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Europe Revisited - Impressions of 1920 and My Earlier
Impressions of 1918 and 1919, 1920.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON
"EUROPE REVISITED---IMPRESSIONS OF 1920,
AND MY EARLIER IMPRESSIONS OF 1918 AND
1919," AT THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,
OCTOBER 10, 1920, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

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When one visits Europe in 1920 and returns to the United States, one carries back with him certain vital facts and certain great convictions; and of some of these facts and convictions I will speak this morning.

One of the pleasant and encouraging facts that one brings back with him from abroad is this: the remarkable recuperative power of our present day civilization. ✓ I need not repeat a platitude so often repeated--that at no time in the history of mankind has a storm of such intensity swept over the world as ^{that} during the past five years; a hurricane that rocked the very foundations of society.

I need not tell you that this past war, for the vastness of its destructive power, for the awfulness of its slaughter, for the magnitude of its disorganization, was unprecedented in the annals of humanity. Two-thirds of the world were engaged in it; ten millions, (I understand) were destroyed; two hundred billions of dollars, representing so much of human labor and achievement, were consumed. . Practically all the customary pursuits of men

were halted, altered and redirected into other channels. It seemed as though everything was suspended, confused, destroyed; and many of us, in the darker moments of the war, in a spirit of pessimism, said, "~~Why~~ ^{Assyria & Babylon} Our civilization is about to sink into the abyss of ruin, of annihilation, even as the civilizations ^{here} of Greece and Rome in the ancient days." And yet in 1920, scarcely two years after this terrible holocaust, we see a Europe which, though not entirely recovered, is most remarkably on the way to a complete recovery and restoration.

In England one can scarcely ^{see} ~~know~~ the effects of the past war. Business is ^{active} ~~prosperous~~; men are at work; industry and commerce are developing rapidly. Men have quickly returned to the customary and habitual pursuits and practices which prevailed in the days before the war. Of course, there are irritating problems; there are many vexations which have been bequeathed by the war,--a terrific national debt, which necessitates heavy taxation; a great deal of industrial unrest,--all the friction that comes as a result of a new readjustment. But civilization is not dead in England!

In France, too, the normal is ^{life returning} ~~coming back~~. (France is returning to a normal status.) Of course, ~~it~~ ^{it} suffered most during the war, and consequently the return to a normal condition is slower in France than in England. And yet the fields in France are tilled, and the factories are at work; the men are industriously

engaged in their occupations. And the French are just as vitally, and earnestly, and whole-heartedly concerned with art and literature and science as they were in the days before the war.

Belgium, of course, as you know, was the first nation in Europe to recover. Italy, in spite of these critical manifestations of industrial unrest, is slowly but surely emerging into a ^{firm} ~~steady~~, progressive career. A good deal of the unrest in Italy is due to the lack of raw material. When that is ~~somehow~~ adjusted, Italy will quickly resume ^{her} ~~its~~ former position ^{as} ~~of~~ a dependable, civilizing and civilized agency in the concert of European nations.

Germany is slowly, tortuously, but nevertheless, to my mind, surely coming out of the daze of disillusion into the cold reality of the new day and the new adjustment that she faces. The intelligence, the sanity, the practical mind of the German people, are gaining mastery over the former spirit of pique and resentment and depression, and if the Allies do not unnecessarily provoke a spirit of chaos and rebellion in Germany, before many years Germany will become a ^{stable} ~~steady~~ and progressive republic in Europe.

It is only in eastern Europe where war has been artificially stimulated, and where a ^{an unfortunate} ~~vicious and stupid~~ peace treaty has translated all the horrors of war into still greater horrors of peace, that chaos still reigns.

The world, to my mind, ^{on the whole} is convalescing rapidly and well. (That is perhaps due to the fact that the more highly civilized a people or a generation is, the quicker is its recovery from catastrophe; just as the stronger the individual is, the quicker is his recovery from disease. I think it is perhaps also due to this fact: that civilization today is more extensive and more democratic than it was in the ancient days. There are many more reservoirs of strength from which to draw when the vitality of one source is exhausted. In the ancient days civilization was concentrated in one locality, and there among a certain class, and when disaster overtook that locality or that class, that civilization perished.

Hellenic civilization was limited to Hellen^{es}, to Greece, to the Ionian littoral; Roman civilization was practically confined to the Mediterranean coast lands; and when great invasions took place and calamity ensued, those civilizations, for all intents and purposes, disappeared, for they had no great reservoirs of strength to draw from.

But our present day civilization, fortunately, is more extensive geographically, and more extensive as far as the people and the masses themselves are concerned; so that when one source is afflicted, there are other sources from which to draw. The tree of civilization has so many more roots to draw strength and vitality from.

--so many more sources; and that is why, to my mind, our European civilization has recovered so magnificently and in such quick time from the terrible calamity of the Great War. And that is an encouraging fact. It should also be a helpful and stimulating fact to know now that we are not going to wreck and ruin; it should enable us to be a little more patient and tolerant and deliberative.

When a house is on fire people do not tolerate men who stand by and suggest renovations and refittings, but when the house is not in danger suggestions for renovations and remodeling and refitting are decidedly in order and should be welcomed. Now, our civilization is not on the brink of ruin and the house is not on fire, and suggestions for amelioration, reforms and improvement should not and ought not to be made in that spirit of petulance and impatience and intolerance with which they were made in the past few years. We are to look a bit more to our manners henceforth, to our speech; to bring back a bit of that culture and refinement into our lives, that spirit of tolerance which is the chief characteristic of culture in a civilization.

That, to my mind, is the first fact that impresses itself upon a visitor to Europe in 1920--the remarkable restorative or recuperative power of our modern civilization.

The second fact is this: the slow but sure revival of liberalism in Europe among the peoples of

Europe--not among the governments of Europe. The governments of Europe are loath to give up the almost unlimited powers that were conceded to them during the days of the war. They would still like to control public opinion through a good and docile press. They also like to feel that the people are behind them in all their international maneuverings and schemings. They would still like the power to crush ruthlessly any criticism of their policies and their actions. The governments of Europe are not yet pervaded with any spirit of liberalism; but the peoples are.

When I visited Europe a year ago, in 1919, the people were still laboring under the influence of organized government propaganda, of an artificially stimulated patriotism or chauvenism. A year ago the peoples of Europe were still laboring under the fog and the weariness of war; in one place under the intoxication of victory, and in the other place under the dejection and depression of defeat.

Now, those conditions are not conducive to the growth of liberalism, but in 1920 the peoples of Europe seem to be emerging from that condition. In 1920 one can see that, in spite of the many cross-currents on the surface of European life, deep down in the channels the stream of liberalism is running swift and smooth, and gaining momentum as it moves on.

The English are now the first to recover that

spirit of independence, with a freer expression of free opinion than any other people in Europe. That is, of course, their pride and their characteristic. I need ~~not~~ recount but one story which, to my mind, brought out in bold relief this spirit of freedom, of independence of thinking that the Englishman has regained and that the Englishman asserts today. I am not holding this up as a good example, to be imitated and modeled after in the United States, but this is illustrative of the temper of present day England.

I attended a great meeting one Sunday evening in London, addressed by the labor delegation to Russia. It was a radical gathering of the extreme sort. All the old war horses of English radicalism were there--Bonfield, Williams, Purcell, and that old buzzing wasp of English politics, Ben Turner. They were all there in full force and in full regalia. I was anxious to see how Englishmen speak a year after the war; and I was astounded. Such freedom, such license, even in England, one did not expect to meet with!

This was a vast gathering of almost 15,000 people, and the meeting was opened with the singing of "The Red Flag." A gentleman arose and said, "The time has now clearly arrived for us to destroy the English government." Another gentleman arose and said, "The soviet form of government is triumphant in Russia. Let us prepare for it here in England." And a third arose

and said, "Force! Why, we have no objection to using force when the occasion presents itself!" And so speaker after speaker arose and expressed, to my mind, some of the most vicious doctrines.

A member of Parliament was sitting alongside of me, and I was frequently compelled to smile when I thought of home and the conditions in the United States; and he asked me just why I smiled, and I told him that things were so different at home. This member of Parliament was an old Tory, one of the worst reactionaries in the English Parliament. He said, "You are a young people; you are not accustomed to freedom; you are still afraid of it. We here have had it so long that we are not actually afraid of it. What you hear this afternoon on the platform you can hear in Hyde Park from fifteen platforms, from fifteen lunatics every day in London.

English labor is quickly making itself felt in English life. I was in London during that critical time, you will recall, when the Russians were marching on to Warsaw. The English government was determined that the Russians should not get into Warsaw, and the English government was on the verge of declaring war on Russia, in spite of the fact that it had previously made overtures to Russia to send delegates to London. Within twenty-four hours every labor union in England was notified that a council of action had been formed, comprised of the heads of all the national labor trades

unions in England, and that this council of action would be in daily session during this critical time and during the period of negotiations, and that if the English government was determined to drive England into another imperialistic war, English labor would veto that decision.

That is a very dangerous precedent, but English labor is dead tired of war, of any war, of all wars; and English labor is determined to never again put its destiny into the hands of a few unscrupulous diplomats and politicians to be played with at will.

Liberalism in France, my friends, is making rapid progress, in spite of the fact that the government of France is determined to ruin itself in new imperialistic adventures in many parts of the world. In Italy liberalism has actually invaded the Foreign Office and the government service. In Germany liberalism is making slow headway against an organized reaction on the part of those who desire to bring back the ancient royalties, and the ancient prerogatives, and the ancient aristocracies that have been discredited.

In Russia liberalism, somehow, is being confused with a form of government that is the direct opposite of liberalism in thought, in spirit and in action; but it is making headway.

After the terrible reaction that set in following the war, the peoples of Europe are finding themselves again, and are realizing that the hope and the salvation

of Europe lie in a broad, tolerant spirit of legitimate progress and development. They have thrown themselves, heart and soul, into the work. It is a very interesting fact to note that of the twenty-eight countries where today women have the vote, twenty-two of these countries were granted this right in the six years of war between 1914 and 1920. Of course, it is a slow progress, due, to my mind, to two facts: first, to the innate disinclination of human beings to know the truth and to live by the truth, and, secondly, to an organized propaganda on the part of the privileged classes who do not wish the truth to be known in order that it may not be accepted.

Those of you who have interested yourselves during the past few years in the new subject of psychoanalysis perhaps know that psychoanalysts make a great deal of this almost instinctive resistance and suppression of unpleasant and unpalatable truths that exist in the psychic life of man. I think it was Freud who said that men hate and fight against the acceptance of any fact that would outrage their native self-love, that would in any way destroy their peace of mind, or their comfort, or their habitual customs. I think it was the same master mind, Freud, who said that the two great truths that have revolutionized life have been fought viciously and desperately by men, consciously or unconsciously.

Man fought the truth, in the first place, that this earth was not the center of the universe, that it

was only a speck in a limitless space. That meant that man was not of such terrible importance in the plan of creation. That was an outrage of human self-love, and, if you remember the history of this development, man bitterly fought the acceptance of this fact; and when biologic research revealed the fact that man was not the choice creation, an act of special creation, but that man was a development out of the animal kingdom, that man retains many of the animal instincts, mankind fought that truth tooth and nail, and Darwin and Wallace and their followers experienced this organized hostility on the part of the conscience of the world against the acceptance of these new truths.

Now, it is so with the truths today, with all
-kind
truths,--man does not wish to know the truth. It wishes to obtain fictions, myths, semi-logical things that would justify it in its conduct, something that would explain its conduct; and its conduct is the result not of logic, but an outspringing expression of those latent, deep-seated, unconscious emotions, and sentiments, and passions, and self-interest and self-love. So that progress of any kind will have to be slow and will have to fight its way against this instinct of man to resist innovation, this instinct to resist anything that would necessitate a surrendering of comfortably entertained notions; that would necessitate the pain and the friction of readjustment. This we must constantly keep in mind: men do not

wish to know the truth; they must be made to accept it.

The second fact that militates against the quick and rapid spread of progress in the world is organized propaganda. What is propaganda? It is education aimed not at the attainment of truth, but at the attainment of a certain, definite, highly desirable goal. Propaganda aims to make an object universally desirable by exaggerating its virtues, by discounting its vices, and by discrediting those who oppose it.

The philosophy of propaganda is the philosophy of the Jesuits--the aim justifies the means. Given a desirable moral end, assuming that it is desirable or moral, that means lying, falsehood, exaggerations of all kinds, excitations, agitations, stimulating the worst passions of men; all else is legitimate and desirable, for the end justifies the means.

Now, the propaganda works in a very subtle way. It camouflages itself; it does not say that it is propaganda. It first drops certain unconfirmed and unauthorized rumors; it works through popular rumor as much as through the press and through books and through the lecture platform; and after a while these rumors begin to work on the critical faculty of men and women. These rumors, unconfirmed though they are, sooner or later become sort of a background in the minds of men and women, a sort of apperceptive lobby, so that all future information is not only accepted without question

but is invited and looked for. The propagandists after a while become more brazen and make more affirmative statements, and after a while they have led you to the point of riot, of massacre, of war, of hate, whatever their one object may have been.

Now, Europe during the war had a propaganda mind that worked subtly and invidiously, but constantly all the time, so that its reason, its critical, analytical faculty was dulled, and imagination, and passion, and desire held sway over the actions of men. Europe is fast emerging out of that propaganda mind; it no longer takes all that the organized propagandists would like to feed it. It is only in the United States where we somehow still take these things as they are given to us, as they had been given to us during the war.

Those, then, are two facts that one brings back with him from Europe--first, the recuperative power of civilization, and, secondly, the revival of liberal thought in Europe. There is still a third, and I shall be through. One carries back with him from Europe a confirmed feeling of the almost absolute futility of war. The gains which the world can credit as a result of the past war are not justified by the sacrifices which have been made. The European governments, my friends, have learned practically nothing as a result of this war.

In Central Europe, from tip to toe, there is not a spot of soundness; there is not a point that is not

one of irritation. They are at any moment ready to hurl themselves at one another, throughout Central Europe, and claw at their very vitals. The Foreign Offices of Europe are still as busily engaged in scheming, in plotting, in attempts to cut the throat of their nearest neighbor, as they were before the war. This last and greatest crime of the past few years, the Russo-Polish war, was a manipulation, a contrivance of a few Foreign Offices of Europe, and the misery and the suffering and the starvation that it brought to millions of people are not even told of.

And now that the Poles and the Russians have finally agreed to sign an armistice, France,--the France that we love so much, the cradle of human liberty,--is now turning to General Wrangel in the south of Russia, whom it has recognized, and, as the Chicago Daily News aptly remarks, "whom it has recognized while he was still recognizable." There is no morality, there is no idealism, there is no spirit of truth-seeking, or of brotherhood in the Foreign Offices of Europe, as a result of the war. It seems that they are like the Bourbons--they never forget anything and they never learn anything; and only the fate of the Bourbons will restore to Europe control of its own destiny.

In 1918, in the days of the war, I found in Europe a spirit of idealism. I saw all about evidences of great sacrifices, of great devotion; I saw millions of

men embraced by the holy fervor and devotion to a great cause; I saw men give up their customary pursuits, their customs, their hobbies, their possessions, their very lives for an ideal which they thought sacred and holy. And that was exhilarating because it revealed the nobility, the dignity, the majesty of human life. That idealism of the war I did not find in Europe in 1920. On the contrary, one finds a spirit of cold cynicism, of disillusionment, especially among those who are controlling the affairs of Europe. Even American idealism has been discredited. I recall that in 1918, as I walked through the streets of the great city of Paris, I saw American soldiers drive by in American trucks, and saw the Parisians line the curbs and remove their caps and throw them into the air with cheers; and tears were streaming from their eyes; there was a feeling of gratitude for a people that came into the war, not for personal gain, not to satisfy any ambition, but simply to serve a great cause, to help the great powers of Europe who were struggling against the terrible foe.

In 1920 one finds few evidences of that spirit of gratitude in Europe. On the contrary, there is criticism and mockery at every turn--in England, in France, in Italy,--everywhere. The English praise the Americans in America--not in England. Please remember that. In the past few months emissaries of England have come here, and in the coming few months more emissaries

will come here to America to tell us how much they think of us. Send them back home and tell them to save these things in England, because the English need it more than we do.

When one thinks of the aftermath of this war, which, to my mind, is even more terrible than the war itself; when one reads that in the city of Vienna alone ninety-eight percent of 300,000 children are underfed; when one reads that there ^{are} in Europe 300,000 orphaned, Jewish children, uncared for, underfed, wandering about in the streets, in the villages, lying on hard boards, stealing, being exploited by all the criminal elements in those cities. And mind you, these are only Jewish children, many of them orphaned by terrible massacres that came along with the celebration of victory in 1918; when one thinks of typhus reaching out and taking its toll in the tens and hundreds of thousands in Galicia, in ~~Eukrania~~ ^{Ukraine}, in Serbia, in Russia, in Poland, in Austria; when one thinks of that tide of hate that has swept over Europe at the end of the war; when one thinks of that canker of anti-Semitism that is now eating the very vitals of Europe; when one thinks of the condition of the Jews in those countries who, before the war, occupied positions of brilliance and influence; when one thinks of the Jews in Hungary, that splendid type of Jew that stood at the very eminence of service, of business, of art, of science, of literature in Hungary, now looked upon as an outcast,

hunted from place to place, mocked and starved; when one reads daily of Red Terrors and White Terrors, of revolutions and counter-revolutions,--ask yourself: Have the gains of the war justified these things?

I feel today--and I have no hesitancy in saying it, because it is said after very long deliberation--that if the world in 1914 knew what the world knows in 1920, and if it were then asked whether it wished to enter the war, it would have given a firm and categorical negative as its answer.

I read a few days ago an article from the pen of that greatest living Frenchman, Anatole France, saying that Europe is sick and that Europe is dying. I am not in full agreement with him. Anatole France makes the statement that the victories of the Allies have been as disastrous as the defeat of the Central Powers. I am not in full agreement with that. I am not, as you have heard, pessimistic about the outcome of conditions in all Europe, but I do know that these gains that we treasure as the result of this war could have been obtained at a less costly figure.

To summarize what I have said this morning, one carries away from Europe, above all else, this all-compelling conviction: that Europe today--and those who have been in Europe during the summer will agree with me--needs above everything else--Peace. It needs a real peace; it needs a time in which to steady its nerves;

it needs a time in which to clear its mind of the effects of intoxication brought about by the war. And any man--and I say this with deep conviction--that today would stir up strife and war in Europe against any people; any man today who would stir up war against Russia, or any man in Russia who would stir up war against other nations in Europe,--that man is hostile to the best interests of Europe and of humanity, because Europe needs peace and quiet, and a chance to take hold of itself and make straight the crooked ways, to correct the abuses, to feed its starving population, to check the spread of devastating epidemic diseases.

It needs peace and it needs help--philanthropic help, financial help; it needs food to feed its starving millions in eastern Europe; and, lastly, it needs a new heart, even as it has now gained a new body. That new heart will not be vouchsafed to Europe unless the people who are vitally concerned bring to Europe a new spirit and a new consecrated devotion,--the workers, the toilers of the world; and by that I mean not only the men who work with their brawn but the men who work with their brain--the teacher, the professor, the doctor, the man of business, the engineer, as well as the unskilled laborer. These are the men who hate war, the men who pay the bill for every war, or for every international crime.

These men, the workers of the world, the toilers in society, must take the reins of government into their

own hands, out of the hands of professional schemers and traffickers in human rights and privileges, and prepare the way for a rejuvenated, and rehabilitated, and reconstructed Europe, a Europe where the blessed song of children's voices will yet again be heard, mingled with the song of men at work and the song of women in their homes; a Europe dedicated to the new spirit; a Europe bent upon the task of knitting anew the severed links of our broken brotherhood. And in this task America will be of great service. America must stop meddling in European affairs. America must resume its majestic position as the great idealist of the world; it must give of itself in all that it has--not munitions, not armaments, to instigate other wars, but when they want our spirit of democracy, when they want our spirit of a square deal, when they want our spirit of peace and the love of justice and righteousness, then we shall give and give it unto them freely and generously; but not until then.

We must not become a partner to a scheme of partitioning Europe; we must not join a band of unscrupulous imperialists in perpetuating themselves and in saddling themselves upon the back of Europe. We must stand firmly for principles, and give only when those principles are accepted.

Europe is facing a new day, friends. Many problems, many difficulties, many obstacles are in its

way; but Europe will emerge. We are not faced with the Dark Ages. We are faced with a great hope for all the children of the pepples of the earth, who will give of themselves to that great future.

