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## THE JEWS IN ROUMANIA.

BY THE REV. M. GASTER, CHIEF RABBI OF THE SEPHARDI COMMUNITIES OF ENGLAND.

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WHOEVER has been able to watch the agonized look of the animal under the air pump, when it slowly begins to realize that the life-giving air is disappearing, can picture to himself vividly the look upon the face of the Jews in Roumania. They are under such an air pump, called the Roumanian Chambers, and session after session a little more of the air which has been left to the Jews is slowly and remorselessly drawn out. That which increases the horror of the situation is the satisfied countenance of these legislators, and the cynical attitude with which they watch the gaspings of the animal under the pump, and the resentment they show if it attempts to escape from the terrible situation thus created.

Lest it be thought that the situation here described is exaggerated, I will mention some of the laws which have been passed; some of the ordinances which have accompanied apparently innocent laws, directing the officials how to apply them, and some of the cases of persecution as well as some of the consequences which have resulted therefrom.

Firstly, the Jews living in Roumania have been driven out of the villages and rural districts, and compelled to live in the artificial Ghetti thus created in the small rural townships and in the larger towns. The Jews, without exception, have then been declared "aliens not subject to an alien Power." Who on earth understands such a definition? Not to belong to any country in the world is an absolute impossibility, and yet have the Powers of Europe, to their lasting shame, winked at such preposterous sophistry. For this remarkable fiction of "aliens not subject to another Power," Austria is morally responsible. For when Rou-

mania aspired to become an independent state, immediately after the Russo-Turkish war, one of the first steps towards official recognition was the abolition of the status of "protégés" granted by various Powers to aliens living in Eastern countries. This is still the case in Turkey, Morocco and elsewhere, and as Roumania had, up to then, formed part of the Turkish Empire, such protégés abounded. Austria, which counted about 16,000, by a stroke of the pen declared these people thenceforth not to stand any longer under its protection; yet Austria took no steps to ascertain what would become of these people, and what would be their political and civil status; they were left suspended in the air, as it were. Evidently, Austria hoped, or expected, that they would pass now under the protection of the Roumanian Government, and would enjoy at least all those civil rights which they enjoyed whilst still subjects of Austria. Roumania, however, took advantage of this state of things and declared *all* the Jews, natives as well as those who up to that time had been subjects of other Powers, to be "aliens not subject to any power." Hence "alien," in the legislation of the country, means, and meant, almost exclusively, Jews, for they alone are no longer protected by the representatives of other Powers; they have no possibility of obtaining redress by the intermediary of ambassadors.

Other Powers did not interfere. The reasons are not far to seek, and may be mentioned here briefly, notably in view of the vigorous action taken by the United States Government. The Governments of Europe are playing a political game, and every pawn on the chess-board counts. In order not to drive one of these smaller states into the arms of one of the two groups of Powers, they have refrained from exercising any pressure on Roumania on a question on which the Roumanian governing parties felt very keenly. It would not suit Austria to drive Roumania into the arms of Russia, nor would it serve the purpose of Russia to make Roumania an open enemy. There is further the old adage of the "beam and the mote" which could be applied, should any of the Central European Powers interfere too strongly in the Jewish question in Roumania. Anti-Semitism, which is rampant in these countries, gave a kind of support and countenance to the action of the Roumanians, and thus the only argument which would be of any weight was wanting—the moral condemnation of the treatment of the Jews in Roumania.

Of greater importance was the economic factor, which determined the benevolent neutrality of the Central European Governments. By ignoring the Jewish question, and by playing into the hands of the different political parties, one Power after the other got some bargain in exchange. Germany got the conversion or the redemption of the great railway undertaking by Stroussberg, into which much German money had been sunk. It was carried out at a very remunerative price, and now Roumania is indebted to Germany for no less than three-quarters of a milliard of francs. It is, therefore, easy to understand why Germany will take up an attitude of cool reserve in response to the American note. Any weakening of Roumania's credit is sure to shake its financial position, and might jeopardize the enormous interests Germany has at stake there.

We must not forget, also, the plan Germany has in view to connect the future Bagdad Railway with Central Europe by way of Bucharest-Constanza.

And thus the Jews are left to their fate to be treated as "aliens." But they are aliens only as far as the enjoyment of rights is concerned; they are considered as "natives" when it is a question of duties. They are exempt from none. They must serve in the army, but cannot be promoted. They have to pay all taxes and fees, but are not allowed to benefit by any of the advantages to be derived therefrom. For example, they pay towards the establishment and maintenance of all the public schools, but, in virtue of the Law passed in 1896, they are excluded, under the plea of "foreigners" or "aliens;" if admitted, they must pay a separate fee, and they can be admitted only if there is room left after all others are provided for. Similarly, though they form the majority of merchants, they are not allowed to vote for the Chambers of Commerce, nor can any Jew be a member of a Chamber. The hardship is the greater, as these Chambers pass laws which affect the Jews.

The Jews cannot own any rural land and they are excluded from agriculture. Not living in the villages, and being prohibited, already as far back as 1873, from selling any liquors, even where they are tolerated, the charge which is sometimes levelled against them, on the head of usury and sale of intoxicating liquors, falls entirely to the ground in the case of the Roumanian Jews.

By the law passed in 1887, the Jews were prevented from selling tobacco, and by the same law they were excluded from the public service and from participating in any public work. It was also declared unlawful even to employ Jews in any of the above trades, and they will soon be deprived of the right to sell groceries, to keep coffee-houses, or baker shops, etc., in rural districts, according to a law submitted to Parliament in December, 1901. Slowly the whole Jewish population, which, on the basis of accurate statistical returns, numbered about 260,000 in 1895, has been driven more and more into the small towns, increasing the hardships already experienced by those who lived there before.

In order to understand clearly the economic conditions prevailing in Roumania, it is necessary to remember that, out of five and a half millions of inhabitants, about four millions are peasants, living in the most destitute condition, worse off than the "moujik" of South Russia, and perhaps even worse than the Polish peasant of Galicia. These poor people are the prey of the land-owner and of the official of the government. They want nothing, spend nothing, and earn just as much in prosperous years as will pay taxes and other obligations and will, perhaps, keep soul and body together. These are the genuine Roumanians, kind-natured, well-disposed, frugal and honest, not given to persecution or hatred, and even disposed to be friendly towards the Jews who live in their midst. I well remember the scenes at Brusturoasa, some twenty years ago, when armed peasants would not allow the Jews to be driven out from their village by the government officials.

Such warm friendship has been shown whenever Jews were driven out by the prefect or mayor at the instigation of the Government. The Jew had befriended them, said the peasants, and often protected them by his advice from abuses from other quarters, and therefore they would not part with him.

This alone is ample refutation of the charges of the official agents, who, on the basis of a specially-designed law preventing "vagabonds" from living in villages, coolly declared Jews to be vagabonds. Thanks to this interpretation they and their furniture and little belongings have often been taken out forcibly from the houses or shops in which they had lived for many years, loaded on carts, sent out of the village under the escort of the local police, and then left to their own fate. Such ejections from

villages have taken place when the woman was in childbed, and in terrible weather when the children were actually dying.

So recently as August 18th, of this year, a certain Michel sin Bercu, who from his childhood had lived in the village Ciurneshti, district of Zlatinoasa, county Botoshani, found himself suddenly driven out of that district, from which his children had been recruited for the army. Forty peasants signed a petition for his re-admission, stating that he had lived peaceably with them all the time. Of course, no notice was taken of the petition, and a man who has hitherto been able to support himself and family honestly, is suddenly ruined and goes to swell the number of poor in the town, who find their means dwindling from day to day. Small townships have been retained under the category of villages, only and solely for the purpose of keeping the Jews out of them. The reason was openly stated in the Roumanian Parliament when the petition of the inhabitants came up for discussion.

How difficult it is made for Jews to live on the land, will be shown by another case, which came under my own observation when I was in Roumania two months ago. Owing to the rich harvest, the landowners were in want of hands to reap the corn promptly. A number of young Jews offered their services for a very scant emolument, and worked on the farm for about a fortnight. At the end of the time, payment was refused, and the mayor of the village expelled them as "vagabonds" who had no right to live in rural places. They had to find their way back on foot to the various towns from which they had come, depending on local charity for their subsistence. This is the answer which must be given to the statement of the Premier, M. Sturdza, who recently stated, in the interview he granted to a foreign journalist, that the Jews ought to take to agriculture.

The fact is that the Jews would be only too willing to work as peasants, if allowed.

About twenty years ago, when still living in Roumania, I approached the late minister and statesman, C. A. Rosetti, then Minister of the Interior, and suggested to him the plan of settling the Jews in the newly-acquired province of Dobrudja, and thus solving the Jewish question. But he replied that, according to the constitution, they could not plant a foreign colony on Roumanian soil. The argument was fallacious, for Dobrudja did not form part of Roumania when the constitution was promulgated (1864);

and, furthermore, native Jews could not be termed a "foreign" element.

I mention this incident, because it shows how long ago the Jews wished to take to agriculture in Roumania, and it illustrates, on the other hand, the settled policy of the Roumanian Government to treat the Jews as "aliens" from the first years of their independence, and to use the Jews as a party weapon.

Here is another instance of the arbitrary treatment to which the Jews are exposed, without the possibility of remedy. They are the property of the Government and subjected to the will of the meanest official, who knows that he will be protected by his superiors in any action against them. Legal action taken by the Jews against any official has not had any result hitherto, except in a few cases of abuse too flagrant to be wholly ignored,—and then the punishment was ludicrously out of proportion to the wrong done.

Take the case of a certain Jancovitsh, who had been robbed and murdered by four Roumanians. Their guilt was beyond doubt, and the jury in Jassy condemned each of them to ten years' penal servitude. Brought soon afterwards before another jury in March, 1902, the court acquitted two, and merely imposed on the others a fine amounting in the aggregate to about \$800. Again, instigated by the Government, as evidenced by the protection granted to the rioters by the police, the students and the mob of Bucharest attacked the Jewish quarters in 1897, robbed and plundered and ill-treated a number of Jews, entered the great Synagogue, destroyed the desks, tore the sacred vestments and desecrated the Ark. The police connived at these excesses and protected the rioters. Real foreigners had also to suffer by these ruffianly acts, and at the remonstrance of the foreign ambassadors, 150 rioters were *pro forma* arrested. All but seventeen were immediately liberated, and these seventeen were unanimously acquitted when tried soon afterwards. The then minister, Pherekyde, had the audacity to state in plain language in the House of Parliament that this was a mere patriotic ebullition on the part of generous youths!

The reason for this patriotic ebullition is still more instructive than even the ebullition itself and its consequences, for it throws a curious light on the mental disposition of the governing classes in Roumania. The ostensible cause was a meeting called together

by young Roumanian Jews, in order to protest against the attempt of the then Minister of War to exclude Jews from military service. The claim of the Jews seemed to a few at least of the better Roumanians to be a just one, for they asked to be treated also in other respects as natives, just as they were when recruited for the army, whilst true aliens are exempt from military service. To obviate the logical sequence of the recruiting, the Minister of War conceived the idea of asking parliamentary sanction to exclude the Jews. The Jews, however, though badly treated in the barracks and not allowed by law to be promoted, were yet anxious to pay their blood-obligation to the state, and came together to protest against that proposal of the minister. This was the crime of the Jews! It was for this audacity that they were mobbed.

Yet another result was that the right of public meeting was more stringently narrowed down, for the Premier, Mr. Sturdza, declared to Dr. Beck, the Rabbi of one of the Synagogues at Bucharest, that the right of meeting was a political right, and as such, Jews could not enjoy it. A meeting called by the artisans to discuss the consequences of this decision was forcibly dispersed by the police, and when some of them went on a Friday night to Synagogue for their devotional service, they were told by the police to disperse, and the sanctity of the place was as much ignored by them then as on all occasions when the Government chooses to intimidate the Jews.

The latest exploit took place only a few days ago. I am informed, on unimpeachable authority, that towards the middle of September, persons who hold a very high administrative position proceeded on a mission to some of the most northern parts of Moldavia, which lie on the confines of Bucovina and Galicia, notably Dorohoiu. This place is famous for the excesses of the prefect Morruzzi, some twenty years ago, who went on the great Day of Atonement, and, under the pretext of fumigating the place, out of fear that a possible contagion might have been introduced from across the border, brought burning charcoal braziers into the densely packed Synagogue, and heaped on the burning coals pounds of sulphur, with the result that the congregation was nearly asphyxiated. The case was reported through the press and not denied, and the then prefect was thereupon advanced to the post of prefect of Bucharest. The Commission is



going now to the same spot and also to the small townships of Radautz, Hertza, Saveni, Mamornitza, etc., photographing some of the less attractive types, and also putting questions to the people.

This Commission violates the sanctity of the Synagogue and outrages the feelings of the worshippers, by going with the photographer on the Sabbath into the Synagogue to take the photographs whilst the people are at prayers. The members of this special Commission are Mr. Vasile Lascar, the former Minister of the Interior and now first secretary of the ministry; Captain Vasescu, the Parliamentary representative of the locality, and the prefect of the District himself, the highest administrative functionary, Mr. George Billat.

The object of this new manœuvre it is not difficult to guess. When the Anglo-Jewish Deputation waited on Lord Salisbury some years ago, the Roumanian Government, with the view of discrediting the Jews, had photographs taken of the most disreputable-looking persons and sent them abroad as specimens of Roumanian Jews. This time, however, the manœuvre will not succeed. There are photographs of groups of emigrants taken in Roumania and on the way during the course of the last two or three years, and they show a far different type of Jew. This is the genuine, for this is the only fair, representative of the hard-working element driven to bay and forced to leave the old home. In the face of these photographs, specimens of the most backward Jews of the country will not mislead anyone.

A few words, now, about that famous law of expulsion. When the attempt was made on the life of Alexander II., Roumania could not give up to foreign jurisdiction any one who had entered the land. The men who had drawn up the Roumanian Constitution had all eaten of the bread of exile, and had therefore taken good care that such a law should not be introduced into the new order of things. But at the instance of Russia, the Roumanian Government passed a law by which it was authorized to expel from its territory any *foreigner* who had been guilty of inciting to rebellion, and who had caused grave troubles to the country. The object was to make it legal to expel Nihilists. This law was applied at a given moment to native Jews. It is modelled after the laws of mediæval barbarism, for no appeal is possible, no reason need be given. The police alone have the power to apply

it, and on many occasions blank formulas of expulsion have been given to the prefects of various districts to be filled in with any names they like. Thus, Jews can be plucked out of their homes without warning and without time for settling their affairs, and can find themselves escorted by police agents to the nearest frontier. Russia took good care not to allow such a perversion of justice to be perpetrated against its own subjects living in Roumania, nor would Russia allow such expelled Jews to cross the Russian frontier. Austria again connived at this violation of the most elementary principle of personal liberty. It so happened in my own case, eighteen years ago, that I, whose great grandfather lies buried in Bucharest, had to leave the country thus as an exile. I had incurred the displeasure of the Nationalist faction by my literary work, and by my open advocacy of the cause of my brethren. Being ordered to leave my country, I demanded a passport and obtained one. There is the irony of the thing: I had to leave as an exile *with a passport!* John Bratiano and D. Sturdza were then at the head of the Government. Yet, at my reception by Their Majesties in August last, Her Majesty the Queen said to me: "We often grieve that you are no longer among us."

I call attention to this incident, only to emphasize the fact that no Jew, however high he may have been placed and however earnest his efforts may have been for the intellectual or material welfare of the country, is safe. An imprudent word, effective opposition to local blackmailing by police and administration, and on the morrow he may find himself a ruined and a broken man driven across the frontier, a homeless vagrant. To return to Roumania means to expose himself to the rigor of the law, which provides exemplary punishment and re-expulsion.

The Government has also been careful to break the last possible staff upon which the Jews could lean for self-protection, and for the assistance of their poorer brethren. By a ministerial decree the Jewish Communities have been dissolved. They have no *locus standi*, they are not recognized as "legal persons" and therefore cannot hold any property. Thus it is impossible for the Jews to combine and to establish charitable institutions on a communal basis, neither school, nor hospital, nor public bath, nor any other institution, for before the law no such thing exists as a Jewish Community. It has, therefore, happened that a public

bath-house belonging to a Jewish community has been confiscated in one of the principal towns of Moldavia, for the reason that no one was recognized as the legal owner.

The Jews can not establish a "Gabella," a local meat tax from the meat slaughtered according to Jewish rites. To heighten the irony, the Roumanian local municipalities who rule the abbatoirs have arrogated to themselves the right to levy this very tax on the Jewish meat killed by Jewish slaughterers, and to apply the proceeds to their own needs, whilst depriving the Jews of any benefit.

The little charitable work that can be carried on in such a state of absolute anarchy is due solely to private initiative. With the increasing poverty, this source is also dwindling down, and thus the poor wretches are neither able to be represented nor to be helped, and misery is growing daily.

Those who have now grown old under persecution feel too weak and broken to venture upon a new life outside the old home. But what is there in store for the younger man, with every step beset by snares and pitfalls, every feeling of manhood stifled, every form of ignominy and hatred heaped upon him, abuse to the right of him and blackmail to the left, not sure of the morrow, not secure in his work, and in some cases not safe with his life. Only those who have lived in such a state can realize the terrible agony and suffering of these unfortunate people. No professional career is open to them. They may not even act as broker in commercial transactions, nor as assistant to a chemist, to a lawyer, or to any one engaged in technical work. The Jew may not teach, even in schools founded by Jews and kept with Jewish money.

Driven into the towns, where the demand for labor is not so great considering the primitive economic conditions, the Jews have to trade chiefly with one another. Roumanians, except the peasants, are as a rule either officials or desirous of becoming officials. The mercantile community and the artisan class consist chiefly of real foreigners, who have lived in the country for one generation or even less, and these are the people who claim rights as Roumanians, and who have to be propitiated by the persecution of the Jews. The state of the government often depends upon voters who are personally interested in removing the Jewish competition. There are very few native traders and still fewer

genuine native workmen. To these the same bribe is offered—to restrict as much as possible the Jewish competition either by restrictive laws, or by regulations and boycott. Thus the little work left to the Jews is now forcibly taken away from them by the latest “Artisan law,” which has at last roused the conscience of the world, for by it the Jews are now face to face with starvation.

It is to be wondered at how these people, in spite of their appalling poverty, can manage to keep clean and decent. Whoever has seen a group of Jewish emigrants from Roumania must have been surprised to find them scrupulously clean. As for their education, there are few Roumanian Jews who can not read and write. As to their skill, only a few examples may be cited. The khaki uniforms for the English army were made to a large extent by Jewish tailors who had emigrated from Roumania to England, and similarly a large proportion of the saddlery and leather-work used in the army during the last war was the work of Roumanian Jews in London.

These facts I had the honor of submitting recently to His Majesty the King of Roumania, when an audience had been granted me in Sinaia. His Majesty is conversant with all the details of the situation. To add that His Majesty, who has rescued Roumania from a state of primitive semi-barbarism and has raised it to the position which it now claims among the European nations, would be anxious to see the work accomplished by him placed on the firm foundations of internal peace, and to see the country assured of a flourishing and prosperous future, would merely express in a few words the programme planned by His Majesty. No wonder, therefore, that His Majesty would be pleased if he saw the political parties in Roumania adopting broader views, and sinking political quarrels in order to unite in a promising economic development of the country. The Jews are an essential economic factor in that development, and it is in the highest degree desirable for the benefit of the country itself to utilize the very forces which are now uselessly repressed. To grant them some security of life and limb, to remove the artificial barriers erected by narrow-minded political partisanship, to interpret honestly the law of expulsion, to banish the anomaly of “aliens not subject to an alien power,” to place on a clear footing the social status of the Jews, and the position which they occupy in the legislative and administrative life of

the country, and to give them the right and power of internal communal organization, would be just so many steps in the moral and economic development of the country. If only the leaders of political parties were endowed with a little of the perspicacity and love for the country evinced by His Majesty, we would not have to despair of its future. But for the time being, no ray is breaking through the storm clouds. The Government listens neither to the voice of reason, nor to that of humanity.

M. GASTER.