Chapter 3

During the Reign of Nicholas 1st

With regard to the Jews, Nicholas I was very resolute. It was during his reign, according to sources, that more than half of all legal acts relating to Jews, from Alexis Mikhailovich to the death of Alexander II, were published, and the Emperor personally examined this legislative work to direct it.1

Jewish historiography has judged that his policy was exceptionally cruel and gloomy. However, the personal interventions of Nicholas I did not necessarily prejudice the Jews, far from it. For example, one of the first files he received as an inheritance from Alexander I was the reopening, on the eve of his death (while on his way to Taganrog), of the “Velije affair”—the accusation against the Jews for having perpetrated a ritual murder on the person of a child. The Jewish Encyclopedia writes that “to a large extent, the Jews are indebted to the verdict of acquittal to the Emperor who sought to know the truth despite the obstruction on the part of the people he trusted.” In another well-known case, linked to accusations against the

* (1818–1881), The “liberator” tsar whose name is associated with the “great reforms” of the 1860s (abolition of serfdom, justice, the press, zemstvos, etc.) and the rise of the revolutionary movement; assassinated on March 13, 1881 by a commando of the Will of the People.
1JE, t. 11, p. 709.
Jews (the “assassination of Mstislavl”), the Emperor willingly turned to the truth: after having, in a moment of anger, inflicted sanctions against the local Jewish population, he did not refuse to acknowledge his error. By signing the verdict of acquittal in the Velije case, Nicolas wrote that “the vagueness of the requisitions had not made it possible to take another decision”, adding nevertheless: “I do not have the moral certainty that Jews could have committed such a crime, or that they could not have done it.” “Repeated examples of this kind of assassination, with the same clues,” but always without sufficient evidence, suggest to him that there might be a fanatical sect among the Jews, but “unfortunately, even among us Christians, there also exists sects just as terrifying and incomprehensible.” Nicholas I and his close collaborators continued to believe that certain Jewish groups practised ritual murders. For several years, the Emperor was under the severe grip of a calumny that smelled of blood... therefore his prejudice that Jewish religious doctrine was supposed to present a danger to the Christian population was reinforced.

This danger was understood by Nicolas in the fact that the Jews could convert Christians to Judaism. Since the eighteenth century, the high profile conversion to the Judaism of Voznitsyn, a captain of the Imperial army, had been kept in mind. “In Russia, from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, groups of ‘Judaisers’ multiplied. In 1823, the Minister of Internal Affairs announced in a report “the wide-spread of the heresy of ‘Judaisers’ in Russia, and estimated the number of its followers at 20,000 people.” Persecutions began, after which “many members of the sect pretended to return to the bosom of the Orthodox Church while continuing to observe in secret the rites of their sect.”

“A consequence of all this was that the legislation on the Jews took, at the time of Nicholas I... a religious spin.” The decisions and actions of Nicholas I with regard to the Jews were affected, such as his insistence on prohibiting them from having recourse to Christian servants, especially Christian nurses, for “work among the Jews undermines and weakens the Christian faith in women.” In fact, notwithstanding repeated prohibitions, this provision “never was fully applied... and Christians continued to serve” amongst the Jews.

The first measure against the Jews, which Nicolas considered from the very beginning of his reign, was to put them on an equal footing with the Russian population with regard to the subjugation to compulsory service to the State, and in particular, requiring them to participate physically in conscription, which they had not been subjected to since their attachment to Russia. The bourgeois Jews did not

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2 Ibidem, pp.709–710.
3 Hessen, Istoria evreiskogo naroda v Rossii (History of the Jewish People in Russia), in 2 vol., t. 2, Leningrad, 1927, p. 27.
4 LJE, t. 7, p. 322.
5 JE, t. 11, pp. 709–710.
6 LJE, t. 2, p. 509.
7 JE, 1.11, p. 710.
supply recruits, but acquitted 500 rubles per head. This measure was not dictated solely by governmental considerations to standardise the obligations of the population (the Jewish communities were in any case very slow to pay the royalties, and moreover, Russia received many Jews from Galicia where they were already required to perform military service); nor by the fact that the obligation to provide recruits “would reduce the number of Jews not engaged in productive work”—rather, the idea was that the Jewish recruit, isolated from his closed environment, would be better placed to join the lifestyle of the nation as a whole, and perhaps even orthodoxy. Taken into account, these considerations considerably tightened the conditions of the conscription applied to the Jews, leading to a gradual increase in the number of recruits and the lowering of the age of the conscripts.

It cannot be said that Nicolas succeeded in enforcing the decree on the military service of the Jews without encountering resistance. On the contrary, all instances of execution proceeded slowly. The Council of Ministers discussed at length whether it was ethically defensible to take such a measure “in order to limit Jewish overcrowding”; as stated by Minister of Finance Georg von Cancrin, “all recognise that it is inappropriate to collect humans rather than money.” The Kehalim did not spare their efforts to remove this threat from the Jews or to postpone it. When, exasperated by such slow progress, Nicholas ordered a final report to be presented to him in the shortest delays, “this order, it seems, only incited the Kehalim to intensify their action behind the scenes to delay the advancement of the matter. And they apparently succeeded in winning over to their cause one of the high officials,” whereby “the report never reached its destination”! At the very top of the Imperial apparatus, “this mysterious episode,” concludes J. Hessen, “could not have occurred without the participation of the Kahal.” A subsequent retrieval of the report was also unfulfilled, and Nicolas, without waiting any longer, introduced the conscription for the Jews by decree in 1827 (then, in 1836, equality in obtaining medals for the Jewish soldiers who had distinguished themselves).

Totally exempted from recruitment were “the merchants of all guilds, inhabitants of the agricultural colonies, workshop leaders, mechanics in factories, rabbis and all Jews having a secondary or higher education.” Hence the desire of many Jewish bourgeois to try to make it into the class of merchants, bourgeois society railing to see its members required to be drafted for military service, “undermining the forces of the community, be it under the effect of taxation or recruitment.” The merchants, on the other hand, sought to reduce their visible “exposure” to leave the payment of taxes to the bourgeois. Relations between Jewish merchants and bourgeois were strained, for “at that time, the Jewish merchants, who

9 V. N. Nikitin, Evrei zemlevladetsy: Istoritcheskoe. zakonodatelnoe, administrativnoe i bytovoe polojenie kolonij so vremeni ikh vozniknovenia do nachikh dnei [Jewish farmers: historical, legislative, administrative and concrete situation of the colonies from their creation to the present day], 1807–1887, Saint Petersburg, 1887, p. 263.
10 JE, t. 13, p. 371.
11 Hessen*, t. 2, pp. 32–34.
12 JE, t. 11, pp. 468–469.
13 LJE, t. 7, p. 318.
had become more numerous and wealthier, had established strong relations in governmental spheres.” The Kahal of Grodno appealed to Saint Petersburg to demand that the Jewish population be divided into four “classes”—merchants, bourgeois, artisans, and cultivators—and that each should not have to answer for the others. In this idea proposed in the early 30s by the Kehalim themselves, one can see the first step towards the future “categorisation” carried out by Nicolas in 1840, which was so badly received by the Jews.

The Kehalim were also charged with the task of recruiting among the Jewish mass, of which the government had neither recorded numbers nor profiles. The Kahal “put all the weight of this levy on the backs of the poor”, for “it seemed preferable for the most deprived to leave the community, whereas a reduction in the number of its wealthy members could lead to general ruin.” The Kehalim asked the provincial authorities (but they were denied) the right to disregard the turnover “in order to be able to deliver to recruitment the ‘tramps’, those who did not pay taxes, the insufferable troublemakers”, so that “the owners... who assume all the obligations of society should not have to provide recruits belonging to their families”; and in this way the Kehalim were given the opportunity to act against certain members of the community.

However, with the introduction of military service among the Jews, the men who were subject to it began to shirk and the full count was never reached. The cash taxation on Jewish communities had been considerably diminished, but it was noticed that this did by no means prevent it from continuing to be refunded only very partially. Thus, in 1829, Nicholas I granted Grodno’s request that in certain provinces Jewish recruits should be levied in addition to the tariff imposed in order to cover tax arrears. “In 1830 a Senate decree stipulated that the appeal of an additional recruit reduced the sums owed by the Kahal of 1,000 rubles in the case of an adult, 500 rubles in the case of a minor.” It is true that following the untimely zeal of the governors this measure was soon reported, while “Jewish communities themselves asked the government to enlist recruits to cover their arrears.” In government circles “this proposal was welcomed coldly, for it was easy to foresee that it would open new possibilities of abuse for the Kehalim.” However, as we can see, the idea matured on one side as well as on the other. Evoking these increased stringencies in the recruitment of Jews by comparison with the rest of the population, Hessen writes that this was a “glaring anomaly” in Russian law, for in general, in Russia, “the legislation applicable to the Jews did not tend to impose more obligations than that of other citizens.”

Nicholas I’s keen intelligence, inclined to draw clearly legible perspectives (legend has it that the Saint Petersburg–Moscow railway was, as a result, mapped

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14 Hessen, t. 2, pp. 68–71.
16 LJE, t. 7, p. 317.
17 Hessen, t. 2, pp. 64–65.
18 Ibidem, p. 141.
out with a ruler!), in his tenacious determination to transform the particularist Jews into ordinary Russian subjects, and, if possible, into Orthodox Christians, went from the idea of military recruitment to that of Jewish cantonists. The cantonists (the name goes back to 1805) was an institution sheltering the children of the soldiers (lightening in favour of the fathers the burden of a service which lasted ... twenty-five years!); it was supposed to extend the “sections for military orphans” created under Peter the Great, a kind of school for the government which provided the students with technical knowledge useful for their subsequent service in the army (which, in the eyes of civil servants, now seems quite appropriate for young Jewish children, or even highly desirable to keep them from a young age and for long years cut off from their environment. In preparation to the cantonist institution, an 1827 decree granted “Jewish communities the right to recruit a minor instead of an adult”, from the age of 12 (that is, before the age of nuptiality among the Jews). The New Jewish Encyclopedia believes that this measure was “a very hard blow.” But this faculty in no way meant the obligation to call a soldier at the age of 12\textsuperscript{19}, it had nothing to do with “the introduction of compulsory conscription for Jewish children,”\textsuperscript{20} as wrote erroneously the Encyclopedia, and as it ended up being accredited in the literature devoted to the Jews of Russia, then in the collective memory. The Kehalim even found this a profitable substitution and used it by recruiting “the orphans, the children of widows (sometimes bypassing the law protecting only children)”, often “for the benefit of the progeny of a rich man.”\textsuperscript{21} Then, from the age of 18, the cantonists performed the usual military service, so long at the time—but let us not forget that it was not limited to barracks life; the soldiers married, lived with their families, learned to practice other trades; they received the right to establish themselves in the interior provinces of the empire, where they completed their service. But, unquestionably, the Jewish soldiers who remained faithful to the Jewish religion and its ritual suffered from being unable to observe the Sabbath or contravene the rules on food.

Minors placed with cantonists, separated from their family environment, naturally found it difficult to resist the pressure of their educators (who were encouraged by rewards to successfully convert their pupils) during lessons of Russian, arithmetic, but above all, of catechism; they were also rewarded for their conversion, moreover, it was facilitated by their resentment towards a community that had given them up to recruitment. But, conversely, the tenacity of the Jewish character, the faithfulness to the religion inculcated at an early age, made many of them hold their grounds. Needless to say, these methods of conversion to Christianity were not Christian and did not achieve their purpose. On the other hand, the accounts of conversions obtained by cruelty, or by death threats against the cantonists, supposably collective drownings in the rivers for those who refused baptism (such stories received public attention in the decades that followed), fall within the domain of pure fiction. As the Jewish Encyclopedia published before the Revolution the “popular legend” of the few hundred cantonists allegedly killed by

\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem, p. 34.  
\textsuperscript{20} LJE, t. 7, p. 317.  
\textsuperscript{21} LJE. t. 4, pp. 75–76.
drowning was born from the information published in a German newspaper, according to which “eight hundred cantonists were taken away one fine day to be baptised in the water of a river, two of them perished by drowning...”

The statistical data from the Military Inspection Archives to the General Staff for the years 1847–1854, when the recruitment of Jewish cantonists was particularly high, showed that they represented on average only 2.4% of the many cantonists in Russia, in other words, that their proportion did not exceed that of the Jewish population in the country, even taking into account the undervalued data provided by the Kehalim during the censuses.

Doubtlessly the baptised had an interest in exculpating themselves from their compatriots in exaggerating the degree of coercion they had to undergo in their conversion to Christianity, especially since as part of this conversion they enjoyed certain advantages in the accomplishment of their service. Moreover, “many converted cantonists remained secretly faithful to their original religion, and some of them later returned to Judaism.”

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In the last years of the reign of Alexander I, after a new wave of famine in Belarus (1822), a new senator had been sent on mission: he had come back with the same conclusions as Derzhavin a quarter of a century before. The “Jewish Committee” established in 1823, composed of four ministers, had proposed to study “on what grounds it would be expedient and profitable to organise the participation of the Jews in the State” and to “put down in writing all that could contribute to the improvement of the civil situation of this people.” They soon realised that the problem thus posed was beyond their strength, and in 1825 this “Jewish Committee” at the ministerial level had been replaced by a “Directors Committee” (the fifth), composed of the directors of their ministries, who devoted themselves to studying the problem for another eight years.

In his eagerness, Nicholas preceded the work of this committee with his decisions. Thus, as we have seen, he introduced conscription for the Jews. This is how he set a deadline of three years to expel the Jews from all the villages of the western provinces and put an end to their activity of alcohol manufacturing, but, as under his predecessors, this measure experienced slowdowns, stoppages, and was ultimately reported. Subsequently, he prohibited Jews from holding taverns and diners, from living in such places, and ensuring the retail sale of alcohol in person, but this measure was not applied either.

22 JE, t. 9 (which covers the years 1847–1854), p. 243.
23 K. Korobkov, Evreiskaia rekrouchina v tsarstvovanie Nikolaia 1 (The Recruitment of Jews under the Reign of Nicolas I), in Evreiskaia starina, Saint Petersburg, 1913, t. 6, pp. 79–80.
26 Hessen, t. 2. p. 39.
Another attempt was made to deny the Jews one of their favourite jobs: the maintenance of post houses (with their inns and taverns), but again in vain because, apart from the Jews, there was not enough candidates to occupy them.  

In 1827, a leasing system of the distilling activities was introduced throughout the empire, but there was a considerable fall in the prices obtained at the auctions when the Jews were discarded and “it happened that there was no other candidate to take these operations,” so that they had to be allowed to the Jews, whether in the towns or in the countryside, even beyond the area of residence. The government was, in fact, relieving the Jews of the responsibility of organising the collection of taxes on liquor and thus receiving a regular return. “Long before the merchants of the first guild were allowed to reside in any part of the empire, all farmers enjoyed the freedom to move and resided in capitals and other cities outside the Pale of Settlement... From the midst of the farmers came prominent Jewish public men” like Litman Feiguine, already mentioned, and Evsel Günzburg (“he had held an alcohol manufacturing tenancy in a besieged Sevastopol”); “In 1859 he founded in Saint Petersburgh a banking establishment... one of the most important in Russia”; later, “he participated in the placement of Russian Treasury bonds in Europe”; he was the founder of the dynasty of the Günzburg barons). Beginning in 1848, all “Jewish merchants of the first guild were allowed to lease drinking places even where Jews had no right to reside permanently.”

The Jews also received a more extensive right with respect to the distillation of alcohol. As we remember, in 1819, they were allowed to distil it in the provinces of Great Russia “until Russian artisans acquire sufficient competence.” In 1826 Nicolas decided to repatriate them to the Pale of Settlement, but in 1827 he conceded to several specific requests to keep distillers in place, for example in the state factories in Irkutsk.

Vladimir Solvoyov quotes the following thoughts from Mr. Katkov: “In the western provinces it is the Jew who deals with alcohol, but is the situation better in the other provinces of Russia? ... The Jewish innkeepers who get the people drunk, ruin the peasants and cause their doom, are they present throughout Russia? What is happening elsewhere in Russia, where Jews are not admitted and where the flow of liquor is held by an Orthodox bartender or a kulak?” Let us listen to Leskov, the great connoisseur of Russian popular life: “In the provinces of Greater Russia where Jews do not reside, the number of those accused of drunkenness, or crimes committed under the influence, are regularly and significantly higher than within

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27 JE, i. 12, p. 787; Hessen, t. 2, p. 39.
28 Ibidem, t. 5, p. 613.
31 Ibidem*, t. 11, p. 710.
the Pale of Settlement. The same applies to the number of deaths due to alcoholism... And this is not a new phenomenon: it has been so since ancient times.”

However, it is true, statistics tell us that in the western and southern provinces of the empire there was one drinking place per 297 inhabitants, whereas in the eastern provinces there was only one for 585. The newspaper The Voice, which was not without influence at the time, was able to say that the trade of alcohol of the Jews was “the wound of this area”—namely the western region—“and an intractable wound” at that. In his theoretical considerations, I.G. Orchansky tries to show that the stronger the density in drinking places, the less alcoholism there was (we must understand that, according to him, the peasant will succumb less to temptation if the flow of drinks is found under his nose and solicits him 24 hours a day—remember Derzhavin: the bartenders trade night and day; but will the peasant be tempted by a distant cabaret, when he will have to cross several muddy fields to reach it? No, we know only too well that alcoholism is sustained not only by demand, but also by the supply of vodka. Orchansky nevertheless pursues his demonstration: when the Jew is interposed between the distiller and the drunken peasant, he acts objectively in favour of the peasant because he sells vodka at a lower price, but it is true that he does so by pawning the effects of the peasant. Certainly, he writes, some believe nevertheless that Jewish tenants have “a poor influence on the condition of the peasants”, but it is because, “in the trade of bartending, as in all the other occupations, they differ by their know-how, skill and dynamism.”

It is true that elsewhere, in another essay of the same collection, he recognises the existence of “fraudulent transactions with the peasants”: “it is right to point out that the Jewish trade is grossly deceitful and that the Jewish dealer, tavern-keeper and usurer exploit a miserable population, especially in the countryside”; “faced with an owner, the peasant holds on firmly to his prices, but he is amazingly supple and confident when dealing with a Jew, especially if the latter holds a bottle of vodka in reserve... the peasant is often brought to sell his wheat dirt cheap to the Jew.” Nevertheless, to this crude, glaring, arresting truth, Orchansky seeks attenuating circumstances. But this evil that eats away the will of the peasants, how to justify it?...

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Due to his insistent energy, Nicholas I, throughout his reign, did not only face failures in his efforts to transform Jewish life in its different aspects.

This was the case with Jewish agriculture.

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34 I. Orchansky, Evrei v Rossii (Jews in Russia, essays and studies), fasc. 1, Saint Petersburg, 1872, pp. 192–195, 200–207.
The “Regulation on the obligations of recruitment and military service of the Jews”, dated 1827, stipulated that Jewish farmers “transferred...” on private plots were released, as well as their children, from the obligation to provide recruits for a period of fifty years (exemption incurring from the moment they actually began to “engage in agricultural work”). As soon as this regulation was made public, more Jews returned to the colonies than those who had absented themselves on their own initiative, that had been signalled absent.36

In 1829 a more elaborate and detailed regulation concerning Jewish cultivators was published: it envisaged their access to the bourgeois class provided that all their debts were paid; authorisation to absent themselves for up to three months to seek a livelihood during periods when the land did not require their physical work; sanctions against those who absent themselves without authorisation, and rewards for distinguished agricultural leaders. V. Nikitin admits: “To compare the severe constraints imposed on Jewish farmers, ‘but with rights and privileges exclusively granted to the Jews’, with those of the other taxable classes, it must be observed that the government treated the Jews with great benevolence.”37

And, from 1829 to 1833, “the Jews labour the land with zeal, fate rewards them with good harvests, they are satisfied with the authorities, and vice versa, and general prosperity is tainted only by fortuitous incidents, without great importance.” After the war with Turkey—1829—“the arrears of taxes are entirely handed over to the Jewish residents as to all the settlers... for ‘having suffered from the passage of years’.” But according to the report of the supervisory committee, “the bad harvest of 1833 made it impossible to retain [the Jews] in the colonies, it allowed many who had neither the desire nor the courage to devote themselves to the agricultural work of sowing nothing, or almost nothing, of getting rid of the cattle, going away from here and there, of demanding subsidies and not paying royalties.” In 1834, more than once, they saw “the sale of the grain which they had received, and the slaughter of the cattle”, which was also done by those who were not driven to do so by necessity; The Jews received bad harvests more often than other peasants, for, with the exception of insufficient seedlings, they worked the land haphazardly, at the wrong time, which was due to the “the habit, transmitted from generation to generation, of practising easy trades, of mismanaging, and neglecting the surveillance of livestock.”38

One might have thought that three decades of unfortunate experiences in the implementation of Jewish agriculture (compared to universal experience) would suffice for the government to renounce these vain and expensive attempts. But no! Did the reiterative reports not reach Nicholas I? Or were they embellished by the ministers? Or did the inexhaustible energy and irrefragable hope of the sovereign impel him to renew these incessant attempts?

In any case, Jewish agriculture, in the new Jewish Regulation dated 1835 and approved by the Emperor (the result of the work of the “Directors Committee”), is not at all excluded, but on the contrary, enhanced: “to organise the lives of the Jews according to rules which would enable them to earn a decent living by practising agriculture and industry, gradually dispensing instruction to their youth, which would prevent them from engaging in idleness or unlawful occupations.” If the Jewish community were previously required to pay 400 rubles per household, now “every Jew was allowed to become a farmer at any time, all tax arrears were immediately handed over to him, and to his community”; They were given the right to receive land from the state in usufruct without time limit (but within the Pale of Settlement), to acquire plots of land, to sell them, to rent them. Those who became farmers were exempt from taxation for twenty-five years, property tax for ten years, recruitment for fifty years. In reverse, no Jew “could be forced to become a farmer”. “The industries and trades practised in the context of village life were also allowed to them.”

The influential Minister of Finance, Cancrin, proposed to place the deserted lands of Siberia at the disposal of Jewish agriculture; Nicolas gave his approval to this project at the end of the same year 1835. It was proposed to attribute to Jewish settlers “up to 15 hectares of good land per male individual”, with tools and workhorses billed to the Treasury, and paid transportation costs, including food. It seems that poor Jews, laden with large families, were tempted to undertake this journey to Siberia. But this time the Kehalim were divided in their calculations: these poor Jews were indeed necessary to satisfy the needs of recruitment (instead of wealthy families); it was concealed from them that the arrears were all handed over to them and they were required to carry them out beforehand. But the government changed its mind, fearing the difficulties of a transfer so far away, and that the Jews, on the spot, lacking examples of know-how and love of work, and would resume their “sterile trade, which rested essentially on dishonest operations that have already done so much harm in the western provinces of the empire”, their “innkeeper occupations of ruining inhabitants by satisfying their inclination for drinking,” and so on. In 1837, therefore, the transfer to Siberia was stopped without the reasons being publicised.

In the same year, the Inspectorate estimated that in New Russia “the plots of land reserved for Jewish settlers contained a black potting

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39 Nikitin*, pp. 193–197.
41 M. Guerchenson, Soudby evreïskogo naroda (The Destinies of the Jewish People), in 22, Literary and political review of the Jewish intelligentsia emigrated from the USSR to Israel, Tel-Aviv, n° 19, 1981, p. 111.
42 Nikitin, pp. 197–199, 202–205, 209, 216.
soil of the highest quality, that they were ‘perfectly suited to the cultivation of cereals, that the steppes were excellent for the production of hay and livestock farming’.” (local authorities, however, disputed this assessment).  

Also in the same year of 1837, a Ministry of Public Goods was established, headed by Count P. Kiselyov, who was entrusted with the transition measure intended to prepare the abolition of serfdom, the task of “protecting the free cultivators” (the peasants of the Crown)—there were seven and a half million of them registered—including the Jewish farmers—but they were only 3,000 to 5,000 families, or “a drop of water in the sea, relative to the number of peasants of the Crown.” Nevertheless, as soon as it was created, this ministry received numerous petitions and recriminations of all kinds coming from Jews. “Six months later it became clear that it would be necessary to give the Jews so much attention that the main tasks of the ministry would suffer.” In 1840, however, Kiselyov was also appointed president of a newly created committee (the sixth one) “to determine the measures to be taken to reorganise the lives of the Jews in Russia”, meaning he also was to tackle the Jewish problem.

In 1839, Kiselyov had a law passed by the State Council authorising the Jews on the waiting lists for recruitment to become cultivators (provided that they were doing so with their whole family), which signified that they would benefit from the major advantage of being dispensed with military service. In 1844, “a still more detailed settlement concerning Jewish farmers” gave them—even in the Pale of Settlement—the right to employ for three years Christians who were supposed to teach them how to properly manage a farm. In 1840, “many Jews came to New Russia supposedly at their own expense (they produced on the spot ‘attestations’ that they had the means to do so), in fact, they had nothing and made it known from their very first days that their resources were exhausted”; “there were up to 1,800 families of which several hundred possessed neither papers nor any proof whatsoever of where they came from and how they found themselves in New Russia”; and “they never ceased to come running, begging not to be left to rot in their misery.” Kiselyov ordered to receive them by levying the spendings to the “settlers in general, without distinction of ethnic group.” In other words, he assisted them well beyond the amounts provided for. In 1847, “additional ordinances” were enacted to make it easier for Jews to become farmers.

Through his ministry, Kiselyov had the ambition to establish model colonies and then “to eventually settle this people on a large scale”: for this purpose, he set up one after the other colonies in the province of Ekaterinoslav, on fertile soils, well irrigated by rivers and streams, with excellent pastures and hay fields, hoping very much that the new settlers would benefit from the remarkable experience already gained by the German settlers, (but as it was difficult to find volunteers among them

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45 JE, t. 9, pp. 488–489.
46 Nikitin, pp. 239, 260–263, 267, 355, 358.
to settle in the midst of the Jewish settlements, it was decided to employ them as wage earners). New credits were constantly granted to these future model colonies; all arrears were remitted to them. In the second year of their settlement, Jewish families were required to have at least one vegetable garden and one seeded hectare, and to ensure a slow increase in the area sown over the years. Insofar as they had no experience in the selection of livestock, this task was entrusted to the curators. Kiselyov sought to facilitate the travelling conditions of families (accompanied by a small number of day labourers) and to find ways to provide specialised agricultural training to a certain contingent of settlers. But in some families there was still very little to worry about agronomy: in extreme cold, people did not even go out to feed the beasts—so they had to equip them with long hooded coats!  

In the meantime, the flow of Jews migrating to agriculture did not dry up, especially since the western provinces suffered from bad harvests. Families that did not include the necessary number of able-bodied men were often dispatched, “the Kehalim sent by force the destitute and invalid, retaining the rich and healthy to have the possibility of better responding to collections, to pay royalties and thereby maintain their institutions.” “In order to prevent the influx of a large number of needy destitutes,” the ministry had to demand that the governors of the western provinces have strict control over the departures—but, on site, departures of contingents were hastened without even waiting to know whether lodging was ready; moreover, the credits allocated to the starters were retained, which sometimes compromised a whole year of agricultural work. In the province of Ekaterinoslav, there was not even time to distribute the land to the volunteers: 250 families left on their own to settle in Odessa.

However, the reports of various inspectors from different places blended as one: “By submitting to this end, [the Jews] could make good, or even excellent, farmers, but they take advantage of the first occasion to abandon the plough, to sacrifice their farms, and to return to horse-trading and their favourite occupations.” “For the Jew, the number one job is the industry, even the most humble, of total insignificance, but on condition that it provides the greatest profit margin... Their fundamentally industrious mindset found no satisfaction in the peaceful life of the cultivator”, “did not create in them the slightest desire to devote themselves to agriculture; what attracted them there was first and foremost the abundance of land, the scarcity of the Jewish population, the proximity of borders, trade and lucrative industry, not to mention the franchises which exempted them from royalties and conscription.” They thought they would only be compelled to organise their houses; as to lands, they hoped to “lease them at an appreciable rate, in order to occupy themselves, as in the past, with commerce and industry.” (This is what they declared naively to the inspectors.) And “it was with total disgust that they tackled the work of the earth.” Moreover, “religious rules... did not favour the Jewish cultivators”, they forced them to long periods of inactivity, as, for example, during the spring plantings, the long Passover holiday; In September, that of the Tabernacles lasted fourteen days.

“at the time when intensive agricultural work, such as soil preparation and sowing, is needed, although, according to the opinion of Jews who deserve all trust, Scripture requires strict observance during the first and last two days of the celebrations.” On the other hand, the spiritual leaders of Jewish settlements (there were sometimes as many as two prayer houses, one for the Orthodox—or Mitnagdes—, another for the Hasidim) entertained the idea that as a chosen people they were not destined for the hard work of the farmer, which is the bitter lot of the goyim. “They rose late, devoted an entire hour to prayer, and went away to work when the sun was already high in the sky”—to which was added the Sabbath, resting from Friday night until Sunday morning.49

From a Jewish point of view, I. Orchansky actually arrives at conclusions similar to those of the inspectors: “Leasing a farm and employing wage-earners... encounters more sympathy among the Jews than the passage, in all regards difficult, to agricultural labour... We note a growing tendency for Jews engaged in rural activity to exercise it first and foremost by leasing land and using it through the assistance of wage-earners. In New Russia, the failures of Jewish agriculture stem from “their lack of accustomed to physical labour and the profits they derive from urban trades in southern Russia.” But also to emphasise the fact that in a given colony the Jews “had built a synagogue with their own hands,” and that in others maintained vegetable gardens “with their own hands.”50

Nevertheless, the numerous reports of the inspectors agreed that in the 40s and in these “model” colonies, as in the past, “the standard of living of the settlers, their activities and their enterprises were well behind those of the peasants of the Crown or landowners.” In the province of Kherson, in 1845, among the Jewish settlers, “The farms are in a very unsatisfactory state, most of these settlers are very poor: they dread the work of the land, and few cultivate it properly; also, even in years of good harvest, they obtain only low yields”; “In the plots, the soil is hardly stirred,” women and children hardly work the land and “a lot of 30 hectares is barely enough for their daily subsistence.” “The example of the German settlers is followed only by a very small number of Jewish residents; most of them 'show a clear aversion' to agriculture and they 'comply with the demands of the authorities only to receive a passport that allows them to go...' They leave a lot of land in fallow, work the land only in certain places, according to the goodwill of each one... they treat the cattle with too much negligence... harass the horses until they die, nourish them little, especially on the days of the Sabbath”; they milk delicate cows of the German race at any hour of the day, so that they no longer give milk. “Jews were provided free fruit trees, 'but they did not plant orchards.' Houses had been built in advance for them—some were ‘elegant, very dry and warm, solid’; in other places, they had been poorly constructed and expensive, but even where they had been built reliably, with good quality materials... the negligence of the Jews, their inability to keep their lodgings in good condition... had led them to such a state of degradation that they could no longer be inhabited without urgent repairs”; they were invaded by

50 Orchansky, pp. 176, 182, 185, 191–192.
humidity which led to their decay and favoured diseases; many houses were abandoned, others were occupied by several families at the same time ‘without there being any kinship between them, and, in view of the impetuous character of these people and their propensity to quarrels’, such cohabitation gave rise to endless complaints.”

Responsibility for unpreparedness for this large migration is evident to both parties: poor coordination and delays in the administration’s actions; here and there, the development of the houses, poorly guarded, left much to be desired, giving rise to many abuses and waste. (This led to the transfer of several officials and trials for some of them.) But in the Jewish villages, the elders also reluctantly controlled the careless ones whose farm and equipment deteriorated; hence the appointment of supervisors chosen among retired non-commissioned officers whom the Jews got drunk and coaxed with bribes. Hence also the impossibility of levying royalties on the settlers, either on account of indigence—“in every community there were only about ten farmers who were barely capable of paying for themselves”—or because of the “natural inclination of the Jews to evade their payment”; over the years, arrears only increased and they were given again and again without requiring any reimbursement. For each day of absence without authorisation, the settler paid only 1 kopeck, which hardly weighed on him, and he easily compensated for it with the gains he made in the city. (By way of comparison: in the villages the Melamed received from 3,000 to 10,000 rubles per year, and in parallel to the Melamed there had been an attempt to introduce into the colonies, in addition to the use of the Jewish language, a general education based on Russian and arithmetic, but “simple people” had little “confidence in the educational institutions founded by the government.”

“It became more and more indisputable that the ‘model colonies’ so ardently desired by Kiselyov were just a dream”; but, while curbing (1849) the sending of new families, he did not lose hope and affirmed again in 1852 in one of his resolutions: “The more arduous an affair, the more one must be firm and not to be discouraged by the first lack of successes.” Until then, the curator was not the true leader of the colony, “he sometimes has to put up with the mockery and insolence of the settlers who understood very well that he had no power over them”; he was entitled only to advise them. More than once, due to the exasperation provoked by failures, projects had been proposed which would have consisted in giving the settlers compulsory lessons in such a way that they would have to put them into practice within a period of two or three days, with a verification of results; to deprive them of the free disposal of their land; to radically eliminate leave of absence; and even to introduce punishments: up to thirty lashes the first time, double in case of recidivism, then prison, and, depending on the seriousness of the offense, enlistment in the army. (Nikitin asserts that this project of instruction, as soon as it was known, “exerted such terror upon the Jewish cultivators, that they redoubled their efforts, and hastened to procure cattle, to furnish themselves with

agricultural tools... and showed an astonishing zeal in the work of the fields and the
care taken to their house.” But Kiselyov gave his approval to a watered-down project
(1853): “The lessons must correspond perfectly to the capacities and experience of
those for whom they are intended”, the instructor responsible for organising
agricultural work can deviate from it only in the sense of a reduction in tasks, and
for the first offense, no punishment, for the second and third, ten to twenty lashes,
no more. (Enlistment in the army was never applied, “no one... has ever been made a
soldier for his failings at work,” and in 1860, the act was definitively repealed.53)

Let us not forget that we were still in the age of serfdom. But half a century
after the conscientious attempts of the government to entice the Jews to provide
productive labour on virgin lands, the outlines of the villages of Arakcheyev* began
to appear.

It is astonishing that the imperial power did not understand, at this stage, the
sterility of the measures taken, the desperate character of this whole enterprise of
returning to the land.

Furthermore, the process was not over...

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After the introduction of compulsory military service, alarming rumours
spread among the Jewish population, announcing a new and terrible legislation
prepared especially by the “Jewish Committee”. But in 1835, a General Regulation
concerning the Jews was finally promulgated (intended to replace that of 1804), and,
as the Jewish Encyclopædia discreetly notes, “it imposed no new limitations on the
Jews.”54 If we want to know more: this new regulation “preserved for Jews the right
to acquire all kinds of immovable property excluding inhabited areas, to conduct all
kinds of commerce on an equal footing with other subjects, but only within the Pale
of Settlement.”55 These Regulations of 1835 confirmed the protection of all the rights
recognised to the Jewish faith, introduced distinctions for the rabbis, conferring on
them the rights granted to the merchants of the first guild; established a reasonable
age to marry (18 and 16 years old); adopted measures to ensure that the Jewish
attire did not differ too much and did not cut off the Jews from the surrounding
population; oriented the Jews towards means of earning their livelihood through
productive labour (which prohibited only the sale of spirits on credit or secured on
domestic effects), authorised all kinds of industrial activities (including the renting
of distilleries). To have Christians in their service was forbidden only for regular

* Count Alexis Araktchev (1769–1834), a favourite of Alexander I, creator of the “military colonies”
which were to house the soldiers with their families and replace the garrisons.
54 JE, 1.12, p. 695.
55 M. Kovalevsky, Ravnopravie evreev i ego vragui (The Equal Rights of Jews and their Enemies), in
Schit: literatournyj sbornik (Literary collection), under the dir. of L. Andreyev, M. Gorky and F.
Sologub, 3rd ed. increased, Moscow, Russian Society for the Study of Jewish Life, 1916, p. 117.
employment but authorised “for short-term work” (without the time limits being
specified) and “for work in factories and factories”, as well as “as an aide in the work
of the fields, gardens and vegetable gardens” which sounded like a mockery of the
very idea of “Jewish agriculture”. The Regulations of 1835 called upon Jewish youth
to educate itself; it did not restrict Jewish enrolment to secondary schools or
university. Jews who had received the rank of doctor in any discipline, once
recognised (not without formalities) of their distinguished qualities, were entitled to
enter in the service of the State. (Jewish doctors already enjoyed this right.) With
regard to local government, the Regulation abrogated the previous limitations: from
now on, Jews could hold office in local councils, magistrates and municipalities
“under the same conditions as if members of other faiths had been elected to office.”
(It is true that some local authorities, particularly in Lithuania, objected to this
 provision: in certain circumstances, the mayor has to lead his citizens to church—
how could a Jew do it? Also, can a Jew sit among the judges when the oath is sworn
on the cross? In the face of these strong reservations, a decree in 1836 stipulated
that in the western provinces the Jews could occupy in the magistracy and the
municipalities only one third of the positions. Finally, with regard to the thorny
economic problem inherent in cross-border smuggling, which was so detrimental to
the interests of the State, the Regulation permitted the Jews already residing there to
remain there, but prohibited any new installations.

For a State that still maintained millions of its subjects in serfdom, all that has
just been mentioned might not appear as a system of cruel constraints.

During the examination of the Regulation before the Council of State, the
discussions concerned the possibility of allowing the Jews free access to the internal
provinces of Great Russia, and the opinions expressed on this subject were as
numerous as they were varied. Some argued that “to admit the Jews to settle in the
central provinces, they had to be able to justify certain moral qualities and a
sufficient level of education”; others replied that “Jews can be of great use because of
their commercial and industrial activity, and that competition cannot be prevented
by prohibiting anybody from residing and practising commerce”; “it is necessary to
raise the problem... plainly put: can the Jews be tolerated in this country? If one
considers that they cannot be so, then all must be cast out,” rather than “leave this
category in the midst of the nation in a situation likely to engender in them
continuous discontent and grumbles.” And “if it is necessary to tolerate their
presence in this country, then it is important to free them from any limitations
placed on their rights.”

Moreover, the “archaic Polish privileges (abandoned by the Russian State
since the reign of Catherine) which granted urban communities the power to

56 JE, t. 11, p. 494.
57 Kovalevsky, in Schit, p. 117.
58 Hessen*, t. 2, pp. 50–52, 105–106.
59 JE, t. 12, p. 599.
60 Hessen, t. 2, pp. 47–48.
introduce restrictions on the right of residence for the Jews” reappeared with further acuteness in Vilnius first, then in Kiev. In Vilnius, the Jews were forbidden to settle in certain parts of the city. In Kiev, the local merchants were indignant that “the Jews, to the great displeasure of every one, engage in commerce and business between the walls of the monasteries of Pechersk ... that they take over all commercial establishments in Pechersk” and exclude “trade Christians”; they urged the Governor-General to obtain a ban (1827) “on the Jews to live permanently in Kiev... Only a few categories of individuals would be able to go there for a determined period of time.” “As always in such circumstances, the Government was obliged to postpone on several occasions the deadline set for their expulsion.” The discussions went back to the “Directorial Committee”, divided the Council of State into two equal camps, but under the terms of the Regulation of 1835 Nicolas confirmed the expulsion of the Jews from Kiev. However, shortly after, “certain categories of Jews were again allowed to reside temporarily in Kiev.” (But why were Jews so lucky in commercial competition? Often, they sold at lower prices than Christians, contenting themselves with a “lesser profit” than the Christians demanded; but in some cases, their merchandise was deemed to have come from smuggling, and the governor of Kiev, who had taken the defense of the Jews, remarked that “if the Christians were willing to take the trouble, they could oust the Jews without these coercive measures.” Thus, “in Belarus, the Jews had the right to reside only in the towns; In Little Russia, they could live everywhere, with the exception of Kiev and certain villages; In New Russia, in all inhabited places with the exception of Nikolayev and Sevastopol” military ports from which the Jews had been banned for reasons related with the security of the State.

“The 1835 Regulations allowed merchants and [Jewish] manufacturers to participate in the main fairs of the interior provinces in order to temporarily trade there, and granted them the right to sell certain goods outside the Pale of Settlement.” In the same way, artisans were not entirely deprived of access to the central provinces, even if only temporarily. According to the Regulation of 1827, “the authorities of the provinces outside the Pale of Settlement had the right to authorise the Jews to remain there for six months.” Hessen points out that the 1835 Regulations “and subsequent laws extended somewhat for the Jews the possibility of temporarily living outside the Pale of Settlement”, especially since the local authorities turned a blind eye “when the Jews bypassed the prohibitions.” Leskov confirms in a note he wrote at the request of the governmental committee: “In the 40s”, the Jews “appeared in the villages of Great Russia belonging to the great landowners in order to offer their services... Throughout the year, they rendered timely visits ‘to the lords of their acquaintance’” in the neighbouring provinces of

* Or “the Grottoes”: a group of monasteries whose origins go back to the middle of the eleventh century and which still exist today.

61 Ibidem, pp. 40-42.
62 LJE, t. 7, p. 318.
63 JE, t. 14, p. 944.
64 Ibidem, t. 11, p. 332.
65 Hessen, t. 2, pp. 46, 48.
Great Russia, and everywhere they traded and tackled work. “Not only were the Jews not driven out, they were retained.” “Usually, people welcomed and gave refuge to Jewish artisans...; everywhere the local authorities treated them with kindness, for, as for the other inhabitants, the Jews provided important advantages.”⁶⁶ “With the help of interested Christians, the Jews violated the limiting decrees. And the authorities were in their turn incited to derogate from the laws... In the provinces of Central Russia, it was decided to fix fines to be imposed on the owners who let the Jews settle in their home.”⁶⁷

This is how, led by conservative (more specifically religious) considerations of not wanting fusion between Christians and Jews, the authorities of the Russian state, faced with the economic push that attracted Jews beyond the Pale of Settlement, were unable either to make a clear decision or to clearly apply it in practice. As for the dynamic and enterprising character of the Jews, it suffered from too much territorial concentration and too strong internal competition; it was natural for them to overflow as widely as possible. As I. Orchansky observed: “The more the Jews are scattered among the Christian population, the higher is their standard of living.”⁶⁸

But it would be hard to deny that, even in its official perimeter, the Pale of Settlement for Jews in Russia was very large: in addition to what had been inherited from the dense Jewish grouping in Poland, the provinces of Vilnius, Grodno, Kaunas, Vitebsk, Minsk, Mogilev, Volhynia, Podolsk and Kiev (in addition to Poland and Courland) were added the vast and fertile provinces of Poltava, Ikaterinoslav, Chernigov, Tauride, Kherson and Bessarabia, all together larger than any state, or even group of European states. (A short time later, from 1804 to the mid-30s, the rich provinces of Astrakhan and the Caucasus were added, but the Jews hardly settled there; again in 1824, in Astrakhan, “no Jew was registered as taxable.”⁶⁹ This made fifteen provinces within the Pale of Settlement, compared with thirty-one for “Deep Russia”. And few were more populous than the provinces of central Russia. As for the Jews’ share of the population, it did not exceed that of the Moslems in the provinces of the Urals or the Volga. Thus the density of Jews in the Pale of Settlement did not result from their number, but rather from the uniformity of their occupations. It was only in the immensity of Russia that such an area might seem cramped.

It is objected that the extent of this area was illusory: it excluded all zones outside cities and other agglomerations. But these spaces were agricultural areas or intended for agriculture, and it was understood that this domain, accessible to the Jews, did not attract them; their whole problem was rather how to use these spaces for alcohol trade. Which was a deviation.

⁶⁷ Hessen, t. 2, p. 49.
⁶⁸ Orchansky, p. 30.
⁶⁹ JE. t. 3, p. 359.
And if the large Jewish mass had not moved from narrow Poland to vast Russia, the very concept of the Pale of Settlement would never have been born. In narrow Poland, the Jews would have lived densely piled up, with greater poverty, growing rapidly without carrying out any productive work, 80% of the population practising petty trade and the dealing of intermediaries.

In any case, nowhere in Russian cities were implemented obligatory ghettos for the Jews, as was still known here and there in Europe. (If not the suburb of Glebovo, in Moscow, for those who went there as visitors.)

Let us remember once more that this Pale of Settlement coexisted for three quarters of a century with the serfdom of the majority of the Russian rural population, and so, by comparison, the weight of these limitations to the freedom of coming and going was somewhat lifted. In the Russian Empire, many peoples lived by millions in high density areas within their respective regions. Within the borders of a multinational state, peoples often lived compactly more or less as separate entities. So it was with the example of the Karaites and the Jews “of the mountains”, the latter having the freedom to choose their place of residence but which they hardly used. No comparison is possible with the territorial limits, the “reserves” imposed on the native populations of conquered countries by colonisers (Anglo-Saxons or Spanish) who came from elsewhere.

It is precisely the absence of a national territory among the Jews, given the dynamism they displayed in their movements, their highly practical sense, their zeal in the economic sphere, which promised to become imminently an important factor influencing the life of the country as a whole. We can say that it is on the one hand, the Jewish Diaspora’s need to access all the existing functions, and on the other, the fear of an overflow of their activity which fuelled the limiting measures taken by the Russian government.

Yes, as a whole, the Jews of Russia turned away from agriculture. In crafts, they were preferably tailors, shoemakers, watchmakers, jewellers. However, despite the constraints imposed by the Pale, their productive activity was not limited to these small trades.

The *Jewish Encyclopædia* published before the Revolution writes that for the Jews, before the development of heavy industry, “what was most important was the trade of money; irrespective of whether the Jew intervened as a pawnbroker or money changer, as a farmer of public or private income, as tenant or tenant—he was primarily involved in financial transactions.” For even in the period of rural economy in Russia, “the demand for money was already felt in ever-increasing proportions.” Thence, the transfer of Jewish capital into this industry for them to participate in it. Already, under Alexander I, energetic arrangements had been made to encourage the participation of Jews in industry, especially in drapery. “It subsequently played an

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70JE, t. 13. p. 646.
important part in the accumulation of capital in the hands of the Jews,” and then “they did not fail to use this capital successively in factories and plants, mining, transportation and banking. Thus began the formation of a lower and upper Jewish bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{71} The Regulations of 1835 “also provided privileges for Jewish manufacturers.”\textsuperscript{72}

By the 40s of the nineteenth century, the sugar industry had grown considerably in the south-western provinces. First, The Jewish capitalists began by granting subsidies to the refineries belonging to the landowners, then by assuming their administration, followed by becoming owners, and finally building their own factories. In Ukraine and New Russia, powerful “sugar kings”, among others Lazare and Lev Brodski. “Most of these Jewish sugar producers had begun in the distillery of alcohol... or as tenants of cabarets.” This situation also took place in flour-milling.\textsuperscript{73}

At the time, no contemporary understood or bothered to foresee what power was being accumulated there, material first, then spiritual. Of course, Nicholas I was the first not to see, nor understand. He had too high an opinion of the omnipotence of the imperial power and of the efficiency of military-type administrative methods.

But he obstinately desired success in the education of the Jews so that the Jews could overcome their extraneousness in relation to the rest of the population, situation in which he saw a major danger. As early as 1831, he pointed out to the “Directors Committee” that “among the measures likely to improve the situation of the Jews, special attention should be given to raising them via education... by the creation of factories, the prohibition of precocious marriages, a better organisation of the Kehalim..., a change in clothing customs.”\textsuperscript{74} And in 1840, when the “Committee in charge of identifying measures for a radical transformation of the life of Jews in Russia” was founded, one of the first aims envisaged by this committee was “to promote the moral development of the new generation by the creation of Jewish schools in a spirit contrary to the Talmudic teaching currently in force.”\textsuperscript{75}

All the progressive Jews of that time also wanted general education (they were only divided on whether to totally exclude the Talmud from the program or to study it in the upper grades, “with the illumination of a scientific approach, thus relieved from undesirable additions”\textsuperscript{76}). A newly established general education school in Riga was headed by a young graduate of the University of Munich, Max Lilienthal, who aspired to invest himself in the “spread of education among Russian Jews.” In 1840, he was cordially received in Saint Petersburg by the ministers of the

\textsuperscript{72} JE, t. 15, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{73} Dijour, in LJE-1, pp. 165–168.
\textsuperscript{74} Hessen*, t. 2, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{75} JE, t. 9, pp. 689–690; Hessen, t. 2, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{76} Hessen, t. 2, p. 83.
interior and education, and wrote to the “Committee for the Transformation of the Life of the Jews” proposing the project of a consistory and theology seminary with the aim of training rabbis and teachers “according to pure ethical foundations”, as opposed to “calcified talmudists”; However, “before acquiring the essential principles of faith, it would not be permissible to study profane matters.” Thus the ministerial project was modified: the number of hours devoted to the teaching of Jewish matters was increased.  

Lilienthal also sought to persuade the government to take preventive measures against the Hasidim, but without success: government power “wanted a front unifying the various Jewish social milieux who waged war.” Lilienthal, who had developed his school in Riga “with amazing success”, was invited by the Ministry to visit the provinces of the Pale of Settlement in order to contribute to the work of education, through public meetings and conferences with Jewish personalities. His journey, at least externally, was a great success; as a general rule, he met with little open hostility and seemed to have succeeded in convincing the influential circles of the Jewish world. “The enemies… of the reform… had to express their approval outwardly.” But the hidden opposition was, of course, very important. And when school reform was finally applied, Lilienthal renounced his mission. In 1844, he left unexpectedly for the United States, never to return. “His departure from Russia—perhaps a way of escape—remains shrouded in mystery.”

Thus, under Nicholas I, not only did the authorities not oppose the assimilation of the Jews, but rather they called for it; however, the Jewish masses who remained under the influence of the Kahal, feared constraining measures in the religious sphere, and so did not lend themselves to it.

Nevertheless, school reform did begin in 1844, despite the extreme resistance of the leaders of the Kehalim. (And although “in creating these Jewish schools there was no attempt to reduce the number of Jews in general schools, on the contrary, it was pointed out that they should, as before, be open to the Jews.” Two kinds of Jewish public schools were created (“modelled on Jewish elementary schools in Austria”): two years, corresponding to Russian parish schools, and four years, corresponding to district schools. Only Jewish disciplines were taught by Jewish (and Hebrew) teachers; the others were given by Russian teachers. (As Lev Deitch, a frenzied revolutionary, admits, “The crowned monster ordered them [Jewish children] to learn Russian.”) For many years, these schools were led by Christians, and were only led by Jews much later.

“Faithful to traditional Judaism, having learned or overshadowed the secret objective of Uvarov [Minister of Education], the majority of the Jewish population

77 Ibidem, p. 84; JE, t. 13. p. 47.
78 Hessen, t. 2. pp. 85–86.
79 Ibidem, pp. 84, 86–87.
81 Ibidem, t. 3, p. 334.
82 L Deitch, Roi evreev v rousskom revolioutsionnom dvijenii, (The Role of Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement), t. 1, 2nd ed., Moscow-Leningrad, GIZ, 1925, p. 11.
saw in these government measures of education a means of persecution like the others.”  
(Said Uvarov, who, for his part, sought to bring the Jews closer to the Christian population by eradicating “prejudices inspired by the precepts of the Talmud”, wanted to exclude the latter entirely from the education system, considering it as an anti-Christian compendium). Continuing for many years to distrust the Russian authorities, the Jewish population turned away from these schools and fuelling a real phobia of them: “Just as the population sought to escape conscription, it distrusted these schools, fearing to leave their children in these homes of “free-thinking”. Well-off Jewish families often sent to public schools not their own offspring, but those of the poor. Thus was entrusted to a public school P. B. Axelrod; He then went on to college, and then obtained broad political notoriety as Plekhanov and Deitch’s companion in the struggle within the Liberation of Labour). If in 1855 only the duly registered Heder had 70,000 Jewish children, the public schools of both types received only 3,200.

This fear of public education was perpetuated for a long time in Jewish circles. In this way, Deitch remembers the 60s, not the middle of nowhere, but in Kiev: “I remember the time when my countrymen considered it a sin to learn Russian” and only tolerated its use “in relations with the goyim.” A. G. Sliozberg remembers that, until the 70s, entering college was regarded as a betrayal of the essence of Jewishness, the college uniform being a sign of apostasy. “Between Jews and Christians there was an abyss which only a few Jews could cross, and only in the great cities where Jewish public opinion did not paralyse the will of all.” Young people attached to Jewish traditions did not aspire to study in Russian universities, although the final diploma, according to the Recruitment Law of 1827, dispensed one of military service for life. However, Hessen points out that among Russian Jews belonging to “the most affluent circles”, “the spontaneous desire to integrate... the public schools was growing.”

He adds that in Jewish public schools “not only the Christian superintendents but the majority of Jewish teachers who taught the Jewish disciplines in the German language were far from the required level.” Thus, “in parallel with the establishment of these public schools, it was decided to organise a graduate school intended for the training of teachers, to form better educated rabbis capable of acting progressively on the Jewish masses. Rabbinic schools of this type were founded in Vilnius and Zhytomir (1847).” “Despite their shortcomings, these schools were of some use,” according to the testimony of the liberal J. Hessen, “the rising generation was
familiarising itself with the Russian language and its grammar.”91 The revolutionary Mr. Krol was of the same opinion, but he also condemned the government unreservedly: “The laws of Nicholas I instituting primary public schools and rabbinic schools were reactionary and hostile to the Jews; schools, willingly or unwillingly, allowed a small number of Jewish children to learn secular education. As for the “enlightened” intellectuals (the Maskilim) and those who now despised the “superstitions of the masses”, they “had no place to go”, according to Krol, and remained strangers amongst their own. “Nevertheless, this evolution played an enormous role in the spiritual awakening of Russian Jews during the second half of the nineteenth century,” even if the Maskilim, who wanted to enlighten the Jewish masses, met with “the fierce opposition of fanatical Jewish believers who saw in profane science an alienation of the devil.”92

In 1850 a kind of superstructure was created: an institute of “Jewish scholars”, as well as a consulting inspectorate among the heads of academies.

Those who came from the newly created rabbinical schools occupied in 1857 the functions of “public rabbis”; Elected unwillingly by their community, their designation was subject to the approval of the authorities of their province. But their responsibility remained purely administrative: the Jewish communities regarded them as ignoramuses in the Hebrew sciences, and the traditional rabbis were maintained as genuine “spiritual rabbis.”93 (Numerous graduates of rabbinic schools, “found no positions, neither as rabbis nor teachers”, pursued their studies at university94, then became doctors or lawyers.)

Nicholas I did not release his pressure to regulate the internal life of the Jewish community. The Kahal, who already possessed an immense power over the community, grew even stronger from the moment conscription was introduced: it was given the right to “give for recruitment at any moment every Jew who did not pay his royalties, who had no fixed abode or committed intolerable misdemeanors in Jewish society,” and it used this right for the benefit of the rich. “All this nourished the indignation of the masses towards the rulers of the Kehalim and became one of the causes of the irremediable decline of the Kahal.” Thus, in 1844, the Kehalim “were dissolved everywhere, and their functions were transmitted to municipalities and town halls”95; In other words, urban Jewish communities found themselves subject to the uniform legislation of the state. But this reform was not completed either: the collection of the arduous and evanescent arrears and the lifting of the recruits were again entrusted to the Jewish community, whose “recruiters” and tax collectors were substituted for the ancients of the Kehalim. As for the registry of

91 Ibidem, p. 121.
92 M. Krol, Natsionalism i assimiliatsia v evreïskoi islorii (Nationalism and Assimilation in Jewish History), in JW, p. 188.
93 LJE, t. 4, p. 34; B. C. Dinour. Religiosno-natsionalnyi oblik rousskogo evreïstva (The Religious and National Profile of the Russian Jews) in BJWR-1. p. 314.
94 Hessen, t. 2, p. 179.
95 LJE*, 1.4, pp. 20–21.
births, and thus the counting of the population, they remained in the hands of the rabbis.

The government of Nicolas also took a position on the inextricable problem of the internal tax collection of Jewish communities, first of all on the so-called “casket” (indirect tax on the consumption of kosher meat). A provision of 1844 specified that part of the proceeds should be used to cover public arrears in the community, to finance the organisation of Jewish schools and to distribute subsidies to Jews who devoted themselves to agriculture. But there was also an unexpected imbroglio: although the Jews “were subject to the capitation on the same basis as the Christian bourgeois”, that is, to a direct tax, “the Jewish population, thanks to the amount of the “casket”, were, it is to say, in a privileged position to pay the royalty”; in fact, from then on “Jews, including the wealthiest, covered by personal payments only an insignificant part of the taxes owed to the tax authorities, turning the balance into arrears,” and these never ceased to accumulate: by the mid-50s, they exceeded 8 million rubles. There followed a new imperial decree dictated by exasperation: “for every 2,000 rubles” of new arrears, “an adult had to be provided as recruit.”

In 1844 a new and energetic attempt was made—again aborted—to expel the Jews from the villages.

Hessen pictorially writes that “in Russian laws designed to normalise the lives of Jews, one hears as a cry of despair: in spite of all its authority, the government fails to extirpate the existence of the Jews from the depths of Russian life.”

No, the leaders of Russia had not yet realised the full weight and even the “unassimilability” of the immense Jewish legacy received as a gift under the successive divisions of Poland: what to do with this intrinsically resistant and rapidly expanding group in the Russian national body? They could not find reliable rulings and were all the more incapable of foreseeing the future. The energetic measures of Nicholas I surged one after the other, but the situation was apparently only getting more complicated.

A similar failure, which was escalating, followed Nicholas I in his struggle against the Jewish contrabands at the frontiers. In 1843 he categorically ordered the expulsion of all Jews from a buffer zone of fifty kilometres deep adjacent to Austria and Prussia, in spite of the fact that “at some frontier customs the merchants who traded were practically all Jews.” The measure was immediately corrected by numerous exemptions: first, a two-year period was allowed for the sale of the goods, and then the duration was extended, and material assistance was offered to the

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96 Hessen, t. 2, pp. 89–90.  
97 JE, t. 12, p. 640.  
98 Hessen, t. 2, p. 19.  
99 Hessen, 1.1, p. 203.
expellees for their new settlement; furthermore, they were exempted for five years from all royalties. For several years the transfer was not even initiated, and soon “the government of Nicholas I stopped insisting on the expulsion of the Jews from this border strip of fifty kilometres, which allowed some of them to stay where they lived.”

It was on this occasion that Nicolas received a new warning of which he did not measure the extent and the consequences for the whole of Russia: this formidable but very partially enforced measure, intended to expel the Jews from the frontier zone, motivated by a contraband which had assumed an extension dangerous to the State, had aroused in Europe such indignation that it may be asked whether it was not this measure that drastically confused European public opinion with Russia. It may be said that this particular decree of 1843 must date from the very beginning of the era when the Western Jewish world, in the defense of its co-religionists in Russia, began to exert a decisive influence, which, from then on, would never fall again.

One of the manifestations of this new attention was the arrival in Russia in 1846 of Sir Moses Montefiore, the bearer of a letter of recommendation from Queen Victoria instructing him to obtain the “improvement of the fate of the Jewish population” of Russia. He went to several cities of high Jewish density; then, from England, sent a long letter to the emperor recommending the emancipation of the Jews from all limiting legislation, to grant them “equal rights with all other subjects” (with the exception, of course, of the serfs), “in the short term: to abolish all constraints in the exercise of the right to settle and to circulate between the boundaries of the Pale of Settlement”, to allow merchants and craftsmen to visit the provinces, “to allow Christians to be employed in the service of the Jews…, to restore the Kahal…”

But, on the contrary, Nicolas did not relinquish his determination to bring order to the lives of the Jews of Russia. He resembled Peter the Great in his resolution to structure by decree the whole State and the whole of society according to his plan, and to reduce the complexity of society to simple, easily understood categories, as Peter had formerly “trimmed” all that disturbed the clear configuration of the taxable classes.

This time it was a question of differentiating the Jewish population from the towns—the bourgeois. This project began in 1840; when the intention was to go beyond the national and religious singularity of the Jews (the opinions of Levinson, Feiguine, and Gueseanovskiy were then examined), they endeavoured to “study the root of their obstinate isolation” in relation to “the absence of any productive work in them”, their “harmful practice of small trades, accompanied by all sorts of frauds and tricks.” Regarding the “idleness” of many Jews, the government circles blamed it on “inveterate habits”; they considered that “the Jewish mass might have been able

100 LJE, t. 7. p. 321.
to find livelihoods, but traditionally refused to exercise certain types of employment.”

Count Kiselyov proposed to the Emperor the following measure: without affecting the Jewish merchants, perfectly well-settled, to worry about the so-called bourgeoisie Jews, more precisely to divide them into two categories: to count in the first those who benefit from goods and a solid sedentary lifestyle, and include in the second those who are devoid of these factors and set a period of five years for them to be made craftsmen in workshops, or farmers. (One regarded as an artisan the one who enrolled forever in a workshop: as a sedentary bourgeoisie, one who had enrolled in a workshop for a certain time.) As for those who did not fulfil these conditions at the end of the period of five years and remained confined to their former state, they would be considered “useless” and subjected to military service and a period of work of a particular type: they would be enrolled in the army (those 20 years old and onwards) in number three times higher than the standard required, not for the usual twenty-five years of military service, but for only ten. And, meanwhile, “they would be used in the army or the navy by instilling in them, above all, different trades and then, with their consent, they would make craftsmen or farmers”. In other words, they would be forcibly given vocational education. But the government did not have the funds to do so and was considering using the “casket” tax, as Jewish society could only be interested in this effort to rehabilitate its members through labour.

In 1840, Nicholas I gave his approval to the project. (The phrase “unnecessary Jews” was replaced by “not performing productive work.”) All measures to transform the lives of the Jews were reduced to a single decree providing for the following steps: 1) “regularisation of the collection of the ‘casket’ and suppression of the Kahal”; 2) creation of general education schools for Jews; 3) institution of “parochial rabbis”; 4) “establishment of the Jews on land belonging to the State” for agricultural purposes; 5) categorisation; 6) prohibition to wear the long garment. Kiselyov thought of introducing social categorisation in a fairly distant future; Nicholas placed it before agriculture, which, for a quarter of a century, had not ceased to be a failure.

However, the categorisation provided for a period of five years for the choice of occupations, and the measure itself was not announced until 1846, meaning it could not turn into a reality until January 1852. (In 1843 the Governor-General of New Russia, Count Vorontsov, rose up against this measure: he wrote that the occupations “of this numerous class of merchants and intermediaries were ‘vilified’ and that [80%] of the Jewish population was counted as ‘useless’ elements,” which meant that 80% of the Jews were mainly engaged in trade, and Vorontsov hoped that, given the vast economic potential of New Russia, “any form of constraint could

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103 JE, t. 13, p. 439.
104 Hessen*, t. 2. pp. 81–82.
105 Ibidem, pp. 82–83.
he did not think it necessary to expel the Jews from the villages, but thought that it was enough to intensify their education. He warned that the categorisation would probably arouse indignation in Europe.\(^{106}\)

Scalded by the way Europe had reacted to the attempt to expel the Jews from the border area, the Russian government drew up a detailed statement on the new measure in 1846: in Poland, Jews had neither citizenship nor the right to own immovable property, and was therefore restricted to petty trading and the sale of alcohol; incorporated in Russia, they saw the limits of their residence extended, they received civil rights, access to the class of merchants in the cities, the right to own real estate, to enter the category of farmers, the right to education, including access to universities and academies.\(^{107}\)

It must be admitted that the Jews did receive all these rights from the first decades of their presence in the famous “prison of the peoples”. Nevertheless, a century later, in a collection written by Jewish authors, one finds the following assessment: “When the annexation to Russia of the Polish provinces with their Jewish population, promises were made concerning Rights, and attempts to realise them [italics are mine, A. S.; said promises were kept, and the attempts were not without success]. But at the same time, mass expulsions outside villages had begun (indeed, they had been outlined, but were never effective), double taxation was implemented [which was not levied in a systematic way, and eventually abandoned] and to the institution of the Pale of Settlement was undertaken”\(^{108}\) [we have seen that the borders of this area were originally a geographical heritage]. If one thinks that this way of exposing history is objective, then one will never reach the truth.

Unfortunately, however, the government communiqué of 1846 pointed out that the Jews did not take advantage of many of these measures: “Constantly defying integration with the civil society in which they live, most kept their old way of life, taking advantage of the work of others, which, on all sides, legitimately entails the complaints of the inhabitants.” “For the purpose [of raising the standard of living of the Jews], it is important to free them from their dependence on the elders of the community, the heirs of the former leaders of the Kahal, to spread education and practical knowledge in the Jewish population, to create Jewish schools of general education, to provide means for their passage to agriculture, to blur the differences of clothing which are unfair to many Jews. As for the government, “it esteems itself entitled to hope that the Jews will abandon all their reprehensible ways of living and turn to a truly productive and useful work.” Only those who refuse to do so will be subject to “incentivised measures for parasitic members affecting society and harming it.”\(^{109}\)

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106 Ibidem, pp. 100–103.
107 Ibidem, p.103.
109 Hessen*, t. 2. pp. 103–104.
In his reply to this text, Montefiore condemned the categorisation by insisting that all the misfortune came from the limitations imposed on the free circulation of the Jews and their trade. Nicolas retorted that if the passage of the Jews to productive work was successful, time, “of itself, would gradually mitigate these limitations.” He was counting on the possibility of re-education through work... Being held in check here and there, and elsewhere in his efforts to transform the way of life of the Jews, he had the ambition to break the Jews’ tendency to close in on themselves and to solve the problem of their integration with the surrounding population through labour, and the problem of labour by drastically reinforced conscription. The reduction of the length of military service for the Jews (from 25 to ten years) and the intention of providing them with vocational training was scarcely clear; what was perceived concretely was the levying of recruits, now proportionately three times more numerous than among Christians: “Ten recruits per year per thousand male inhabitants, and for Christians seven recruits per thousand once every two years.”

Faced with this increase in recruitment, more people sought to escape. Those who were designated for conscription went into hiding. In retaliation, at the end of 1850, a decree stipulated that all recruits not delivered on time should be compensated by three additional recruits in addition to the defaulter! Now Jewish communities were interested in capturing the fugitives or replacing them with innocent people. (In 1853 a decree was issued enabling Jewish communities and private individuals to present as a recruit any person taken without papers.) The Jewish communities were seen to have paid “takers” or “snatchers” who captured their “catch”; they received from the community a receipt attesting that the community had used their services when handing over those who did not respond to the call, or who carried expired passports—even if they were from another province—or teenagers without a family.

But that was not enough to compensate for the missing recruits. In 1852 two new decrees were added: the first provided for each recruit provided in excess of the quota imposed, to relieve the community of 300 rubles of arrears; the second “prohibited the concealment of Jews who evaded military service and demanded severe punishment for those who had fled conscription, imposed fines on the communities that had hidden them, and, instead of the missing recruits, to enlist their relatives or the community leaders responsible for the delivery of the recruits within the prescribed time limits. Seeking by all means to escape recruitment, many Jews fled abroad or went to other provinces.”

From then on, the recruitment gave rise to a real bacchanale: the “snatchers” became more and more fierce; on the contrary, men in good health and capable of

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111 LJE, t. 4, p. 75.
112 JE, t. 9, p. 243.
113 Hessen, 1, 2, p. 115.
114 LJE, t. 7, p. 323.
working scurried off, went into hiding, and the backlogs of the communities grew. The sedentary and productive part uttered protests and demands: if recruitment began to strike to an equal extent the “useful elements” and those which do not exercise productive work, then the vagabonds will always find means of hiding and all the weight of the recruitment would fall on the “useful”, which would spread among them disorder and the ruin.”

The administrative overflows made the absurdity of the situation clear because of the difficulties that ensued; questions were raised, for example, about the different types of activity: are they “useful” or not? This fired up the Saint Petersburg ministries. The Council of State demanded that the social categorisation be delayed so long as the regulations of the workshops were not elaborated. The Emperor, however, did not want to wait. In 1851, the “Provisional Rules for the Categorisation of Jews”, and “Special Rules for Jewish Workshops” were published. The Jewish population was deeply concerned, but according to the testimony of the Governor General of the South-West, it no longer believed that this categorisation would enter into force.

And, in fact, “... it did not take place; the Jewish population was not divided into categories.” In 1855, Nicholas I died suddenly, and categorisation was abandoned forever.

Throughout the years 1850–1855, the sovereign had, on the whole, displayed a limitless sense of pride and self-confidence, accumulating gross blunders which stupidly led us into the Crimean war against a coalition of States, before suddenly dying while the conflict was raging.

The sudden death of the Emperor saved the Jews from a difficult situation, just as they were to be saved a century later by the death of Stalin.

Thus ended the first six decades of massive presence of Jews in Russia. It must be acknowledged that neither their level nor their lack of clarity prepared the Russian authorities at that time to face such an ingrained, gnarled and complex problem. But to put on these Russian leaders the stamp “persecutors of the Jews” amounts to distorting their intentions and compounding their abilities.

115 Hessen, t. 2, pp. 114–118.  
116 Ibidem, p. 112.  
117 JE, 1.13, p. 274.  
118 Hessen, t. 2, p. 118.