

SOLZHENITSYN'S TWO CENTURIES TOGETHER contd - The Pogroms, part two.
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In his discussion of the 1881-2 pogroms, Solzhenitsyn naturally emphasises the fact that - contrary to what is still widely believed - there is no evidence that the Russian government, or dark forces close to the Russian government - were behind, or in any way supported, the attacks on the Jews - that, on the contrary, the authorities did what they could, albeit with limited means, to suppress them. In my last article I showed that recent English language research (Hans Rogger, John Klier, I.M.Aronson) supports him in this. It also tends to support his view that contemporary accounts of assaults on the persons of Jews, in particular of rape, were very much exaggerated. The main target was property.

This research, like Solzhenitsyn's, is largely based on government reports. The more horrific alternatives which appeared in the London based *Jewish World*, but also in Russia itself, were put together by Jewish writers interviewing victims. There was probably a great deal of hearsay and rumour in these accounts but they reflect the absolute terror which was felt by Jews both in the areas affected and more widely since no-one knew where the pogroms might break out next. In an essay on the St Petersburg based Jewish Russian language paper, *Razsvets* (Dawn), Steven Cassedy (Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature in Princeton University) comments:

*'what matters for a picture of the historical moment of the pogroms is not that contemporary beliefs about a government conspiracy later proved to be baseless, but that those beliefs were present at that time; not that the government never really sent well-dressed agents-provocateurs to urge violence against the Jews, but that people at the time believed this was true. The commonly held conviction at the time was that the government and local authorities were cooperating and conspiring, that the anti-Semitic press was acting at the behest of the government, and that the government was rewarding rioters by meting out absurdly light punishments.'*¹

THE QUESTION OF EMIGRATION

The effect on Jews in the Russian Empire, both at the popular level and among the intelligentsia, was enormous and is rather underplayed by Solzhenitsyn. In particular, Solzhenitsyn doesn't discuss the drama that took place in the Polish town of Brody (in Galicia, at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), which experienced both in 1881 and 1882 a large, for the time, influx of Jews fleeing from the Pale of Settlement.

According to Jonathan Frankel in his book *Prophecy and Politics*:

'by the summer, July and August 1881, emigration was becoming the central issue. The cause of this shift of interest was straightforward enough. A sociopolitical chain reaction had been set in motion in April. Large population movements had been started by the pogroms. In Kiev, for instance, in late April there were numerous reports of a mass flight from the city; ten or twelve extra carriages had to be coupled onto every train leaving for Berdichev and Belaia Tserkov. In turn, according to secret governmental reports,

¹ Steven Cassedy: 'Russian-Jewish Intellectuals Confront the Pogroms of 1881: The Example of "Razsvet"', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2/3 (Oct., 1993 - Jan., 1994), pp.136-7

*the population flows served to increase popular excitement through the south and contributed to new outbreaks of destruction in the region: In the months of June and July, respectively, there were large-scale pogroms in Nezhin and Pereiaslav. The prolonged turmoil, for its part, brought trade in southern Russia almost to a halt. On 30 May, T. S. Morozov wrote secretly in the name of the Moscow business community to [Minister of Internal Affairs] Ignatiev urging him to do everything in his power to halt the pogroms because the major trade fairs were being canceled throughout the south and huge quantities of food were piling up in the Moscow warehouses. The spreading economic chaos made it all the more difficult to employ the refugees or even to provide them with enough food to keep them from starving. This spiral of violence, flight, and disruption was exacerbated by the popular tendency to blame the catastrophe on the Jews themselves. Emboldened by the failure of the government to take an effective stand, in word or deed, against the pogroms, the zemstva [local assemblies] now joined the press in calling for a halt to Jewish competition in various areas of trade and education or, as they put it, to prevent the Jews from exploiting the local population. Some petitions even demanded that the Jews be totally evacuated - expelled - from their areas.'*²

Berdichev and Belaia Tserkov were both in the Russian controlled part of the Ukraine. Berdichev had been an important centre of Jewish culture but was at the time in decline. Belaia Tserkov seems to have been in the process of becoming an important centre (54% of the population in 1897. They are both categorised as 'shtetls' in the online History of Jewish Communities in Ukraine - jewua.org)

Frankel goes on to say that the impetus towards emigration was encouraged by outside forces, in the first instance the Paris based Alliance Israélite Universelle. In 1870-1, during a famine in Lithuania, the Alliance had supported the emigration of some 500 Jews to the United States. In the Summer of 1881, it was considering a similar scheme - 'a selected group of able-bodied Russian Jews.' However, as Frankel says (p.59), 'plans that were tentative and modest in Paris were blown up to gigantic size as if by a distorting mirror in Russia.' Late in August a delegate from the Alliance on his way to Russia was diverted to Galicia, to Brody, near Lvov, where he found some 500 Jewish refugees. That, however, was only the beginning.

Frankel describes an intense debate which arose among Russian Jews between those deeply opposed to emigration and those in favour. The opponents argued that it would only encourage the ambitions of the Russian Judeophobes. Since they wanted to expel the Jews, a policy of emigration would amount to an incitement to violence. The case for emigration was put by Grigorii Bogrov and Simon Dubnow. Readers of earlier articles in this series will recognise the names. Grigorii Bogrov, who was for a while editor of *Razsvets*, was indeed the grandfather of the Bogrov (Dmitri, or Mordko, depending on how Jewish you want him to be) who assassinated Stolypin. Dubnow appeared in the last article as the historian whose account of the pogroms had been universally accepted until challenged by Rogger, Klier and Aronson. Both Bogrov and Dubnow had been champions of the reform and modernisation of Jewish life. Bogrov indeed at the end of his life converted to Christianity, though his son, Dmitri's father, remained loyal to Judaism. In my last article I quoted an account of Dubnow suggesting that his views had not been greatly changed immediately by the pogroms - he still believed that an

² Jonathan Frankel: *Prophecy and Politics - Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews*, Cambridge University Press, 1984 (first ed 1981), p.58. Frankel was based in the Department of Russian Studies and Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He died in 2008.

advance of Jews towards equal rights in the Russian Empire was inevitable - but Frankel gives a different impression.

The crisis saw the emergence of the group *Am Olam*, led by Monye Bokol and by M.I.Rabinovich, who would later be well known as a novelist under the name 'Ben Ami' (son of my people). They had been involved in setting up self defence groups in Odessa - among the 500 people arrested during the Odessa pogrom in May were 150 Jews '*preparing for an open battle with the Christians*'.³ 'Am Olam' means 'The Eternal People' and this in itself marks a substantial new development. Previously the main emphasis among Jewish radicals, Socialists and Revolutionaries, had been on the needs of the Russian *narod* (people), arguing that the duty of Jews was to abandon their backward religious ways and fuse with the Russian movement.

Solzhenitsyn develops this case, pointing to the involvement of Jews in the Russian populist movement, the immense influence of 'Nihilism' on Jewish revolutionaries from wealthy families, the willingness of Jews to join the movement of 'going to the people'. To quote Solzhenitsyn (p.241) '*Neither could one accuse these early Jewish revolutionaries of anti-Russian motives, as some are doing at the present time in Russia. Not in the slightest!*' With regard to the attraction of Russian 'Nihilism', as represented by Chernyshevski's novel *What is to be done* and by the character of Bazarov in Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Sons*, I've already said something on this in my previous article, discussing the formation of Simon Dubnow. The Jewish enlightenment, the *haskalah*, aiming to modernise Jewish culture and reconcile it with the best in European culture, had turned in Eastern Europe, together with modern minded Russian intellectuals, towards writers such as J.S.Mill in England and Auguste Comte in France. What is called 'Nihilism' in Russia is not far removed from what was called liberalism, utilitarianism or positivism in Western Europe. It did not see itself as a 'negative' tendency. It was absorbedly interested in exploration of the material world, and in the practical arts, medicine, engineering. The 'nihil' in question was a rejection of religion and conventional morality. Erich Haberer's book, *Jews and Revolution*, giving a detailed account of Jewish involvement in the populist movement, especially in the 1870s, points to a policy of self education circles developed by the quite brilliant Jewish revolutionary, Marc Natanson, and suggests that '*as a philosophy of emancipation Russian Nihilism can be viewed as an extension of Jewish enlightenment*'.⁴

Am Olam - The Eternal People - broke with this essentially non-Jewish orientation and argued that the Jews were themselves a *narod*, a people in their own right and that the task of politically minded Jews was to fuse with their own *narod*. In early 1881 the Am Olam theorist Monye Bokal was planning an agricultural commune (not the first or the last by a long shot to think of agriculture as a future for Jews!) but in the context of the pogroms he engaged in a propaganda tour of the affected areas arguing for emigration. Meanwhile his colleague Ben Ami went to Paris to try to persuade the Alliance Israélite Universelle to finance it.

The idea gained traction and on the 13th October (Frankel, p.65) another representative from the Alliance said that since the beginning of September 3,000 refugees had arrived in Brody. The Jewish advocates of emigration wanted to raise money themselves but could not do so without

³ Frankel p.54, quoting the acting governor of Odessa, Count Dondukov-Korsakov.

⁴ Erich Haberer: *Jews in Revolution in Nineteenth Century Russia*, Cambridge University Press, 1995. Quotation p.15. Haberer is Associate Professor of History at Wilfred Laurier University in Toronto.

the permission of the government which Ignatiev, probably listening to the St Petersburg Jewish magnates grouped round Gintsburg, refused. It was therefore down to the Alliance which initially was supportive.

Both the Alliance and Am Olam envisaged emigration to the United States. Between 22nd October and 20th November some 1300 refugees were sent in seven parties to New York but this of course created an incentive for more refugees to come. It also created panic among the Jews in New York and the Board of Delegates of the Union of Hebrew Congregations in New York demanded a halt. The three thousand refugees still in Brody were encouraged, both by the Alliance and the Russian government to return home (Frankel doesn't elaborate on whether or not they had homes to go to). By January 1882 only about one hundred were left.

BRITAIN AND THE RETURN OF THE JEWS TO PALESTINE

But that still wasn't the end of the story. In 1882, the initiative for Jewish emigration passed over to the Mansion House conference in London. This is where the remarkable figure of Laurence Oliphant (who, strangely, isn't mentioned by Solzhenitsyn) comes into the picture.

There was a lively tradition of 'restorationism', as Zionism was known in the nineteenth century, in Britain. Some time in the 1820s a woman called Mary Seddon was confined to a lunatic asylum after she had hired a donkey and set off with a group of Jews for Jerusalem to begin the return of the Jews to the Holy Land (the group of Jews abandoned her in France). That may be an eccentric example but it is worth mentioning because she happened to be the grandmother of Beatrice Webb. Eitan bar-Josef, in his essay on *Christian Zionism and Victorian culture* takes it as a paradigm for his argument that though restorationist views were widespread and held by often very influential and wealthy people they were still regarded as not quite respectable. He quotes a story told by the very keen restorationist Anthony Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, in 1862:

*'Once when he was sitting on the [Lunacy] Commission as Chairman the alleged insanity of a lady was under discussion, he took a view of the case opposite to that of his colleagues. One of the medical men who was there to give evidence, crept up to his chair and, in a confidential tone, said, "Are you aware, my lord, that she subscribes to the Society for the Conversion of the Jews?" "Indeed!" replied Lord Shaftesbury; "and are you aware that I am President of that Society?"'*⁵

The reference is to the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, established in 1809 with the restoration of the Jews to Palestine as one of its main aims. Bar-Josef's argument is that although the return of the Jews to the Holy Land in fulfilment of prophecy was a major and serious concern of many well known and powerful people, it had to be represented in terms of a practical Imperialist interest if it was to achieve respectability. Getting British control of Palestine as part of a process of facilitating access to India could be seen as a valid foreign policy objective but it was by no means obvious that peopling Palestine with Jews was the best way of achieving it. Thus Shaftesbury describes the means he had to employ to win Palmerston, his father-in-law, to the cause in 1840:

⁵ Eitan bar-Yosef: 'Christian Zionism and Victorian Culture', *Israel Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer, 2003), p.20. Bar-Yosef is a historian based in the Ben Gurion University in the Negev.

'August 1. Dined with Palmerston. After dinner left alone with him. Propounded my scheme, which seemed to strike his fancy; he asked some questions, and readily promised to consider it. How singular is the order of Providence! Singular, that is if estimated by man's ways! Palmerston has already been chosen by God to be an instrument of good to His ancient people; to do homage, as it were, to their inheritance, and to recognise their rights without believing their destiny. And it seems he will yet do more. But though the motive be kind, it is not sound. I am forced to argue politically, financially, commercially; these considerations strike him home; he weeps not like his Master over Jerusalem, nor prays that now, at last, she may put on her beautiful garments ...' (p.28)⁶

Palmerston, for whom preservation of the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russia was a major foreign policy objective, was well aware of the religious motive behind the restorationist cause:

"Pray don't lose sight of my recommendation to the Porte, to invite the Jews to return to Palestine," he wrote to the British ambassador in Constantinople on 4 September: "You can have no idea how much such a measure would tend to interest in the Sultan's cause all the religious party in this country, and their influence is great and their connexion extensive." These issues "excite a very deep interest in the minds of a large number of persons in the United Kingdom and the Sultan would enlist in his favour the good opinion of numerous and powerful classes in this country ...' (Bar-Josef, p.29)

LAURENCE OLIPHANT - HIS RELIGIOUS VIEWS

In his book *Land of Gilead*, published in 1880 shortly before the 1881 crisis, Laurence Oliphant wrote:

'It is somewhat unfortunate that so important a political and strategical question as the future of Palestine should be inseparably connected in the public mind with a favourite religious theory ... So far as my own efforts are concerned they have no connection whatever with any popular religious theory upon any subject.' (Bar-Josef, p.33)

Well, maybe. But Oliphant had an interesting religious trajectory of his own. His parents were followers of Edward Irving, the highly respected minister of the Scottish Presbyterian church in London, friend of Coleridge and of Thomas Carlyle, who adopted a pre-millennial and restorationist position (the second coming of Christ would precede and inaugurate the thousand years of His personal rule and be accompanied by a return of the Jews to the Holy Land); but who subsequently championed the 'gift of tongues', an early moment in the development of nineteenth century Pentecostalism. An account of his life was written by Margaret Oliphant, a well-known novelist of the time who also wrote a life of Laurence Oliphant. Philip Earl Steele, an American historian, specialist in Polish history, whose account will be the basis of much of what I have to say about Laurence, says that the two Oliphants

⁶ The context here was an upsurge of interest in the possibility of Jewish emigration to Palestine prompted by *'the struggle between the Sultan and Mehmet Ali [of Egypt], in which the Powers intervened, for the lordship of Palestine, the appointment of a British Consul at Jerusalem, Britain being the first of the Powers to take that step, the Damascus outrage [a pogrom prompted by the charge that Jews had used Christian blood to bake unleavened bread] which shocked the British conscience and moved Parliament and the City of London to protest.'* In 1845 Britain claimed a right of protection for the Jews living in Palestine. This comes from Albert M. Hyamson: 'British projects for the restoration of Jews to Palestine', *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, No 26 (1918), pp.134-5.

weren't related but the Wikipedia account of Margaret Oliphant says that they were cousins (her maiden name was Wilson. Wikipedia says that her husband Frank Wilson Oliphant was also her cousin. I really don't feel inclined to pursue the matter any further at the present time).

Oliphant himself was a successful diplomat, travel writer (*A Journey to Katmandu*, 1852; *The Russian Shores of the Black Sea*, 1853), satirist (*Piccadilly*, first published in serial form in 1865), journalist, becoming an MP in 1865. But in 1868 he threw all that up to join the spiritualist, preacher and poet Thomas Lake Harris in his 'Brotherhood of the New Life' in Brocton, New York state. I haven't established if Harris had any interest in restorationism. It seems unlikely. He wrote an interpretation of the Apocalypse, available at archive.org, which says nothing about the contemporary position of Jews or the Holy Land and is mainly concerned with a system of breathing that would characterise a new Christian humanity in harmony with the divine breath that animates the Universe. A defence of his Brotherhood of the New Life published in 1891, says:

'Conscious human life begins and ends with the fact and consciousness of breath : all men are aware of the fact that they breathe from and breathe into nature. Immersed by the continuous act of respiration in this beautiful and bounteous natural world ; they living in it ; it living in them ; their faculties open to the knowledge of Nature and their senses are thrillingly fed and solaced by its joys. With me the breath is twofold: besides the usual breathing from and into Nature, there is an organic action of breathing from and into the Adorable Fount and Spirit of existence. First realised as by a new birth of the breathing system, a breath of new intellectual and moral infancy, this, carefully held, reverently and sacredly cherished as a gift of God, has advanced till at present each organ of the frame respire in breathing rhythms, making of the body one conscious form of unified intellectual and physical harmony : the spirit, the real or higher self, is absorbing the lowly naturehood, yet meanwhile nourishing it with the rich and vital elements of a loftier realm of being. This gift that I hold is the coming inheritance of all.'

Mankind awaits its New Humanity

As Earth once waited for the first-born rose.

Every act of my respiration for the last forty years has partaken of this complex character. "He breathed upon them and said, receive ye the Holy Ghost." [spiritus ; breath.] He breathes into me so that I receive the holy breath continually. In my lowly, creature emptiness and nothingness, I yet realise the organic presence of the Christ. I witness, in this age of unbelief, to the fulfilment of the Master's promise.'

He continues (and I quote this to indicate the apparently very severe discipline he imposed on Oliphant and on his wife and mother and perhaps to suggest that Oliphant's motive was genuinely charitable):

'But this mortal mind and flesh, this action and passion of the frame, can not be translated from naturehood into humanhood by any process but that of the acceptance and adoption, by each individual, of the whole corporate interest of mankind as his interest; to be embraced and served in the full denial of any superior self-interest, or family or churchly or class interest. With the discovery that he begins to breathe in God, comes to the man the discovery that God lives in the common and lowly people of the world.

'Here then is found the present cross of Christ. The aristocrat must be crucified to aristocracy ; the plebeian to plebeianism ; the luxurist to luxury ; the ascetic to asceticism ; the exclusive to exclusionism.

*It is a strict, honest give up and come out from spoilage, pretence and illusion. For this God is a jealous God : he proffers to man the wealth of a consummate and indestructible manhood, to be realised in each filial and fraternal personality ; but man, to receive the gift, must first accept the common burden and sorrow and service of mankind.'*⁷

He saw himself (as the title of his Apocalypse commentary - *Arcana of Christianity* - would suggest) as a successor to Swedenborg. We're certainly not in the usual territory of Protestant Utopianism. Both in Brocton and in his later commune in Santa Rosa, California, he developed a reputation for the production of fine wines, and the Japanese Kanaye Nagasawa, who became Harris's successor after his death in 1906, was to earn the nickname 'Wine King of California.'

Oliphant broke with Harris in 1876, launching an eventually successful law suit to regain the money he had given him. He was later (1886) to publish a novel, *Massolam*, based on his experience with Harris and in fact he also seems to have continued his interest in Harris's ideas, publishing a treatise on the spiritual (and sexual) significance of breathing, *Sympneumata*, in 1885.⁸ According to the account by Philip Earl Steele '*it was in 1978 that Oliphant began to squarely focus his attention on Palestine.*' After the break with Harris '*it comes as small surprise that Oliphant, in searching for a new field of endeavour for his restless energy and feverish mysticism, turned towards the Restorationism he had been raised with. Another factor was that of the changing international situation. This particularly concerned the fears of Great Britain that, following the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Russia ... would now attempt to seize areas in the Levant from the Ottomans.*'⁹

Oliphant's 'Plan for Gilead' was, as he explained in a letter written in 1878, '*To obtain a concession in the northern and more fertile half of Palestine ... Any amount of money can be raised upon it owing to the belief which people have that they would be fulfilling prophecy and bringing on the end of the world. I don't know why they are so anxious for this latter event but it makes the commercial speculation easy ...*'

He quite easily secured the support of the Prime Minister, Disraeli and of the Foreign Minister, Salisbury. Also of the novelist George Eliot, whose last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876, had finished with the hero discovering that he had a Jewish mother and committing himself, without any apocalyptic motive, to the cause of a Jewish return to Palestine. With credentials from the British government he secured the support of the governor of North Palestine and a sympathetic hearing in the Sultan's court in Constantinople (according to Steele he wrote to Disraeli saying that '*In his talks with the Turks*' he had '*stressed that Protestants from Great Britain*

⁷ Thomas Lake Harris: *Brotherhood of the New Life - Letter from T.L.Harris with passing reference to recent criticisms*, Santa Rosa, California, Fountraingrove Library, Vol 1, No 2, July 1891, pp.4-5 and 7-8.

⁸ There is an account in Julie Chajes: *Alice and Laurence Oliphant's Divine Androgyne and "The Woman Question"* apparently accepted for publication in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 2015. I have it from Academia.edu. Julie Chajes teaches in the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

⁹ Philip Earle Steele: 'British Christian Zionism (Part 2): The Work of Laurence Oliphant', *Fathom Journal*, Jan 2020, available online. Harris and Oliphant both believed that a new age was about to dawn in which humanity would be completely - and physically - transfigured. Given the connection to breath I would speculate that they had in mind something like the third age envisaged at the end of the twelfth century by Amaury of Bène - the age of the Holy Spirit (the Old Testament was the age of the Father, the New Testament of the Son). Oliphant settled in Palestine to write his own versions of Harris's ideas, together with the novel in which he criticised Harris. I think it quite possible that he might have seen the return of the Jews to Palestine as part of the process of ushering the new age in - not quite mainstream restorationism but an interesting variant.

and the United States would provide enormous funding to help realise the aim of establishing a Jewish colony, and he confessed to the Prime Minister that it was difficult to explain to the Turks why that was.'

Land of Gilead was published in England in December 1880. According to Steele: 'Oliphant's efforts in the Ottoman Empire and now the publication of his resulting book made him an all but universally known figure in the Jewish Diaspora, with the Jewish press extensively and most often excitedly reporting on the progress of his plans.' This included the London based *Jewish Chronicle*. There was of course a great difference between Oliphant's argument, based entirely on the interest of the Jews, of the Turks, and of course not neglecting the British, and the approach of the Christian Zionists organised in a society nominally at least devoted to the conversion of the Jews, or simply seeing the restoration as a necessary prelude to the return of Christ. If Oliphant had hopes of that sort he kept them carefully under wraps.

THE MANSION HOUSE INITIATIVE

Meanwhile in England in 1880 Gladstone had become Prime Minister. There was a certain groundswell of hostility to Russia and sympathy for Jews owing to the case of L.Lewisholme, a German Jew but naturalised British citizen who had been refused permission to stay in St Petersburg on account of his Jewishness in contravention of the 1859 Anglo Russian treaty that allowed British citizens free access to Russia. Between May and August 1881, there were fourteen interventions in the House of Commons mainly from the Anglo-Jewish Conservative MP for Greenwich, Henry de Worms, but although this was the high point of the Russian pogroms the questions mainly concerned Lewisholme.¹⁰

British public opinion did not really start moving on the pogroms until late in 1881. A Russian Jewish Committee was established under Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild after a joint conference of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo Jewish Association. Still there was little enthusiasm for a policy of emigration, certainly not to Britain. Frankel (pp.71-2) quotes editorials in the *Jewish Chronicle* complaining 'that the migration of "the raw unfledged Polak", of "the swarm of Polish Jews", was the root cause of antisemitism in Rumania, in Germany (where "they vex the soul of Professor Treitschke") and indeed throughout the world.'

It seems to have been the pogrom in Warsaw in December that brought about substantial change. Two very influential articles were published in *The Times* in January based on the most dramatic Jewish accounts and on 1st February there was a public meeting in Mansion House (official residence of the Lord Mayor of London) condemning Russian barbarism, attended by, among many others, the Bishop of London, Cardinal Manning, Professor Bryce and Lord Shaftesbury. Frankel says that 'similar public meetings were held in the month of February in most of the major cities across the country and the British press was suddenly filled with articles condemning the pogroms.'

A committee was set up, usually chaired by the Mayor of London or by Cardinal Manning but mainly attended by prominent Jews. By mid-February, £50,000 had been raised. The policy agreed was to aid emigration to the United States but on 15th February *The Times* published an article by Oliphant saying that (to quote Steele) 'many of the refugees wished to settle in Palestine

¹⁰ John Klier: *Russians, Jews and the pogroms of 1881-2*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.238-9.

where - differently than in America - their religion and way of life would be safeguarded and invigorated. News of Oliphant's stance spread at once across Europe with much of the Diaspora again placing its hopes in him. Mansion House responded by drafting Oliphant into its special committee and then dispatching him as a commissioner to Galicia.'

Oliphant and his wife Alice Le Strange seem to have taken their time going to Galicia. They stayed for a fortnight in Vienna where they met Perets Smolenskin, publisher of the Hebrew language journal *Ha-Shahar* (The Dawn). Smolenskin had published an account of Oliphant's plan for Palestine the previous Autumn. Oliphant also won the support of the leading Polish Hebrew language journal *Ha-Majad* (The Preacher) which published an article by him arguing that it wouldn't be the Jews of Great Britain who would help in the colonisation of Palestine but the Protestants who *'will contribute thousands, I may well say, hundreds of thousands to promote this great object.'*

The Oliphants finally arrived in Lvov, near Brody, on the 12th April *'and then immediately began their direct work with the refugees. This was when the Oliphant cult that had been swelling for several years in the Diaspora reached its zenith. He was now widely spoken of as a "saviour" and "another Cyrus" ... "In cities and small towns in Russia, Romania and Galicia" writes the historian of Zionism Nathan Gelber, "you could find in the houses of poor Jews a picture of Oliphant.'* 'Oliphant committees' were formed by Jews throughout the Pale.

Parallel with the Mansion House committee a fund raising committee was established in France under the chairmanship of Victor Hugo and the Baron Alphonse de Rothschild. The French Committee and the New York Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society tried to keep to the principle observed by the Alliance Israélite Universelle of only sending a select group of able-bodied refugees and giving the rest the means to return to Russia. The Mansion House Committee however had refused to send refugees back to where they were in danger of persecution - all the greater once what could have been the start of a new wave had broken out in the majority Jewish town of Balta in March. This meant virtually unlimited emigration to the United States and the committee tried to circumvent the opposition in New York by establishing contact with Jewish committees in other US centres. *'By June 1882 three trains a week, each carrying about three hundred refugees were leaving Brody en route to the North Sea ports. All in all, from April until the end of June, the Mansion House Committee sent some 8,000 Jews at its expense to the United States. But, of course, this was not a static process. The more who were sent, the more came.'*

Although the hopes placed in Oliphant contributed greatly to the influx of refugees into Brody, the Oliphants themselves only seem to have been there for less than a month. Oliphant's attention was still fixed on Palestine but Palestine was closed to the Jews by a policy of the Sultan: *'The difficulties involved forced him to issue to the Jews an appeal, together with the Alliance Israélite Universelle, that they should remain where they were for at least the next four months until such time as the Turks would allow them to settle in Palestine.'*

As a result, Oliphant resigned from his Mansion House mission at the beginning of May in order to go, via Moldova and Romania, to Constantinople to argue the case directly with the Ottoman government: *'The British press presented Oliphant's journey to Istanbul as "a triumphant march."'* Writing in 1887, Oliphant himself said *'so intensely wrought up were the expectations of the much suffering race who form the largest proportion of the population of this part of Europe [between Brody and Jassy, in Moldova] that at every station they were assembled in crowds with petitions to be*

transported to Palestine, the conviction apparently having taken possession of their minds that the time appointed for their return to the land of their ancestors had arrived, and that I was to be their Moses on the occasion.'

However the political situation had changed drastically since his earlier visit to Constantinople. In 1879 the priority of the British government had been to curtail the ambitions of Russia after its victory in the Russian-Turkish war. In 1882, however, Britain was engaged in the seizure of Egypt. In those circumstances the very reason that Jews had placed such hope in Oliphant - that he represented a substantial body of British public opinion if not actually the government - had become a pretty fatal handicap. The Turkish court was now intensely suspicious of any initiative coming from Britain. In Constantinople Oliphant tried to enlist the support of the US ambassador - without success but it's worth mentioning anyway because the ambassador in question was Lew Wallace, author of *Ben Hur*.¹¹

Nor was Oliphant particularly supported by the British government. The public agitation which produced the Mansion House meeting obliged the Gladstone government to produce a couple of blue books on the situation in Russia but though of course condemning the pogroms and expressing sympathy for the victims they took a view similar to that of Klier and Solzhenitsyn, that accounts such as those that had appeared in *The Times* were greatly exaggerated and the Russian government had done what it could to control the situation. In March, in the context of the Balta pogrom, De Worms, against the wishes of the Jewish Liberal MPs, initiated a debate in Parliament, but it was without consequences. Gladstone declared (Klier, p.242) *'I am bound to believe that the Emperor of Russia and his government regard these outrages with the same feelings as we contemplate them ourselves.'* The Irish MP Frank Hugh O'Donnell said that since the Jews controlled the money markets they could look after themselves, unlike the Irish or the Indians, victims of British Imperialism.

In the event, with Palestine closed to Jewish emigration and the US facing a recession and refusing to take any more, the Mansion House Committee was forced late in June to reverse its policy and press for the return of the Jews, still flooding into Brody (there were some 9,000 there in mid-July after the transportations to the US had stopped). At the beginning of June Ignatiev, suspected of anti-Jewish sentiments, was replaced by Count Dmitri Tolstoy who issued a convincingly firm circular insisting that further pogroms would not be tolerated. It was generally believed, at least among non-Jews, that the violence was at an end. On 21st June Tolstoy, at the urging of the Jewish railway magnate Samuil Poliakov (Frankel p.111), put out a further circular forbidding Jewish emigration.

LONGER TERM CONSEQUENCES

By the end of 1882, it looked superficially as if everything had settled back to what it had been before the pogroms began, but this was misleading. At a popular level, two huge and complementary developments had occurred. The Russian-Ukrainian peasantry had asserted itself as a force to be reckoned with in a spontaneous outburst of raw violence. The

¹¹ Oliphant did have one success. He secured the removal of Romanian Jews to Palestine, pointing out that after independence the Romanian government had refused to extend Romanian citizenship to Jews who were therefore still technically citizens of the Ottoman Empire.

revolutionary groups - *Land and Freedom, People's Will, Black Repartition* - had identified themselves with the peasantry believing that it was their condition that made revolution inevitable. The policy of going to the people in the early seventies - though it had mainly concerned Great Russia not the area of the Pale - had been conducted in hopes of overcoming what was perceived as traditional peasant apathy from the days of serfdom. The pogroms could hardly be described as a political uprising given that there seemed to be no leadership, organisation or even theory behind it but such a spontaneous expression of popular discontent could hardly fail to throw the revolutionaries into a state of confusion. The terrorist *Peoples Will*, which had been behind the assassination of the Tsar (and a series of political assassinations leading up to it) put out a statement unequivocally supporting the peasant initiative:

'Wherever you look, wherever you go - the Jews are everywhere. The Jew curses you, cheats you, drinks your blood ... But as soon as the muzikhi rise up to free themselves from their enemies as they did in Elizavetgrad, Kiev, Smela, the tsar at once comes to the rescue of the Jews: the soldiers from Russia are called in and the blood of the muzhik, Christian blood, flows ... You have begun to rebel against the Jews. You have done well. Soon the revolt will be taken up across all of Russia against the tsar, the pani [Polish landlords - PB], the Jews ...' (Frankel, p.98)

This was issued late in the day, in August, by which time the violence had died down but it was the result of intense debate in the Executive Committee (meaning that even if some of them were unhappy with it they knew what they were doing when they issued it), written by G.G. Romanenko, the party's specialist in Ukrainian affairs. 2,000 copies were printed and extra copies were produced locally in Elizavetgrad. It was later repudiated but it illustrates the problem facing the populists. How could they condemn as backward, barbarian, ignorant the very peasantry they regarded as the revolutionary class, who had risen in opposition to a people who had traditionally played the role of *kulak*, the role of the bourgeoisie. Frankel (p.99) quotes an article by Romanenko defending his manifesto in the October issue of the party journal:

'Do you remember one of the stories of the French Revolution from Taine? One of the crowd throws himself on the corpse of a woman who has just been trampled to death by the infuriated mob. He tears open her breast, drags out her heart and with exaltation sinks his teeth into it. But should Robespierre, Danton, St. Just and Desmoulines have abandoned their role and obligations in French history because of the excesses of the people enraged by oppression? ... We have no right to react with indifference, still less with hostility, to a true popular movement ... Elemental forces will erupt, the horrors of the French Revolution and the Pugachev rebellion will repeat themselves ...'

One can see how convenient, indeed necessary, was the thesis that the peasantry had been misled by occult forces close to the government.

The difficulty experienced by the revolutionaries was a reverse image of the difficulty experienced by the government. As the revolutionaries could see the uprising as a foretaste of possible revolution, so could the government. As the revolutionaries wanted to be on the side of the peasantry to exploit their revolutionary potential so did the government in order to dampen it down. As it was convenient for the revolutionaries to blame occult forces close to the government for misleading the peasants so it was convenient for the government to blame the revolutionaries. On both sides to actually condemn the muzhiks was seen as politically and ideologically very dangerous.

Which put the Jews, both at the popular and at the intellectual and political level, in a difficult situation. At the popular level, while relations had long been tense, they may not have realised quite the extent to which they were hated by their neighbours. From now on they could never know when that hatred might again break out in a wave of destructive violence or what sort of protection they could expect from the government if it did. And there appeared to be very little they could do to change the economic status that had brought this hatred upon them. On the intellectual and political level the effect was to reinforce a tendency that was already developing away from the general political interest of the whole population towards concern with the specific problems faced by Jews.

Frankel argues that it was only after a number of years had passed that the long term consequences of the pogroms could be assessed. As the main institutional consequence he sees the emergence of '*two political movements ... on the one hand, the proto-Zionist movement - the Hoveve Zion [Friends of Zion - PB] in Russia, the colonies in Palestine - and on the other, the Jewish Labour Movement in the United States ... They had become the first political movements, as distinct from pressure groups, philanthropic organisations, ideological sects and newspaper campaigns, in modern Jewish history ... Thus the division within the Jewish world (which would become increasingly important until 1933) between a socialist camp virulently hostile to the Zionist idea and a nationalist camp committed to it can be traced back to the late 1880s.*'

To be continued