

The Jews in America

The Characteristics and Occupations of the Eastern Jews Who Form Eighty Per Cent. of the Jewish Population of the United States

III. THE "MENACE" OF THE POLISH JEW

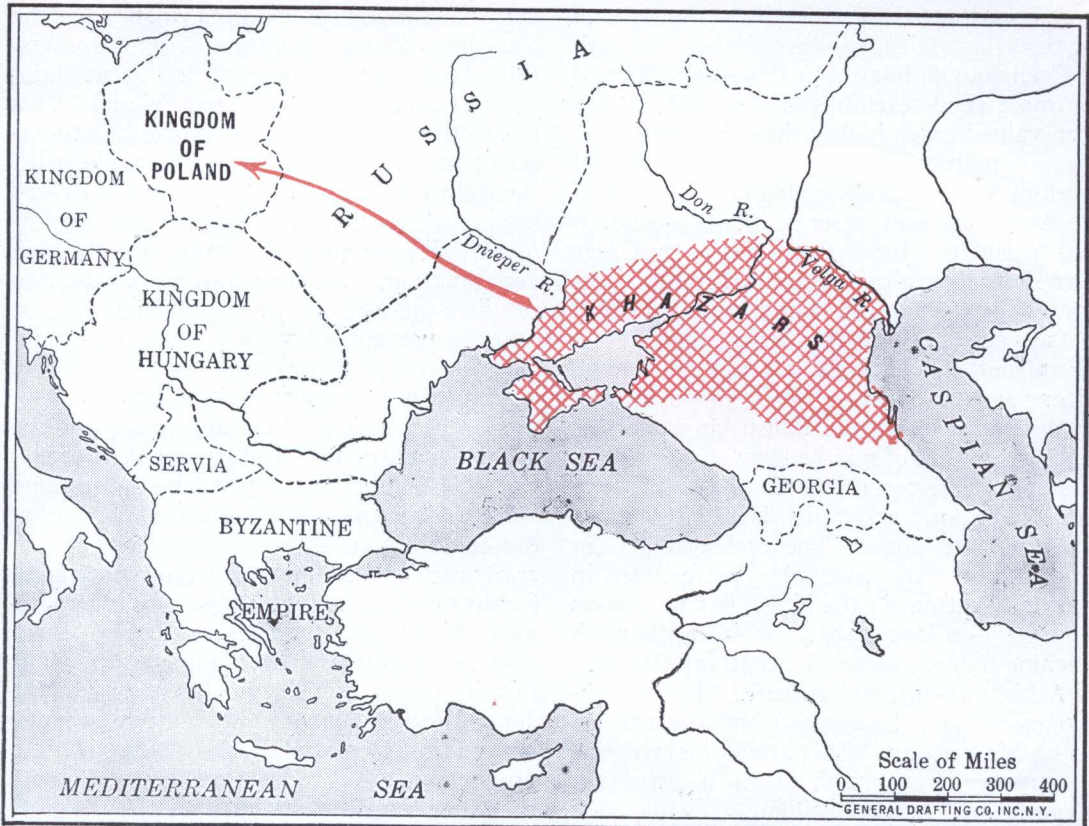
BY BURTON J. HENDRICK

THE most important facts brought out in the preceding articles are that the Jews have by no means made the great economic and financial progress in this country which is commonly attributed to them, and that the largest measure of success they have achieved is the work of the minority elements in the Jewish population—the Spanish, or Sephardic Jews, who have been a part of the American population for nearly three hundred years and the German Jews, who came in considerable numbers from 1820 to 1880. Of the 3,000,000 or more Jews in the United States these more efficient elements comprise perhaps 500,000. What part have the remaining 2,500,000 or more played in the economic development of this country? To what extent have they shown themselves especially adapted to the conditions on this side of the Atlantic? In other words, to what extent have they demonstrated that they are fitted for that assimilation in the economic, political, and social life of America which is the one supreme test of citizenship?

From the standpoint both of the citizen and business man, no more abrupt change could be imagined than that which the Eastern Jew made when he transplanted himself from the old cities of Poland to the Atlantic seaboard of the United States. This Jew had never been a citizen, and had never developed the slightest sense of citizenship, as that word is understood. For thousands of years he had merely been the member of a tribe, governed by tribal laws and tribal chiefs. With the Jews from western Europe who had preceded him to America, in much smaller numbers, the Polish or Eastern Jew had little in common except a common religion. I have made this point before, but it cannot be made too frequently or too emphatically, for it is the

fundamental fact in the existing Jewish problem. The Armenian and the Englishman are both Christians; in fact the Armenian was a Christian when the Englishman was a pagan; but no one would be justified in regarding an Armenian and an Englishman as members of the same race and upholders of the same ideals of society. Perhaps the difference between an Eastern and a Western Jew is not so great as that between an Armenian and an Englishman, but still this disparity does represent a wide gulf. And the difference—and this is the important point—is really one of race. It is necessary only to look at a typical Polish Jew, with his blond hair, his blue or green eyes, and his stubby nose, to see that physically he is quite a different person from the Spanish or the German Jew.

These physical traits portray the great infusion of Slavic and Tartar or Mongol blood that flows in his veins; and this infusion is a matter of history. In the Middle Ages a famous kingdom of the Khazars extended its rule in Russia for a considerable area north of the Black Sea. The authorities are not agreed as to precisely what racial stock these people belonged or whence they came. The Jewish Encyclopædia describes them as of Turkish origin; other writers classify them somewhat indefinitely as "Turanians"; while others refer to them as Tartars or Mongols. On one point all commentators are agreed; historically and ethnologically they did not have the slightest connection with Israel. Yet the Khazars, according to so high an authority as Dr. Maurice Fishberg, "made up the nucleus of the future Jewry of eastern Europe." For the Khazars are unique in this regard: they are the only non-Jewish people who are known to have embraced the Jewish religion. Judaism, in the main, has not been a proselyting faith; it has always been cherished as the



WHERE THE MASS OF THE EASTERN JEWS ORIGINATED

In the Eighth Century the Khazars, who then lived to the north and east of the Black Sea, accepted the Jewish religion. This people, ethnically, had nothing in common with the Jews, but later, when their kingdom in southern Russia broke up, they migrated in great numbers to Poland and, intermarrying with the Jews from Germany, became the Polish Jews of to-day

exclusive possession of the children of Abraham; there are scattered groups of non-Jewish Jews, it is true—there are even a few Chinese Jews; but the Khazars, in a manner the historic details of which are not known, and concerning which many myths have gathered, adopted Judaism as their religion in the Eighth Century. For several succeeding centuries the Khazar Kingdom was a flourishing one; the vicissitudes of history, however, destroyed the Khazar nation and dispersed its people; great hordes of them drifted westward into Poland; the fact that their religion was Jewish made it inevitable that they should intermarry with the Jews who were already established there in large numbers, and who had probably come from Germany. Thus the blood of this Turkish or Mongol people flows extensively in the veins of the Eastern Jew to-day. A further large Slavic mixture makes the Eastern Jew

racially alien to Jews from other parts of Europe. Thus the masses that comprise one fourth the present population of New York City trace their beginnings, in considerable degree, to certain tribes that roamed the steppes of Russia in the Middle Ages and happened to accept the religion of Judah as their own.

As candidates for assimilation these Jews, as they land at Ellis Island, are about as promising as a similarly inflowing stream of Hindus or Syrian Druses. This may seem an extreme statement, but a glance at the Jews of eastern Europe, especially Poland, makes it clear that it is not. For these Eastern Jews have never been Europeanized. For ages they have lived, in Poland, in Russia, in Galicia, in Hungary, in Rumania, not as a nation or part of a nation, but essentially as a tribe. With them the Jewish religion has been the all-important consideration, far

more important than nationality; the right to practise their faith, to observe their Sabbath and religious holidays, to limit their diet to the most rigid teachings of the Talmud, has been valued much higher than the mere right to enjoy political equality. A Jew of the old breed in America takes pride in calling himself an American and resents any imputation that he is not; a Jew in Germany, as the Great War showed, is almost fanatical in his assertion of his Germanism; but a Jew in Poland just as vehemently resents being called a Pole. "I am not a Pole; I am a Jew," he retorts. After a sojourn of 800 or 1,000 years in Poland he does not speak the Polish language; his dialect is a form of middle low German which was spoken in certain parts of Germany in the Middle Ages and which is still spoken in a few remote areas. The orthodox Jew in Poland not only lives, by preference, in crowded ghettos in the cities, but he dresses in a way—a long gabardine of black cloth reaching to his ankles and a skull cap trimmed with fur—which emphasizes his Jewish particularism. His long beard and the ringlets about his ears are also part of his religion. He treats his womankind in a way that suggests his Asiatic origin. "Thank God I am not a dog, a woman, or a Christian," is the prayer of thanksgiving with which he begins his day. Just as Japanese women blacken their teeth and Chinese women bind their feet, so the orthodox Polish Jewesses, after marriage, shave their heads. These are merely the outward indications of an Orientalism that controls all phases of Jewish life. For centuries the orthodox Jews existed in Poland under an order that was tribal and patriarchal—never national. They were not subject to the laws and the civil and criminal administration of the country but they were ruled, in all departments of life, by their own rabbis, who administered the law as it is laid down in the Old Testament and the Talmud. They even counted time, not according to the Christian, but according to the Jewish Calendar. The British Commission sent to investigate the condition of the Jews in Poland were astonished to find, in interrogating witnesses, that few knew the day of the week, the month, or the year; the reason is that they all reckoned time according to the orthodox Jewish calendar. That this exclusiveness is not necessarily enforced upon an unwilling people is evident from the

fact that the Jews of Poland demanded of the Versailles Peace Conference—and successfully—the right to be regarded as a "minority" people in a resurrected Poland. This means that the Jews intend to maintain themselves in Poland as a separate people, with the right to a certain number of seats in every municipal council and the national parliament, with important powers of legislation and taxation, with their own law courts, the privilege of using their own language, and other important advantages which they are to enjoy not as Poles but as Jews.

Thus the organization of the Eastern Jews in Europe, in its political and social aspects, is primitive, tribal, Oriental; and their economic status represented just about the same stage of progress. Though the population did contain a considerable number of handicraftsmen, especially in the tailoring trades, for the most part the Polish Jews were middlemen—hucksters, hawkers, peddlers, small tradesmen, petty bankers, and the like. The Polish masses were agriculturists, and the Jews, who were for the most part city dwellers, acted as middlemen in the distribution of their products. They would travel into the surrounding country, chaffer with the peasants for their vegetables, and sell them in the city. Poland of course was not an industrial state; factories were few; there was thus no opportunity, had the Jew really had the inclination, for training in industrial life. They were the small shopkeepers in the town; they hawked their wares up and down the streets; such occupations, however, could not furnish support for the entire Jewish population, the result being that the great masses lived under conditions of appalling poverty and social degradation. That they were uncleanly in their habits was perhaps the inevitable consequence of the over-crowded conditions under which they existed, for their poverty was so great that a great population struggled from hand to mouth, never knowing whence their daily bread was to come.

Such was the exotic mass that the steamships began dumping on the Atlantic seaboard forty years ago, and which has been attempting since to adjust itself to the economic conditions of the United States. That their preparation for this experience had been most meagre has already been made plain. The immigrating races which had preceded the Eastern Jew had found abundant opportunities in a

land whose foremost note was the pioneering spirit. Take the original settlers, for example—those colonists from the British Isles who, at the time of the Revolution, formed 80 per cent. of its population, and whose descendants form not far from 60 per cent. of its population to-day. We first see these hardy frontiersmen in the Seventeenth Century making accessible to civilization the Atlantic seaboard; in the early Nineteenth Century they poured across the Alleghany Mountains into the Ohio Valley, here also building up a great agricultural country and founding cities and great industries; after the Civil War the same elements crossed the Mississippi and the Missouri, creating flourishing commonwealths as far as the Pacific Coast. This was a real immigration—this the real business of a new people in a new land. In the wake of this original population came the other great races of northwestern Europe. The Germans did their part, and it was a splendid one, in opening the farm lands of the Mississippi Valley—this also was nation building in the true sense; the Irish also, though rather too much inclined to form colonies in cities, distributed themselves generally and became a great contributing element in American industry and agriculture; the Scandinavians, almost exclusively farmers, were the most important forces in making the Northwest one of the most stately agricultural regions in the world. The Slavs occupied themselves largely in the mines, the packing houses, the industrial centres, and therefore, inferior though they were in the graces of civilization, they became creators of wealth on a huge scale.

But the Eastern Jews presented an entirely different aspect. A preliminary view, as they left the immigration station, prepared to mingle with the other races toiling to upbuild the republic, was rather disconcerting. Their half starved appearance, their furtive movements, their hollow chests, their undeveloped bodies were the outward physical signs of the centuries of city dwelling that had been their portion. However, these traits were superficial: a short course in the use of the bathtub and the tooth brush might easily have remedied these defects of early training; unfortunately there were more deeply lying phenomena which presented obstacles to Americanization in any real sense—incorporation, that is, into all phases of American

life. Probably the greatest of these were the religion and the mentality of the Eastern Jew. The orthodox faith itself offered an almost complete impediment to his industrialization. The German, the Irishman, and the Italian readily found employment in factories and on public works. The Jew could not do so and remain steadfast to his orthodoxy. His Sabbath is Saturday; but American industry recognizes Sunday as the day of rest; municipalities or railroads could not employ Jews as laborers, as they did the Irish, the Italians and other races, because the orthodox Hebrew would have felt compelled to drop his implements on the Seventh day. Again, the Jew is perhaps the most prayerful person in the world; he accompanies practically every act with a fixed ritual; almost every hour of the day has its religious observances. He can therefore engage in no occupation that does not give the opportunity for these almost continuous communings with the Almighty; even though he had had an inclination for manual labor of the usual kind, he could not have engaged in it and remained an orthodox Jew.

These facts set him as completely apart from the other immigrating peoples as did his dietary laws. So long as they controlled his daily routine he could never become a working unit in the American industrial machine. Inevitably, therefore, these masses began to seek their livelihood in the ways to which they had been accustomed for centuries in their Polish homeland. City dwellers for unnumbered centuries in Europe, they clung tenaciously to the great cities of the Atlantic seaboard. Three thousand miles of open continent beckoned to them—fertile lands in which, like Abraham and Jacob of old, they could have practised sheep herding and all the arts of husbandry; but apparently only the already teeming cities had any attractions. For ages in Poland they had been slum dwellers, living in horrible, ill-smelling ghettos; similarly they became slum dwellers in New York, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and other Atlantic cities. This herding in the great centres of population was something unprecedented. The Irish and the Germans, and later the Italians did, indeed, form urban colonies to a certain extent—the large city population of “native Americans” was a development of the same kind; but no other immigrating race had become exclusively

city dwellers, as did these Eastern Jews. But there was one manifestation more astonishing still. Not only did they flock almost as one man to the city slums; by far the greater proportion of them gravitated to one city. At present the Jewish population of the United States is something more than 3,000,000; of these at least one half live in New York City. According to the Jewish Communal Register, all meat which is slaughtered near New York, and for its consumption, is killed by Shoetim—official Jewish slaughterers commissioned by rabbis; gentiles are therefore constantly eating Kosher meat with a sweet unconsciousness of its Levitical cleanliness. On Jewish holidays at least 40 per cent. of the New York school children are absent; certain schools are totally deserted; and the city departments, in which Eastern Jews are extensively employed, are all but depopulated. The fact that half the

Jews in the United States are living in New York City—where one man in every four is a Jew—is an arresting one; it is the most astounding development of Jewish immigration. Whereas the Jewish population of New York amounts to nearly 30 per cent. of the whole, the Jewish population of Philadelphia is only 10 per cent. of the whole; of Chicago 10 per cent.; of Cleveland 12 per cent.; of Detroit 10 per cent.; of St. Louis and Baltimore 8 per cent. Why do the Eastern Jews flock in such mighty numbers exclusively to New York? Why do other great centres of urban America apparently have less attraction for them? It is the most portentous fact presented by the whole phenomenon of immigration. Their co-religionists, the Spanish and German Jews, showed no such persistence for the

greatest American city; at the time of the Civil War, these Jews were found in every city, every village, every plantation, every mining camp; there never was a time when at least half of them fixed their habitations in one urban community.

Just as in Poland these people had been city dwellers so here likewise they attempted



WILLIAM FOX

Formerly a sponger in a garment factory and now a moving picture producer

to reproduce the economic life to which they had been accustomed for centuries. The push cart, which had hitherto not been a familiar sight in New York, now began to clog certain public thoroughfares. Buying and selling on a small scale continued to be the occupation in New York, as in Warsaw and Lodz, of an infinitely greater number than could possibly earn a living this way. Jewish street hawkers filled the crowded thoroughfares, and Jewish retail shops, in infinite number, sprang up in all parts of the city. Jewish signs, printed in Hebrew characters, began

to appear, not only in the crowded East side, but in other parts of New York. Jewish newspapers, likewise printed in Hebrew characters, were ultimately found on most New York news-stands. Advertisements, printed in the strange characters of the Talmud, found their way into the subway stations and cars. All this represented merely an attempt to reproduce in New York City the life which the Jews had led in eastern Europe.

Of this tendency a few concrete illustrations will suffice: For centuries the Polish Jews had been active in the liquor trade, and now again in this country their energies found an outlet in the same direction. Nothing better shows how the Jewish business instinct differs from that of the Anglo-Saxon. The

Eastern Jew is the most adroit shoe-string capitalist in the world. He can start business on almost anything; a few dollars, the labor of himself and his family—with these as a foundation he frequently works himself up to at least a moderate prosperity. Above all, as already said, he is an individualist; he must work for himself, not for others; he must exclusively reap the reward of his own talents and industry; the complexities of modern business organization are entirely beyond his grasp. Necessarily also he is a middleman. The scope of his participation in a minor way in certain trades—the whisky and wine trade, the tobacco trade—vividly brings out these facts. Though he has always been active in the liquor business, he has had nothing to do with beer. Why? Because the brewing of beer was a great organized industry; it required a large capital, a big plant, an organization based on modern lines, with capital stock, directors, and executive staffs. Again the beer business gave practically no opportunity for the middleman. In the main the breweries were their own middlemen; they themselves owned the saloons and the saloon keeper was little more than an employé or manager. In this branch of the business there was therefore no chance for the Eastern Jew. But the Jews had been wine merchants in Europe since the time of Charlemagne; and they now proceeded to follow their trade in this country in a way that differed little from the methods in the day of that great monarch. They became omnipresent in the vineyards of California; of course they never raised the grapes themselves; they went from place to place, buying up the “must”—the unfermented juice freshly pressed from the grape; and this in turn they passed on to the vintners. The job was an intensely individual one and the Jewish cleverness at bargaining made this particular operation in the wine business a Jewish monopoly.

Meanwhile in the great cities, especially New York, the Jews were working into the whisky business according to methods of their own. This occupation, as they engaged in it, required practically no capital; moreover, the trade was extremely profitable. Only exceptionally did the Jew become a distiller; as usual, he was the middleman. In Russia and Poland he had circulated among the peasants, selling his vodka; and now again in

New York the retailing of whisky was done, on an extensive scale, as a peddling occupation. The Jewish whisky-merchant started business in the smallest possible way. He would buy a few quarts from the distiller and take it to his tenement home. Every evening, assisted by his family, he would submit it to the process known as “blending”; he would pour in a little prune juice or caramel to give the necessary color, put it up in bottles, and he was ready for the day’s business. The next morning he would load his little stock upon his pushcart, and make the round of his customers—at first usually personal friends or relatives. After scraping together a few hundred dollars in this painful fashion the Jewish whisky dealer would achieve his ultimate ambition; he would rent a “store” and make his bid—usually a successful one—for “family trade.” Almost never did he start a saloon, though, as his career progressed, he commonly did a large business supplying saloons, clubs, hotels, and restaurants. Hundreds of Eastern Jews, starting in this humble fashion, rose to be rich wholesalers of whisky; a few, though not many, became distillers. In the days of state prohibition—the ten or fifteen years preceding the Eighteenth Amendment—these Jews did an immensely profitable “mail order” business—the business, that is, of shipping this indispensable beverage from alcoholic into non-alcoholic states. At present they furnish more than their just proportion of “boot-leggers.”

In the tobacco business the Eastern Jews have manifested precisely the same traits. Again they merely duplicate the kind of merchandizing which for centuries they have followed in Europe. Just as, in a limited sense, they became manufacturers of alcohol—confining their operations almost exclusively to “blending”—so, in a similarly restricted sense, have they become manufacturers and dealers in tobacco. The lines of the business that demanded large capital, organization, and manufacturing on a big scale they ignored; but we find the Jews filtering into those branches where the opportunities for small beginnings and individual operations are more favorable. In the formation of the American Tobacco Company, for example, the Jews had practically no share. This great corporation is entirely “American.” But the middlemen with whom it has had

constantly to deal are, for the most part, Jews. Just as the Jewish wine merchants traversed the vineyards of California buying up the "must" so does the Jewish tobacco expert cover the tobacco farms of the South, of New England, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, buying from the farmers the leaf tobacco. This business is intensely speculative; prices fluctuate from day to day, almost from hour to hour; a thousand elements determine them; the Jew has demonstrated so much skill at the operation that he controls practically 90 per cent. of the crop. In tobacco manufacture he is also active, as capitalist and as workman — always within the limitations of mentality and temperament already set forth. As a manufacturer, for example, the Jew figures hardly at all in the production of cigarettes, plug tobacco, or snuff—the latter archaic substance being still made and used in this country to a greater extent than is popularly supposed. Why is the Jew scarcely identified with these important and highly profitable branches of the tobacco trade? For the same reason that, though extensively occupied with the whisky business, he concerned himself little with beer. The manufacture of cigarettes is a highly organized industry; it operates great factories in which machinery is largely used; it requires a great capital; but the Jew does not take to organization; he is not gifted at the operation of machinery; he eschews the industries that demand a great initial outlay; and so, in tobacco, as in all things, he is the shoe-string capitalist.

But there is one branch of the tobacco business that still gives an opportunity for

small-scale enterprise and in this department, as might be expected, the Eastern Jew is extremely active. This is the manufacture of cigars. Cigar making is still largely a manual industry; all that the industrious Jew needs are a few handfuls of leaf tobacco, a board, and a knife; with these he can make his beginnings as a manufacturer. The trick

of rolling cigars is acquired in a week or so. The first factory is a tenement room; the first employees are the wife and children of the aspiring industrialist. In a few days the combined efforts have heaped up a small stock of cigars; the head of the family then starts peddling these among his relatives or friends; in the old days the corner saloon became an early customer; not infrequently the corner grocery will exchange food for the product. In this way a few hundred dollars are assembled; a room is rented as a factory; Jewish immigrants are pressed into service; in a few years the one-time peddler has established a profitable business.

The American Tobacco Company manufactures a small proportion of its cigars, but probably not far from 75 per cent. of the product is in the hands of the Jews. The president of the American Cigar Company, the subsidiary corporation that handles cigars, is Mr. A. L. Sylvester—a Jew whose life story illustrates the manner in which the race rises by painful stages. At the age of eleven Mr. Sylvester began his career as a "sprig boy" in a Jewish cigar factory; it was his uninspiring job to sit on the floor and recover the leaves or "sprigs" discarded by the sorters. He then became a buyer of leaf tobacco, an occupation that took him to the farms of Connecticut



MARCUS LOEW

Formerly a dealer in furs and now owner of a large group of vaudeville and moving picture theatres

Pennsylvania, and Ohio; and his skill as a purchaser ultimately made him the head of the largest leaf-tobacco house in the country. So strong was his grip on this phase of the business that he was taken in by the American Tobacco Company on its formation. Another better known American Jew who started his career in a tobacco factory and who has since extended his energies to other lines is Mr. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, and still a member of the Cigar Makers' Union.

But capitalism on a small and individual scale could hardly support the great mobs of Eastern Jews that were landed at American ports between the years 1881 and 1914. An overruling Providence seemed to have created the great American business of ready-made clothing especially with Jewish immigration in mind. The manufacture and the sale of wearing apparel had for ages exercised a fascination for the Jew. Even in the Middle Ages tailoring was one of his favorite occupations; a common sight in the cities of Poland was the hundreds of Jews and Jewesses sitting in the ghetto plying their needles and their shears. Many of the Polish Jews who found their way to this country in the period under review had already spent a life-time working in the clothing trades. For reasons already set forth the Jews could not possibly labor in American industrial establishments, even had they had the inclination—which is not likely; but these racial peculiarities formed no impediment to their absorption by the sweatshop. The manufacture of clothing in those early days was largely a household or tenement industry. The several members of the family could work according to their own routine and largely make their own hours; there was thus plenty of opportunity for the prayers, ablutions, and other devotional observances which are indispensable in the daily life of the orthodox Hebrew. They could keep their own Sabbath and religious holidays and work on Sunday. But the concentration of the Eastern Jew upon the clothing trades has a much deeper explanation than this. Once more it is the familiar story of Jewish individualism and Jewish talent for small-scale capitalism. It is one of the few remaining American industries in which a man can start manufacturing on a small scale and gradually build up a large business, and it is one of the few that is not yet com-

bined in large corporations or trusts. The prevailing form of organization is still the individual or the partnership. Whereas most other great manufactured products are consolidated in great companies, there are still several thousand independent clothing factories in greater New York. The industry is still competitive in all its many branches; and the transition from workman to sub-contractor, from sub-contractor to contractor, and from contractor to wholesaler, is still a comparatively easy one. Every cap-maker, sponger, sewing-machine operator, cutter and baster of to-day is the proprietor of to-morrow; and success means his own financial profit—there are no stockholders among whom the earnings must be divided: the competition, which is feverish in its intensity, is competition between thousands of units; for there is no Standard Oil Company or United States Steel Corporation dominating the garment business.

The story of Jewish monopoly in the clothing trades is not a pleasant one; it is a story of exploitation, commonly of an exceedingly cruel kind, and exploitation of Jews by Jews. Readers of Kingsley's "Alton Locke," to say nothing of Hood's "Song of the Shirt," do not need to be told that the sweating system in the tailoring trades did not originate with the Russian Jews. But never has it reached such an intensity or been carried on on so extensive a scale as under this branch of Israel in the great cities of the United States, especially in New York. The manufacture of ready-made clothing began about 1850, long before the coming of the Eastern Jew; the earliest workers were the Irish; to them succeeded the Scandinavian, then the German, then the German Jew. But the occupation in those days was a vastly different one from the trade as it has developed in more recent times. These earlier workers were journeyman tailors; they had mastered all the details of their trade, at which they had spent the usual period of apprenticeship. But the masses of Jews who entered the trades after 1881 were not tailors in any real sense. The work was now minutely subdivided and two or three weeks' instruction was usually sufficient to teach a newly arrived immigrant one of the many operations necessary to the completion of a garment. It was the introduction of this division of labor—the substitution of the unskilled worker

for the old-fashioned tailor—that enabled the Russian Jew to obtain the absolute dominance of the business in all its departments. The secret of their prosperity was the introduction of the contract system. Formerly the manufacturers had really made the product in all its details; now the so-called manufacturers became merely capitalists who farmed out the production of their stock to a multitude of contractors. One would do the cutting, one make the coat, another the vest, another the “pants” and so on. The manufacturer would leave these separate garments, or fraction of garments, with particular contractors and collect them at a specified date. He put together his suits and coats, and the endless articles that constitute male and female wearing apparel, much as Mr. Ford manufactures his automobiles; his business was primarily to “assemble” the scattered fragments into an ordered whole. This organization rendered it possible to start with practically no capital and to advance rapidly to proprietorship. The workman ambitious of becoming a “contractor”—and, after laboring for a year or two, thousands began business for themselves—could usually acquire the needed machinery on credit, paying for it by instalments out of the proceeds of his contracts.

He then recruited his force from the recently arrived immigrant ship; he would corral certain of his relatives or friends; he would stop pushcart peddlers in the streets, portraying the supreme opportunities of a career with a sewing machine or a pressing iron. Ten or a dozen operatives, scraped together in this fashion, would congregate in his tenement house; the contractor de-

pendent entirely for funds upon the manufacturer for whom he worked; the latter would call each Monday, receive the garments and pay cash, and with this the contractor would pay his wages; in case of a sudden shortage of money, the neighborhood pawnbroker usually acted as his banker. The workroom, in these early days of the industry, before the

state laws forced the sweatshops out of the tenements, was a pretty distressing place. The “task” system added to its discomforts. This was the plan of setting a fixed amount of work as the day’s “task,” and of rigidly holding the operatives to their “quota.” At the head of the “team,” as the group of workers was known, sat the contractor himself and he usually acted as the pace-maker. He did perhaps the “machine work”; finishing his operation, he would pass the garment to a neighbor, who did the needle work; the latter in turn would pass it to a “baster”;

the baster would pass it to a “finisher”; the next in line would be the buttonhole-maker; then came the “feller,” then the “presser.” Five or six garments a day, produced under this hectic system, at first constituted the “task”; as competition increased, the number grew to ten, fifteen, or twenty. Ten or a dozen bent and wretched figures, huddled in a small unventilated room, the atmosphere fetid with the odors of cooking and heated with the fire of the pressing irons, every man feverishly struggling to finish one garment before another was passed down—hardly any thing more horrible than such a physical and nervous strain could be imagined. These unfortunates would work ten, twelve, sixteen, sometimes eighteen hours a day; the ambition that made the work endurable was the



ADOLPH ZUKOR

Formerly a fur dealer and now head of one of the largest moving picture concerns

expectation of early graduation from the bench into the ranks of contractors. Conditions, of course, have vastly improved since those early days; the work is now done for the most part in factories; but the essentials of the organization, the contract system, are still maintained.

When the Eastern Jews first started in, the German Jews controlled this industry; the latter, however, could not survive this new kind of competition; their co-religionists from the east of Europe rapidly drove them out of business—many of them into bankruptcy. The case of Meyer Jonasson, a German Jew who, before the Eastern Jews became powerful, was the greatest manufacturer of women's cloaks, fairly pictures the displacement that now took place. The intense competition that came from his own co-religionists rapidly destroyed Mr. Jonasson's great business and drove to him insolvency and to suicide. All personal experiences were not so tragic as this one; yet what took place in the case of Meyer Jonasson is the story of the whole trade—the German Jews were driven out by their Russian brethren. Thus the economic history of the Eastern Jew in this country is largely a history of the clothing trades. In this the masses have found employment and thousands of individuals have found fortune. In other ways it has served as a basis of prosperity for it has furnished the Jewish community with the liquid capital that has made possible its operations in other lines. Just as the so-called Standard Oil group has used the money made in oil for the purchase of railroads, steel mills, and other enterprises, so have the Eastern Jews used the cash heaped up in the cloak and suit trade for operations in other lines. Their activities in the moving picture business—for it is a business of the crassest sort—especially illustrates this tendency. That the Russian Jews dominate the "movies" just as overwhelmingly as they dominate the clothing trades is the fact, and the still more interesting fact is that there is the closest connection between the two occupations. The entertainment of the American masses is provided almost exclusively by men who a few years ago were occupied in clothing them. William Fox was a sponger in a garment factory; Marcus Loew was a dealer in furs; Adolph Zukor was also a fur merchant; and Carl Laemmle started his

career in the clothing business. Writers who are called to Hollywood are somewhat discouraged to find that the men with whom they must discuss their scenarios and whose critical judgment they must appease are almost exclusively ex-buttonhole-makers, basters, and pressers, whose knowledge of the English language is very limited and whose artistic taste has not progressed greatly beyond the intellectual standards of Laura Jean Libbey. There is much discussion today as to what is the matter with moving pictures; but what is the matter is very apparent; the trouble lies in the fact that they are merely one department of the cloak and suit industry.

The other activity in which the Russian Jew has extensively specialized is real estate. Here is a kind of business that appeals especially to his racial pride. As a recent European he places a social stress on the ownership of land to which the American gives little consideration; he comes from a part of the world where the possession of the soil has immemorially been the privilege of the aristocracy. More than this, the laws of Russia have always excluded Jews from owning land; the right of doing so in the United States therefore is perhaps the greatest boon conferred by their new citizenship. Real estate also calls into play those traits which have already been described as the most outstanding ones of the Eastern Jew: his individualism, his passion for the personal possession of the thing that he can call his own, his genius for operating on a very small capital, his penchant for bargaining, for buying and selling, for speculation. He worms his way into the ownership of the soil in precisely the same way that he starts in the clothing business, in cigar making, in the liquor trade. He scrapes together a few hundred dollars at his sewing machine or pressing board; with this he purchases an equity in a tenement house, giving first, second, third, fourth, and fifth mortgages for the remainder. He then moves his family into the least desirable apartment; he himself becomes the janitor; his wife does not disdain the job of scrubwoman; his sons not infrequently do service as painters, paper hangers, and general repairmen. In this way the expenses are reduced to a minimum; his "overhead" is very light; everything is kept within the family, which labors eighteen

hours a day with one consuming determination—to get together money enough to pay off the series of mortgages as they fall due. The family can subsist on the modicum of food and can wear the cheapest clothes; it spends no money on amusement or general frivolity; it has but one purpose in view—to meet those payments! No “agent” or “manager” is employed; every week the proprietor visits his tenants, collecting his rent, almost all of which promptly goes into the bank. He has thus purchased a \$30,000 or \$40,000 tenement with a “shoe string” of a few hundred dollars; yet he invariably collects enough from his tenants to make his payments. One house paid for, he buys another and repeats the operation; he begins speculating, buying one day and selling another, perhaps skimming a profit of a few hundreds; he is also an insatiable gambler in vacant property.

So skilful are these newly arrived Jews in this game that practically all their racial competitors long since retired from the field. In New York City the greater part of the soil, at least in the tenement sections, is now held by Russian Jews. A list of the owners of New York reads like an immigrant manifest at Ellis Island; if you glance over the real estate transfers in the morning paper, it is seldom that any except a Jewish name strikes your eye. Such well established property-owning families even as the Astors are retiring from this field; for years they have been selling their lower grade land to Russian Jews. In the better apartment sections the Jews are also extensive owners; yet that same disparity which the Jews show in other directions, commercial, scientific, and artistic, appears

also in this. Able as they are in many ways they seldom reach the top. The greatest landowners of New York are still Christians. The Jews own little property on Broadway, Wall Street, Fifth Avenue, and other especially high-grade areas. The great skyline that greets the incoming passenger represents Gentile not Jewish enterprise. The Jews do

not own the Woolworth Building, the Metropolitan Tower, the City Investing Building, the Equitable Building or hundreds of others that could be mentioned. New York, in its finest architectural aspects, is still the preserve of the native stock and every day becomes more so.

Of course the one business that most people have in mind when they think of Jewish activities is the theatre. The word “business” is used with complete accuracy. Several years ago Mr. Marc Klaw, in a public apology for the “theatrical trust” of which he was so important a part, boldly took the stand that the theatre was not



CARL LAEMMLE

Who started his career in the clothing business and then transferred his activities to the moving picture field

art—it was purely a commercial enterprise. The Jews, discussing this phase of their activities, commonly use the expression “the amusement business.” The words tell the whole story. Yet, in estimating their influence upon the stage, it is necessary to be discriminating. The actors and actresses, for the larger part, are Gentiles; the same is true of the playwrights, and, to a greater extent than is commonly supposed, of the “producers”—the managers who put on the plays. The artistic side of the stage, with certain important exceptions, is thus in the hands of Christians. That the American stage, so far as the production of the work of American writers is concerned, has greatly improved in the last quarter of a century; that

the technique of play production—lighting, scenic effects, and the like—has similarly improved, must be apparent to all except those who are altogether hopelessly hidebound worshippers of the past. That it has acquired a startling freedom in the treatment of certain aspects of life is also apparent. There is a tendency to attribute this salaciousness to Jewish management; yet there is a danger of becoming overhasty in this judgment. The English stage, to say nothing of the French, shows the same tendencies, and the Jews do not dominate these theatres to the extent that they do the American. Another disconcerting fact is that the authors of these plays are too frequently Gentiles. Recently Mr. Avery Hopwood has permitted to be published the fact that he has made nearly \$1,500,000 in the last ten years as a playwright. Unfortunately many of the most profitable of his plays are of salacious character.

Making all necessary qualifications, however, the fact remains that the Jewish influence on the stage, as a whole, has been deplorable. Probably most people would not regard David Belasco and the Frohmans as disintegrating influences; but the firm of Klaw and Erlanger, and the Shuberts can hardly be regarded as elevating forces in the American theatre. The Shuberts are Hungarian Jews; they belong to that eastern branch of the race which has shown less sympathy with American ideals than have their German and Spanish predecessors. The chief sin that can be laid at the feet of these men is that they have reduced the theatre to a purely commercial and speculative enterprise. Only to a limited extent are they theatrical men at all; that is, they produce few plays; they do not train actors; primarily they are nothing but dealers in theatrical real estate. By purchase, lease, or other arrangement they have succeeded in gaining control over most of the theatres in the United States. Their business is that of renting these buildings to the actual producers of plays. This power makes them practically the dictators of the theatrical profession; they can say what plays are to be produced, where they are to be produced, and when. The result is the elimination of the theatrical manager, as he was known in the old days. The managers who then gave distinction to the American stage were men—occasionally women—who trained their own companies, controlled their

own theatres, arranged their own "bookings." Every important American city had its own stock company, companies that not only furnished wholesome entertainment but did great service as schools of actors and actresses. In those days such actors as Edwin Booth and Mary Anderson could start on tour with no company of their own, using the stock companies in the cities they "played" as "support." But the Jewish theatrical syndicate, by gaining control of the theatre buildings, reduced theatre managers to the position of caretakers and janitors; they had nothing to say as to the companies they would engage; all this was arranged for them by a "booking office" in New York. The most unfortunate effect was this disappearance of these old schools of acting. Actors like Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, Richard Mansfield, and Lawrence Barret, and actresses like Mary Anderson and Ada Rehan and Helena Modjeska have vanished, leaving no successors.

There are many other aspects of Russian Jewish immigration. The second generation is largely employed in the public service—as clerks and stenographers in the city departments, as lawyers, doctors, dentists, as school teachers, policemen, and firemen. Yet this survey of their activities, limited as it is, proves one thing. Their "assimilation" has taken place only to a very moderate extent. They have penetrated only slightly into the multitudinous businesses and industries that make up that great complex known as American life. Any race fifty per cent. of whose people live in one city, and the remaining fifty per cent. in other large American cities, can hardly be regarded as having become flesh of the flesh of the American body. Perhaps, in the course of a century or so, a wider distribution and a wider range of energies may be accomplished, but the task of incorporating these 3,000,000 and more already here will monopolize the Nation's digestive powers for a long time to come. Until that result has been attained it would be folly to add still more to our responsibilities of this kind. The Nation has all the town dwellers that are good for it; one of the great tasks of the present is to get people from the city into the country. The three-per-cent. restriction on immigration therefore represents statesmanlike wisdom of the highest kind, and all attempts to break this down should be vigorously resisted.