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THE
SOCIAL CONCEPTION OF JUDAISM
AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

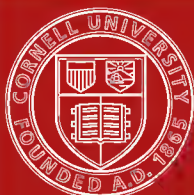
By
BERNARD LAZARE

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AND

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THE SOCIAL CONCEPTION OF JUDAISM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE.¹

For two thousand years the Jews have been scattered among the nations and sharing their life; for centuries they have been in permanent contact with the Christian nations, and yet their customs, their mind, the doctrines of their sacred books, those of their philosophers even, are less known than the practices of the Dahomeyans or the Lapps. To appraise the part they play, their action and their intellectuality, people constantly make use of the same pack of antique prejudices, and of a certain number of formulas whose only merit is an indisputable antiquity.

To all the world the Jews were formerly a collectivity of usurers, trained by their Talmud to the most subtle frauds, brought up in the art of accumulating the maximum of gold. To-day people recognize in them simply marvelous qualities as drainers of capital and as traders; but people go further. If these gifts are attributed to the Jews, it is by virtue of an alleged social conception which is said to be peculiar to them. And you must not think that this is solely an anti-Semite opinion,—it would not be worth the trouble of either combating or discussing; but it is also the opinion of men who would make an outcry if they were described as having taken sides with any party; it is the opinion of intellectual men, enlightened in everything but this; it is even the opinion of some Socialists, notably of Jaurès; and it is for this reason that a reply must be made.

For those of whom I have been speaking, the social conception of the Jews is an essentially mercantile conception. They think like the anti-Jews on this point, but they limit themselves to expressing their thought differently; they present it with a scientific apparatus and a sort of economic dog-

¹ Originally printed in the "Grande Revue."

matism, but at bottom they come to the same result; they consider capitalism as a Jewish creation, and, just as Drumont after Gougenot de Mouneaux speaks of the Judaizing of the Christian peoples, so does Jaurès after Marx.

“It is the Jewish idea,” says an anti-Semite, Marquis de la Tour du Pin, “which leads the rich man to the exploitation of the poor by the modern form of usury, capitalism”;¹ and Jaurès writes, “The social conception of the Jews, founded on the idea of trade, is in perfect harmony with the mechanism of capital.” It seems, then, that anti-Semitism and Socialism are in agreement on this point—at least the Socialism of Jaurès, since after this declaration he added that Drumont might *without exaggeration* have said that “the Jews, habituated by age-long persecutions to the practice of solidarity, and long since inured to the management of movable wealth, exercised in our society a disproportionate and dangerous action,” and he ended with these words, very significant as coming from his pen: “This socialism, shaded with anti-Semitism, would hardly have raised objections among free minds.” A strange conception of Socialism, a not less strange conception of the free mind, surprising at all events in a man who is one of the directors of the Socialist movement in France.

How did Jaurès come to the point of formulating such principles? By servilely adopting an opinion of Marx, an opinion of Marx which has long been a dead weight on the Jewish question, whether it is employed as a weapon by the anti-Semite or is adopted without discussion and without reflection by the Socialist. What is this opinion of Marx? How was he brought to utter it?

At the moment when the emancipation of the Jews was being discussed in Germany, in 1843, Bruno Bauer issued a book which attracted much attention, “Die Judenfrage.” He there expressed this idea,—that, to emancipate himself, the Jew must first deliver himself from his Judaism, then deliver himself from Christianity, a higher religious term, but one that had sprung from the Jewish religion. In a word, the emanci-

¹ “La Question Juive et la Revolution Sociale,” p. 19.

pation of the Jews is a theological question. Marx replied in the "Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher." For him the question was social first and foremost, and one had to consider, not "the Jew of the Sabbath," as Bruno Bauer had, but "the ordinary Jew." Thenceforth the "question of the Jew's faculty for emancipating himself" is changed into this other question: "What particular social element must be overturned to efface Judaism?" Now, "what is the mundane basis of Judaism? it is practical wants, egoism. What is the Jew's mundane worship? it is trade. What is the Jew's mundane divinity? it is money. Well, then, to emancipate one's self from trade and money—that is, from practical and real Judaism—would be the great emancipation so necessary at our epoch. An organization of society which should cause to disappear the presuppositions and bases of trade, and consequently trade itself, would render the Jew impossible; his religious consciousness as Jew would evaporate and disappear, like a very thin mist in the true vital atmosphere of society. On the other hand, if the Jew recognizes as null, and destroys, this Jewish practical essence (selfishness, trade, money), then the Jew raises himself at once out of his present swamp; then the Jew labors in the service of the universal emancipating idea; then the Jew turns to a valiant wrestler against the extreme expression of human alienation. We recognize in Judaism, then, an anti-social element, universally diffused, which has been pushed to its present height by the current of history without the collaboration of the Jews; but this anti-social element cannot blend in it and will disappear—*Jewish emancipation, in its utmost significance, is the emancipation of humanity from the bonds that Judaism imposes on it.*"

For Marx the Jew had emancipated himself by Judaizing the Christians, when, to be really emancipated, he ought to have de-Judaized himself, and, to put it better, disappeared, carrying with him his conception of trade.

If the Marx of "Das Kapital" ever reread this hasty and casual polemic, no one can have judged more sternly than himself his own logomachy, his categorical affirmations and peremptory assertions supported by no proof, no fact. Logi-

cian that he was, he certainly smiled at the religio-economic metaphysical emptiness which he naively displayed in his article in the "Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher." When he wrote it, he was ignorant of everything about the Jews; his father had been converted to Protestantism, and had let his son be ignorant of everything, of the religion, the history, and the present situation of those to whom so many spiritual ties attached him. Later he must have known them better,—at all events, he utters no further opinion about them; but that which he had one day set forth is still doing service, as I have pointed out. The Anarchists of the Dühring type have picked it up in Germany; anti-Semites like Drumont back themselves up with it; and Socialists do not hesitate on occasion to affirm, as the master did one day, that the social conception of the Jews is based on trade.

How can such a theory be justified by producing scriptural documents, emanating from the Jews, which develop doctrines apologetic for mercantilism; by pointing out in Israel a constant tradition adapted to develop the idea and the practice of trade; by establishing from facts, in fine, that Judaism's constant care has been business?

Let us, for the moment, limit ourselves to written sources. Where can we go to look for the social conception of the Jews? In the Bible, in the Talmud, and finally in the philosophers and economists who have sprung from this nation. Let us see, then, what is the political economy of the biblical writers,—chroniclers, moralists, and prophets; what is that of the Talmudists and the doctors of the middle ages, and that of the philosophers and the theorists. Then we will inquire whether their doctrines have left no trace among the non-Jews.

"As for us," writes Flavius Josephus, "we do not live on a sea-coast; we are not very fond of commerce. Our cities are remote from the sea, and our occupations consist in cultivating the fine land which we inhabit."

The biblical chroniclers know of no other condition for man than the agricultural condition: "Yahve-Elohim," says Genesis (2:15), "took man and installed him in the garden of Eden to practise agriculture there." According to a midrash,

Cain and Abel having divided between them the empire of the world, the former chose the agricultural condition, and possessed himself of the soil; the second took the pastoral condition, and possessed himself of the flocks. So the Jewish feasts were feasts of agriculture. Passover the feast of springtime, Pentecost that of harvest, and finally Rosh Hasshanah, the start of field labor, the recommencement of the year; it is only later that there were attached to these feasts historic recollections like the coming out from Egypt and the promulgation of the Law.

All the maxims of the Bible are agrarian. If it recommends having many children, it is because every parcel of the soil has to be worked; and Hillel was in the same tradition when he said that a numerous body of domestics is an open sore. How did the old books of Israel understand rewards and punishments? The rewards shall be a good harvest, the ears of wheat bursting with their grains, the trellises breaking under the weight of the grapes; the chastisement shall be drought and the unproductiveness of the fields.

To sit in peace under one's vine and fig-tree, such was the ideal; so the golden age was realized under the good kings. Agriculture was in a manner consecrated by God, and the greatest men of Israel—those whom the divine voice called to be heads of the people or prophets—held the plough or drove the cattle.

As for commerce, the Bible ignores and despises it. In the time of the patriarchs it was in the hands of the Ishmaelites, whose caravans passed through the country. In the time of the kings the Phœnicians practised it. The usual words and terms applicable to commerce did not exist in biblical Hebrew. It was only after the exile, and in the Talmudic period, that these words entered into the language.

And not only was the social conception of the Bible an agricultural conception, but it was parcellary, and the law was made with a view to hindering the establishment of large properties. In ancient Israel the field could not be alienated except under compulsion of force. It was let for a certain number of years, and in the jubilee year the field returned to

the first possessor. Furthermore, between the day of the letting and the jubilee year, there existed a very extensive right of redemption (Leviticus 25: 13, 15, 28).

It was only when the jubilee year was abolished that the rich families could extend their possessions, and that large properties were established. It is dating from this moment, too, that one sees violent revendications produced, which, in the first century before and after Jesus Christ, ended in a real social revolution, whose termination, at the moment of the war against Vespasian and Titus, was characterized by the replevining of the lands of the rich by the sicarii and their partisans. It has never been pointed out that at the epoch of this resistance to Rome the patriotic struggle was complicated by an inner struggle, a real class struggle, which explains the anathemas and passionate recitals of Josephus, who himself belonged to the category of the possessors. All the ground of Judea, at the time when Jesus appeared, was turned upside down by the revendications of tribunes and revolutionists. After the destruction of the temple by Titus, after the crushing of the Jews, the goods were found in the hands of the sicarii, or of the middle class who had bought them from the sicarii. The *dikarikon* was established,—that is, the right of revendication with regard to the goods bought by the sicarii,—but it was found necessary to suspend its application.¹

Up to this epoch the representatives of popular aspirations were no other than the prophets. They, in the same degree as the old chroniclers, had the love of agriculture and the contempt of commerce. They added to these a sort of deification of the poor man, the humble man, the non-possessor, and a fierce hatred of the rich man, of which the Gospels bring us the echo. Mercantilism was odious to them. For them, as well as for the gnostic writers, “merchant” is a synonym for “swindler”: “The merchant holds in his hands the balance of deceit,” says Hosea (12: 8), and Jesus the son of Sirach declares, “The merchant cannot keep from doing wrong” (26: 28). For them the desirable condition is the

¹ J. Daremberg, “Géographie de la Palestine,” p. 476.

peace of the countryman planting his vineyard and eating the fruit.

There were other voices by which the Jewish people expressed its social ideal; they were those of the poet of the Psalms, a real literature of the poor, as a scholar has said.¹ Never was there written a more frantic glorification of the condition of poverty, a more extraordinary apology for indigence, a more frightful anathema of the rich man. The Gospel, with its fervors and its tendernesses, sprang entirely from there; the primitive church lived on the Psalms, and Catholicism has been unable to conceive another ideal than that.

It is not in the Bible, then, that we shall find this social conception of the Jews, based on trade. Quite to the contrary, the conception is cleanly anti-mercantile. Catholicism has adopted it, has not ceased to recommend it and in a measure to apply it, and later this essentially Jewish conception has been turned against the Jews, of whom a fraction had become traders. For Christian society the device was *ense et aratro*; the two social types became the soldier, "he who defends the fields, and the husbandman, the corner-stone of the nation; the biblical contempt for the middleman was professed, and they had a Jewish hatred for the Jew.

In fact, it is not from the Greeks or from the Romans that the Christian peoples can have drawn these prejudices. Among the Greeks agriculture was considered a servile profession, and it was the slaves who cultivated the land. As for the Romans, if Cicero did say, speaking of agriculture, "There is nothing worthier of a free man,"² he preferred to speculate with the politicians and to take part in financial companies. In the same way Cato wrote that "one could make no greater eulogy on a man than to say that he was an able agriculturist and a good farm-manager,"³ but he preferred to lend at fifty per cent. and, hardest of masters, have his slaves toil on the glebe. As for the people, it was a people of money-handlers or of *frumentarii*.

¹ Is. Locle, "La Littérature du Louvre."

² "De officiis."

³ "De re rustica."

If among the modern Catholic nations (for the Protestant nations, though brought up in the reading of Jewish books, have succeeded in emancipating themselves by free discussion) we consider France as a type, we shall see that it has constantly lived on this biblical and Jewish social conception. If we were anti-Semitic, we should say that it was Jewified; but from this point of view, as we are going to show at once, no one is more Jewified than the anti-Semite, an essentially agrarian and (theoretically at least) anti-mercantile animal.

French politicians, economists, and moralists have kept the patriarchal conception of the old Jews. "Husbandry and pasturage are the breasts of France," said Oliver de Serres and Sully; and the latter, desirous to favor agriculture solely, refused even to protect the culture of the mulberry-tree and the silk industry. Antoine de Moret-Chrestien, who asked an equal protection for manufactures and agriculture, was bold in this.

Colbert's mercantilism was considered abominable, and agrarian protectionists like Bois-Guillebert combated it with violence. Colbert has been popularly made a disagreeable and almost anti-French figure; and, when there was founded in France a truly national school of economists, it was the school of Quesnay and the physiocrats.

The conception of Quesnay and his disciples is a dogmatic and scientific transference of the Jewish and Christian conception of the political universe; only, in place of being democratic, they were aristocratic agrarians, thinking all that Fontenelle one day wrote: "I might have my hand full of truths, and I would not open it for the people." In agreement, besides, with all that eighteenth century whose writers and philosophers wrote and thought only for privileged people.

Under Quesnay's three classes composed the nation: the *productive class*, that of the cultivators; the *proprietary class*, comprising the proprietors properly so called; and the *sterile class*, composed of those engaged in industry and commerce. An agricultural realm, such was Quesnay's dream: "Let the

¹ "Tableau économique."

sovereign and the nation," said he, "never lose sight of the fact that the land is the sole source of riches, and that agriculture is what multiplies them,"¹ and he praised Sully, "that great minister who, to procure revenues to the king and the nation, and to sustain the forces of the State, desired only husbandmen, vinedressers, and shepherds." So political sovereignty could belong only to the possessors of the land. "He who possesses no land," wrote Turgot, "cannot have a country except by heart, by opinion, by the happy prejudice of childhood." Cleaner-cut and harder, Mably said: "Only the men who have an inheritance have a country" [*patrie*, "fatherland"]. This was excluding the poor from citizenship, and that was the thought not only of the physiocrats, but of all the pseudo-democratic philosophers of the eighteenth century.

This idea, that only the man who possesses the soil has a country, is found again among the anti-Semites of to-day, and it is on this account that they refuse the Jew the title of citizen.

We have seen how the biblical conception was transformed for the physiocrats. At the end of the eighteenth century, and during the first years of the nineteenth, it was the doctrines of the English economists, of Smith and others, that were developed at the same time that industry was being born and growing up. But beginning with 1834, at the moment of the great English industrial expansion, the Christian economists in France felt the need of returning to the sound doctrines, the *revealed* ones, those of the Bible. Agriculture, "solid base of all national prosperity," was praised anew; there was formed a "Religious Association for the Progress of Agriculture in France," an association presided over by the duc de Montmorency, whose purpose was to "put agricultural labor under the influence of the principles and practice of the Catholic religion." These doctrines found defenders, like M. de Villeneuve-Bargemont, who published a treatise on Christian political economy, in which it was said:

¹ "Maxime générale."

“Of all the industries to which man can deliver himself in order to assure his existence and his happiness, the most solid, the most appropriate to a just distribution of wealth, the least subject to disastrous vicissitudes in the activity of labor and in the rate of wages, that which most happily maintains equilibrium in population, that, in fine, which Providence first offered to men as at once test and consolation, is, without contradiction, agricultural industry: that is to say, labor exercised on the soil itself to produce food or raw materials. The French and Italian economists of the eighteenth century, in considering the land as the source of all wealth, had perceived a great truth, which religion had, moreover, been proclaiming for a long time.” As you see, the new Christian economists base themselves on the Bible, and praise the physiocrats for having followed it; but they are more in conformity of thought with the sacred writers than are the physiocrats, from the ethical standpoint at least, since they blame exaggerated wealth and praise self-renunciation, and poverty while trying to reconcile them with the necessities of modern life and industry. This care is especially visible in one of them, M. Charles Périn, the author of “*De la Richesse dans les Sociétés Chrétiennes*,” a work in which he tried to reconcile “material progress and Christian self-renunciation” and to demonstrate that “for material as well as moral order nothing great and truly useful can be done, or has ever been done, except by self-renunciation.” For M. Charles Périn, “far from supposing that a society should be considered inferior because in it agricultural propensities overcome industrial propensities, one may, on the contrary, see in the predispositions that turn national activity toward agriculture one of heaven’s greatest blessings on that people, and perhaps a sign of the great things that God expects of it.”

But one man above all based himself on the social doctrines of the Old Testament, and he is a man essentially representative of a class and of a condition of mind. This man is Le Play. Not only does he maintain that agriculture, completed by some arts having for their object, like it, the exploitation of the natural wealth of the soil, the air, and the water, is

strictly sufficient to give a nation a permanent prosperity,' but he further writes the "Organization of Labor According to the Custom of the Shops and the Law of the Decalogue" to praise the patriarchal family, source of prosperity, and to maintain that only nomadic shepherds, and agglomerations of agriculturists owning their estates, escape these alternations of corruption and reform. They alone preserve this solid prosperity, which is revealed, not by wealth, brilliancy, and power, but by labor, frugality, and virtue.

So it is not in the Bible that we can find a social conception based on trade. We have seen there only a conception of an agricultural and pastoral society, and the biblical ideal has become in our days the ideal of Catholic economists and of anti-Semites. The chief reproach that these last address to the Jews is that of not being agriculturists in the countries where they find themselves. We will examine this reproach.

We must see now what idea the Talmudic doctors formed of the sources of wealth, and what was their social ideal. As the work of the rabbis was only a long commentary on the Bible, it could not but present agriculture as the thing of all others. "Just as God," says a midrash, "at the beginning of the world occupied himself with the planting of the garden of Eden, so every Israelite's first care should be to apply himself to agriculture." Eleven tractates of the Talmud were consecrated to agricultural labors, and formed a rural code, the "Sedar Zeraim," and a celebrated rabbi, Rabbi Eleazar, said: "All men will one day leave their trades to give themselves up to agriculture."² But this sentence is of itself an indication that at the Talmudic epoch agriculture was only the most desirable of conditions. From a people exclusively pastoral and agricultural the Jews had become mainly a people of artisans, and the Talmudist's social conception is that of a nation of workmen and scholars. "He who gives his child no trade teaches him brigandage," said Rabbi Judah the Holy. "He who earns his living by labor is greater than he who fears God," said another doctor. On every page of

¹ "La Réforme Sociale," ch. xxxiv.

² Midrash Rubba on Leviticus.

the Talmud there is found this glorification of manual labor, and of labor whatever it may be. "Rather than remain idle," it is said, "hunt for carrion on the highway to earn your living, though you should be high priest or a man of rank." The scholar himself, so honored that it was said, "A scholar, were he a bastard, takes precedence of the high priest who is ignorant,"—the scholar was to derive no profit from science, but was to follow the maxim of Rabbi Fzadow: "Do not make of sacred study a crown to stir your pride or an instrument of domination";¹ and he must have a manual occupation, for he knew with Rabbi Gamaliel that "all religious study which is not accompanied by labor is sterile and leads to sin."²

So all the great doctors were artisans. Rabbi Shammai was a mason, Rabbi Hillel a wood-cutter, Rabbi Tshah a blacksmith, Rabbi Joseph ben Chalabgha a currier, Rabbi Nehemiah a potter, Rabbi Orchaiah a shoemaker, Rabbi Pinchath a stone-cutter. "Do not recoil from any task," said Rabbi Akiba to his disciples; "cut up, if necessary, a beast dead in the open street. Do not say 'But I am a scholar.'" It was this rule of the Talmudists that St. Paul, the commentator of the new law, followed when he said: "All that we have need of, I and those who are with me, it is our hands that furnish it to us."³ Later, Spinoza will conform to it; he will meditate on the eternal substance, but he will not live on his metaphysics; he will refuse the liberalities of the great who wish to pay for his science, and will live by his trade of crystal-polisher.

This conception is very far from being a mercantile conception; the glorification of the artisan having given birth to laws protective of labor, it implied a contempt of the detainer of wealth, of the possessor of gold, and, above all, of him who made it bear fruit. Now, in an agricultural society like the Jewish, what was the way in which the rich man could increase his fortune? It was lending at interest, usury. Now,

¹ Pirke Aboth, 4 : 7.

² Pirke Aboth, 2 : 2.

³ Acts 20 : 34.

no law has been severer against usury than the biblical law, and the Talmudic law which flows from it. For them, money is sterile.

“ If you lend money to one of my people,” it is said, “ to a poor man who is sojourning with you, you shall not behave toward him as an exactor, you shall not impose on him the obligation of paying you usury ” (Exodus 22:25). Leviticus (25:35,36) prescribes further: “ When your brother becomes poor, you shall maintain him; if it is a pagan foreigner and he also lives with you, you are to maintain the poor pagan too. You shall not take interest from him, from your brother, or from the pagan, for you shall fear your God.” To this there has been opposed an often-cited text of Deuteronomy (23:19, 20), according to which it was permitted to take interest from the foreigner. In reality this text means the contrary of what it is made to say. Here it is: “ You shall not make your brother bite, be it the biting of money or of an object of nourishment, or of any object whatever which he may bite; you may make a foreigner bite, but you shall not make your brother bite.” To make one bite was to pay interest to him; and the biblical text signifies that one is to pay no interest to his brother, but that one is to pay interest to the foreigner: Why? Because without doubt this foreigner’s law allows him to take interest. It is the Christian conception of the middle ages; the Christian is not to lend on interest, but the Jew and the heretic, the Lombard, the Cahorsin, might do so.

According to the Bible, a loan was to be gratuitous, but he to whom it had been granted did not remain a debtor forever; a special law, at fixed periods, came to liberate him; every seven years there arrived the sabbatic year, the year of the Shemitah, and debts were annulled: “ Let every creditor give a release of his loan,” said the book. “ He shall not press his neighbor, his brother, for God has proclaimed the year of release.” (Deuteronomy 15:1.) There was still more: even in the course of the sabbatic year lending at interest was prohibited, and it was forbidden to refuse the loan, though the debt was to be annulled at the expiration of the year. “ Take care,” Deuteronomy recommends (15:9) “ not to let your-

selves be surprised by this impious thought, and to say in your heart: 'The seventh year, which is that of remission, is near,' and thus to turn away your eyes from your brother who is poor, without being willing to lend him what he asks you for.'

At Hillel's time it was necessary to evade this law, which economic evolution could not let stand. There was then introduced into the code what was called the *prosbol*. Before the sabbatic year the creditor presented his claim to the tribunal, a minute of this presentation was taken, witnesses attested it, and the limitation was suspended. But this law guaranteed only the payment of the gratuitous loan. As regards usury the Talmudists were harder than the book they commented on had been. They likened usurers to robbers; usurers were to them "gazlanim," brigands, from whom they took away the right to testify.¹ A Talmudic legend well shows the sentiments that inspired the money-lender. Those whom the prophet Ezekiel raised to life, it says, had all deserved death for having adored the idol of Nabu-kudurri-usur. But the divine mercy raised them up, excepting one alone, because he lent at interest. "He who has money and who lends it without interest," declares Rabbi Simon, the son of Eleazar, "is he of whom the Psalmist speaks, saying: 'He who does not put his money out at usury nor take reward against the innocent shall never be moved;' it results from this that he who lends at usury shall lose his luck." "It is prohibited to receive a reward for waiting for payment, or for having left the capital with the debtor for a certain time. That is the rule of usury," said Rabbi Nahaman.

In proscribing usury under all its forms the Talmudists employed all the resources of their casuistry and of their subtlety. So they prohibited making a bargain with a peasant that he should furnish his products all the year at the low price of harvest; for the buyer, in paying him in advance, was considered as a usurer. "If," we find in another text, "an individual says to another: 'Give me money, I will give you all the milk that I shall at once obtain from my goats,' he does a permitted thing; but, if he engages to furnish the

¹ Baba Meziḥ 61a, Sanhedrin 24a.

milk of his goats (during all the year and when the price shall have risen) for the low price of the moment of the sale, he does a prohibited thing." One must not, it was again said, "borrow a measure of wheat to return the same measure after harvest"; in fact, the price might have risen at that time, and a usury would be paid by the debtor. It was even forbidden to exchange two unlike labors,—for instance, to weed a neighbor's field and have him dig one's own.

Usury properly so called, *ribith hetzuzah*, was that forbidden by the Mosaic law; the rabbinical law did more; it forbade what it called *ab ak ribith*, the dust of usury, the usury of commercial transactions. It prohibited, for instance, giving merchandise to a haberdasher that he might sell it and divide the profit with him who had intrusted it to him; for thus the haberdasher would not get paid for the work that would have fallen upon him in selling what he would say he was only the guardian of, and his contractor would receive a usurious profit. The Talmudists made further refinements; they prohibited *anticipated usury*, which consisted in making a present to one from whom one was desirous to borrow; *delayed usury*, sending a present to one from whom one has borrowed and whom one has paid. They prohibited even *usury in words*: "One must not say, to give a creditor pleasure, a thing that one would not have said if one had not borrowed the money," and creditors were not to accept any of these sorts of usury.

This is quite the contrary of a trader's conception, and all these measures tended to hinder commerce and to set barriers to it. Observing such rules, submitting to such laws, a people could not but remain a people of artisans and agriculturists. And the Talmudic law did not limit itself to forbidding usury; it made those who had unlawfully received it disgorge. "Pagan tribunals," said Rabbi Saphra, "force the debtor to pay the creditor the usury which at receiving the loan he engaged to pay. It is this usury which our tribunals, on the contrary, force the creditor to return to the debtor, if the latter has already given it to him."¹ In the middle ages people applied to the Jew banker and lender his own law, when they

¹ All these texts against usury are taken from the tractate Baba Meziḥ.

forced him to make restitution; it is true that they took from him interest and capital.

The Roman tribunals which gave judgment in matters of usury must, in fact, have been an object of horror to the Jews. All the Talmudic legislation was made in favor of the poor man, the peasant, and the working-man. The Roman law was made for the rich man; it was essentially a trader's law; so a part of the social and inner history of Rome is made up of the revolts of the plebs against the rich and the money-lending nobles. If one compares the Roman law with the rabbinical law, one feels still more the severity of the former, which gave to the nobleman and the rich man all rights over his debtors. Shylock has existed only among the Romans. If ever a people had a social conception based on trade and speculation, it was the Roman people, which knew no independent commercial association, and which saw all great financial and industrial operations carried on by appointment of the State, and for its profit.¹

The Roman legislative conception was a cruel conception, based on a harsh and pitiless defence of property, pushed to such a point that there was a time when he whose plough grazed his neighbor's field was guilty of sacrilege and had to take flight, he and his oxen. Never was a system of plutocratic and military aristocracy more strongly established than at Rome. The assessment-roll did everything there; it was "the basis of almost all the judicial laws,"² and Cicero wrote: "To choose a judge, one must have regard to fortune as much as to personal merit." In what country have men of money had so much influence, and so open an influence, as had at Rome the knights,—that is, the publicans,—that is, the financiers? If the Talmudic doctors were artisans, the writers and philosophers of Rome were usurers or bankers. Cato ground his borrowers; Brutus lent at 48 per cent., and had siege laid to the senators of Salamis, his debtors, of whom five died of hunger during that siege; Cicero got two million sesterces out of his province; Seneca crushed Brittany

¹ A. Deloume, "Les Manieirs d'Argent à Rome."

² A. Deloume, *op. cit.*

under his usury; Pompey made himself the lender of the cities of the east; and the soldiers of the legions made themselves usurers in the countries they occupied. They had the commercial genius besides, as the Greeks had. Cato, to guarantee his money lent, invented silent partnership; that paid better than invoking the harsh law of the twelve tables, which yet was an alleviation too, since it limited the weight of the chains with which one could load a debtor, and, in spite of its giving permission to sell the insolvent as a slave, outside Rome, it said "at least unless the creditors prefer to divide among themselves his bleeding members." Never did such barbarity illustrate a Judaic law; the law of like for like was a real alleviation of this law.

So, if the people withdrew to the Aventine hill, if Catiline conspired, it was because it was impossible to bear longer the cruelty of the money-lenders. But what mattered it to the publicans? They had their men like Cicero, like Pompey, and the senate decided on war against Mithridates to safeguard the knights' interests in the provinces of Asia. Pompey commanded and followed their interests, as Bonaparte later, in Italy, served the interests of the financiers of the Directory.

So one may say that the world, in so far as it has become capitalistic, has been Romanized and not Judaized; the Jew himself has been Romanized. Before the *diaspora*, the dispersion, he was ignorant of commerce; the Phœnicians dared not teach it to him as long as he remained on his land; it was the Roman who educated him. The craze for money, its deification, capitalistic barbarity, disregard of every human interest other than the financial or commercial interest, are traits of the Roman soul, but not of the Jewish soul. The Roman was a trader by taste, a part of the Jews followed him by constraint, and from these there always arose protests against those among them who practised usury and banking.

The Tosafists and doctors of the middle ages were in communion of ideas with the Talmudists. Rashi, the great doctor of Champagne, condemned usury; Maimonides likewise. Karo, the theologian, said: "We must give heed, for the

debtor, the creditor, the endorser, the witnesses, are transgressors of the law. He who puts money out at interest shall be poor; he is as if he denied the coming out of Egypt and the God of Israel." He added: "The usurer must be forced and struck till he gives up his life."¹

When the necessities of the times, and the evolution which drew it on, made of the Jewish *bourgeoisie* a financial *bourgeoisie*, there were always to be found men like Rabbi Moses of Coucy or Joselmann of Rosheim to condemn exaggerated interest. There were also found, it is true, theologians to put this *bourgeoisie* at rest with its conscience. Certain Tosafists, and Karo himself, authorized taking interest in case of danger to life, but those who were called the pilpulists (pepper-pounders), refined casuists, insisted on perverting the law. They proscribed the abhorred name of usury; they called this act a participation in the profit resulting from the loan. To fix the rate they made an arbitrary valuation of the prospective profit, and divided it so that the half corresponded to the desired rate. Thanks to the etymological interpretation of texts, in themselves prohibitive, from the Bible and Talmud, they even came to justify this procedure and this participation (*Hether iska*). But this anxiety proves how strong was the power of the prohibition, and what prejudices the Jew had to conquer when he became a money-lender.

It is not in the Talmud, either, then, or in the works of the Jewish doctors and theologians, that we find this *social conception of the Jew, based on trade*. On the contrary; and the Christian church inherited this Jewish anti-mercantilism, too. The theory of the church against usury is that of the Talmud. The church did not get this from the Greeks or from the Romans, trading nations, but inherited it from Israel, an agricultural people, where such theories ought naturally to be developed. It was only in the middle ages, in the thirteenth century, that the church could prop itself up with the authority of Aristotle, who had declared money sterile,—and that without his theory having ever had an influence on the facts in Greece, or on the law, which never limited the rate of interest.

¹ "Jove Dea," § 160, 1-5.

The first Christian communities, the first fathers, penetrated with biblical evangelism, knew scarcely more than one form of capital,—capital living on usury; they could not but adopt, then, the doctrines of the Old Testament. But, if for the church the type of the *mutuum* is the gratuitous loan, it too, under the pressure of facts, admits accommodations, and it recognizes four cases where the *mutuum* might bear interest: 1, the *lucrum cessans*,—that is, “the loss of an emolument which one would probably have received if one had not lent money”; 2, the *damnum emergens*,—that is, “the damage of which the loan is the direct source”; 3, the *periculum sortis*,—that is, “the danger of losing the funds lent by reason of the borrower’s insolvency”; 4, the *titulum legis*, in virtue of which, “by the mere fact that the civil law authorizes the reception of an interest proportionate to the loan, this reception is considered legitimate.”¹ The Tosafists were not so liberal; it is true that there were protestors. When Bernardino of Feltre, to compete with the money-lending Jews, founded in Italy the first *monts de piété*, these lent gratuitously; but there came a moment when Bernardino obliged them to take an interest to cover the expenses of administration. After him an Augustinian monk, Barianno, published a furious pamphlet against the “*monts d’impiété*.”

In our day it is the anti-Semites who theoretically represent the anti-mercantile and anti-usurary conception of the Bible and the Talmud. According to their social conception, according to the idea of society which they form, the anti-Semites may without paradox be considered as uncompromising Jews; and in this the anti-Semites are only the left wing of the Catholic economists, the Perins and the Le Plays, and the Christian Socialists.

If we have not found the doctrine based on trade in either the Bible or the Talmud, shall we find more of it in the works of the philosophers and economists who have sprung from Israel? It is neither Ibn Gabirol nor Spinoza who will show it to us; the Platonism of the one and the pantheism of the other leave no room for an apology for trade. No more is it a Ri-

¹ Ch. Perin, “De la Richesse dans les Sociétés Chrétiennes,” t. 2, p. 384.

cardo, still less a Marx and a Lassalle, who will formulate it; quite the contrary. Will it be said that Colbertism and mercantilism—in so far as they are economic theories—are Jewish social conceptions? Thomas Mun, Colbert, and François Malon, are not Jews, no more than is Smith, in spite of his industrial system; no more than Bentham, who wrote the “Defence of Usury”; no more than Turgot, who claimed the full liberty of the interest of capital. If there is a social system based on trade, it is not that of the “German Jew Marx,” as the good Anarchist Bakounine called him; it is that of St. Simon, who said: “I have received the mission to get political power out of the hands of the clergy, the nobility, and the judicial order, in order to put it into the hands of the industrial class.”¹

Where, then, shall we find the trace of this “social system of the Jews, based on trade”? Listen to Marx: “It is not in the Pentateuch and in the Talmud,” says he, “but in present society, that we find the essence of the present Jew; we find him there, not as an *abstract* essence, but as an essence as *empirical* as possible.”² This is to say that the Jew realizes practically, in the society in the midst of which he lives, a conception based on traffic, and that he always has realized it. Disembarrassed of all logomachy, this means that the Jew, since his entrance into the Christian world, has been suitable only to trade. And this is assuredly what we find at the basis of all the reasonings, all the theories against the Jews, or of those which make pretence to explain the Jew socially. How can such an error have spread? How has it been adopted by well-informed and open minds? This is what I have still to explain.

Let us suppose a historian who, to study a people, to give its characteristics, its philosophy, and its ideal, limits himself to considering one of the classes of this people. If he regards only the proletarians, he will perhaps conclude that this people has a social conception based on anti-mercantilism and on labor. If, on the contrary, he faces solely the financial,

¹ “Système industriel,” p. 167.

² Marx, “Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher.”

industrial, and commercial *bourgeoisie*, he will declare quite as justly that this people's social conception is based on trade. No nation will be able to escape the consequences of such a way of writing history.

This is what has happened for the Jews; and they have been considered under the aspect of traders not only by the anti-Semites, but by the Jews themselves who have wished to write their history. On certain points Drumont is in accord with Grätz; what differentiates them is that Grätz pleads the extenuating circumstances. He too declares that the Jew is a tradesman and money-handler, but it is because he has been constrained to it. This is an assertion radically false; in reality it is the Jewish *bourgeoisie* that have become traders and money-handlers, and not the "Jews." But the Jewish historians have never written any but the history of the Jewish *bourgeoisie*, for the use of the Jewish *bourgeois* of their time. They have not known the people, they have ignored them, they have refused to see them. Their history being also an apologetic history of the Jews in relation to the Christians, a history written with a view to demonstrate the progressive efforts of the Jews towards assimilation,—which is not fair,—they have constantly had a preoccupation, not to write the history of the Jews as a nation.

In reality, this history is not otherwise comprehensible. The Jews have never ceased to be a people. If there are different types among them,—that is, if, such as they are today, they do not descend from a single pair,—it is none the less true that these ethnographic types, different among them, belong only to them. They have a similar mentality. I speak in general; for, if I study English mentality, I shall not take as the object of my examination the sons of naturalized Englishmen living in France. Likewise, in speaking of the Jews, I mean to speak of the mass of Galician, Roumanian, Russian, and Oriental Jews, and not of the sparse Christianized and Hellenized Jews of the west,—though nevertheless the higher types of these have preserved their Jewish characteristics. In this mass a special intellectuality arises from the same education, from the same material, religious,

and moral mode of life. From a triple point of view, ethnological, ethical, and intellectual, the Jews are incontestably a people in which individualities are, as in all peoples, susceptible of being naturalized perfectly. If one regards them from the economic point of view, one sees them divided into classes, like every other nation, and it has always been so. There has at every time been among them a financial higher *bourgeoisie*,—whose part, however, has been exaggerated,—an intellectual or commercial middle *bourgeoisie*; and it has not been sufficiently noted that the economic history of the Jews is not the history of struggles between Christian and Jewish money-handlers, but of struggles between petty trading *bourgeois*, Jewish and Christian. Finally, there has always been among the Jews an immense proletariat.

That no agriculturists are found among them—and these will be found too, but exceptionally—is not surprising. The Jews immigrated into the ancient world; now, the immigrant is never an agriculturist, except when he utilizes an uninhabited country; when he spreads abroad in the midst of peoples occupying a territory, he does business, like the Greek, like the Phœnician, or else he is an artisan.

It was so for the Jews. If at Alexandria, at Rome, there were among them wealthy dealers, speculators, and financiers, their mass was a body of poor plebeians. At Alexandria the synagogue was divided into lodges, each occupied by one of the corporations of Jewish artisans. At Rome, if many among them possessed an influence due to their wealth,—the only influence one could have at Rome,—and merited Cicero's apostrophes or Cæsar's good will, the greater part was composed of little people, camped around the Capene gate and given up to the lowest trades.

All the Jewish communities were thus constituted,—a nucleus of rich, a group of traffickers devoting themselves to business on the small scale, a great number of artisans, and, finally, a whole *gens* of paupers living around the synagogue on pious alms and on the levies made by the administrators of the community on the revenue of those who could meet the expenses of worship and the support of the needy.

In the charters, in the cartularies, these artisans and these paupers do not and cannot appear; they do not treat with cities and religious communities, be it for the possession of real estate, be it for the obtaining of commercial privileges; no more do they figure on the list of those who pay the taxes. It is the community that pays for them, for it is the administrators who are responsible. On the other hand, part of the chroniclers and historians who incidentally speak of the Jews speak of them in the fashion of anti-Semites, and one is as well informed by reading them as one would be informed on the Jews of the nineteenth century by reading Drumont, who writes, without wrinkling an eyebrow, that the Jew is not a working-man. The Ajobards, the Rigords, see in the Jew only him who practises lending at interest or banking operations. It is by comparing those who pay taxes with the total of the Jewish population that one finds the poor man and the petty artisan. As for documents, they will be found in the writings of the numerous travelers who have visited the Jewish communities. These, like Benjamin of Tudela, like Petoyah of Ratisbon, like John Belon, etc., have found the Jewish working-man everywhere. The Jewish chronicles furnish enough of precise information in the accounts of popular turmoils or of the discussions which everywhere preceded the expulsion of the Jews. "Who has made the Turks so strong"? said Lorenzo to the senate of Venice and to Louis Mocenigo, who wanted to drive out the Jews, "and where would they have found such able artisans for the manufacture of the cannon, the bows, the bullets, the swords, the bucklers, and the targets, which permit them to measure themselves with the other peoples, if not among the Jews whom the kings of Spain had driven out?"¹ Finally, the grave-stones of the Jewish cemeteries, and the archives of the communities or documents emanating from them, will furnish precious facts and hints. By studying them one will not only have the history of the classes among the Jews, but one will further ascertain that class struggle has always been alive within the communities. I cannot cite numerous facts here, and the matter

¹ "Orneh Harbah," p. 181 (Sée's translation).

would deserve a special study; but, if one wishes an example, he may take that of the Jews, at least in the seventeenth century, when the rich wished to abolish the progressive tax which governed the "career" and to replace it by the personal tax, at the same time changing the doctoral system of representatives of the community in such a way that petty commerce and the artisans could not have been represented in the councils.¹

One will also ascertain that no people had so great a number of poor as the Jewish people. In the first place, war being held in horror in Israel, the desirable condition was that of poor man and doctor of the law. The rich held it an honor to have a numerous *clientèle* of needy persons and of more or less miserable scholars. The history of an Abarbanel in Spain, of a Reina Nassi in Turkey, is very characteristic from this point of view. But circumstances contributed much to create this immense class of dwellers in penury. Agriculturists at home, in their land, traders after the dispersion,—a part of the Jews became in the Christian nations the intermediaries between Europe and the east. After the great economic movement of the Crusades, the Catholic *bourgeoisie* takes protectionist measures for its own commerce, and closes to the Jew—after having massacred him besides—the route to the east, reducing him to trade in the interior with the peasant, thus thrusting him back in great part into the petty *bourgeoisie*. On the other hand, the guilds are formed on a religious and Christian basis; they drive out the Jewish artisan, thrust him back into the lower trades, oblige him to labor almost solely for his brother Jews, and thus contribute to the creating of a formidable class of unemployed in every Jewish community. As soon as the Jew wishes to get out of this situation, and obtains temporary privileges, the guilds of merchants and the corporations of the handicrafts rise against him. This is especially visible in the seventeenth century, at the moment when legislation is made less hard on the Jews. One must see the history of the Jewish tradesmen, those of Bordeaux, Angoulême, or Languedoc. Almost at the same

¹ Baret, "Revue des Etudes Juives," xxxviii.

epoch the diamond-workers of Amsterdam protested against the Jewish diamond-workers. They asked for certain privileges, and that the Jewish workers be forbidden to labor on Sunday.

The economic situation of the Jews has not changed in our days. As yesterday, as always, the division into classes remains among them; essentially city-dwellers, their *bourgeoisie* is almost wholly commercial or industrial, save a very small fraction, composed on one hand of intellectual men, on the other hand of the high *bourgeoisie* of finance. As for the immense majority, it is still formed by a proletariat concentrated in the Russian territory, Galicia, Roumania, and Bulgaria, and in the important agglomerations of London and New York. In these two centres the official inquiries into the sweating system have shown that the Jewish petty padrone class oppressed heavily its proletariat of the same race. It is the same in the great Russian industrial cities, at Lotz and at Berditcheff, for instance, and in certain Galician districts where periodical strikes bring Jewish padrones and working-men face to face in the struggle. But alongside of this proletariat which, in Holland, in England, in America, has been able to organize itself, there vegetates a whole people of unemployed, a *Lump-Proletariat* such as does not exist in any nation, a crowd of beggars swarming in the steppes of Russia, Poland, Algeria, and the east.

But I do not mean here to make a study of the laboring or indigent Jews; it suffices me to establish their number, and that they form almost the totality of the people. They are so numerous in Russia—293,509 working-men and 89,844 handicraftsmen by the census of 1887, without counting the poor, the unemployed, or the very small traders, peddlers, etc., more wretched than the working-men and six times more numerous,—in Roumania, and in Bulgaria, that the Christian working-men complain of their competition. Likewise in London—there are 60,000 in Whitechapel, 10,000 of them working-men; and in New York there are more than 200,000 of them, where a movement against them has taken shape in the trade unions, the complaint being that they lower wages.

This is correct, for the Jewish proletariat is the most miserable of all, having against it not only its own rich men, but, besides, the rich and the poor of the peoples in the midst of which it finds itself.

So the study of the doctrines of his books—Bible or Talmud—has not revealed to us in the Jew a social conception based on trade; no more has the study of what Marx calls “the empirical essence” of the Jew shown it to us. It is to others than the Jews that the development of the mercantile or industrial or capitalist system must be ascribed, and it is thanks to an insufficient study of the past and present economic condition of the Jews that people can talk as did Jaurès one day, after Marx, and can think, with the immense majority of Jewish writers, that this people’s enemy is in commercial gain, and that capitalism is its work, when in reality it feels it, and suffers from it, in a keener way proportionately than any other people.

The Jew has never been studied except in his *bourgeoisie*; it is time to study him in his proletariat, the truly strong and characteristic mass of the nation.

