



That you stir not up, nor awake my love,
Till it please.

... I doubt the validity of Herr Michaelis' view that we are unfit for army service. Does he wish to say that religion should sanction wars of aggression? Let him name the one religion which is cursed enough to do so. Christianity, to be sure, does not. And are not Quakers and Mennonites tolerated and allowed many more privileges and rights than we are?

Herr Michaelis never speaks of Christians and Jews, but always of *Germans* and *Jews*. He does not content himself with establishing the religious differences between us; he prefers to see us as strangers who will have to agree to all conditions which the owners of the land are ready to concede to us. But this, in the first place, is a question to be decided: would it not be better for the owners of the land to accept those they now merely tolerate as citizens rather than bringing strangers at great cost, into their country[?]? Secondly, we should also consider the following problem: for how long, for how many millennia, must this distinction be-

tween the owners of the land and the stranger continue? Would it not be better for mankind and culture to obliterate this distinction?

I think, moreover, that laws should not be influenced by personal convictions at all. Laws should take their inevitable course, proscribing whatever is not beneficial to the general good. When personal convictions conflict with the laws it is up to the individual to resolve this problem on his own. If then the fatherland is to be defended, everybody who is called upon to do so must comply. In such cases, men usually know how to modify their convictions and to adjust them to their civic duty. One merely has to avoid excessively emphasizing the conflict between the two. In a few centuries the problem will disappear or be forgotten. In this way, Christians have neglected the doctrines of their founders and have become conquerors, oppressors and slave-traders, and in this way, Jews too could be made fit for military service. But it is obvious that they will have to be of the proper height, as Herr Michaelis wisely reminds us, unless they are merely to be used against hostile pygmies and fellow Jews.

ABBÉ GRÉGOIRE

13. An Essay on the Physical, Moral and Political Reformation of the Jews (1789)¹

But the Jews, I shall be told, are incapable of being reformed, because they are absolutely worthless. I reply, that we see few of them commit murder, or other enormous crimes, that call forth public vengeance; but their abominable meanness produces base actions. Mr. Michaelis² assures us, that in Germany, of twenty-five criminals imprisoned

or condemned, twenty-four are always Jews. This is the assertion of Mr. Michaelis—but, in the first place, an assertion is no proof. The truth of this, however, might have been easily ascertained, by examining and producing the criminals. Secondly, supposing the circumstances to be as true as it is doubtful, this would prove nothing but against the

Source: Abbé Grégoire, *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs* (Metz, 1789), in Abbé Grégoire, *An Essay on the Physical, Moral and Political Reformation of the Jews*, translator not indicated (London, 1791), pp. 134-44.

German Jews; and lastly, it would still be necessary to establish as a certainty that this perversity proceeds immediately from their religion, or their natural disposition. That it is not inspired by the law, is evident; shall we believe, then, that it is innate? Some peevish philosophers, indeed, have pretended, that man is born wicked; but happily for the honor and comfort of humanity, this system has been banished to the class of absurd and mortifying hypotheses. So many laws made against the Jews, always suppose in them a natural and indelible worthlessness; but these laws, which are the fruit of hatred or prejudice, have no other foundation but the motive which gives rise to them. This perversity is not so inherent in their character as to affect every individual. We see talents and virtues shine forth in them wherever they begin to be treated as men, especially in the territories of the Pope, which have so long been their terrestrial paradise; in Holland, Prussia, and even among us. Hertz³ and Bloch⁴ render the Jewish nation illustrious at present in Germany; and the Hague is honored by a Pinto.⁵ We must, therefore, believe these people susceptible of morality, until we are shown, that they have invincible obstacles in their physical organization, and in their religious and moral constitution.

Let us cherish morality, but let us not be so unreasonable as to require it of those whom we have compelled to become vicious. Let us reform their education, to reform their hearts; it has long been observed, that they are men as well as we, and they are so before they are Jews.

Mr. Michaelis objects also, that this nation being in constant opposition to general manners, will never become patriotic. We allow that it will be difficult to incorporate them into universal society; but between difficulty and impossibility, there is the same difference as between impossibility and possibility. I have myself remarked, and even proved, that hitherto the Jews have been invariable in their manners and customs; but the greater part of their customs are not contrary to civil functions; and with regard to

those which may appear to be incompatible with the duties of the citizen, they are preserved only by the uniformity of that conduct, which all nations observe towards them. If we do not maintain, with Helvetius,⁶ that the character and disposition of man depend altogether on his education, we at least allow, that in a great measure they are the result of circumstances. Can the Jews ever become patriots? This is a question proposed by those who reproach them with not loving a country that drove them from its bosom; and with not cherishing people who exercised their fury against them—that is to say, who were their executioners.

Flatterers, in every country, extol the attachment of the people to their sovereigns, and to their country; thus gratifying the vanity of the master at the expense of truth. Study the characters of men, in different countries, and you will find, that pleasure and interest are the grand springs by which they are actuated; provided the people sleep securely in their habitations, and enjoy there in peace, the fruits of their fields, which they cultivate at their ease, and provided they are not subjected to the scourge of the law, nor oppressed by the iron hand of despotism, they are satisfied; but under any other circumstances, they show something more than indifference with regard to their government, as well as to their sovereign: they even offer up secret vows for a revolution, because they imagine that a new order of things will procure them happiness; and they know nothing of patriotism but the name, except, perhaps, in places where they have a share, though at a distance, in the legislative or executive authority. We may, therefore, lay it down as a fact, that the character of the French, for two years past, has acquired more energy and displayed more patriotism than in the two last centuries.

The Jews, every where dispersed, yet no where established, have only had the spirit of a body which is entirely different from the spirit of a nation; for this reason, as had been observed, it is neither that of the English at London, nor that of the Dutch at the Hague,

of the pro-French patriotism of Alsace-Lorraine Jews since 1870 had been the persistence of anti-Jewish discrimination within the German army. Bréal therefore found it inconceivable that Dreyfus could have betrayed France "for the profit of that same Germany that would have . . . nothing to offer him except the disdain of all the officers, together with the contempt of all honest men." Deeply distressed by the antisemitic and anti-Alsatian attacks of the French press during the Affair, Bréal continued:

If one had wanted . . . to discourage, to deter Alsatian youth, what better ploy could have been found? I'm speaking here not of the Jews, whom certain newspapers cover with mud to such a degree that Germany in comparison must appear to them the country of tolerance, but of the Protestants of Alsace, who see how men such as Scheurer-Kestner and Picquart are treated,* of the sincere Catholics who do not want to allow the law to be made for them by journalists without conviction and without scruple. . . . These are not only good servants lost for France; sooner or later, they will be good servants gained by our neighbors. What remains to us of Alsace is on the verge of being lost.⁵⁵

Such predictions were indeed already being realized in the Reichsland. The government noted a marked diminution of pro-French sympathies among the native population as a whole and forecast that it would not be long before the indigenous population would rally to the cause of *Deutschtum*.⁵⁶ The shift in sentiment among the Jewish population was even more remarkable. The Bezirkspräsident in Metz noted, "The sympathies of the native Jewish population for France, following the antisemitic incidents there, have experienced a marked cooling," and his counterpart in Strasbourg commented, "Alsatian Jewry, who formerly showed itself to be extremely engaged in French affairs, have had their confidence in the neighboring country severely shaken in this respect by the outbreak of the antisemitic movement."⁵⁷

This disillusionment had several long-range consequences. While some Jews remained committed to a pro-French stance, others sought new answers. As Bréal had pointed out, Germany no longer compared so unfavorably with France in the treatment of its Jewish

*Georges Picquart, an Alsatian, was a lieutenant colonel in the French army who spoke out in Dreyfus's defense when he discovered the General Staff's cover-up. He was subsequently imprisoned.

those in Berlin to prescribe to the representatives of the Centralverein in Alsace-Lorraine what they should and shouldn't do about the attainment of civic equality for Alsace-Lorraine Jewry.⁶⁵

Thus, the Jews of the Reichsland, just as the general population did, came to develop a particularist identity. As their predecessor, the author of the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin* article of the early 1870's had already shown, this localism, while maintaining a separate identity, was not in the least antithetical to integration into the Reich.

More than anyone, Nathan Netter, who became Grand Rabbi of Lorraine in 1900, embodied the anomalies inherent in this new situation. Born in a small Alsatian village in 1866, the son of a cattle dealer, Netter grew up and was educated almost entirely during the German period.⁶⁶ Confronted by the problem of nationalism, he solved it in an unprecedented manner: he elevated patriotism into a universal ideal, divorcing it from nationalism. This paradoxical solution enabled Netter, and the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine in general, to express loyalties to both France and Germany simultaneously. In his sermon at the 1908 Noisseville commemoration to erect a monument for the fallen soldiers of 1870, Netter declared, "In honoring today their beautiful spirit, we have made a resolution . . . to be inspired by their example, whatever the country to which we belong, since the cult of the *patrie* is international, to give in our turn our heart and our soul to the *patrie* the day when it will have need of us."⁶⁷ This seemingly contradictory point of view was in many ways a natural outgrowth of the peculiar situation of Alsace-Lorraine generally and of Alsace-Lorraine Jewry especially. By the twentieth century, though Jews in the Reichsland continued to live under the constant pressure to prove their patriotism, they were no longer sure which country they should turn to. At Noisseville, Netter glorified "*le culte du souvenir*" ("the cult of remembrance"); but only a few years later he published an effusively patriotic pro-German sermon, and during the First World War he encouraged Jewish loyalty to the German war effort.* As a result, French officials in Alsace-Lorraine after the

*Netter, *Die Vaterlandsidee*, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, Feb. 12, 1915, pp. 3-4. The only parallel I have ever seen to Netter's peculiar distinction between patriotism and nationalism was articulated in 1906 by a Jew from Posen, an area similarly torn by a nationality conflict. Max Kollenscher, a leading Posen Zionist, argued that although Jews might never achieve integration into the German nation, it was entirely possible for them to express patriotism toward the German state. As