

The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess

MOSES HESS was both a communist and a Zionist. He played a decisive role in the history of the first movement, he virtually invented the second. Indeed this remarkable fact is his chief, perhaps his sole, claim to fame. Nevertheless, in the course of his troubled and dedicated life, Hess uttered some highly original and telling judgements, that have not, even now, obtained the recognition that they seem to me to deserve. He was a prophet without much honour in his own generation, certainly none in his own country. Yet much of what he said was new and, as it has turned out, both important and true. In particular he detected in the life both of European society in general, and of the European Jews in particular, symptoms of what, he feared, was a fatal disease; or, if not fatal, at any rate dangerous. Against it he offered remedies which, whether or not they were effective, were at any rate specific proposals capable of being realised, and not cries of self-pity, or empty forms of words, or vague and idle dreams. His theses were indeed dismissed at the time of their utterance, as being some, or all, of these things. But this verdict seems to me wholly unjust. The counter-thesis that I should like to offer is that Hess was, at any rate after 1848, an exceptionally penetrating and independent thinker who understood and formulated the problems with which he was dealing more clearly than the majority of his critics, whose rival diagnoses, admired for their wisdom in their own day, have stood up badly to the test of time. But even if I am mistaken about this, the questions that Hess raised, in the form in which he raised them, are exceedingly live issues today, and have become, if anything, more critical than they were in his own lifetime. Even if he had no other claim on our attention, this would, I think, be sufficient in itself.

I

Moses Hess was born in 1812, in the city of Bonn, into a Jewish family whose forbears may have come from Poland. His parents be-

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longed to that generation of German Jews which had been freed by the French wars of liberation. Between 1795 and 1814 Bonn was under French rule; the gates of the Jewish ghetto were flung wide open, and its inmates, after centuries of being driven in upon themselves, were permitted to emerge into the light of day. Personal freedom (or at any rate an enlarged measure of it), economic opportunity, secular knowledge, liberal ideas, acted like a heady wine upon the children of the newly emancipated Jews. When, in 1815, after the final defeat of Napoleon, the Rhineland was annexed to Prussia, and King Frederick William III made an attempt to return to ancient ways, the reimposition of most of the old restrictions on the Jews of his kingdom produced a crisis among the newly liberated. Some among them could not bear the thought of a return to their former degraded status, and accepted baptism with varying degrees of sincere conviction. The radical journalist, Ludwig Börne, changed his name and his faith on the same day; so too did Heinrich Marx, the father of Karl Marx. The poet Heine, the jurist Eduard Gans, Ludwig Stahl (who later co-founded the Conservative Party), the children of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, were the best known converts to Christianity. Others reacted in the opposite direction. For reasons both of genuine piety and of pride, they became even more fiercely attached to their ancient religion. Amongst these were the members of Hess's family. In 1817 his father moved to Cologne, where he established a sugar refinery, soon grew prosperous, and in due course became head of the Jewish community of the city. The boy, aged five, was left behind in Bonn, where his devoutly religious maternal grandfather gave him a traditional Jewish upbringing, and a solid knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud and the medieval commentaries. Almost half a century later Hess gave a moving account of this single-minded old merchant, who could not hold back his tears when he spoke of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews. There is no doubt that his early education affected Hess indelibly: images and symbols drawn from the history of the Jews remained with him to the end of his life. One may, perhaps, permit oneself to wonder about the consequences to the world, had Karl Marx, the grandson of a rabbi, been brought up in this fashion, and not (as in fact he was) on a diet of eighteenth-century rationalism by a father who was a mild follower of Voltaire.

Hess's mother died when he was fourteen, and he then went to live in his father's house in Cologne. When he was eighteen, he was reluc-

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tantly allowed by his father to go to the university of Bonn. There is no evidence of what happened to him there. Indeed, it is dubious whether he even matriculated. At any rate, the experience seems to have left no impression upon him. We know little about him at this time; only that, in common with a good many other idealistic young men in Germany, he was deeply affected by the mystical nationalism and romanticism which then was sweeping over the German intelligentsia.

His father wished him to enter his own expanding business. Moritz Hess, as he was called at this time, flatly declined. He appears to have had no clear idea of what he wanted to do. He wished only to serve mankind, help the destitute, liberate the oppressed and, above all, not make money, since this appeared to him bourgeois egotism in its most repulsive form. He quarrelled with his father, and left his parents' house with a very small sum of money in his pocket, to see the world, or at any rate Europe. He went to England, where he starved miserably, then to Holland and France. He was in Paris in 1832, and it was perhaps among the poor German émigrés – mostly left-wing exiles – that he imbibed the radical ideas then in vogue in that relatively free capital.¹ The revolution of 1830 had created immense hopes among the liberals of Europe, and Paris was fermenting with socialist sects and ideas, especially those affected by Saint-Simonian and Fourierist doctrines, which, by and large, called upon men to recognise and fight the evils of cut-throat competition and individual enterprise and the strife and destruction of both the bodies and the souls of men inevitably entailed by them, and instead to cooperate in collective undertakings that would release the great productive energies of mankind in a planned and harmonious manner, and create universal prosperity, justice and happiness on earth. Some of these men were confused dreamers. Others were acute and highly practical organisers who understood the revolutionary consequences of technological progress. Idealistic and short-lived communist colonies in America and elsewhere sprang from the former strain. From the latter grew the Suez and Panama canals, the new railway system of France, and novel technocratic notions and institutions of many sorts, from the industrial monopolies to the New Deal, from vast cartels and state-owned

¹ Doubt is thrown upon this by Edmund Silberner, 'Der junge Moses Hess im Lichte bisher unerschlossener Quellen', *International Review of Social History* 3 (1958), 43-70, 239-68.

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enterprises to five-year plans and the welfare state. The most radical of these trends was the continuing underground tradition of out-and-out communism, preached by the proscribed followers of the executed revolutionary Babeuf, who declared that not merely the love, but the possession, of private property was the root of all evil, and that justice or liberty were not possible without complete social and economic equality which, in its turn, depended upon the total abolition of inheritance and of virtually all private ownership.

Hess accepted these doctrines fervently, adding to them his own enthusiastic faith in the romantic intuitionism preached by the disciples of Fichte and Schelling, together with what he understood of Spinoza, whom the romantics affected to admire; and, like other radical young intellectuals of his generation, tried to cast this odd amalgam into the mould of the great dominant philosophy of that time – the Hegelian system. Totally destitute, he returned to Cologne on foot, made his peace with his father, and was appointed a clerk in the family sugar refinery. This, as might have been foreseen, ended in complete failure.

He finally abandoned his father's house, scraped together a sum of money sufficient to keep him alive for a few months, and, anxious to say his own, personal word in the metaphysical debates that (partly as a result of government censorship) took the place of political discussion in Germany in his day, composed a treatise embodying his entire *Weltanschauung*. This metaphysical philosophy of history, full of Hegelian clichés, published in 1837, was called *The Sacred History of Mankind by a Young Disciple of Spinoza*, and today is virtually unreadable. Although the title claims the inspiration of Spinoza, apart from a vague rationalism, and belief in the unity of all creation, the text has little to do with the great seventeenth-century master; its inspiration is more that of romantic Protestant theology: the spirit is that of Schleiermacher. The central thesis is that in the beginning men lived in an undifferentiated unity of spirit and matter – a condition of primitive communism that preceded the invention of property. This period is carefully divided by the author into fourteen sub-periods each dominated by a great leader. This original unity was broken by Christianity, which began by reconciling spirit with matter, but, in its distorted medieval form, exaggerated the spirit, and led to a one-sided mysticism. The dynamic process of the Hegelian historical dialectic will, however, set this right. It is the task of modern man, armed with consciousness of his historic mission, to create a rational harmony of matter and spirit, as preached by Schelling in Germany –

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though, in the author's view, with too much emphasis on spirit; and by Saint-Simon in France – though with too much emphasis on matter. This harmony is to be embodied in a new dispensation – ‘social humanity’ – in which the evil institution of private property – the social form of covetous greed – together with competition and the division of labour by which men are brutalised and dehumanised into the semblance of mere animate property – so much raw material to be exploited by an élite of capitalists – will at long last be abolished. Thus the Hebrew prophets – the truest heralds of the new world – will at last be vindicated. To achieve this ideal men must (in the spirit of Fichte) obey the moral imperative of seeking after the holy life of reciprocal self-sacrifice. The Jews are mentioned by Hess only to be dismissed as embodying a preliminary stage superseded by Christianity. The ancient Jewish state is to be admired, indeed, as representing a unity – a fusion of state, church, religion, and political and social life – a single set of principles regulating the whole of human life. Men have wandered from God, but they will return to Him, and ‘the ancient law will rise again, transfigured. . .’. In this way the Jews will disappear as a people, but not before they have conquered the world spiritually. Thereby their special mission will be fulfilled. Indeed their part is over already, for they have been rendered obsolete by Christianity, and they are counselled to leave the stage of history. ‘The people chosen by their God must disappear for ever, that out of its death might spring a new, more precious life.’

All this was no worse, but certainly no better, than the farrago of metaphysics, social messianism, and personal ardour that constituted the normal matter of the innumerable historico-theological systems with which German universities were at this time flooding the philosophical public. Most of these treatises were deeply religious in spirit and purpose, being attempts to find in art or science the path to individual or national salvation which the orthodox Christian churches seemed no longer capable of providing for critical minds. Some sought substitutes for religion in literature, in music, in varieties of mystical experience. Others, perhaps the majority of such spiritually *désœuvrés*, at any rate in countries under German influence, sought for the answer in history as the progressive revelation of the ways of God or the Absolute Spirit, and this led to the schools of what is best called *historiosophy* – the attempt to make history do the work of theology or speculative metaphysics – of which the most celebrated are the movements associated with the names of Schelling, Hegel, Comte,

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Spengler, and to some degree, Marx and the disciples of Darwin. Arnold Toynbee was the leading, it may be the last, representative of this type of secular messianism in our day.

The Sacred History of Mankind found no readers, and is today deservedly forgotten. It is of interest only because it shows that, even in this early phase, Hess was a fully-fledged socialist, indeed the earliest German socialist – the first faithful German disciple of the French egalitarians – a belated, somewhat idealistic, German Babouvist. Moreover, it established Hess as a member of the avant-garde philosophical left – the Young Hegelians of extreme radical views. All the disciples of Hegel believed that their master had discovered the true pattern of human history, which lay in perpetual movement towards increasing rationality and freedom, that is to say, a state in which more and more men would comprehend more and more clearly what the logically inevitable purposes of the Universal Spirit must be – whither history, revealing its nature and direction to itself, in the form of the critical and creative human spirit, was developing. This growth of self-awareness on the part of the universe conceived as an active subject – a spirit or organism – takes the form of the increase of rational knowledge among men, and therefore of their power over nature and over themselves, that is, their freedom, and thereby brings the millennium nearer. According to Hegelians of all shades of opinion this process consisted in the perpetual struggle and collision of forces at every ‘level’ – social, intellectual, economic, political, physical – leading to crises (that sometimes took the form of social revolutions), each of which marked a stage in the ascent of the ‘World Spirit’. The left-wing Hegelians interpreted this as meaning that the essential function of the most advanced elements in society – the most rational, the most conscious of what they were, what stage they had reached, and whither the next inevitable step in the ascent of the Spirit must lead – was essentially destructive, destructive of whatever was static, dead, literally stupid, frozen, irrational, whatever obstructed self-criticism and thereby the progress of humanity towards its goal. In their view absolute rationality meant the attainment by humanity of absolute freedom over itself and over its environment; and this could be achieved only by actively removing the obstacles to such emancipation – a view that carried plainly revolutionary implications. Some young Hegelians confined their radicalism to the realms of theory, and spent their energies on subverting traditional beliefs – mainly religious and metaphysical – like David Friedrich Strauss with his boldly iconoclastic

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Life of Jesus, or Feuerbach and the brothers Bauer who, in their different ways, interpreted religion in terms of social mythology. Others went farther, and, like the eighteenth-century materialists, held that unless the social and psychological conditions which had kept men in ignorance, and given birth to the religious or social or political illusions that had reconciled humanity to its helplessness and misery, were themselves destroyed, no true progress could be made. Among these were such young philosophical amateurs as Arnold Ruge, Friedrich Engels and, the best known of all, Karl Marx.

Hess felt it craven to be anywhere but in the forefront of this battle for the soul of mankind. He was twenty-five years old, a generous, high-minded, kindly, touchingly pure-hearted, enthusiastic, not over-astute young man, ready, indeed eager, to suffer for his ideas, filled with love of humanity, optimism, a passion for abstractions, and aversion from the world of practical affairs towards which the more hard-headed members of his family were trying to steer him. His marriage tells us more of his character and temperament than anything else. He met in Cologne, and married, a poor seamstress – sometimes referred to as a prostitute in the writings about him¹ – not, apparently, because he had fallen in love with her, but in order to redress the injustice perpetrated by society; he wished to perform an act expressive of the need for love among men and for equality between them. So far as we know he lived in complete harmony and happiness with his wife for the rest of his days. Sibylle Hess, who was a gentile, worshipped him to the end of his life, occasionally deceived him (against which he protested, but not very strongly), and shared his poverty with the greatest devotion. It was perhaps this childlike quality – Hess's unworldliness and purity of character, rising at moments to genuine saintliness² – that so deeply irritated the tough-minded 'realists' among his fellow socialists, who looked on him as a benevolent ass. Yet even

¹ Sibylle Pesch was described as a street-walker in a Cologne police dossier of 1854, and Hess's family seems to have believed something of this kind. Edmund Silberner, in his definitive biography of Hess, throws some doubt on this and finds that the evidence is inconclusive. All that we know is that Sibylle was and remained a pious Catholic, and that Hess did not marry her until his father's death, perhaps for fear of upsetting him too deeply.

² Hess's moral character has a strong affinity with Dostoevsky's ideal of the 'positively good man' embodied in the heroes of *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. A Jewish communist is the last human type in which Dostoevsky would have looked for any semblance to his ideal.

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Marx, who utterly despised him, could discover no moral view or fault to cast in his teeth.

Hess spent the next four years in intensive reading of books about philosophy and social theory, still supported, we must surmise, by his irritated, but far from heartless family. His next volume, which appeared in 1841, attracted more attention. *The European Triarchy* is a primarily political treatise, an answer to a now even more forgotten work called *The European Pentarchy* that advocated the parcelling out of Europe between the five great powers; and it represents an advance in its author's social and political views. The only salvation of mankind lies, we are told, in the universal adoption of socialism, in particular in the abolition of private property.¹ The reason for this is not the need for economic efficiency, nor the inexorable demands of history, nor the emergence of a particular class – the proletariat – at war with other classes, which is destined inevitably to destroy or supersede all its rivals, but quite simply that socialism alone is just. Hess, in sharp contrast to Marx and his school, even while he fully accepts the analysis of society into social-economic classes, does not believe that class conflict is either desirable or inevitable. He is a socialist, indeed a communist, because he thinks that all egoism – like all domination – is destructive of the human personality and frustrates master and slave alike, inasmuch as individual faculties can never be developed fully in conditions of competition, but only in harmonious collaboration with others, as the French socialists – Saint-Simon and Fourier – had conclusively shown. Communism for Hess was the sole form of social altruism realisable in the historical conditions of the age. (In 1843 he describes it as being simply 'practical ethics'.) He did not attempt to give a detailed analysis of the structure or needs of the proletariat, largely because (like his fellow radicals, Marx, Ruge, Engels, Grün, Feuerbach and the brothers Bauer) he had personally met too few members of this class, and was a good deal more honest than most of his allies. History for him is a struggle of

¹ Edmund Silberner, in his very illuminating article on Moses Hess in *Historia Judaica* 13 (1951), 3–28, describes the doctrine of this book, despite its advocacy of the abolition of private inheritance and the community of ownership, as not quite tantamount to socialism. I am not sure that I understand what, in his opinion, distinguishes Hess's doctrine from, at any rate, the stock French socialism of his time. Hess does not, it is true, go so far as Cabet, but he is certainly at least as socialist as, say, Louis Blanc, and more so than the Fourierists or Proudhon.

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self-assertive egoism (of individuals or classes or nations) with the opposite principles of altruism, love and social justice. The fact that the belief in equality, solidarity and justice had always represented, at any rate, the professed aspirations of men, proves that these qualities flow from man's true nature. Rational and harmonious cooperation between men is possible (sometimes appeal is made to the authority of Spinoza or Hegel, sometimes to the theses of the French *philosophes*) but it must always be fought for. Human happiness lies in human hands, and if enough individuals can be convinced of the truth of the propositions advanced by the author, human beings will be enabled to create their own happiness. The 'scientific' socialists – Marx and his tough-minded followers – later poured derision on this 'Utopian', 'rose-water', 'humanitarian' doctrine as an absurdly idealistic, ineffective kind of socialism, suspended in a timeless void, abstract, unhistorical, not evolved out of insight into concrete social conditions; and represented their own brand of socialism as superior, if only in virtue of the fact that it was 'deduced' from the concrete facts – that it was not something the realisation of which turned on luck or accident, on what might or might not happen, that depended upon the precarious goodwill of this or that group of men, or on this or that set of unpredictable circumstances. Marx genuinely believed (as in a sense Hegel believed before him) that what alone made a cause worth fighting for was that it represented the inevitable next stage in the social evolution of men as rational beings, a stage that could be determined accurately only by means of scientific analysis and prediction. The social revolution – the expropriation of the owners of property and their replacement by public ownership, and the victory of the propertyless class – was, on this view, in any case inevitable; for this reason it was what rational men would pursue simply because they knew that to seek after anything else, to identify themselves with any other group of persons, was automatically to ignore the social 'reality' by which any individual, and his ideas, were determined, and consequently to court destruction by the forces of history – something that only fools or madmen could want.

Hess would have none of this. He believed that social equality was desirable because it was just, not because it was inevitable; nor was justice to be identified with whatever was bound, in any case, to emerge from the womb of time. All kinds of bad and irrational conditions had been produced before now, and persisted. Nothing was to be accepted merely because it had occurred – but solely because it

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was objectively good. Hegelian historicism had evidently not struck so deep in him after all; heretical as this was, he stoutly maintained that the only way to achieve social justice, the abolition of poverty and the equitable distribution of the ever more plentiful goods (which, owing to maldistribution, were breeding more misery than happiness) was by the conscious will of men convinced of the moral necessity of their action. One could, and one had a duty to, convince men by rational argument that if they turned their resources into productive and harmonious channels, they would be better off both materially and morally; this was Hess's 'True Socialism' – the Utopian sentimentalism for which Marx and Engels mocked him so bitterly.¹ They called him Rabbi Moses and Rabbi Hess, and laughed his theses to scorn.

And yet, in the light of our later experience, it almost seems as if Hess, with his *naïveté*, his traditional Jewish morality, his pleas for justice and his quotations from Spinoza and the Bible, may not, after all, have been as profoundly mistaken as the more celebrated founders of 'scientific' socialism. The exacerbation of the class war, as predicted and encouraged by Marx and Engels, has in due course occurred. The revolution for which they worked has, in one form or another, transformed the lives of large portions of the human race. But it seems clear that where this occurred in accordance with Marxist principles and tactics, that is to say by means of the violent expropriation of the property-owning classes, the mere fact of the abolition of private property and the creation of the dictatorship of the communist party (or a committee of it) claiming to represent the proletariat, have not, by themselves, brought about internal or external harmony, or economic equality, or personal liberty or social justice. And, on the other hand, wherever these ideals have been realised or, at any rate, approached, this seems to have been, almost invariably, the result of the conscious effort of individuals working for them as ends in themselves, under no illusion that they embodied the inexorable forces of history or any other agency; least of all the work of men disposed to deceive themselves or others by systematically representing what would normally be recognised as acts of cruelty, exploitation, injustice

¹ His views at this time (1843) are very clearly set out in two articles, 'Sozialismus und Kommunismus' and 'Philosophie der That', in an émigré anthology called *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz*, as well as in his articles in the Paris *Vorwärts*, the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, and *Der Sprecher*, edited by Karl Grün in Wesel.

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and oppression as being mysteriously transformed into virtuous actions, or at least means to virtue, by the sanctifying process of historical necessity – the inexorable march of ‘God in history’ – the historical dialectic.

Throughout his life Hess’s socialism remains founded on purely moral premises. In this respect his opinions resemble those of the nineteenth-century Christian socialists, or the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries, or the British and Scandinavian socialists of our time, far more than those of Marxists and other ‘realists’. Hess wants the abolition of private property because he thinks that men will not cease to fight and oppress one another, and will not cease to be themselves poisoned by the injustice they breed, unless they live a social or communal life; and to this type of life he thinks private property to be a fatal obstacle. Private property must be abolished. But unless the reform is carried out with full moral realisation of what its purpose is, it will achieve nothing. Mere mechanical abolition of private property is certainly not enough. There must be a change of heart. But this cannot happen until the material and institutional conditions which have hardened men’s hearts are themselves altered. Yet the mere alteration of this framework will not by itself produce the required spiritual transformation, unless the moral principles which alone are worthy of free men are understood and consciously applied.

These moral principles belong to all men as such, and are recognised even if they are not acted upon by all men in some degree, but most clearly by the best and wisest. These principles are not necessarily those of only one given class, even though the demands of an oppressed class embody them more genuinely than the demands of those who gain by such oppression. This is the notion of ‘abstract humanity’ with which Marxists charge Hess and the other Utopians; as if the concept of the ‘class of the exploited’ is any less abstract. Hess’s creed derived from these principles from first to last. His socialism, and later his Zionism, are direct consequences of it. Those who find the concept of class rights more real than that of human rights, as well as those who find comfort in believing men to be agents of impersonal forces that will secure the victory for their own group soon or late, whatever their opponents may wish or think, that is to say, all natural Hegelians, Marxists, Calvinists, and other extreme determinists, particularly in the fields of politics or social life, will inevitably find Hess both unrealistic and unsympathetic.

The European Triarchy in particular advocated the union of the

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three civilised powers in Europe: Germany, the home of ideas and the champion of religious liberty; France, the battlefield on which effective social reform and political independence had been won; and England, the home of economic freedom, and moreover itself the synthesis of the French and German spirit – neither ‘over-speculative’ like Germany, nor ‘vulgarly’ materialistic like France. These three powers must unite against Russia, the reservoir of reaction, the home of barbarian repression threatening to engulf Europe and trample upon its liberties. Appeals for union against Russia as an enemy of the west were, by then, common enough in Germany and, indeed, elsewhere in Europe. The only originality of Hess’s book consisted in the fact that it tied this familiar proposal to the necessity for radical social reform, and of ‘peaceful revolution’ (he believed that violence bred violence and destroyed the soil for peaceful reconstruction), as being alone likely to save Europe from collapsing under the weight of the contradictions of its capitalist system of production and distribution.

The book attracted some attention. Hess was revealed to the German intellectual world as an eloquent left-wing agitator, and in the course of the next two years was offered, and accepted, various journalistic posts, which brought him into close contact with other like-minded young men, notably Engels, Marx and Ruge. The first and fieriest German Hegelian to turn communist, Hess converted the young Friedrich Engels to his creed.¹ He met Marx in 1841, and although the latter had had some inkling of current communist doctrines from the book published in Germany by Lorenz Stein which gave an account of the views of the leaders of the French communist sects, it was most probably Hess’s hot eloquence that first shook the foundations of his faith in Hegelian political theory with its deification of the bureaucratic state as the expression of human reason and discipline, and turned him on to the path of militant social collectivism. There were of course passages in Hess’s book which cannot have satisfied Marx even then. The ethical tone, but, even more, the frequent references to the Hebrew prophets, and the prevalence of Hebraic motifs generally, had never been to his taste. Marx himself, as is only too plain, decided to eliminate this particular source of embarrassment once and for all from his life. He had no intention of

¹ In an article in the Owenite journal *The New Moral World*, Engels says that Hess was the first young Hegelian to become a communist. *New Moral World* No 21, 18 November 1843; see Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (London/New York/Moscow, 1975–), vol. 3 (1975), p. 406.

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going through the torments of an ambivalent status such as afflicted more sensitive and less ruthless natures, such Jews as Börne, for instance, or Heine or Lassalle or Disraeli, throughout their mature lives. All his bitter and exasperated feeling against the discrimination practised against himself he transferred by a bold, if not altogether conscious, stroke to a much vaster field: by identifying his own grievances with those of the insulted and the oppressed everywhere, and in particular with those of the proletariat, he achieved his own psychological emancipation. It was in the name of the oppressed workers that he thundered, of a great symbolic multitude – impersonal, remote from his own world and his own wounds – not of his own painful humiliation as a former Jew denied a professorial chair; it was for them alone that he demanded and prophesied justice, revenge, destruction. As for the Jews, in an essay written two years after he met Hess, he declared them simply to be a repellent symptom of a social *malaise* of the time, an excrescence upon the social body – not a race, or a nation, or even a religion to be saved by conversion to some other faith or way of life, but a collection of parasites, a gang of money-lenders rendered inevitable by the economically self-contradictory and unjust society that had generated them – to be eliminated as a group by the final solution to all social ills – the coming, inescapable, universal, social revolution. The violently anti-Semitic tone of this essay, which Engels more feebly echoes (anti-Semitism was not uncommon among socialists of that, or indeed later, time), became more and more characteristic of Marx in his later years. It affected the attitudes of communists, particularly Jewish communists, towards the Jews, and is one of the most neurotic and revolting aspects of his masterful but vulgar personality. The tone adopted by Hess was profoundly different. Hess's actual opinions were not very different from those of Marx or any other young Hegelian radical of this time. Like them, he identified emancipated Jews of his time with capitalism and its evils. He refers to them with open dislike and contempt as so many grasping financiers – 'moneybags': they are for him the epitome of the acquisitive spirit. Nevertheless, the tone is different from that of either the tormented Heine or the troubled Marx. But he did not suffer from a self-hatred that made him wish to commit acts of violence against his nature. He did not try to cut the traces of his origins out of himself, because he did not feel it as a malignant growth that was suffocating him and of which he was ashamed. In *The European Triarchy* he merely repeated what he had said some four years earlier – that the task of the Jews

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was to disperse and assimilate – they had served their turn in making first Christianity, and after that (inasmuch as Judaism stresses social ties more than Christianity) social regeneration by communism possible; they had acted as a ‘goad’ and a ‘ferment’ that has promoted the ‘mobility’ of the west and prevented it from stagnating like China, but this function was now over. Because they had rejected Christianity, they were now a mere ghostly presence ‘unable either to die or to come to life’, a mere skeleton, a fossil, and it was time that they married gentiles and disappeared. The ‘Triarchy’ of the civilised great powers would emancipate them fully, and give them the rights of men and citizens; but their real emancipation would occur only when all hatred and contempt for them on the part of others disappeared. In short he repeated the noble commonplaces that have formed the staple doctrine of liberal assimilationists everywhere and at all times.

The act of apostasy constituted by this creed precipitated the final rupture between him and his devotedly Jewish father. Yet this is not the whole story of Hess’s feelings about the Jews even at this time. In 1840, in Damascus, a Jew was accused and convicted of committing an act of ritual murder. Anti-Jewish disorders followed. The repercussions of this terrible and ancient slander led to agitation by the horrified Jews of France and England, scandalised their sympathisers everywhere, and ended in some redress for this injustice obtained by the Montefiore-Crémieux mission. Hess reacted painfully to this incident, and for the first time, so he tells us later, began to wonder whether the general solution that he advocated for all human ills would, in fact, automatically cure those of the Jews also. In the same year, during the great wave of anti-French chauvinism which passed over Germany at that time, he came across a Francophobe hymn by the poet Becker, and in a burst of patriotic feeling set it to music and sent his composition to the author. Becker sent an icily polite reply with an anti-Semitic scribble¹ in a disguised, but still recognisable, hand on the back of the envelope. Hess was dreadfully upset; but as a rationalist and socialist, decided to conquer his feelings both about Damascus and about Becker. These, he tried to say to himself, were the aberrations of a society in its death throes. The social regeneration of mankind would make them for ever impossible.

¹ ‘Du bist ein Jud.’ *Rom und Jerusalem, die Nationalitätsfrage* (Leipzig, 1862) (hereafter *R. J.*), letter 5, p. 25. Subsequent references to the letters of *R. J.* are given by letter and page, thus: V 25.

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There was no room in the universal society of the future for sectional religions or interests. The Jews must scatter and vanish as a historical entity. A universal religion must replace a purely national one. If the Jews could not bring themselves to accept baptism for themselves, at least they must baptise their children; in this way the 'Judaeo-Christian tradesmen's world' would end in dignified dissolution. In any case the sufferings of the proletariat were surely a greater and more urgent cause than those of the Jews, however painful and undeserved. Hess repressed his wounded feelings, at any rate for the time being. Doctrine – helped out with special pleading – triumphed over the direct evidence of experience.¹ This is the prototype of the story of many a Jewish socialist and communist since his day. It is to Hess's eternal credit that he was among the few to recognise, before his life was done, that this comforting theory rested on a fallacy; not an ignoble fallacy, perhaps, but still delusive. Twenty years later, having diagnosed it as such, he proclaimed his results to the world, with great simplicity and courage. At no moment in his life did he have anything to hide. He made mistakes, since he was often naïve and uncritical. He was saved by his moral insight, which remained uncontaminated by personal vanity or dogma. And his conscience was always clear.

The time of disenchantment was still to come. In 1841 Hess fell under the spell of the brilliance and boldness of Karl Marx's views. He met Marx in August of that year, preached communism to him, and early in September wrote² to his sceptical friend Auerbach:

¹ But not entirely. In *R. J.*, Hess mentions a manuscript composed at this time proclaiming the need for self-determination as a solution for the Jewish problem. The fate of this *esquisse* is unknown: most probably Hess incorporated it in *R. J.* But there does survive a fragment of this early period, which, as Edmund Silberner, its discoverer, has been good enough to tell me, declared the need for a Jewish nationhood. This demonstrates that Hess did not, as might otherwise have been suspected, unconsciously antedate the moment at which he first conceived the idea of the Jewish state. But at this stage it was probably no more than a bold fantasy. The young Lassalle, too, toyed with the notion of a new Judaea at this time. The 1830s and 40s are rich in extravagant political schemes. Nevertheless, despite occasional moods of this kind, Hess was wholly anti-nationalist at this period, and consciously rejected the Zionist ideas which had suggested themselves insistently to him and to which he was later to return.

² Cologne, 2 September 1841. See Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Abteilung 1, Band 1. 2 (Berlin, 1929), pp. 260–1.

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He is the greatest, perhaps the only true philosopher actually now alive . . . Dr Marx – that is the name of my idol – is still a very young man (about twenty-four at the most), and will strike the final death blow at medieval religion and politics. He combines philosophical depth with a most biting wit: imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel – not thrown together anyhow, but fused into a single personality – and you will have Dr Marx.

With Marx he collaborated on the radical *Rheinische Zeitung*, until things became too hot for him in the Rhineland. Accused – justly enough – of being the original fountainhead of violent communist agitation in Germany (a strange historical responsibility to bear for a peace-loving idealist deeply opposed to the use of force), he was sent off to the security of Paris as a correspondent for his journal. In Paris he took a hand in the conversion of the celebrated Russian revolutionary, Mikhail Bakunin, to the revolutionary communism that preceded the anarchism of his later life, and for a time became an enthusiastic supporter of Proudhon. He admired Proudhon and Cabet – the most fanatical of all the socialists of that time – for making their appeal directly to the poor and the oppressed, and not waiting, like Saint-Simon or Fourier, for some enlightened despot or millionaire to put through their social schemes for them. In 1843 he returned to Cologne, agitated among the workers, published routine left-wing articles attacking private property, religion, and the tyranny of the state; he seems to have occupied a political position intermediate between communism and anarchism.¹ He was at this time an active member of a faithful band of brothers, which included Proudhon, Bruno Bauer, Karl Grün, Max Stirner, all afterwards condemned by Marx as mere abstract moralists – men who denounced capitalism for no better reason than that they believed it to be evil – which was mere subjectivism disguised as objective judgement. Marx maintained that since all men were in fact conditioned by the position of their class, and their position in their class, and since their moral and political opinions were a rationalisation of their interests (that is to say, of what their class at a given stage of its evolution needed and desired, or was endangered by and feared), to suppose that one could praise or condemn from some neutral vantage point, above the battle, above the class struggle, was to fall into a fatal ‘metaphysical’ illusion. The only truly objective ground from which one could rationally attack, or act

¹ See p. 222, note 1 above.

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to destroy, a given view, institution, regime, was that of the new dialectical science of historical development. Rational politics was the support of what history – the class struggle – would bring forth, and the condemnation of what it could not but destroy; to resist the movement of history, operating through objective material factors and their effects on – and reflections in – human consciousness, was therefore arbitrary, irrational, literally suicidal. Proudhon, Cabet, Hess, were in this sense ‘idealists’ and Utopians, and had condemned themselves to impotence, to what Trotsky was later to call ‘the rubbish heap of history’.

Nevertheless, despite their contempt for their former mentor (and perhaps their jealousy of a forerunner), Marx, and especially Engels, preserved relatively good relations with Hess, made some use of his draft (if only to condemn it) for the *Communist Manifesto* which they composed late in 1847,¹ and treated him with a mixture of patronising irony and ill-tempered impatience that was due to what all Marxists were later in a chorus to describe as ‘sentimental and idealistic communism’. Hess was too simple and free from *amour propre* to react to, or even notice, this insulting attitude. He tended to return good for evil, and treated the fathers of ‘scientific’ socialism with deep respect and even loyalty to the end of his life. He saw in them, whatever their faults, indefatigable workers in the cause of justice for the oppressed workers. That was enough for him. Whoever resisted injustice and fought for a freer and better life for all men was his friend and ally.

After a precarious existence in Paris, eked out by hack work in various German émigré journals, he went to Brussels in 1845 and stayed there, on and off, until 1848. He paid visits to Germany, helped Engels to edit a left-wing journal, *Der Gesellschaftsspiegel*, in Elberfeld, and to agitate (they won converts everywhere except among the workers), wrote on the evils inherent in capitalism as the cause of overproduction and misery in the midst of plenty, condemned money as itself a factor in the process of *Entmenschlichung* – turning human beings into goods bought and sold for a price – and was finally dismissed by Marx as a ‘feeble echo of French socialism and communism with a slight philosophical flavour’.

¹ As also, somewhat earlier, in their *German Ideology*, unpublished in their lifetime, of which with his customary disinterestedness Hess, who was reviled in other parts of the work, may actually have written a section. See Eduard Bernstein, ‘Vorbemerkung’, in *Dokumente des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1901–5), vol. 3, p. 17f.

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The revolution of 1848 broke out while he was in Germany. His widow later maintained that he had been condemned to death for his part in it, but this is probably a pious invention. The defeat of the revolution did not break his spirit or diminish his faith in mankind. Unlike most of his radical allies in France and Germany, whom the easy victories of Bismarck, the Emperor of Austria and Prince Napoleon over the forces of democracy left morally and intellectually bankrupt, he neither crossed over to the enemy, nor retreated into the typically émigré condition of resentful inactivity broken by occasional efforts to justify one's own conduct and condemn that of everyone else. He wandered over, and starved in, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, opened a brush shop in Marseilles, and finally returned to Paris, in 1854, where after more than twenty years of nomadic life, he finally settled. Living in poverty (alleviated for a short while by an inheritance left him by his father, who died in 1851) and supporting himself by casual journalism, the father of German communism continued to believe unswervingly in the classless society, the perfectibility of all mankind, and the part to be played in this by the progress of empirical discovery and invention. He studied anthropology, physiology and the natural sciences in general – for he was convinced that mankind would be regenerated by scientific knowledge applied by men of skill and public spirit. Politically he sympathised with whatever seemed to him to move towards the light. He won the friendship and respect of Ferdinand Lassalle – ‘the man with the head of Goethe on Jewish shoulders’ – and cooperated with him in the creation of his new General Federation of German Workers – the foundation of all organised social democracy in Europe. At the same period he ardently acclaimed the Italian struggle for unity and independence. The Italians, especially Mazzini and his friends, represented the principle of nationalism as he had always understood and believed in it. Hess did not accept the Marxist doctrine of the unreality of nationalism as a basic factor in history. He condemned cosmopolitanism as the deliberate and unnatural suppression of real historical differences which enriched mankind. But he did not see what right any nation had to regard itself as superior to another, and he sharply rejected the Hegelian distinction between the ‘historic’ nations, and those unfortunate ‘submerged’ nationalities, which the more bellicose nations, chosen to ‘play a historic role’ in virtue of their superiority, had a ‘historic’ right to absorb and dominate. Like the eighteenth-century humanist Herder, he believed in the natural differentiation of mankind

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into separate races or nations. He did not bother to define these concepts, since he thought that they signified something that all sane men recognised, and which had only acquired disreputable associations because of the brutal acts that had been, and still were, committed in their names. He condemned Prussian chauvinism without reserve. He detested Russian expansionism and tyranny. But the desire of the Italians to establish themselves as a free nation in their own land evoked his warmest sympathy. He saw in the papacy, rather than in foreign invasions, the major cause of Italian backwardness, disunity, and economic and spiritual misery, echoing, in this respect, the views of Italian patriots from Machiavelli to our own day. As he reflected about the problems of Italian nationalism, and followed the career of the Italian patriotic movement with the devoted sympathy and admiration that every liberal in Europe (and particularly in England) felt for the followers of Garibaldi and Mazzini, the nature and destiny of his own scattered and 'submerged' people – the Jews – once again began to preoccupy his thoughts. In 1861 he returned to Cologne under a political amnesty granted by the King of Prussia. In 1862 he published his best and most famous book, *Rome and Jerusalem*, in which his new doctrine was expounded.

Whether Lassalle's national brand of socialism – Hess was collaborating closely with Lassalle at this time – had influenced him, or whether his ideas grew according to some inner pattern of their own, there is no doubt that he spoke and wrote thereafter like a man who had had a transfiguring experience. Scarcely any notice of his book was taken then, or subsequently, by political specialists or the general European reader. It remained, like Hess himself, outside the central currents of its time. Upon the educated German Jews, however, it fell like a bombshell, as, indeed, it was intended to do. Even today, more than a hundred years after its publication, when much of it is necessarily obsolete, and a great deal that must once have seemed wildly Utopian and fanciful has in fact, sometimes by scarcely perceptible steps, come to pass, it still impresses one as a bold and original masterpiece of social analysis. It is a clear, penetrating, candid, uncompromising book, at once a collection of disturbing home truths calculated to cause acute discomfort to liberal assimilationists among Jews everywhere, and at the same time, and despite its occasional rhetoric, a direct, simple and exceedingly moving profession of faith. It contains a description of the condition of the Jews in the west, a diagnosis of their ills, and a programme for the future. The pinpricks

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of his cosmopolitan socialist friends evidently no longer affected Hess. He gave expression to a dominant conviction which he had for many years repressed, and which finally proved too strong to stifle, and felt at peace.

II

Rome and Jerusalem consists of a preface, twelve letters written to a bereaved lady,¹ an epilogue, and ten supplementary notes. It deals with a wide variety of aspects of the same central subject – the Jews, what they are, and what they should be. The essential tone is given near the beginning of the book, in the first letter, in which the author says:

Here I am again, after twenty years of estrangement, in the midst of my people. I take part in its days of joy and sorrow, in its memories and hopes, its spiritual struggles within its own house, and among the civilised peoples in whose midst it lives, but with which, despite two thousand years of common life and effort, it cannot achieve complete unity. One thought which I believed I had extinguished for ever within my breast is again vividly present to me: the thought of my nationality, inseparable from the heritage of my fathers and from the Holy land – the eternal city, the birth-place of the belief in the divine unity of life and in the future brotherhood of all men.²

Hess goes on to assert that nationality is real. Nations are a natural historical growth, like families, like physical types. To deny this is merely to falsify the facts, and springs from unworthy motives of fear and cowardice. In the case of the Jews the ringing phrases that some among them use against nationalism and medieval prejudice are only an attempt to conceal their desire to dissociate themselves from their 'unhappy, persecuted, ridiculed people . . . The modern liberal Jew is to be despised with his fine words about humanity and enlightenment, intended only to disguise his disloyalty to his brothers.'³ This creates a false situation that becomes increasingly unbearable to everyone. Europeans have always regarded the existence of Jews as an

¹ The lady was, in fact (as Edmund Silberner has established), a genuine friend of Hess, but the genre is a common vehicle in the nineteenth century for political *pensées*.

² I 1 (see p. 226, note 1 above).

³ V 27–8.

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anomaly. It may well be that the progress of justice and humanity will one day lead to justice for the Jews: they will perhaps be emancipated, but they will never be respected so long as they act on the principle of 'Ubi bene, ibi patria.'¹ Denial of nationality forfeits everyone's respect. Assimilation is no solution: 'It is not the pious old Jew, who would rather have his tongue cut out than misuse it by denying his nationality: it is the modern Jew who is despicable for disowning his race because the heavy hand of fate oppresses it.'² The banner of enlightenment will not save him from the stern verdict of public opinion. 'It is no use pleading various geographical or philosophical alibis.'³ The modern Jew is merely despised for trying to leave what he thinks to be a sinking ship. 'You may don a thousand masks, change your name and your religion and your mode of life, creep through the world incognito so that nobody notices that you are a Jew. Yet every insult to the Jewish name will wound you more than a man of honour who remains loyal to his family and defends his good name.'⁴ Some Jews in Germany think that they can save themselves by modernising their religion, or, finally, by conversion. But this will not help them. 'Neither reform, nor baptism, neither education nor emancipation, will completely open before the Jews of Germany the doors of social life.'⁵ He says again and again that the Germans are anti-Jewish racially. The tall, blond Germans are much too conscious of the small, dark Jews as being something intrinsically different from themselves. What the Germans hate is not so much the Jewish religion or Jewish names as the Jewish noses;⁶ change of faith or name evidently does not help: consequently what the Jews are tempted to deny is not so much their religion as their race. But their noses will not vanish, their hair will remain curly, their type has, after all, remained unaltered since the ancient Egyptian bas-reliefs in which the Semitic type, as we know it, is quite unmistakable.⁷ They are 'a race, a brotherhood, a nation, whose own existence is unfortunately denied by its own children, and one which every street urchin considers it his duty to despise, so long as it is homeless'.⁸ Homelessness is the heart of this problem: for without soil 'a man sinks to the status of a parasite, feeding on others'.⁹ All betrayal is base as such. 'If it is true that Jewish emancipation is not compatible with adherence to the Jewish nation, a Jew ought to sacrifice the former for the latter.'¹⁰ And, still more violently: 'Jews are not a religious

¹ 'Where I do well, there is my country.' V 27.

² *ibid.*

³ V 28.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ IV 14.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ IV 15.

⁸ V 31.

⁹ XII 110.

¹⁰ IV 17.

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group, but a separate nation, a special race, and the modern Jew who denies this is not only an apostate, a religious renegade, but a traitor to his people, his tribe, his family.¹ Racial chauvinism – nationalism in any form – is condemned by Hess in the most passionate terms, then and later. But to deny one's nation or race is at least as repulsive as to proclaim its superior rights or powers. The German Jews cannot understand this. They are genuinely puzzled by German anti-Semitism. They feel that they are true patriots, soldiers who have fought for Germany, 'Teutomaniacs'² as fiercely hostile to the French as other Germans. They sing popular patriotic German songs as fervently as any Germans; yet when Becker, the author of one of these, insulted him, Hess, for attempting to set it to music, this was a brutal and deplorable act, as he declares he now realises, but in a sense almost instinctive – a natural reaction. Intolerant nationalism is certainly a vice, but one must realise that it is a racial vice; for races exist, and Jews belong to a race which is not that of the Germans. To deny this is to falsify the facts. To be a race or a nation is not to desire racial or national mastery. It is a disease of nationalism to seek to dominate others: but Jews, like other peoples, need a normal national life. Hess goes on to say that the great French historian Augustin Thierry at the beginning of the nineteenth century rightly maintained that history is dominated by the struggles not only of classes, but also of races and nationalities. 'Semites' and 'Teutons' are not mere linguistic categories, although they carry no titles to superiority in themselves. Each race has different and incommensurable gifts, and they can all contribute to the enrichment of mankind. The Aryan race, according to Hess, has the gift of explanation – that of science – and the gift of creating beauty, a capacity for art. The Semites' genius lies elsewhere – in their ethical insight and in their sense of holiness – in the sanctifying of the world by religion. There are no superior and inferior races. All races must be made free, and then only they will cooperate as equals. Like others, like many Christian and Moslem peoples, the Jews have slept a deep sleep under gravestones upon which various preachers have inscribed their soporific formulas, but the crowing of the Gallic cock has awakened the kingdom of the sleepers, and the French, the soldiers of progress, will break the gravestones, and the peoples will begin to rise from their graves.³ Just as Rome, which since Innocent III has been the city of eternal sleep, is today gradually being resurrected as the city of eternal life by the stout-hearted

¹ IV 17.

² V 26.

³ V 28–9.

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patriots who fight for Italian freedom, so Jerusalem too will awake. The waters of the Tiber – the sound of the victories in North Italy – awake the Jews from their slumbers, and resound in the hills of Zion. He declares that he too had been living his life in a dream. It was only in 1840, when the charge of ritual murder was made against the Jews in Damascus, that he himself suddenly realised where the truth lay. 'It dawned on me for the first time, in the midst of my socialist activities, that I belonged to my unfortunate, slandered, despised and dispersed people',¹ and he goes on to say that he stifled his cry of pain, because of the greater sufferings of the European proletariat to which he thought that he ought to devote his life.

Polish nationalism had evidently made little impression on Hess, since it was bound up with Roman Catholicism, and Rome had been an inexhaustible well of anti-Semitic poison. But the awakening of Italy – secular and humanist – had made him realise that the last of all the great national questions, the Jewish question, must finally obtain its solution too. He declares that this question has too long been concealed behind the fantastic illusions of rationalists and philanthropists who deny the national character of the Jewish religion. The religious reform movement among the German Jews has done nothing but bring emptiness into Jewish life, and break off boughs from the Jewish tree. With a shameful lack of pride its leaders tell the Jews to conceal themselves among the other nations. With what result? They change their names, only so that the anti-Semites might dig up their original Jewish names, and fling them in their faces; so that poor Meyerbeer, the composer, is now always called by them Jacob Meyer Lippmann Beer; and Ludwig Börne is always called Baruch, which is, indeed, his real name.² Socialists in Germany³ indulge in this pastime no less than others. This situation is deeply humiliating. Jews have been persecuted and massacred, but in the Middle Ages, by remaining steadfast and faithful to their ancestral values, they at least avoided degradation. Modern Jews, especially those who have changed their names, deserve the contumely which openly or secretly is heaped upon them.

Hess proceeded to be as good as his word. He declared that his first name was henceforth not Moritz but his Hebrew name, Moses.⁴ He

¹ V 23.

² VI 42.

³ And, he might have added, France, Russia, and a good many other countries.

⁴ His works continued to appear under the non-committal 'M. Hess'.

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said that he regretted that he was not called Itzig; nothing was worse than flying under false colours.¹ In a moving passage, early in the book, he says that Moses was not buried in the Holy Land, whereas the bones of Joseph were carried there, because, according to the rabbis,² when Moses presented himself before his future father-in-law, Jethro the priest of Midian, to sue for his daughter's hand, he did not reveal his true origin: he allowed it to be assumed that he was an Egyptian; whereas Joseph revealed himself to his brethren, and never disavowed anyone or anything. One moment of weakness deprived Moses of his right to burial in the land of the ancestors whom he had by his silence denied; so that, according to the Scriptures, no man knows the place of his grave.

What, then, are the Jews to do if they are not to remain sorry hypocrites or worthless nonentities among the nations? Hess affirms that Jews are made Palestinian patriots by their very religion. When his grandfather wept as he read to him Jeremiah's vision of Rachel, in her tomb in Ramah, lamenting over her children as they were carried off before her eyes to the Babylonish captivity;³ and when he showed him olives and dates, saying with shining eyes, 'These come from *Eretz Israel*,'⁴ he was many miles from his native Rhineland. Jews buy Palestine earth, he goes on to say, on which to rest their head when they are buried; they carry sprigs of palm bound in myrtle during the Feast of the Tabernacles; and, he might have added, they pray for rain or dew at the seasons at which their forefathers did so in the Holy Land. This is more than a superstition or a dogma. Everything that comes from Palestine, everything that reminds them of it, moves them and is dear to them as nothing else. If the Germans are prepared to accept them only at the price of denying their race, their religion, their temperament, their historical memories, their essential character – then the price is not only morally too high, but not capable of being paid at all: the proposal is both disgusting and impracticable.

Nor is the solution to be found among those fanatical fundamentalists who, with their heads buried in the sand, denounce all science, all aspects of modern secular life. How, he asks, are the Jews to build a bridge between the nihilism of the reform rabbis who have learned

¹ VI 42.

² He gives as his source the *Midrash Rabba* on Deuteronomy, II 8, p. 37 in the English translation by J. Rabbinowitz (London, 1939).

³ IV 19–20.

⁴ 'Yisrôel', as in fact they called it. IV 18.

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nothing and the conservatism of the orthodox who have forgotten nothing? There is only one solution, and it awaits the Jews upon the banks of the Jordan. The French nation will aid them. France the great liberator, the first to break the ancient shackles and herald the civil liberties of the Jews like those of other peoples – France must, once she has built the Suez canal, make it possible for the Jews to establish colonies on its shores, for without soil (Hess repeats this over and over again) there is no national life. But who will go to this barren eastern country? Not, it is certain, the Jews of the west. They will stay in the various European lands in which they have gained education, culture, honourable positions in society. They are too deeply bound up with western civilisation. They have lost their vitality as Jews. They will not wish to emigrate to a remote and barren land. They may place their knowledge, their wealth, their influence, at the disposal of the immigrants, but they will not go themselves. For them Palestine will be at best what Hess calls ‘a spiritual nerve centre’.¹ Universities will arise there, and a common language which all these immigrants will speak. Who, then, will go? There can be no doubt of that. The Jews of eastern Europe and the other lands where the ancient faith has kept them solid and insulated from their environment, it is these and only these that will move.² Their vitality is like that of the corn seeds sometimes found in the graves of Egyptian mummies: given soil and light and air, they grow and become fertile again.³ Western Jewry is encrusted by the dead residues of the obsolete products of a decayed rationalism which no inner force – only a shock from without – can remove; but the rigid crust of orthodoxy that stunts the progress of eastern Jewry will be melted when the sparks of national feeling that smoulder beneath it are kindled into the sacred fire which heralds the new spring, and the resurrection of their nation into a new life.⁴ The Jewish assimilationists who detest what they call religious obscurantism desire to root out these superstitions. But to crush the rabbinical shell in which Judaism is contained is to crush the seed within. It needs not destruction but earth to grow in.

There is also an extraordinary excursus⁵ on the Hassidic movement. Whereas the reform movement inspired by Moses Mendelssohn is an attempt to dilute Judaism and to free the Jewish people on foreign

¹ *R. J.*, note 9, p. 234.

² This surely constitutes one of the most exact true prophecies ever made about events three-quarters of a century later.

³ V 29–30.

⁴ XII 121.

⁵ VI note 5 (on pp. 208–11).

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soil – which is patently impossible – the great revivalist sect of the Hassidim is a genuine development of the Jewish religion, a response to the authentic need for life on the part of the devout masses, for fresh significance for old symbols, and therefore destined for a great future. Unlike the reformers who are using the timber of Judaism for non-Jewish ends, and secretly share Heine's view that the Jewish religion is a misfortune rather than a religion, forgetting that even converted Jews, whether they want it or not, are painfully affected by the condition of the Jewish masses, the Hassidim are a living spiritual force. It is true that Hess confuses the name of the founder of the *Chabad* Hassidim, and speaks of Samuel of Wilno instead of Shneur Zalman. But what is remarkable is that an émigré communist agitator should have heard of this movement at all, and have realised at so early a date that the founder of this movement – the Baal Shem – was destined, in the end, to triumph over Moses Mendelssohn. For Hassidism and Zionism were, and are, living forces, as the reform movement, with all its humanity, civilisation and learning, is not.

It is the benighted beings of whom there are millions in the dominions of the Russian, Prussian, Austrian and Turkish empires, the Jews of these backward provinces, that will, according to Hess, immigrate to Palestine and create the new state. There the existence of Jewish self-identity will neither 'need to be demonstrated, nor to be demonstrated away'.¹ As for the other Jews, they will, if they wish it, assimilate to the countries of their birth; and in this way, as men who recognise themselves to be of foreign origin and have, by an act of free choice, decided to change their nationality, will obtain more respect than those who pretend that they have no nationality to exchange. Even the Germans who today (that is to say, in the 60s of the last century) despise all 'the painstaking efforts of their Jewish fellow citizens to Germanise themselves', and care nothing for all their 'cultural achievements' the catalogue of which the latter are forever reciting, will, once the Jews are a nation on their own ancestral soil, give them as a nation that which they refuse to give them as individuals.²

But that day may not be near: and in the meanwhile religion is the great preservative of Judaism, and must on no account be diluted or brought up to date. For Hess the Jewish religion is, in its secular aspect, the foundation of all egalitarianism and socialism: for it recog-

¹ IV 17.

² *ibid.*

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nises no castes or classes, and assumes the unity of all creation. It allows no feudalism, no social hierarchy, it is just and equal and the true source of the noblest social movements of modern times. It does recognise the principle of nationality, but (so Hess maintained) it excludes chauvinistic nationalism, such as that of Prussia, as morally wrong; yet equally it leaves no room for its contrary – empty and artificial cosmopolitanism which, by denying even the just claims of nationality, falsifies the facts, sets up illusory ideals, and with its bogus prospectus lures innocent men to their doom. The first condition of true internationalism is that there should be nationalities. Internationalism is a movement not to abolish, but to unite, nations. Consequently Hess welcomes the renaissance of Jewish historiography among the German Jews and quotes with approval the names of Weill, Kompert, Bernstein, Wihl, and, above all, Graetz, who became his friend, and from whose history of the Jewish people – ‘people, let it be noted, not church or religion’ – he copiously and happily quotes.

Everything that had been suppressed by Hess for over twenty years now came welling up. He constantly returns to beliefs instilled in him by his father and grandfather. ‘I myself, had I a family, would, in spite of my dogmatic heterodoxy, not only join an orthodox synagogue, but would also observe in my home all the feast and fast days, so as to keep alive in my heart, and in the hearts of my children, the traditions of my people.’¹ He denounces all forms of adulteration and compromise, all forms of adaptation to meet the needs of modern times. Prayers must on no account be shortened, nor German versions used instead of Hebrew; Jewish preachers must be held in the greatest honour. What he fears above everything is what he calls ‘nihilism’.² The reform movement he regards as thin and unconvincing, a pathetic and vulgar imitation of Christianity, a counterfeit modern substitute for something ancient and unique. If he must choose, he would rather keep all the six hundred and thirteen rules of the *Shulchan Aruch*; one day a new Sanhedrin, meeting in Jerusalem, may change or abrogate them; until then, the Jews must preserve what they possess – their authentic spiritual heritage – unmodified. He mocks at the fictitious ‘missions’³ which some Jews persuade themselves that they have been called to perform among the nations – to teach toleration to other religions, or propagate the doctrine of ‘pure theism’,⁴ or

¹ VII 50.

² *R. J.*, *passim*, e.g. VII 52, VIII 63.

³ VIII 66.

⁴ VIII 65.

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even the arts of commerce. 'It is better for the Jew who does not believe in a national regeneration of his people to labour, like an enlightened Christian of today, for the dissolution of his religion. I can understand how one can hold this view; what I do not understand is how one can believe simultaneously in "enlightenment" and in the Jewish mission in exile, that is to say, in the ultimate dissolution and the continued existence of Judaism at one and the same time.'¹ Do the Jews who wish to sacrifice their historical past to such abstractions as 'Liberty' and 'Progress' really imagine that anyone will be taken in?² Does Meyerbeer really think that anyone besides himself is deceived because he so carefully avoids Biblical themes in his operas?

Having settled his account with the German Jews, Hess turned to the practical problem of the colonisation of Palestine. He noted that Rabbi Hirsch Kalischer of Thorn had already drafted a plan for precisely such a movement;³ he noted, too, that a Monsieur Ernest Laharanne, in a book called *The New Oriental Question*, supported this view. Laharanne, who was employed in the private office of the Emperor Napoleon III, was a Christian and a passionate advocate of Zionism. He denounced the rich emancipated Jews for their indifference, the pious Jews for defeatism, and declared a state in Palestine to be the only solution of the Jewish problem; the Sultan and the Pope would doubtless resist this plan, but he felt sure that free French democracy would ultimately prevail against both. He spoke of the fundamental right of the Jews to a historic home, and believed, too optimistically, that the Turks would, for a handful of gold tossed them by Jewish bankers (or, perhaps, obtained by the nobler expedient of a democratic subscription from the entire Jewish people), admit large Jewish colonisation. He spoke lyrically of the infinite mystery of Jewish survival, of the fact unparalleled in the history of mankind, that faced by enemies in every age – Alexandrian Greeks, Romans, Asiatics, Africans, barbarians, feudal kings, grand inquisitors, Jesuits, modern tyrants – they yet survived and multiplied. The French and the Jews must march together, together they must revitalise the parched land of Palestine and rescue it from the terrible Turk. French democracy, Jewish genius, modern science, that was to be the new

¹ VIII 67.

² IX 74.

³ Kalischer's *Drishath Zion* appeared a few months before *R.ŷ.*; like Newton and Leibniz, the two authors knew little of one another's lines of thought.

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triple alliance that would at once save an ancient people and revive an ancient land.

Hess, as may be imagined, welcomed this with great enthusiasm. In a characteristically apocalyptic mood, he prophesied that the national solidarity and unity that was the basis of Jewish religion would gradually make all men one. Natural science would liberate the workers, racial struggles would come to an end, and so, too, would those of classes. Jewish religion and Jewish history (a vast amalgam in which he included the teachings of the Old Testament and the Talmud, the Essenes and Jesus) said to men: 'Be of the oppressed and not of the oppressors; receive abuse and return it not; let the motive of all your actions be the love of God, and rejoice in suffering.'¹ By this gospel the world would be regenerated; but the first requirement was the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine. The rich Jews must buy the land and train agricultural experts. The *Alliance Israélite* – a philanthropic body of French Jews – must help Rabbi Natonek of Stuhl-Weissenburg in Hungary, who was ready to interview the Sultan about this plan, armed with a letter of recommendation from the Turkish Ambassador in Vienna. Jewish colonists must be led by men trained in modern methods of thought and action and not by obscurantist rabbis. The plan was capable of being realised; it must be realised; nothing stood in the way but bigotry and artificial cosmopolitanism, from both of which the majority of the Jews recoiled instinctively. Hess ends his extraordinary sermon on a note of high enthusiasm.

The language of *Rome and Jerusalem*, after a hundred years, seems antiquated. The style is by turns sentimental, rhetorical, and at times merely flat; there are a good many digressions and references to issues now totally forgotten. And yet it is a masterpiece. It lives because of its shining honesty, its fearlessness, the concreteness of its imagination, and the reality of the problem that it reveals. The morbid condition that Hess seeks to diagnose and cure has not vanished; on the contrary, it is as widespread now as in his day, but its symptoms are better known. Consequently the book is, despite its lack of literary talent, not dated. And because it is simple, and not encumbered by the dead formulas and the (by now often meaningless) Hegelian patter that mars some of the most original pages of Marx and his followers, its

¹ He refers to the passages in the tractates *Sabbath* 88b, *Yoma* 23a and *Gittin* 36b, as cited in H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1863), p. 226, note 1. See *R. J.*, p. 137, note.

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impact is still exceedingly fresh and direct; it can still provoke sympathy or violent opposition; it remains an analytic and polemical essay of the first order. No one concerned with its central theme can read it with indifference.

III

Hess had travelled a long way from the violently anti-religious communism and anti-nationalism of his younger days. The fierce attack upon the assimilationist reformers was in part, of course, an attack on his own dead self. The solution consisting in a dignified national dissolution by means of systematic intermarriage and the education of children in a faith different from one's own, which he now so ferociously denounced, was the very conduct that he himself had earlier advocated. The conscientious internationalism of his young Hegelian days was replaced by the realisation (it seems destined to come, late or soon, to almost every Jewish social thinker, whatever his views) that the Jewish problem is something *sui generis*, and seems to need a specific solution of its own, since it resists the solvent of even the most powerful universal panaceas. Nor was this in Hess's case the final reaction of a persecuted and exhausted old socialist, who, tired of waiting for the realisation of his universalist dreams, settles for a more limited national solution as a temporary expedient, or returns to the happy, conformist days of his youth as an escape from the excessive burden of the universal social struggle. To think this is to misunderstand Hess profoundly. He was a man who abandoned no belief unless he had convinced himself by rational methods that it was false. His Zionism did not cause him to abandon socialism. He evidently felt no incompatibility between communist ideals and belief in a Jewish national Risorgimento. Hess was not, like Hegel or Marx, a historical thinker of genius who broke with previous tradition, perceived relationships hitherto unnoticed (or at least not clearly described), imposed his vision on mankind, and transformed the categories in terms of which human beings think of their situation, their past and their destiny. But neither did he suffer from the defects of these despotic system-builders. He was intellectually (as indeed in every other respect) a man of complete integrity and did not, for any psychological or tactical reason, try to force the facts into some preconceived dogmatic pattern. The strongest single characteristic of his writings, especially

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of his later works, is a pure-hearted devotion to the truth, expressed with candid, at times childlike, simplicity. It is this that makes his words often devastating, and causes them to linger in the memory longer than the richer and weightier sentences of the more celebrated prophets of the age.

Hess abandoned neither socialism nor Zionism because he saw no incompatibility between them. His socialism – which was nothing but desire for social justice and a harmonious life – did not, any more than Lassalle's, preclude nationality. He could conceive of no inevitable collision between purposes or policies that seemed true, responded to genuine needs, and were morally good. It did not so much as occur to him that modern Jews should be prevented or even dissuaded from, let us say, the celebration of the Feast of the Passover, or the fulfilment of other religious duties, because these were obsolete survivals or superstitions that had nothing in common with an enlightened scientific outlook. He took it for granted that one truth and one value could not require the suppression of another; hence the moral values of socialism, and the truths embodied in a sense of one's individual social national human past, could not possibly, if correctly conceived, ever clash. Life would be sadly and quite gratuitously impoverished by the sacrifice of anything good or true or beautiful. It is this 'idealism', this '*naïveté*', that the tougher-minded revolutionaries derided in his day much as they do in ours.

After being Lassalle's representative in Cologne, and five years after publishing *Rome and Jerusalem* – to the theses of which he remained unwaveringly faithful to the end of his days – in 1867 Hess joined the International Workingmen's Association, founded, as everyone knows, by his old comrade in arms and remorseless denigrator, Karl Marx. He represented the workers of Berlin in the First International, and in 1868 and 1869, as a Marxist delegate, fought the representatives of Proudhon and of Bakunin, old friends whom he deeply admired, because he thought that their doctrines would disrupt working-class unity. He never became an orthodox Marxist. He still did not believe in violence or class warfare as an inescapable historical category; and he was a full-fledged Zionist *avant la parole*. But he was a socialist, and when he spoke of the Jewish state in Palestine, he declared that the soil of that country must be acquired by the Jews acting as a single national whole in order to prevent private exploitation. Similarly he regarded full legal protection of labour among the future colonists as a *sine qua non*, and declared that the organisation of

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industry, agriculture and trade must follow Mosaic – which for him was synonymous with socialistic – principles. He wanted to see in the new Jewish state workers' cooperatives of the type organised by Lassalle in Germany, state-aided until such time as the proletarians formed a majority of the inhabitants of Palestine, when the state would automatically, peacefully, and without revolution, become a socialist commonwealth.

All these ideas met, it may well be imagined, with an exceedingly hostile reception among educated Jews, particularly those German liberal Jews against whom Hess's sharpest sallies were directed. Such words had certainly never before been addressed to them. Jews in Germany had for almost a century been much adjured and much discussed. Mendelssohn and his followers had accused them of clinging senselessly to the ghetto for its own sake, of blind avoidance of the magnificent opportunity of entering the world of western culture that was at last open to receive them. The orthodox charged them with godlessness, with heresy and sin. They were told to cling to their ancient faith; to abandon it; to adjust it to modern life; to dilute it; to emulate German culture by critical examination of their own antiquities; to be historians, scholars, higher critics; to enter western civilisation by their own door; by doors already built by others; not to enter it at all. But in this great babel of voices, no one had yet proposed to them to recognise themselves for what they were – a nation: odd, *sui generis*, but still a nation; and therefore to give up nothing, avoid self-deception, not to seek to persuade themselves that what was not theirs and had never been theirs was dearer to them than what was truly their own, not to offer up, with pain and an unbearable sense of shame, what alone they could truly love, their own habits, outlook, memories, traditions, their history, their pride, their sense of identity as a nation, all that they, like other peoples, were and lived by, everything, indeed, that they could respect in themselves or others respected in them. Others – Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians – probably understood this better than the emancipated Jews to whom Hess spoke. No people struggling for its country can deny the Jewish people the right to its own land without the most fatal inconsistency, he wrote. And so, in the twentieth century, it duly and honourably turned out. But in the circumstances of the time his words were wounding to many, not least because they were true. 'Educated *parvenus* in Christian society'¹ he called his opponents with more bitterness than justice.

¹ R. J., note 9, p. 234.

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He poured vinegar in their wounds with the bitter zeal of a convert turning upon the blind mass from which he is sprung. Their reaction may well be imagined. The most eminent German-Jewish scholar of the day, Steinschneider, expressed himself with comparative moderation, and called Hess a repentant sinner,¹ adding the hope that the book would not be exploited by the enemies of the Jews already in Palestine. The celebrated scholar and publicist, the advocate of reform Judaism, Abraham Geiger, whose disavowal of nationality and intense efforts to feel and think like a Hegelian German of Jewish persuasion Hess had pilloried in telling language, reacted with understandable hostility: in an anonymous review entitled 'Old Romanticism, New Reaction', he condemned Hess's book root and branch. He called the author 'an almost complete outsider, who, after bankruptcy as a socialist, and all kinds of swindles, wants to make a hit with nationalism . . . and along with the questions of restoring Czech, Montenegrin and Szekler nationality, etc. . . . wants to revive that of the Jews'.² The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* said, '. . . we are first and foremost Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen and Americans, and only then Jews'.³ The growth of civilisation would cause desire for Palestine to evaporate among the eastern Jews.

So the debate – which even now is by no means closed – began, more than thirty years before the word 'Zionism' had been so much as heard of. The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* cautiously opened its journal, the *Archives Israélites*, to Hess, and offered tepid support. The *Alliance* was attracted by the notion of having so well known a publicist on its side, but was frightened of the notion of organised immigration to Palestine, although it was prepared to support such Jews as had already found their way there as the result of such minor efforts to colonise Palestine as were already, at that time, beginning to be made.

The scandal caused by the book duly died down. Like Hess's earlier works, it had, as far as can be determined, no influence at all. The return of the Jews to Palestine had, after all, been spoken of not

¹ 'Ein Baal Teshuvah'. Quoted by Theodor Zlocisti, *Moses Hess, Der Vorkämpfer des Sozialismus und Zionismus 1812–1875* (Berlin, 1921), p. 312.

² *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* 1 (1862), 252.

³ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 26 (1862), 610. See further a valuable article by Israel Cohen, to which I owe these quotations, 'Moses Hess: Rebel and Prophet', *Zionist Quarterly* (Fall 1951), 45–56, especially pp. 51–2.

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only by pious Jews or Christian visionaries, but by the great Napoleon himself at the time of his Egyptian campaign, by Fichte, by the Russian revolutionary Decembrist Pestel, who, like Fichte, wished to rid Europe of the Jews, by the French-Jewish publicist Joseph Salvador, by the eccentric English traveller Laurence Oliphant, by Rabbi Kalischer, and by other more obscure figures. It is possible that George Henry Lewes, who had met Hess in Paris, had spoken of his views to George Eliot and so inspired her novel *Daniel Deronda*, with its Jewish nationalist hero. But all this was of no account in a world where no one except, perhaps, a few groups of Jews scattered in eastern Europe (and, oddly enough, Australia) took such matters seriously. Hess was not destined to see in his own lifetime even the beginning of the fulfilment of his ideals.

The rest of his life is characteristic enough. Like other impoverished émigré journalists, he acted as correspondent of various German and Swiss journals, as well as the Chicago German weekly *Die Illinois Staats-Zeitung*, for which he wrote from 1865 a series of despatches which show a grasp of European affairs scarcely inferior to those of the *New York Tribune's* European correspondent – Karl Marx – and far greater powers of accurate prediction of events.¹ He was dismissed from it in 1870, ostensibly for excessive interest in politics in which his German-American readers were held to have too little interest. In the same year, on the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, he was expelled from Paris as a Prussian citizen, although, as may be imagined, he denounced Bismarck's aggression with all his might, and called upon the Jews to give their sympathies to France – the cradle of liberty and fraternity, the home of revolution and all humane ideals. He went to Brussels where he called for an alliance of all free peoples against 'Russianised Germany', a country intent on destroying France, only because France wanted to make humanity happier. In 1875 he died, as for the most part he had lived, in obscurity and poverty, an unworldly, isolated figure, and by his own wish was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Deutz by the side of his parents. His posthumous work, *Die Dynamische Stofflehre*, was published in Paris by his devoted wife in 1877 as a pious monument to his memory.

¹ The evidence of Hess's gifts as a political prophet, as well as much else of interest, may be found in Helmut Hirsch, 'Tribun und Prophet. Moses Hess als Pariser Korrespondent der Illinois Staats-Zeitung', *International Review of Social History* 2 (1957), 209–30. See also the admirable *Denker und Kämpfer* (Frankfurt, 1955) by the same author.

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She declared it to be his life's work, but it is a confused, half philosophical, half scientific, speculation of no interest or value today.¹ His real life's work is the simple and moving book which still contains more truth about the Jews, both in the nineteenth century and in our own, than any comparable work. Like its author, it was all but forgotten until events themselves rescued both from unjust oblivion. Today streets are called after him in the two principal cities of the state of Israel: nothing would have surprised or delighted him more greatly. After 1862 he was a Jew first and a Marxist second; he would, I suspect, have considered the systematic disparagement of his ideas and personality by Engels and his imitators as more than made up for by the recognition given him by the Jewish state in which he believed with his whole being. Yet nothing seemed less likely during his lifetime.

IV

Like other intellectually honest, morally sensitive and unfrightened men, Moses Hess turned out to have a deeper understanding of some essential matters than more gifted and sophisticated social thinkers. In his socialist days – and they only ceased with his death – he said that the abolition of property and the destruction of the middle classes did not necessarily and automatically lead to paradise; for they did not necessarily cure injustice or guarantee social or individual equality. This was a bold and original view for a socialist of those days. His allies were, for the most part, men dominated by a desire for a clear-cut social structure, and a rationalist, rather than rational, desire to solve social problems in almost geometrical, black-and-white terms. Like their forerunners in the eighteenth century, but armed with different hypotheses, they tried to treat history as an exact science, and to deduce from the study of it some unique plan of action guaranteed to make men for ever free, equal, happy and good. In this dogmatic and intolerant milieu Hess permitted himself to doubt whether any solution could, in principle, achieve this, unless and until the men who built the new world themselves lived by the principles of justice, and felt benevolence and love towards individual human beings and not

¹ Hess's earliest biographer, Theodor Zlocisti, thinks otherwise, and calls him a forerunner of modern atomic theory: *op. cit.* (p. 245, note 1 above), p. 412.

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merely humanity at large, that is to say, were endowed with a character and an outlook which no amount of social and political reform could of itself secure. It is surely a sign of immaturity (even though it may be evidence of a noble and disinterested nature) to stake everything on any one final solution to social problems. When to such immaturity there is added a ruthless will, and a genius for organisation which enables its possessor to force human beings into patterns unrelated to their nature and their own wishes, then what starts as pure and disinterested idealism, inevitably ends in oppression, cruelty and blood. A sense of symmetry and regularity, and a gift for rigorous deduction, that are prerequisites of aptitude for some natural sciences, will, in the field of social organisation, unless they are modified by a great deal of sensibility, understanding and humanity, inevitably lead to appalling bullying on the one side and untold suffering on the other. Even though he knew that he would be mercilessly denounced for stupidity, ignorance and irresponsible Utopianism by his admired, tyrannical comrades in arms, Marx and Engels, Hess could not bring himself to view the world through their distorting spectacles. He did not accept their view of man's nature. He believed in the permanent and universal validity of certain general human values. To the end of his days he firmly believed that human feeling, natural affections, the desire for social justice, individual freedom and solidarity within historically continuous groups – families or religious associations or nationalities – were to be valued as being good in themselves. He did not think that these deep human interests, however they might be modified in space or time, were necessarily altered by historical evolution or conditioned by class consciousness or by any other relatively transient phenomenon to anything like the decisive extent of which the so-called scientific Marxists spoke. As for the relative value and importance of the desire for national independence, it is perhaps enough to point to recent events in Hungary, in Poland and elsewhere¹ for evidence that the orthodox Marxist interpretation of national feeling and its lack of influence upon the working classes of a nation conspicuously no longer capitalist, contains fallacies that have proved tragic enough to many of those involved in them. These are merely the latest and most spectacular examples of truths which Hess saw more clearly than his comrades, without the slightest trace of chauvinism or morbid nationalism, and, let it be added, in the context of the extreme left-wing socialism of which he was one of the purest

¹This was written in 1957.

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and most eloquent proponents. This alone seems to me to establish that his claims, even as a social theorist, as against his critics, are not too difficult to sustain, and that his significance has been for many years systematically underestimated by faithful Marxists¹ to the greater glory of their own creed, but at the expense of the facts of history.

v

In his view of the Jewish question (as it used to be called) Hess's predictions have proved to be almost uncannily accurate. Thus, in one of his more sibylline passages, he declares that the liberal Jews of Germany will one day suffer a cataclysm the extent of which they cannot begin to conceive. Nobody will deny that, at any rate, this prophecy has proved to be only too horribly verified. Similarly Hess preached against assimilation in its heyday, and all that he said about the false position into which the assimilators had put both themselves and their victims seems to me to have been wholly vindicated by the events that followed. No one can today pretend not to know what Hess had meant by his references to 'various geographical or philosophical alibis'² behind which Jews (or other human beings) try to make out that they are not what they most conspicuously are because they cannot face embarrassing truths about themselves; thereby deceiving only themselves, causing discomfort or shame to their friends, and amusement or contempt, and, in the end, hatred, on the part of their enemies. Hess had observed that the Jews were in fact a nation, however skilfully definitions were juggled to prove that they were not, and he said so in simple, and, to some, startling and even shocking language. Yet it seems clear that the state of Israel, whatever

¹ e.g. by Auguste Cornu, who in his scholarly and lucid *Moses Hess et la gauche Hégélienne* (Paris, 1934) treats Hess as a minor and somewhat slow-witted precursor of Marx, whose views had been rendered obsolete by Marxism. Cornu's later works go even farther in this respect. This is in effect also the view of Georg Lukács in his article 'Moses Hess und die Probleme der idealistischen Dialektik', *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* 12 (1926), 105-55. Irma Goitein in her *Probleme der Gesellschaft und des Staates bei Moses Hess* (Leipzig, 1931) shows far more insight.

² V 28 (cf. p. 233, note 3 above).

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attitude may be adopted towards it, could not have come into being if the Jews had in fact been not such as he, but as his opponents supposed them to be, whether they were orthodox rabbis, or liberal assimilationists, or doctrinaire communists. He has, furthermore, proved to be right in supposing that the western Jews would not, of their own volition, choose to emigrate, whatever the difficulties they encountered in their various communities, because, in the end, they were too happy, too comfortable, too well integrated in them. Although, like his friend Heine, he had to some degree anticipated the development of German barbarism, yet Hitler was far beyond anything that either had imagined; and Hess had, therefore, on the evidence available in his day, correctly assumed that it was the eastern and not the German Jews who would be driven both by their internal solidarity and by economic desperation to new worlds, and in particular to the creation of an autonomous community in Palestine.

He believed in natural science applied to create social welfare; he believed in cooperatives, communal endeavour, state ownership, or, at any rate, public ownership. To a large degree – larger than is pleasing to those who favour other forms of social organisation – these principles have today been realised in the state of Israel. He believed deeply in the faithful preservation of historical tradition. He spoke about this in language scarcely less fervent, but a good deal less biased and irrational, than Burke or Fichte. He did so not because he feared change – he was after all a radical and a revolutionary – but because through his most extreme and radical beliefs there persists a conviction that there is never any duty to maim or impoverish oneself for the sake of an abstract ideal; that nobody can, or should, be required to vivisect himself, to throw away that which affords him the deepest spiritual satisfaction known to human beings – the right to self-expression, to personal relationships, to the love of familiar places or forms of life, of beautiful things, or the roots and symbols of one's own, or one's family's, or one's nation's past. He believed that nobody should be made to sacrifice his own individual pattern of the unanalysable relationships – the central emotional or intellectual experiences – of which human lives are compounded, to offer them up, even as a temporary expedient, for the sake of some tidy solution, deduced from abstract and impersonal premises, some form of life derived from an alien source, imposed upon men by artificial means, and felt to be the mechanical application of some general rule to a concrete situation for which it was not made. All that Hess, towards the end of his life,

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wrote or said, rests on the assumption that to deny what inwardly one knows to be true, to do violence to the facts for whatever tactical or doctrinal motive, is at once degrading and doomed to futility. The foundations of his beliefs, both socialist and Zionist, were unashamedly moral. He was convinced, moreover, as a matter of empirical knowledge, that moral beliefs played a major role in human affairs.

The socialist morality that he so pure-heartedly preached, as well as the type of nationalism that he idealised, have, on the whole, proved more enduring and productive of human freedom and happiness than the more 'realistic' solutions of his more Machiavellian rivals, both on the right and on the left. For this reason he is to be counted among the genuine prophets of our own day who said much that was novel, true and still of the first importance. This is the title to immortality of 'the communist rabbi', the friend of Heine and Michelet, the man whom Karl Marx, in his rare moments of high good humour, used to call 'the donkey, Moses Hess'.