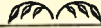


## INTRODUCTION



RECENT HISTORICAL EVENTS, PARTICULARLY THE advent of Hitler to power in Germany, have once more dramatically emphasized to the world the existence of the "eternal" Jewish problem. Historically this problem dates back to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, when the Jews, having been made a homeless people, were scattered throughout the ghettos of the world. Nor is persecution of Jews a new phenomenon in history: it was as common in ancient and medieval Europe as it is in Nazi Germany today. And, even as in the case of Germany today, at various periods in history, liberals, democrats, reformers and humanitarians have raised a cry against the persecution of Jews. More than fifty years ago the famous Russian author, Saltykov-Shchedrin, gained the everlasting gratitude of the Russian Jews as well as of civilized mankind, when, after the first wave of pogroms that broke out in Russia in 1881, he wrote his famous proclamation of sympathy for the downtrodden Jewish people. Saltykov-Shchedrin was not alone in his protest. There were numerous other intellectuals who believed in liberty, equality and, above all, humanitarianism. However, having added their bitter tears to the mighty Jewish lament, these humanitarians relapsed into silence and the

Jewish problem had to wait for another dramatic event such as the Nazi "humane extermination of Jews," before civilized mankind, once more shocked at the brutality and bloodshed, would raise its voice in protest.

For the Jewish masses, however, still languishing in the old ghettos of Poland, Roumania, and in the newest ghetto of Germany, this problem has never ceased to exist. I, for instance, have been painfully aware of it since the age of nine.

I was two years old when my father, who was in turn a tailor in a New York sweatshop, a labor agitator and a newspaper editor, decided to leave the East Side and return to Russia to work for the emancipation of the Jewish masses. When I returned to the United States seventeen years later, although as yet quite young, I brought with me very intimate memories of a world war, two revolutions, a devastating civil war and several pogroms. There is, to be sure, nothing remarkable in that. Even at this moment, thousands of Jews are living under the yoke of oppression and in constant dread of pogroms.

That there is a Jewish problem that demands immediate solution is, at this date, obvious to anyone who is at all aware of contemporary life and reality. But is there an effective and concrete solution of this problem?

There have been many solutions propounded in the past. We know, of course, the Nazi solution of the "humane extermination of Jews." A somewhat similar solution was proposed by a Tsarist minister

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of internal affairs, Pobedonostsev. He believed that the Jewish problem would be solved by "one-third of the Jews adopting Christianity; one-third emigrating from Russia, and one-third committing suicide."

There are also the "friends" of the Jews who insist that the only way out for the Jew is assimilation—that he should once and for all renounce his tradition, language, literature and culture and, through intermarriage, become a part of the dominant race.

This "way out," incidentally, has been practiced to a marked degree by members of the Reformed Synagogue in Great Britain and the United States and by the "Poles of the faith of Moses" in Poland. But no Jews have been more assimilated to the manners and customs and prejudices of their native land than the German-Jewish middle class, and yet, they did not escape the axe of Hitlerism.

The orthodox Jews, on the other hand, believe that the Jewish problem is "eternal" and cannot be solved; that it is the will of God that Jews should suffer in exile and that only through suffering will the Jew redeem himself.

After the World War, two historical events occurred which gave a new impetus towards the solution of the Jewish problem—the Balfour declaration which proclaimed Great Britain's readiness to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and the Russian Revolution.

The Zionists' aim of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine with the cooperation of Great Brit-

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ain occupies a prominent place in the Jewish scene throughout the world. It is not within the scope of this book to discuss either Zionism or Palestine. There is no doubt the Zionists are fighting valiantly for the realization of their ideal. Unfortunately, Palestine is the modern home of the Arabs who will not and cannot be elbowed aside. The soil is no longer, as in the Biblical days, flowing with milk and honey. The territory is small and cannot absorb all the Jews who would like to go there. What is more important, however, is the underhand game that is being played by British imperialism which, as even well-known Zionists admit, is the greatest stumbling block on the path of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

The solution of the Jewish problem in Soviet Russia proceeds along entirely different lines. The Soviet leaders are Marxists and, like Marx, they believe the Jewish question to be simply an economic problem deeply rooted in the existence of bourgeois society. They predict that only in a socialist society free from the spirit of bourgeois barter and competition will the Jew be emancipated with the rest of humanity.

It is in the light of this theory that Soviet leaders set out to solve the problem of the Jews and also of the other numerous national minorities—Ukrainians, White Russians, Tartars, Buriats, Mongols, Georgians—who, like the Jews, have been oppressed and exploited by the Tsarist regime. Whether one agrees with Communism or not, one must realize that the

attempt of the Soviet Government to solve the Jewish problem is not merely a gesture but is inherent in the Soviet philosophy. Before the Revolution Jews in Russia were not permitted to work on land. Now the Government has granted the Jews large tracts of land in the Crimea and the Ukraine. Jews work in Soviet factories and offices. They are also free and are even assisted greatly by the Government in developing their own language, culture, art and literature. Soviet Russia has also established a Jewish autonomous region in the fertile Far Eastern territory of Biro-Bidjan, a territory that will eventually become a Jewish Soviet Republic.

In the subsequent chapters I shall endeavor to present a realistic portrait not only of the newly-born Jewish peasant tilling the soil in the steppes of the Crimea and the birth of a new Jewish art and literature, but also of the *luftmensch* still suffering in the ghettos of Poland and Germany; I shall portray not only the ghettos but the end of the ghetto. Before doing this, however, I wish to sketch briefly the life of the Russian Jew under the Tsar, his rôle in the revolutionary movement, particularly in the Bolshevik upheaval of 1917, by going back to my own boyhood in Rovno.

L. D.

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