

THE RUSSIAN JEWS.*

IN this volume Prof. Leo Errera of the University of Brussels has given a clear outline of the condition of the Jews in Russia from early times to the present day. He thinks it probable that the Crimea and other southern districts received Hebrew immigrants in the third century B.C. Towards the seventh century A.D. many of the Khazars, a Finnish people from the banks of the Volga, became converts to Judaism. In the eleventh century a great number of Jews took refuge in Poland from the persecutions to which they were subjected in Germany, and during the two succeeding centuries this was the only country in Europe where they could develop peacefully. In the seventeenth century both the Jews and the Catholics of Poland suffered severely from a Cossack invasion. Later the extension of Russia incorporated this and other regions which had been largely populated by Jews.

With few exceptions the attitude of the Russian sovereigns toward their Hebrew subjects has been that of hostility, but under Alexander II the improvement in law and administration was so marked that there was every reason to hope for entire reform. Upon the sudden death of this monarch a violent reaction ensued. M. Pobédonostsev, the procurator of the Holy Synod, maintained over the new czar, who had been his pupil, "an ascendancy similar to that exercised by Torquemada over Ferdinand and Isabella or by Père la Chaise over Louis XIV." This ecclesiastic, admitted by Professor Errera to be "hard-working and upright," seems to be hopelessly narrow in his religious and national fanaticism. Russia, he believes, must be wholly Slav and wholly Christian. To this end the infamous "May Laws" of 1882 were elaborated by General Ignatieff. These measures applied to the territory known as the Pale of Jewish Settlement, in the southwestern part of the empire. Only here and in the adjoining district of Poland are Jews permitted to live. By the first provision of the May Laws they were forbidden to settle outside of towns and townlets, the only exceptions being in those Jewish colonies that had previously existed and whose inhabitants were agriculturalists. As no Russian law has ever defined what is meant by a "townlet," a wide opening was made for the most arbitrary proceedings; for a townlet might any day be declared to be a village, and the Israelites would, in conse-

quence, be expelled. "Such expulsions did not fail to occur with ever-increasing severity, the result being to fill to overflowing all towns of the settlement, in which the population was already enormously overcrowded, in which labor was at a standstill, and where competition had reached such a deadly pitch that the hygienic conditions of life became daily more and more deplorable."

Professor Errera believes that if these restrictions continue to be enforced an epidemic of typhus will result which must spread throughout Europe. From 1883 to 1890 the persecution was conducted with alternations of mildness and severity, but since 1890 the functionaries have vied with each other in the execution of the ordinances. The author speaks with great respect of the report addressed to the United States Government in 1892 by the two special commissioners, Messrs. Weber and Kempster, who were appointed to inquire into the causes of the increasing immigration to America of persons wholly without resources. Their report contains only facts for which the commissioners could personally vouch. It testifies to the truth of tragic stories which at the outset seemed incredible.

In addition to the sweeping law already referred to, the following may be especially noted among the methodical persecutions of the last three years: 1. All foreign Jews have been expelled, not excluding those who, having been born in Russia, eagerly demanded naturalization. This measure has pressed with especial severity on the Roumanian Jews, access to Roumania being denied to all Jews living outside its borders. 2. Jews who had lived on sufferance outside the "Pale" since 1865 have been driven into that district. 3. Many lucrative and honorable professions have been closed to Jews. 4. Since 1886 limitations have been placed upon the number of Jews who could be admitted to the universities, the high schools, and even the gymnasiums. 5. The benefits of various charitable institutions have been refused to Jews, notwithstanding that such establishments may be supported by their money, or, indeed, may have been founded by them. 6. Various obstacles to the Jewish worship are contrived and exceptional taxes are imposed. In spite of these repressive measures the Jews have abstained from insurrection and have seldom consented to free themselves from their troubles by apostasy. Conversions to Christianity have been hardly 1,300 per annum, a proportion of three in every 10,000.

The system of hunting the Jews into the settlement and there crowding them into towns has resulted in such misery that the American commissioners left Wilna "carrying with them an ineffaceable impression of an amount of wretchedness the like of which they had never seen before and which they hoped never to behold again."

In disproving a seriatim the main charges made by the Russian press against the Jews, Professor Errera produces some interesting statistics. It is found that the rate of interest paid by the peasants to Jewish money-lenders is considerably less than that demanded by the Russian tradesman in those provinces closed against the Jews. The manufacture of spirits in the settlement is proportionally less than in other parts of Russia. The Jews furnish more than their share of soldiers. There are more artisans among them than among the non-Jews, and the American commissioners found the farming of Hebrew colonists better than that of the Christians. In short, Jewish enterprise has been proved important to the prosperity of the empire.

To impartial students of the subject four solutions of present difficulties suggest themselves — extermination, conversion, emigration, and emancipation. By brief and lucid argument three of these are shown to be impracticable. Emancipation, involving liberty of movement and liberty in the choice of career, is the simple remedy which it is the duty and the true interest of the Russian Government to administer to its suffering subjects. Professor Errera's earnest and able plea cannot fail to advance the development of that public sentiment which, sooner or later, must conquer fanaticism and race prejudice in every land.

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