

A COMMENT ON ANTI-SEMITISM - (1938)

In the course of examining the remarks in the press and in literature provoked by the recent persecutions of the Jews, I came upon one essay which struck me as so unusual that I made précis of it for my own use. What its author wrote was approximately as follows:

'By way of preface I must explain that I am not a Jew and therefore I am not driven into making these observations by any egoistic concern. Yet I have felt a lively interest in the anti-semitic excesses of to-day and have directed my particular attention to the protests against them. These protests come from two directions - ecclesiastical and secular - the former in the name of religion, the latter appealing to the claims of humanity. The former were scanty and came late; but they did come in the end, and even His Holiness the Pope raised his voice. I confess that there was something I missed in the demonstrations coming from both sides - something at their beginning and something else at their end. I will try now to supply it.

'All these protests, I think, might be preceded by a particular introduction, which would run: "Well, it's true, I don't like Jews either. In some sort of way they seem strange to me and antipathetic. They have many disagreeable qualities and great defects. I think, too, that the influence they have had on us and our affairs has been predominantly detrimental. Their race, compared with our own, is obviously an inferior one; all their activities argue in favour of that." And after this what these protests do in fact contain could follow without any discrepancy: "But we profess a religion of love. We ought to love even our enemies as ourselves. We know that the Son of God gave His life on earth to redeem all men from the burden of sin. He is our model, and it is therefore sinning against His intention and against the command of the Christian religion if we consent to Jews being insulted, ill-treated, robbed and plunged into misery. We ought to protest against this, irrespectively of how much or how little the Jews deserve such treatment." The secular writers who believe in the gospel of humanity, protest in similar terms.

'I confess that I have not been satisfied by any of these demonstrations. Apart from the religion of love and humanity there is also a religion of truth, and it has come off badly in these protests. But the truth is that for long centuries we have treated the Jewish people unjustly and that we are continuing to do so by judging them unjustly. Any one of us who does not start by admitting our guilt has not done his duty in this. The Jews are not worse than we are; they have somewhat other characteristics and somewhat other faults, but on the whole we have no right to look down on them. In some respects, indeed, they are our superiors. They do not need so much alcohol as we do in order to make life tolerable; crimes of brutality, murder, robbery and sexual violence are great rarities among them; they have always set a high value on intellectual achievement and interests; their family life is more intimate; they take better care of the poor; charity is a sacred duty to them. Nor can we call them in any sense inferior. Since we have allowed them to co-operate in our cultural tasks, they have acquired merit by valuable contributions in all the spheres of science, art and technology, and they have richly repaid our

tolerance. So let us cease at last to hand them out favours when they have a claim to justice.'

It was natural that such determined partisanship from some one who was not a Jew should have made a deep impression on me. But now I have a remarkable confession to make. I am a very old man and my memory is no more what it was. I can no longer recall where I read the essay of which I made the précis nor who it was who was its author. Perhaps one of the readers of this periodical will be able to come to my help?

A whisper has just reached my ears that what I probably had in mind was Count Heinrich Coudenhove-Kalergi's book *Das Wesen des Antisemitismus*, which contains precisely what the author I am in search of missed in the recent protests, and more besides. I know that book. It appeared first in 1901 and was re-issued by his son in 1929 with an admirable introduction. But it cannot be that. What I am thinking of is a shorter pronouncement and one of very recent date. Or am I altogether at fault? Does nothing of the kind exist? And has the work of the two Coudenhoves had no influence on our contemporaries?

Sigm. Freud