

CONTEMPORARY INTERMARRIAGE

By

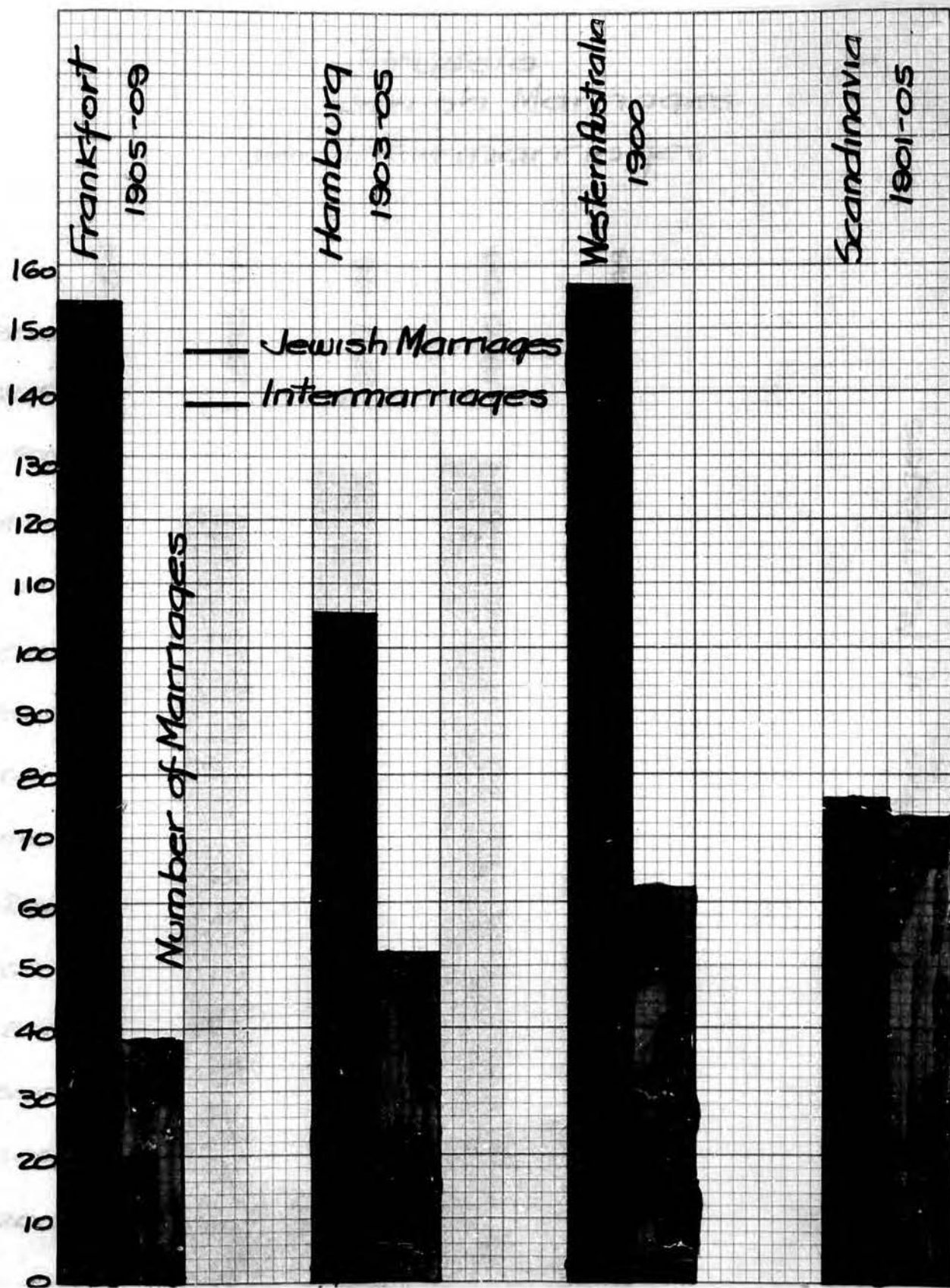
BENJAMIN MYRON PARKER

JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

1 9 2 6.

The problem of intermarriage is old. An analysis of this problem in every period of history has caused a re-awakening in Jewish life. Intermarriage is the resultant force of Jewish adjustment. It is the equilibrating force of the Jew and his environment. It also happens to be one of the few resultant factors that is subject to analysis. It is the indicator of the growth or loss of Judaism. It shows us whether the Jew is satisfied with Judaism, whether Judaism is a potent factor in his life and whether it has induced in him that loyalty and love which can act as a powerful deterrent, in view of the great difficulty of keeping a minority group alive.

What are the tendencies in modern times? Is the future of Judaism at stake? For is not the future of Judaism dependent upon the adherence of the Jew to his faith, which will inspire him to help develop Judaism and upon the abolition of intermarriage? What are the facts? And if the number of Jews that are being lost are on the increase, can we not find out why? Since it is the resultant of a number of forces, can we not determine the power and direction of these component forces? By analyzing these component forces and the conditions which cause their action, is it not possible to diminish their power and alter their direction, in order that the resultant force, the equilibrating force, intermarriage, may be at a minimum?

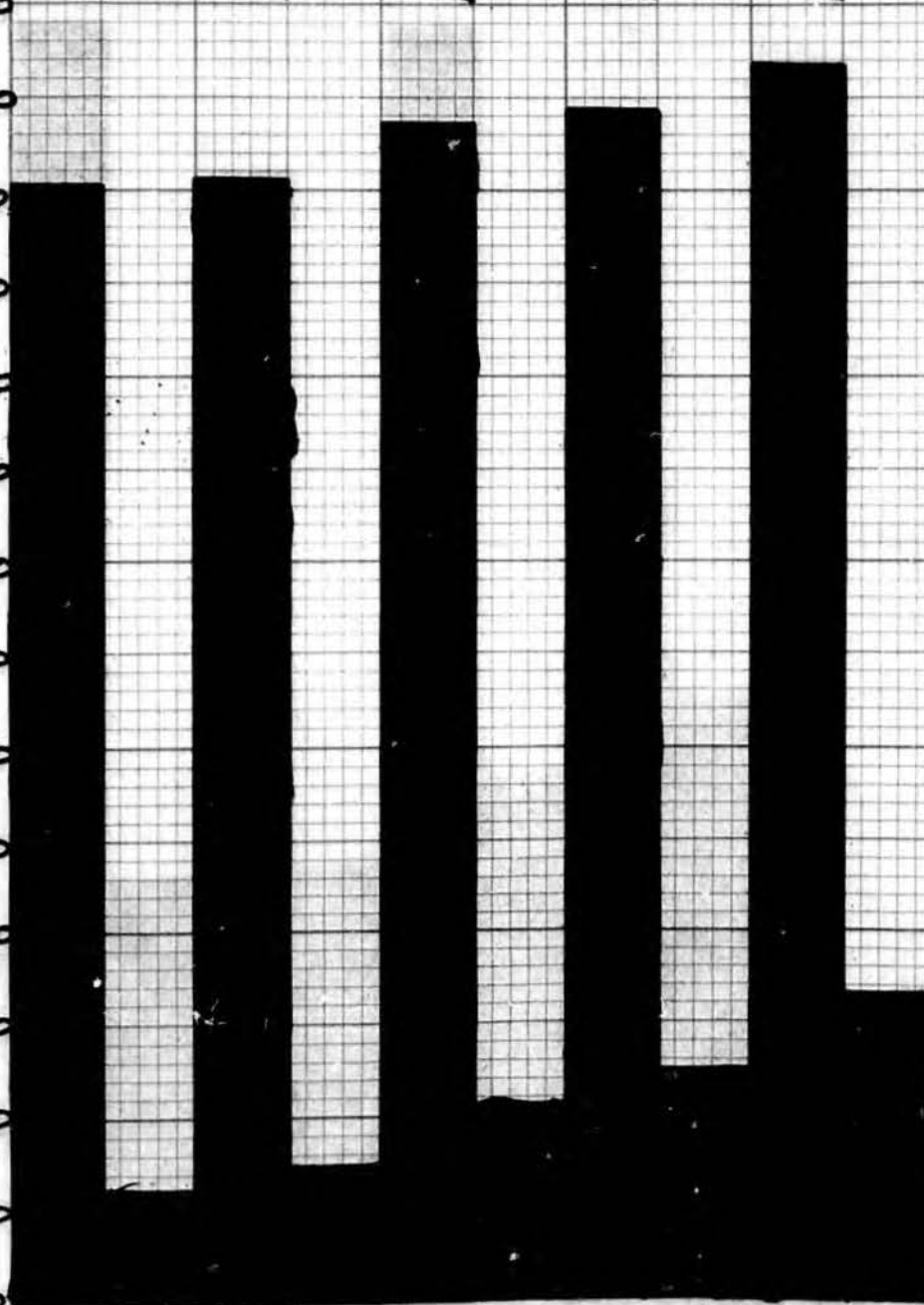


Prussia
Jewish Marriages
Intermarriages

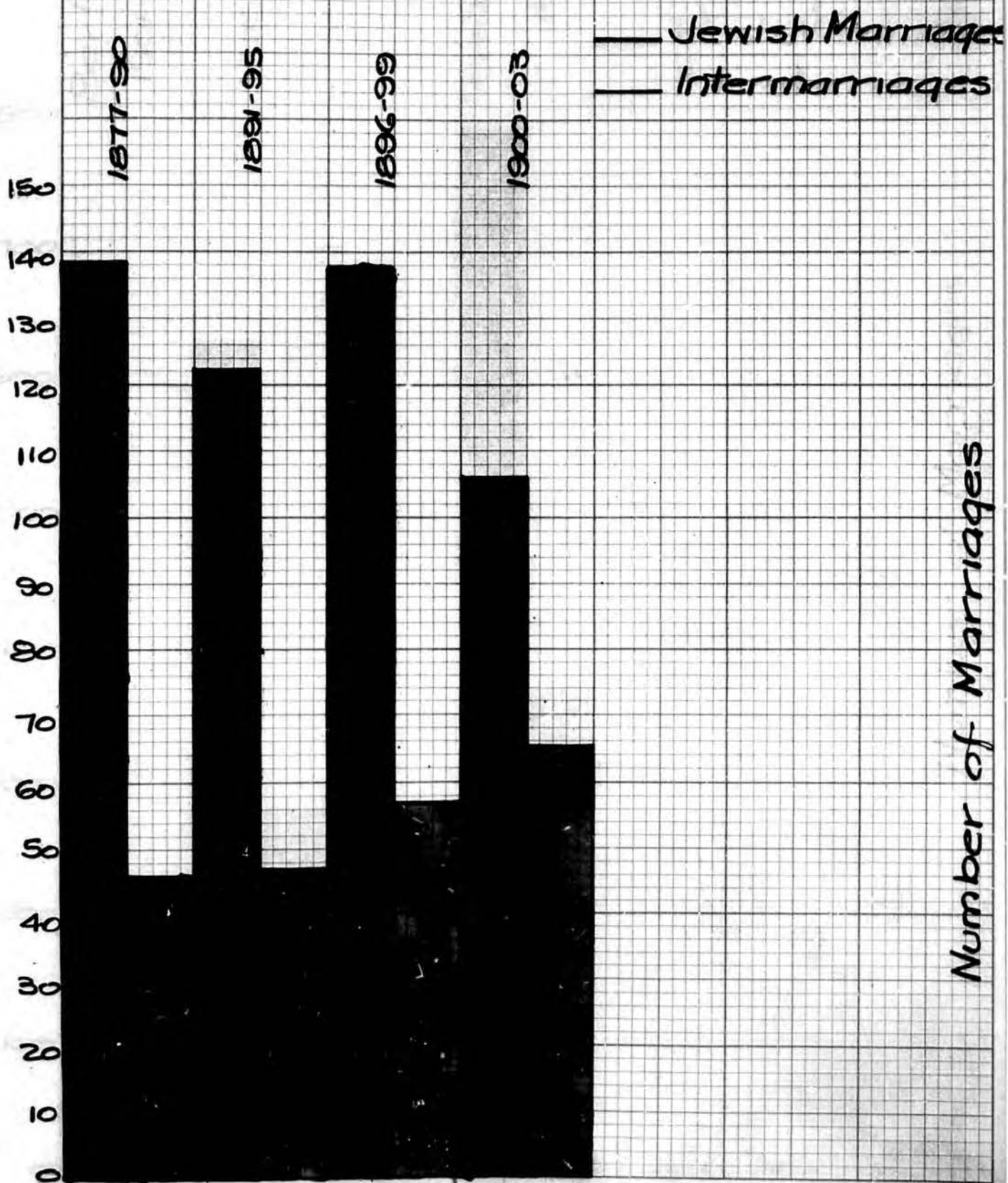
1875-84
1885-94
1895-99
1900-04
1905-08

3000
2800
2600
2400
2200
2000
1800
1600
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0

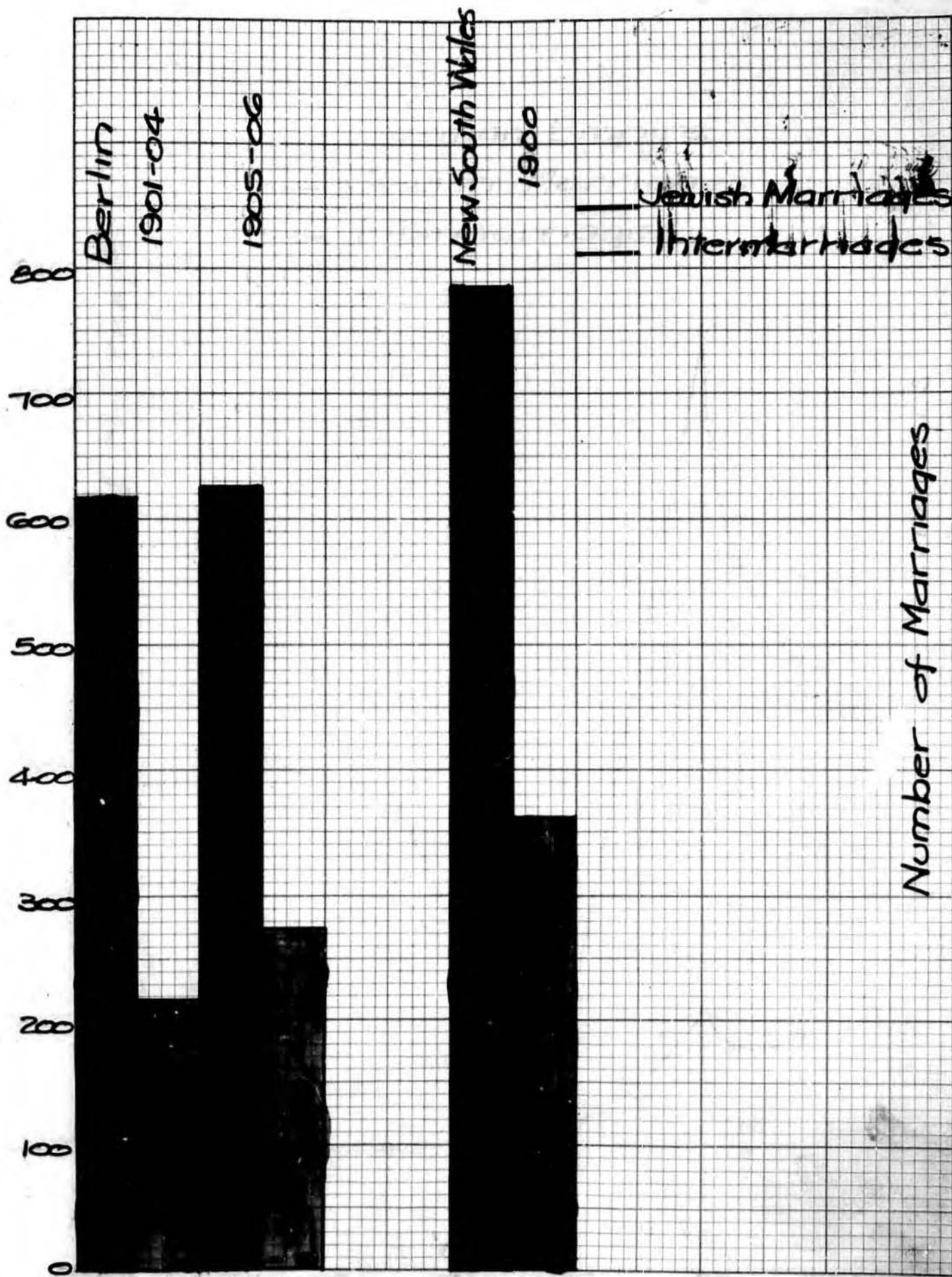
Number of Marriages

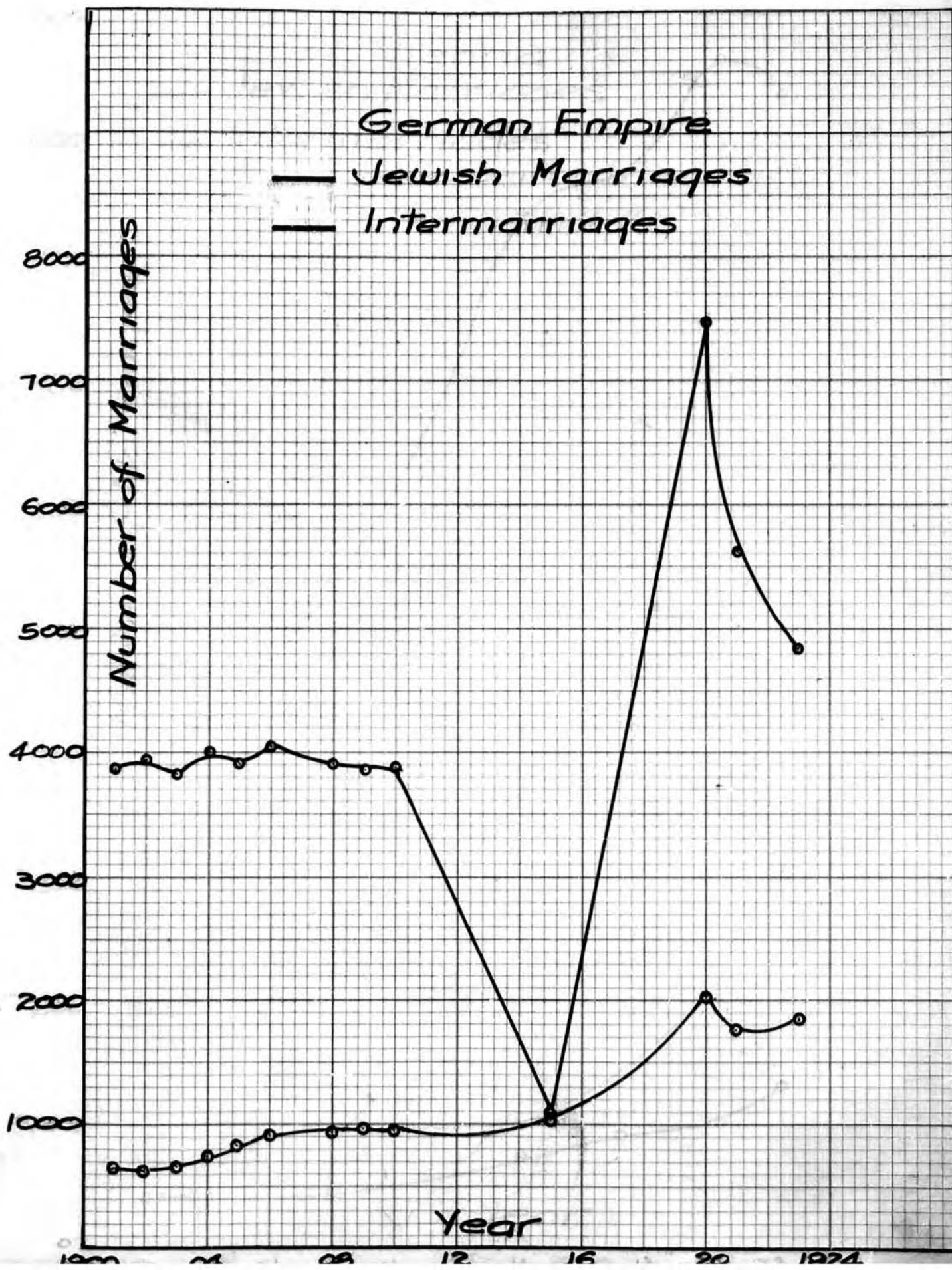


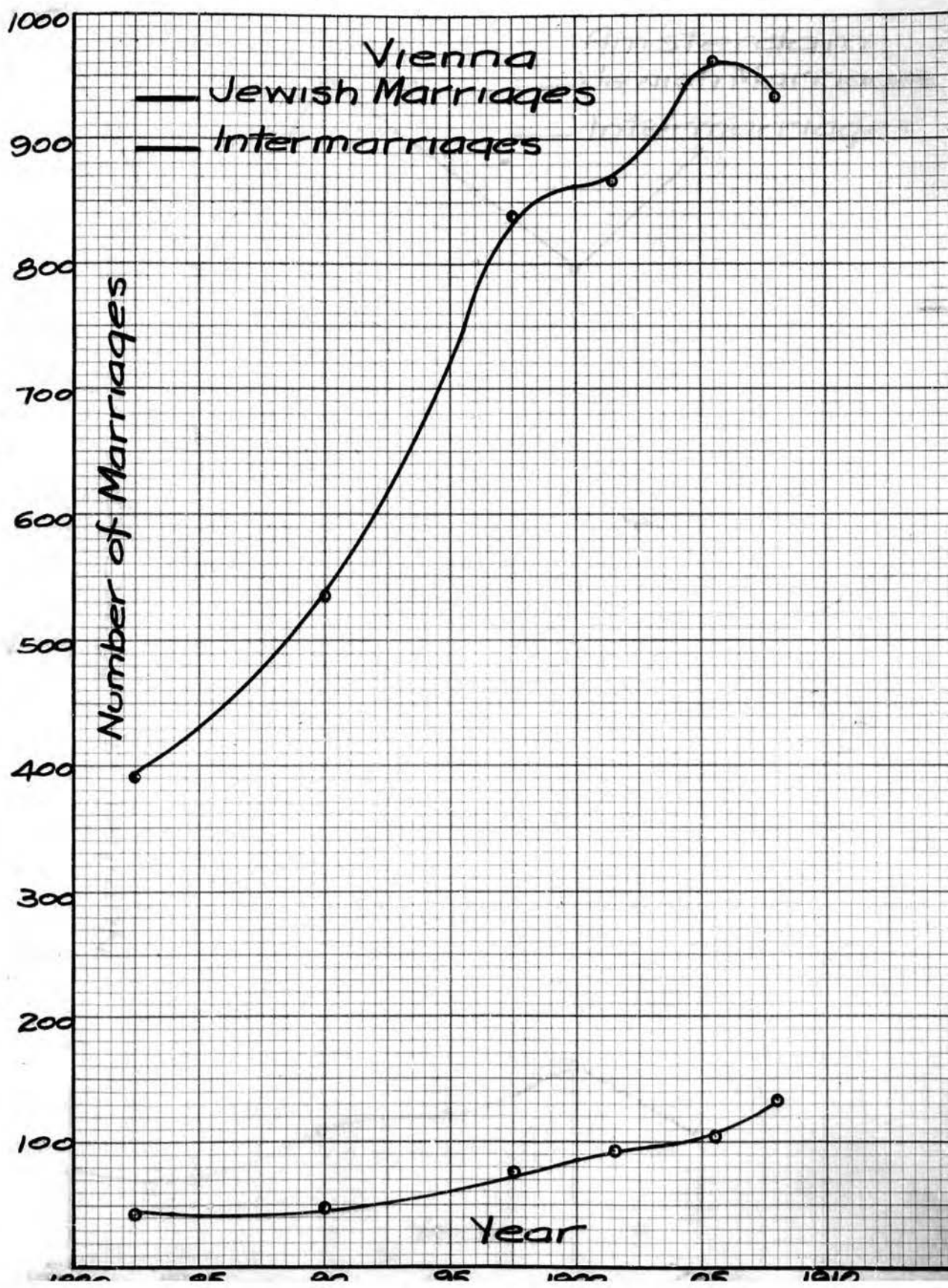
Trieste

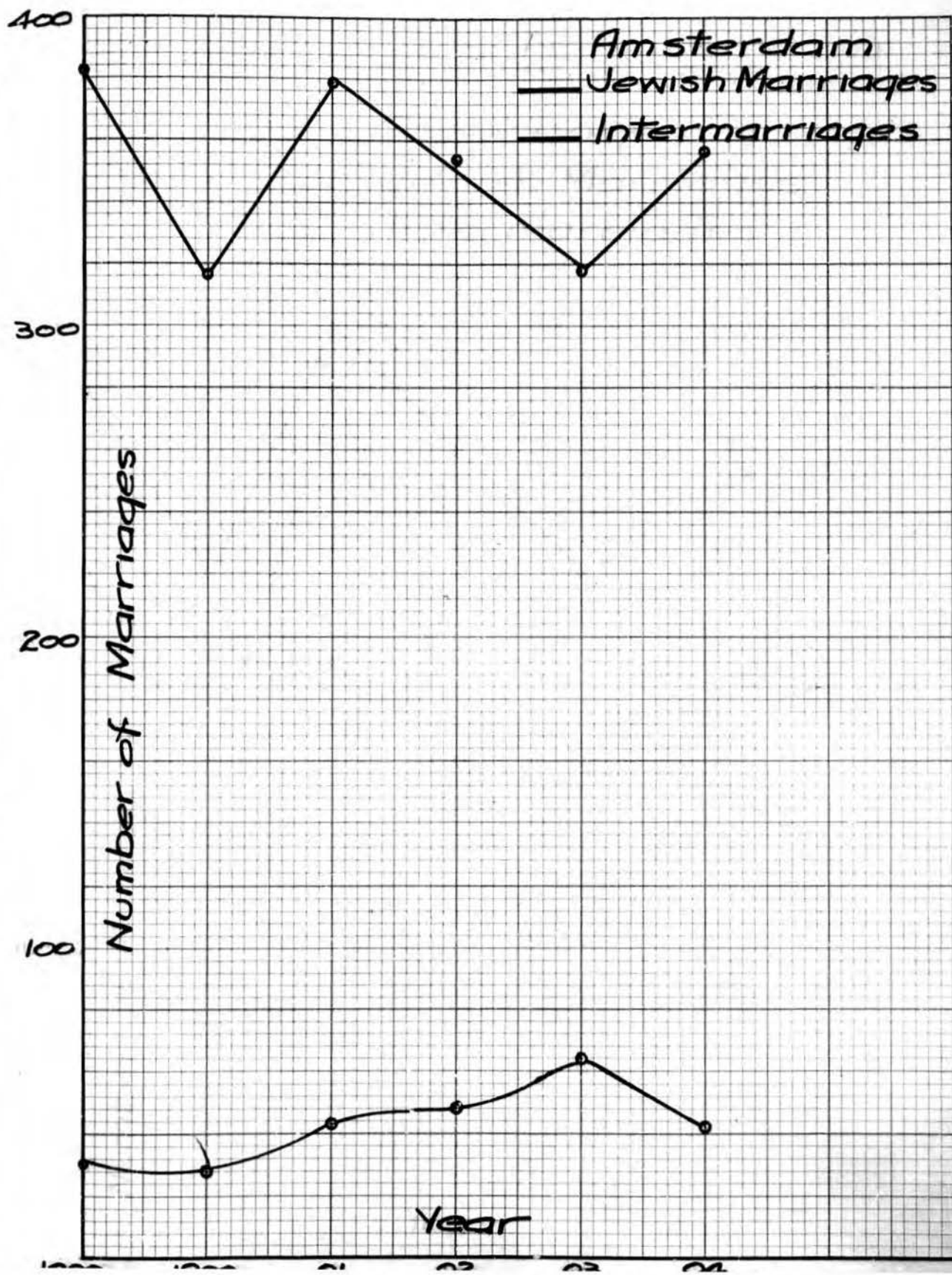


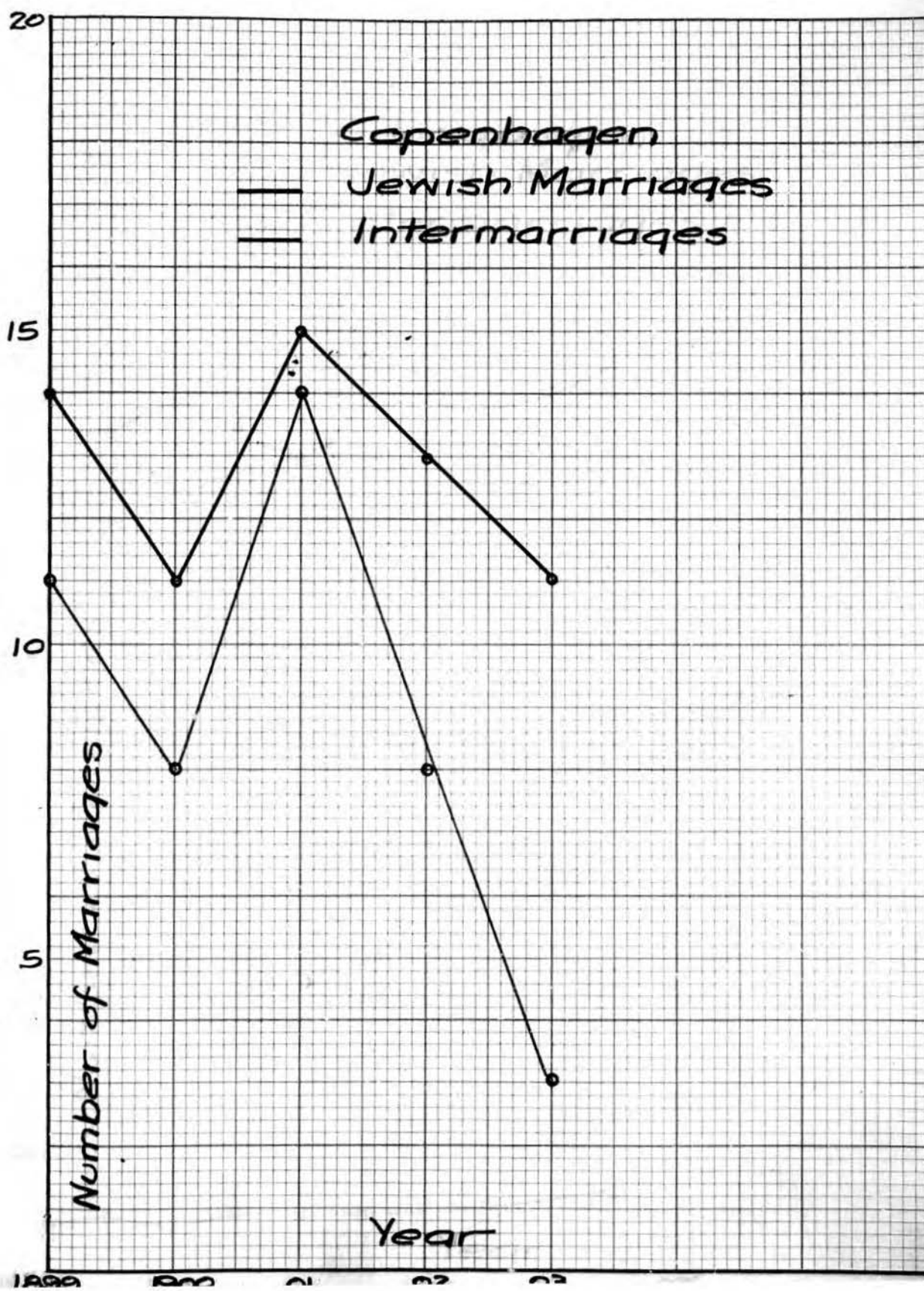
Number of Marriages

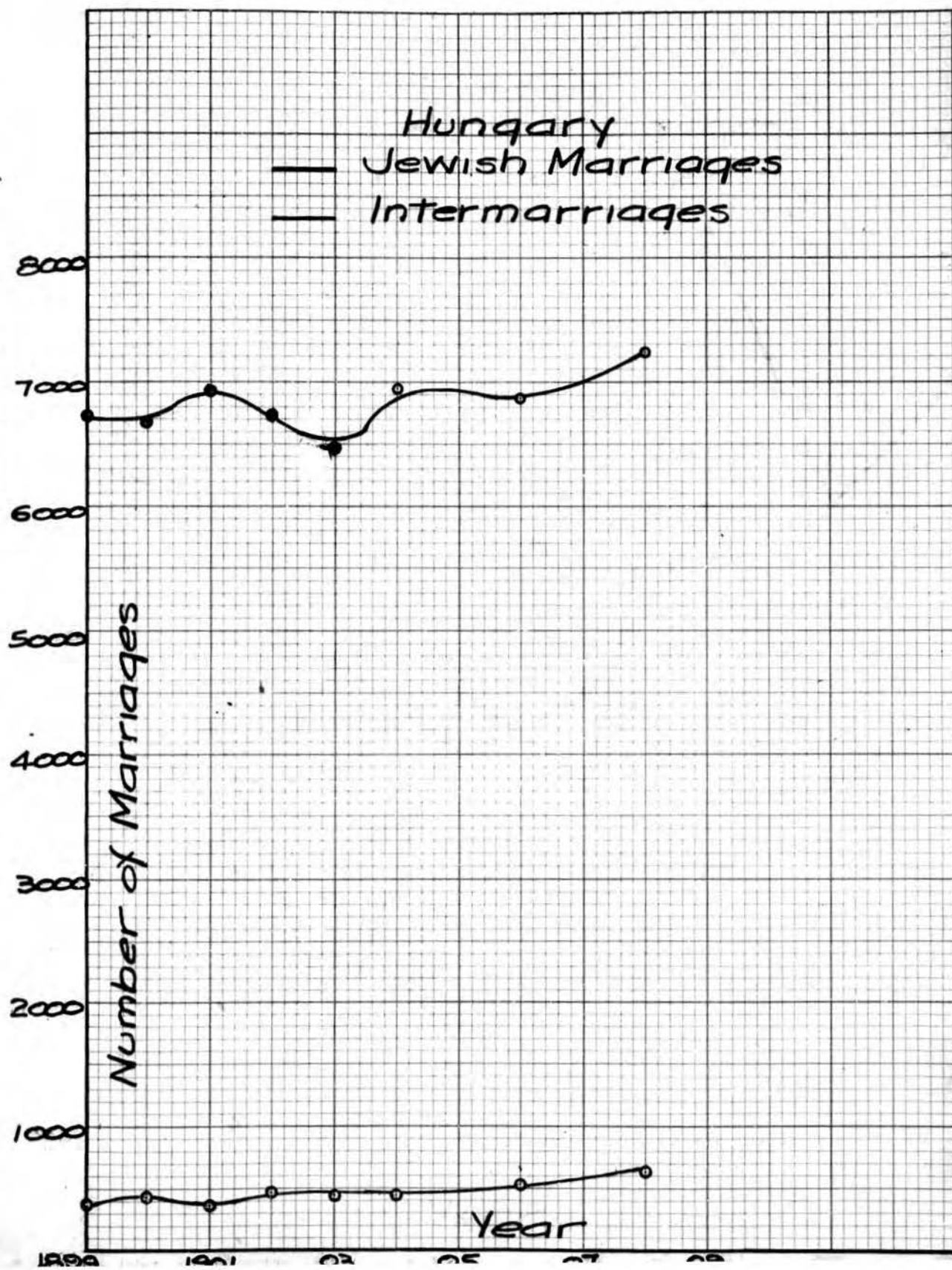


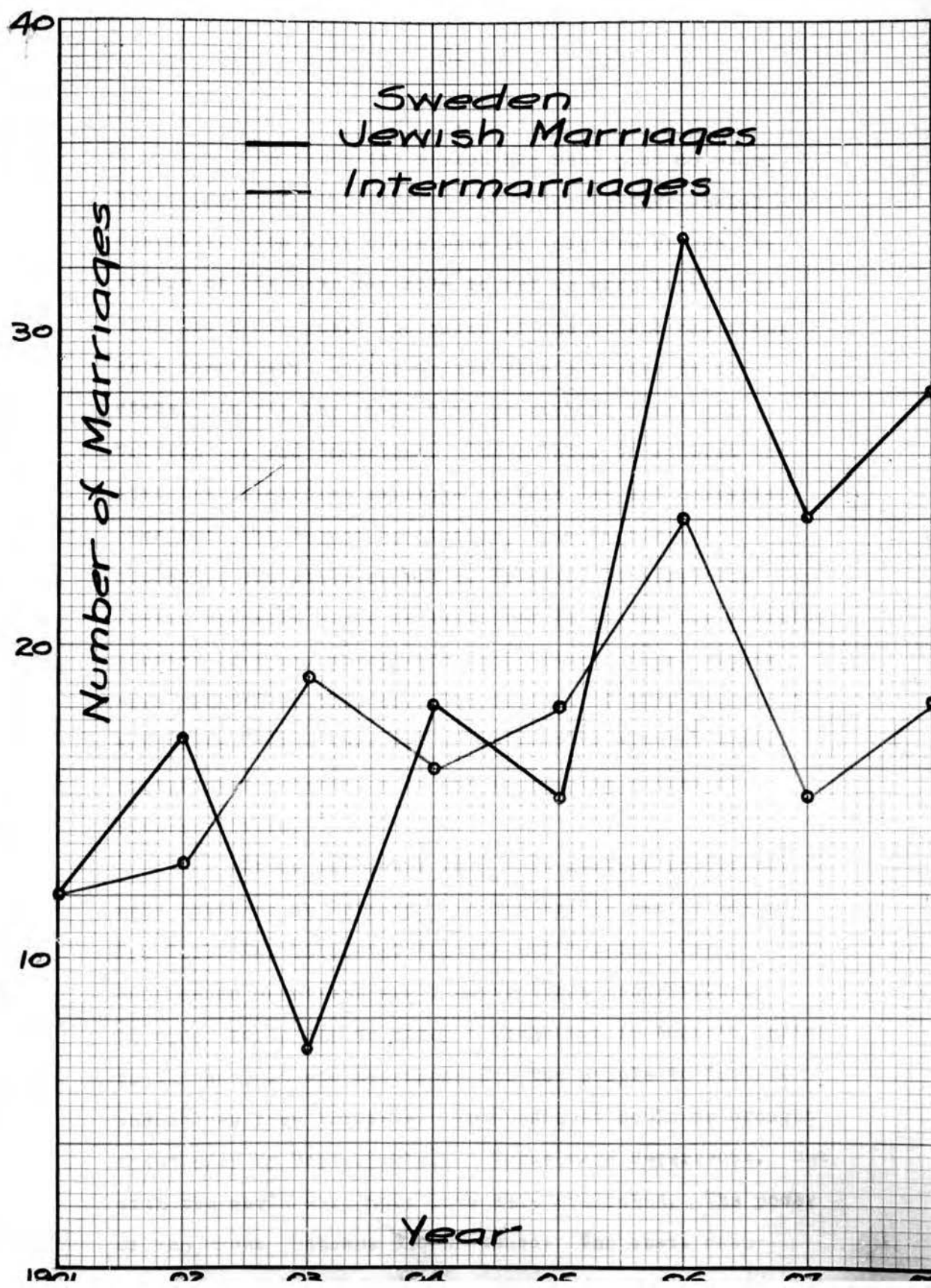












II
CAUSES

The christian church has been just as eager to prevent intermarriage as the authoritative Jewish Assembly. The only difference is that the church, by virtue of its power was able to set up more inhibitions than the synagogue. The power of the church and state were identical. Church orders were executed by the state. It was the state that prohibited marriages between Jew and Christian. The impetus to abolish the statutes forbidding marriage between Jew and Christian came from the French Revolution, when Napoleon I abolished the state-church in France. He asked the Jewish Synhedrin which he assembled to answer the question whether Jews may marry with Christians. Equal rights were granted to the Jew. The removal of this church authority, which very few of us want to witness again, contributed materially to the increasing number of intermarriages.

It was not until 1875 that similar conditions were obtained in Germany. In Hungary it was in 1895. The World War liberated Austria and Russia. The Mohammedan countries still carry these prohibitions. In order for a Jew to marry a Christian in Austria, prior to the war, it was necessary for the couple to declare themselves free thinkers. In Russia it could be brought about only by Baptismals. These were deterrents. But with the world war, these laws were abolished. The power of the Greek Orthodox Church waned. The state was

independent of the church. Religion no longer influenced the lives of the Russians, nor did the church dictate their laws. Christians and Jews are marrying more freely and in greater numbers.

But why has the Jew allowed himself to die because of the mercy of Christendom due to its inner weakness? Why has not the Jew been able to withstand these temptations? Is it not because of the attitude of its authoritative bodies? What were the official opinions of the Napoleonic Synhedrin, the Braunschweig Conference, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the modern French Reform Synagogue?

The opinion of the Synhedrin was that only marriages with Canonites are absolutely forbidden, but that marriages with Christians ought probably not to be celebrated by Jewish priests, but otherwise, there was no hindrance. The Rabbinical Conference of Braunschweig proclaimed that the marriage of a Jew with a Christian woman or with any adherent of a monotheistic religion, is not prohibited if the children of such marriage are permitted by the state to be brought up in the Israelitish Religion. The Central Conference of American Rabbis declared that mixed marriages are contrary to the traditions of the Jewish Religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American Rabbinate. But an amendment to the effect

that a rabbi ought not to officiate at a mixed marriage was lost when put to a vote. The Reform Synagogue of Paris permits mixed marriages.

These authoritative bodies have not the courage of their convictions. They leave it to the individual, and then condemn him because of his actions. Since when is the reasoning of the American Rabbi, "contrary to tradition", greater than contrary to life. Their is no consistency. The individual Jew also bears no conviction. Organized Jewish Religion is losing its hold upon its people. Each rabbi is a pope with different views. The Jew does not represent anything definite. One can get permission to do anything even though it be contrary to the growth of Judaism. Rabbi and Minister officiate at the same wedding.

The influence of religion upon the Jew is declining. The rabbis have not won the confidence of their people. They speak to empty pews. They do not reach and are not keeping their people. Even the very small percentage that is affiliated with the synagogue, has not been religiously inspired. In 1918, there were only 39,260 seats in all the synagogues of New York City in which English sermons were being preached. If we remember that there were 900,000 Jews in New York City then, most of whom spoke and understood English, we realize that less than 5% could be accommodated. There are not even the potential powers and capacities for

influencing. The religious decline under these conditions, is inevitable.

B. Rapchinsky in the *Rassviet* magazine of Paris, April 19, 1925, declares that the Dutch Jewish leaders of Holland are discussing very seriously the problem of intermarriage, and their declaration is, "The chief cause for the increase in intermarriage between Jews and gentiles in Holland, is attributed by some to the falling away of religiosity among Jews as well as non-Jews. The number of persons not affiliated with any religious institutions in this country is growing from year to year, as can be seen from statistics of the last twenty years." This lack of affiliation is universal.

This indifference and neglect on the part of the older generation is transmitted to the younger generation. There is only a very weak attempt to develop the religious consciousness of the young. In New York City during 1917, 275,000 Jewish children attended the elementary schools. Only 65,400 received some religious education, less than 24%. Can we prevent Jews from intermarrying when their loyalties are founded upon ignorance rather than upon Torah and Truth?

Minority groups cannot ~~perceive~~ survive upon blind loyalties. They exist either because they feel that they have some distinct contribution to offer, or because outside pressure has been brought to bear. We all like to be martyrs. Martyrdom fascinates. But now that the Jew is no longer oppressed, he seeks to get out. Blind

loyalties will not hold him. His group consciousness has become weakened. He is no longer proud of his people. He revolts against the remaining restrictions. Intermarriage to him is an apparent solution. Nothing was sacrificed by him when he tried the experiment. He had no religious consciousness to trouble him.

There has also been a movement in Jewry which believes it can solve the Jewish problem by means of minimizing religion. Their dominant slogan is that we are a Jewish Race, a definite ethnic group.

They have nothing to offer religiously. Their loyalties consist in the gloating over their history. And it so happens that their children have not received any Jewish education, and if they have not suffered or witnessed suffering because they were Jews, will they not intermarry very readily? Of course they will. It is only the diversity of religious belief that is everywhere the great stumbling block in the way of marriage. For them, religion is non-existent. Also when the temporary shyness and strangeness which usually disappears in two generations has been worn off, the road is wide open. What is to hold them? Intermarriage to them is not sacrilegious. They require no clergyman to sanctify their marriage. They scoff at the religious ceremony.

Many of these marriages have been made possible due to the leniency of Christendom and the enlightenment of its adherents. The Jew is no longer a thorn in the

side of the clergy. The edicts which prohibited the clergy from dining with the Jew, have been revoked. The Christian is understanding the Jew to a greater extent. The Jew in his eyes is no longer the unusual or rare person. They are not distinguished by their resemblance to Biblical patriarchs. They are no longer depicted as the arch-heretics, "Deicide or Incarnate Anti-Christ." The Christian folk lore which regarded the Jew as inhuman, is being discarded.

The basic idea of the age has become the Brotherhood of Man. And this is greatly responsible for our attitude and is accordingly influencing our behavior. This has even helped break down the barrier between the Catholic and the Protestant. They too are intermarrying in greater numbers, much against the protest of the catholic church. This basic idea has acted as a powerful solvent of all the old ideas and established customs. We are now living under the warm sun of tolerance. And under such skies, those who live on good terms with their neighbors, marry with them regardless of ethnic strains or religious beliefs. For the Jew who had no desire to be branded or set apart and who felt he had no distinctive contribution as a Jew, this atmosphere provides a very easy avenue of escape. And they have escaped.

Their escape has been made easy because of the apparent ease with which they have been able to adopt the

western custom. This of course, made it necessary to drop their old customs. It is also a curious fact that with the greatest proportion of Jews, the strength of their religiosity varied directly with the number of religious precepts and customs that they observed. Religion was synonymous with custom. When customs, like dietary laws, phylacteries, shaving with a razor, and Sabbath were dropped, religion too was dropped. In the west, the home has no longer become the center of influence. This custom was also adopted by the Jew. With this, he lost the influence of the old Jewish home. He had no memories to trouble him. Father and mother no longer influenced him. They could not help him carry on as a Jew.

Being removed from the east, the memory of pogroms did not taunt him. The Christian was friendly to him. He had no training which caused him to spitte when passing a church. They never suffered in the name of Jesus. Christianity was not to them the anathema of old. What would then deter them from intermarrying. Did they not have a similar outlook upon life? Were not the goals of both of them, the development of good human souls? Did they not speak the same language and have a similar education? There no longer were any animosities over the problems of Theology and Religion. They both agreed that there was no hell, no savior, no god, nor any immortality. Can intermarriage be prevented where people think in this

manner?

Very few of us have the proper sense of perspectivity. If we are not in direct contact with our object, we rarely see it as it exists. But rather thru the lense of distance which distorts the reality. This unreal imagination by Jew of Christian and vice versa, caused by ignorance and lack of contacts was one of the very strong barriers of the ages. But now the Jew has attained a higher economic status. His mobile powers are greater. He now is allowed to move. There are very few restrictions. He is one of the great contributors to modern culture. He has been assimilated linguistically and socially because of his intense participation in the modern world. He studies and teaches at any university. There are no guilds which require certain religious belief or affiliation. His religion is no longer a stumbling block. And if it were, it has been so diluted, that it could be further watered until its strength could hardly be detected. His clothes and his living quarters are the same as the Christians. When there is this increased intermingling without any self consciousness, there is greater field from which to choose to marry. Under these conditions, christian women and Jewish men can learn to grow fond of each other and develop a true love. With a greater choice, there are more temptations.

They come and go unhampered. They operate as equals. They have absorbed the cultures of their respective countries. To differentiate between the

Jew and Christian is difficult as is the case in Prussia, Scandinavia, France, and Italy. And not having any distinct message as a Jew, they must intermarry. Where immigration is limited, and only a small number of Jews remain in the country, their appearance in Christian circles is not resented. A love will develop. There will be a disparity of sexes and Christendom, not the immigrant Jew, as heretofore, will be the reservoir from which the Jew will choose.

Under these conditions, the road to intermarriage is made very smooth. Ruppin says that the more Jews and Christians mix with one another in economics and social life, the more likely it is that they will marry with one another. I believe that in our day, when Jew and Christian receive the same education, develop the same contempt and similar psychological outlooks, when they are both absolutely ignorant of their respective religions, when they feel that they have nothing distinctive to contribute as a Jew or a Christian, intermarriage must increase. The edict of the priest and rabbi may be heeded. But their inner consciousness rebels. It is this inward feeling that counts, that will record future history. This inward feeling, I believe, approves of intermarriage. This, the priest and rabbi have been unable to influence by their outward commands. This can possibly be explained by the four year experiment in New York City. The play

"Abie's Irish Rose" deals with this type of theme. It has already been seen by over 4,000,000 people, something unusual. Critics call it stupid, impossible, inartistic, and bad art. Yet the inner consciousness of the people like it. The priest says thou shalt not intermarry. The rabbi says thou shalt not intermarry. The populace heeds only after a fashion, but their hearts and emotions approve of intermarriage. They enjoy seeing it and give their consent to it, if only on the stage. If we are against mixed marriages we must somehow alter these emotional reactions. Otherwise they will record history.

III

RESULTS

Man is not born free. He is born into a definite scheme of life. His birth may be likened to another link which has been attached to a given chain. He absorbs all the tradition, memories and habits of his group. They are his whether he wills them or not. The world recognizes them. No amount of mumbling of the lips or outward conversions will alter the circumstances. Once born a Jew, you are always recognized by the world as a Jew. You may if you choose, have an adjective preceding the word Jew, but the eyes of the world are not blinded. Even such a one as a very liberal Unitarian minister of New York City, speaks of a trustee of his church not as a Christian, or a Jew converted to Christianity, but as the Jew who is the member of his board. By intermarrying, we do not solve the Jewish problem. We just complicate it, and cause an increased embarrassment in the lives of the participants.

It is not very pleasureable to live estranged from one's parents, brothers, sisters, and relatives. Intermarriage brings about an abrupt separation with family and traditions. Rarely do the parents forget. Their link has been snapped from the chain of tradition instead of being developed or causing further growth. Practical difficulties are developed. In smaller cities, social activities emanate from the church. Even if one

adopts the religion of the other, yet there is the suspicion in the adopted group. Your traditions are not my traditions. The president of my congregation has a son and daughter who live in the same town as he does. Both are married. The daughter has intermarried. Prior to the establishment of the liberal synagogue, neither ever attended divine service, or associated themselves with Jewish activities. Now they are both members of the synagogue. The son in fact, is one of its most ardent devotees. But the daughter and her ex-catholic husband do not come. She feels strange, guilty and out of place when he accompanies her to the synagogue. He in turn is always "red in the face", tho he has expressed on many occasions that the services inspire him. It just can't be eradicated.

Their social activities must be curbed. And since Man is a gregarious being, this seclusion causes stress. Their minds cannot be free. It is impossible for them even to attend a congregational seder with perfect freedom and ease. Somehow, they do not feel at home. Discussions of religion must be avoided. No amount of logic or rationalization can overcome this difficulty. The development of the emotions in their youth, for which they are not responsible, cannot be overcome.

There is always a breath of apology and restraint in such homes. Even an unconscious remark

concerning their religious differences is like prodding at a sore sensitive spot. Religion to them is associated with pin pricks. In such homes, there cannot be any religious development. They are too sensitive. It is a house divided and disrupted, a house with two sets of ideas and ideals. And where there is undue sensitiveness, there are additional causes for trouble. Statistics verify this.

Divorces among mixed marriages in Berlin are from three to four times as numerous as pure marriages.

The children of mixed marriages are not under ordinary conditions attached to the parent who belonged to the minority group. Very often they despise the parent for not being a member of the dominant religion. The child in most cases has never attended the religious schools. They have no definite religious convictions themselves, but they have the desire to associate themselves with the dominant group. They will lie and deny that their Jewish parent is of Jewish origin. They are unhappy over the entire matter, which could easily have been solved if we did not live in this complicated civilization. The child must be labelled. Who ever heard of just a child? He must be a Christian, Mohammedan, Jew, or some other standard ensign bearer. Just as the man without a country and without a union is looked down upon, so is the child who is not labelled because of any religious affiliations.

To what Sunday School shall we send our child, is an important home issue when the child reaches his sixth or seventh birthday. Houses are divided and relatives are talking. A hornet's nest has been disturbed. And the poor little innocent child is the cause. What to send off to one who is about to begin his adventure of religious development. But it ends not here. Even by the children of his Sunday School, will he be unduly noticed? He bears the stigma, somehow, of an intermarriage. He feels strange among Jew and stranger among Christians. Children will always ridicule and put forth embarrassing questions. They will say as they have in my town to a child of a mixed marriage whose father is a Jew, "Your father is not allowed to eat this and this." Why? It increases the sensitiveness of the child. He cries. He is teased and made uncomfortable. Probably a fight will ensue. Is there a principle involved? Shall we forestall any such occasions? Whom shall he marry? Shall it be Jew or Christian? He feels equally strange in both groups. The Jew looks upon him half heartedly; the Christian does not with open arms accept him. Why shall we cause our offspring such feelings? Shall minister or rabbi sanctify such marriage?

Usually, the child adopts the dominant religion. Ruppin says that only about 10% of the children of mixed marriages remain definitely Jews and marry in the Jewish

community.

It may cause many blushes, because the stigma of the Jew in him is not easily eradicated. In each succeeding generation, the blush will be less pronounced, but to Judaism and to the Jewish people, he has said farewell. David Einhorn well epitomized the matter when he said that every intermarriage is another nail in the coffin of Judaism.

There are those who do not get out immediately. They must remain because of the wills of their parents or because society does not allow them to escape. They are somehow branded. This group increases disloyalty among others who look to them as pointed examples. This group is not interested in the growth and development of Judaism. Their presence, I believe, jeopardizes the growth of Judaism.

Very often, this group is respected in the community. They may be honest business men, gifted attorneys, established bankers, scientists, artists, or literary men. They very often are the exemplars of the youth. Yet by their intermarriage, they also rob Judaism of their own potential qualities. They no longer play any part in the development of Jewish culture. Their gifts do not benefit Judaism nor do they enhance its growth.

Judaism is more weakened thru intermarriage than thru persecution or forced conversions. Once

intermarriage becomes a "fad" or no longer is associated with questionable motives, and immigration into that district has been checked or eliminated, the entire community will ultimately be absorbed.

The Jewish colony in Karkent, China, remained intact while it had its own religious and spiritual center. Oberst Gudowiz, the well known explorer and Chinese authority, says that with the impoverishment of its centers and the weakening of its spiritual ties, intermarriage set in. Gradually the entire Jewish community was absorbed by the Chinese. Pictures of the Karkent Jews show them to be Chinese in every respect, including the characteristic "pigtail", only one of these Jews still preserving some Jewish racial traits, says Dr. Holm, the Danish explorer. Max Nordau writes that of the descendants of the Synhedrin, not half are now Jews; and even those who have not abjured Judaism, many have Christians in their families. He further writes that there is not a single Jewish House of more than half a century's standing which had not become related by marriage to Christians. Yet another generation and not one of these old families of French Jews will any longer adhere to Judaism.

A few weeks ago, I spoke to a young Jewish woman who was recently divorced from her husband. She had no Jewish training or education and was raised in a home that was free from Jewish influences. She told me that she never felt as though she were a Jewess. And it so happened that she learned to love a Christian. She married him. The ceremony was civil. Her parents were not very happy over her match, but her husband was received by them. It was after their marriage that her Jewishness was awakened. It was due to the remarks of her husband when he became angry. The shout "Damned Jew" somehow stirred up the thousands of years of latent memories. These memories she said would not die.

The dogma of our modern age is that "Love is grand." Every one must love if he is human. And that this love is the solvent of all prejudices and conceptions. We are not supposed to analyze the possible results. The love of the individual is great and will overbalance and dissolve all possible bad results. Most love is just a certain form of infatuation and this modern dogma is most dangerous. Must we not break up this false dogma and induce inhibitions which will prevent intermarriage? But what type of inhibition shall we develop? Shall we encourage such outward forces as Ghettoes, colored garbadines, pogroms, anti-semitic movements, exclusions, and social ostracisms? No, they will not cause growth.

The Chief Rabbi of England proclaimed "Be steadfast in your separateness so that your wedded state may bring you happiness." This has very little effect. Compulsion or threat is not desirable in religious matters. It never solves the problem. Complaints and lamentations over religious life or deprecating intermarriage, are only signs of religious concern, but they are never solvents.

In Germany, the "C. V. Zeitung", the organ of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith, believes that it can solve the problem with the slogan, "Back to the village to preserve German Jewry." In their issue of June 2, 1925, they write, "The plague of intermarriage and apostasy is a result of the Jews settling in the large cities. In the crowding of our co-religionists in the cities and the continuous exodus of the Jewish communities from the village, we see the main factor in the disintegration of Jewry." But the Jews are in the cities and we must help them there. The cry of the grand old days in the village is no solution. We cannot afford to rationalize. The leaders of Jewry must reach their religionists. They must grapple with the problem. The blame is on their shoulders. They have not been able to cause Judaism to grow and develop in such manner that their co-religionists would find it to be a necessity instead of being able to

dispense with it with very little concern.

Rabbi Israel Brodie, an Anglo-Jewish minister, writes in the Australia Jewish Herald that the true method of reducing intermarriage, is in the cultivation and revival of Jewish home life, which is the real center of defence against the ravages of what is in many cases, a disease. It is beautiful rhetoric. But home ties in our modern civilization, are very weak. A home life is almost against the spirit of the age. We have our own problem and let us not try to solve it by complicating it with the pronouncement of a general remedy which may cure the ills of the civilized world.

We must recognize the conditions of the world in which we as Jews, are living. What are our own specific weaknesses? The strongest inhibiting force of intermarriage must come from within the individual. He must be made to feel the distinctiveness of his religion because intermarriage varies inversely as the strength of religious distinctiveness. The ideal of a Jewish individualism or the potential powers of a distinct contribution to the world, honestly, fully and consistently/embraced, if induced in him, is alone able to check intermarriage. He must not be expected to be a Jew by virtue of his negation of Christianity. In order to hold him, he must as a Jew evolve enough positive elements of an intense Jewish religious consciousness, to feel himself

distinct from all other forms of religious liberalism, constantly given off by Christianity. Liberal negativism must be replaced by affirmation, with something distinct, unique and elemental. His motto should be "I am still I, thou art still thou." The curve of progress of liberal Christianity and liberal Judaism may approach the same asymptote, but they must remain in our time, in separate quadrants.

How can we best develop this inhibiting force. I believe that it is thru the reorganization and reconstruction of the synagogue. The basic idea or purpose of the synagogue should be changed. It should no longer be considered as an institution. It should not be architecturally constructed so that it would artificially induce us to pray. For prayer with such mysterious associations leave us when we are home amidst simple architecture. It is a psychological phenomenon that our habits are developed with definite associations. Prayer should be associated with the home atmosphere and not with the drab institution. And if the basic idea of the synagogue should become that of a congregational home for the community and should contain every activity that is associated with the ideal home, then each individual would feel free to contribute towards its advancement. That is the way of the home. Their parents teach and advise and are then taught by the children. The process

is circular. There is no autocracy. Every member is equally important.

But in the institutionalized synagog, we are supposed to go to learn. The rabbi preaches and we are expected to absorb it. Very few laymen ever feel or are made to feel the responsibility for the growth of Judaism. Their contribution is their money. Their initiative and creative powers which would enhance the growth of Judaism is not demanded. The circular process does not work. He is always on the receiving end. After a number of poundings, he becomes fatigued, weakens and drops away from Judaism. He is dulled. If he has nothing to contribute as Jew, shall we then wonder if he inter-marries?