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LORD SHAFTESBURY ON THE RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM RUSSIA TO PALESTINE

The following is the greater portion of a speech by this venerable nobleman at the recent anniversary meeting of the Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews:—

“You express your sympathy with the persecuted people of the Jews—persecuted under circumstances more atrocious, more vile, more greedy, more grasping, more covetous, more detestable in every sense of the word, than any other persecution that I have ever heard of in modern times. This persecution has been governed by greed from beginning to end, and it has exceeded in anarchy and spoliation and bloodshed, the records of almost all the persecutions that I have read of, even in Roman history. I cannot but believe that a very serious issue awaits the Russian empire. I remember my learned and valued friend, Dr. McCaul, once quoting to me a passage which I could not understand in the Book of Isaiah. Speaking of the Jews as a nation, the prophet uses the words, “terrible from their beginning hitherto.” I could not understand that passage, because the Jews have seldom gone beyond their boundary for the purpose of aggression; but the Doctor gave me the true interpretation—I have held it ever since, and I hope every one of you will hold it. “Aye,” he said, “they are ‘terrible from the beginning hitherto,’ because no nation ever injured the Jews without smarting for it.”

Now, there is a kindred feeling to that shown by Russia, though it is restrained in expression and in operation; there is a strong anti-Semitic feeling among the Germans, but it rests on totally different grounds. A vast number of the Germans are deeply hostile towards the Jews, and I heard the solution of that only a few months ago, having suspected it before. A friend of mine being in Berlin, got into conversation with a very great man there, a man who knew what he thought himself, and who also knew what others thought. My friend said to him, “What is the history of this strong anti-Jewish feeling which you have in Berlin and throughout Germany?” He replied, “Do you want to know?” “Yes.” “Then,” he said, “I will tell you. These Jews, if they go into commerce, become the first merchants; if they go into the banking line, they become the first bankers; if they go into law, they become the first lawyers; or if they go into literature, they beat us all. Whatever career they undertake, they drive out the Gentiles; and I tell you, sir, we won’t stand it.” There is, in fact, a great jealousy of that wonderful people who are now coming to the front. And what a sign of the times it is, that wherever the Jews are, they are either the most prominent people to be persecuted, or the most prominent people to take a lead in all the various professions!

WILL THEY RETURN TO PALESTINE?

Now, the question arises, "Will the Jews return to their own land?" A great number of them are going to America; they will go anywhere if they can there find freedom from persecution, and ease to pursue their career. I do not think there is, so far as I can make out, any great desire among the Jews as a nation to return to their own land. And this I know from authority, that the wealthy Jews of England—I do not know whether this is the case with the wealthy Jews of other countries—are very adverse to it. I had it from an influential Jew's own lips, that the wealthy Jews of England do not wish that any Jew whatever should return to the land of his forefathers. But there are many ready to go, and it will depend upon the contributions made by faithful Christians whether they shall be enabled to go in greater or smaller numbers.

WILL THIS PERSECUTION CEASE?

Another question arises, "Will this persecution cease?" I do not believe it will. It may cease for an interval but it will recur in successive periods. And there is every reason why it should do so. The persecution of the Jews in Russia and Poland does not depend upon religion or nationality. These have nothing whatever to do with it. The Russians would persecute any people in the same position as the Jews. Bear this in mind, that the Jews hold in mortgage a very considerable part of the landed property of Russia; that they hold in their debt a very large proportion of the peasantry, and very many of the shopkeepers in different parts of the empire. Every single opportunity which now presents itself to the Russian people for plunder and spoliation of the Jews is almost sure to be seized. In the destruction of the Jews, and of their papers, Russians get rid of documents by which they are bound, and which might be brought as evidence against them; and so long as there is property to be laid hold of, so long will you find the Russian people rising against the Jews.

RUSSIAN HATRED TO THE JEWS

The Russian people would not, perhaps, if left to themselves, be so greedy or so violent; they are encouraged by the officials of the Russian

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empire, many of whom are indebted to Jews. This I had on official authority, that at the very last outbreak in Balta, while the Jews were being persecuted, the police stood by and would not allow the Jews to protect themselves, while they, at the same time, encouraged the peasantry to come in with their carts and wagons to carry away the plunder from the Jewish houses. It has been shown that the Government is paralyzed—that part of it, I mean, that wished well to the Jews. I believe the present Emperor to be a humane man; I believe him to be a just man; but, although he

is a despot, he is as perfectly inefficient for the government of his empire as though he

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were a baby two years old. He has no will of his own, and is surrounded by officials of an anti-Semitic character. The Russian empire is lost in profligacy and wickedness and every description of vice. Whatever else it may be, this persecution is a sign of the end—I should rather say, perhaps of the beginning of the end—of that great end which, God be praised, cannot be far off.”

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— August, 1882 —



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