

CHAPTER 2

HOW A JEW CAME TO GOD

An Intellectual Experience

I AM a Jew. Not that anyone cares, least of all myself, and my abrupt declaration serves only to introduce the story of an intellectual experience, not a sermon nor anything suggestive of a purpose. My excuse for bringing the matter up at this time is that there is some talk about a "Jewish problem," and the recrudescence of this phrase, with its socially unpleasant connotations, has again got me to asking myself what it is that I am when I name myself, or am named, a Jew. For the better part of a half century I have tried to capture the invariable positives and negatives of the human being so labelled, but, so far, my intellectual curiosity has not been answered. I admit that this

curiosity was whetted on the emery wheel of unpleasant experiences, but it is still lively after the years have turned these experiences into pleasant reminiscences.

Maybe I would have forgotten the whole thing if some people who call themselves Christian, which defies definition almost as stubbornly, did not make it their business to re-fasten the label on me whenever through forgetfulness I have allowed the edges to become loose. They seemed to care a great deal more than I do. And they show their concern in ways that are often ingenious and with a sense of delicacy; and sometimes they are not so nice about it. There's the fellow who explains, when he invites me to lunch, that he is not taking me to his club—I did not know he belonged to one—because “there's a stupid feeling among the members, which of course I do not share, that might prove embarrassing, and I wouldn't have that for all the world.” Or the one who in a complimentary mood assures me that I am not a Jew but “like one of us.” And the cliché “some of my best friends are Jews” is definitely used to properly place me. Thus, by innuendo, inference or direct statement, or even a knowing look, I am gratuitously reminded that I am what I am whenever the fact slips my mind. All my years I have been called, and have called myself, a Jew, and that, according to some authorities, establishes the fact. But, the question will not down, what do these three letters describe or define? I've asked the question of many people and have got almost as many different answers, not one of which squares with observable fact.

Subjectively, I know that “I am”; but as for “a Jew,” I have no consciousness of it at all. It has never been revealed to me; I have learned it by rote only. Hunger, fatigue, headache and itch are quite real. There is no mistaking these facts of consciousness. But never have I experienced a similar perception of Jewishness. There may be people to whom

perceptions of race, religion or nationality are as definite as the taste of ice cream, but I am inclined to believe that these ideas are like lipstick or a coat—something one puts on and takes off. Or has put on, like shackles. Be that as it may, I am devoid of any sensory perception of Jewishness.

A Lexicographer's Search

I look into the mirror and see there the reflection of features similar to those worn by others called Jews. Yes, my face has a marked resemblance to my father's, also to my brothers', and my children bear the same features. Maybe, then, there are certain distinctions of physiognomy which, if they could be captured in words, would settle this matter of definition. However, I observe features quite suggestive of my own worn by people who are not called Jews; the exclusiveness becomes uncertain. My people came from Russia, and I notice that many Russian Christians, on the basis of their facial characteristics, could easily pass for blood relations. Then I see Jews with straight, thin noses, dark skins and slender contours, features usually associated with Latin peoples; the Jewish girl I married was sometimes taken for a Spaniard. Again, there is the hooked proboscis of the German Jew which is equally characteristic of the Aryan faces. The search for a definition must go beyond features.

I said my people came from Russia, from the southern part, around Odessa. In the eighth and ninth centuries that part of the world was occupied by a pagan people known as the Khazars. The record classifies them as Tartars, but as the territory embraced a transit between the Black Sea and the Caspian, there is some doubt as to the singleness of their blood, for in all probability it was tainted with Persian, Hun, Armenian, Slavonic and whatever other kind came down this path of war and trade. Now, legend has it that many of

these Khazars were converted to Judaism; some say the entire tribe was. Can it be, then, that far back among my progenitors I could find an adulterated Tartar? Perish the thought! Yet we know that marriage is a matter of propinquity, not of race; and if the Russian Jew bears a likeness to his Christian compatriot, the idea of consanguinity cannot be put away. Taking into consideration the fact of biological transmission of physical characteristics, can we not say that in his matings the Jewish male, like all other males, has not been scrupulously race-conscious? And Jewish girls are not hard to look at either. But, why belabor the point? Solomon, we are told, had three hundred wives and a thousand concubines. He picked them for their beauty only, and he went far and wide to get them. So, we Jews got pretty well mixed up with non-Jews long, long before the dispersion, and have been as continuously guilty of intermarriage as the people we intermarried with. It seems, then, that a racial definition, in the sense of a continuous stream of the same kind of blood, will hardly hold.

Well, then, how about a definition based on religion? And the rejoinder is, which Jewish religion are you talking about? A while ago I was reading about the ritual in the Holy Temple at the time of Pontius Pilate and it occurred to me that a reincarnated high priest of the times would find himself more at home at a Catholic high mass than in the modern temple of the "better class" Jew. Imagine the mortification of a bewhiskered and skull-capped Polish Jew in the house of worship frequented by his hatless son, where the women's chests are exposed and where no rail or elevation separates the sexes. It's as much as to ask him to eat pork chops—which the son does. In proportion to their numbers, the Jews can probably lay claim to as many schisms as do the Christians, to say nothing of the many who own up to no sect.

Then there is the attempt to give the Jews a nationalistic definition.* If I adhere to this idea I say to myself: I am part of a political entity which lost its physical reality some two thousand years ago; this nation exists in the record of its past, its cultural continuity and in its well-advertised manifest destiny. It is a nation without the physical appurtenances of one. Examining that fancy, I ask myself, can two thousand years of history be wiped out, as if it never happened? What warrant have we in nature for the persistence of national entities? Has not every state carved out its career with the sword, and when that sword lost its edge did not the state disappear? It is interesting to read about the ancient Greeks, to study the records of Aztec culture or the unearthed artifacts of lost empires. I would like to know why these social integrations disappeared, why such highly developed civilizations could not maintain themselves. Such information might help me foretell the course of the civilization of which I am a part. But I feel no call to fight for the restoration of a state which exists only in poetry. Citizenship in a state without authority is a contradiction. Furthermore, the ideology involved in the proposed restoration smacks too much of Hitlerian nationalism based on racial purity, reinforced with claims to divine selection. It defies the record and is decidedly dangerous.

* This was obviously written before the advent of Israel. The argument is still the same. This new state, despite the arguments of professional Zionists, is by no means a continuation or revival of the one ruled by Solomon or Caesar. It is brand new, and I feel no more attachment to it than I do for the one that is presumed to be its predecessor. There is a strident group in this country who insist that American citizenship does not absolve the Jew from loyalty to Israel, that he is in fact vested with dual citizenship, the stronger of which, judging by their demands for financial help, is in the newly acquired half. That is silly. In the event of conflict between Israel and the United States (not an impossibility, since geography might compel Israel into the U.S.S.R. camp), which of his two loyalties would lay first claim on him? Or, perchance, would he take up arms against himself? . . . However, if loyalty to Israel is the identification of a Jew, then I declare unequivocally that I am not one.

And so it has been all these years. An examination of the suggested definitions amounts to a process of elimination, and it is not surprising that mysticism is resorted to by many; accordingly, the Jew is endowed with a soul which is *sui generis* and undefinable. Maybe so. But I confess to an incapacity in such supersensory perceptibility. When things get beyond the rational I am lost. . . . And so, I have come to the conclusion that I am a Jew because I call myself one, and so does everybody else who cares to classify me, and that is all there is to it. I have hit upon a description of the Jew which, while lacking the conciseness of a definition, helps to identify his particularism. We'll go into that after I have got along with my story.

Early Background

The lower west side of New York at the turn of the century was going through the usual transition of a fine residential section into an area of low-priced tenements, rooming houses and marginal factories. The street where I spent my pre-high school days was already entering the factory phase. A few streets away the vestiges of early New York aristocracy held on to its brownstone elegance; that was nearly twenty years before enterprising realtors rescued these anachronisms from well-deserved demolition. They painted the fronts white and the shutters green, and invested the section with profitable romance by reviving its ancient name of Greenwich Village. I never heard the name when I went to school in that section.

There were two Jewish families besides mine in the neighborhood, and one moved uptown before I got to high school. Irish, French and Italian emigrants had taken over, sometimes creating distinct nationalistic islands on contiguous streets, sometimes getting all mixed up as they did on my street. Much to the chagrin of my mother, my associates were

not only not of my people, but were inclined to practices not sanctioned by the *Talmud* or any other moral code. The only reason I did not accompany some of my companions to the reformatory was that I was not apprehended in the business of selling lead pipe purloined from partially built or empty houses.

One had to fight to live in this environment and the "Jew" epithet was as good a *casus belli* as any other. But, the matter rarely came up in a purely descriptive form, the viciousness of the accompanying adjectives rather than the word itself being the real challenge. I was yet to learn the flavor of real anti-Semitism. The fact that I didn't go to church on Sunday marked me off, but I recall being envied for that good fortune. I could and would fight, I was good at the games we played, and when the gang had some collective purpose to pursue I was expected to do my share. Race consciousness never entered into our affairs.

I knew I was a Jew. There was no question about that but it did not bother me. It did bother my mother, of course. She had a rabbi come to the house to teach me Hebrew. My apostasy began right there and then, not only because this added education interfered with my ball games, but also because of my objections to the pedagogical method of the rabbi. He insisted on my learning Hebrew by sight and sound, rather than by understanding of the text, and progress was made difficult by my impertinent interrogations. I began to suspect that these hieroglyphics hid objectionable ideas.

An incident of this period did much to undermine whatever inclination I may have had toward the ancient tradition. One very cold night the rabbi tottered into our house in a pitiful condition; it took a half dozen glasses of boiling tea to thaw him out. He then told how a sympathetic "goy" had offered him a pair of gloves and why he had refused the

gift; a Jew must not be the instrument of bringing a "mit-vah," or blessing, on a non-believer. That was the first time, I believe, that I came smack up against the doctrine of the "chosen people," and it struck me as stupid and mean.

The real and permanent education of the child consists in the fermentation of ideas put into its mind by experience; against that all book learning is as nothing. For instance, I remember well my last trip to the synagogue, when I was eleven years of age, on Yom Kippur. The ritual was of ancient vintage; women and children worshipped in the balcony, while the shoeless, shawled and skull-capped men on the main floor faced the walls as they incanted the prayers to the metronomic swaying of their bodies. Not all of the men followed custom so meticulously, but the more devout could be so identified. One of these attracted my attention because he was head of the other Jewish family on the street. This fellow came by a bad reputation in the community, for shady business practices, for uncouthness and loudness, for wife-beating. My folks were hardly on speaking terms with this man or his family. Well, on this particular holy day our neighbor was doing his devotions with noticeable intensity, and that started me thinking and asking questions. Could one day of hard prayer in a synagogue wash out the sins of a whole year? Is God bought off so cheaply? My mother parried me for a while and then brushed me off with "the ways of God must not be questioned." That settled it. I sneaked off to an important one-o'-cat game on the street.

My mother finally got her wayward son into high school. These four years were indeed happy ones. Contact with boys of more reputable background weaned me away from docks, warehouses, gang warfare and trial by fisticuffs. Football helped to reflate the ego which had somewhat collapsed in this more rarefied atmosphere; the acclaim of the crowd on Saturday afternoons was reassuring. I began to take a more

than perfunctory interest in books. I even became conscious of marks. I took part in extra-curricular activities other than athletics, such as the school paper and a literary society, and all in all enjoyed high school immensely. During these years not once, as far as I can recall, did the matter of discrimination make itself felt.

Higher Learning

Then came college. To me matriculation was quite an experience, almost a hallowed event. In those days most boys who went to college did so because that was in the tradition of their class and matriculation was like the first shave, something one did because one had arrived. Boys of my world almost always completed their formal education at fourteen, a few more put in four years of high school (or less, if circumstances demanded), and a smaller number whose parents were ambitious for them got to college. Higher education was hard to come by; only those who showed special ability, as evidenced in competitive examinations, were subsidized. Society had not yet taken on the collective duty of raising its moronic level. Hence, for those of us who were determined to "work our way through" the mere fact of having entered was an exhilarating experience.

Nothing happened during the first few weeks to indicate that social life in college would be much different from what it was in high school. I went out for football, fully confident that I would make the grade. In my relations with the squad I was diffident, not because of any race consciousness, but because I felt out of place in an atmosphere where tradition counted. I was a bit afraid of it. In high school this lack was brought home to me in a poignant way. Through our mutual interest in literature another lad and I struck up a close acquaintanceship, and one afternoon he invited me to dine

with his folks. It was not the quiet elegance of the home that most impressed me, although that was considerably different from the utilitarian surroundings I associated with home. What struck me with force was the easy courtesy that graced the relationship between my friend, his older brother and their mother. It wasn't manners, it was manner. This was all new to me and I was filled with fear that I might prove myself out of place. Particularly so when the two boys came to dinner dressed in their dinner-coats (which I believed were worn only at class and fraternity dinners); in not the slightest way was I made conscious of my non-conformity. I learned then that in social deportment the docks had taught me little.

A few such experiences put me on my guard. I played hard and left the matter of companionship to the others, expecting it to come when I proved myself. One thing annoyed me. In those days of interlocking interference the ball carrier was part of the ball, and interferers were expected to pull, push or throw him for an extra foot or inch. But, nary a hand touched me. I did not understand it, and must have shown my confusion, for one day the only other Jewish boy on the squad said to me, "Don't let it get you, kid; it's tough going for a Jew on this squad, but you've got what it takes and you'll make good." So, that's what it was! It was my first introduction to the finesse with which discrimination could be practiced.

My education along these lines progressed rapidly. I had played in all the freshman games, was considered a first-stringer and fully expected to "win my numerals" in the final game. When the coach called out the starting line-up in the locker-room just before game time, my name was not on the list, and nobody seemed to think it odd. I did, of course. What hurt me the most was that there was no way of openly

resenting the affront, without being churlish, and the best I could do was to take it out on the opposing players when necessity compelled the coach to put me into the game.

The open attack—the “goddam Jew”—came one Friday afternoon. The varsity coach—we had no rule barring freshmen those days—kept me for special instruction; I was being taught the fine art of throwing my body into mass plays, and for that purpose a skeleton offense was opposed to me. On the very first rehearsal I felt a fist on my jaw. It happened again, and the third time the epithet was thrown with the fist. Whatever polish I had acquired in the past few years left me completely, and with the choicest language of my past I sailed into the senior to whom I traced the offense. To my chagrin, he wouldn't fight. I thought later that the whole thing may have been a prearranged affair, to test my toughness, for the next day I was put into the varsity game. But at the time I was burned up.

There were other incidents, on the field and on the campus. One that sticks in my memory after all these years occurred about three months after the start of the term. A fellow with whom I had been very friendly at high school, a member of my fraternity there, passed me as I was crossing the campus with another friend, without acknowledging my salutation. I said to my companion: “What's the matter with Carl, is he deaf?” “No, not deaf, but didn't you see that fraternity pledge pin on his lapel? He can't be friendly with a Jew now.” That hurt.

Soon I learned that discrimination was not confined to the students. Some of the Jewish upper-classmen protested openly against the wave of anti-semitism that year—I learned later that it was a regular autumnal phenomenon—and were for doing something about it. They called a meeting. I would have laughed at such a thing in high school; but I went to this one. That is something the persecutors do

not understand—that persecution makes a minority: as the professional Jews well know, if Jews are unmolested they tend to lose all sense of commonality and go their separate ways; they coalesce in proportion to the pressure put upon them. At this meeting a committee was appointed to consult with a Jewish professor, a man of international repute, on ways and means. “Forget it,” advised the professor, “and it will die down. Let me tell you something. We Jewish members of the faculty are invited to all faculty functions, but we always decline, because we are expected to decline.”

A Mission Is Born

By the end of my freshman year I had about soured on college life. Being husky and pugnacious, I found relief in fisticuffs, whenever the opportunity presented itself, which was rare, because the affronts were subtle and intangible; I don't doubt that sensitiveness found slights where none were intended. It occurred to me later that if I had developed in my earlier years a sense of comradeship with Jews as Jews, adjustment to this new world would not have gone so hard. I could have eased into the discrimination rather than have it pounded into me. I realized, too late, that I would have done better by myself if I had not ventured into the sacred temple of footballism. One is never hurt if one keeps one's place. It must have been particularly difficult for the rich Jewish boys who tried to buy their way into forbidden social circles and were despised for it by their own kind, as well as by the others.

Beginning with my sophomore year I went to college for the sole purpose of learning a trade, and learning it as fast as possible. So, in spite of the necessity of earning enough to pay my tuition, I took on sufficient subjects, and one summer course, to cut my college career by one year. But, peculiarly enough, my hard introduction into anti-semitism blossomed

into a purpose; I would try to find the cause for this horrible thing and see what could be done about eradicating it. Toward that end I selected from the electives as much philosophy as was allowed to an undergraduate. This idea came to me, I think, from the numerous references to God and religion which I ran across in a text book used in one of the philosophy courses; I had already come to the *a priori* conclusion that religion was at the bottom of social discords. Maybe, then, philosophy would help me solve the riddle.

I remember particularly a course in the history of philosophy. The sessions were held late in the afternoon for the convenience of students from the theological seminary. There were also some older students, specials, with heretical tendencies, and only the diplomatic skill of the professor prevented the metaphysical battles from becoming brawls. The post-session arguments in the corridors provided the real fun of the course; and here the athiests had the best of it, probably because they were more emphatic. The sharpest of these was a Jew, a special student about thirty years of age, whose deep sincerity indicated that he had a mission. Before the year was up the God-less ones had me on their side, and I had a mission too. An emotional experience had given my intellectual groping a definite direction.

There was no doubt in my mind that I had found "truth." Having found it, I was in no mood for further questioning, for contemplative reflection. All I needed now was confirmation of my discovery, for which I looked to propaganda. I swallowed whole the agnosticism of Robert Ingersoll and the "Age of Reason" became my bible against the Bible. The anti-clerical tales with which seventeenth and eighteenth century literature is full served as documentary proof of the perfidy of all things religious. Atheistic literature and a publication, for which I later wrote an article or two, fed me with

phrases that served for reason. It is easy to found a philosophy upon a half-truth, the easiest thing in the world of thought. The anti-semitism which had hurt me became only a single expression of the evil which religion had always wrought, and I linked the sufferings of the Jews with the slaughter of the Huguenots, the massacre of Christians by the followers of Mohamet, the Inquisition and all the persecutions that throughout history had been done in the name of God. The Borgias can be explained psychologically or politically; I chose to explain them as the product of religious mania. Whenever I read of slaughter in the name of "God and country" I blamed it on God alone. Religion became the cause of all strife, the church the altar upon which human happiness is sacrificed, clericalism the embodiment of all evil. The world would never be a fit place to live in until the whole kit and kaboodle were wiped out. And toward that wind-mill I tilted my lance.

I sometimes wonder whether reformers are more interested in their egos than their reforms. My judgement in the matter would be biased. At any rate, I think I was quite sincere in my anti-God crusade. I sought converts. In Chicago—where I was employed as an advertising man, having given up as hopeless for a Jew the ambition of becoming a professor of English—there was an institution known as the "nut club." Membership was voluntary, unpaid, and the meetings were held in a park. Every warm evening or weekend men bent on impressing their views on one another would proceed to do so without formality. Two arguers would lock horns and if they tussled well a crowd would gather about them. No parliamentary rules and very few rules of courtesy impeded the progress of the debate. Hour upon hour this would continue, with new protagonists taking the place of the exhausted ones. This "nut club" was

just what I needed to develop my enthusiasm and I was a regular member, the protests of my young wife notwithstanding. I was loyal to my atheism.

More Education

About eight years after I left college I ran across a book I had heard something about and had put down on my reading list. It was *Progress and Poverty*. A friend had a copy in his library—he said he had never read it—and while waiting for him to shave I read the introduction entitled *The Problem*. It explored the age-old social problem of poverty in the midst of plenty and promised the reader an inquiry into the cause. I wasn't particularly interested in the proposition, although my contact with poverty should have predisposed me to it, but was struck with the literary style. Here was something of the cameo clarity of Matthew Arnold, a little of the parallel structure of Macaulay, the periods of Edmund Burke, and with all this Victorianism a new-world fervor that was catching. I know I was more interested in how this man Henry George—some fellow who, I had heard, had run for mayor of New York—said it than in what he had to say. Probably a nineteenth century essayist, I surmised, whom I had missed and the deficiency had to be made up. I borrowed the book for a week or two.

For six months I read and re-read this book, even to the neglect of the "nut club." Some technicalities in economics delayed my progress, and a rather involved discussion of the nature of interest came near flooring me. There were too, occasional panegyrics about God and the natural order which I passed off as nineteenth century flubdubbery with which the author sugar-coated his decidedly radical ideas. Through it all there was a cogency in the reasoning that could not be denied. I became convinced the author had something.

And then came a thought which disturbed my enthusiasm. If Mr. George was right, that poverty and the fear of it stir up social hatreds, then bigotry is a mere manifestation and organized religion is not a basic cause. That tended to upset the case I had built up. Suppose, I said to myself, I were to level all the churches, put the priesthood out of business, convince everybody that religion is poison, there would still be the problem of poverty; there would still be an environment that makes for tough boys and another that produced dinner-coated young gentlemen. And maybe, I continued, the troubles which I had been laying at the door of the conniving pious is in fact the product of poverty, as Mr. George claimed. Well, at any rate, there were now two strings to my bow, economics and religion, and I could vary my diatribes, just for a change.

I tried out my newly acquired theory in the park. The defense of an idea begets conviction of its correctness. Even before I knew the answers I managed to parry questions with plausibilities which, strangely enough, I frequently found corroboration for in the book, to which I had to refer often. The crowd seemed to be much more interested in this poverty-in-the-midst-of-plenty argument than in attacks on the institution of religion, and it might be that this greater interest had some influence on my intellectual switch; even a crusader likes to please a crowd, and, in fact, likes a crowd to please. I gradually gave up on religion and put my reading time to economics and social problems. These were subjects I had paid little attention to at college; now they seemed all-important and I began reading all I could find on them, including, of course, the other books of Henry George. The thread of piety which ran through his works I dismissed for years as so much persiflage. Finally, and reluctantly, it dawned on me that his religious concepts in some way integrated his economics and his social philosophy. His God and

his natural law meant something to his scheme of thought and I determined to find out what it was, even though, having been scorched by pragmatism as well as agnosticism, I was sure there was nothing to it.

What About "Natural Rights"?

I found in the writings of Mr. George frequent references to the idea of absolute right. Upon reflection, it occurred to me that though this idea is definitely metaphysical I had been relying upon it, without question, in my quarrel with anti-semitism. It is the principle enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, that in their public relations all people must be accounted equal, that none have an inherent claim to prerogatives as against the others. But why? Whence comes the authority for this principle? It is not a legal matter, since the implication is quite clear that the business of the law, in theory at least, is merely to implement this inherent quality. It is a law above the law, of an invariable which men may not affect even though they ignore it to their detriment. Nor is this principle a matter of expediency in social relations, as the pragmatists claim, since on the ground of expediency argument could well be adduced for the suspension of equality; as when a nobility or a political party promote their own ascendancy "for the general good."

The Declaration finds authority for this principle of equality in a Creator. Here the human mind, finding no other answer to its eternal "why," takes recourse to its imagination and invents a first cause. The atheist rejects this concept as a myth, the agnostic says "I don't know." But both of them, in attacking the evil practices of organized religion, look to the "nature of things" for a moral yardstick. Everybody who objects to injustice does so on the ground that these practices violate some principle of justice which is above human

will. This is so even when authority for justice, or equality among men, is found in the "dignity of the individual"; for that phrase is just as metaphysical as the "nature of things."

Reasoning so, I recognized that in spite of my pragmatic leanings I too had unconsciously premised my social thinking on the assumption of a "natural order." I saw that this assumption is the essence of religious thinking, and I reflected how every social philosophy with which I was familiar likewise fell back on an extra-human pattern of things. Even the ultra-materialistic socialists, in their doctrine of historical inevitability, are guilty of transcendentalism. Admittedly, I reasoned, this is a flight of the finite mind from its own limitations; it is a search for security in an invariable; it is mining for bedrock in the infinite; and in so doing it must rely on its power of imagination. It does so as a matter of necessity. It must "make sense" of the world in which it lives, since it revolts at the madness induced by chaos. If it rejects the principle of essential equality among men, which admittedly it finds only in the myth of the "natural order," the human mind is led logically into a mess of incongruities. Thus, if all men are not created equal, what objection could one make to a master-and-slave status? That a few enjoy wealth and power at the expense of the many should occasion no quarrel, since it just happened so and there is no warrant in reason for disturbing the arrangement. Exploitation, discrimination or social disabilities of any kind do not exist if the premise of parity is false. The only justification for a change in the status would be the force one could apply toward that end. Rejection of any concept of absolute right makes justice synonymous with power, and that is an incongruity the mind finds difficult to accept. In this flight from such madness the human mind finds haven in logical fiction.

I found, then, that I had built my whole case against mi-

nority disabilities on an article of faith. And there was no way of getting away from it. Whichever way I turned the argument for equality I came to the question of "rights," and soon found myself adding the adjective "natural." The hide-bound realists, with whom, up to this point, I counted myself, reject the doctrine of natural rights as untenable; but their scoffing does not prove their case. While they explain "rights" as political delimitations of human behavior, they leave unexplained the justification or the political power to dispense "rights"—unless, indeed, the only justification for power is power, which is chaos again. If they adhere to the democratic theory, that "rights" inhere in the individual and that for practical purposes he lends them to his government, they must explain how the individual came by his "rights" in the first place. The realist's fear of the imagination leaves him without intellectual rudder.

Thus was undermined my faith in the inutility of faith. Putting aside organized religion, discounting ritual, rejecting theological doctrine, there still remained the necessity of establishing an unprovable "nature of things" as the final recourse of inquiry. Not that the "nature of things" offers an explanation for anything; but that the human mind must establish it as the compendium of those invariable forces which, when understood, help us to explain experience. The exigencies of life require that we go on looking to nature for its secrets, and maintaining faith that in them lies immutable law. And that, I believe, is the essence of the God-idea.

And "Natural Law"?

Thirty some years ago students of Henry George foresaw the coming of the New Deal, or something like it. The foresight stemmed from his chapter entitled "How Modern Civilization May Decline." In this he reasoned that the tendency of the wage level, regardless of productive increases, toward

the point of mere subsistence, would open the way for State interference in economic affairs. Frustration and ignorance would demand it, and the politician, bent on his own purposes, would come forth with fantastic promises. Since politics is incapable of raising wages, but can only impose interventions which lower the productive level from which wages come, the result must be deterioration. New and more impossible promises would supplant the discredited ones. To carry them out the politician would ask for additional powers, including, of course, new tax levies. Political liberty would be put on the counter and offered at the bargain price of a mess of pottage. The eventual outcome would be a dictatorship—he called it, in 1879, an “imperatorship”—completely dominating all things economic, as well as political and social.

Henry George maintained that this consequence is not an historic imperative. It is no more necessary for society to go through the wringer of collectivism than it is necessary for a man to step off a high roof and break his neck. In the latter case, the man takes the consequence of defying an immutable physical law; and when society, said George, defies immutable laws in the field of economics it will likewise come to a bad end. Like the classicists before him, George was a firm advocate of natural law in economics.

It is not germane to this story to go into the economic theories of Henry George. What I had to encompass, and what I think is the basic economic issue of the present, is the doctrine of natural law. Briefly, this is the doctrine: nature has its own ways of applying means to ends, which are made known to us by critical observation; we observe in nature the constant recurrence of certain sequences, and because of that constancy we ascribe to the sequences a cause-and-effect relationship; we describe this presumably causal relationship in words or symbols, which we call natural law. The

function of the "law" is to help us predict, to apply nature's means to our ends. Thus, when we observed that water always seeks its own level—a natural law—we were able to place our plumbing so as to bring about desired results.

Now, it is a certainty that nature does not ring a bell when we have hit upon one of her laws, and it is also a certainty that we have "discovered" some that subsequent investigation has shown up to be frauds. For these reasons the pragmatists reject the doctrine of natural law out of hand; there ain't no such animal, they say. They describe the constant sequences as probabilities; what has always happened, as far as we know, will probably recur in the future, but there is no assurance that it will. Natural law is a figment of the imagination, and so is causality.

Between the pragmatist and the transcendentalist there will never be more than a truce. Each represents a subjective attitude so deep-rooted that no objective meeting ground is possible. I believe I took to the natural law doctrine because of an inherent distrust of leadership; omniscience was too much to expect of the human and his integrity was equally questionable. I knew what faith in their wisdom has done to the priest and the politician, and students could be led astray if they took their professors to heart. Even in my college days I had fought it out with the socialists, before I knew the economic answers, on the ground that man's management of man is presumptuous and fraught with danger. I would rely on something less frail, something free of foibles, something impersonal. That something could be nothing else than nature. True, she is a rather elusive one, difficult to describe, let alone to handle, and philosophy could argue her non-existence. Nevertheless, she had proven herself a helpful fiction, if that is her real character, in the progress of mankind. I would trust her more than any man I ever knew or read about.

The difficulty, however, was that acceptance of the natural law doctrine called for faith in an order of things outside man and his works; and faith and I had been on the outs since I first laid all social difficulties at the door of religion. I had fortified myself against the God-idea implied in the natural law doctrine. In my study of philosophy I met transcendentalism with a knowing smile. Youth admits of no unconquerable ramparts of thought and attacks every unknown with complete confidence in its offensive powers. That is the proper function of youth, for from the vigor of its self-assurance our fund of knowledge does profit. But, when maturity comes to check up on youth's achievements the sum-total looks too much like spit and polish. The basic enigmas which youth inherits it passes on.

And so, I came to the God-idea because my rejection of it put rational thinking on a merry-go-round; there was no way of measuring the validity of an idea except by itself. The emotional storm which anti-semitism had stirred up caused me to throw overboard the anchor of reason. I had confused the organization which presumed to monopolize religion with religion itself, which is merely faith in the possibility of an explanatory pattern of constancies. If nature cannot provide any guide to orderly thinking, any rules for an overall harmony, then man's eternal search for one is silly. Must we look to parliaments for guidance? We might as well resign ourselves to wandering about in a maze of contradictions and quit trying to make sense of experience.

So, What Is a Jew?

When I was convinced that the primary cause of social discord is economic, I gave thought again to the so-called Jewish problem. Admitting, I said to myself, and to those who cared to listen, that some people delight in disliking Jews or any other minority, the matter would not come to

violent hatred if everybody was always fully occupied at making a living and enjoying life. There would be no time for that sort of thing. And if it were realized that under proper conditions every pair of hands, even Jewish, add to the general fund of wealth, the dislike might be replaced by a healthier emotion.

Ofttimes, however, the getting of a living under our socio-economic arrangement is attended with frightening difficulty. At all times, except when war or its anticipation keeps us busy, there seem to be more willing to work than our economy can employ, and the competition for jobs is disheartening; not only are some forced to go without but those who are employed get relatively little out of it. This is bad enough in itself, but it looms still worse when the evidence of existing plenty is all too strong. To the discomfort of going without and the exasperation of futility is added a feeling of injustice; the unfairness is more maddening than the lack.

At this point in human affairs the pagan custom of locating a culprit comes upon us. Divinity is not immune from this habit of mind, for it is proclaimed, and proven with figures, that there are more mouths than nature can provide for, regardless of the pair of hands which accompany each mouth. The surplus population must be got rid of, one way or another. That's the answer of the pragmatic literate, who goes on to say that nature's way of balancing accounts is some form of mass slaughter. To the unlettered unemployed, however, a more specific culprit is necessary. Who took my job, who robbed me of my trade and my business? Peculiarly enough, the blame is always put on somebody who is least capable of defending himself from the charge or from any action that might be taken. In Texas it may be the Mexican; in California all economic troubles came from Oriental competitors; in New England, after the Civil War and even into this century, it was the Irish. The ex-slave has been an espe-

cially easy target, and then, of course, there is the Jew. There must be a culprit, as every reformer knows; would socialism have come as far as it has without the help of bosses, capitalists, bourgeois and fascists?

It is a very ancient custom, this business of scapegoats. According to the record, the Philistines served the Israelites in that capacity, while all the troubles of the Roman plebeian came out of Carthage. The peculiarity of the Jew is that he has served as scapegoat number one for nearly twenty centuries throughout the predominantly Christian world. Other minorities have been picked on at times, but wherever the Jew has made his presence felt in numbers he has held the lead role with little competition. The pogrom has been standard procedure whenever economic difficulties burst into social disaffection. Admitting the evidence of history on this point, there still remains the question as to why the Jew has been so consistently singled out.

We cannot dislike a people until we are convinced that these people are essentially different from us. It is easy then to establish inferiority. Our military men found, for instance, that hatred of the Germans was difficult to arouse, simply because it was difficult to establish an essential difference between the New Yorker and the Berliner, and tortuous argument had to be resorted to; with the Japanese the problem was quite simple for anybody so different from us in appearance must be inferior to us in capacities, to say nothing of character. Similar rationalization supports the disabilities put upon Orientals, Mexicans and Negroes in this country. The Jew, however, makes things difficult by offering a minimum of physical differences from his tormentor; his particularism had to be established.

This problem of identification was made easy by the Jew. He made himself a "different" kind of person long years ago. He accumulated a culture in the ancient days and has car-

ried this culture, like necessary baggage, throughout his peregrinations. There is no doubt that where they have not suffered from segregation, or too confined segregation, Jews have added the culture of their neighbors to their own, sometimes to the point of self-submergence. Nevertheless, the indicia of their culture—which is the sum-total of those habits of language, tradition, religion, knowledge and mannerisms which an integrated people acquire—have left their mark. The mark becomes less visible as less notice is paid it, and more pronounced as persecution forces them back into themselves, for mutual protection and solace. It will be recalled that when Hitler began his anti-semitic campaign many a German Jew had to learn what it is to be a Jew; the culture was foreign to him.

One item in this culture needs to be emphasized at this time; I believe it is the one that has got the Jew into difficulties. That is the tendency toward self-expression which we call individualism. It may be that this characteristic stems from his ancient education (see the Hebrew Prophets), and it may be that it was brought on by necessity. At any rate, the Jewish child has drilled into him almost from birth the importance of self-improvement through self-help. Never is the individual taught that group excellence is more important than, or different from, individual excellence. It is he, the unit of the tribe, that makes it. Undoubtedly, this training shows up in an inordinate self-respect which, in a weak character, becomes irritating self-assertion. The point I wish to make is that Jewish culture is definitely not socialistic, even though tribal adherence has always been emphasized as a matter of self-preservation. That many Jews have advanced socialistic ideas is true, but I believe this can be explained as an inclination to protect against injustices, which is characteristic of the individualist. Karl Marx, it must be remembered, was an anti-statist, advocat-

ing the peculiar notion of abolishing the state through an interim dictatorship. Among the Old Bolsheviks were a number of Jews, more than their proportionate population would entitle them to; but it is significant that very few of them escaped the Stalinist purges; the Jew is too individualistic to be tolerated by the collectivism he sometimes urges.

Be that as it may, the differentiation which marks the Jew is cultural. A friend of mine, a scholar and agnostic, deplored the urge toward assimilation on the ground that the best in this culture would thereby be lost to mankind. However, it is his cultural idioms which identifies the Jew as a "different" sort of person, thus qualifying him for the role of minority scapegoat. Whether assimilation can completely eradicate these idioms is a question that cannot be decided until a long period of non-discrimination has permitted assimilation to take its course. So long as the institutions which bring about a scarcity economy are in force, the Jew will not divest himself of his historic role. The so-called Jewish problem, then—and this is true of all minority problems—is *at bottom* neither racial nor religious, but economic. Its eradication is dependent on the solution of the poverty-amidst-plenty problem. Maybe natural law can show the way; surely, the makeshifts of political law have failed.