



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Memorial Day Address, 1920.



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~~flesh so that an idea may emerge triumphant, that~~  
~~is God's truest evidence that the soul is supreme~~  
~~and firmly in the lives of men. And nobleness comes~~  
Then, as the slain soldier-poet  
sang - "Honor comes back, as a king to earth -- and Nobleness walks  
back into the world, and dignity and grandeur re-  
in our ways again!"  
~~turn to life~~, for we begin to see in the clay man, and  
the earth man, the signs and the imprints of  
divinity. P. 2

One of the most beautiful poems that have  
come out of the great struggle was written by one  
who himself died in the war. It is called, "The  
Gifts of the Dead."

"Blow out, you bugles, over the rich dead!

There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,  
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.  
These laid the world away; poured out the red  
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be

Of work and joy, and that unhopéd serene,

That men call age; and those who would have been,  
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth

Holiness, lacked so long, and Love and Pain.

Honour has come back, as a king to earth,

And paid his subjects with a royal wage;

And Nobleness walks in our ways again;

And we have come into our heritage."

In the early days of the war I more than once  
expressed the thought, which was then perhaps merely



a hope and a prayer of mind<sup>4</sup>, that the awful carnage might reveal to the eyes of men the sanctity and the nobility of human life; that men might learn to revere life, to regard it, even when found in the humblest and lowliest of God's children, as something divine, something that must not be polluted or harmed or rendered ugly in the world.

I said more than once that the war wrote a new epic--the epic of the common man. That the war has shown how the ordinary and the average and the common man--the baker, and the clerk, and the stevedore, and the miner, and farmer lad, men whom you and I would scarce suspect of greatness--will respond to the challenge of the moment, to the urgency of the occasion, in such a sublime and wonderful fashion as to startle us into reverence.

I have maintained that the acts of heroism and bravery, not alone of the few that were singled out for distinction, but of the millions of men who stood there day after day, and week after week, and year after year, who grumbled and carried on, and grumbled and carried on, in spite of the soul-crushing, deadening, wearying monotony of it all,--that these men have shown us what a wonderful thing the human soul is, and how dreadfully cruel and stupid we are when we take these fine souls that are capable of such wonderful emotions and let them lie fallow, un-



Take  
~~And turn to~~ the ideal for which 60,000 <sup>(6)</sup> American  
lads laid down their lives in the last world  
war. They died for peace and democracy. I  
suppose that these words ~~sound~~ <sup>sound</sup> rather  
strange to our ears to-day. There is no very  
little of real peace in the world to-day and  
<sup>very</sup> little of real democracy.-



developed, uncultivated, uninspired.

The gifts of the dead! By the very manner of their dying they have taught us a new reverence for life. And they inspire us, friends, not alone by the manner of their death, but by the things for which they died. I suppose it is a trite thing now to say that these sixty thousand American boys, and these fourteen hundred thousand French boys, and these six hundred thousand British lads, and the innumerable other fine young spirits, died for peace and democracy. I suppose these words ring rather ~~strange in our ears now.~~ And yet it <sup>that</sup> is true that they died for peace and democracy, and they have not died in vain. We are not yet privileged to see with our own eyes the ~~beneficent~~ results of their sacrifices. We are as yet too near the ~~backwash~~ <sup>details and incidents</sup> of the war. ~~the~~ <sup>to dis-</sup>cern its ~~large contours.~~ <sup>large contours.</sup> ~~clouds have not yet lifted, and the storm has not yet cleared the atmosphere,~~ but gains have been <sup>made,</sup> ~~achieved,~~ <sup>vital gains which will tell in the future life</sup> gains that humanity will profit on in the days to come. <sup>of mankind.</sup>

The Civil War did not end slavery. The Civil War did not emancipate the slaves; only in a very narrow and limited sense did the Civil War emancipate the slaves. It will take decades more and generations ~~before~~ before the negro in the United States will receive some sort of political and economic <sup>not to speak of</sup> ~~and~~ social equality in this land. The Civil War just cleared the jungle



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~~prepared~~ and ~~paved~~ the way for <sup>the</sup> slow, patient, heart-breaking, <sup>campaign</sup> ~~laborious labor~~ in behalf of <sup>his real</sup> emancipation. And <sup>similarly</sup> ~~this~~ great war did not establish democracy and did not establish peace, but it cleared the jungle and removed <sup>some</sup> ~~the~~ obstacles and <sup>prepared</sup> ~~paved~~ the way for us, the living, through the coming years, <sup>then</sup> ~~in~~ efforts, ~~in~~ <sup>and</sup> sacrifice, and ~~in~~ struggle, to achieve <sup>real</sup> democracy and peace.

(P. 8)

The world today is at war. The world today is still <sup>sore</sup> ~~sword~~-ridden with kings and petty tyrants and thieving diplomats, and many of the fine hopes which we had entertained during the war have come to naught. The world today, especially the lands of eastern Europe, is in a burning misery such as it has not yet seen. There are ravages of disease and epidemics and starvation and hunger the world over, and tens of thousands are perishing for want of the very elements <sup>any thing</sup> of life.

Two weeks ago Mr. Davidson, who is the chairman of the American Red Cross, made this tragic announcement: "Whatever our attitude towards the League of Nations, or our apprehensions regarding foreign entanglements, I feel it is essential that the people of the United States realize that one of the most terrible tragedies in the history of the human race is being enacted within the broad belt of territory lying between



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the Baltic and the Black and the Adriatic Seas. The reports which come to us make it clear that in these war-ravaged lands civilization is broken down. Disease, bereavement, and suffering are present in practically every household, while food and clothing are insufficient to make life tolerable. Men, women, and children are dying by thousands, and over vast, once civilized areas, there are to be found neither medical appliances nor medical skill sufficient to cope with the devastating plague."

Not, the war has not been an unmixed blessing, and the signing of the armistice in November, 1918, did not usher in the millennium, but it would be untrue to say that the war had been fought in vain, and that the sacrifices of <sup>our men and those of our allies</sup> ~~the millions of men~~ <sup>have</sup> ~~had~~ proved futile. The gains for a freer life, ~~the~~ <sup>gains</sup> for greater democracy, ~~the~~ <sup>gains</sup> for the rights of the submerged and the denied peoples of the earth, and ~~the~~ <sup>gains</sup> for the ultimate establishment of universal peace are real, and will become ~~more real~~, more vital, <sup>and</sup> more visible, as <sup>things go on</sup> ~~life moves on~~. But it remains for us to see that these gains are <sup>conserved and expanded.</sup> ~~given a local habitation and a name~~. It remains for us to take up the torch which <sup>they who died put</sup> ~~was fairly~~ thrown into our hands. It remains for us ~~to be on the alert~~, to see that none of <sup>these hopes</sup> ~~these things~~ for which <sup>these</sup> men gave of their blood is dissipated, and squandered and gambled away in councils <sup>thieving</sup> ~~diplomats~~, or <sup>by</sup> ~~our own~~ indifference and selfishness — <sup>or</sup>



Peace will come. It must come! There  
is the quality of divine inevitableness  
about it. Many more Wilsons will  
perhaps be crucified. Many more  
graves will perhaps mark the sorrowful  
road ~~along which it must pass.~~ ~~which it must traverse.~~  
But Peace, like Freedom, cannot be perma-  
nently denied or indefinitely postponed. It will  
triumph in the end. —

Memorial Day, too, should remind us of our  
duties to this great Republic whose votive  
offering these men were — our duties as  
citizens, as conservers of a great democratic  
tradition. We do not always think of  
these duties. — P. G.



IS OUR NATIONAL LIFE CORRUPT ?

I am humiliated and heartsick not so much <sup>by</sup> for what happened in Washington, <sup>by</sup> for the vast betrayal of public trust, but for the system of government and the political intelligence of the American people which make such conditions possible; for this oil scandal, which seems to have bespattered with suspicion not one or two individuals but whole departments, numerous officials and prominent civilians, and to have laid bare a whole system preying upon democratic government at its very source and fountainhead-- I say, this oil scandal is not the first in our national history, nor, I fear, the last.

One need not catalogue them all--they are all too numerous; but one need but recall the moral lapses in government during the last few years to be staggered not by the incidents but by a condition which makes these incidents possible,-- the Ballinger scandal during the Taft administration, the various tariff scandals, the successive and successful appropriations of public lands by railway interests, the Alaskan coal field grab, the war profiteering, the Veteran Bureau scandals,-- all within the last few years, and all the work not of insignificant political figures or of <sup>mediocre</sup> foreigners, but of important men representing the highest type of Nordic <sup>stock generally acknowledged by historians to be the best on earth!</sup>

*We are too engrossed in our private pursuits.*  
We are too busy making money to think of government. The only time we do think of government is when we have hard times, (~~and then for some unknown reason we blame the government in Washington for the hard times, and we think~~ and when our taxes are too irksome and excessive; at all other times we are content to let government alone. We resent government interference in our affairs, and ~~we~~ we are content not to interfere with the affairs of ~~the~~ government. We vote, if we vote at all, by parties, seldom stopping to reflect that neither of the political parties now has <sup>a distinctive program differentiating it from the other.</sup> the slightest reason for existence.

So that the high privilege and the grave responsibility of ruling this greatest republic on earth, of guarding and guiding the lives of a hundred and ten millions of people, are left in the hands of the professional politicians, the men who are

*sometimes*



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~~office~~ <sup>men</sup> ~~men~~ in ~~the work~~ not for public service but for private gain—<sup>who</sup> ~~men~~ most often are mediocrities, <sup>quite</sup> ordinary persons who have not succeeded very well in their own chosen ~~professions or~~ vocations, and ~~we~~ have entered politics for the money that is in it, or the influence that is in it.

These democratic institutions under which we lived were purchased <sup>by</sup> in blood and in sacrifice, and were handed down to us and entrusted into our keeping. The democratic experiment is such an uncertain one, so tenuous, so delicate, that only the loyalty of the finest minds and the truest hearts ~~of democracy~~ can keep it from utter failure and disaster. A monarchy, with all its failings, succeeds, nevertheless, very often in giving rise to a noble tradition of public service in a few noble families, where the art of government is cultivated, where political sagacity and administrative wisdom are cultivated and handed down as a rich heritage from one generation to another. Democracy has no such traditional excellencies and merits, no such noble families to carry on the work of government.

Democracy must call continuously day by day upon the mind <sup>and</sup> the soul of the people; and if the intelligence of a democracy shuns government, and if the people living under a democracy are indifferent to ~~the democratic~~ government, except as it becomes dramatic and spectacular, or except as it touches their stomachs and their purses, then democracy must inevitably fall into the hands of the marauders, <sup>of</sup> the betrayers and the schemers of the land.

We have, somehow, blandly assumed that the democratic form of government is the most perfect form in the world. It may be, but we certainly have not yet established that fact. Democracy is certainly not as efficient, <sup>as</sup> competent, as aristocratic forms of government. Democracy has certainly not yet produced a superior type of legislator or administrator, or a superior type of judiciary. On the contrary, it seems as if democracy is reducing ~~the~~ standards of government to the low level of general mediocrity and incompetence.



and in secret sessions.

You men, especially you young men, who fought in the war, who have had that wonderful experience that few men have in their lifetime, must carry on the work. You men of knowledge and men of vision must carry on the great work, and you must bring to it a spirit of great love.

Ah, men and women, this torn and tortured world of ours needs today more than it needs food, a little love. This torn world of charred farms and ruined hearths, of desolation and starvation, of hates, and passions, and feuds, and grudges, this world that for five years was steeped in a veritable cesspool of hate, needs more than it needs anything else in the world the balm of reconciliation, the balm of real, human brotherhood.

The day of retribution and vindication is past. The day of universal sympathy and reconciliation and mutual concession and forgiveness must now come in. It is sometimes necessary to crush a foe; it is sometimes necessary to incapacitate an enemy and render him incapable of further harm. It is sometimes even necessary to punish sin and transgression, but it is never, never necessary or becoming or worthy to hate. And only as we take, in the tasks of tomorrow, a spirit of love, of kindness, of forgiveness, of helpfulness,



~~Democracy seems to pull down, to the low level of the average and the ordinary and the commonplace; it seems to be stifling excellence and superior ability.~~

Now, I believe that democracy can make for excellence, that excellence and democracy are not incompatible. A form of government which can give rise to a Lincoln, and a Roosevelt, and a Wilson, is not arid ground for superior men. But democracy can do nothing of itself. Democracy, after all, is only an idea, a method. It is not a living thing. It cannot itself give birth to superior men. The people, living within this democratic system, alone can express the idea by employing the method. If we fail, democracy remains an irrelevant abstraction, dead--signifying nothing.





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will the world be able to emerge out of the terrible  
chasm that the war has brought upon it.

May this Memorial Day bring to us the holy  
resolve to profit by the death of the heroes ~~and~~  
~~the~~ ~~heroes~~, by the manner of their death, and by  
the things for which they died. Let us gain a new  
consecration and a new devotion for the great tasks

of tomorrow. *the establishment of freedom and  
peace, <sup>in the world</sup> and the preservation of the highest  
ideals of our nation in the midst  
of a changing ~~and~~ ~~evolving~~ world,*

