

RUSSIAN JEWS NOW TO HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS IN CZAR'S DOMAIN

Should the rumors current in London that the Czar is about to assure the Russian Jews of equal political and civil rights with the rest of his subjects, prove to be justified, considerable satisfaction will be felt throughout the British dominions. There has long been a strong feeling that the treatment accorded by Russia to the Jews, Poles and Finns ought not to receive even the tacit acquiescence of the British people. On some occasions, notably that of the last visit to England of the Czar, this feeling has not remained altogether unexpressed, and a proclamation of the kind foreshadowed would go far towards its removal.

In the year 1910 it was estimated that over 6,200,000 of the total number of Jews in the world, estimated at 13,000,000, were living in Russia. They appeared there at an early date and during the Middle Ages were alternately received, persecuted and banished, a form of treatment in which Russia was not at that time singular. The Jews were admitted to Russian proper by Peter the Great. In 1742 35,000 of them were expelled by the Empress Elizabeth. When in 1792-95 the partition of Poland took place great numbers of Jews were brought under Russian rule. They continued to receive alternately kind and harsh treatment from their Russian rulers. Re-admitted to Russia proper by Catherine II. and protected by Alexander I., who, in 1805-9, issued decrees insuring them full liberty of trade and commerce, the Emperor Nicholas again deprived them of their privileges. After 1835 a scheme of gradual emancipation was devised and partially carried out, but a great set-back occurred under Alexander III. due to the influence of Pobledonostseff, who was a great reactionary and inspired the policy of Russification and religious persecution which marked the reign of Alexander III. From the year 1881 great restrictions were imposed on the Jews. They were confined largely to one huge ghetto, known as the Pale of Settlement, and since 1881 the laws against them have been applied with great severity. They were forced out of all offices of trust, and from nearly all professions, while restrictions were placed upon their use of the schools and universities. Thus forced to live in poverty and neglect, no fewer than 100,000 of them took refuge in flight, many benefiting by the colonization schemes of the Jewish Colonization Society, who have established colonies in Argentina and Brazil.

In the ancient kingdom of Poland the Jews were very numerous, and as early as 1264 enjoyed considerable power in that country and Lithuania. After 1848 their numbers were increased by fugitives from Germany

and Switzerland, and for many years the whole trade of the country was in their hands. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, they were much persecuted and sank into a condition of great poverty and ignorance, but since the French revolution education has made great progress among them.

Among the more recent events in connection with the life of the Jews in Russia have been the riots and pogroms at Odessa, Kiev and other places. The formation, about the year 1907, of the Union of Genuine Russians resulted in serious anti-Jewish disturbances in Odessa, which were followed up by assassinations and pogroms there and in other places. The Sunday observance law enforced in the same year compelled the Jews to remain idle during no less than 180 days annually. In the following two years the condition of the Jews made much discussion; educational disabilities were placed upon them and there were expulsions of them from several towns. At this time, it is said that there were 130,000 Jews in the south of Russia who were without any facilities for education. In 1910 the expulsions continued. The medical conference declared that the increase of insanity among the Jews was caused by the tragic, economic and social conditions under which they suffered. The expulsion was then ordered of all Jews with no right of residence, and in some cases the regulations governing this right were strained to include people who had lived ten to twenty years in one place. The same state of affairs continued during 1911, and the Russian nobility demanded the expulsion of Jews from the government and military services and that they should be denied employment in administrative and judicial positions. It was also demanded that they should be separated from Christians in the schools, that the Pale be maintained, and that the privilege of honorary citizen be restricted.

The Duma is 1912 agreed to clauses in the Military Service bill fining heavily the families of Jews evading military service and declining to exempt Jewish ecclesiastical authorities from military service, though this exemption continued to be enjoyed by the Christian and Mussulman ecclesiastics. The accusations of ritual murders were revived; Jews were prohibited from being justices of the peace and also from accepting scholarships.

From these briefly stated facts it will be seen that the grant to the Jewish people in Russia of equality of political and civil rights will be a long overdue act of justice. Some good, at any rate, will have been done as a result of the war if the people of Poland and Finland also obtain real autonomy.