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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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The World Rededicated, 1917.

"THE WORLD RE-DEDICATED"

It was Oscar Wilde, I believe, who said that "A cynic is one who knows the price of everything and the value of none". If I were asked to define a materialist I would say that a materialist is one who knows the origin of everything and the worth of none. With the coming of Darwin, our mental attitude underwent a radical transformation. We began to subject the human phenomenon to the doctrine of evolution. Economics, Sociology, Politics, Religion, every human value was no longer looked upon as something static and that may be studied /analyzed logically, but as something dynamic which must be studied historically. We began to study evolution of things rather than their constitution, we began no longer to define things by their attributes, but to explain them by their antecedents, in a word, we began to search for the origin of all moral or spiritual values, just as the school of evolution set out in quest of the origin of species*****

was fraught with great danger, Some of us were unprepared for so decided a change, some of us were compelled to accept the doctrine of evolution, because of its logical potency, because of its appeal to our intellect and some were actually thrown into the depths of despair*****rawness and crudities which had attended this same institution, its low, earthly origin, fairly appalled us. When we began to realize that man was not created perfect in one day, that wisdom did not spring full-grown from the brow of Duse, that Religion was not revealed in all the glory of perfection, on some mountain height. When we began to realize that man was the imperfect product of many ages, struggling for perfection, when we began to perceive that our much-gloried wisdom was, after all, the crude, many-colored*****thru myriads of years, that our religions were, after all, the muddy, ground waters of Eternity(?) before they merged

in the crystal rivers of truth, then some of us were hurled from the heights of enthusiasm to the depth of despair*****groping in the gloomy depths of history, to find the lowest stratum of things***** with the rich soil of human possibilities, that stratum which is decked with the flowers of rare personalities and warmed by the sun of still higher visions, we became materialists, knowing the origin of everything but the worth of none. Now some of us escaped this great *Syrian* bomb, where armies have*****some of us got a glimpse of the greater truth. The lordly Hudson rolling in its majesty down to the sea, was no less stirring because ~~it~~ its origin was a little stream in the Adirondacks*****the ineffable glory of a Beethoven symphony is not at all *destroyed or marred (?)* *****by the fact that the musical soul of man ~~is~~ first found expression in some wild beating of the tom-tom, and religious aspirations are no less real, no less true, no less vital today, because ~~forsooth~~, these same aspirations, in days gone by expressed themselves in crude rites, ~~and~~ ceremonies and superstitions and like human institutions, my *friends* ~~friends~~, must not be valued by their origin but by their present worth and utility. The human institution, once established, is absolutely independent of the source which gave it life. We must gauge the value of our institutions by their functioning ability, by their power to enrich and ennoble our present day life and not by its origin or ~~source~~ its source. Now that is a tremendous truth and it has bearing upon the subject of Chanukah and upon the subject perhaps, also of this great war.

The festivals of Israel, some years ago, were subjected to a most devastating criticism. The three great festivals of Israel, Passover, Chanukah and Succoth, were found to have been originally nature festivals, common to all agricultural peoples***** the Spring period of early harvest and the period of the later harvest. *Succoth* They had nothing of the later significance with which Israel endowed

~~these, therefore~~ and therefore, it was said these festivals, because
 of their lowly origin, have no longer any appeal to us. They should be
 abolished. Now we celebrate*****festivals, not for
 their primary meaning but for their present significance. Now Chanukah
 was also made the butt of this superficial tide of criticism. Chanukah
 was originally the celebration of the winter ^{harvest}*****common among all
 early peoples. Chanukah perhaps, by a different name, was celebrated
 long before the victory of the Maccabees and lights were kindled to urge
 the sun to return on its course. The victory of the Maccabees, perhaps
 took place at the same period of the year and ultimately this celebration
 crowded the natural celebration out and Chanukah came to mean purely
 the victory of the Maccabees and some said that because of its lowly
 origin, it has no significance for us today, but Chanukah has a meaning,
 irrespective of its origin. Chanukah means to you and me, something so
 supremely beautiful that it appeals to us more than any other festival
 of the year. Whenever Chanukah comes around, the Jew feels some added
 dignity, ~~and pride~~ a pride, a glory, he becomes conscious of the great
 heritage which is his. It has meant the festival of light and the
 festival of freedom. Chanukah is called the festival of lights, it
 should be called the festival of light. Have you ever stopped to think
 how religiously fond the Jew at all times was of light, light, light.
 The first cry of creation was "Let there be light". One of the most
 terrible afflictions that the Jewish mind could conceive of*****
 ****"Let there be darkness in the land of Egypt", and the punishment
 of the sinner was that his light should be put out. and the reward of
 the righteous is that his light should be upon his way. Israel ~~has~~ is
 urged to "Walk in the light of the Lord." "The Lord is my light" says
 the psalmist. "In thy light shall be seen light" and the people that
 made of its soul, the dwelling place of light could not be content

to hide its light under a bushel so that the prophet sees the glorious day of the Messiah when darkness shall cover*****but the light of the Lord shall be upon them and the nations shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy*****that was the passion, the spiritual obsession of the Jews. The festival of light always remind*****of this supreme mission of our people*****the torch bearers, the light bringers of the world. Israel has hated, with all the hatred of its thousand year old suffering, all bigotry and enmity. everything that beclouds the bright rays of the son. Israel cries for light, and Israel, though a little cruse of oil, outlived the nights of Eternity, even as that little cruse of oil that was found in the Temple and which gave promise of burning but one day, burned with ever-burning splendor, the eight days of the festival. It is a festival of light but it is more so a festival of freedom, freedom—that ~~xxx~~ is the key-note of Chanukah. It breathes of the spirit of brave men, it breathes of the spirit of men who dared to ~~live~~ live and die for their faith, their freedom, their independence, of the strength of the minority never to submit to overwhelming odds. The festival of Chanukah breathes nothing of that humid, ~~annervating~~ spirit which is so common among men and women of our people today, it breathes nothing of the truckling, craving, self-analytical spirit of our people today. Chanukah is essentially the festival of free men, men of pride and dignity of their possession, men of might and of conviction and because of that, how much akin is the spirit of Chanukah to the spirit of 1776. It was the same struggle, the struggle of a handful of men to preserve themselves, their life, their independence, their soul as it were and how much is the spirit of the Maccabees akin to the spirit of 1917. It is the same struggle, my friends, the struggle of the Macabees was the struggle of Judaism against Paganism and the struggle of today, in its deepest truth, is the same identical age-old almost eternal struggle

of Judaism and Paganism, the issues involved in this struggle are essentially Jewish, they are certainly not Christian, but the struggle to us*****the second great truth which Israel evolved out of its soul and its life, that truth, that a nation, as individuals, are not ~~laws~~ laws unto themselves, that nations are not exalted above the *****moral ambition, that the same moral *****that holds good between man and man, must hold good between nation and nation, that righteousness and righteousness alone, exalteth a nation, not wealth, not prosperity, not territorial conquest, but righteousness, even as righteousness exalteth a man, so righteousness exalteth a nation, and this, I take it, stripped of all its super-imposed motives, this I take it, is the bed-rock of this war. Shall there emerge out of this struggle***** that nations will submit themselves unto this law or shall we emerge out of this struggle in ~~the~~ ^a veritable type of international anarchy? I say that this is a struggle of unbridled Paganism*****and the international moral implications of Judaism ***so that this war, my friends, when looked upon from the point of view of its source and its origin, is the most terrible, the most depressing of all wars. With an eye to its source, this war is the most tragic of all wars, - offspring of an unscrupulous, cynical, greed-maddened civilization, conceived in sin and begotten of hate, and lust and envy, this war looks like the most gruesome and terrible of tragedies, it appears as though humanity were immolating itself upon the altar of a God who has long since died. How blind, how ~~stupid~~ brutal, how stupid it all appears, this needless spilling of precious blood, this destruction of countless young lives, this pall of sorrow that has settled like night over the world, this waste of glorious energy -- how blind, how brutal, how stupid it all seems, when judged by the cause, the origin, the source of this struggle, but when looked upon from its present implications, its new motive, its new consecration, the new soul which humanity has given to

to the struggle, it appears as the necessary and inevitable prelude to the great Chanukah, the great world re-dedication, Then the war was but the necessary struggle to crush the Syrian hosts of darkness before the temple of humanity could be re-dedicated, before the altars which had been defiled, before the halls of the temple that had been tainted by the pollution of selfishness, could be cleansed, before the lights that had been quenched and darkened in the halls of humanity could be re-kindled. When looked upon from its present purposes and motives, then these men who are struggling and dying, are not blind, foolish victims of a blind, foolish passion but they are the veritable Maccabees who are building the new Jerusalem of America, Jerusalem, the city of peace, and the men and women who bleed and weep, are watering by their blood and their tears, - watering the waste places of the world and they are the husbandmen of the new day. The hand of God has written upon the face of the world "Weighed, weighed and found wanting". This age must die, this day must pass, this civilization must be destroyed and before our very eyes it is cracking, it is crumbling, it is dying, but even as the old day is just now passing in blood and fire, the dawn of the new day is breaking, the dawn of peace, the dawn of promise, the dawn of glory, Even at this hour, which to me is perhaps the darkest hour of the war, even at this hour, when the ghastliest, most depressing of thots comes to the mind of one who loves his country deeply, even at this hour, millions of hands are magically transforming the world, are magically transforming the tears into jewels for a crown for tomorrow, are blending the sobs and bitter words into a profoundly soft and sweet music of a redeemed humanity. A legend tells that when the Maccabees entered the Temple of Jerusalem, they found eight spears and taking the spears and placing tapers upon each spear, they turned them into torches and illumined the temple. I believe that this is symbolic of the new Chanukah, the re-dedication of world that is coming. When

the alarm of war is stilled and the hue and cry dies away, we shall take each threatening spear and turn it into a torch, we shall take the sword and turn it into a **plowshare** and each knife into a pruning hook. The day will come, it may be far distant, but blessed be he that waits and hopes for the breaking of the dawn. Until that day comes, we can but hold aloft the banner of the Maccabees, upon which was inscribed "He who is for the Lord, come to me, he who is for the Lord come to me," for I believe, in the depth of my soul, that the new motives be kept constantly before our minds' eye. If we do not lose ourselves in the labyrinth of needless hate and rancor, if we remain true to our vision that this war is in truth/^{the} war of God, the war of **humanity** --it is the last great struggle of a long-suffering world to reach the **land** of promise, of brotherhood and peace, so - to the men that fight and suffer and to the men and women ~~xxx~~ who remain behind, let this Chanukah festival of re-dedication, breathing the spirit of life and freedom, bring a message of cheer and comfort. They are the fighting people of the Lord, even as the Maccabees of old fought, (people of the Lord) even as the Maccabees of old, overcame enormous obstacles and succeeded in dedicating the new house of God, so we hope and pray, will the noble, brave Maccabees of today succeed in re-dedicating the house of God which is the world of men. Amen.