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MS-53: Moses J. Gries Papers, 1850-1934 (bulk 1890-1930).

Series D: Sermons and Addresses, 1893-1917, undated.

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“In Darkest Ghetto,” 1904 April 3.

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April 3rd., '04.

IN DARKEST GHETTO.

Ghetto is a word of unknown origin. It means the Jewish quarter where Jews were compelled by law to live. Behind Ghetto walls and within the Ghetto gates the Jews were locked at sunset and on Sundays and on Christian holy days. The first Ghetto dates from the 11th, perhaps the 10th century and the Ghetto in Rome was not abolished till 1870 and its walls were not destroyed till 1885. Thank God, there is not a single Ghetto today.

I do not like the word Ghetto. It sounds interesting, it suggests curious customs and strange human figures. We Jews should not perpetuate the name and surely not create Jewish quarters.

There is a Ghetto today, - it is the pale of settlement in Russia. No walls shut the Jews in, they are locked behind no gates. But Jews who attempt to live outside the pale except the favored few are harassed and hunted and driven back. What is the pale of settlement - fifteen governments or provinces as large as Texas, in which the Jews of Russia must live. It extends from near the Baltic to the Black Sea. The pale itself is narrowed by the law prohibiting Jews from living within thirty-three miles of the frontier; and still further narrowed because Jews in Russia may live only in towns and villages.

Toward the end of the 18th century, Russia tried to solve her Jewish problem by locking up the Jews within the pale. The plan has brought endless misery. Russia still solves her problem in the same way. A century ago, in 1804, plans were proposed to better the condition of the Jews in Russia. A century afterward, in 1904, the plan has not yet been put into execution. The old, and worse conditions, exist. The Ignatieff May laws were signed by the emperor May 3rd. 1882. Their drastic character and their still more drastic enforcement sent the first great stream of Russian emigration to western Europe and to this western world. The indignation of the world gave peace for a while. The laws were re-enforced in 1891. They are unjust, inhuman laws and cruelly executed. Today Monpléhv rules the state and Pobiedonospseff rules the Church. They give promise of no new liberties in Russia.

One year ago, at the Easter season, the whole world was shocked by the

horrors of Kishineff. Foul murders - cruel mutilations of helpless victims - horrible brutal violations of defenseless women and children; murders and mutilations and violations unspeakable. We hesitate to speak of that which they hesitated not to do.

Now the dispatches bring us rumors concerning danger in Odessa. Odessa a splendid city, larger than Cleveland, whose 200,000 Jews Michael Davitt says embrace the wealthiest and most enterprising bankers, merchants, brokers, contractors and business men of the empire. Is it possible that there may be another Kishineff. Russia was responsible and is today. Kroushevan, the editor of the Bessarabetz, created the passion and horrors of Kishineff. For years he preached hatred to the Jews, destruction of their property, eye - even death to the Jews. He was a danger to the public peace. Why was he not suppressed? Today anti-Jewish papers are still preaching hatred of the Jew. The Novoye Vremya, when it is not blaming the United States - is blaming the Jews for Russia's unfortunate war with Japan. So many times, in the history of the world, the Jew has been made the scapegoat.

Russians declare the Jew is a danger to Russia because he is not Russian in nationality, in race, in religion; because he is socialist and revolutionist; because he "exploits" the poor Moujik, the peasant and all the rest. Count Cassini, and Arnold White and Goldman Smith have suggested that the Jews were money-lenders and usurers and oppressors of the people, therefore they were hated. It was not the truth and it is not the truth. Jews and non-Jews are usurers and money-lenders in Russia, but the Jewish money-lenders are not usually killed in Russian riots. They know how to make their peace with the police and the officials. Davitt tells us all the Jews killed at Kishineff were working men, - a few poor dealers - with one exception - a cattle-dealer, murdered for the money known to be in his possession. Fifty percent of the Jews of Kishineff were working men and poor. In proportion to population, there are more artisans among Jews than among non-Jews in Russia. Jews in Odessa are rich and successful and enterprising, but one-third are so poor they do not know where they shall obtain tomorrow's bread. Harold Frederick, in his book, "The New Exodus", says concerning the Jews within the pale - "I have never seen anywhere else in Europe, not even in the poorer part of Ireland which I know well, a more terrible poverty than is the rule of their lives.

"The sober truth is that is the Jew who has been "exploited." He has been

invited to cities in the interior to create and to build up industries and then rudely and ungratefully driven back to the pale. More than once the order of expulsion has been proclaimed. Then came a petition from the people,- merchants and officials - let the Jews remain, they are needed as artisans. The Jew is industrious and sober and the Russian is not. The Jew has intelligence and capacity and the Russian has not. Therefore, the Jews succeed even under heavy burdens and adverse conditions where the Russian fails.

Are the Jews Socialists and Revolutionists? I do not doubt some are. I do not question many of them are hoping and working for changes in governmental policy that will bring more liberty and more justice to the people. Why should they not be, joined with the thousands of others not Jews? Not all is peace and content in the Russian Empire.

The Jews are not Russian - they are "alien" in nationality and race and religion. Jews have been in Russia along the Black and the Caspian Seas perhaps these 2000 years before the beginning of the common era. They found refuge in Poland, during the crusades more than 7000 years ago. The old Khazar kingdom, king and people, were converted to Judaism in the eighth century. They and their fathers for many generations, had been born upon the soil of Russia, but they are still "alien". They have put upon them all the obligations of citizenship, special burdens and special taxes, but few of the rights and little of the protection which belongs to the citizen. Dr. Walter Kempster, the U.S. commissioner, who investigated the conditions of the Jews in Russia, marveled at the loyalty of the Jews to Russia, in spite of all her cruelty and her injustice. It is their fatherland, it is their home.

Jews are still in Egypt. Egypt of today is spelt Russia, and the pale of settlement is the land of Goshen. It is difficult to imagine that Egypt and Pharoah and the task-masters and the hard labor were worse than is Russia today. There are more millions of Jews in Russia than there were Hebrews in Egypt. The world waits for a new Passover of freedom.