

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1, pages 226 - 227

Many Maskilim had a hand in this treachery. As later transpired, they had instigated the government^o Others, who had retained their allegiance, withdrew their support from these institutions once they had become apprised of the government's true intentions. Some even turned into active opponents and proclaimed the seminaries to be "houses infected with plague, rotten from the very beginning." The results proved the true nature of the beginning. Many of the students later openly turned their backs on their Judaism; they callously violated the prohibitions of the Torah, and mocked at everything Jews held holy. Some converted to Christianity. [32]

By 1873 even the government had become convinced that these seminaries were not fulfilling any useful function and closed them down.

[32] See the article by Alexander Zederbaum (Haerez) in Hamelitz, XIX, No. 26: "These seminaries were the 'place of evil waters' against which the Sages of the Talmud had uttered their warning, that many students who had drunk of the waters were exiled or died of their sins and the Name of Heaven and of Israel and the Torah were desecrated. In Zhitomir pupils were discovered eating trefah meat on Shavuot which fell on Shabbat and were not expelled. A Vilna Hebrew instructor became an apostate and was not relieved of his post. He also led several students astray with his wives and yet he was not dismissed." See I. A. ben Jacob in Atlas' anthology, Hakerem (1888); Zichron Ya'akov, I, p. 174.

Years later, when R. Israel's stand was debated in Hashachar (X, 230) even Peretz Smolenskin sided with him. He wrote: "In regard to these Rabbinical Schools, R. Israel was not in error in his perception. Those who chose him [to head a seminary] were. They thought they were offering him control, but it was servitude instead. The Hebrew Dean was not master of the school; the Russian head was. He decided everything pertaining to religion... Only an office-seeker would accept such a position, but not someone fleeing from honor and falsehood."