

The Jacobs affair has become a cause célèbre, repercussions of which are still felt far beyond the confines of Great Britain. In this essay, Mr. Cohen describes the background and the implications of the controversy which has rocked British Jewry. Mr. Cohen, an accountant by profession, a student of Anglo-Jewish history by avocation, is a member of the Council of the Jewish Historical Society of England and Jews' College.

THE RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN ANGLO-JEWRY

1. THE BACKGROUND

To see religious disputations merely as quarrels over religion is to exhibit an outmoded naïveté. The English Great Rebellion of 1642 marks the struggle for political power of the emergent merchants and squirearchy at least as much as it represents a clash between Puritans and Episcopalians. It would therefore be futile to attempt to discover the causes of the recent Anglo-Jewish controversy merely by reading the works of Louis Jacobs. They provided little more than a pretext for a struggle for ascendancy in the rapidly disintegrating community. The little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, was already visible on the occasion which might have afforded a prospect of unity, but which, instead, triggered off considerable ill-feeling—the Tercentenary Celebrations of 1956.

A splendid banquet was held at the Guildhall, in the City of London, on May 29, honored by the presence of the Duke of Edinburgh. The Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, was present as also the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Lord Bishop of Chichester and the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council. The Chief Rabbi, the Haham and many of the Anglo-Jewish clergy were there, not excluding the up-and-coming minister of the New West End Synagogue.

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

Two members of the Ecclesiastical Court of the Chief Rabbi did not attend, nor had they attended the representative service held the previous week. Originally it had been planned to hold a service at which Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Reformers and Liberals would all participate, but right-wing Orthodox opinion had objected to a state of affairs in which Reform and Liberal ministers might appear to possess ecclesiastical validity. Instead, the service was held at the oldest synagogue in the United Kingdom, the Sephardi *esnoga* of Bevis Marks, conducted exclusively by Sephardi officiants (except for the special prayer read by the Chief Rabbi) and the Progressives were given scrolls to carry in the various processions. Even this was too much for the rigorous. The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations refused to be officially represented and two of the four dayanim were elsewhere.

There had been cracks in the religious unity of Anglo-Jewry ever since the Reform schism of 1840, but efforts had often been made to paper them over, usually in the name of a toleration not far removed from apathy. The new cracks arose from fresh forces within Orthodoxy, never experienced before in Anglo-Jewish history. A century and more earlier, the Anglican Church had discovered that ancient doctrines, long undisturbed and gathering dust, could suddenly become dogmas capable of rousing incredible enthusiasm and equally violent hostility. The historical parallel would be indignantly denied (even if understood, which is unlikely) by Orthodox Jewry of today, but the spirit of the Tractarian polemics hovers over the recent controversies.

The United Synagogue

The United Synagogue is not co-extensive with the Anglo-Jewish community. It has no associated synagogues outside the Home Counties and it is not the only Orthodox association of synagogues inside that area. But nearly all the principal London synagogues are under its aegis and it is the organization mainly responsible for the Chief Rabbinate. Historically, the Chief Rabbinate is far older and, in point of jurisdiction and

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

prestige, more important and extensive, but, for many practical purposes, the Chief Rabbinate is an integral part of the United Synagogue. This association acts in two ways; it has given the United Synagogue a significance in Jewish matters that it would otherwise have lacked and it has imposed on the Chief Rabbinate an obligation to work in close accord with the lay leaders of the United Synagogue.

Now the United Synagogue was established in 1870 on practical, empirical grounds. The five Synagogues that were the first members were already in existence, but they wished to coordinate their administration. The Constitution of the United Synagogue therefore deals extensively with administrative matters, but it has almost nothing to say on the question of religion. It was content to leave everything in the hands of the Chief Rabbi. The holder of the office at that time was Dr. Nathan Marcus Adler, the most distinguished scholar in its history. His rabbinic learning had a European reputation, he had graduated at the University of Erlangen and he was staunchly and unyieldingly Orthodox.

The Laity

Quite otherwise was the lay leadership. It became accepted tradition that the United Synagogue drew its leaders from the old-established, prosperous families. They were men of probity, with wide business and financial experience and communal loyalties, but they were usually poorly grounded in Jewish knowledge. Their religion was thus formal, conventional and superficial, centering exclusively on the synagogue service. The Judaism of tradition, which encompassed the study, the kitchen, the bedroom, was all but unknown to them and was regarded as an intellectual aberration of the immigrant, from which Anglicization would sooner or later rescue him.

Their bloodless form of Orthodoxy was catered to by ministers whose standards of Jewish learning were very low and whose level of personal Orthodoxy was frequently not high. Dr. Adler, as well as his son and successor, Hermann, was determined to keep the reins of rabbinical control firmly in his

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

own hands and was thus willing to accept ministers of poor calibre (scholastically speaking; as social workers and synagogue functionaries they were often first rate). This probably originated in a fear of Reform, but it finished up by creating a form of traditional Judaism that was quite estranged from the authentic rabbinical outlook.

The religious philosophy of the laity was never very explicit, but it rested on an optimistic liberalism natural enough for persons in their age and circumstances. For them the progress of emancipation was inevitable and the spread of European standards of civilization no less so. In an atmosphere of mutual toleration and understanding, they wished to be Englishmen of the Jewish persuasion, more or less regular in attending the synagogue, unfailingly ready to assist their brethren who might be victims of misfortune in less happy lands, but securely confident that there could never be any clash between their interests as Jews and their interests as Englishmen.

Pogroms

But before the United Synagogue was a dozen years old disquieting facts arose to challenge the soundness of this doctrine. The May Laws of 1882 showed that Czarist Russia was prepared to put the clock back to a medieval situation of hostility and discrimination, designed to force the Jews into conversion or emigration. They succeeded only in the second. The consequence was Jewish immigration into the United Kingdom on a scale that strained both the resources and the good-nature of the older settlers. The immigrants came poverty-stricken and ignorant of European culture, but they were willing to work and struggle for their material advancement and no sacrifice was too great for their children's education. Their progress might be slow, but ultimately they were to challenge and defeat the hegemony of the ancient families.

With immigration there also awoke the Zionist ideal, that the Jews were a people as well as a religious community and that their salvation from persecution lay in re-possessing their old homeland of Palestine. Such a view was anathema to most of

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

the older Anglo-Jews (although there were a few important exceptions) and Dr. Hermann Adler was vehemently opposed to political Zionism. His colleague, Dr. Moses Gaster, the Haham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, on the other hand, took a leading part in Zionist activities and was consequently involved in bitter clashes with his lay leaders, compared to whom the United Synagogue leaders were little more than arrivistes. Dr. Joseph Hermann Hertz, Chief Rabbi from 1913, was an ardent Zionist and a doughty fighter. "The Chief Rabbi," observed a clerical wit "will always consider the peaceful solution of a problem — when all other methods have failed." He died in 1946, utterly estranged from the President of the United Synagogue, Sir Robert Waley-Cohen.

The European Tragedy

Dr. Hertz had lived to see all the liberal hopes of his early years blighted by the events from 1933 onwards, compared with which Czarist Russia appeared refined and moderate. In Palestine, clashes between the Mandatory Power and the Jews became frequent and ugly. When Ernest Bevin turned back the "Exodus" from the shores of the Holy Land, the last frail confidence in European liberalism was snuffed out.

Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy at the end of the War was scarcely recognizable as the descendant of that of 1933. The bulk of the community was unaware of this and their standards of observance had, in fact, deteriorated disastrously under the strain of evacuation and National Service. However, there had been two types of refugee who were to alter the whole attitude of Orthodoxy. These were, firstly, Jews from Germany and Austria, who had managed in their home countries to combine high standards of secular culture with a rigid adherence to Orthodox beliefs and practices and there were refugees from Poland and Hungary, mainly Chassidim, who brought with them a hyper-Orthodoxy which took root in the troublous war years and proved unexpectedly, and even weirdly, sturdy and influential.

These new influences showed themselves in the establishment of Talmudical colleges, Jewish Day Schools, Orthodox youth

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

movements and so forth. The old-style Anglo-Jewish minister gave way to a new type whose studies had gone further and deeper and whose standards of observance were much higher. Two rabbis deserve mention in this connection, Isidore Epstein, Principal of Jews' College 1945 to 1962 who did his best, despite the opposition of influential lay-leaders, to turn that rather undistinguished theological college into an embryonic rabbinical seminary, and Ezekiel Abramsky, Dayan of the London Beth Din (the Ecclesiastical Court of the Chief Rabbi) from 1933 to 1950, whose personality and profound erudition raised the prestige of the Court to a height it had never known before.

Exeunt the Grandees

Few within the United Synagogue appreciated what was happening. Yet the old families were gradually yielding power to newer arrivals and their successors had a degree of Jewish knowledge and observance that the previous office-holders had never possessed. The ministry was moving to the right and the *Beth Din* was becoming an influence quite apart from the Chief Rabbi.

Israel Brodie became Chief Rabbi in 1948, when the two wings in the United Synagogue seemed equally matched, and both parties supported him. He was moderate in his views and had been a Senior Chaplain to the Forces. Equally, however, he was strictly Orthodox and no innovator. But the balance was already precarious. The tide was flowing against the old families; the Board of Deputies had moved away from the influence of the "Grand Dukes" to that of the Zionist Federation in 1945 and their hold on the United Synagogue was shortly to become just as tenuous.

Opposition

There were others who viewed developments with grave disapprobation. People had regarded themselves as Orthodox if they were members of an Orthodox synagogue and never sup-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

posed that this entailed any commitment regarding belief or practice. Now they discovered that a rather dreary reactionary movement was in the ascendant. The old easy-going tolerance was being relentlessly edged out. Freedom of opinion was diminishing and to qualify for respectability, a doctrine had to meet the most stringent requirements of rigidity. The exercise of rabbinic authority on the part of the *Beth Din* was never accompanied even by the slightest effort at public relations. This particularly harmed them in connection with conversions (nearly always by ladies wishing to contract marriages to Jews). Rabbinical authorities have always been very chary of allowing conversions of this nature and the London *Beth Din* was never any exception. But it was probably less stringent in its requirements in earlier years and the disappointed applicants (or their sponsors) reported untoward delays and little politeness in their treatment. The leftists cast envious eyes at the Conservative Synagogues of America, where each congregation had autonomy to make its own approach to traditional observance. Here, conformity was putting an end to those minor breaches with strict Orthodoxy which had long reassured the moderates that United Synagogue Orthodoxy was *sui generis*. Mixed choirs disappeared at the Central and New West End Synagogues, while at Hampstead, a direct appeal from its minister to the Chief Rabbi brought a directive to introduce the *duchan* ceremony after a half-century's absence. The central *almemar* was an automatic feature of all new major synagogues, whereas previously the preference had been for the reform position adjoining the Ark.

There was nothing théological about these differences and neither party probed very deeply to defend its position. The right wing could truthfully state that in its loyalty to the Codes it was merely making explicit what was always implicit in the United Synagogue position and that it claimed nothing beyond what had always been the Orthodox norm. The left wing could look back to an earlier period in the United Synagogue history and wanted to restore the *status quo ante bellum*. The opinions of both sides regarding the Bible were shrouded in a decent obscurity.

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

The Candidate

It is impossible to feel that this situation contained anything irreconcilable or explosive. That it did explode can be attributed to a certain violent element in the left wing, for whom a compromise was not enough — they were determined to reconquer the community. They considered that they occupied the communal strategic points and meant to dominate by a series of carefully planned coups, all of which became dismal failures.

Yet their chances of success were good. In 1956 the Chief Rabbi and Dayanim had been publicly humiliated by the Council of the United Synagogue, who had insisted on the *Beith Din's* moving, against their wishes, into Woburn House (the headquarters of the United Synagogue) and the compliance of the Orthodox members of the Council seemed to show that respect for the rabbinate would always yield to authoritarian lay pressures. The Hon. Ewen Montagu, far out on the left, was President of the United Synagogue — the ace of trumps of communal offices. The Honorary Officers of Jews' College were only too anxious to reverse the policy of Dr. I. Epstein. In 1957 William Frankel became Editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*. He was a prominent member of the New West End Synagogue, once the most fashionable and influential of the constituents of the United Synagogue. He was a fervent admirer of Louis Jacobs, minister of the congregation since 1954 and one of the most learned and able members of the ministry.

To the left-wingers he seemed much more. Owing to their abject lack of Jewish culture, his attractive, if hardly profound, theology struck them as positively Maimonidean in its brilliance, while his semi-modernist philosophy of Judaism, which had been current for at least a century, came as a species of revelation.

"Quibus deerat inimicus per amicos oppressi." "Those who lacked an enemy were destroyed by their friends." This bitter aphorism of Tacitus may be considered the motto of the subsequent controversy.

II. THE STORM

From the time of the Tercentenary Celebrations onwards,

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

everybody with any communal knowledge began feeling edgy at the prospect of a coming clash. We must leave the general background to look at some strands in the immediate causes of the conflict.

The first has an interesting literary parallel. The second paragraph of Anthony Trollope's masterpiece of clerical life "Barchester Towers" tells us that "the death of old Dr. Grantly (the Bishop of Barchester) took place exactly as the ministry of Lord — was going to give place to that of Lord — . . . and it became at last a matter of intense interest to those concerned whether the next appointment should be made by a conservative or a liberal government." Louis Jacobs was the favorite rabbi of the Old Establishment, but the Old Establishment was gasping its last. Five years earlier, rabbinical promotion would have been obtained for him with the same ease that the *Beth Din* had been forced into Woburn House. Five years later, he would not have had even an outside chance. Trouble blew up when the Old Establishment wanted to retain power by reversing the religious trend in the community.

The Chief Rabbinate

Secondly the whole issue was bedeviled by its involvement with the succession to the Chief Rabbinate. It was commonly understood (and has never been challenged in any credible way) that the ultimate aim of Jacobs' supporters was to ensure that he succeeded Dr. Brodie as Chief Rabbi. This was the factor which introduced the atmosphere of bitterness, for both parties were playing for high stakes which they thought it politic to conceal. Had the question of modernism within Orthodoxy been posed by an ordinary member of the rabbinate, there might have been an entirely different answer. More probably, there would have been no answer at all, for the whole idea of a *kulturkampf* is alien to the Anglo-Jewish outlook. Provided that the observances of traditionalism are maintained intact, thought-processes can be regarded as the individual's private preserves. But the problem posed by a modernist Chief Rabbi could not be fobbed off so easily.

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

Thirdly there was the position of the Chief Rabbi himself. The office has evolved a certain mystique. It is easy to play down its importance by showing the large number of congregations which do not acknowledge the supremacy of the Chief Rabbi, but, in truth, he is the head of the whole Orthodox community, *de jure* in some places, *de facto* in the others. The greatest events in the history of every synagogue in the United Kingdom usually receive a heightened significance from his presence. If a new place of worship is to be opened — he is there; a new minister to be inducted — he is there; the passing of a distinguished communal leader — he delivers the eulogy; Jewry to be represented on some important national occasion — he is the representative. Consequently, the personality of the Chief Rabbi is deeply impressed on the minds of all members of the community. Something of the aura of his distinguished predecessors clings to him; he is the living embodiment of rabbinical tradition. Of course, he is human and fallible. He can be criticized, but only within certain limits and with a certain deference. This reservation was completely ignored by the supporters of Louis Jacobs. Dr. Brodie was vilified and abused in a way that violated one of the hitherto accepted decencies of Anglo-Jewish life and many who were certainly not fundamentalists or obscurantists instinctively rallied behind him.

The Time Factor

For the fourth strand, recourse must be had to a certain amount of conjecture, but not beyond the bounds of what is reasonable. This is the question of timing. Dr. Epstein was scheduled to retire as Principal of Jews' College in 1959 and Dr. Brodie's term of office was to end in 1965. Dr. Jacobs was brought into Jews' College as a tutor shortly before Dr. Epstein's retirement date. The appointment was made against Dr. Epstein's wishes and Dr. Brodie's concurrence was given most unwillingly. (I was told by Sefton Temkin, now in the U.S.A., but then a columnist of the *Jewish Chronicle* and a strong Jacobs supporter, that the Chief Rabbi was threatened that, unless the appointment was made, Dr. Jacobs would follow Dr.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Alexander Altman, at Brandeis since 1959, on the "brain drain" to the United States and he would then have to account to an outraged public opinion for the loss, in quick succession, of two of the leading clergymen under his jurisdiction,* Dr. Brodie must have had ample opportunity in the following years to regret the weakness which he demonstrated in this instance and which involved him in the embarrassing dilemma of having to explain why Jacobs was *kasher* as a Tutor, but *treifah* as a Principal). The appointment led to immediate hostility on the part of the Orthodox and some of the Jews' College students showed an inclination to boycott the new tutor's lectures. Dr. Epstein made no secret of his annoyance and the student body petitioned for his period of office to be extended. The Council agreed on an extension of two years, but with such bad grace that they never even informed Dr. Epstein, who learned of it from a press report (he told me this himself).

When, in May 1961, it was announced that the Chief Rabbi would become Acting Principal on Dr. Epstein's retirement, with Rabbi Dr. H. Zimmels as Director of Studies, it was clear that Dr. Brodie was playing for time. There was a risk, in fact, that no appointment might be made during the remainder of Dr. Brodie's term of office. Very curiously, during the two years which had elapsed since his arrival at the College, Dr. Jacobs had comforted himself in a way that could only make it more difficult for Dr. Brodie to accept him. He was indifferent to keeping his head covered, he was seen at functions where there was no *kashrut* supervision and he persistently advocated a vague and disquieting modernism. It was the task of Jews' College, he said "to endeavor to work out a philosophy of Judaism which is not obscurantist but which, while fully conversant with modern thought, is at the same time fully rooted in tradition." Was this simply the enthusiasm of a young man, anxious to blow away the cobwebs from an old institution, or double-talk, presaging a root-and-branch attack on traditional Judaism? His auditors never knew; perhaps he was hardly sure himself.

* According to other sources, the Chief Rabbi's decision was not influenced by external pressure but by the hope that under the proper guidance Dr. Jacobs might in due time arrive at a traditional position. — *Ed.*

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

His motives in flaunting his modernism at this critical stage of his career can be interpreted in different ways. His supporters could point to an uncompromising integrity, his detractors might suppose that he placed too much reliance on his influential supporters. It is certain that, with a little more concern for Orthodox susceptibilities, he might have become Chief Rabbi without difficulty.

The Eruption

The attempt to influence Dr. Brodie behind the scenes having failed, recourse was made to public opinion. On September 15, 1961, the *Jewish Chronicle* published a feature on Louis Jacobs so laudatory as to be almost bathetic. Thus fortified, the Honorary Officers of Jews' College formally recommended the appointment of Jacobs as Principal. For thirteen years Dr. Brodie had endeavored to keep the left and right wings of the United Synagogue in some sort of balance, but as each moved steadily away from the center, the feat became increasingly difficult. Perhaps Dr. Brodie's heart was no longer in it. During this period he had become the acknowledged leader of rabbinical forces for much of the European continent, and his responsibilities extended so far beyond the United Synagogue that he lacked all inclination to make concessions of merely parochial significance. He vetoed the appointment and the Jacobs faction, with all the forces of modern publicity at their command, ensured that his life was rendered as wretched as they could make it.

The rest of the controversy received so much press coverage that it is unnecessary to describe it here. Only one point may, perhaps, be made. Not one Orthodox rabbi in the whole world gave Jacobs unequivocal support. Three rabbis, all of whom had grudges against the London *Beth Din*, proffered sympathy and the handful of other clerics who supported him were mainly such as to arouse the worst suspicions of the Orthodox.

III. THE PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Jacobs says that his standpoint "is that of Zechariah

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Frankel, the great pioneer of the 'historical school,' but with a stronger theological emphasis" (*Principles of the Jewish Faith*, p. 296). He also differs from him in his attitude to the Pentateuch. Dr. Jacobs, though quite a moderate in his views, basically takes his stand with the Bible critics and accepts the approach and findings of Higher Criticism.

Now there is a philosophical difficulty over Biblical criticism which Jacobs does not appreciate, because he holds fast to the view that "there is not the slightest need for us to give up the doctrine of Revelation" (*The Sanction of the Mitzwoth*, p. 3). If one approaches the Pentateuch — which is the real core of the problem — as a piece of ancient literature, to be examined just like any other production of olden times, you can discover, or fancy you discover, details of date, method of compilation and so forth. But you cannot discover revelation or divinity, because these are intangibles which secular methods are not designed to ascertain. If, on the other hand, you predicate that the volume contains a record of divine revelation, how can you be sure that the methods of textual analysis, designed for purely human productions, can yield reliable results when applied to something for which they were never intended?

This is not a problem which worries an agnostic scholar and is not of much moment to Christians. As the supersession of the Old Covenant has to be justified on theological grounds, the process is rendered easier by depicting it as a patchwork of often discrepant sources. But a Jewish scholar with traditional loyalties finds himself in the uncomfortable position of cutting down the branch on which he is sitting. Jacobs attempts to resolve the insoluble by a meaningless piece of evasion, that the Pentateuch is "in a sense, all human, in another sense all divine." This is on a par with his statement that he is not a modernist but a "non-fundamentalist." At the critical point, he retreats behind an impregnable barrier of non-language.

The Commandments

The "stronger theological emphasis" of which Jacobs speaks is where he parts company with traditional Judaism, not so

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

much by what he says, as by the implications of what he says. On page 13 of his essay, *The Sanction of the Mitzwoth*, he explains that God works through and in Israel and therefore the *minhag* of Israel (*minhag* here is more or less what would be called *Torah* by anybody else) is the will of God. "We need a vocabulary of worship and this the Mitzwoth provide. That is their sanction."

It must be noted that Dr. Jacobs refers repeatedly to the "Mitzwoth" (I keep his pedantic transliteration for what it is worth) but he is very chary of referring to the Codes. I am not now playing with words, for this choice of language is not accidental. It is vital to the understanding of Jacobs' position. Loyalty to the Codes means the acceptance of the entire corpus of traditional law. Observance of the *mitzvot* in the Jacobs sense means the acceptance of those which one likes. This is not a statement to be made lightly, but I am prepared to prove it, in the first case, unfortunately, by an *argumentum ad hominem*.

Jacobs writes (*Principles of the Jewish Faith*, p. 296) "I keep the Sabbath, irrespective of its origins, because it is the fundamental religious institution of my people . . . because my personal life is enriched immeasurably by the weekly reminder that God is my Maker and Creator of all there is." Brave and fine words, but the New London Synagogue, created by and for Louis Jacobs, is the first so-called Orthodox congregation to be founded in the United Kingdom on the assumption that a large number of its members will ride to services on Sabbath. It is situated three-quarters of an hour's walk from the New West End Synagogue and was intended as a central rallying point for its dissident members and other supporters of Louis Jacobs. Jacobs knew that there would be blatant *chillul shabbat* on the part of his congregation, not imposed by a population shift, as happens, particularly in the provinces, but by the religious indifference of its founders. So much for his devotion to the Sabbath idea.

Subjectivity

It will be found that Dr. Jacobs always writes about the *mitzvot* in a vague and rather sentimental fashion. The *mitzvot*

are "part of that interaction between the divine and the human that is Torah" (*We Have Reason to Believe*, p. 104). "We too accept the Torah as the word of God because we can witness the effect of Jewish observance" (*ib.* p. 105). He does not range very far in his discussion of *mitzvot*, usually limiting himself to the Sabbath, the dietary laws and the Synagogue. Nevertheless he does not deny that his views must entail a fresh approach to the Halakhah. "We would be guilty of pulling wool over people's eyes if we pretended that there are only theoretical differences between us and the *Beth Din*. The truth is that differences in theory inevitably result in differences in practice" (*The Sanction of the Mitzwoth*, p. 14).

What are these differences of practice? It is clear that the practices which appeal to Dr. Jacobs are those which enrich his appreciation of life and have an aesthetic or mystical appeal. But he is not the first person in Jewish history to find that the mystical appeal of the *mitzvot* is scarcely compatible with the rigors of the highly developed regulations of the Codes. He makes use of the distinction which is now commonplace among the semi-Orthodox. On the one hand, there is the Halakhah, ennobling, flexible and divine; on the other, the London *Beth Din*, choking the spirit out of it with bigoted fanaticism. Whatever may be said against the *Beth Din* (and most of it is due to their own folly in ignoring public relations) their halakhic expertise is beyond criticism. A *Beth Din*, however, cannot content itself with declaiming the beauties of the Halakhah; it has to implement it in the light of contemporary problems. At this stage, a curious distinction is made; the Halakhah remains superb, but its interpretation is alleged to be harsh and illiberal, the inevitable outcome of a fundamentalist theology.

But, of course, there is no such thing as a "pure" *mitzvah*, independent of codifiers. The attack on interpretation is often an attack on the idea of the *mitzvah* itself, camouflaged by an exaggerated respect for its alleged spirit. It would be wrong to accuse Dr. Jacobs of this, but it is so often done by the *Jewish Chronicle*, his fervent admirer, that the danger of this approach is patent. On one level the following statement is calculated to draw the non-observant to an appreciation of the *mitzvot*:—

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

"It is not the origin of a religious practice that matters but what it has become, the highest form in which it has been expressed, and this is in itself the will of God." (*We Have Reason to Believe*, p. 103).

What, however, is the "highest" form? This must be a value judgement, varying with every individual approach. Everybody can observe the *mitzvah* in any fashion he regards as its highest form, secure that he is fulfilling the divine law. The highest form of Sabbath observance may be, for some, driving to Synagogue to hear Jacobs preach, but this is the beginning of the end of real Sabbath observance.

Just as dubious is his approach to the festival of Purim. If one "doubts the historicity of the events recorded in the book of Esther, this will not prevent him from observing these festivals [he is talking of Chanukah as well] in the traditional way. For he will know that the message of Esther that God protects His People and that tyranny does not triumph . . ." But how can one learn anything about the Deity from a legend? Only in the way that one learns about Jove from the *Aeneid* or Odin from the *Nibelungenlied* — the activities and attitudes of non-existent *numina*.

The fact is that Dr. Jacobs, despite all his questionings, remains an observant and believing Jew. This is achieved by ignoring logic when its pressure becomes too unpleasant. When Bible Criticism, comparative religion and scientific historiography have done their worst, he finds the Divine still burning brightly in the débris. It is an act of faith compared with which a belief in Sinaitic revelation is quite puny.

The Appeal

The idealism and enthusiasm, the modernism and enlightenment, combined with a pervading vagueness and tolerance, make quite an attractive mixture for two classes of persons. Those who are not anxious to leave Orthodoxy, but dislike current trends within it, find the Jacobs ideology very appealing. It has traditionalism without teeth. So do a certain class of intel-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

lectuals, who have an interest in "religion," but little knowledge of Judaism and to whom a rabbi well up in the latest theological jargon is a refreshing change.

Beyond that there is (or, perhaps, was) a large body of public opinion which was dissatisfied, to a greater or lesser extent, with Orthodoxy and saw in Jacobs the possibility of effecting modifications. Their interest, however, was transient, incapable of being maintained in a sort of soap-opera theological wrangle and many were repelled by the public airing of an internal Jewish quarrel in the general press. Sheer inertia has been the real bulwark between Jacobs and a mass following.

The controversy has hardened all attitudes in Anglo-Jewry. Orthodoxy has become an exercise in dogmatics, in which all intellectual curiosity is taboo. Reform is practically a self-contained community. Religious life, in consequence, consists of an Orthodox extreme, an utterly indifferent majority and the Progressives. This is a situation which ought to give grounds for the gravest concern, but, in truth, so much time and energy are wasted on organizational matters that the gradual erosion of the community hardly arouses attention. It must be said in favor of Dr. Jacobs that he at least recognized a spiritual malaise and offered a cure. His cure, unfortunately, left the patient worse than when he found him, but the failure of the remedy does not mean the disappearance of the malady.

Postscript — Garnethill

Since the foregoing was written, there has been a decisive set-back for Jacobs. The Garnethill Synagogue in Glasgow was confidently expected to secede from its adherence to the Chief Rabbinate and to link up with Jacobs' Synagogue, the New London. Its minister and honorary officers were in favor of this course and the synagogue, of pronounced unorthodox outlook — the New West End of Glasgow — had long been in a state of virtual separation from the rest of the local community.

On June 6th a heated meeting was held to effect the necessary constitutional changes. The motion to withdraw from "the ecclesiastical authorities as recognized by the London United

The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry

Synagogue" (which included the local *Beth Din*, with which they were at open enmity) was carried by 181 to 133 votes, less than the two-thirds majority required.

But the motion "to make contact with other like-minded congregations, including the New London Synagogue" was defeated by 186 to 128 votes. So, after five years of unprecedented publicity, Louis Jacobs was no more acceptable to Garnethill Synagogue members than their own unloved *Beth Din*! The other "like-minded synagogues" were not named, although it is not difficult to make a guess at some of them. But nowhere else can there be found such vicious dislike of rabbinical authority as at Garnethill and it is unlikely that the New London Synagogue will invite further rebuffs by making approaches to less promising associates.