

he was at least as much concerned to discredit Freemasonry and the progressive forces in general as to attack the Jews. His book, armed with an enthusiastic foreword from the head of the Foreign Mission Seminary in Paris, was explicitly directed to the Fathers at the Council – and not wholly in vain, for des Mousseaux was blessed by Pope Pius IX for his courage.

In France Gougenot des Mousseaux found a worthy successor in the Abbé Chabauty, *curé* of Saint-André at Mirebeau in Poitou, honorary canon of Poitiers and Angoulême. In 1881 this man published a 600-page volume called *Les Francs-Maçons et les Juifs: Sixième Age de l'Eglise d'après l'Apocalypse*, in which he argued that Satan, through the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, was preparing the way for the Jewish Antichrist and the world-dominion of the Jews. In his most influential book, *Les Juifs nos maîtres* (1882), Chabauty did more than re-hash his predecessor's arguments, he added an important discovery of his own. He had found, in the *Revue des études juives* for 1880, two letters which seemed to him to be full of the most sinister significance, and which were indeed later to acquire a sinister significance in the history of antisemitism. They are known as *The Letter of the Jews of Arles* (or, in some versions, of Spain) and *The Reply of the Jews of Constantinople*; and they read as follows:

Honourable Jews, greetings and blessings!

This is to tell you that the King of France, who is again master of Provence, has ordained by public proclamation that we must become Christians or leave his territory. And the people of Arles, Aix and Marseilles want to take away our belongings, they threaten our lives, they wreck our synagogues, they cause us much vexation; and all this makes us uncertain about what we ought to do to keep the Law of Moses. This is why we ask you to be so good as to let us know, in your wisdom, what we ought to do.

CHAMOR

Rabbi of the Jews of Arles  
the 13th of Sabath, 1489

Well-beloved Brethren in Moses, we have received the letter in which you tell us of the anxieties and adversities you are suffering.

The advice of the grand satraps and rabbis is as follows:

You say that the King of France demands that you become

Christians: do so, since you cannot do otherwise, but keep the Law of Moses in your hearts.

You say that you are forced to surrender your belongings: then make your children merchants, so that, little by little, they may strip the Christians of their belongings.

You say that attempts are made against your lives: then make your children doctors and apothecaries, so that they may deprive Christians of their lives.

You say that they are destroying your synagogues: then make your children canons and clerics, so that they may destroy their churches.

You say that people are vexing you in many other ways: then see to it that your children become advocates and notaries, so that you will get the Christians under your yoke, you will dominate the world, and you will be able to take your revenge.

Do not depart from this order that we give you, for you will see by experience that, from the abasement in which you now find yourselves, you will attain the summit of power.

V.S.S.V.F.F.

Prince of the Jews of Constantinople  
the 21st of Casleu, 1489<sup>1</sup>

From the point of view of the literary historian these 'letters', which date at least from the sixteenth century, are not without interest. Probably they were originally written in Spain, as a satirical comment on the Marranos – the Spanish Jews who claimed to have been converted to Catholicism but who were suspected, often rightly, of remaining Jews at heart. What is certain is that they were meant as a joke – the signature Chamor, for instance, is simply the Hebrew for donkey! For Chabauty, however, there was no possible doubt as to their authenticity – after all, as he pointed out, was not the *Revue des études juives*, which reprinted them, founded by the Baron de Rothschild?

And indeed thanks to these 'letters' the enterprising *curé* stumbled on an idea which had not occurred to any of his predecessors. He convinced himself that a single, secret Jewish government had existed throughout the Dispersion, that it was pursuing an unchanging plan for world-domination, and that all Jews owed it absolute obedience. And he was also

<sup>1</sup> The 'letters' are reprinted in E. A. Chabauty, *Les Juifs nos maîtres*, Paris-Brussels-Geneva, 1882, Chapter I.