Democratic Watchman.

Bellefonte, Pa., July 15, 1892.

In The Land of Bondage.

An Interview with a Jew Concerning the Indignities Offered His Race in Russia—Daily in Danger of Expulsion.

Nominally, the Russian famine is over. Nominally, also, the Jewish question is in abeyance just now in Russia. As a matter of fact, the worst phase of the famine is that through which Russian peasants are now passing at this moment, when the "horse famine"—the scarcity of horses by means of which seed-corn might be conveyed to the affected districts—is daily becoming a great calamity. With regard to the Jewish question, the following outline of a conversation which a representative of the *Pall Mall Gazette* had recently with a Russian Jew speaks for itself. It was at Mr. Arnold White's house that the gentleman in question gave an account of the way in which the Russian Government, as the Egyptians of old, "made the lives of the children of Israel bitter with hard bondage":—

"But what more can the Russian Government do to you, when even two or three years ago the moan of the Jews was that oppression had gone so far as to tie them hand and foot? There seemed no room for further oppression short of bodily torture."—"Just so, We ourselves. benighted as we were thought that our humiliation could go no further. But as good is infinite, so evil also is infinite; and now, some years after we thought the rigor of the law could be extended no further, we have come to see that there is no end to the wrong that can be done to us. Is it a wonder that, hopeful though we are as a race—hopeful, energetic and patient—we have turned pessimist? If our wrists were bound with strong chains," the Israelite continued, emphasizing his words with characteristic gesticulations and with a bitter smile; "if our wrists were bound with irons, I and my people could not be more utterly helpless than we are this day in Russia.

"It began with the present Tzar. Under Nicholas much was done to lighten the hardships of the Jews, and Alexander II, the Liberator, naturally extended our freedom and treated us as his subjects and not as an alien, hostile race. Nor was Alexander III an anti-Semite when he began to reign. It was Ignatieff, first of all, who began the persecutions—Ignatieff, who is your friend and sympathizer when you are face to face with him, but whose words are of absolutely no value. He is in no way to be trusted. General Ignatieff knew full well the value of the Jewish element in Russia: he knew that where the Jews form part of the community the community flourishes—for Jews do not drink, they are not immoral; they are practical, thrifty, fond of family life, and moderate in all their ways. Shall I tell you how Ignatieff showed his appreciation of the Jews? He has estates in various parts of Russia, which he lets to tenants for various agricultural purposes. Shortly after the present Tzar began to reign, he let those estates on a long lease to Jewish tenants. A few days after the contracts had been made, the law made by Ignatieff, came into force by which Jews are not only forbidden from buying but also from becoming tenants in all but fifteen out of the sixty provinces of Russia proper, to say nothing of the Caucasus, Siberia, Bokhara, and other parts of non-European Russia. Of course the tenants then in possession were allowed to keep their farms, and Ignatieff had secured good tenants for many years to come. He and Pobedonestzeff prejudiced the Tzar more and more against the Jews, and now it has gone so far that we are now prepared for almost anything.

"Even those Jews in Russia who are not in daily danger of expulsion from the country are beginning to despair, and when once a man loses hope for the future his energy, and indeed all his interests, are lost also. You know that some classes of Jews are exempt from the law by which Jews are not allowed to live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The descendants, for instance, of those Jews who served in the Russian army in the reign of Nicholas belong to these. Of course they are Russians as much as any of the Tzar's subjects, since for generations and generations they have lived among Russians, and like Russians. Many of them, indeed, speak no other language than Russian. But even those, though as yet they are not threatened with compulsory emigration, are nearly worn out and hopeless. The other day a well-known St. Petersburg tailor, a Jew (I'll give you his name if you like) came and said to me, 'I mean to go to Argentina.' 'What for?' I asked, 'since the new laws affecting the Jews do not concern you, your grandfather having been a soldier under Nicholas.' 'That is true,' the man replied, 'but I can't stand this any longer. To day I am still allowed to live in St. Petersburg, but how am I to know that I shall not presently be told to move on? I have no spirit left; no energy to make plans and to attend to my business. I am going to Argentina.' And, mind you, he was a flourishing, well to do, intelligent man."

"But, honestly, do you not think there is something in the argument of the anti-Semites that, as Dr. Stocker expressed it to me some time ago, the Jews are the vampires that suck the life-blood out of those who are not of their race, notably out of the guileless rural populations? Surely there is some reasons for all these measures for suppressing the Jews?"

"There is not. Look at the official statistics published in Russia, and you will see that wherever the Jews formed part of the community there the district flourished. Where the Jewish element was absent the districts were poor. Look at the statistics. Facts speak louder than words. Mr. Arnold White gives the exact figures in the article on the Russian Jews which he contributes to the *Nineteenth Century* for May. But, mark you, the Russian Government was keen enough to see that it was defeating its own object by continuing to publish these figures. Hence, since 1888, their publication has been discontinued.

"And can you wonder that the rural districts where the Jews are allowed to live are more flourishing than those where they are forbidden to live? Surely the fact is too well known, and has been proved too long to need any further proof, that the Jews are a keen careful, thrifty race, given to work hard, and not addicted to extravagance and reckless expenditure. Look along the centuries and you will see it all through history. Now, what does this mean in the present case? Simply this. The Jew who deals in agricultural produce knows the market value of his goods. He also knows that if he means to get a good price for, say, his grain, he must supply a good quality. A healthy competition among the peasant farmers from whom he buys his grain is the result. The Jew's grain is of a good quality, therefore he attracts consumers; he himself can pay a good price, and yet make a good profit. The market in the district where the Jew lives being good, the traffic is such that means of communication must be found. Railways are built, or steamers: the district becomes one through which run the roads of civilization: its prospeirty is established.

"What, on the other hand, happens in the rural districts where the moujick reigns supreme? If you know the Russians at all, you know that, although an infinitesimally small part of the subjects of the Tzar are highly cultured and keenly intelligent, the great mass is not so. They are dense, shortsighted, improvident. As cilvilization spreads this may change in the future. But we have to deal with present facts. And the facts are these. The Russian peasant sells his grain to the first buyer who comes; and since grain can be bought at more accessible places, and at a fair market price, not many buyers care to penetrate the districts whence transport of goods is slow and expensive, and the buyer thus gets the grain at his own figure. If no buyer appears the grain rots in the barn. The district naturally remains poor. The moujick in selling retains sufficient grain to last him and his family through the winter, and to supply him with seed-corn in spring. Now, take the case of a year of famine like the present. As the grain gets scarce, buyers turn up even in the remote villages. They offer two roubles where otherwise they have only offered one. The moujick rejoicingly sell all he has to sell; receives double pay, and presently dies of hunger. This consequence he did not forsee his ventral vision does not go so far. Nor have the Russian people, either agriculturalists or peasants, any sympathy whatever with the treatment of the Jews, although that is the theory of Mme Novikoff and Pobedonestzeff. The inhabitants of the district whence the Jews have been driven are loudly clamoring for the return of the exile. It is the Government only which is responsible, and the Russian Government where the Jews are concerned, is blind and deaf—and mad. Yes, mad."

"Then what about Jews' love for intrigue, conspiracy, Nihilism?" "These allegations also can be explained. It is true that among the men and women arrested as Nihilists there are a great many Jews. For this reason: more suspicion falls upon the Jews than upon others: more arrests are made, and chronicled, or published, how often the allegations are disproved or the prisoners quietly released for want of any evidence against them. Let me give you an instance from my own experience, the Secretary of the Jewish community at St. Petersburg, a man named Gordon is a friend of mine. He is known by Jews all the world over as a great scholar of ancient Hebrew, and he is the greatest of our modern poets. Sometimes ago I met him on the street. 'How is it you never come to see me?' he asked. 'I have not seen you for I don't know how long. Come on Saturday; I shall be at home that day.' I promised, but when Saturday came I was two busy. So I sent my servant with a note, explaining why I could not come. The servant did not come back, nor did I hear or see anything of him for a day or two. I went to Gordon's house. A policeman was in charge. Gordon, his wife and three small children had been arrested on the Saturday, on the charge of his being concerned in a Nihilist conspiracy. My servant so I heard later on, had presented my note at the door, and was also arrested, Well, Gordon and his wife and children were kept in prison for three months, and then they were banished from St. Petersburg. But Gordon's brother, an influential lawyer, moved heaven and eath to have his brother's case investigated. 'If he is guilty, have him hanged,' he said; 'but if not, give him his liberty.' Through the influence of some mighty man he got his way; the case was sifted, and it was found that Gordon was absolutely ignorant and innocent of any conspiracy whatever. I got my servant back, too, after some time. He had been quietly sent to his village, and forbidden to come back to St. Petersburg. But Loris Melikoff helped me; he was one of our liberal-minded men."

"And what is to be done? What is your remedy for this state of things?" "The remedy must come fom without; it will never come from within. The press of Europe must do it. If I were Europe I would protest, protest, protest day after day, week after week, year after year—not passionately, spasmodically, but calmly, persistently, seriously. That is the only way. What is that story of the drop of water wearing out the rock? It is thus that we must obtain justice. I can see no other way."

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