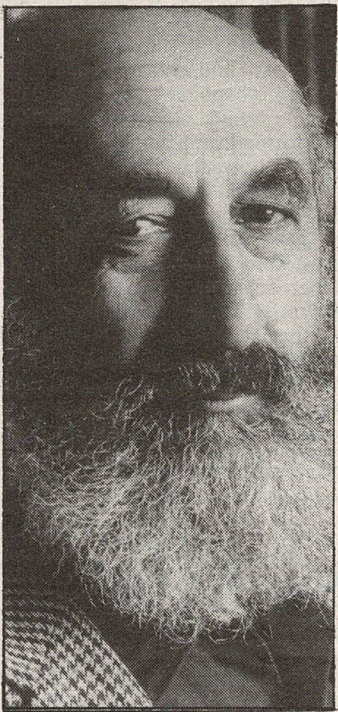


On the other hand



Chaim Bermant

Doomed to be an honourable exception

I KNEW there was something amiss with the British honours system when my 50th birthday passed and I still hadn't received a knighthood.

I thus have every sympathy with the Prime Minister's plans to reform the system, though I am not sure if the sort of reforms he has in mind are practical.

Does he really want the general public to submit nominations for honours? If he does, he may find half the Jews in the country nominating the other half.

I am not suggesting that Jews have an inordinate hunger for honours, but if you believe that you are one of the Chosen it is natural to wish to be that much more chosen than others.

Hence the importance which people who may not even set foot in synagogue, attach to the fact that they are a Cohen, or a Levi rather than a Yisroel.

Even I, the most humble and modest of men, am at pains to define myself as a *ben ho'rav* — the son of a rabbi — to show that even if I am only a Yisroel, I am not a common-or-garden Yisroel. (Jewish women, incidentally, have no such distinction, there being no honours among Jewish women.)

The first newspapers I read were Yiddish papers and in them I noticed that, while some names had titles before them, like Rav or even Rav Ha'Gaon, a great many had letters after them, like z'l or z'tz'l.

The first stood for *zecher livrocho* (of blessed memory) and the second for *zecher tzadik livrocho* (of blessed and saintly memory), and both, of course, indicated that they were dead, which is a distinction of sorts.

When we moved to Glasgow and I learned to read English I noticed that quite a number of people had BA or MA after their names and I took it that they too were dead, until I came across an MA who was alive, after a fashion, and it eventually dawned on me that they denoted scholastic achievements.

Almost everyone in the community is honoured in some way or another by being chairman of this or treasurer of that — even if he has nothing to treasure — but the honours which really count are those which emanate from outside.

I had a great uncle, Aryeh Leib Daets, who was chairman — and treasurer — of just about everything in Glasgow, but what really distinguished him were two letters after his name: JP.

He was not only a leader in Israel but a judge among the goyim.

Though he had settled in the city in 1904 he had never acquired a proper command of English. But he recognised a drunk when he saw one and, in his 40 years on the bench, he must have consigned half of Glasgow to the cooler.

All that, however, was a long time ago when an honour such as being made a Justice of the Peace was bestowed only on the chosen few. Today everybody in Glasgow who isn't in prison is a JP.

The real king of the community was a Knight of the Shire, Sir Maurice Bloch, who was to Scottish Jewry what the Rothschilds were to world Jewry.

I don't know if Sir Maurice was as rich as the Rothschilds, but he was in some respects better off than them. For a start, he was a bachelor, so that he had fewer outgoings. Moreover, while the Rothschilds made their money from money, he made his from whisky, so that in the last resort, if he couldn't sell his wares he could always drink them. (I had the impression that he often did, for he had the rosy hues of a man who knew how to live.)

I once had to wait for him in his

office and came away half intoxicated from the smell of brandy and cigars.

The entire community drew pride from Sir Maurice's knighthood and still benefits from his generosity. If Aryeh Leib Daets was chairman of just about everything, Sir Maurice was life president. Yet, when he stood as a Tory candidate for the Gorbals — which was then the main centre of Jewish life — he was twice defeated, which suggests that Glasgow Jewry was prepared to accord him every honour except the one he actually craved.

Sir Maurice died about 30 years ago. Since then, three Glasgow Jews have been raised beyond the order of knighthood to become peers of the realm. Two, Lord Greenhill and Lord Finnieston, are now dead. The third, Lord Galpern, a former Provost of the city, is, at 90, still very much alive.

The trouble is, none of the three was particularly rich, but then all three were Labour creations. A Tory Prime Minister, even if he believes in a classless society, appreciates that a high rank goes ill with a low income, which is possibly why I'm still not a Sir and why my wife is not a Lady.

Readers' requests

● The charity, Help A Bride, seeks recently worn bridal gowns that are no longer required. — (Mrs) S. Vorhand, (Mrs) N. Ackerman, 15 Western Avenue, NW11 9HE.

● For "Under the Chupah," a book on all aspects of Jewish marriage, I am looking for couples willing to be interviewed. — David Finlay, 5 Bigwood Court, Bigwood Road, NW11 6SS.

● Accounts of unusual experiences from birth to death are sought for the BBC's "A Journey Through Judaism." — Ruth Kaitiff, P. O. Box 951, BBC GMR, Oxford Road, Manchester M60 1SD.

● The Wizo Singers urgently need an accompanist. Please contact Mrs Lotte Fraser on 071-486 2691. — Natalie Freeman, Wizo, 107 Gloucester Place, W1H 4BY.

● I require background material on the education of Jewish girls in Alsace, c. 1914. — Jacqueline Hall, Department of Languages, Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham NG11 8NS.

● Information is sought on Violet Guttenberg, author of "A Modern Exodus" (1904). — David Brauner, Flat 10, Lonsdale College, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YN.

● I require details of Yiddish groups in Britain. — Fritz Spitzer, 22 Adalia Crescent, Leigh-on-Sea, SS9 3SN.

● Information is needed for research into the Buckle Street School. — Leon Rudolf, 8 Embassy Lodge, 243-251 Regents Park Road, N3.

● I would appreciate help in preparing an article on the Tottenham Jewish community during 1920-30. — (Rabbi Dr) Max Newman, 1856 Blackstone Place, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237, USA.

● Material, particularly on Hillel Houses, is sought for a history of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation. — Alan Webber, Hillel House, 1-2 Endsleigh Street, WC1 0DS.

● Former pupils of special schools are invited to contribute accounts of their experiences for a book on the subject. — Simone Aspis, 19 Dean Road, NW2 5AB.

● For an MA thesis, I would like to hear readers' opinions of Jewish characters in TV programmes over the past couple of years. — (Ms) Jacky Fairfax, c/o Media Studies, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1 0AL.

● I am looking for interviewees for a history of Jews in the recording industry. — Michael Brett, 30 Belmont Avenue, N13 4HD.

● Material relating to Primo Levi is required for a new biography. — Ian Thomson, 21 Gloucester Street, SW1 2BD.

● Details of shiurim are sought for the 1993-94 Shiur Diary. — (Rabbi) S. M. Kupetz, 4 Hanover Gardens, Salford M7 0FQ.

● I am seeking information on the 1917 Abercrombie ward by-election in Liverpool. — Cecil Skulnick, 26 Crompton Court, Cromptons Lane, Liverpool L18 3EZ.

● The Bomber Command Association of Canada is looking for relatives of Flight Sergeant Ernest Israel Glass in connection with a memorial to be dedicated in July. — (Mrs) D. Beasty, 42 Highfield Crescent, Bradford BD9 6HP.

● Material is required for a history of the 35s Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry. — (Mrs) D. Gerlis, 24 Park Hill, W5 2JN.

● For the Ajax House memorial room, I am collecting letters written to or by servicemen and women during the Second World War. — Henry Morris, Ajax, Eastbank, N16 5RT.

● I would like to interview native Yiddish speakers who have lived in Belorussia. — Vitaly Zaiko, Yarnton Manor, Yarnton, Oxford OX5 1PY.

● Photographs relating to the St Louis are needed for a new edition of "Voyage of the Damned." — Gordon Thomas, The Old Rectory, Ashford, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

● Favourite recipes are wanted for a Wizo cookbook. — Ruth Levene, 40 Llandennis Avenue, Cyncoed, Cardiff CF2 6JH.

● I would like to contact anyone involved in the Refugee Children's Committee in Cambridge, 1933-45. — (Dr) Gertrude Dubrovsky, 244 Hawthorne Avenue, Princeton, NJ 08540, USA.

● I require information on the "life and times" of Grove Dwellings and the surrounding area. — Nigel Winfield, 34 Grove Dwellings, Adelina Grove, E1 3AE.

SPEAKING in favour of the beleaguered eruv recently, I was attacked by venomously anti-eruv Jews spouting a policy I had taken to be nearing extinction.

"We Jews have no business making demands," I was told. "We shouldn't call attention to ourselves. We're grateful to be here. Proud to be British. The last thing we want is to make waves."

These are the Jews who flinch when they see a bevy of Bnei Akiva boys, kipot flapping in the breeze, making their animated way through Britain's streets. Totally unnecessary! Why wear skullcaps in public, when they could wear simple hats?

These are the Jews who wince as Howard Jacobson binds tefillin round the globe, courtesy of Channel 4, in a streimel-swinging search for his Roots Schmoots; who wish Maureen Lipman had stuck to letter writing; and who shuddered at Jackie Mason directing incandescent Yiddishisms at the Queen Mother. This is all just "too Jewish."

Such Jews are relieved that Chief Rabbi Sacks has an English accent; keep their kids off school for first day Rosh Hashanah, but write a letter detailing flu symptoms; and would have felt better had Gary "Pig Farmer" Sinyor made a nice, non-denominational "Carry-On" film.

The "heads-down-lie-low" lobby would have us discard our Jewishness along with our pyjamas in the morning; have us live out our lives in silent, pre-emptive appeasement of potential anti-Semites. They are most comfortable with the notion of Jew as chameleon, seamlessly slotting into society at large and eradicating any spontaneous behaviour which might promote unflattering stereotyping.

Despite their protestations about unsightly poles, wires *et al*, only one, hypothetical, feature of the proposed eruv really got up many of these people's nose-jobs. They couldn't bear the idea that the eruv might attract hordes of observant Jews — bearded types who might claim them as their own by wishing them "Good Yomtov" in front of the neighbours.

As a strategy for self-preservation, keeping your head down and lying low is an out-and-out failure. The assumption is that if we're neither seen nor heard anti-Semitism will wither on the bough.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitism operates entirely independently of Jews. You don't need to know a

Acute angle



Vanessa Feltz

Not frowning but raving

Jew to be a Jew-hater, as the upsurge in racially-based right-wing extremism currently to be seen in Europe conclusively proves.

In the 1930s, several hundred of Germany's foremost Jews paid for an advertisement in the press declaring: "We regard ourselves, along with the overwhelming majority of German Jews, as members of the German, not of the Jewish people."

In 1993, German Jews are so few as to be barely discernible in that country's demographic statistics. The huge majority of Germans under 45 have never seen a Jew in the flesh. German Jews cannot have kept a lower profile. They certainly haven't spent the past 50 years flaunting their tallit fringes in cities haunted by the memory of the compulsory yellow star.

Nonetheless, only a few months

ago, a man was burned to death there simply because he was — wrongly — suspected of being Jewish.

When we strive to be "like them," we imply that there's something unsavoury about being "like us." Jewish self-loathing is extraordinary because it's derivative. We buy the detestable tenets of anti-Semitism and use them against ourselves.

Despite being surrounded by countless examples of warm-hearted, open-handed, intellectually innovative, and financially impoverished Jews, we still scan one another for signs of the greedy, grasping, ostentatious usurer lurking beneath the surface. By struggling to disprove stereotypes, we acknowledge their validity.

Diminishing diaspora Jewry has never needed self-confident role models more. Greville Janner may be doing a magnificent job on that front, but he can't be expected to fly the flag alone. Out-married, incidentally Jewish, stars on the political firmament have him seriously outnumbered.

This country is full of Jews who would wince at being labelled Jewish: major writers (leaving scant hope of a Great British Jewish novelist on the order of Americans like Bellow or Roth); Jewish comedians who would never dream of cracking a Jewish joke; Jewish actresses terrified of being typecast.

Add to these, all the Jekyll-and-Hyde Jews, Jewish at home but scrupulously neutral outside.

Britain is a multi-racial society. There is no longer a homogeneous "norm" from which we are excluded. In the land of the turbaned Sikh, exuberantly plaited Rastafarian and safety-pin-pierced punk there is, thank God, no "right" way.

We no longer stand in danger of betraying our origins with alien vowel sounds or an overdose of sequins.

If you drop a can of baked beans on your toe in Waitrose and let out an involuntary "gevalt!" so what?

If we want to set up an eruv, or hoist a menorah over Golders Green station, or walk to shul carrying lulavim, nothing should inhibit us from — within the laws of the land — doing precisely that.

We've had gay pride and Black power.

Isn't it time we wore our experience of being Jewish with similarly? Heaven knows, there's nothing else I'd rather be.