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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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“Russia and Her Jews,” 1905 November 12.

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RUSSIA AND HER JEWS.

Five million Jews live in Russia, and although they and their fathers have lived and died upon Russian soil and under the Russian flag these many centuries, - yet today they are not counted as Russians. Russia holds her Jews as alien, as foreigners, as other than Russian, although Russia is the land of their birth, their home, and the land of their fathers.

It is of interest to note that some Jews were in Armenia and the Caucasus five hundred years before the common era. Jews were in the Crimea and along the east coast of the Black Sea 1900 years ago. In the year 740, the king of the Chazars and all his kingdom adopted Judaism. In the 14th century, the Jews of Kiev and of other cities, enjoyed the rights of free citizenship. They were influential in Moscow at the end of the 15th century. Jews were in Russia before the Romanoffs themselves. In the 18th century, the Jews were expelled from Russia, and then from Little Russia, and then came the final decree of expulsion in 1742. The year 1772 brought the partition of Poland, and the annexation of White Russia, and with Poland came her thousands upon thousands of Jews, under guarantee of religious liberty and inviolability of property, promises, which like so many of Russian promises, have been broken again and again.

The 19th century brought the emancipation of the Jews in all the lands of Europe. At last were broken the shackles and chains which, for so many centuries, narrowed and burdened the life of the Jews. The 19th century brought to the Jews freedom and justice, - but Russia still holds fast to medieval methods, and the 20th century brings a return to the Dark Ages.

The Jews of Russia live by compulsion in the Pale of Settlement established in 1791. Russia's population is 126,000,000 plus. Her Jews number 5,189,401, according to the census of 1897, 4.13% of the entire population. The Pale is 1/23rd of the whole of Russia. The Jews form 115 plus of the population of the Pale. Outside the Pale, they number less than 15 of the population. About 945

of the Jews of Russia are compelled to live within the Pale. The Pale covers 15 governments, and within the Pale the Jews are prohibited from dwelling in the villages and towns. The congestion is intense. The poverty and misery and the struggle to live, are beyond description.

The year 1882 stands out as the date of the Ignatieff lay laws. Again and again the lives of Jews have been made bitter by these laws and their cruel enforcement. 1891 is memorable because of the banishment from Moscow. 14,000 Jewish artisans, men, women and children, were expelled with unspeakable brutality. 1903 is the year of Kishineff, with all its horrors.

And what is the cause for all these sorrows, and burdens, oppressions and persecutions? The cause is social, economic, race hatred, we have been told, and now 'tis political. The Jews are revolutionists, they are destroyers of the autocracy and enemies of the government. No doubt Jews, with many others not Jews, are stirred by the spirit whose rising threatens autocracy at this very hour. But the cause of Jewish persecution in Russia these centuries is not political, nor racial, economic nor social. Let none believe it. As long as it stands upon Russian statute books that by conversion to the Greek Catholic Church, a Jew will free himself from all burdens and restrictions, the Russian law and Russian government proclaim him pariah and outlaw in the land of his birth.

But the Jews are to blame. "They were to blame for the horrors of Kishineff and Gomel. The trials of those who were butchered and massacred were a travesty on justice. Krushivan, whose words in the Bessaravetz, inflamed the passions of the multitude, is still unpunished! His inflammatory denunciations pass uncensured. The blood of Kishineff was brought home to the very threshold of Von Plehve. Rarely indeed has a strong public man ever died so universally condemned."

The Jews were held responsible for America's favor to Japan, and for American Anti-Russian spirit. The press of America yielded to Jewish influence, was the parting fling of the discredited Cassini.

America knows why she was Anti-Russian. America has not forgotten

George Kennan's story of Siberian exiles and Siberian prisons and Siberian horrors, nor Harold Frederic's letters concerning Russian brutality. - Even now the political prisoners are coming out of the prisons in which they have been buried these decades. America remembers Russia's broken promises, and her treaty violations in Manchuria. America understands the spirit of Russian despotism and has no sympathy therewith. America cannot forget Tolstoy was excommunicated and would have been imprisoned if Russia dared, and thus Sienkiewicz and Gorki.

Again, we read the story of Jewish slaughter and inhuman butchery in Odessa and cities of south-western Russia, and perhaps everywhere where Jews live. 5,657 wounded, reported in Odessa alone, men, women and children slaughtered in cold blood. Jewish houses marked with a cross, Jews challenged to show cross of ikon. The mind hesitates to believe the stories of revolting barbarity, - the mutilation of the bodies of men and women and babes, - the living and the dead.

Again, in history the Jew is the scapegoat. The passion of Russia shall spend itself, its fierce lust shall be satisfied with Jewish blood and with Jewish loot. The mob, the police and soldiers join in the merry hunt. Today Jews are the victims of the "loyalists" and the "patriots". I believe them to be the agents of autocracy. The story of Kishineff repeats itself. Massacre, riot and rapine, night and day. Police and soldiers not preventing, sometimes assisting; but almost on the instant that martial law is declared, the loyalists are dis-armed, and riot and rapine and massacre are at an end.

What shall we of America do? We Jews of America, and all Americans, Jews and non-Jews? Shall we denounce Russia and Nicholas II and Count Witte? Shall we appeal to the president and the government of the United States?

Shall we denounce Russia? No need for Jews to add further denunciation of the holy Russian Empire. No indictment of Russia as a government can be as severe as her indictment by Russia's own, her intellectuals, the heart and the brains of the Russian people. History will record a true judgement concerning Russia and her crimes. "Bureaucracy is the curse of Russia."

All Russia today demands freedom, the freedom which we all believe belongs to all men; freedom of conscience, of speech, of assembly, and of the press.

Let the world, not the Jew, declare Russia to be what she in truth is,-- unworthy a place among the civilized nations of the earth. Let the world proclaim, and the nations hear it, that the Czar of Russia, his hands red with the blood of war, and of the massacre of his innocent people, is unworthy to lead the nations to the altar of peace.

Shall we appeal to the president? 'Tis useless to appeal for intervention when intervention is impossible. We may have full faith in President Roosevelt, that at the proper time he will speak and act with courage and with justice, in the name of and on behalf of humanity.

For the moment our hope centers in Count Witte, hailed these many months as the strong man of Russia. Count Witte has cabled to Jacob Schiff:

"The government is horrified at these outrages. You know that I do not sympathize with such outbreaks. All I can do to stop the disorders is done, but as the country is in such an unsettled state, the local authorities are too often powerless." Perchance, in the fury and passion of the storm, the "strong man of Russia" may prove but a broken reed.

Let the public opinion of the nations be proclaimed in press and pulpit and platform. Russia is more willing to listen than a few years ago. Let the press thunder, and the pulpit ring. The world should not be silent. The Jew will speak and act. He will help his unfortunate brothers, as he has helped so many hundreds of times in Jewish history. Let not the Jew alone speak, and act, and help. We wait to hear the voice of the Christian world. Let Cleveland speak! Let America speak! Sound the protest in the name of Christianity. Enough of the bigotry and fanaticism of the dark ages. Jewish persecution is the shame of the 20th century. Let the world speak for the oppressed and against the oppressor.

There can be no true friendship between America and Russia. Democracy

is not in sympathy with despotism and autocracy. But a few months have passed since the peace envoys met at Portsmouth. All America witnessed the spectacle of Russia playing to public opinion; but American statesmen, discerning, and American journalists, keen to discover truth, and the American people penetrated beneath the masquerade. Russia, until she mends her ways, is unworthy the respect and surely unworthy the friendship of a free and a freedom and justice-loving people.

Let America open wide the door of welcome to the wanderers, who, escaped, driven and hunted, will flee across the continent and sea. Let the mighty voice of public opinion speak from the heart of America, which believes in liberty and justice to all men.

