CHAPTER I THE RISE OF JEWISH NATIONALISM

ACCULTURATION AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

On February 9, 1807, an honor guard of French grenadiers beat a military tattoo on their drums at the entrance to the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. Thereupon a procession of seventy-one men filed in to take their seats in the hotel's ornate banquet hall. Solemnly, the chairman, a bearded rabbi in dark clerical attire, gaveled the meeting to order. The delegates were all Jews. They had gathered to participate in a Sanhedrin, a modern version of the council that had issued and enforced the laws during the Jewish Commonwealth of antiquity. The ancient body plainly had languished following the destruction of Jewish statehood at the hands of the Romans. Now, however, much to the astonishment of Frenchmen and Jews alike, the Sanhedrin was being revived at the explicit orders of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was the emperor's intention that the Jews of France, to whom the General Assembly had granted equality of rights only fifteen years before, should accept the responsibilities of citizenship in as "official" and ceremonial a manner as the Jewish tradition itself provided.

Although the nation's 40,000 Jews had been emancipated in 1791, this was hardly attributable to their popularity in a Christian state. The determining factor, rather, was the unsparing rationalism that already had overthrown the *ancien régime*, and that seemed capable of final validation only if applied without distinction to all the inhabitants of the land. In any case, both the revolutionary government and Napoleon, its successor, appreciated that France no longer could sustain itself as a Great Power while tolerating the relics of corporativism, including the ghettoized autonomy of the Jews. Nor was it possible to ignore the tangible dividends to be accrued from the unlocked mobility of Jewish wealth and enterprise. If Napoleon appreciated these fraternal advantages, however, and indeed bestowed them on Jews in the territories he conquered elsewhere in western and central Europe, he expected certain commitments in return. He demanded specific assurances that rabbinical jurisdiction in Jewish civil and judicial affairs was a thing of the past, that the Jews had turned their backs forever on their separate nationhood, on their corporative status, and not least of all on their traditional hope for redemption in Palestine.

The French emperor received his assurances. Grateful for the honor paid their religious sensibilities, the members of the revived Sanhedrin affirmed their determination to "gallicize" all elements within their own community. Formally, too, they declared that rabbinical laws henceforth would be applied exclusively to matters of

religious tradition and practice; that France alone had claim on their political allegiance; that French Jews "no longer formed a nation"; and that they had renounced forever their dream of collective exodus to the ancestral Land of Israel. As it transpired, these commitments were destined to exert a far-reaching influence on Jewish life, and well beyond the borders of France itself. Although the Jews of western Europe—those emancipated by the Revolution, by Napoleon's armies, or, grudgingly, by local regimes—numbered scarcely half a million in 1807, and at most three-quarters of a million fifty years later, they represented the "aristocrats" of Jewish life. By mid-century, they had consolidated the rights tentatively awarded them during the revolutionary-Napoleonic era, and were free to build homes, to travel, to engage in business, and to practice their professions as they chose. In their hearts they were certain, too, that their own efforts, more even than Gentile toleration, had achieved this equality of status. Faithful to the Sanhedrin's historic affirmation, they had shown themselves loyal comrades-in-arms, public-spirited citizens, sensitive interpreters of their various national idioms.

To protect what they had achieved in civic freedom, moreover, Western Jews, in the United States and Europe alike, tended to accept the emerging nineteenth-century consensus that loyalty to a national state was incompatible with pluralism in cultures. In increasing numbers, they dropped the traditional allusions to Zion in their ritual observances and spoke of the messianic age less in terms of return to the Land of Israel than of a miraculous "end of days," or of an era of "universal brotherhood." Ultimately the Sanhedrin's nationalist commitment provided a rationale for Germans, Frenchmen, and Americans of the "Israelitish" or "Mosaic" faith—for Jews in a hurry to assume the protective coloration of their Gentile neighbors. The affirmation's most substantial impact, therefore, lay not so much in its repudiation of Jewish corporative autonomy or of nostalgia for Zion, as in the increasing sanction it provided for Western Jews to reject their historic civilization in its wider ethnic and cultural implications.

On the other hand, the lineaments of Western Jewish emancipation and acculturation differed strikingly from the pattern of the *Ostjuden*, the 3 million Jews of eastern Europe who represented nearly 75 percent of world Jewry in 1850. The largest numbers of Jewish "Easterners" were to be found in Russia, where they comprised some 4 percent of the Romanov Empire's population and by far its most despised and oppressed minority. To the tsarist government, no less than to the backward, largely illiterate native peasantry, the Jews were regarded in terms of their medieval stereotype: as Christ killers, well poisoners, or at best as usurious traders and parasitic middlemen. The government's approach to these unwelcome infidels, whom it had inherited in the eighteenth-century partitions of Poland, was simply to cordon them off from integral Russia in a "Pale of Settlement" that consisted essentially of the newly annexed western provinces. Even within this extensive territorial ghetto, the Jews were driven from sensitive border communities, restricted in their opportunities for a livelihood, and denied a share in local government. Under the harshly autocratic Nicholas I, who ruled to mid-century, their communal self-government was abolished and their children subjected to thinly disguised conversionary pressures in the army and the "Crown" school system. Ironically, all these tsarist efforts proved counterproductive to Jewish

"amalgamation." Driven more tightly into themselves, insulated by force and choice from the surrounding Gentile population, the Jews of Russia continued unshakably ethnocentric and grimly intent upon maintaining the full skein of their religious and communal traditions, their unique diet and dress, their Hebrew worship and Yiddish vernacular.

Among the most cherished features of the Russian Jewish cultural heritage, surely, was the memory of the ancestral homeland, the lost and lamented Zion that was enshrined in the ceremony and folklore of virtually every believing Jew. The truth was that throughout all the centuries of Jewish dispersion until modern times, Zion, hardly less than the Deity, functioned as a binding integument of the Jewish religious and social experience. Rabbinic and midrashic literature, the prayer book, medieval literary treatises, all displayed a uniform preoccupation with the Holy Land. Poets, philosophers, mystics, liturgists in Spain, North Africa, and Europe traditionally vied with one another in expressing the yearning of the People of Israel for the ravished cradle of its nationhood. In the West, to be sure, the memory of Zion unquestionably was fading by the nineteenth century, was even being exorcised by reformers and secularists. But for Russian Jews, distraught and quarantined under the tsars, clinging fast to their accumulated sacred literature, the Holy Land was no mere featureless idyll, to be embellished in lullabies and fireside tales. The recollection of its loss was a visceral wound. On the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, commemorating the destruction of Solomon's Temple, east European Jews fasted and mourned as though they had been witnesses and victims of that ancient catastrophe. Three times a day they prayed for the restoration of Jerusalem. Their appeals for timely rains and harvests were phrased in terms evocative not of ice-bound Russia but of the subtropical Holy Land. Jewish festivities and holidays—Passover, Chanukkah, Sukkot, Shavuot—all evoked and refined memories of the departed national hearth. In the manner, then, of other ethnic-religious Eastern communities—of the Greeks and Armenians, for example Russian Jews continued to nourish the vision of a future apocalypse, the redemption of sacred soil.

On the other hand, the Jews of the Pale resisted all attempts to "force the end." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the excesses and perversions of a series of false messiahs had burned them badly. Messianism was transformed, rather, into attendance upon a halcyonic era that alone would signal final redemption in the Land of Israel. "*You'll* never bring the Messiah any nearer," an aged rabbi once cautioned the youthful Chaim Weizmann. "One has to do much, learn much, know much and suffer much before one is worthy of that." Even so, it was no generalized Western Jewish conception of universal amity that brooded in the folk memory of east European Jewry, but rather the mesmeric vision of the Jewish people transplanted to a Zion physically restored.

FORERUNNERS OF ZIONISM

If, then, in the earliest phases of its gestation, Jewish nationalism drew extensively from the messianic dream, it was less than surprising that one of the first to translate prophecy into a more contemporary framework should have been an Orthodox rabbi.

Admittedly, there was little in the career of Rabbi Judah Alkalai to portend this insight. Born at the end of the eighteenth century, Alkalai was an obscure preacher in a little Sephardic community, Semlin, near Belgrade. In 1839, however, he astounded his congregants by publishing a Ladino-Hebrew textbook, *Darchei Noam* (Pleasant Paths), in the introduction of which he alluded to the need for establishing Jewish colonies in the Holy Land as a necessary prelude to the Redemption. In his later writings, of which the best-known was *Sh'ma Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel), Alkalai observed that self-effort toward this climactic physical and spiritual achievement was justified by the very "proof texts" of tradition. Had the Cabalah not intimated that the struggle of devoted Jewish common people everywhere would prefigure the coming of the Messiah? In 1840, moreover, the efforts of influential Western Jewish leaders achieved the release of several unfortunate Jews imprisoned in Damascus on blood libel charges. Alkalai detected in this "miracle" of vigorous secular action a precedent for future stages of redemption—in Palestine. In his booklet, *Minchat Yehuda* (The Offering of Judah), issued in 1843, Alkalai declared:

> It is written in the Bible: "Return, O Lord, unto the tens of thousands of the families of Israel." … [But] upon what should the Divine Presence rest? On sticks and stones? Therefore, as the initial stage in the redemption of our souls, we must cause at least 22,000 to return to the Holy Land. This is the necessary precondition for a descent of the Divine Presence among us; afterward, He will grant us and all Israel additional signs of His favor.

During his remaining thirty-five years, Alkalai continued to publish his ideas extensively, and in the end he himself settled in Palestine as an example to others. Before his death in 1878, the energetic rabbi managed to organize a small group of followers. One of his disciples, interestingly enough, was Simon Loeb Herzl, the grandfather of Theodor. In truth, the link between Alkalai and Theodor Herzl was more than one of generational accident. Like Herzl later, the Rabbi of Semlin favored Jewish national unity through an all-embracing organization, and particularly through the intercession of affluent Western Jews.

Alkalai's views were paralleled to a remarkable degree by a contemporary and colleague, the Orthodox rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer. Serving a large congregation in the Polish-speaking city of Thorn, East Prussia, Kalischer enjoyed a rather substantial following. As a consequence, he was given an immediate and respectful hearing when, like Alkalai, he too discerned in the progressive triumph of Western Jewish emancipation an augury of messianic redemption in Palestine. In 1843, Kalischer published his views in a two-volume work entitled *Emunah Yesharah* (An Honest Faith), and in 1862 completed his presentation in a final volume, *Drishat Zion* (The Search for Zion). Three principal theses were developed in these writings, supported by an impressive array of biblical texts and talmudical responsa. They were: that the salvation of the Jews, as foretold by the Prophets, could take place through natural means, that is, by self-help, and did not require the advent of the Messiah; that the colonization of Palestine should be launched without delay; and that the revival of sacrifices in the Holy Land was permissible. "Pay no heed," he wrote,

> to the traditional view that the Messiah will suddenly loose a blast on the Great Shofar and cause all the inhabitants of the earth to tremble. On the contrary, the Redemption will begin with the generating of support among philanthropists and with the gaining of the consent of the nations to the gathering of the scattered of Israel into the Holy Land.

Only when many pious and learned Jews volunteered to live in Jerusalem, Kalischer explained, would the Creator hearken to their prayers and speed the Day of Redemption.

Prayers would not suffice, however. Moving so far beyond traditional Orthodoxy that some colleagues branded his views heretical, Kalischer urged: the formation of a society of rich Jews to undertake the colonization of Zion; settlement by Jews of all backgrounds on the soil of the Holy Land; the training of young Jews in self-defense; and the establishment of an agricultural school in the Land of Israel where Jews might learn farming and other practical subjects. Far from undermining the study of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), "the policy we propose will add dignity to the Torah. …" Kalischer's notion of "practical messianism" in fact was appealing enough to win over a small but influential group of contemporaries who joined him in founding a "Society for the Colonization of the Land of Israel." At Kalischer's initiative, too, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a renowned French Jewish philanthropy, provided the initial subsidy for a Jewish agricultural school in the Holy Land. Established near Jaffa in 1870, the institution was called Mikveh Israel (Hope of Israel). It is worth noting, however, that Alkalai's and Kalischer's major activities took place during the heyday of mid-nineteenth-century liberalism, an era that inspired almost universal optimism on the future of Jewish emancipation in Europe. Indeed, at no time had the two rabbis ever based their appeal for settlement in Palestine on physical need. It was this lack of urgency, therefore, as well as an underlying Orthodox hostility toward "forcing the end," that accounted for a generally cool reaction to the proto-Zionist vision. At best, the ideas of the two rabbis could be regarded as a modern, but lineally descended, expression of the historic messianism that continued to infuse Jewish life in eastern Europe.

By mid-century, too, a messianic age of sorts appeared to have opened in Russia itself. In 1855, Alexander II ascended the tsarist throne and set about launching a vigorous program of domestic reforms, including a notably more humane approach to the Jews. Rejecting his father's notion of enforced conversion, the new ruler summarily did away with Jewish military "cantonment," the six-year preconscription horror of Russian Jewish life. Thereafter, a succession of imperial ukases allowed greater numbers of Jews to move into the Russian interior, to participate in a new scheme of zemstvo local government, to attend universities, and to practice their professions. The response of east European Jewry to the new and millennial epoch was not simply one of hope and gratitude; it was one of self-examination. For by mid-century a rather considerable Jewish middle class had developed in Galicia, along the border areas of the Pale of Settlement, and in the port city of Odessa. It was this new element that first reacted to the winds of humanism sweeping across Russia from the West.

With fresh opportunities suddenly opening for Jewish enterprise, the Jewish

bourgeoisie now asked if the time had not come for all Jews in the tsarist empire to "modernize," to "productivize" themselves, by moving into more useful and dignified livelihoods and by wresting themselves free from the constricting lock-step of parochial Jewish education. This secularist awakening is known in Jewish history as the Haskalah, the mid-nineteenth-century period of east European Jewish "enlightenment." The earliest of the humanists, seeking an alternative to the squalid Jewish village and the insularity and cultural backwardness it represented, placed a new emphasis on nature and beauty, on love and physical action. Thus, the Haskalah poet Micah Joseph Lebensohn could write yearningly:

Once in a leafy tree, there was my home.

Torn from a swaying branch, friendless I roam,

Plucked from the joyous green that gave me birth,

What is my life to me, and of what worth?

For the Russian Jewish essayist Moshe Lilienblum and for the great Haskalah poet Judah Leib Gordon, there were "normalcy," insight, and enrichment to be gained from discourse with the surrounding Gentile population. "Be a Jew at home and a man in the street," argued Gordon, in the Haskalah's most radical credo—that is, observe one's Jewish traditions in the privacy of household and synagogue, but live a hearty, "normal" Russian life in the outer world.

By placing its faith in cultural emancipation and secular activity on Russian soil, Haskalah literature at first seemingly deemphasized the traditional messianic yearning for Zion. Yet Jewish humanism was responsible as well for a number of features that later were absorbed into the very mainstream of Zionist ideology. In its demand for vocational "productivization," for example, Haskalah literature extolled the merits of physical labor in the fields and factories, a conception that later was to become the very bedrock of Labor Zionism. It idealized, too, a new secular Jew who appraised the world about him realistically, emancipated from the cloisters of religious obscurantism. Most important, the Haskalah revitalized the Hebrew language. Until mid-century, Hebrew had been consigned to the synagogue and the religious school; Yiddish remained the daily vernacular of east European Jewry. Now, however, the writers of the Jewish enlightenment consciously revived Hebrew as their vehicle of expression. One of their motives conceivably was social, to differentiate themselves from the Yiddish-speaking proletariat. But the principal reason unquestionably was ethnocentric, to assure that the Jews who wakened from their insularity would not become simply educated Jewish Russians, in the manner of the German salon-Jews of preceding decades, but enlightened Russian Jews, aware of the treasured values of their heritage. And for whatever purpose, the secular, literary use of this classical tongue inevitably evoked a rich skein of historical associations. Thus, in Hebrew, it was natural to describe the conditions of Jewish life, even its straitened parochialism, in terminology rich with biblical allusions; to contrast the circumstances of the Russian Jewish village with the

legendary (and idealized) glories of ancient Zion.

Zion, then, as envisaged by the Haskalah writers, became a kind of mythic idyll—in the words of Lebensohn, "the land where the muses dwell, where each flower is a Psalm, each cedar a song divine, each stone a book and each rock a tablet." In the ornately tapestried historical romances of Kaiman Schulman and Abraham Mapu, biblical Palestine was projected as the terrain of ancient glory, inhabited by robust farmers and soldiers, by epic heroes and men of action. During the 1870s the Hebrew-language journals enlarged upon this biblical ideal in a kind of pre-adumbrated Zionism. At the same time, however, their pages reflected a growing concern lest "enlightenment" divert the new generation of secularly educated Jews from a basic identification with their people's fate and fortunes. It was a cautionary theme that received its most eloquent treatment at the hands of Perez Smolenskin. A White Russian Jew, the founder-editor of the Hebrew literary monthly *HaShachar* (The Dawn), Smolenskin was the author of six novels and of innumerable essays that, more than any other body of work, laid the foundations of literary realism in the Hebrew language. Not less significantly, he was the first of the major Hebrew writers to warn against the extravagances and dangers of Haskalah.

Like the Russian Slavophiles, disenchanted with the false blandishments of the West, Smolenskin feared that Haskalah extremism was inducing thousands of Jewish humanists to reject their ancestral loyalties. In 1872 his most widely read essay, "Am Olam" (Eternal People), appeared in the pages of *HaShachar*. It was a trenchant defense of Jewish peoplehood:

> The willfully blind bid us to be like all other nations, and I repeat after them: let us be like all the other nations, pursuing and attaining knowledge, leaving off from wickedness and folly.... Yes, let us be like all the other nations, unashamed of the rock whence we have been hewn, like the rest in holding dear our language and the glory of our people.

The western European conception of Judaism as a religious confession was bankrupt, Smolenskin asserted. So, too, was Gordon's concept of the duality of the Jew—"in the home" and "in the street." The time had come to gird for the moral, even political, resurrection of the Jewish people as a national entity. In later essays, Smolenskin made plain that all methods were legitimate in sustaining the national ideal, not excluding the physical colonization of the Land of Israel (this page). Yet in this earlier phase of his writings, too, and well before the tsarist pogroms of the 1880s, Smolenskin's unerring instinct for his colleagues' latent ethnic pride fulfilled a decisive role. He launched the first intellectually effective counterattack against the current Haskalah illusion that secular modernism, rather than national revival, was somehow the answer to the Jewish problem in Europe.

EUROPEAN NATIONALISM AND RUSSIAN UPHEAVAL

If the regenerative impulse latent in both messianism and humanism kindled a Zionist spark among Russian Jewry, so also did the emergence of other nineteenth-century

nationalist and irredentist movements. “Let us take to heart the examples of the Italians, Poles and Hungarians,” wrote Rabbi Kalischer in one of his articles. “All the other peoples have striven only for the sake of their own national honor; how much more should we exert ourselves, for our duty is to labor … for the glory of God who chose Zion!” The Jung Deutschland movement powerfully impressed Micah Joseph Lebensohn, who lived for three years in Berlin; even as Hungarian and Slovakian nationalism deeply affected Smolenskin and Leo Pinsker (this page) in the course of their respective sojourns in Vienna. Eliezer Perlman (Ben-Yehuda), a witness to the Pan-Slavism sweeping the Balkans during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, asked: “Why should we be any less worthy than any other people? What about our nation, our language, our land?”

Perhaps the most original response to the nationalist awakening was that of Moses Hess, the son of an Orthodox Jewish family of Bonn. Reared in the early post-Napoleonic era, exposed to the influences of German scholarship and literature, Hess as a young man gradually lost interest in religion of any variety—and ceased to be a practicing Jew. His punishment was ejection from his father’s business. Thereafter he wandered across Germany, fitfully trying his hand at teaching and writing. Enrolling for a while at the University of Bonn, a “tall, scrawny man, with benevolent eyes and a cock-like curve to his neck,” as he was described later by his fellow student Karl Marx, Hess preached mildly of love, humanity, justice, and sympathy for the poor. In fact, he was preaching a kind of utopian socialism; and in Paris he went so far as to marry a prostitute out of socialist compassion. Reflecting, too, the Hegelian interest in history then current in Germany, Hess in 1837 published his first book, *The Holy History of Mankind by a Young Spinozist*. It sank without a trace. The young man subsequently occupied himself with political journalism.

Hess’s Jewish interests were revived by the apparently ineradicable anti-Semitism of “cosmopolitan” western Europe. In 1857 the writings of Rabbi Kalischer were drawn to his notice, and Hess was impelled to begin a systematic study of Jewish history. Almost simultaneously, too, he became deeply engrossed in the works of the Italian nationalist Mazzini, and was moved by the apparent fulfillment of the latter’s dream of a united Italy. It was the combination of these social and intellectual influences that resulted in Hess’s second volume, *Rome and Jerusalem*, published in 1862. “Here I stand again in the midst of my people,” he admitted at the outset, “after being estranged from it for twenty years.” Hess thereupon confessed that his encounters with European nationalism, his studies in ethnicity, had persuaded him that his original cosmopolitan vision of a single homogeneity of nations was outdated. Each people, he wrote, nurtured its own individual traits, its own unique ambitions and “mission”; the events “now transpiring in Italy” confirmed that view, for “on the ruins of Christian Rome a regenerated Italian people is rising.” Hess insisted, then, that what the Italians and others had achieved must also be achieved by the Jews, who represented the “last great national problem” in Europe. If the Italians had a mission, so, no less, did the Jews in Palestine. “Only a national renaissance can endow the religious genius of the Jews … with new strength, and raise its soul once again to the level of prophetic inspiration.”

Rome and Jerusalem was unique in its prefigurations of later and better-known Zionist doctrines. It anticipated the writings of Ber Borochov and of other Labor Zionists, for example, by asserting that return to the Land of Israel was indispensable if the Jews were to shed their function as a historical anomaly, a social parasite in the lands of other peoples. Only on ancestral soil would Jewish labor find it possible to organize on "correct Socialist" principles. Two decades before Pinsker, Hess issued the warning that a national homeland offered the Jews their last, best chance of self-transformation into a "normal" people, emancipated from the vulnerable phantom status that historically had provoked anti-Semitism. Predating Herzl, Hess envisaged the self-interested collaboration of other governments in reviving a Jewish protégé nation in the Middle East, and the active help of the "Jewish princes"—Rothschild, Montefiore, and other millionaires—who would fund and organize Jewish colonization in Palestine. With these and other insights, Hess's book was a dazzling tour de force of ideological prophecy. Even so, *Rome and Jerusalem* ignited no fires in the Jewish world—not in 1862. Only two hundred copies of the work were sold in the five years after its appearance. It found no English translator for fifty years and was published as a book in Hebrew only in 1899. Hess's role as an authentic visionary of Zionism awaited the centenary of his volume in 1962, when his remains at last were flown from Germany to Israel, and re-interred on the shores of Lake Galilee in a state ceremony.

It is of significance that Hess's writings carried a pungent warning that more than Jewish religious or national ideals awaited, fulfillment in Palestine; sheer physical existence was also at stake. For Hess's ethnic theories alluded not only to differences between nations and peoples, but to the fundamental antipathy between them, and particularly to the animus of the German toward the Jew. "We shall always remain strangers among the nations," he insisted. The validity of this jeremiad was almost instantly confirmed. At first, however, it was less the pseudoscience of German racism than a cruel outburst of Russian nationalism that transformed Zionism from an intellectual theory into an urgent survivalist movement. In the 1860s and 1870s, Slavophilism, a curiously hybrid fusion of Byzantine Orthodoxy and Great Russian nationalism, gained momentum in the tsarist empire. Subsequently Alexander Ill's accession to the throne in 1881, upon the murder of his father at the hands of revolutionaries, ushered in the grimmest period of chauvinist oppression in modern Russian history. Committed to national homogeneity as the foundation of imperial power, the new tsar regarded the ethnic minorities in his dominions as a standing challenge to his autocracy. Almost immediately, therefore, the non-Russian races—Poles, Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Armenians, Turkmenians, among others—found themselves subjected to a far-reaching campaign of discrimination in public employment and in educational and cultural self-expression.

By no coincidence, the Jews once again were the victims of an especial refinement of persecution, for they remained the most suspect and vulnerable of the empire's minorities. Numbering approximately 5 million at the time of the 1897 census, they remained confined by and large to their Pale of Settlement, an area encompassing 20 percent of European Russia. Half of them lived in towns and cities, the rest in villages

and hamlets. To the tsarist regime, moreover, this vast, closely knit Jewish enclave was the object not merely of enforced "Russification," but of organized counterrevolutionary diversion. The bureaucracy was shrewdly determined now to stigmatize "revolutionarism" as nothing less than a Jewish plot. Thus, in 1881, a chain reaction of officially inspired pogroms erupted throughout the dense Jewish hinterland of southern Russia and the Ukraine, taking dozens of lives and wreaking extensive physical damage. The following year a government committee under the chairmanship of the minister of the interior, Count Nicolai Ignatiev, issued a report stating bluntly that the late Alexander II's policy of toleration had failed, that harsh measures were now in order against Russian Jewry. Thereupon Alexander III issued a new series of anti-Jewish decrees on May 3, 1882, in the form of "temporary regulations." Far from being temporary, however, the regulations continued in effect, with mounting stringency in their enforcement, until the March Revolution of 1917.

By the provisions of these "May Laws," all further rural areas were closed to Jewish settlement. Within the Pale, Jews by the hundreds of thousands were driven from the countryside into the city slums. A much tighter *numerus clausus* was imposed in Russian high schools and universities, and Jews were systematically uprooted from the professions. As a consequence both of oppression and of developing industrialization, the economic base of Russian Jewish life was soon all but fatally undermined. By the end of the century, nearly 40 percent of the empire's Jews were at least partially dependent on charity or remittances from kinsmen living abroad, and their sheer physical survival was placed in gravest jeopardy. In this fashion, then, the government's intentions were being fulfilled admirably. "One-third will die out," Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the tsar's closest adviser, blandly observed in 1894, "one-third will leave the country, and one-third will be completely dissolved in the surrounding population." Elsewhere too in eastern Europe, in Austrian Galicia and Rumania, the industrial crisis was almost as serious. Vocationally expendable as a consequence of technological change, inundated by floods of Russian Jewish refugees, burdened (in the case of Rumania) with heavy legal disabilities, the indigenous Jewish communities gradually were reduced to the narrowest margin of subsistence.

PALESTINE AS REFUGE AND RENAISSANCE

The May Laws, and the pogroms of 1881–82 and their aftermath, shattered Russian Jewry's final lingering illusions of equality and achievement under tsarist rule. Even their faith in the redeeming value of enlightenment was blasted, for Russian academicians and university students, no less than government officials and illiterate muzhiks, joined enthusiastically in the new anti-Jewish campaign. "I intended to devote my strength and energy to serving the interests of my country," Chaim Chissin, a Jewish medical student, lamented in his diary, "and honestly to fulfill the obligations of a good citizen.… And now suddenly we are shown the door. It is too much for a sensitive Jew." Lev Levanda, one of the paladins of the Haskalah, opened his heart in the Russian Jewish journal *Rassviet* (Daybreak): "When I think of what was done to us, how we were

taught to love Russia and the Russian word, how we were lured into introducing the Russian language and everything Russian in our home … and how we are now rejected and hounded … my heart is filled with corroding despair from which there is no escape." But of course there had to be some escape. One response was the growth of Jewish socialism, a movement ultimately destined to embrace hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers and their families. Even among the Jewish proletariat, however, there was a strong undertow of awareness that the most effective immediate solution was emigration from Russia altogether. The United States was regarded as the most likely sanctuary.

Nevertheless, for other Jews a continuation of minority status among Gentiles anywhere was no longer an answer. Moshe Lilienblum, the distinguished Jewish humanist, had spent two days cowering in a basement as Russian mobs churned through his neighborhood. "All the old ideals left me in a flash," he wrote afterward. "There is no home for us in this, or any, Gentile land." Henceforth he regarded departure for Palestine as the one remaining solution of the Jewish question, and he pressed this view in innumerable articles. In 1882 he wrote:

> This is the land in which our fathers have found rest since time immemorial—and as they lived, so shall we live. Let us go now to the only land in which we will find relief for our souls that have been harassed by murderers for these thousands of years. Our beginnings will be small, but in the end we will flourish.

Smolenskin, too, the last and greatest figure of Haskalah, now abandoned his earlier conception of the Jews as a uniquely "spiritual" nation and called for mass emigration to Palestine. "Now is the time to circulate this idea," he wrote in 1881, "and to raise funds to help settle those who will go to the Land of Israel. And now for the sake of resettlement in Zion, let us neither be still nor quiet until the light dawns and causes our healing to begin."

Lilienblum's and Smolenskin's focus on Palestine as asylum may have emerged naturally from the messianic tradition, from the Hebraic strain in Haskalah, even from the example of other European nationalist movements. Yet, whatever their disillusionment with the "exile," neither Smolenskin nor Lilienblum, any more than Alkalai or Kalischer before them, offered compelling evidence that the tide of Gentile prejudice might not eventually crest, perhaps even be dissipated by political change within Russia itself. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish liberals and Socialists continued to nurture that dream, after all, and in western Europe and America they were witnessing its apparent realization. If, then, ancient folk memories of Palestine failed to arouse the enthusiasm of these secular leftists, what other compelling incentive was there for them to return to the wilderness of Zion? One such inducement existed, as it happened. It took the form of a rigorous "scientific" analysis of the Jewish condition.

Leo Pinsker was the son of an "enlightened" family of Odessa, a city that functioned as the nerve center of mid-nineteenth-century Haskalah. Educated in the Russian school system, he had studied medicine at the University of Moscow. Afterward, during the Crimean War, he had volunteered as an army doctor and had won high esteem for his

performance battling a cholera epidemic. During the benign reform era of Alexander II, Pinsker shared in the prevailing optimism of the 1860s. Indeed, as a loyal Jew and a frequent contributor to *Rassviet*, he publicized his faith in both Russian toleration and Jewish enlightenment. His vision of the Jewish future at this stage was, like Smolenskin's, one of cultural self-expression within a pluralistic Russia. In 1871, however, an anti-Jewish outbreak erupted briefly in Odessa. Deeply unsettled by the episode, Pinsker withdrew from all Jewish public activities for the next seven years and brooded upon the evident failure of his cherished ideal of enlightenment. His disillusionment was reinforced by the political events of 1881 and their aftermath. It was then, at the age of sixty, that Pinsker departed Russia to visit leaders in central and western Europe and to offer them his plan for Jewish survival. "I put all my soul into the argument," he wrote Lev Levanda afterward. "I made use of all the facts, trying to play upon all the strings of the human heart." Apparently Pinsker was less than successful. Nevertheless, he remained for several months in Berlin, where he organized his views in writing, and published them (in German) in September 1882. His lengthy essay bore the straightforward title *Selbstemanzipation* (Auto-emancipation).

In this work Pinsker outlined his central thesis: normal dealings between peoples were founded on mutual respect, not love; and it was unlikely the Jews ever could be accorded such respect, for they lacked its prerequisite of national equality. "The Jewish people has no fatherland of its own," Pinsker observed, "no center of gravity, no government of its own, no official representation." Rather, the Jews were perceived as a kind of "phantom people," bearing many of the characteristics of nationhood without the final indispensable ingredient of a land of their own. "There is something unnatural about a people without a territory, just as there is about a man without a shadow." Worse yet, as a phantom people, the Jews inspired fear among the non-Jewish majority; and whatever people feared, they hated. If, then, "the prejudice of mankind against us rests upon anthropological and social principles, innate and ineradicable," it was futile to seek the disappearance of these "natural laws" through enlightenment, assimilation, dispersion, or Jewish ultrapatriotism. The solution to the Jewish condition, Pinsker insisted, lay not in reliance upon the will-o'-the-wisp of emancipation, but in a concerted attempt by the Jews to utilize their waning moment of opportunity to restore a national home of their own. Only on such a basis could the Jews achieve the recognizable physiognomy of other nations. "Let 'now or never' be our watchword!" he exclaimed. "Woe to our descendants … if we let this moment pass by!" It was illustrative of Pinsker's "scientific objectivity," however, that he attached no especial sentimental importance to Palestine. "The piece of land might form a small territory in North America, or a sovereign Pashalik in Asiatic Turkey…." What counted most was recognized nationhood on a land, any land.

Until Pinsker, the vulnerability of the Jews as a homeless people had never been demonstrated quite so systematically. For the first time Jew-hatred was analyzed as a deeply complex social phenomenon, bearing little relationship to education or progress in conventional terms. Almost immediately, therefore, *Selbstemanzipation* evoked a responsive chord among its readers. Gordon and Lilienblum praised it effusively, as did

other Haskalah spokesmen. Very quickly, Pinsker became one of the most admired men in Russian Jewry. Indeed, for a while he was the very heart of the gestating Zionist movement. Like Herzl later, Pinsker would have preferred that the headquarters of the movement be established in the West. He had little faith in Russian Jewry, impoverished and straitjacketed as it was by tsarist restrictions; as he saw it, only Western Jews, especially German Jews, commanded the political influence and financial means to secure a national territorial base. And yet, over the next year and a half, in 1882–83, it was specifically among the Western Jewish "aristocrats" that Pinsker failed to elicit a meaningful response. As a result, he was obliged increasingly to turn his attention to his Zionist following in eastern Europe. "It is our most wholesome, most reliable element," he admitted. In 1884, encouraged by Dr. Max Mandelstamm of Kiev and Professor Hermann Schapira of Heidelberg, Pinsker finally set about organizing his amorphous collection of followers into a national movement.

THE CHOVEVEI ZION

By the late 1870s, several years before the outbreak of Alexander Ill's pogroms, Zionist study circles and clubs had begun to function in hundreds of the Pale's cities and towns. Some called themselves "parties" or "assemblies." A number adopted such titles as Ezra or Maccabi. But all were generally known as Chovevei Zion—Lovers of Zion. Their common ingredient was acceptance of the credo "that there is no salvation for the People of Israel unless they establish a government of their own in the Land of Israel." In the classic pattern of other European nationalist movements, a few of these early groups simply offered courses in the Hebrew language and history. Others established choirs or gymnastic and self-defense organizations. The meetings were conducted secretly, for Zionism, like other varieties of minority nationalism, was quite illegal in the tsarist empire. More inhibiting yet, there was no central direction to the Chovevei Zion cause.

It was under these circumstances that Pinsker, by prestige and general recognition the natural leader of the burgeoning Zionist movement, took the initiative in 1884 of summoning a national conference of the various Chovevei Zion societies. To circumvent the Russian authorities, the meeting was convened in Kattowitz, a German Silesian city. Thirty-four delegates attended the initial gathering, and reached a consensus on the financing of Jewish settlement in Palestine as their first priority. Only in the Land of Israel, it was agreed, could the People of Israel be transformed into a viable society and nation. The organization's central office was established in Odessa. As president there of the Chovevei Zion, Pinsker was charged with directing a growing stream of Jewish emigrants to Palestine. There was a certain irony in this task, for Pinsker himself opposed the piecemeal approach to settlement. He would have favored strengthening the Zionist ranks in Europe, afterward summoning an international Jewish Congress to place the Jewish question before the governments of the world. Failing to win conference support of his views, however, Pinsker was obliged to devote his energies thereafter to a colonization effort in Palestine that he regarded at best as of minimal

value.

As it turned out, Pinsker, like Herzl after him, underrated the importance of this gradualist effort. It was uniquely as a "Society for the Support of Jewish Agriculturists and Artisans in Palestine and Syria," rather than as a nationalist organization, that the Chovevei Zion in 1890 won a certain unofficial toleration from the St. Petersburg government (Chapter II). Afterward, too, Pinsker's propaganda efforts throughout Europe on behalf of migration to the Holy Land were remarkably successful. Indeed, before his death in 1891, he managed to provide the Chovevei Zion with a coherent ideology and an organizational framework, to strengthen the foundations of Palestine colonization, and to achieve a quasi-legalization for the movement in Russia.

In the 1890s the Chovevei Zion grew rapidly in many parts of Europe and overseas. It took strong root in Rumania, where the Jewish position was hardly less marginal than in Russia. In the Habsburg Empire the movement was led primarily by east European Jews living in Vienna. One of these was Smolenskin, and another, later, was Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, who first coined the term "Zionism." In Berlin, too, Chovevei Zion groups were founded by Russian Jewish students, prominent among them Leo Motzkin, Chaim Weizmann, and Shmaryahu Levin. Similar groups later were organized among German Jewish students, including the future leaders of German Zionism—Victor Jacobson, Willi Bambus, and Arthur Hantke. In England a Chovevei Zion organization was founded under the leadership of eminent Sephardic Jews, Colonel Albert Goldsmid and Eli d'Avigdor (its branches were called "tents"). Even in the United States, a philo-Zionist group was sponsored in the early 1880s by Russian Jewish immigrants and several distinguished rabbis, Gustav Gottheil, Benjamin Szold, and Marcus Jastrow. Thus it was, by the time Herzl appeared on the scene, that he encountered in Europe and America the nucleus of a thoroughly respectable Zionist movement. Its various societies provided him with the largest number of his followers, including 90 percent of the delegates attending the First Zionist Congress in 1897.

To be sure, Zionism still remained an avant-garde within the Jewish world in the late nineteenth century. Yet it was by no means an insignificant force. As has been seen, its origins traced back in part to Jewish liturgy and tradition, where the messianic image of Zion remained as tactile as the geography of the Diaspora itself. In fact, Zionism strengthened its bonds with the Orthodox religionists by adopting as its own symbols a number of traditional Jewish holidays, those memorializing heroic moments in Jewish history or celebrating Palestinian harvests or sowing seasons. Accordingly, while flight from persecution offered the key to Jewish survival after 1881, the Jewish religious leadership could regard emigration to a Jewish ancestral land more benevolently than departure to the *terra incognita* of emancipated secular countries in the West. It was from European nationalism, meanwhile, that the Zionists derived example and inspiration, even as they adopted from the Haskalah two particularly vital features of their movement: the Hebrew language, with its biblical evocations; and the conviction that the Jewish problem must be solved logically and dynamically, rather than by a fatalistic immersion in traditional Orthodoxy. But for this tough-minded pragmatism, it is questionable whether members of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia would have been as

capable of accepting Pinsker's unsparing analysis of the Jewish condition. Their willingness to do so enabled Zionism to exploit the general east European Jewish mood of migration, and to infuse it with an ideological élan that survived even the crudest realities of pioneering settlement in the Land of Israel itself.