answer in his book *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* (The history of Jews in Germany): “The German Jews of the nineteenth century had done the best that they could to assimilate and therefore felt secure. What they failed to realize was that the liberal era had come to an end.”¹² And in fact, the general impression is that the German Jews during the 1870s and 1880s exhibited a “slow response to the revival of antisemitism,” partly because it raised the question of whether they “could . . . ever really become German”—a question to which few wished to respond in the negative.¹³

This spirit of optimism was not unique to Germany. Despite his disappointment with the nineteenth century, Simon Dubnow, for example, believed that political reactionism was not an inseparable part of nationalism,¹⁴ and that the nations of Europe would understand that protecting the rights of national minorities—including, of course, the Jews—would only be to their advantage. Although the pogroms of 1905 shook his beliefs and roused in him “feelings of fear and apprehension for the future” that Russian Jews faced at the hands of “Amalek’s government,”¹⁵ causing him to support organized Jewish emigration to the United States, Dubnow did not lose hope that Jews in the Russian Empire would attain national autonomy.¹⁶ Jabotinsky went so far as to believe that the Russian intelligentsia was not antisemitic.¹⁷ The Jewish intelligentsia was therefore unable to agree on whether modern antisemitism was a remnant of Europe’s dark past, or an inherent manifestation of Western culture.

The consequence of this second opinion was that any Jewish attempt to integrate and acclimatize was in vain. As noted, Herzl wrote to Bismarck that antisemitism was merely a ghost, but in fact he had concluded that it was a fatal and universal European illness: “The whole world [all of Europe] sips from the well of antisemitism and absorbs it slowly, almost

imperceptibly. It penetrates every pore. It is accepted with the most passionate enthusiasm by those who deal more than most with books and speech: priests and teachers.”¹⁸ The results of this conclusion prompted Herzl to predict a horrible future, which was—in the words of *Altneuland*’s Friedrich—“a denunciation of Old Europe”:¹⁹

Finally we must end up at the bottom, rock bottom. What appearance this will have, what form this will take, I cannot surmise. Will it be a revolutionary expropriation from below or a reactionary confiscation from above? Will they chase us away? Will they kill us?

I have a fair idea that it will take all these forms, and others. In one of the countries, probably France, there will come a social revolution whose first victims will need be the big bankers and the Jews . . .

Anyone who has, like myself, lived in this country [France] for a few years as a disinterested and detached observer can no longer have any doubts about this.

In Russia there will simply be a confiscation from above. In Germany they will make emergency laws as soon as the Kaiser can no longer manage the Reichstag. In Austria people will let themselves be intimidated by the Viennese rabble and deliver up the Jews . . .

So they will chase us out of these countries, and in the countries where we take refuge they will kill us.²⁰

The socialist Zionist thinker Dov Ber Borochof reached a similar conclusion—namely, that “hatred toward Jews is not an economic phenomenon but a psychological and sociological one, born of emotions, and even a social revolution cannot change that.”²¹

Nietzsche was therefore mistaken when he wrote in *Human, All Too Human* that the Jewish problem existed only in countries where the indecent custom of blaming the Jews for any trouble had taken root. In fact, the spirit of antisemitism existed everywhere; both Left and Right participated.²² Nietzsche also wrote that “I have not met a German yet who was well disposed toward the Jews,” and that anti-Jewish sentiment was a firmly implanted instinct among the Germans.²³ Chaim Weizmann expanded this claim, writing in October 1913: “[What European can] say that he is free of antisemitism? A man must be Jewish to be free of it!” The blood libels, Weizmann added, “are not a Russian monopoly; not many years ago we had blood libels in Germany and Austria, and who knows that they might not return?”²⁴ If all the modern phenomena—

nationalism and revolution, reactionism and progress, conservatism and modernity—indeed gave birth to antisemitism, this could not be a coincidental combination of circumstances and causes, but a phenomenon nourished at the very core of the European soul. Only this could explain the fact that although Europe had entered a new, enlightened age, hatred toward Jews still welled up in it, and not only in Eastern Europe, but in the West as well—the stronghold of progress. Only this could explain why antisemitism did not belong only to the lower classes or the reactionary circles, but to the liberal and enlightened circles as well. And only this could explain why antisemitism was targeted not only at traditional Jews but also, and perhaps primarily, at westernized Jews.

Thus the outbreak of popular and official antisemitism during the 1870s and 1880s in Western and Eastern Europe, along with the appearance of racial antisemitism, undermined the foundations of Jews' hope for the nineteenth century and shook the optimistic worldview held by most of the Jewish elite. These events led to the diagnosis of antisemitism as a collective, inherited, and contagious European spiritual illness: the Jews were Europe's nightmare, and antisemitism its antidote. Hatred of Jews took on different forms, but it was eternal; and the German people were the most affected by that illness. The modern hatred of Jews was born in Germany, renowned for its intellectual developments (and in particular for pan-Germanism); the Russians and Poles learned from Germany and imitated it.²⁵ The Orthodox rabbi and mystic Elchanan Hyle Wechsler was apparently the first to respond along these lines to the pamphlet published by Wilhelm Marr and to articles written by the historian Heinrich von Treitschke in 1879. In 1881, Wechsler published the pamphlet *Ein Wort der Mahnung an Israel* (A warning to the people of Israel) and asserted that here was a new type of hatred against Jews. Antisemitism was a "thousand-tongued Hydra," a cross-European phenomenon that first attached itself to Germany. The emergence of racial antisemitism—the "spirit of Amalek"—was, Wechsler wrote, "a phenomenon even more terrible and threatening" than the antisemitism of the past. Marr and Treitschke had described the Jews as a foreign, Semitic element, and in doing so had ridiculed the Jews' prediction of successful integration and decreed an end to all their foolish delusions.²⁶ A year later, on June 5, 1882, and in a different place and context, the staff of the central office of Bilu, in Odessa, wrote: "we are, as history shows, strangers everywhere."²⁷ This antisemitism was not simply the animalistic outburst of a dark, cruel rabble left behind by the march of progress—as the Southern Storms

pogroms were depicted in 1881–82—but a collective pathology, an incurable Judeophobia that was an inseparable part of the collective European personality.

This was the prognosis proffered in 1882 by Dr. Leon Pinsker in his pamphlet *Autoemancipation: A Call to His Brethren from a Russian Jew*.²⁸ Europe's Jews, he declared, were in an unsalvageable situation: the utopia of a Europe without nations was as probable as the coming of the Messiah, but it was impossible for Jews to assimilate into Europe's various nations. Pinsker's radical prognosis was not widely accepted; the majority of the Jewish elite objected to it decisively. Objectors maintained that it gave Europe a bad name, encouraged antisemitism, and spread romantic delusions about a dubious new homeland waiting somewhere beyond the horizon:

Free yourself then, my dear friend [Pinsker], of your harsh thoughts, and do not despair of our historic genius. In the great inventions of our time there lies promise not only for the military powers, but also for the enslaved and impoverished. The telegraph, the steamboat, and the railroad spread word of all the world's happenings at a wonderful speed . . . Get thee to Italy, your heart is ill; but your head, I hope, will become recharged and refreshed in Italy's fields. In Rome every ruin will speak of the might of the ancient world, but in spite of Vespasian and Titus, we are still alive to this day . . . The Roman she-wolf is dead and the Jewish lion-cub is alive and well. Go in peace, and on your return to Russia you will find that the wrath has passed, whether in large part or in small.²⁹

The front-page article in the Russian Jewish weekly *Voskhod* on October 8, 1882, declared that Pinsker had ignored the great struggles in which Europe was embroiled. Despite the manifestations of reactionism that were once again evolving in the nineteenth century, progress would not retreat: antisemitism was not particularly successful, even in Germany. Russians, asserted the weekly, were by nature kindhearted.³⁰ Isaak Rülff, the rabbi of Memel, Lithuania, wrote to Pinsker reassuringly: "The Berliners are not so bad as you think. They merely want another good shock and upheaval to shake off the dust of assimilation and so forth that sticks to them. We will leave this task of purification to antisemitism. Believe me, the latter has an important role yet to play in the story of our national revival."³¹

This optimism sprang from the assumption that antisemitism was not a natural phenomenon but a historical one, which would disappear

from the world along with the factors responsible for it. Thinkers and columnists from the socialist camp saw antisemitism not as an inherent and universal European disease—an explanation that would have put an end to their belief in the possibility of improving European society—but as a result of nationalism and the internal contradictions of bourgeois society. In this spirit, Nachman Syrkin, for example, claimed that the source of antisemitism was the middle class, and that it was a revolutionary movement encompassing every class of society.³² Others proposed distinguishing between different types of antisemitism according to nationality. In 1923, Zeev Jabotinsky wrote that Europe’s Jews were trapped between Scylla and Charybdis,³³ and that they were the first victims of every revolution—and, on the flip side, of every reaction;³⁴ but he added that even though the Poles hated the Jews, the tradition of good neighborliness would at length emerge victorious, because it lay deep in their blood and was stronger than hatred and madness, which resembled a layer of dirt obscuring the true nature of that nation. “Poland will yet be a nation of peace,” he wrote,³⁵ and Polish antisemitism was nothing more than “rhetorical antisemitism”; that is, it was the objective result of demographic pressures and economic competition. It was true that in Poland there were hooligan elements, Jabotinsky wrote after harsh manifestations of public antisemitism,³⁶ but Polish society had almost no substantial hatred toward Jews. In contrast, German antisemitism was “a people’s antisemitism”—that is, a psycho-cultural phenomenon “imbibed with the [German] mother’s milk.”³⁷

Jabotinsky’s words are a far cry from those of Uri Zvi Greenberg, who saw in Poland “the end of all exile”—the place in which Christian Europe was destined to settle its final bloody score with the Jewish people. A macabre irony of history, Greenberg wrote, was that the disaster would take place in wicked Poland, where Jews felt a deep-rooted sense of belonging: “We have been paying room and board to Europe until now. And now this Europe does not want to tolerate us in her lands and even rejects our Einsteins . . . Every nation is joining wicked Poland and raising its voice against its Jews: To Palestine!”³⁸

The need to compare different types of antisemitism in Europe grew stronger after the start of the 1830s. Thus, for example, some claimed that the assimilation of German Jews was the main reason for Germany’s antisemitic reaction, but then how could one explain the existence of antisemitism in Poland, where assimilation was a far less pervasive phenomenon? Nahum Sokolow, who had by then replaced Chaim Weizmann

as president of the Zionist Organization, returned in 1934 from a journey to Poland (his homeland), and wrote that Poland was now headed by a “great European Pole”—Marshal Józef Piłsudski—whose government rejected *Volkist* nationalism based on racial principles. Poland’s government, wrote Sokolow, lacked the foundation that supported German antisemitism; the latter form of antisemitism “expresses itself entirely in the cult of origin and race, in dreams and hallucinations of Polish national unification.”³⁹ But Sokolow also warned that the growing power of the popular nationalist parties was apt to bring about the rise of an antisemitic government in Poland: “a Hitler regime is near,”⁴⁰ and “Polish Hitlerism” would draw after it “a tidal wave and volcanic flow of antisemitism.” Sokolow believed, in other words, that while in Germany antisemitism grew “from top down”—from the government to the people—in Poland it rose “from the bottom up”—from people to government—because “the people are infected with the disease of antisemitism to a greater extent than the government.”⁴¹ Thus, in the absence of a government that might check this growth, Poland would follow in Germany’s footsteps.

In the Yiddish poem “In Malchus fun Tzelm” (In the kingdom of the cross), Uri Zvi Greenberg asked: “How is it possible that those Europeans who worship Bethlehem [i.e., Christians] and sanctify the books of the Bible are also the same savages who dream of the destruction of the last Jew among them?”⁴² Words of warning were sounded, sometimes in harsh language that presented disaster as inevitable and built into Europe’s history, and that was intended to rouse public opinion. However, until the mid-1930s, the dangers of modern antisemitism in Europe were noticed primarily to the extent that they displaced Jews from their livelihoods and made it difficult for them to support themselves, or to the extent that it injured their pride. It was still unimaginable to think that Europe would plan and execute the physical destruction of the Jews.

THE ASHKENAZI APE

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jews began to protect the Jewish collective and to explain Jewish foreignness not in religious terms, but in racial and morphological terms—in terms of differences in “race.”⁴³ Race was the source of the “collective essence,” and racial differences were the reason for what Nahum Sokolow called, in 1882, “eternal hatred for an eternal people.”⁴⁴ The new explanation proffered for antisemitism’s vigor in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was that it was the

unavoidable result of the eternal chasm separating Jews from Europeans, as a result of their racial disparity. In his 1890 novella “Shem and Japheth on the Train,” Mendele Mokher Seforim ridiculed the Germans: they were reverting to the dawn of human history—that is, to the biblical conception of the world (Genesis 8)—and describing themselves as children of Japheth (Aryans), while calling the Jews children of Shem (Semites):

The Germans, who perform miracles of science, have turned the clock back a thousand generations, so that all of us at this day are living in the time of the Flood. Nowadays they call the Jew “Shem,” and the Gentile “Japheth.” With the return of Shem and Japheth the customs of that far-off age have returned too, and the earth is filled with violence. The non-Semites are hostile towards the Semites.⁴⁵

In Mendele’s story, the train is where a Jew and his Polish friend meet and share the same fate. In the intellectual Vladimir Harcabi’s story about his journey by rail from Vilna to Moscow in the summer of 1864—“From the Days of the Flood”—a train plays an entirely different role. There are no divisions between him and the Polish student seated opposite him; these are not Żyd and Pan (Jew and Gentile), but two students belonging to the same world—the student community. Harcabi quotes from Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (3:28): “there is neither Jew nor Greek.”⁴⁶ The first story is a pessimistic one: not only did the dividers not fall, but modern anti-semitism raised the barrier of race, a barrier that could not be overcome even through religious conversion. The second is an optimistic tale: the divisions between the Jewish and non-Jewish intelligentsias fall, and the two have common values.

Mendele Mokher Seforim was probably unable to imagine that Jewish writers would adopt the views in “From the Days of the Flood” and accept the opinion that antisemitism was an inevitable result of the fact that the Aryan nations of Europe possessed a fundamentally different national spirit and soul (*Gemüt*) from those of the Semitic Jews—in other words, that this was a question of different ontological entities, and that it was the profound difference between them that prevented the Jews from becoming part of European culture. Mendele discovered the boundless opposition between Aryan and Semite in a railway carriage, while Lilienblum—as noted earlier—discovered it in a revelation in 1882: “We are strangers not only here, but in the whole of Europe, for it is not the homeland of our people . . . Yes, we are Semites . . . among Aryans; the

children of Shem among the children of Japheth, a Palestinian tribe from Asia in the countries of Europe.”⁴⁷

Lilienblum wrote to the poet Y. L. Gordon that his investigation had “led me to a well-known path, of which I, so preoccupied by everyday matters, had till then taken little note. This is the natural difference between the children of Israel (and perhaps all the children of Shem) and the children of Japheth, at that time the Aryan family, the first of which were Greek, whose brethren later followed in their footsteps.”⁴⁸ Earlier, however, Lilienblum had written an article in which he expressed his opinion that German antisemitism had been invented by Bismarck for political purposes, while the pogroms in Russia were the result of Russian Jews’ lack of equal rights—and that after Bismarck’s political goals were reached, and after Russian Jews were granted equal rights, “this entire disaster will go away.”⁴⁹ At the same time, however, he believed that the source of European antisemitism lay in the character of its society, whether German or Russian. His views shifted radically after the Southern Storms.

In 1882, Lilienblum dubbed German antisemitism “the Ashkenazi Ape.” This ape was admittedly created in Germany for the purposes of political manipulation, but its creation demonstrated that “the earth excels in raising up creatures like these.” The fertile ground that nourished antisemitism was not religious hatred or the dark ignorance of the Middle Ages, but hatred of foreigners founded on the concepts of nationalism and race—the household gods that appeared in Europe as replacements for earlier religious ideals. Since the Jews were neither Slavic nor Teutonic but children of Shem, they were strangers in Europe whether they liked it or not—children of an alien race. Hatred of the Jewish stranger was therefore a natural and organic phenomenon. As a result, even modern European civilization was of no help to the Jews. It did not demand that Jews leave their faith or change their beliefs, but, as Lilienblum wrote, neither could it accept them as part of itself: “Can you demand that I take a stranger into my home and consider him a son?”⁵⁰ The German Orthodoxy also used the new concepts of race; in 1880, for example, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch addressed assimilated Jews from the pages of *Der Israelit*: “As much as you may divest yourselves of every Jewish matter, the race will exist to eternity.”⁵¹ The *Rassenjude* (racial Jew) thus replaced the *Religionsjude* (religious Jew) even in Jewish literature.

It is impossible not to notice the bitter irony hidden in these words, against the background of the widespread antisemitic claim that the threat Jews posed to Europe derived not from their Semitic racial characteristics,

but from the idea that it was they who had created and disseminated the universal values of the West. Consequently, they were responsible for the disintegration (*Zersetzen*) of the organized European societies, and thus the way to save Europe was to destroy the Jews.⁵² It is also impossible not to sense the bitter irony of Jews' invocation of terms from the field of collective psychology, and their diagnosis of antisemitism as a manifestation of a collective pathology. While antisemitic literature depicted Judaism as a hereditary illness, Jews diagnosed antisemitism as a hereditary illness in the Western, Christian world.⁵³

WAS ONLY EUROPE GUILTY?

However, it was not only Europe that was responsible for antisemitism: some placed the blame on European Jews. The two rival movements—Orthodox Judaism and the Jewish nationalist movement (including both the Bund and the Zionist movement)—were thoroughly agreed on the subject of Jewish responsibility for the situation. Both felt that the reason for antisemitism was assimilation—that is, the attempt by Jews to resemble Europeans and to become integrated through self-deprecation and shedding signs of religious or national cultural singularity. It was assimilation that gave rise to the antisemitic reaction, whose goal was to drive the assimilated Jews out of Germanness, or out of Polishness. In the eyes of the Orthodox, the guilty parties were the liberal and Reform Jews, and their rejection of their religion. “Before, we were abused because we were too Jewish; today we are abused because we are not Jewish enough,” wrote Rabbi Rülff in 1883.⁵⁴ Herzl and other Zionists placed the blame on the “financial Jews,” and Herzl did not shy away from using the epithet *Mauschel*, commonly found in the antisemitic German press—meaning a degenerate Jew, of defective character, attempting to escape both his religion and his race, making peace with antisemitism and in fact provoking it.⁵⁵ Herzl wrote: “Antisemitism, too, probably contains the divine Will to Good, because it forces us to close ranks, unites us through pressure, and through our unity will make us free.”⁵⁶

This negative depiction of “exilic Jews” was adopted in Zionist literature. Herzl described European Jews as “the waste product of modern humanity [from which] we will create happy, confident people, just as the waste products of factories, which in the past were unutilized, are used today to produce beautiful aniline colors.”⁵⁷ Others placed the blame on Jews' cursory acculturation, which adopted only superficial, trivial man-

ners. In December 1914, Chaim Weizmann wrote to Ahad Haam about a conversation with Lord Balfour during which Weizmann maintained that German antisemitism stemmed from the fact that the formative element in Jewish society had been assimilated and absorbed by German society—to the detriment of the Jewish people—and society responded with antisemitism. Weizmann added: “We are in agreement with the cultural antisemites, in so far as we believe that Germans of the Mosaic faith are an undesirable demoralising phenomenon.”⁵⁸ According to this outlook, antisemitism was a response to Jewish assimilation in German society. Jabotinsky also wrote, in a similar vein, that “the mad wave of assimilation in Germany has wreaked its revenge on us.”⁵⁹

No wonder that these and similar words, which adopted the negative stereotypes of Jews, were perceived as a clear manifestation of Jewish antisemitism. It is also no wonder that some saw, in this antisemitism or self-hatred, a foolish attempt by Jews to reinvent themselves in order to adapt to criteria dictated by European antisemitism.⁶⁰ Modern antisemitism, they claimed, would pass from the world only when Jews abandoned the attempt to become Europeans in Europe, or when they left Europe forever.