

THE PITY OF IT ALL

A History of Jews in Germany,

1743-1933

AMOS ELON
1743



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The soldiers' uniforms, swords, and spiked Prussian helmets are covered by traditional Jewish prayer shawls. A giant ark of the law is set up on a low hill. On the surrounding cliffs, Christian soldiers stand guard in a long line, protecting their Jewish comrades in arms from enemy attack. In the distance, beneath ominous clouds, the besieged city of Metz undergoes a barrage of cannon fire. The inscription asks: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10).

With the approval, in 1871, of a new emancipation law valid for the entire Reich, German Jews seemed to have achieved, at least in theory, the object of their long struggle. The new Reichstag abolished all restrictions on civil and political rights derived from "religious difference," with none of the implied reservations of the short-lived 1812 decree. Legally, Jews were finally recognized as equals; they were elated and reassured. Among those who left a record of their thoughts, no one suspected that some of the old restrictions would continue to prevail.

The new sense of security was legitimized by the greatest authority in the field. Heinrich Graetz ended the eleventh and final volume of his monumental *History of the Jews* (1871) on a note of supreme, almost triumphant confidence:

Happier than any of my predecessors, I may conclude my history in the joyous feeling that in the civilized world the Jewish tribe has found at last not only justice and freedom but also recognition. It now finally has unlimited freedom to develop its talents, not due to [Gentile] mercy but as a right acquired through thousandfold suffering.

Graetz's history was a grand epic of persecution and little else besides. Except in its optimistic postscript, it breathed a gloomy, lackluster spirit of almost unmitigated fatalism. In the wake of Prussia's "glorious victories" of 1870, however, Graetz, too, declared himself a German patriot and rhapsodized about Bismarck's "genius leadership." In a letter to the historian Heinrich von Treitschke he even promised that in the forthcoming English translation of his *History*, he would revise some of his earlier harsh judgments about Germany which, as he put it, "had become untrue" in the light of recent events.⁵⁴

So content was the philosopher of language Fritz Mauthner, a liberal militant until 1871, that after the establishment of the "glorious" new Reich, he withdrew from all political activity. It seemed sheer joy to be alive "while Bismarck governed the world."⁵⁵ The "great Junker" was now more likable in Mauthner's eyes than any progressive or social-democratic leader.

Heinrich Bernhard Oppenheim, one of Bamberger's fellow rebels in 1848 who, like Bamberger, had spent years in exile, reminisced with satisfaction that, despite the sporadic riots of 1819 and 1848, there had been no major outbreak of anti-Jewish feeling in Germany for more than a century. Oppenheim, a native of Frankfurt and a secular Jew, stated that with the German Reich no one less than the messiah had arrived.⁵⁶ In this conviction, apparently, Oppenheim was elected to the Reichstag in 1874 in a rural constituency with few if any Jewish voters. Between 1871 and 1878, thirty-six Jews, among them twelve converts, were elected to the Reichstag, a body of more than six hundred deputies. If in some eyes they were still outsiders, they were nonetheless outsiders at the very center of public life.

Even such skeptics as Jacoby and Sonnemann, who saw through the feigned constitutionalism of Bismarck's militarized monarchy, shared the optimism of assimilated and assimilating Jewry. With all its flaws, the new Reich seemed to afford better protection to Jews than France, Austria, and even England. And compared with the czarist and Ottoman empires, it was a veritable paradise.

This sense of well-being was buttressed by the community's material advances. At the beginning of the century, most German Jews had been paupers. In Prussia, where the majority lived, 70 percent had led "marginal, insecure" lives; many were wandering peddlers and beggars. By 1870, that figure had dropped to 5 percent. According to taxation figures that probably understated the real state of affairs, over 60 percent of all Prussian Jews were now of "secure middle-class status."⁵⁷ There was perhaps the fastest and greatest leap any minority has experienced in modern European history. Jews had become the most upwardly mobile social group in Germany.

The majority were now city dwellers. Urbanization among Jews proceeded at a pace two or three times that of other Germans. Accultura-

tion was equally rapid. According to the ethnologist Moritz Lazarus, by 1841 there were no longer any fourteen-year-old Jewish children unable to read and write German.⁵⁸ By 1867, 14.8 percent of high school students in Berlin were Jews, three or four times the total percentage of Jews in the city's population. Thousands of sons of shopkeepers, innkeepers, cattle dealers, and peddlers attended universities and entered professions. The rhythms of their lives, especially in Berlin, no longer followed the Jewish calendar; they followed the German. For Christmas, according to Oppenheim, "nearly all Jewish families have fragrant wax candles glimmering on richly adorned fir trees. They consider Christmas a historical and national holiday; they commit this petty heresy to avoid excluding their children from the general festivities or alienating them from their Christian friends."⁵⁹ Some of the leading Jewish families were becoming members of the minor European aristocracy. The Heine family was a case in point. The poet had two brothers, one of whom, a doctor in St. Petersburg, was made a nobleman and married into the Russian aristocracy; the other, a newspaper editor in Vienna, was made an Austrian baron. Heine's sister's son was knighted and became the baron von Embden. One of his two daughters became Princess Murat through marriage while the other married the reigning prince of Monaco.⁶⁰

Three generations after Moses Mendelssohn, Jews were Germans in language, dress, and national sentiment. In name, too, Siegfried and Sigismund were such common names among Jews that non-Jews began to shy away from them. One Jewish tomb from 1879 in the Schonhauser Allee cemetery in Berlin says much about the sensibilities of the time: "Here lies our beloved child, Alfred Deutschland," reads the inscription.⁶¹ Itziks changed their name to Hirtzig, Cohens to Kahn, Lewis to Lau. On the other hand, a Dr. Theodor Cohn rose high in the Catholic hierarchy without changing his name. At the end of a long ecclesiastical career he became the reigning prince-archbishop of Olmutz, the most distinguished Catholic diocese in Austria.* At midcentury, only

four of Moses Mendelssohn's fifty-six descendants were still Jews. When the last died, many of the Mendelssohns attending the funeral witnessed a Jewish rite for the first time in their lives.⁶² Nevertheless, the converted "von Mendelssohns" continued to flaunt the name of their illustrious forefather.

Among pious Jews, fears ripened of the imminent death of the old faith. Bamberger, Oppenheimer, Jacoby, and many others refused to convert as a matter of principle but believed that any remaining differences between Jews and Germans were bound to disappear, at least among men of culture and education. Lazarus claimed that Judaism was as "German" a religion as Christianity. In *The Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, Hermann Cohen reaffirmed Mendelssohn's central idea a century after his death. Cohen was perhaps the most prominent Jewish theologian of his time; he went far beyond anything Mendelssohn had stood for in believing that Judaism and Christianity would eventually merge in one all-encompassing faith. The "communium," as he put it, between Judaism and Christianity would be easier in Germany ("Immanuel Kant's nation") than anywhere else in Europe.⁶³

The key to social integration lay in assimilation through *Bildung* and religious reform. The movement for reform was growing by leaps and bounds. Reformed Jews no longer worshipped in Hebrew. They affirmed their Jewishness through revised prayer books and their Germanness by discarding the traditional prayer for the coming of the messiah "in our days." They no longer desired to be led back to the Promised Land. Germany was their beloved home. Their thoughts now ripened better under fir trees than under palms. Lazarus mused, "To serve Germany, Hermann Cohen announced, was sacred, 'like service of the divine.' One must not love one's country only when it is 'lovely,' as Burke claimed, but 'because it is our fatherland.'⁶⁴

Inevitably, some families split. Jacob Bernays (1824-81) was a distinguished classical philologist, the author of important studies of Spinoza and Heraclitus. When, because of his Jewish origins, he was refused a professorship at the University of Bonn, he became pious and helped found the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau, where for the rest of his life he taught Jewish philosophy, Hebrew poetry, and Jewish litera-

* His appointment had to be confirmed by the emperor, Franz Joseph, who is said to have inquired of his adjutant: "Are you sure he is baptized?"

ture. By contrast, his younger brother, Michael Bernays, converted and became a prominent professor of German literature in Munich. (With Michael Bernays and Ludwig Geiger, Goethe studies began in earnest in 1866. Geiger, the son of a rabbi, founded the central organ of international Goethe research, the *Goethe Yearbook*.) A third Bernays brother remained in the family business in Hamburg and was the father of Martha Bernays, Sigmund Freud's wife.

Berthold Auerbach euphorically claimed that integration was now an established fact. This was a half-truth, at best, but in some of the larger cities, especially in Berlin, it was far from being a pious lie. That the possibility of integration was a widely held belief was confirmed by the sharp decline in the number of conversions.* An 1874 law permitted mixed civil marriages for the first time. Auerbach's hope that within a generation or two the "problem" would be forgotten or, at least, inconsequential did not seem far-fetched. An English observer in Berlin during the Franco-Prussian War was impressed by the degree of social integration among middle-class Jews and Christians. "The Berlin Christian is a far more tolerant being than his English coreligionist," he wrote.⁶⁵ The social limits of integration varied, of course, from place to place. A report in the *Breslauer Morgenzeitung* in 1876 on the annual ball held by the local chamber of commerce made this clear: "Our Christian and Jewish merchants have marketed, discounted, dined, and supped together. They've even intermarried, but they never dance with one another. Is this not highly remarkable?"⁶⁶

A measure of social integration seems to have taken place among the working class. Eduard Bernstein, the future founder of revisionist socialism, who successfully challenged some of the basic assumptions of Marxist doctrine, came from a blue-collar background. His father, a plumber by training, drove a locomotive on the new Berlin-Anhalt railway line. The family lived in a working-class district of Berlin. They attended a so-called Reform temple but, like so many other Berlin Jews, celebrated Christmas as a German folk custom. "I did not pray to

Jesus," Bernstein recalls in his memoirs, "but I never doubted that he actually lived and suffered. I felt the deepest sympathy for him." He tells the story of his older brother, who walking in the street one day was called a Jew. He yelled back: "Jew yourself!" At home, the perplexed boy learned from his mother that he really was Jewish. "We who were born later," Bernstein writes, "grew up in this knowledge. For this reason we took it more philosophically." Only from street urchins did Bernstein ever hear a nasty word about Jews, and even that was rare. The Bernsteins' day of rest was Sunday. They did not observe the Jewish dietary laws, and they shared meals with their neighbors. It was this, above all, that brought the family "emotionally closer to the neighbors. What we believed . . . did not bother them." The Bernsteins' "national identity" was deduced in these circles from the kind of sausages they ate and with whom. The family's own consciousness of who they were was little affected by religious observance. In this respect, they were no different from other blue-collar families or from the agnostic Bambergers or Sonnemanns. "Ach, you Bernsteins are not really Jews," a neighbor once remarked. The comment was well-meant, Bernstein remembered, but "it depressed rather than elated me."⁶⁷

Nonetheless, the repertoire of anti-Semitism was scarcely affected by these changes. The term itself would be coined only in 1879, by one Wilhelm Marr, the obscure author of the diatribe *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*. Marr's point of view was purely secular, that is to say, racial. French savants had spearheaded the new racism long before it was taken up by Marr and other German "experts." The French count Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau seems to have been the first. His *Inequality of Human Races* (1853) hailed "Aryan" virtues and decried Semitic (and Latin) degeneracy. It became a notorious success. Nor did the Germans invent the opposition of "Aryan" and "Semitic." Here, too, credit goes to a Frenchman, the historian and philologist Joseph-Ernest Renan, who identified and distinguished between "superior" Indo-European and "inferior" Semitic races. Renan's influential *Life of Jesus*, which believers and secularists read with equal fascination, portrayed Christ as a humanist immune to the "defects" of his race. In Germany, before the

*It was difficult for a Jew to be converted, the joke went, for how could he bring himself to believe in the divinity of . . . another Jew?

mid-1870s, only a handful of crackpots and marginal journalists preached this particular form of Jew hatred in the face of near-general public indifference.

In October 1873, a stock market crash changed this state of affairs in one blow. The economy had heated to the boiling point, a result of billions in French war reparation payments. The crash affected the entire Continent and came in the wake of feverish speculation in several European countries by reckless promoters with close political connections. Although the various governments had been warned of these machinations, they had done little to restrain them. The bubble burst first in Austria. From there the panic spread to Germany and the rest of Europe. In Germany alone, tens of thousands of middle-class and aristocratic families lost everything. The crash provoked a wave of anti-Semitic agitation unlike anything Germany—or France—had seen since the Crusades or the Black Death. Jews were said to be "inferior" and "immoral"; their successes over the preceding two or three decades were due entirely to devious, even criminal manipulations. It was not an accident that so many stockbrokers happened to be Jews. At whose expense had they been enriching themselves?

Nine months earlier, in a sensational speech in the Reichstag, the Jewish liberal Eduard Lasker had sounded a first dire warning.⁶⁸ Lasker exposed the ruthless activities of Bethel Henry Strousberg, a Prussian railroad tycoon and converted Jew, revealing Strousberg's notorious system of winning government concessions by lining the pockets of parliamentarians and high officials. Strousberg had played a major role in the German economy for years. "That fellow will one day soon be emperor of Germany," Engels had written Marx in September 1869. "Wherever you go, everybody speaks only of Strousberg."⁶⁹ His enormous industrial and railroad holdings collapsed even before the general crash. For the sake of his aristocratic partners—who included the Silesian dukes of Ujest and Ratibor, the Prussian count Lehndorff-Steinort, and a Prince Wilhelm zu Putbus (soon dubbed Kaputbus)—Bismarck, with Bleichröder's assistance, made a last-minute effort to stave off their bankruptcy with state funds. In his characteristic style, Bismarck told the French ambassador:

2 dukes, 1 general, half a dozen ladies in waiting, twice that many chamberlains, 100 owners of coffeehouses and all the cabmen of Berlin found themselves totally ruined. The emperor took pity on the dukes, the aide de camp, the ladies in waiting and charged me with pulling them out of trouble. I appealed to Bleichröder, who on condition of getting a title of nobility which as a Jew he very much valued, agreed to rescue the duke of Ujest and General Count Lehndorff. Two dukes & an aide de camp saved—frankly this is worth the "von" we bestowed on the good Bleichröder.⁷⁰

In the event, they were not really "saved." Beyond the monetary losses, several Reichstag deputies and dignitaries of the royal court were seriously compromised by Lasker's revelations. As for Lasker himself, his disclosures of the swindles and corruption catapulted him overnight into the first rank of public figures. The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* wrote that the name of Eduard Lasker should be added to that of Moses Mendelssohn and other great Jews in history.⁷¹ But little was done to put an end to the corruption Lasker exposed. His warning of an impending general crisis went unheeded, leading only to the appointment of a commission of inquiry into Strousberg's alleged system. It did not lead to concrete monetary and legal reform. In the absence of a clear political will it could not. The Reichstag had no power to subpoena generals, noblemen, and high government officials, who would not in any case have been held accountable by a commission of mere middle-class parliamentarians. A feverish rush for scapegoats ensued.

The main instigators of the new racism were failed aristocrats hit by the inevitable crash, conservative rabble-rousers, and demagogic clergymen; the chorus, in Engels's words, was the howling mob of the petite bourgeoisie. Prominent members of the landed aristocracy, hurt also by a drastic decline in agricultural prices due to cheaper imports from America, were mesmerized by the new wealth of the urban commercial middle class. The main object of their scorn and envy was the notorious "Jewish parvenu." They convinced themselves that their sudden poverty was the fault of the newly rich Jews who were buying up their ancestral country estates and their palatial town houses in the historic

center of Berlin. There was no dearth of hypocrisy here: no subject except sex was so laden with hypocrisy as that of money. When enjoyed by Jews, the same luxuries the aristocracy could no longer afford were decried as "vices." The ostentation of someone like Bleichröder gave this prejudice an appearance of principle and idealism.

Disdain for new wealth was common everywhere; in Germany, where feudal sentiments were stronger than in France or England, it was especially virulent. Aristocrats were, of course, as greedy as anyone else. Bismarck's undoubtedly corrupt alliance with Bleichröder had made both men very rich indeed. In the prevailing myth, however, aristocrats remained great statesmen, valiant soldiers, and devoted public servants. In the aftermath of the crash, popular fury was directed not at them and the government they dominated but at the Jews.

The crash ushered in the German economy's longest recession of the nineteenth century. Like the world economic crisis of 1929, it was all the harder to remedy because it was part of a wider slump. The slump revealed the internal fragility of Bismarck's new empire despite its muscle flexing and trappings of power. One is struck by the sharp contrast between the optimism of the relatively easygoing years before 1873 and the gloom that prevailed afterward; an abyss opened between Germans and Jews. The sudden outbreak of Judeophobia in 1873 was the "gravest and most durable" result of the financial crisis, its "sordid afterbirth," according to Volker Ullrich, a current historian of Bismarck's empire. Judeophobia would follow the new empire to its last day in 1918, a "major component of its political culture."⁷²

At its root was a myth of Jewish "devotionness" and "power" reinterpreted in secular terms. Jews were held responsible not only for the crisis but for capitalism itself: Judaism was "capitalism in the extreme." No less than 90 percent of all "capitalist promoters" in Germany were said to be Jews. Under their auspices, capitalism was generating a materialist society that consumed the hard-earned life savings of good Christians. Stroussberg and Bleichröder were archvillains who incarnated Jewish money power in the popular mind. In a bizarre reversal, Lasker, too, was blamed: by exposing a single corrupt manipulator (Stroussberg), he was accused of covering up for all the other swindlers and crooks, most of them Jews. The attacks extended to Bamberger and

Oppenheim, spokesmen for liberalism, the free market, and democracy. The mass-circulation family magazine *Gartenlaube* and the conservative *Ketzzeitung*, Bismarck's mouthpiece, led the way with a series of vicious anti-Semitic diatribes. Published as books soon after, these became best-sellers. Newspapers all over Germany followed suit: "The Jews form a single chain, from the baptized cabinet minister to the Polish *schmarrer* . . . a physically and psychologically degenerate race . . . governing the entire universe through fraud and usury."⁷³ The attacks fell on eager ears. Spreading unemployment did the rest. August Bebel argued in vain that anti-Semitism was the socialism of fools.

The new anti-Semitism was indirectly facilitated by Bismarck himself. As incriminations against Jews mounted, he maintained an icy silence. He had his reasons. He was not a Jew hater or racist. (He believed that "German stallions should be paired off with Jewish mares," rich ones, presumably.) He was a cynic, a misanthrope, a man of fathomless cunning. His silence was politically convenient. Clearly, he saw it as a means to deflect popular disaffection and weaken the liberal block—once his mainstay but now at odds with his authoritarianism and protectionist economic policies. Two of its leading figures, Bamberger and Lasker—whom Bismarck had come to loathe—were, after all, Jews; so were many liberal voters. Privately, Bismarck referred to his own minister of agriculture, Rudolph von Friedenthal, a converted Jew, as his "Semitic pants shitter."⁷⁴ Bamberger had fallen out with Bismarck not only because of such slurs and Bismarck's economic policies; he was equally irritated by the crude nationalism Bismarck generated in the aftermath of the war. Though he and Lasker convinced themselves that the animus against Jews was a passing fad, Bamberger was soon forced to acknowledge that "the cult of nationality" easily degenerates. "From hatred for others across the frontier it is only a small step to the hatred of others within one's *Heimat*."^{75*}

* It was under Bismarck, according to Volker Ullrich, that "the thunderbolt of communication first hit Catholics, later Social Democrats, and, increasingly, minorities and citizens of Jewish extraction or faith, who were denied membership in the German *Volksnation*" (*Die nervöse Grossmacht*, p. 90).

BARNOLD Auerbach had been living in Berlin since 1860, a frequent guest at court and the recipient of many medals. His books continued to be widely read. He enjoyed being recognized on the street as a famous and beloved author. But his optimism was gone. "I am baffled by the newly awakened *finor leuonikus*," he wrote to his cousin in 1876. "I wish I knew its origin. Could it be a feeling of self-confidence, of knowing their own worth, that Germans now have?"⁷⁶

Others were not at all baffled. Nietzsche regarded Christian anti-Semitism with scorn. Paul Vasilii, author of *La société de Berlin* (1884), was perhaps overly smug when, comparing Berlin with Paris, he claimed that prejudices that had long disappeared in France thrived in Berlin: "There is no city in the entire world where the children of Israel are more repulsed by society or where that society makes greater use of them."⁷⁷ But he was, of course, right in his assessment of the growing intolerance in Germany. In its sudden intensity it seemed far greater than anywhere else in Western Europe. In 1886, the Jewish population of Berlin numbered more than fifty thousand, 5 percent of the total. A fifth of all high school students were said to be Jewish. The modern world of commerce, industry, and democracy threatened many established privileges. The perceived dangers of modernity spawned inchoate fears. Jews had been disliked in the past and at times despised; now, for the first time, they were also feared.

New phrases came into usage (German is a great language for suggestive portmanteau words): *Judenthum* (century of the Jews), *Judentrausigkeit* (Jewish impudence), *Judenparasitenökonomie* (Jewish parasitic economy), and *Judenwelt herrschaft* (Jewish world domination). The word *Demokratie* was said by some to be a translation of a French Jewish word "alien" to the German language. The idea of democracy itself was allegedly advocated only by the *Judenpressungszetler* (the vermin writing for the Jewish-owned press).

In a process analogous to Freud's narcissism of minor difference, the more Jews came to resemble other Germans the more, it seemed, Germans resented them. In parts of the emerging German middle class and the intelligentsia, anti-Semitism became a cultural code, shorthand for a complete worldview. Student fraternities were increasingly infested

with it. As the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács would later claim, the German bourgeoisie had not yet overcome feudalism when the proletariat drove it into the arms of conservatives. Anti-Semitism was becoming a convenient mainstay of the militarized Prussian monarchy.

In 1879, Adolf Stöcker, a prominent Protestant clergyman in Berlin and the official chaplain of the imperial court, joined the anti-Semitic pack, endowing it with an elevated social and spiritual aura. Thousands attended his sermons, at which he insisted: "If we wish to recover, if we wish to hold fast to our German national character, we must get rid of the poisonous Jewish drop in our blood."⁷⁸ As Stöcker saw it, Christians were on the defensive. He disingenuously pleaded with the Jews for "a little more tolerance" toward Christians and "please, a little more equality," too.⁷⁹ The emperor did not approve of Stöcker but was said to consider his conduct "useful in order to make the Jews somewhat more modest."⁸⁰ And Bismarck was pleased with Stöcker's parallel attempt to form a conservative Christian labor party. The recession was in its sixth year; Stöcker's efforts to lure the unemployed away from the growing socialist movement were useful indeed.

The editors of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* remained convinced that the best tactic was to ignore Stöcker. In the long run, the educated middle class would not take its cue from a religious fanatic. Bleichröder went out of his way to reassure his business partners, Nathaniel Rothschild in London and Moritz von Goldschmidt in Vienna, that the agitation was a passing phenomenon. Goldschmidt wrote back to say that he disagreed. Rothschild, for his part, rushed to tell Disraeli that Bleichröder himself was one of the causes of Jewish persecution: "He has been employed so often by the German government that he has become arrogant and forgets that he is very often merely a 'trial balloon' . . . I hear also that Madame von Bleichröder is most disagreeable and haughty."⁸¹ As Bleichröder's biographer, Fritz Stern, comments: "A wretched picture of Bleichröder—and of the Rothschilds."⁸² At the end of October 1879, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* still noted optimistically that the hostility seemed to have "passed its zenith and was on the decline."⁸³

Two weeks later, all such complacency disappeared. Stöcker's virtu-

lence was suddenly legitimized by a powerful and distinguished academic voice. In an essay, published in the influential *Preussische Jahrbücher*, Heinrich von Treitschke, Prussia's leading historian, brought the wisdom of the beer cellars, in Graetz's words, to the rostrum of a great university. His unmatched prestige lent seriousness and respectability to Stöcker's cause. Treitschke inveighed against the "dominance" of Jews in German life and the corruption of Germanic and Christian ideals by the most "pushy" among them. The threat was deadly serious, he warned, but Germans were finally awakening to the menace, he announced. He welcomed the "amazing, powerful excitement" that was finally moving "the deep recesses of our national life. . . . It is as though the nation were recovering its sense of self. It is pitilessly sitting in judgment on itself." Even among men of the highest culture inclined to reject national arrogance or religious intolerance, "the cry is everywhere the same: the Jews are our misfortune!"

Year after year, the inexhaustible Polish cradle spawns hordes of ambitious young men who come pushing across our border to peddle their trousers and whose children and grandchildren are supposed to one day dominate the German stock market and German newspapers. . . . In thousands of German villages there is a Jew practicing usury and driving his neighbors to ruin and buying them up. . . . But the most dangerous of all is the unfair dominance that the Jews exert in the daily press.⁸⁴

Treitschke's essay threw the Jewish community into shock. Over the next twelve months, the number of conversions rose to double the average over the preceding five years.⁸⁵ A grand controversy ensued. With only one prominent exception, Treitschke's critics were Jews, among them rabbis, politicians—Bamberger, Lasker, Oppenheim—and the historian Graetz, whom Treitschke had attacked personally for his derogatory comments on medieval Christianity. (Bamberger joined Treitschke on this score, calling Graetz "the Stöcker of the synagogue.") The others included Paul Cassel, a convert who served as a Christian clergyman in Berlin, and Hermann Cohen, who agreed with Treitschke's main thesis on the necessary unity of state and religion but argued that

Judaism and Christianity would soon merge within the framework of a common "religion of reason."⁸⁶ He went so far as to ask Treitschke to be more patient: the acculturation process was advancing quickly. He even predicted that Jews would eventually be as blond and blue-eyed as their fellow Germans: they wished nothing more ardently than to look "like the Germans, whose appearance we currently mimic only in superficial ways."⁸⁶

The sole prominent Christian who spoke out publicly was Treitschke's fellow historian at the University of Berlin, Theodor Mommsen. Calling the new anti-Semitism "mass insanity," he sharply criticized its "true prophet, Herr von Treitschke."⁸⁷ Providence understood far better than Stöcker and Treitschke that German metal improved considerably when alloyed with a "small measure" of Israel. He did, however, qualify his support: "No Moses will lead them back to the Promised Land; they may sell trousers or write books but they must . . . shed their peculiarity."⁸⁸ He did not specify what this peculiarity was. The extensive discussion filled the daily press and the learned journals for months. Treitschke responded to his critics with growing impatience, and they answered, trying to make their case.

AUERBACH followed the debate in a mood of growing hopelessness. His letters bear ample evidence of his gloom. Treitschke had been one of his close friends. Auerbach decided never to speak to him again. "It is enough to drive you to despair," he noted on March 19, 1880. "Arrogance and aversion are lurking inside even the most open-minded liberals, just waiting for a chance to spring. What exactly do they mean when they say that the Jews first must prove their worth? Isn't that a kind of Inquisition?"

A full year passed before seventy-five Berlin university professors finally signed a petition protesting the foul wave of racism and calling on all Christians to defend "Lessing's heritage." The signatories included the university rector and some of Treitschke's most distin-

*Cohen's idea of religion was Platonic. Asked how one could possibly love an "idea," he answered: "One always loves an idea and nothing but an idea. Even in sensual love one loves only the idea of a person."

guished colleagues. The petition improved Auerbach's mood temporarily: "One is able to breathe again!" But only a week later, hundreds of students gave Treitschke a hero's welcome. The following day Auerbach spent an evening with his old friend Fritz Kapp, a veteran of 1848, now a liberal Reichstag deputy. "Of the thousands I know, he is one of the few who, if some conflict erupted, wouldn't say: 'There goes the Jew.'" Kapp tried to reassure him: within two months everything would be over. Auerbach replied: "I don't believe it. The fires caught and will go on burning. It's to the point where you have to be grateful to almost every single person who declares himself free of prejudice."

Kaiserin Augusta Victoria and the grand duke and duchess of Baden invited Auerbach for tea. They bemoaned the recent assassination of Czar Alexander II by an anarchist's bomb. Auerbach replied that "the ongoing orchestration of the campaign against the Jews is just another way of throwing bombs." The empress assured him that the mood would not prevail. Auerbach, who rarely challenged royalty, disagreed.

"It's no trifling matter having to be told that one does not belong with the Germans, that one has no fatherland," he pointed out. "Believe me," the duchess responded, "these ugly things are only happening here in Berlin." There was little or none of it in Karlsruhe, where she came from. The empress added that even in Berlin it was temporary. "I had to disagree," Auerbach informed his cousin.⁸⁹ The government itself, he said, was succumbing to the agitation by continuing to exclude Jews from the officers corps and from key positions in the administration. Germans simply refused to be a modern nation like the Dutch or the French. They wanted to remain a tribe, held together by their tribal idols. Such arguments were wasted on his present company.

Auerbach was leaving a Berlin restaurant one evening when someone yelled "*Hep! Hep!*" after him. He wept as he told his friend Eduard Lasker what had happened. Lasker consoled him, "Would you scold a sick man for having cholera? Anti-Semitism is an epidemic afflicting these people!"⁹⁰

Shortly after, Lasker and Bamberger left the National Liberal Party and joined the Progressives, a new party to the left of the National Liberals. Bamberger was soon more repelled by the equanimity of "three-quarters of his Progressive colleagues" than by the rabble-rousers, and

he broke with that party too.⁹¹ Two decades after his return from exile, he contemplated emigration. He was certain, he wrote, that the attacks on the Jews were part of the Prussian Junkers' campaign against liberalism, and it was "loathsome." In 1879, the slogan *Wähler keine Juden!*—"Don't vote for Jews!"—figured prominently for the first time in an election to the Prussian state parliament. Over the next six years, the number of deputies of Jewish extraction elected to local parliaments in Germany dropped from sixty-six to thirty-eight, of whom thirteen were baptized.

Theodor Fontane, perhaps the most sophisticated German writer after Heine and especially beloved by Jewish readers, publicly criticized Stöcker. Privately, he expressed fervid anti-Semitism. He wrote his friend Mathilde von Rohr that he was thoroughly "convinced" of the Jews' guilt. Their main fault was their "boundless impertinence." Fontane not only predicted they would suffer "a serious defeat" but heartily "wished them one."⁹²

Auerbach grew more and more disconsolate. Almost overnight he visibly aged, becoming "a sick, tired, broken old man, his skin yellow and dry, his eyes lusterless," according to one account.⁹³ On November 22, 1880, enraged and disgusted, he spent the entire afternoon and evening in the visitors' gallery of the Prussian state parliament, where, amid anti-Semitic catcalls, a motion to disenfranchise the Jews was under discussion.

Auerbach returned home in a state of acute depression. The following day, he summed up the despair that two generations later would become the tragedy of all German Jews.⁹⁴ He noted: "I have lived and worked in vain."⁹⁵