

THE EXPULSION OF THE JEWS FROM ENGLAND IN 1290

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The Expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 by B. L. Abrahams

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B. L. ABRAHAMS

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THE JEWS FROM
ENGLAND IN 1290**

Arnold Prize Essay, 1894.

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JEWS FROM ENGLAND IN 1290

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THIS ESSAY, to which the Arnold Prize in the University of Oxford was awarded in 1894, has appeared in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* for October, 1894, and January and April, 1895. I am indebted to the Editors of the *Review* for permission to republish it.

I wish to express my obligations to *Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica: a Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History*, compiled by Messrs. JOSEPH JACOBS and LUCIEN WOLF, and to *The Jews of Angevin England*, by Mr. JOSEPH JACOBS. Nearly all the passages bearing on Anglo-Jewish history, down to 1206, are contained in the latter book, and many of the references in the earlier part of my essay might have been made to its pages. I thought it better, however, to refer direct to the original authorities, and have, as a rule, mentioned Mr. Jacobs' book only when using passages in it which have been nowhere else printed.

Some articles which I have contributed to Mr. R. H. I. PALGRAVE'S *Dictionary of Political Economy*, to the First Volume of the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, and to the *Jewish Chronicle* for April 26th, 1895, contain information bearing on the subject of this Essay.

THE EXPULSION OF THE JEWS FROM
ENGLAND IN 1290.

THE expulsion of the Jews from England by Edward I. is a measure concerning the causes of which no contemporary historian gives, or pretends to give, any but the most meagre information. It was passed by the King in his "secret council," of the proceedings of which we naturally know nothing. Of the occasion that suggested it, each separate writer has his own account, and none has a claim to higher authority than the rest; and yet there is much in the circumstances connected with it that calls for explanation. How was it that, at a time when trade and the need for capital were growing, the Jews, who were reputed to be among the great capitalists of Europe, were expelled from England? How did Edward, a king who was in debt from the moment he began his reign till the end, bring himself to give up the revenue that his father and grandfather had derived from the Jews? How could he, as an honourable king, drive out subjects who were protected by a Charter that one of his predecessors had granted, and another had solemnly confirmed? To answer these questions we must consider what was the position that the Jews occupied in England, how it was forced on them, and how it brought them into antagonism at various times with the interests of the several orders of the English people, and with the teachings of the Catholic Church. We shall thus find the origin of forces strong enough when they converged to bring about the result which is to be accounted for.

I.—THE JEWS FROM THEIR ARRIVAL TO 1190.

Among the foreigners who flocked to England at, or soon after, the Conquest were many families of French Jews. They brought with them money, but no skill in any occupation except that of lending it out at interest. They lent to the King, when the ferm of his counties, or his feudal dues were late in coming in;¹ to the barons, who, though lands and estates had been showered on them, nevertheless often found it hard, without doubt, to procure ready money wherewith to pay for luxuries, or to meet the expense of military service; and to suitors who had to follow the King's Court from one great town to another, or to plead before the Papal Curia at Rome.²

But though they thus came into contact with many classes, and had kindly relations with some, they remained far more alien to the masses of the people around them than even the Normans, in whose train they had come to England. Even the Norman baron must, a hundred years after the Conquest, have become something of an Englishman. He held an estate, of which the tenants were English; he presided over a court attended by English suitors. In battle he led his English retainers. He and the Englishman worshipped in the same church, and in it the sons of the two might serve as priests side by side. But the Jews remained, during the whole time of their sojourn in England, sharply separated from, at any rate, the common people around them by peculiarities of speech, habits and daily life, such as must have aroused dread and hatred in an ignorant and superstitious age. Their foreign faces alone would have been enough to mark them out. Moreover, they generally occupied, not under compulsion, but of their own choice, a separate quarter of each town

¹ J. Jacobs, *Jews of Angevin England*, 43-4; 64-5.

² Cf. the account of the litigation of Richard of Anesty in Palgrave's *Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth*, Vol. II. (Proofs and Illustrations), pp. xxiv.-xxvii.

in which they dwelt.¹ And in their isolation they lived a life unlike that of any other class. None of them were feudal landowners, none farmers, none villeins, none members of the guilds. They did not join in the national Watch and Ward. They alone were forbidden to keep the mail and hauberk which the rest of the nation was bound to have at hand to help in preserving the peace.² They were not enrolled in the Frankpledge, that society that brought neighbours together and taught them to be interested in the doings of one another by making them responsible for one another's honesty. They did not appear at the Court Leet or the Court Baron, at the Town-moot or the Shire-moot. They went to no church on Sundays, they took no sacrament; they showed no signs of reverence to the crucifix; but, instead, they went on Friday evening and Saturday morning to a synagogue of their own, where they read a service in a foreign tongue, or sang it to strange Oriental melodies. When they died they were buried in special cemeteries, where Jews alone were laid.³ At home their very food was different from that of Christians. They would not eat of a meal prepared by a Christian cook in a Christian house. They would not use the same milk, the same wine, the same meat as their neighbours. For them cattle had to be killed with special rites; and, what was worse, it sometimes happened that, some minute detail having been imperfectly performed, they rejected meat as unfit for themselves, but considered it good enough to be offered for sale to their Christian neighbours.⁴ The presence of

¹ See Jewries of Oxford and Winchester, in the plans in *Norgate's England under Angevin Kings*, I., pp. 31, 40; and Jewry of London, described in *Papers of Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition*, pp. 29-52.

² *Chronica Rogeri de Hoveden* (Rolls Series) II., 261; *Gesta Henrici II. et Ricardi I.* (Rolls Series), I. 279.

³ *Gesta Henrici II. et Ricardi I.* (R. S.), I. 182; *Chronica Rogeri de Hoveden* (R. S.), II. 137.

⁴ Depping, *Les Juifs dans le Moyen Age*, 170; Jacobs' *The Jews of Angevin England*, 54, 178; *Statutes of the Realm* (Edition of 1810), I. 202