

GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S MISSION TO PALESTINE—LETTERS FROM  
MESSRS. M'CHIEYNE AND BONAR.

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They are quite surprised to hear that any christians love the Jews. The next night we reached Waslu, and slept on a floor of a wretched khan. We rose a little after midnight, to see the killing of the chupora,—the only sacrifice which the Jews now offer. To-morrow is the day of atonement. Every Jew this morning sacrifices a cock, and every Jewess a hen.—Looking in at a window, we saw the son reading the prayers,—the mother with a white hen in her hands. At a certain point in the prayer she waved the straggling fowl round her head three times: saying, in Hebrew, "This is my atonement,—this is my ransom, this is my expiation,—this hen shall go to death, and I to happy life." This was repeated thrice; the door then opened, and the boy was sent off with the fowl to the shochet, to get it killed. Wonderful people! even in their blind wanderings they keep up a memorial of the atoning blood of the Son of God. At two we set off,—passed through a delightful country, the hills finely wooded with elm and oak trees, and wild fruit trees growing by the way. In the evening we came in sight of Jassy, the capital of Moldavia, stretching its white arins over the undulating plain beneath us. The tin-covered spires were glancing in the evening sun. A small river runs through the city; and pleasant hills are in view. As we entered we could almost believe that we were entering a town of Israel in their better days. In every street we passed crowds of well dressed Jews; some with their wives and children; sometimes a Jewess, richly attired with all her jewels; all hastening to the synagogue. This evening the day of atonement begins. We were too late to hear the Absolution Chant, which begins the service. We visited two synagogues—filled to overflowing—crowds worshipping outside—the place of the women quite full. The loudness and extravagance of their devotion reminded us of the Jews of Safet and Tiberias. They clapped and wrung their hands, lifted them to heaven, clasped them, and beat upon the breast. The women sobbed aloud.

The English consul paid us the kindest attentions. In every place we find it a real privilege to be subjects of the British Crown. We were comfortably lodged in the hotel of a convert Jew,—the waiter also a convert. There are about 20 converts in Jassy, of good character. There are upwards of 40,000 inhabitants; and of these about 20,000 are Jews. The lowest reckoning we met with makes them 3,500 families. There are 30 large synagogues, and about 150 smaller ones. In one street there are 20! Almost every hour of our three day's stay

in Jassy was occupied. On the day after our arrival we went through about 12 of their synagogues. Many had continued all night in prayer. The eyes of some were red and swollen with weeping. The great candles were all burning, and the shoes off most of their feet on this holy day. All the synagogues were quite full all day,—often hundreds outside, standing praying with their faces towards Jerusalem. In one, about 100 of the women were outside, with their children and infants in cradles. We thought upon Joel ii. 16, and Zech. xii. 12—14. We were strikingly reminded of the solemn feast-days in Jerusalem of old. But, alas! how changed from the beautiful service proscribed for this day, Lev. xvi.; and how deep the veil upon their hearts, which hinders them from seeing that the Son of God is the true scape-goat, to carry away our sins into a land of forgetfulness. Will you believe it, that, with all the externals of intensest devotion, they have all this day been reciting a poem of which not one in a hundred understands the meaning? It is most difficult Hebrew. This is the state of Israel. We came to see the conclusion at sunset; their cries were then most intense, for if they do not obtain forgiveness to-day, it will be too late after the stars appear. A horn sounded, then all came out of the synagogue with their candles burning. They stood facing the moon. The spots in the face of the moon they believe to be the Shekinah; and this concluding prayer is addressed to the Shekinah, with their eyes turned towards the moon. It was a painful sight, and made us think of the worship of Ashtaroth in the days of their idolatrous fathers. This done, they wished one another peace, and retired,—some singing merrily as they went.

Next day we visited a Jewish school, where were 30 children. One little girl was reading the prayer book. We soon found out that they only teach them to read the Hebrew, but not to translate or understand it. We tried the teachers on their own prayers, and on the Psalms, but even they did not know the meaning,—they could make no sense of it. We tried to convince them of their shameful ignorance; they seemed to feel it, and said, there are only two Jews in Jassy who understand the Hebrew grammatically. We visited these two, called by the Jews Epicureans, and found them interesting men. They felt deeply the ignorance of the Jews, and had tried to teach the children the Hebrew grammatically; "But," said one of them, "the parents would not send their children; they want no change, for the old bullock will not learn. If you do any thing