

The Jewish Laborer in London

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perhaps the greatest contribution that the historical conception of economic science is able to give; but as human mind strives after unity as well as after complexity, as if both of them were conclusive, either of them has the right to exist. From the point of view of pure theory, the method of which is absolutely different from Schmoller's, his life-work can be only substructure; but it is a basis on which the grand edifice of pure theory can stand firmly.

How far the practical proposals would be efficient cannot be judged now. The impregnation of economics with ethical ideals is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But whether these ideas will not always meet with the invincible resistance of the real powers beyond all relative ethics is a question which can be solved only in the future, to which, as well as to the past, Ranke's words are applicable: "Only absolute thought is powerful in the world."

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BERLIN.

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### THE JEWISH LABORER IN LONDON

Dr. Halpern's monograph on the Jewish workers of London<sup>1</sup> is a valuable contribution to the literature on the immigration question. The author has carefully compiled a mass of material scattered through official publications, reports of charitable institutions, and the periodical press — English, as well as Yiddish and Russian — and wrought them into an unbiased descriptive study of conditions as they actually exist. His generalizations at times betray a superficial knowledge of subjects not strictly within the scope of his inquiry; fortunately, however, his ventures beyond his proper field are not frequent enough to impair the value of his study.

The monograph consists of six chapters: (1) "Brief Review of the Legal and Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia;" (2) "Statistical Presentation of the Russian-Jewish Settlement in London;" (3) "The Housing Problem;" (4) "The Trades of the Jewish Worker: (a) General; (b) Tailoring; (c) Shoe-Making; (d) the Manufacturing of Furniture;" (5) "Attitude of the Jewish Workers towards Trade-Unionism; Jewish Trade Unions in London;" (6) "Effects of Jewish Immigration."

Those American readers who have seen the life of the Ghetto on

<sup>1</sup> *Die jüdischen Arbeiter in London*. Von Georg Halpern. München: Brenntano & Lotz, 1903. 8vo, pp. 84.

the lower East Side of New York will find its main features reproduced in the author's picture of the Jewish colony in East London. The subject is very properly introduced by a summary of the laws affecting the condition of the Jews in Russia. In treating of Jewish immigration from Russia to Great Britain and the United States, it is very essential to remember that the movement of population at the close of the nineteenth century is not so much the effect of underlying economic causes as a result of the survival of mediæval religious and political conditions. There were some Russian and Polish Jews among the foreign settlers of London and New York as long as two generations ago; a few Russian Jews served in the Union army during the Civil War. Yet neither on this side nor in London was there a Jewish Ghetto prior to 1881. The economic effect of the forcible removal of thirty thousand Jewish tradesmen from Moscow to New York will obviously not be the same as the effect of the natural movement of an equal number of Italian peasants from the country districts of southern Italy to the cities of the New World, even though the sudden rupture of all established business connections may temporarily sink the former into the same class of "destitute aliens." In this respect the East End of London is perhaps a more instructive example than the New York East Side. For the last two decades the Jewish settlement in London has been made up of immigrants who could not pay their passage to New York (p. 10), and yet today considerable real estate in the Jewish districts is owned by these "alien paupers from eastern Europe" (p. 33).

The Jewish immigrant, says Dr. Halpern,

strives with energy to rise to a higher social station; this is doubly true with regard to his children. The Jewish workman makes every possible sacrifice to give his children a higher education; the school children, according to the testimony of school inspectors, while scarcely behind the native children in their bodily development, are, on an average, superior to them intellectually, and they show from the very beginning a strong ambition to rise on the social ladder.<sup>2</sup>

British statistics do not show explicitly the number of Jewish immigrants, but the designation "Russians and Poles" is for all purposes identical with "Russian and Polish Jews." As an exception, seven hundred employees of the gas-works at Beckton are mentioned who are Roman Catholic Poles. On the other hand,

<sup>2</sup> P. 42, citing *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, 1902-3*, p. 10,361.

Austrian and Roumanian Jews, whose condition is the same as that of the Russian Jews, are not included by the author in his statistical compilations (p. 12).

The total number of Russian and Polish arrivals at all English ports fluctuated between 10,954 in 1892 and 33,046 in 1902, exclusive of those *en route* to America. Immigration from Russia and Poland furnished about one-half of the total from all countries (p. 13). In reality, however, the majority of those registered as immigrants remain in England only a short time—until they are able to earn enough to pay their way to the United States. This is shown by the following figures: the total number of immigrants to London, not *en route*, during 1891–1900 was 99,455; whereas the increase in the number of Russians and Poles in London from the census of 1891 to that of 1901 was only 26,795. It would seem to be a fair inference that nearly three-fourths of all the Russians and Poles who landed in London during the decade left for other places. How many of their number moved to other British cities and how many went to the United States, South Africa, etc., the author does not state. The total number of immigrants who were assisted by Jewish charitable institutions with transportation over sea for the period 1891–1900 was 3,552; together with their dependents (averaging 0.8 to every immigrant), about 6,400. To this number must be added about 13,000 persons who were furnished return transportation to the continent or to Russia (p. 23). Thus of the 72,660 persons who landed in London and subsequently moved elsewhere something over one-fourth received assistance, while about 53,000, or nearly three-fourths, paid their own way. According to immigration statistics, 22 per cent. of all immigrants who landed in 1890–97 were without any funds, and 15 per cent. had less than 10s. per head (p. 20). It follows that whereas the very poor constituted 37 per cent. of all immigrants, those who were removed from London at the expense of charitable societies numbered a little over 25 per cent. About one-third of the very poor must have earned enough after a stay in London to pay their own way farther or must have found employment in London.

The author very correctly says :

The reports of the poverty of the Jewish immigrants are very often grossly exaggerated, the “alien” being identified with the “pauper destitute alien.” Now, the conception of the pauper destitute alien is in itself misleading. For the prospect of making a living in London unassisted from charitable sources

is naturally not conditional upon the possession of cash on landing; this would at best suffice only for the immediate needs. Whether the immigrant will be able to assure himself an independent living is determined by his earning capacity and by the opportunities of employment. (P. 29.)

According to the census of 1901, the Russians and Poles of London showed the following percentages of persons of the age of ten years and over engaged in gainful occupations: males, 90 per cent.; females, 24.7 per cent. The corresponding percentages for the whole population of London were 83.64 per cent. and 28.51 per cent., respectively. The higher percentage of male immigrants engaged in gainful occupations is accounted for by the fact that 73.1 per cent. of their number are between the ages of fifteen and forty-five years, whereas the same age-group constitutes only 51.6 per cent. of the total population. On the other hand, the lower percentage of women engaged in gainful occupations is due to the fact that Jewish women after marriage, as a rule, withdraw from gainful occupations. This observation is illustrated by official statistics: of 288 Jewish women employed in 58 tailoring shops only 6 were married.

British statisticians, like our own, do not realize as yet the importance of distinguishing between employers and employees engaged in the same occupation. Still, an estimate can be attempted on the basis of the statistics quoted by Dr. Halpern. Among the specified occupations of the Russians and Poles of London in 1901, there were 342 men and 331 women classed by the author as *Tabakarbeiter*, as distinguished from *Tabakhändler*; we take it that the former represented wage-earners, while the latter were traders. Eliminating, on the one hand, those wage-earners, and, on the other hand, tobacco dealers, street peddlers, commercial travelers, salesmen and clerks, and others engaged in mercantile pursuits (*Handels-gewerbe*), and also "teachers, etc.," we find 22,380 men and 5,176 women, in all 27,556 persons, engaged in all other occupations, which includes both employers and wage-earners. According to factory statistics for the year 1902, there were 15,317 Jewish and 5,307 gentile workers employed in 1,778 workshops, and 5,307 gentile workers employed in 1,778 workshops, in the borough of Stepney, where nearly all the Russian and Polish Jews are concentrated. This gives an average of 11.6 workers to one shop. Assuming an average of one employer to each shop, the total number of Jewish employers, may be estimated at one-twelfth of the total number

engaged in each occupation. On this basis the Jewish population of London can be approximately distributed as follows:

	NUMBER	PER CENT.
Manufacturers, shopkeepers, and storekeepers.....	2,300	8
Commercial travelers, salesmen, clerks, etc.....	517	2
Street peddlers .....	533	2
Wage-earners in manufacturing establishments.....	22,928	76
Teachers, etc.....	245	1
All others .....	3,299	11
Total .....	<u>29,822</u>	<u>100</u>

It goes without saying that this is only a rough estimate: many Jewish workmen are employed by gentile manufacturers and the average for all shops is probably somewhat higher than that for Jewish shops; on the other hand, however, the group "all others" doubtless includes a number of wage-earners. Making all due allowances, the Jewish workers of London probably constitute about three-quarters of its Jewish population, the rest being engaged in all sorts of mercantile pursuits.

Of the total number engaged in gainful occupations more than two-fifths of all males (41.8 per cent.) and over one-half of all females (51 per cent.) found employment in the tailoring trade, under the so-called "sweating system." The underlying basis of this system is, of course, that division of labor within the workshop, which Karl Marx describes as "a special creation of the capitalist mode of production."<sup>3</sup> This system was in existence long before the advent of the Jewish immigrant. What he did was to introduce it into the tailoring trade which, in England prior to that time, had remained in the handicraft stage. The English tailor was, and still is, a custom tailor who takes pride in making an entire garment from beginning to end; the Jewish immigrants have developed the manufacture of ready-made clothing, which was before their arrival imported in large quantities from Germany. Attempts of British manufacturers to introduce the system of division of labor into their clothing factories failed. In the days preceding Jewish immigration ready-made clothing was manufactured exclusively with female labor, wages were extremely low, and the grade of the goods likewise. The arrival of a mass of immigrants mostly unfamiliar with any skilled trade furnished the proper human material for the development of a

<sup>3</sup> *Capital*, p. 217 (New York edition).

system of division of labor within the workshop. The social gain resulting from this system is the opportunity now enjoyed by wide strata of the laboring population of producing for themselves new clothing; this fact is emphasized by the complaints of the decline of the trade in old clothing (p. 45).

The Jewish immigrants thus did not come into competition with the skilled English tailor. It is a noteworthy fact that the Jewish immigrant has raised the rate of wages in the manufacture of ready-made clothing; even Jewish girls command a higher rate of wages than native working-women (p. 56). It is not uncommon in labor disputes to fill the places of Jewish strikers with English women (p. 56). The reason for this rise of wages is found by the author in the organization, imperfect as it may be, of the Jewish workers. It would seem, however, that the explanation mistakes effect for cause. The introduction of male labor would naturally tend to raise the rate of wages; moreover, whereas a large percentage of English working-women are partly supported by their fathers or husbands, the Jewish immigrant girl is more frequently entirely self-supporting. The rate of wages is thus primarily determined by the cost of the worker's subsistence; organization is but one of the means by which the wage is adjusted to meet the necessities of the wage-earner.

The efforts to organize the Jewish workers of London have been very unsuccessful; many unions were organized at one time or another, but they were all short-lived. The Jewish workers can be brought together by a strike or a lockout, but after the specific object of organizing has been accomplished they lack the cohesive power needed to hold them permanently together (p. 69). The explanation of this fact is sought by the author in the individualism of the Jewish worker. He is not unconscious of the effect of the condition of the trades in which the immigrant finds employment; he shows that "where the chance of becoming independent is slight, labor organizations are much stronger" than in those trades where the sweating system prevails. Yet the psychology of the Russian Jewish worker, which is the product of his antecedents in Russia, is to the author the main factor determining the attitude of the immigrant toward trade-unionism.

The Jewish worker has only in England become a wage-earner. He may have belonged in Russia to the lowest stratum of the unemployed proletariat or of artisans and small traders—a wage-earner he was not, nor does he regard himself as one. Jewish factory workers in Russia there are only in very few

places (according to statistics for the year 1899 there were in the whole "pale of settlement" only 33,933 Jewish factory and mill workers). . . . What is characteristic of a good trade-unionist, the desire to improve his condition within his social status, within his station in life, precisely that is quite foreign to the Jewish worker. The feeling of personal dependence is far more painful to him than to the English worker. As a wage-earner he has no class-consciousness and considers himself in a transitional stage; he belongs only by force of necessity to the class in which he is at the time earning his sustenance, and he thinks only of improving his own condition, not of raising that class. All he strives for is to become independent as soon as possible. Hence the large number of small contractors and subcontractors of all sorts, whose gains often do not exceed the wages of their workmen. (Pp. 71-73.)

The generalization is too sweeping and some of the statements of fact by which it is supported are open to question. In the first place, Russian statistics of factory operatives are utterly misleading. All establishments coming within the jurisdiction of the old guilds are classed as "handicrafts;" a furniture factory, a bookbinding shop, employing from twenty to fifty workers would not be considered a "factory." Furthermore, strong labor organizations may be shown to exist, in the United States, in such trades as are nothing but handicrafts, e. g., the barber trade. It is a fact that the immigrant from Russia had no experience in trade-unionism, since trade unions are prosecuted as conspiracies by the Russian law. That in itself, however, would not prevent the Jewish worker from adopting the ways of British trade-unionism, as he has adapted himself to working on Saturday and resting on Sunday, which to the Jewish immigrant must at first appear quite a revolutionary change. It is the opportunity of becoming an independent employer that feeds the spirit of individualism and militates against organization, rather than the reverse.

The Jewish immigrant in London thus appears as the exemplary worker, devoutly conforming to the precepts of political economy. He practices "abstinence from personal consumption" to a degree which has made him an "undesirable alien;" he abstains from the use of alcoholic liquor; he is "willing to work" from thirteen to fourteen hours a day, and in rush seasons he frequently works as long as sixteen and eighteen hours a day; he does not regard his condition as permanent, his highest ambition being to become an entrepreneur, an employer of labor; and he begins to save with that purpose in view as soon as he is able to earn regular wages; he believes in competition and disbelieves in organized labor. Yet when



the returns are counted, it looks as if virtue were, with him, but too often its own reward. His annual earnings are below those of the English workman; even when he has risen to the rank of "sweater," his earnings are not much above those of his employees, but "his extraordinary frugality and complete abstention from the use of alcoholic liquor enable him to expend for rent a higher portion of his weekly earnings than does the native workman" (p. 34). The landlord considers him "the best tenant," because he is ready and willing to pay the most exorbitant rents. The net economic results of the "abstinence" of the Jewish immigrant are summed up in crowded tenements and excessive rents.

About one-half (45 per cent.) of the inhabitants of Whitechapel live in one-room dwellings; there are, on an average, three occupants to such a room. The average for all houses is 2.24 occupants to a room. Rents have gone up nearly 82 per cent. since 1890.

A form of rent-usury unknown outside the East End is the so-called "key money;" it is only by the payment of the key-money that the new tenant acquires the right of entry to his rooms; usually it inures to the landlord—at times, however, to the outgoing tenant, or to the real-estate agent. The key-money has within late years rapidly advanced and bears no relation whatsoever to the rental price. . . . Not infrequently the key-money for a room which rents for from 4 to 6 shillings per week is as high as £2 and £3. (Pp. 34, 35.)

Another evil which goes with overcrowding and high rents is the unsanitary condition of the houses in the congested districts. In Whitechapel an investigation of 497 houses showed 58 per cent. of them to be defective. Still it is shown that in Lambeth and Kensington, where there are no foreign-born residents, the conditions are still more unsatisfactory (pp. 29, 30).

That the rise of house rent in the district inhabited by Jewish immigrants has resulted in the crowding out of the native residents is demonstrated statistically. A contributory cause has been the extension of the factory district into Stepney, which reduced the number of inhabited houses in Whitechapel from 7,277 in 1891 to 5,735 in 1901; the same is true of other registration districts in the borough of Stepney. The author fails to note that the overcrowding of workingmen's districts in London is older than Jewish immigration. The same conditions are complained of in official reports for 1865. Says Dr. Hunter:

He feels clear on two points—first that there are about twenty large

colonies in London, of about 10,000 persons each, whose miserable condition exceeds almost anything he has seen elsewhere in England, and is almost entirely the result of their bad house accommodation; and, second, that the crowded and dilapidated condition of the houses of these colonies is much worse than was the case twenty years ago.

Karl Marx, who quotes the above statement, goes on to say that the better-off part of the working-class, together . . . with the lower middle class, falls in London more and more under the curse of these vile conditions of dwelling in proportion . . . as factories and the afflux of human beings grow in the metropolis.

He quotes another health report which says that "rents have become so heavy that few laboring-men can afford more than one room."<sup>4</sup>

The apparent predilection of the Jewish immigrants for the congested districts, despite higher rents and poor accommodations, has been a riddle to the sociologist and a problem for the philanthropist. The explanation given by the author for Whitechapel and the adjoining districts would fit as truly the conditions of the lower East Side in New York.

The center of the Jewish town in London is located on the site of the old Jewish Ghetto. . . . Whitechapel had of old a numerous English-Jewish population. . . . When, in 1881, the exodus of the Russian Jews began, those of the refugees who drifted into London naturally sought among their coreligionists protection and aid in the strange land. . . . Here were concentrated all charitable institutions; here soon developed an industry which could utilize the unskilled immigrants—the domestic manufacture of ready-made clothing which gave employment to thousands. That later immigration further crystallized itself around this first settlement needs no further explanation; every newcomer went there where he found his countrymen who spoke his language, who fully understood the misery of his condition, and who . . . are always ready to offer liberal assistance to their countryman whose need is at the time greater than their own. Thus a large Russian-Jewish population has gradually grown up. . . . Now every newcomer can hope speedily to find employment in one of the specifically Jewish industries. It is therefore self-evident that at present the Jewish immigrant is restricted in the choice of a habitation to certain parts of the East End. (Pp. 25, 32, 33.)

Other causes are mentioned by the author, such as the proximity to the City, where all warehouses are located which furnish work to the sweat-shops, the use of the dwelling for a workshop, the subletting of rooms to boarders, the proximity of synagogues and Jewish butcher shops where "kosher" (ritually clean) meat may be had.

<sup>4</sup>*Capital*, pp. 415, 416 (Humboldt Publishing Co., New York), quoting *Public Health*, Eighth Report (1865), p. 89.

Still all these causes are merely derivative, and the author fails to assign a place to the purely social factor—the natural craving of every human being for social intercourse with his own kind. “Whitechapel makes in many respects practically the impression of a city of the Jewish pale of settlement in Russia” (p. 26)—this in itself is sufficient to draw to it thousands of Russian Jews who may no longer be attached to it by economic ties.

A brief consideration of these conditions shows the utter futility of the efforts of charitable institutions to bring relief by encouraging “dispersion” of immigrants throughout the country.

On the whole, the importance of the Jewish Board of Guardians is very much overrated by the author, whereas the tenement-house policy of the London County Council and the Borough Council of Stepney has been considered by him as not within the scope of his inquiry (p. 37). Yet it must be obvious that the problem is one which can be adequately dealt with only by the municipality.

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### BOURGUIN'S EXAMINATION OF SOCIALISM <sup>1</sup>

M. Maurice Bourguin has made an interesting and valuable examination of socialism and social problems. His book is in summary a detailed analysis of the several social systems proposed by the contemporary socialist groups, a painstaking review of the leading facts of modern capitalistic society, and, finally, the author's conclusions as to how far the actual economic evolution justifies the socialist theory and expectations.

In his study of socialism, which makes up the first part of his book, M. Bourguin has included “every system which implies suppression, reduction, or diffusion of capitalistic revenues by instituting, beside or in place of individual rights, collective rights in things for the profit of communities more or less vast.” Such a definition of socialism might cover almost every type of social reform movement, whether anarchism, communism, co-operation, or the mildest demands for state ownership of public utilities. Our author has, however, excluded from his discussion anarchism and communism; anarchism because, although a plan for the suppression of capitalistic revenues, it supposes in addition the suppression of all central or

<sup>1</sup> *Les systèmes socialistes et l'évolution économique.* By Maurice Bourguin. Paris: Armand Colin, 1904.