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THE KISHENEV MOVEMENT.

Concerning the wonderful movement toward Christ on the part of the Jews of Siberia, which is now attracting the attention of the civilized world, *Harper's Weekly* says: –

"Ever and anon reports reach western Europe and America of a remarkable movement among the Jewish people of southeastern Europe and Siberia. In these vague and often conflicting accounts so much can be recognized as the substratum of truth that we have in this agitation a unique movement, looking to the acceptance of the principles of Evangelical Christianity, and of Western culture and civilization, not by individual members of this strangest of historic peoples, but by the Jews as a nation. It is only now that a fair and correct view of the genesis, character, and development of the agitation can be gained.

"The movement, whose beginnings date back almost four years, is yet in its formative stage. But its development during this period has been such that it can confidently be pronounced no longer a mere experiment with doubtful chances of permanent existence. It has manifested a remarkable vitality; its growth has been steady and healthy, positive in character, yet avoiding all unnatural haste and dangerous extremes. Having been recognized [R1035 : page 8] by the Russian authorities as a *religio licita*, it now has a legal existence and legal rights. Its character stamps it as one of the most unique phenomena in the variegated kaleidoscope of national, social, and religious interests that divide the hearts and minds of the Czar's one hundred and sixteen millions of subjects.

"The view generally entertained that the Kishenev movement is entirely religious in character is both correct and incorrect. It is correct in this, that at least for the present the new spirit that controls the new communion finds its most pronounced expression in the acceptance of the tenets of Christianity. On the other hand, it is incorrect also, because

neither the inception nor the ultimate end and aim of this people is Christianity as such. The latter is rather a means to an end, and not the end itself. The ideal that fills the souls of Rabinowitch and his followers is the improvement and growth of the highest and best interests of his people. In his [R1036 : page 8] search for the best means to attain this end, he, after years of study and research, has reached the conclusion that this can only be accomplished through a moral regeneration of the people, which, in turn, can be effected only through the religion of the New Testament as the completion and fulfillment of the Old. The movement is thus, strictly speaking, not religious at all, at least not primarily, but is national, and in the interests of progress and civilization in the best sense of the word. It is in no sense or manner the result of Christian missionary activity. It is an independent agitation springing up entirely out of Jewish soil. Its intrinsically non-religious character is attested by the further fact that Rabinowitch was not a Jewish rabbi; he is not ordained to the present day. Indeed, among all the participants and leading men of the movement there is not one who is or has been a clergyman of any sect or creed. Whatever influence Christian workers may have now in those regions on the Jewish people is independent of the Kishenev society, and was no decisive factor in its formation or development.

"Rabinowitch was a merchant, and later a lawyer. Energetic in character and ambitious in self-improvement and the advancement, politically, socially and morally, of his people, he years ago became known as a zealous friend of reform among the Eastern Jews. With an education and enterprise far beyond his brethren, he set about to devise ways and means to attain his ideals and ends. He did what he could to secure for them better political rights, but was unable to protect them against the fierce persecutions that five years ago set in against the unfortunate Israelites in Russia, Roumania, and neighboring countries. He acquainted himself with the advanced philosophical thought of the West, in the hope that its adoption by his people would elevate them to a higher spiritual plane, and thus secure for them higher ideals and nobler ends. But he soon learned to doubt both the efficiency of the

means and the possibility of applying them to a people whom centuries of persecution and ultra conservatism had been hardening to principles so at variance with their traditional ideas. He again attempted to win them away from their greed for gain, which, next to their formalistic religious exercises, is the all-controlling and all-degrading factor in the mind and life of the Oriental Jew. But his endeavors to establish agricultural colonies for them, both at home and in the Holy Land, proved abortive. While in Palestine the conviction ripened in him, through an independent study of the New Testament in its relations to the Old, that Israel had made the mistake of its national life, and had become untrue to its historic mission, by the rejection of Christ.

"This conviction concerning Christ, not as the Savior of the *world*, but as the embodiment and fulfillment of the prophecies of old, and of the ideals and aims of Israel as a nation, is the central thought around which the whole movement circles. The principles enunciated by the humble Nazarene are recognized as those which alone can accomplish the destinies of the people, and enable them to attain the end for which they were set apart as a chosen people. It is thus regarded as a serious break in the normal and historical development of Israel, that eighteen hundred years ago this people as a nation refused to accept those tenets and principles which are regarded by all Christians, and now also by Rabinowitch and his followers, as the legitimate and only correct outcome of the whole previous historical development of Israel. To heal this breach is the ideal aim of the Kishenev reformers, by setting in anew there where first the chosen people entered upon an erroneous path of national development.

"These ideas explain why the Kishenev communion by no means desire to join any of the existing Christian denominations. Their object is to secure the recognition of Christianity, and the morality, culture, and civilization that have grown out of Christianity, as the genuine and legitimate development of Old Testament Judaism, and as the only means of securing the national prosperity of the Jews as such. For this reason they do not think of ceasing to be Jews. Whatever is

characteristic of Judaism is a national idea, and is not religious in character, and has not been superseded by the Christian phase of revelation, they retain. They still keep the seventh day; they still practice circumcision; they still celebrate the Passab feast as a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt – because all these are national characteristics distinguishing them from the Germans, from the English, from other peoples, as separate nations, each with its own peculiarities.

"The genesis and development of such clear-cut ideals is all the more remarkable when we remember the manner of men in the midst of whom they have sprung up. Those who are accustomed to see only the Western Jew, with few characteristics differing from his Christian neighbor, can form no idea of his Oriental brother. He is still the outcast his Western brother was during the Middle Ages. His religion is Talmudic to the core. It is a petrified formalism, traditional legalism, and religionism hardened through centuries of conservatism and reverence for the faith of the fathers. He is the modern representative of that stern Pharisaism which we find depicted on the pages of the New Testament. From that day to this there has essentially been no progress, no development in his religion, except that line has been added to line and precept to precept.

"And yet it is just this characteristic of the Oriental Jew that enables us psychologically to understand the rise of the Kishenev movement. Among the Western Jews, whose religious tenets have been seriously modified by their constant intercourse with Western thought, and whose faith or unfaith is now to a great extent the result of compromises with modern thought, such an agitation would be unthinkable. The philosophy of history could not explain it. The factors could not produce it. But the Eastern Jew, as a man of positive convictions, will exchange these only for other positive convictions."

It is true, as above shown, that the Jew has held and still holds too rigidly the national idea, – that God's plan for ruling and blessing the

world centers in the national exaltation of the seed of Abraham; but it is also true that nominal Christians have not held that idea sufficiently. Both extremes are disadvantageous and blinding. The Jew fancies his nation *necessary* to God's purpose, and hence is proud and boastful and unready for God's real plan. The Gentiles losing sight of all blessing *through* any particular people, theorize that God is now trying to draw the world to himself, and are perplexed at the small results of the past eighteen centuries.

The truth lies between the two positions. God will use *a nation* to bless the world in general, and that nation must first be exalted to universal dominion before *through it* "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." But God is not bound by his covenant with Abraham to take his literal children according to the flesh for this nation which he shall exalt to bless all others. On the contrary Abraham, who was faithful to God's promises, is reckoned as the father of *the* faithful one – Our Lord Jesus; and he is the only heir of the covenant made with Abraham. And he selects others who under the cover of his perfection and united to him as his bride, are counted with him – the Seed of Abraham, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation. And in this nation, when complete and glorified, which we believe will be very shortly, all the families or nations of earth shall be blessed. Israel *first* shall be blessed, and become the earthly agency for blessing others of the earthly family.
– EDITOR.

