



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel
148

Box
52

Folder
152

Dr. Max Nordau, 1923.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER,

SUBJECT: DR. MAX NORDAU.

AT THE TEMPLE - SUNDAY MORNING,

FEBRUARY 18, 1923, CLEVELAND, O.

M... 1927

On the 22nd day of ~~last month~~ there died in the city of Paris, in comparative poverty, though not in obscurity, a man who is destined to live long in the grateful memory of his own people and that of the entire world--Dr. Max Nordau.

In the death of Dr. Nordau there passed away a prophet who summoned men and nations to repentance, and warned them of impending doom; and in his death there passed away a champion of Israel, a staunch defender of his people--a modern Maccabee, who heralded and labored for the rebirth of his people.

Dr. Max Nordau belonged to the giant spirits of the human race. In him a brilliant mentality, an encyclopedic mind, a linguistic gift, a literary endowment, a brilliant wit, a courtly manner, were wedded to a high moral passion and a fine idealism and a vast courage, that put Dr. Max Nordau in the front ranks of the great leaders of mankind.

I called him an iconoclast. Perhaps I should call him a prophetic iconoclast. Dr. Nordau was an iconoclast; he shattered idols--which seems to be the task providentially assigned to all the great prophets of the human race, and more especially to the prophets of Israel from the days of Abraham to this day. He shattered these idols furiously and in high passion, and yet not wilfully nor petulantly.

Dr. Max Nordau's intellect was not a destructive

intellect; he was not merely a rebel, a disgruntled, discontented, fretful personality; he was raging and storming against all the social values and all the social conventions and all the institutions of mankind. He was not a "bull in the china shop"; he was a prophet; he knew that the mission of the prophet was as Jeremiah conceived of it--"first, to break and to shatter and to destroy the old, and then to rebuild and to replan."

He shattered these idols because he wished to enthrone true idols. He hated above all sham and fraud and hypocrisy, whether it be the sham and the fraud of ancient institutions and ancient movements, or the sham and the fraud of new institutions and new movements. He hated the hypocrisy of monarchy even as he hated the hypocrisy of democracy. All that glittered, that was not real, all that was pretense, all that was fraud, all that was not relevant to a fundamental, underlying truth, that did not emanate from something that was essentially real and sound and sane and moral--that Mordau hated and viciously, bitterly attacked.

But just as he was an iconoclast he also was a builder. The dynamics of his soul were not exhausted in destructiveness; he had much left for constructive work. He was the physician--as in very truth by profession he was a physician--he diagnosed the malady without any reference to the likes and the dislikes and the prejudices of the patient; and once having diagnosed the malady he proceeded to suggest the remedy, the cure, if a cure were possible.

He was a builder, and a very orthodox one. People are prone to think of Nordau as a radical. In the modern connotation and significance of the term, Nordau was an extreme orthodox in his views; he based his views on those ancient foundations of the ancient wisdom upon which the prophets of antiquity based their convictions. And Dr. Nordau shared the prophet's fate, and more especially the fate of a Jewish prophet; he was persecuted during his lifetime. All these groups and classes and individuals whom he so vehemently attacked and ruthlessly exposed, turned against him and embittered his life. His life was passed in storm and in struggle, and it ended, almost tragically, during the war.

Dr. Nordau, though an Austrian subject, lived in France for over thirty years. He loved France; he loved the sweet temperament and the mellow culture of France. He was Franco-German; he denounced the treachery of victorious Germany in taking Alsace-Lorraine from France. But during the war these groups and these peoples, these reactionary elements whom Nordau attacked turned against him, and, influential as they were in the circles of the government, they succeeded in having Dr. Nordau humiliated. First, he was imprisoned, and then he was exiled, and then his property, the accumulations of a life time, the little bit that he had gathered together, hoping to leave it to his wife and his daughter, was confiscated by the French government, and, up to this day, not yet returned; and Dr. Nordau experienced the tragedy of

the Wandering Jew in the twilight hours of his life, and he died in a little room on the fifth floor of a humble dwelling-place in Paris--a poor man but not an obscure nor a forgotten man.

Dr. Max Nordau was Jew in yet another sense; he was the child of two cultures and two civilizations, which, in a sense, is the tragedy of Jewish life. He was born of orthodox Jewish parents. His father was a rabbi, and in the early days of his life he was imbued and saturated with the spirit of orthodox Jewry, with all its romance and all its poetry, and the learning of his people, and then in youth and in manhood he went out into the world, entered the universities of Europe and came in contact with a new civilization and a new culture and a new environment, totally different from, and in many ways hostile to, that civilization in which he was reared as a child, and he tried and he struggled throughout his days to effect (as so many of his try to do) a synthesis of these two cultures and these two civilizations. So that there is much that is almost anomalous, much that is difficult to understand, much that is contradictory, apparently, in the life of Nordau.

For example: Nordau was an irreligious man; Nordau was an anti-religious man; Nordau denied God, Nordau denied the soul, Nordau denied immortality, Nordau scoffed at religious customs and religious practices, and when he died a talis was wrapped about his body, and the kaddish was pronounced by the Chief Rabbi of France at his grave at his

request.

Nordau was an internationalist, as so many of our brilliant minds were during the past generation in Europe. He was a cosmopolitan. His ideal was, as he called it, the solidarity of the human race. He hated national chauvinism, and he hated even the spirit of nationalism, which led to national prejudices and hate and rivalries and war. He was a broad, free, untrammelled spirit, a citizen of the world; and yet Nordau was the founder of the Zionist movement, together with Dr. Theodore Herzl. Nordau became the eloquent spokesman of Jewish Nationalism; and Nordau was a passionate Jewish Nationalist.

Very strange--nearly anomalous; very contradictory; and yet very human, isn't it? For, after all, free as the spirit of man might wish to roam, and, in the early days of our youth, does roam, after a while our wings become tired and we would like to have a place upon which we can lie--a resting place. We can speak of the human race and the solidarity of the human race and the love of our fellowmen, but, after all, there is the pull and the tug of our own, our own people, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone; who know us, who understand us, who can sympathize; and that tug and that pull brought Nordau back to his people.

And after all, a man may have an intellect that is absolutely emancipated from all religious convention and from all religious convictions, and yet the longing soul remains unsatisfied and hungry and thirsty. A starved soul

cannot be fed by a brilliant intellect, and Nordau craved for the poetry and the beauty and the romanticism and the soul food of his youth, and in his later life came back to them.

I want to speak this morning of Dr. Nordau, first, as the thinker, the philosopher; the man whose voice shook Europe and startled the peoples of the earth; and then of Nordau, the Jew.

Dr. Nordau's philosophy is embodied in a trilogy of books--the first, "Conventional Lies of our Civilization," published in 1883; the second one, "Paradoxes," published two years later; and the third, "Degeneration," published thirty years ago, in 1893.

There are two main theses in the thought of Dr. Nordau, and only two; and to express these two fundamental convictions and to call dramatically the attention of the world to all their implications, Nordau wrote this trinity. His first thesis was this: that our present day civilization is crumbling--crumbling like the civilization of the ancient Romans before the invasion of the barbarians, and crumbling because of an all-pervading, destructive pessimism, which pessimism is evidenced in all departments of life--in art, in literature, in philosophy, in religion; which pessimism was caused by this one fact: that there is today a rift, a discrepancy, an incongruity between the things we do and the things we believe in; between the institutions in which we live and our opinions concerning these institutions. There is this tragic disharmony between theory and practice in every

department] in every sphere of civilization today. In other words, says Dr. Nordau, we live consistently a lie.

We no longer believe in the things which we do out of practice, out of convenience, and because of compulsion; we no longer believe in the basis of our political life; we no longer believe in the basis of our religious life; we no longer believe in the basis of our economic life; we no longer believe in the basis of our social life. And yet we keep on living these things as though their bases were still true and as though we still believed in them.

Dr. Nordau says:

"This is the tragic side of our contemporaneous civilization, that the ancient institutions have no longer the courage and self-confidence to maintain their positions before mankind, in the stiff and unyielding forms in which alone they are true to logic and history, repeating the Jesuits' motto: 'As we are or not at all.' They attempt an impossible compromise between their premises and the convictions of modern times; they make concessions to the latter, and allow themselves to be penetrated by intellectual elements foreign to their constitution, and sure to disintegrate it. The new ideas to which they are trying to conform themselves are in direct opposition to every one of their fundamental principles, so that they resemble a book containing on the same page some ancient fable with foot-notes criticising, ridiculing and abusing it in every possible way. In this shape these institutions, denying and parodying their true character, seem objects of ridicule and scorn to cultivated

minds, and even to the uncultivated, sources of annoyance and painful perplexity."

The era of science--which is this era--claims Nordau, has destroyed man's faith in these institutions; and yet these institutions continue. With what result? With the result that character is destroyed. What is character? Character is an integration, a unity, of self; character is brought about by an individuality possessing certain few, simple, dominant convictions which are true to itself, which are sufficient to guide and influence and determine it. A man has character when he has what we call principle; when he has in his life a unified, harmonizing, ingrowing conviction.

Now we are in a European civilization; convictions have been destroyed; faith has been undermined; character has been destroyed. And where there is no character, says Dr. Nordau, degeneration must set in, as it is setting in (so he claims) to destroy civilization.

He goes into great detail to prove his thesis. On these conventional lies of our civilization he has five chapters; one called "The Lie of Religion," another called "The Lie of a Monarchy," a third called "The Political Lie," the fourth called "The Economic Lie," and the fifth called "The Matrimonial Lie."

Perhaps of these five his first chapter, the Lie of Religion, is the least constructive and the least helpful to us today. Perhaps in his day, forty years ago, when the

book was written, there was enough of dynamite in this chapter to have set man to thinking, to have shaped them. But as we read it today, the chapter seems rather naive--perhaps we might say antiquated. Nordau lived during the period when the theory of evolution had first burst upon mankind, but which theory had not yet been understood in its deeper significance. The theory of evolution at the time was accepted as dogma, as a finality; and its implications were clear: nature was ruled by blind, unchanging forces, controlled by constant and unyielding laws; nature was not possessed of a will power or an intelligence from within; that these laws dethroned God, dethroned the soul, dethroned religion.

And Nordau accepted all these naive and early conceptions concerning the theory of evolution. He calls religion "a physical relic of the childhood of the human race." At best it is a functional weakness of mankind. Religion is based on fear; God is the creation of that tendency in man to anthropomorphize, to place a will-power, a conscious will-power, a somebody, back of every natural phenomenon; the soul is an illusion; immortality is merely an expression of man's disinclination to die, of man's inability to conceive of himself annihilation; religion is a figment of man's imagination.

And Nordau presents a religion of his own which men ought to accept. In place of God the ideal of solidarity of the human race; in place of the church the lecture hall and

assembly room, and in place of the ritual, the ballot.

Nordau was even more vehement in his denunciation of religious forms than of the content of religion.

He said: "I can understand why some people are religious: there is a sentimental yearning for it. Well and good. But for people today to believe in religious forms and in religious ceremonies, in churches, in rituals, in a Bible, in priests and dogmas, that is a lie--a living lie."

He had a very wrong estimate of the Bible, did Dr. Nordau. He recanted in later life. He said: "The morality of the Bible is revolting; the concept of the universe in the Bible is childish; its literature, its second-rate ceremonies, are coarse; their origin is in barbarism; they are Asiatic or African. They have no meaning for people today."

Of course it is too late in the day to begin a refutation of these contentions. Suffice it to say that we know now that the theory of evolution, at least, does not dethrone God; that science does not prove the non-existence of God or of the human soul; that it does not deny immortality. Suffice it to say that we know now that the lecture hall can never take the place of the church, and the ballot box of the church ritual. Suffice it now to say that the origin of things does not determine the value of things. Because a ceremony was begun ten thousand years ago in the jungle life and in the jungle instincts and in the jungle needs of the human race, it does not necessarily follow that that ceremony

or that practice or that rite or that custom no longer has value and relevancy for us today.

It is not what the origin or the beginnings of a thing are; it is what the thing itself means for us--how it reaches our soul, how it touches the mainsprings of our emotions, what function it has in our life today. You might as well look with disfavor and contempt upon a symphony of Beethoven because, forsooth, music began with the beating of a tom-tom in some hut or cave of a primitive savage. You might hold Shakespeare in contempt because, forsooth, literature began in some rhythmic sing-song of a battle hymn of savages; you might look with contempt upon a magnificent cathedral because the first architectonics of the human race were miserable huts of reeds and rushes and twigs.

It is not what the beginning of a thing is that counts: it is what it has come to be. And civilization is just this: the real interpretation which every age puts upon things which, somehow, seem to be, in their essence, at least, eternal.

There is not very much, I say, that is constructive in Dr. Nordan's attitude and opinion concerning religion, and I fear me that he most felt that in his declining years. But there is much more of meat in his second chapter on the lie of monarchy and aristocracy. There all that brilliant wit of Nordan (which I had the good fortune of seeing in action a few years ago in London), all his gift of satire, his destructive satire, comes into play. And that chapter won

for him the undying hostility of all these classes.

Of course he hates monarchy, but, he says, absolute monarchy is a logical thing; constitutional monarchy is a lie. Absolute monarchy is based on the theory of the divine rights of kings, and one who assumes that premise, that kings have divine rights, a mission and commission given by divinity, then one ought to believe in absolute monarchy or constitutional monarchy. Where people insist upon loyalty to a constitution and at the same time insist upon loyalty to a monarchy, there is that conflict, and there is that incongruity, and there is that rift, says Nordau, which is a lie and which makes for a living lie in our civilization.

He was not a ranting democrat. If there is anything true about Nordau it is true that he was an aristocrat in the finest sense of the word; not only in his bearing and in his courtly manner and in his speech, but he was an aristocrat in thinking.

Nordau did not believe in human equality. He said that, too, is one of the conventional lies of our civilization, one of the lies of democratic civilization. Liberty? Yes. Fraternity? Yes. Equality? Oh, no. Nature is against it. It is an intellectual fiction. The struggle for existence denies equality; our whole progress in civilization depends upon leaders--the leadership of the few exceptional, gifted ones, upon the very inequality of which we complain.

Republicanism, he said, is a good thing. "But do not be captivated by words and slogans and catch phrases.

A republic, if it is to be a progress and a truth, must be founded upon a number of social, political and other institutions, entirely different from those existing at present." At present a republic is a lie because the ground has not yet been cleared for a real republic. "As long as Europe continues to live in its present forms of civilization, a republic is a contradiction and an unworthy play upon words. A simple political revolution, which would turn any one of the existing monarchies of Europe into a republic, would be merely imitating the acts of the apostles to the heathen, during the early part of the Middle Ages, who converted the pagans from their false forms of worship, by simply giving their gods, festivals and ceremonies, Christian names." It is only a question of the juggling of names between present day monarchies and present day republics.

"The entire effect of such a revolution would be limited to pasting upon the shop-worn, unsalable goods, a lot of new labels, which would deceive the people into thinking a new stock of goods had been procured. A republic is the last link of a long chain of development. It is the form of government in which the ideal of self-government finds realization--the supreme power residing ultimately in the whole people and directly exercised by them. This form of government, if it is organically genuine, and not merely an external, pasted on or painted resemblance to a republic, is inherently incompatible with hereditary privileges and distinctions, with the enormous influence wielded by accumulations of capital

and monopolies, with the power of an army of office holders and with any restrictions to the free liberty of thought, speech and action of the grand masses of the people. But to leave the organization of the State as it is, and merely to change the name of the government from a monarchy to a republic, is like the well-known trick of the publishers who manage to smuggle forbidden works into another country, by substituting for the title-page another, taken from some innocent fairy-tale or prayer-book. What was the Italian republic of 1848, or the Spanish republic of 1868, and what is the French republic of 1870, but monarchies with their thrones standing vacant for a while, monarchies parading under the mask of republicanism."

I said that Nordau was an aristocrat. Nordau even believed in hereditary aristocracy; he believed in families of aristocratic bearing and culture and prestige, in which families the trust of aristocracy, the pledge of aristocracy, the promise of aristocracy was handed down from generation to generation; he believed in that kind of aristocracy--that it makes for finer bodies and finer souls, that it makes for character. But the aristocracy of today, the nobility, he says, that is sham, that is an anthropological fake, as he calls it. They are not the fittest, they are not the aristos, they are not the best, they are not the most capable, they are not the most heroic, they are not the standard bearers; they do not excel in body, they do not excel in character. That is patent aristocracy, that is

aristocracy made by patent, by the will of a monarch or a king; that is aristocracy made by wealth, and that is a lie.

There should be an aristocracy, but that aristocracy should exist on one condition, namely, that they remain true to the tradition of the aristos, and they welcomed into their ranks everyone who evidenced exceptional ability of character and mind and soul--an aristocracy that assumes the burden and the responsibility of the leadership of the world. That is the kind of aristocracy he believed in.

Nordau speaks of the political lie. He hated government interference; he hated the inequalities which existed due to taxation, where the poor man is taxed while nominally the rich man is taxed. He hated the idea of representative government which is not representative. He was not an anarchist; he believed in government. He says, "You cannot get three people together but what, before long, there will be a certain set of regulations or agreements of mutual subordination for a common purpose, which is government." But he believed in a simplified government; he did not believe in all the cluttering, confining, annoying restrictions which bureaucracy (which Spencer called the coming slavery) imposed upon men.

Government, to Nordau, was to be like a traffic officer--to keep the traffic moving, not to interfere with traffic; to keep the traffic of the human soul moving and not to interfere and inject itself into the lives of individual men. That is a condition to which we are coming in the

United States today. There is a passion for government interference; there is a passion for law-making; there is a passion for petty regulations, that slowly but surely, even if unconsciously, is deliberately circumscribing, ultimately destroying, the elemental human rights which men ought to enjoy in a democratic government. And Nordau forty years ago foresaw it.

Nordau speaks of the economic lie. He speaks of the inequalities which bring so much of misery and unhappiness into the world; he speaks of what the city life has done for men. Our civilization today is an urban civilization, a city life civilization; and the city life has created a wage-earning class; our factory system has created a class dependent not upon the soil, not upon something which they command, not upon something real and constant, but upon a shifting, uncertain job; and that has brought uncertainty and instability into the lives of the workingmen.

Nordau is not a communist; Nordau exposes the folly of communism. He says the love of property and the influence of property is fundamental, even as the influence of sex in the human race, and it is one of the essential things in civilization; but a man is entitled to his property, the things he owns and the things he has achieved, and he is entitled to the use of that property, and he is entitled so to protect his offspring that in their early years they would be amply provided for. But no man has a social right, claims Dr. Nordau, to bequeath a fortune which society has

helped to make to his offspring, to be handed down through generations, thereby corrupting succeeding generations through idleness and the lack of the need of work; thereby creating an idle, parasitic, lazy class in civilization; thereby creating men who live for luxury and not for productiveness.

And Nordau believes that the only cure of all our economic ailments can be effected through the abolition of inheritance. He says that is not radical; in England they have had a law for hundreds of years that only the first born inherits his father's wealth; all others are disinherited. He says, "I want to apply that same law even to the first born." And he has a prophetic warning at the close of his chapter on the economic lie, and as I read it anew, I knew the man spoke forty years ago as a prophet spoke.

He said: "Great catastrophes are looming up on the field of political economy and it will not be possible to ignore them much longer. As long as the masses were religious, they could be consoled for their wretchedness on earth by promises of unlimited bliss in the future. But today they are becoming more enlightened and the number of those patient sufferers is daily growing less who find in the Host a satisfactory substitute for their dinner and accept the priests' order on the place waiting for them in paradise with as much pleasure as if it were some good terrestrial farm of which they could take immediate possession. The poor count their numbers and those of the rich and realize

that they are constantly growing more numerous and stronger than the latter. They examine the sources of wealth and they find that speculating, plundering and inheriting have no more rational justification for existing than robbery and theft, and yet the latter are prosecuted by the laws. The increasing disinheritation of the masses by their deprivation of land and by the increasing accumulations of property in the hands of a few, will make the economic wrongs more and more intolerable. The moment that the millions acquire in addition to their hunger, a knowledge of the remote causes to which it is due, they will remove and overthrow all obstacles that stand between them and the right of satisfying their appetite. Hunger is one of the few elementary forces which neither threats nor persuasion can permanently control. Hence it is the power which will probably raze the present structure of society level with the ground, in spite of its foundations of superstition and selfishness--a task beyond the power of philosophy alone."

Do you see Russia in all this? That was Nordau's first thesis--we are living a lie. And his second thesis was this, that our present day art and our present day literature give evidence of this fact: that we are degenerating. Nordau says that there is growing evidence everywhere about us, especially in our art, and especially in our present day literature, of decadence, of degeneracy; the type of degeneracy that characterizes the criminal degenerate--a physical, psychic degeneracy.

Nordau applies the science of psychiatry and psychology to art and literature and finds that they are rotten to the core, that they are suffering from a malady, and that malady is simply this: that our civilization today is so involved, that our civilization today is so cluttered up, that it has exerted too much of a strain upon the nervous system of the human race. We cannot bear the burden of civilization because we have not cleared the ground for a healthy, normal civilization. We have speeded up life; we have put tremendous mechanical forces at work in the world producing things and things and things! But our emotions have not kept pace with our intellect. Emotionally we are still five hundred or a thousand or five thousand years in antiquity; intellectually, mechanically, scientifically, we are living at a breakneck speed, and this incongruity, this rift, is telling upon the nervous system of the human race. It is breaking it, it is demoralizing it, it is making for degeneracy!

And he talks of Tolstoi and Ibsen and Brandes and Swinburne and Nietzsche, and shows, rightly or wrongly--I am not defending his thesis now--the writing of these men, their style, their teaching, their points of view, are that of a degenerate criminal, of men who have lost their hold upon reality, of men who have lost the restraint and the discipline of real culture and real civilization, of men who are drifting aimlessly because they cannot control their emotions, even as a nervous person cannot control his muscles.

He speaks of the so-called modernists, the so-called realists, and all the filth that has come into modern day literature, which is exalted as being evidence of the emancipation of the human soul from the shackles of convention. He says that is a lie, they are not evidences of emancipation; they are evidences of enslavement to all that is corrupt in the body politic. And like a prophet of old, with that model passion of Isaiah, he calls on sane, healthy, normal human beings to organize and stamp that snake to death which is poisoning the whole system; and for six hundred pages he diagnoses, with the close reasoning of a mathematician and the close analysis of a physician, the maladies of the present day; and he concludes his great work with this tremendously powerful paragraph.

He says: "We in particular, who have made it our life's task to combat antiquated superstition, to spread enlightenment, to demolish historical ruins and remove their rubbish, to defend the freedom of the individual against State oppression and the mechanical routine of the Philistine; we must resolutely set ourselves in opposition to the miserable mongers who seize upon our dearest watchwords, with which to entrap the innocent. The 'freedom' and 'modernity', the 'progress' and 'truth,' of these fellows are not ours. We have nothing in common with them. They wish for self-indulgence; we wish for work. They wish to drown consciousness in the unconscious; we wish to strengthen and enrich consciousness. They wish for evasive ideation and babble;

we wish for attention, observation, and knowledge. The criterion by which true moderns may be recognised and distinguished from impostors calling themselves moderns may be this: Whoever preaches absence of discipline is an enemy of progress; and whoever worships his 'I' is an enemy to society. Society has for its first premise, neighborly love and capacity for self-sacrifice; and progress is the effect of an ever more rigorous subjugation of the beast in man, of an ever tenser self-restraint, an ever keener sense of duty and responsibility. The emancipation for which we are striving is of the judgment, not of the appetites. In the profoundly penetrating words of Scripture, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.'"

And that is why I speak of Dr. Max Nordau as the true orthodox. He is not a preacher who has come to denude and destroy the very moral foundations of our system; he is the man who has come to preserve, but to preserve not the sham, not the externalities, but to preserve the foundation, the heart, the soundness of our moral law; and in that he is one with all the seers and the prophets of the human race.

And he is an optimist, an extreme optimist. He believed in the regeneration of society even as he saw its degeneration; he believed that there is in this vast cosmic scheme an urge, a vital urge, which was constantly evolving new and higher forms, and which was driving man, if man would not estop it, let and hinder it, to higher levels of purer air.

And Nordau asks for a clearing of the jungle so as to permit this clean, fine, wholesome spirit which is urging, driving, propelling in the soul of man, to be given free expression.

That is Nordau, the thinker--a modern prophet in every sense of the word. A word about Nordau, the Jew, and I shall be through. Nordau was a Zionist; Nordau was a Nationalist; Nordau believed in the regeneration of Israel as a people upon Israel's ancient soil in Palestine. There was no compromise in his position; it was to him a dogma, a creed--even as he did not believe in dogmas and creeds in anything else. Nordau became the champion and the spokesman of this great renaissance of Israel.

Nordau hated the sham and the hypocrisy of Jews. Nordau hated the Jew who denies himself, because that, to him, showed lack of character, which makes for degeneration. Nordau hated what he calls the luftmensch, the materialistic Jew, who was losing his soul in the obesity of wealth, who was corrupting himself through the gifts bestowed upon him by his emancipation.

Nordau called with a clarion voice for an enlightened, proud, purposeful Jewry the world over. He knew the tragedy of Jewish life. He witnessed the pogroms of 1882; he witnessed the Dreyfus affair; he knew the condition of eight millions of Jews in Eastern Europe. He called the luftmensch the "men of the air,"--men who had no solid foundation upon which to stand. He knew their tragedy and

he knew their needs; he loved his people and he returned to them from the glittering civilization of Western Europe, and from the academies and the universities, from the life and light and sweetness of French civilization; he went back to the bleakness and the gloom and the poverty and the misery of his own people; he returned to help them, and it is no wonder that, after years of service, when he died universal Israel stood by his open grave and mourned the passing of a prophet and the passing of a Maccabee.

--0--



Sermon, The Temple, February
18, 1923

On the twenty-second day of January, 1923, there died in the city of Paris, in comparative poverty, though not in obscurity, a man who is destined to live long in the grateful memory of his own people and that of the entire world - Dr. Max Nordau.

In the death of Dr. Nordau there passed away a prophet who summoned men and nations to repentance, and warned them of impending doom; and in his death there passed away a champion of Israel, a staunch defender of his people - a modern Maccabee, who heralded, and labored for, the rebirth of his people.

Dr. Max Nordau belonged to the giant spirits of the human race. In him a brilliant mentality, an encyclopedic mind, a linguistic gift, a literary endowment, a brilliant wit, a courtly manner, were wedded to a high moral passion, and a fine idealism, and vast courage.

I call him an iconoclast. Perhaps I should call him a prophetic iconoclast. He shattered idols - which seems to be the task providentially assigned to all the outstanding prophets of the human race, and more especially to the prophets of Israel from the days of Abraham to this day. He shattered these idols furiously and in high passion, and yet not wilfully nor petulantly.

Dr. Nordau's intellect was not a destructive

intellect; he was not merely a rebel, a disgruntled, discontented, fretful personality, ~~he~~ raging and storming against all the social values and all the social conventions and all the institutions of mankind. He was not a "bull in ^a ~~the~~ china shop"; he was a prophet; he knew that the mission of the prophet was as Jeremiah conceived of it--^m "first, to break and to shatter and to destroy the old, and then to rebuild and to replant."

He shattered ~~these~~ idols because he wished to enthrone true ^{values.} ~~values.~~ He hated above all sham and fraud and hypocrisy, whether ~~it be~~ the sham and the fraud of ancient institutions and ancient movements, or the sham and the fraud of new institutions and new movements. He hated the hypocrisy of monarchy even as he hated the hypocrisy of democracy. All that glittered, ^{all} that was not real, all that was pretense, all that was fraud, all that was not relevant to a fundamental, underlying truth, ^{all} that did not emanate from something that was essentially real and sound and sane and moral--that Nordau hated and viciously, bitterly attacked.

But just as he was an iconoclast he also was a builder. The dynamics of his soul were not exhausted in destructiveness; he had much left for constructive work. He was the physician--^{as} in very truth by profession he was a physician--^{he} he diagnosed the malady without any reference to the likes and the dislikes and the prejudices of the patient; and once having diagnosed the malady he proceeded to suggest ~~the remedy,~~ ^{was} the cure, if a cure were possible.

He was a builder, and a very orthodox one. People are prone to think of Nordau as a radical. ^{Yet in} ~~the~~ the modern connotation ^{of} ~~and significance~~ the term, Nordau was ~~an~~ ~~orthodox~~; ~~in his view~~ he based his views on those ancient foundations of the ancient wisdom upon which the prophets of antiquity ^{had} based their convictions. And Dr. Nordau shared the prophet's fate, and more especially the fate of a Jewish prophet; he was persecuted during his life⁺ time. All these groups and classes and individuals whom he so vehemently attacked and ruthlessly exposed, ^L turned against him and embittered his life. His life was passed in storm and in struggle, and it ended ^{in near tragedy.} ~~during the war.~~

Dr. Nordau, though an Austrian subject, lived in France for over thirty years. He loved France; he loved the sweet temperament and the mellow culture of France. ~~After the war of 1870, he~~ ^{After the war of 1870, he} denounced the ^{venality of} ~~Germany~~ ^{Germany} in taking Alsace-Lorraine from France. But during the ^{war} ~~the~~ ^{world} ~~these~~ these reactionary elements ^{that} ~~whom~~ ^{had} Nordau attacked turned against him, and, influential as they were in the circles of the government, they succeeded in having Dr. Nordau humiliated. First, he was imprisoned, ~~and~~ then ~~exiled~~ exiled, and then his property, the accumulations of a life time, the little bit that he had gathered together ^{hoping} to leave it to his wife and his daughter, was confiscated by the French government, and, up to this day, ^{has} ~~not~~ ^{been} returned; and Dr. Nordau experienced the tragedy of

the Wandering Jew in the twilight hours of his life. ~~He~~
^{in Paris}
died in a little room on the fifth floor of a humble dwelling
~~place in Paris~~ a poor man but not an obscure nor a forgotten
man.

Dr. Max Nordau was ^a Jew in yet another sense; he was
the child of two cultures and two civilizations, which, in a
sense, is the tragedy of Jewish life. He was born of
orthodox Jewish parents. His father was a rabbi, and in the
early days of his life he was imbued and saturated with the
spirit of orthodox Jewry, with all its romance and all its
poetry, and the learning of his people, and then in youth and
in manhood he went out into the world, entered the universi-
ties of Europe and came in contact with a new civilization
and a new culture and a new environment, totally different
from, and in many ways hostile to, that civilization in which
he was reared as a child, ~~and he tried and~~ he struggled
throughout his days to effect (as so many of ^{us} ~~his~~ try to do)
a synthesis of these two cultures and these two civilizations.
So ~~that~~ there is much that is almost anomalous, much that is
difficult to understand, much that is contradictory,
apparently, in the life of Nordau.

gal
98

For example: Nordau was an irreligious man; Nordau
was an anti-religious man; Nordau denied God, Nordau denied
the soul, Nordau denied immortality, Nordau scoffed at
religious customs and religious practices; ^{but} ~~and~~ when he died
a talis was wrapped about his body, and the Kaddish was
pronounced by the Chief Rabbi of France at his grave, at his

request.

Nordau was an internationalist, as so many of our brilliant minds were during the past generation in Europe. He was a cosmopolitan. His ideal was, as he called it, the solidarity of the human race. He hated national chauvinism, and he hated ~~even~~ the spirit of nationalism, which led to national prejudices and hate and rivalries and war. He was a broad, free, untrammelled spirit, a citizen of the world; and yet Nordau was the founder of the Zionist movement, together with Dr. Theodore Herzl. Nordau became the eloquent spokesman of Jewish Nationalism; and Nordau was a passionate Jewish Nationalist.

Very strange--nearly anomalous; very contradictory; and yet very human, isn't it? For, after all, free as the spirit of man might wish to roam, and, in the early days of our youth, does roam, after a while our wings become tired and we would like to have a place ^{to rest.} ~~upon which we can lie--a resting place.~~ We can speak of the human race and the solidarity of the human race and the love of our fellowmen, but, after all, there is the pull and the tug of our own, our own people, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone; who know us, who understand us, who can sympathize; and that tug and that pull brought Nordau back to his people.

And, after all, a man may have an intellect that is absolutely emancipated from all religious convention and from all religious convictions, and yet the longing soul remains unsatisfied and hungry and thirsty. A starved soul

cannot be fed by a brilliant intellect, and Nordau craved for the poetry and the beauty and the romanticism and the soul food of his youth, and in his later life ^{he} came back to them.

I want to speak this morning ^{first} of Dr. Nordau, ~~first~~ ^{as} the thinker, the philosopher; the man whose voice shook Europe and startled the peoples of the earth; and then of Nordau, the Jew.

Dr. Nordau's philosophy is embodied in a trilogy of books--¹the first, Conventional Lies of our Civilization, published in 1883; the second ^{one}, Paradoxes, published two years later; and the third, Degeneration, published ~~thirty years ago~~ in 1893.

There are two main theses in the thought of Dr. Nordau, and only two; and to express these two fundamental convictions and to call dramatically the attention of the world to all their implications, Nordau wrote this ^{trilogy} ~~trilogy~~. His first thesis was this: that our present-day civilization is crumbling ²crumbling like the civilization of the ancient Romans before the invasion of the barbarians, and crumbling because of an all-pervading, destructive pessimism, which ~~pessimism~~ is evidenced in all departments of life--¹in art, in literature, in philosophy, in religion, ^{this} ~~which~~ pessimism ^{is} ~~was~~ caused by ~~this~~ one fact: that there is today a rift, a discrepancy, an incongruity between the things we do and the things we believe in; between the institutions in which we live and our opinions concerning these institutions. There is this tragic disharmony between theory and practice in every

department, in every sphere of civilization today. In other words, says Dr. Nordau, we live consistently a lie.

We no longer believe in the things which we do out of habit, out of convenience, and because of compulsion; we no longer believe in the basis of our religious life; we no longer believe in the basis of our economic ~~life~~ ^{life}; we no longer believe in the basis of our social life. And yet we keep on living these things as though their bases were still true and as though we still believed in them. Dr. Nordau says:

extra

This is the tragic side of our contemporaneous civilization, that the ancient institutions have no longer the courage and self-confidence to maintain their positions before mankind, in the stiff and unyielding forms in which alone they are true to logic and history, repeating the Jesuits' motto: "As we are or not at all." They attempt an impossible compromise between their premises and the convictions of modern times; they make concessions to the latter, and allow themselves to be penetrated by intellectual elements, foreign to their constitution, and sure to disintegrate it. The new ideas to which they are trying to conform themselves are in direct opposition to every one of their fundamental principles, so that they resemble a book containing on the same page some ancient fable with footnotes criticising, ridiculing, and abusing it in every possible way. In this shape these institutions, denying and parodying their true character, seem objects of ridicule and scorn to cultivated minds, and even to the uncultivated, sources of annoyance and painful perplexity.

(C) The present era of science, claims Nordau, has destroyed man's faith in these institutions; and yet these institutions continue. With what result? With the result that character is destroyed. What is character? Character is an integration, a unity of self; character is brought about ^{when} ~~by~~ an individual possesses ^{certain} ~~simple~~ simple, dominant convictions which are true to him, which are sufficient to guide and influence and determine him. A man has character when he has what we call principle; when he has in his life a unified, harmonizing, ingrowing conviction.

Today in European civilization convictions have been destroyed; faith has been undermined; character has been destroyed. And where there is no character, says Dr. Nordau, degeneration must set in, as it is setting in (so he claims) to destroy civilization.

He goes into detail to prove his thesis. On these conventional lies of our civilization he has five chapters: one called "The lie of religion", another "The lie of ^{and aristocratic} a monarchy", a third "The political lie", the fourth "The economic lie", and the fifth "The matrimonial lie."

no 4 ~~Perhaps~~ of these five, his first chapter, "The lie of religion", is ^{perhaps the} least constructive and the least helpful to us today. Perhaps in 1883, when

340
the book was written, there was enough ~~in~~ dynamite in this chapter to ~~have~~ set ^{man} to thinking, to ~~have~~ ~~awakened~~ ^{awaken} them. But as we read it today, the chapter seems rather naive ~~perhaps~~ perhaps we might say antiquated. Nordau lived during the period when the theory of evolution had first burst upon mankind, ^{and} ~~the theory~~ had not yet been understood in its deeper significance. The theory of evolution ~~was~~ was accepted as dogma, ~~its~~ Its implications were clear; nature was ruled by blind, unchanging forces, controlled by constant and unyielding laws; nature was not possessed of a will power or ^{inner} intelligence; ~~the~~ ^{natural} law dethroned God, dethroned the soul, dethroned religion.

(C) gal 199
~~and~~ Nordau accepted all these naive and early conceptions concerning the theory of evolution. He calls religion "a physical relic of the childhood of the human race." At best it is a functional weakness of mankind. Religion is based on fear; God is the creation of that tendency in man to anthropomorphize, to place ^a ~~will~~ conscious willpower, a somebody, back of every natural phenomenon. ^a The soul is an illusion; immortality is merely an expression of man's disinclination to die, of man's inability to conceive of ^{his} ~~the~~ annihilation; religion is a figment of man's imagination.

~~and~~ Nordau presents a religion of his own, ~~which~~ ^{the} ~~is~~. In place of God the ideal of solidarity of the human race; in place of the church the lecture hall and

assembly room; and in place of the ritual, the ballot.

Nordau was even more vehement in his denunciation of religious forms than of the content of religion.

Extract

I can understand why some people are ^{re}religious; there is a sentimental yearning for it. Well and good. But for people today to believe in religious forms and in religious ceremonies, in churches, in rituals, in a Bible, in priests and dogmas, that is a lie ^m a living lie.

~~But, in spite of all dogmas, that is a living lie.~~

He had a very ^{misguided} estimate of the Bible, did Dr. Nordau, ^{and he} recanted in later life. He said: "The morality of the Bible is revolting; the concept of the universe in the Bible is childish; its literature, its second-rate ceremonies, are coarse; their origin is in barbarism; they are Asiatic or African. They have no meaning for people today."

Of course it is too late in the day to begin a refutation of these contentions. Suffice it to say that we know now that the theory of evolution, at least, does not dethrone God; that science does not prove the non-existence of God or of the human soul; that it does not deny immortality.

Suffice it to say that we know now that the lecture hall can never take the place of the church, ^{nor can} the ballot box ^{replace the} ~~the~~ church.

^{of the church.} church ritual. Suffice it now to say that the origin of things does not determine the value of things. Because a ceremony was begun ten thousand years ago in the jungle life and in the jungle instincts and in the jungle needs of the human race, it does not necessarily follow that that ceremony

—X

342
or that practice or that rite or that custom no longer has value and relevancy for us today.

It is not what ~~the beginnings~~ the beginnings of a thing are; it is what the thing itself means for us ^{how} it reaches our soul, how it touches the mainsprings of our emotions, what function it has in our life, ~~that~~. You might as well look with disfavor and contempt upon a symphony of Beethoven because, forsooth, music began with the beating of a tom-tom in some hut or cave of a primitive, ~~that~~. You might ^{as well} hold Shakespeare in contempt because, forsooth, literature began in some ^{as well} rhythmic sing-song of a battle hymn of savages: you might ^{as well} look with contempt upon a magnificent cathedral because the first architect ^{was a} ~~were~~ of the human race ~~were~~ miserable huts of reeds and rushes and twigs.

(C) It is not what the beginnings of a thing ^{are} ~~is~~ that counts: it is what it has come to be. And civilization is just this: the real interpretation which every age puts upon things which, somehow, seem to be, in their essence, at least, eternal.

There is not very much, I ^{think} ~~am~~, that is constructive in Dr. Nordau's attitude and opinion concerning religion, and I fear me that he ~~most~~ ^{most deeply} felt that in his declining years. But there is much more of meat in his second chapter on "The ^{the} ~~the~~ Lie of monarchy and aristocracy." There all ~~that~~ ^{the} brilliant wit of Nordau (which I had the good fortune ^{to} ~~see~~ in action ^{in 1920} ~~in London~~), all his gift of satire, his destructive satire, comes into play. And that chapter won

for him the undying hostility of all these classes.

Of course he hates monarchy, but, he says, absolute monarchy is a logical thing; constitutional monarchy is a lie. Absolute monarchy is based on the theory of the divine rights of kings, and one who ^{accepts the} ~~assumes that~~ premise that kings have ^{a God-given right to rule} ~~divine rights, a mission and~~ commission given by divinity. ~~that~~ ought to believe in absolute monarchy, ~~constitutional monarchy~~. Where people insist upon loyalty to a constitution and at the same time ~~insist~~ upon loyalty to a monarchy, there is that conflict, ~~there~~ there is that incongruity, and there is that rift, says Nordau, which ~~makes~~ makes for a living lie in our civilization.

He was not a ranting democrat. If there is any thing true about Nordau it is ~~that~~ that he was an aristocrat in the finest sense of the word; not only in his bearing and in his courtly manner and in his speech, but ~~in his~~ ^{his} in thinking.

Nordau did not believe in human equality. He said that that, too, is one of the conventional lies ~~of our civilization~~ of democratic civilization. Liberty? Yes. Fraternity? Yes. Equality? Oh, no. Nature is against it. It is an intellectual fiction. The struggle for existence denies equality; our whole progress in civilization depends upon leaders--the leadership of the few exceptional, gifted ones, ~~upon the very inequality of which we complain.~~

Republicanism, he said, is a good thing. "but do not be captivated by words and slogans and catch phrases."

A republic, if it is to ~~be~~ progress, ~~and~~ must be founded upon a number of social, political and other institutions, entirely different from those existing at present." At present a republic is a lie because the ground has not yet been cleared for a real republic. "As long as Europe continues to live in its present form of civilization, a republic is a contradiction and an unworthy play upon words. A simple political revolution, which would turn any one of the existing monarchies of Europe into a republic, would be merely imitating the acts of the apostles to the heathen, during the early part of the Middle Ages, who converted the pagans from their false forms of worship, by simply giving their gods, festivals and ceremonies Christian names." It is only a question of the juggling of names between present-day monarchies and present-day republics.

The entire effect of such a revolution would be limited to pasting upon the shop-worn, unsalable goods, a lot of new labels, which would deceive the people into thinking a new stock of goods had been procured. A republic is the last link of a long chain of development. It is the form of government in which the ideal of self-government finds realization--the supreme power residing ultimately in the whole people and directly exercised by them. This form of government, if it is organically genuine, and not merely an external, pasted-on or painted resemblance to a republic, is inherently incompatible with hereditary privileges and distinctions, with the enormous influence wielded by accumulations of capital

SINGLE
SPACE
&
INDENT
EXTRACT

and monopolies, with the power of an army of office holders and with any restrictions to the free liberty of thought, speech and action of the grand masses of the people. But to leave the organization of the State as it is, and merely to change the name of the government from a monarchy to a republic, is like the well-known trick of the publishers who manage to smuggle forbidden works into another country, by substituting for the title-page another, taken from some innocent fairy-tale or prayer-book. What was the Italian republic of 1848, or the Spanish republic of 1868, and what is the French republic of 1870, but monarchies with their thrones standing vacant for a while, monarchies parading under the mask of republicanism."

I said that Mordau was an aristocrat. Mordau even believed in hereditary aristocracy; he believed in families of aristocratic bearing and culture and prestige, in which ~~the~~ the trust of aristocracy, the pledge of aristocracy, the promise of aristocracy was handed down from generation to generation. He believed in that kind of aristocracy ^{that} it makes for finer bodies and finer souls, that it makes for character. But the aristocracy of today, ^{our} nobility, he says, ~~is~~ is sham, ~~an~~ an anthropological fake, as he calls it. They are not the fittest, they are not the aristos, they are not the best, they are not the most capable, they are not the most heroic, they are not the standard-bearers; they do not excel in body, they do not excel in character. That is patent aristocracy, that is

gal 100
extract since space + indent

(C)

aristocracy made by patent, by the will of a monarch or a king: ^{it} ~~that~~ is aristocracy made by wealth, and ^{that} ~~it~~ is a lie.

There should be an aristocracy, but ^{it} ~~it~~ should exist on one condition: namely, that ^{it} ~~it~~ remain true to the tradition of the aristos, ^{and} ~~it~~ welcome into ^{its} ~~its~~ ranks everyone who ^{has} evidenced exceptional ability of character and mind and soul--an aristocracy that assumes the burden and the responsibility of ~~the~~ leadership. ~~That is the kind of aristocracy he believed in.~~

Nordau speaks of the political lie. He hated government interference: he hated the inequalities which ^{resulted from} ~~existed due to~~ taxation, where the poor man is taxed ^{heavily} while ^{nominally} ~~the rich man is taxed~~. He hated the idea of representative government which is not representative. He was not an anarchist; he believed in government. ~~"You cannot get three people together but what, before long, there will be a certain set of regulations or agreements of mutual subordination for a common purpose, which is government."~~ But he believed in a simplified government; he did not believe in all the cluttering, confining, annoying restrictions which bureaucracy (which Spencer called the coming slavery) imposed upon men.

Government, ^{said} ~~to~~ Nordau, ^{should function} ~~was to be~~ like a traffic officer--^{to} keep the traffic moving, not to interfere with traffic; to keep the traffic of the human soul moving and not to interfere and inject itself into the lives of individual men. That is a condition to which we are coming in the

United States today. There is a passion for government interference; there is a passion for law-making; there is a passion for petty regulations, that slowly but surely, even if unconsciously, ^{are} ~~is deliberately~~ ^{and may} circumscribing, ultimately destroying ~~the~~ the elemental human rights which men ought to enjoy in a democratic government. And Nordau ~~foresees~~ ^{this tendency} ~~in 1863~~.

Nordau speaks of the economic lie. He speaks of the inequalities which bring so much ~~of~~ misery and unhappiness into the world; he speaks of what ~~the~~ city life has done ^{to} ~~for~~ men. Our civilization ~~is~~ is an urban civilization; ~~and the city life has created a~~ and the city life has created a wage-earning class. Our factory system has created a class dependent not upon the soil, not upon something which they command, not upon something real and constant, but upon a shifting, uncertain job; and that has brought uncertainty and instability into the lives of ~~the~~ workingmen.

Nordau is not a communist; Nordau exposes the folly of communism. He says ^{that} the love of property and the influence of property is fundamental, even as the influence of sex in the human race, and it is one of the essential things in civilization. ~~A~~ A man is entitled to his property, ^{to} the things he owns and the things he has ^{acquired} ~~achieved~~; ~~and~~ he is entitled to the use of that property; ~~and~~ he is entitled ~~to~~ to protect his offspring, ^{so} that in their early years they ^{will} would be amply provided for. But no man has a social right ~~to bequeath a fortune which society has~~ ^{to his offspring} to bequeath a fortune which society has

^{him} helped to make, ~~to his offspring~~ ^{a fortune} to be handed down through generations, ~~thereby corrupting succeeding generations~~ ~~through idleness and the lack of the need of work~~ thereby creating an idle, parasitic, lazy class, ~~thereby~~ thereby creating men who live for luxury and not for productivity.

~~Mr~~ Mordau believes that the ~~only~~ ^{only} cure of all our economic ailments can be effected through the abolition of inheritance. He says that ^{this} ~~is not~~ ^{idea} radical, ~~in England they~~ ^{England has} ~~have~~ had a law for hundreds of years that only the first-born inherits his father's wealth; all others are disinherited. ~~"I want to apply that same law even~~

to the first-born." And he has a ~~prophecy~~ ^{prophecy} warning at the close of his chapter on the economic lie, and as I read it anew, I knew ^{that} ~~the man~~ ^{in 1883} spoke ~~as a prophet~~ ^{speaks,} ~~as a prophet~~ ^{as a prophet}.

~~Great~~ Great catastrophes are looming up on the field of political economy and it will not be possible to ignore them much longer. As long as the masses were religious, they could be consoled for their wretchedness on earth by promises of unlimited bliss in the future. But today they are becoming more enlightened and the number of those patient sufferers is daily growing less who find in the Host a satisfactory substitute for their dinner and accept the priests' order on the place waiting for them in paradise with as much pleasure as if it were some good terrestrial farm of which they could take immediate possession. The poor count their numbers and those of the rich and realize

extract

angle and space indent

extract

single
opposite
interest

(C)

that they are constantly growing more numerous and stronger than the latter. They examine the sources of wealth and they find that speculating, plundering and inheriting have no more rational justification for existing than robbery and theft, and yet the latter are prosecuted by the laws. The increasing disinheritation of the masses by their deprivation of land and by the increasing accumulations of property in the hands of a few, will make the economic wrongs more and more intolerable. The moment that the millions acquire in addition to their hunger, a knowledge of the remote causes to which it is due, they will remove and overthrow all obstacles that stand between them and the right of satisfying their appetite. Hunger is one of the few elementary forces which neither threats nor persuasion can permanently control. Hence it is the power which will probably raze the present structure of society level with the ground, in spite of its foundations of superstition and selfishness--a task beyond the power of philosophy alone.

Do you see Russia in all this? That was Nordau's first thesis--we are living a lie. And his second thesis ~~was~~ ^{was} that our present-day art and ~~present-day~~ literature give evidence of ^{the} fact, that we are degenerating. ~~Nordau says that there is growing evidence everywhere of us, especially in our art, and especially in our present day art and literature, of decadence, of degeneracy; the type of degeneracy that characterized the criminal degenerate--a physical, psychic degeneracy.~~

gal
101

no 9 Mordau applies the science of psychiatry and psychology to art and literature and finds that they are rotten to the core, that they are suffering from a malady, and that malady is simply this: that our civilization ~~today~~ is so involved, that our civilization today is so cluttered up, that it has exerted too much of a strain upon the nervous system of the human race. We cannot bear the burden of civilization because we have not cleared the ground for a healthy, normal civilization. We have speeded up life; we have put tremendous mechanical forces ^{to} work ~~in the~~ producing things and things and things! But our emotions have not kept pace with our intellect. Emotionally we are still five hundred or a thousand or five thousand years in antiquity; intellectually, mechanically, scientifically, we are living at ~~a~~ breakneck speed, and this incongruity, this rift, is telling upon the nervous system of the human race. It is breaking it, it is demoralizing it, it is making for degeneracy!

~~He~~ He talks of Tolstoi and Ibsen and Brandes and Swinburne and Nietzsche, and shows, rightly or wrongly, ^{that} I am not defending his thesis now ^{that} the writing of these men, their style, their teaching, their points of view, ^{those of} are ~~that of~~ degenerate criminals, of men who have lost their hold upon reality, of men who have lost the restraint and the discipline of real culture and real civilization, of men who are drifting aimlessly because they cannot control their emotions, even as a nervous person cannot control his muscles.

He speaks of the so-called modernists, the so-called realists, and ^{of} all the filth that has come into modern-day literature, which is exalted as being evidence of the emancipation of the human soul from the shackles of convention. He says ^{that} that is a lie, ^{that these} ~~these~~ are not evidence of emancipation; they are evidence of enslavement to all that is corrupt in the body politic. And like a prophet of old, with ~~the~~ ^{an} passion of Isaiah, he calls on sane, healthy, normal human beings to organize and stamp ~~to~~ ^{that snake} death which is poisoning the whole system ~~and~~ ^{for} six hundred pages he diagnoses, with the close reasoning of a mathematician and the close analysis of a physician, the maladies of the present day; and he concludes his great work with this tremendously powerful paragraph.

~~We~~ We in particular, who have made it our life's task to combat antiquated superstition, to spread enlightenment, to demolish historical ruins and remove their rubbish, to defend the freedom of the individual against State oppression and the mechanical routine of the Philistine; we must resolutely set ourselves in opposition to the miserable mongers who seize upon our dearest watchwords, with which to entrap the innocent. The "freedom" and "modernity" the "progress" and "truth," of these fellows are not ours. We have nothing in common with them. They wish for self-indulgence; we wish for work. They wish to drown consciousness in the unconscious; we wish to strengthen and enrich consciousness. They wish for evasive ideation and babble;

extract

change space and indelible

✱

we wish for attention, observation, and knowledge. The criterion by which true moderns may be recognised and distinguished from impostors calling themselves moderns may be this: Whoever preaches absence of discipline is an enemy of progress; and whoever worships his "I" is an enemy to society. Society has for its first premise, neighborly love and capacity for self-sacrifice; and progress is the effect of an ever more rigorous subjugation of the beast in man, of an ever tenser self-restraint, an ever keener sense of duty and responsibility. The emancipation for which we are striving is of the judgment, not of the appetites. In the profoundly penetrating words of Scripture, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

And that is why I speak of Dr. Max Nordau as the true orthodox. He is not a preacher who has come to denude and destroy the ~~very~~ moral foundations of our system; he is the man who has come to preserve ~~but~~ to preserve not the sham, not the externalities, but to preserve the foundation, the heart, the soundness of our moral law; and in that he is one with all the seers and the prophets of the human race.

And he is an optimist, an extreme optimist. He believed in the regeneration of society even as he saw its degeneration. He believed that there is in this vast cosmic scheme an urge, a vital urge, which ~~is~~ constantly evolving new and higher forms, and which ~~is~~ driving man, if man would not stop it, ~~let and hinder it~~ to higher levels, ~~of power and~~

★

1574
 And Nordau asks for a clearing of the jungle so as to permit this clean, fine, wholesome spirit ~~which is~~ urging, driving, propelling in the soul of man, to be given free expression.

That is Nordau, the thinker¹—a modern prophet in every sense of the word. A word about Nordau, the Jew, and I shall be through. Nordau was a Zionist, ~~Nordau was a~~ ^{He} Nationalist. ~~Nordau~~ believed in the regeneration of Israel as a people upon Israel's ancient soil in Palestine. There was no compromise in his position; it was to him a dogma, a creed¹—even as he did not believe in dogmas and creeds in anything else. Nordau became the champion and the spokesman of this ~~great~~ renaissance of Israel.

(C) Nordau hated the sham and the hypocrisy of Jews. ^{He} ~~Nordau~~ hated the Jew who denies himself, because that, to him, showed lack of character, which makes for degeneration. Nordau hated what he calls the Luftmensch, the materialistic Jew, who was losing his soul in the obesity of wealth, who was corrupting himself through the gifts bestowed upon him by his emancipation.

Nordau called with a clarion voice for an enlightened, proud, purposeful Jewry the world over. He knew the tragedy of Jewish life. He witnessed the pogroms of 1882; he witnessed the Dreyfus affair; he knew the condition of eight millions of Jews in Eastern Europe. He called the Luftmensch the "men of the air"¹—men who had no solid foundation upon which to stand. He knew their tragedy and

22K

he knew their needs; he loved his people and he returned to them from the glittering civilization of Western Europe, and from the academies and the universities, from the life and light and sweetness of French civilization. He went back to the bleakness and the gloom and the poverty and the misery of his own people. He returned to help them, and it is no wonder that, after years of service, when he died universal Israel stood by his open grave and mourned the passing of a prophet and the passing of a Maccabee.



DR. MAX NORDAU

At The Temple, February 18, 1923.



March 22

On the 22nd day of last month there died in the city of Paris, in comparative poverty, though not in obscurity, a man who is destined to live long in the grateful memory of his own people and that of the entire world--Dr. Max Nordau.

In the death of Dr. Nordau there passed away a prophet who summoned men and nations to repentance, and warned them of impending doom; and in his death there passed away a champion of Israel, a staunch defender of his people--a modern Maccabee, who heralded and labored for the rebirth of his people.

Dr. Max Nordau belonged to the giant spirits of the human race. In him a brilliant mentality, an encyclopedic mind, a linguistic gift, a literary endowment, a brilliant wit, a courtly manner, were wedded to a high moral passion and a fine idealism and a vast courage, that put Dr. Max Nordau in the front ranks of the great leaders of mankind.

I called him an iconoclast. Perhaps I should call him a prophetic iconoclast. Dr. Nordau was ^{prophetic} an iconoclast; he shattered idols--which seems to be the task providentially assigned to all the ^{outstanding} great prophets of the human race, and more especially to the prophets of Israel from the days of Abraham to this day. He shattered these idols furiously and in high passion, and yet not wilfully nor petulantly.

Dr. Max Nordau's intellect was not a destructive

intellect; he was not merely a rebel, a disgruntled, discontented, fretful personality; he was raging and storming against all the social values and all the social conventions and all the institutions of mankind. He was not a "bull in the china shop"; he was a prophet; he knew that the mission of the prophet was as Jeremiah conceived of it--"first, to break and to shatter and to destroy the old, and then to rebuild and to replan."

He shattered these idols because he wished to enthrone true idols. He hated above all sham and fraud and hypocrisy, whether it be the sham and the fraud of ancient institutions and ancient movements, or the sham and the fraud of new institutions and new movements. He hated the hypocrisy of monarchy even as he hated the hypocrisy of democracy. All that glittered, ^{all} that was not real, all that was pretense, all that was fraud, all that was not relevant to a fundamental, underlying truth, ^{all} that did not emanate from something that was essentially real and sound and sane and moral--that Nordau hated and viciously, bitterly attacked.

But just as he was an iconoclast he also was a builder. The dynamics of his soul were not exhausted in destructiveness; he had much left for constructive work. He was the physician--as in very truth by profession he was a physician--he diagnosed the malady without any reference to the likes and the dislikes and the prejudices of the patient; and once having diagnosed the malady he proceeded to suggest the remedy, the cure, if a cure were possible.

He was a builder, and a very orthodox one. People are prone to think of Nordau as a radical. In the modern connotation and significance of the term, Nordau was an extreme^{ly} orthodox in his views; he based his views on those ancient foundations of the ancient wisdom upon which the prophets of antiquity based their convictions. And Dr. Nordau shared the prophet's fate, and more especially the fate of a Jewish prophet; he was persecuted during his lifetime. All these groups and classes and individuals whom he so vehemently attacked and ruthlessly exposed, turned against him and embittered his life. His life was passed in storm and in struggle, and it ended, almost tragically, during the war. } ?

Dr. Nordau, though an Austrian subject, lived in France for over thirty years. He loved France; he loved the sweet temperament and the mellow culture of France. He was Franco-German; he denounced the treachery of victorious Germany in taking Alsace-Lorraine from France. But during the war these groups and these peoples, these reactionary elements whom Nordau attacked turned against him, and, influential as they were in the circles of the government, they succeeded in having Dr. Nordau humiliated. First, he was imprisoned, and then he was exiled, and then his property, the accumulations of a life time, the little bit that he had gathered together, hoping to leave it to his wife and his daughter, was confiscated by the French government, and, up to this day, not yet returned; and Dr. Nordau experienced the tragedy of

the Wandering Jew in the twilight hours of his life, and he died in a little room on the fifth floor of a humble dwelling-place in Paris--a poor man but not an obscure nor a forgotten man.

Dr. Max Nordau was ⁹Jew in yet another sense; he was the child of two cultures and two civilizations, which, in a sense, is the tragedy of Jewish life. He was born of orthodox Jewish parents. His father was a rabbi, and in the early days of his life he was imbued and saturated with the spirit of orthodox Jewry, with all its romance and all its poetry, and the learning of his people, and then in youth and in manhood he went out into the world, entered the universities of Europe and came in contact with a new civilization and a new culture and a new environment, totally different from, and in many ways hostile to, that civilization in which he was reared as a child, and he tried and he struggled throughout his days to effect (as so many of ^{us} ~~his~~ try to do) a synthesis of these two cultures and these two civilizations. So that there is much that is almost anomalous, much that is difficult to understand, much that is contradictory, apparently, in the life of Nordau.

For example: Nordau was an irreligious man; Nordau was an anti-religious man; Nordau denied God, Nordau denied the soul, Nordau denied immortality, Nordau scoffed at religious customs and religious practices, and when he died a talis was wrapped about his body, and the kaddish was pronounced by the Chief Rabbi of France at his grave, at his

request.

Nordau was an internationalist, as so many of our brilliant minds were during the past generation in Europe. He was a cosmopolitan. His ideal was, as he called it, the solidarity of the human race. He hated national chauvinism, and he hated even the spirit of nationalism, which led to national prejudices and hate and rivalries and war. He was a broad, free, untrammelled spirit, a citizen of the world; and yet Nordau was the founder of the Zionist movement, together with Dr. Theodore Herzl. Nordau became the eloquent spokesman of Jewish Nationalism; and Nordau was a passionate Jewish Nationalist.

Very strange--nearly anomalous; very contradictory; and yet very human, isn't it? For, after all, free as the spirit of man might wish to roam, and, in the early days of our youth, does roam, after a while our wings become tired and we would like to have a place upon which we can lie--a resting place. We can speak of the human race and the solidarity of the human race and the love of our fellowmen, but, after all, there is the pull and the tug of our own, our own people, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone; who know us, who understand us, who can sympathize; and that tug and that pull brought Nordau back to his people.

And after all, a man may have an intellect that is absolutely emancipated from all religious convention and from all religious convictions, and yet the longing soul remains unsatisfied and hungry and thirsty. A starved soul

cannot be fed by a brilliant intellect, and Nordau craved for the poetry and the beauty and the romanticism and the soul food of his youth, and in his later life ^{he} came back to them.

I want to speak this morning of Dr. Nordau, first, as the thinker, the philosopher; the man whose voice shook Europe and startled the peoples of the earth; and then of Nordau, the Jew.

Dr. Nordau's philosophy is embodied in a trilogy of books--the first, "Conventional Lies of our Civilization," published in 1883; the second one, "Paradoxes," published two years later; and the third, "Degeneration," published thirty years ago, in 1893.

There are two main theses in the thought of Dr. Nordau, and only two; and to express these two fundamental convictions and to call dramatically the attention of the world to all their implications, Nordau wrote this trinity. His first thesis was this: that our present day civilization is crumbling--crumbling like the civilization of the ancient Romans before the invasion of the barbarians, and crumbling because of an all-pervading, destructive pessimism, which pessimism is evidenced in all departments of life--in art, in literature, in philosophy, in religion; ^{this} which pessimism was caused by ~~this~~ one fact: that there is today a rift, a discrepancy, an incongruity between the things we do and the things we believe in; between the institutions in which we live and our opinions concerning these institutions. There is this tragic disharmony between theory and practice in every

department] in every sphere of civilization today. In other words, says Dr. Nordau, we live consistently a lie.

We no longer believe in the things which we do out of ^{habit} ~~practice~~, out of convenience, and because of compulsion; we no longer believe in the basis of our political life; we no longer believe in the basis of our religious life; we no longer believe in the basis of our economic life; we no longer believe in the basis of our social life. And yet we keep on living these things as though their bases were still true and as though we still believed in them.

Dr. Nordau says:

single space

"This is the tragic side of our contemporaneous civilization, that the ancient institutions have no longer the courage and self-confidence to maintain their positions before mankind, in the stiff and unyielding forms in which alone they are true to logic and history, repeating the Jesuits' motto: 'As we are or not at all.' They attempt an impossible compromise between their premises and the convictions of modern times; they make concessions to the latter, and allow themselves to be penetrated by intellectual elements, foreign to their constitution, and sure to disintegrate it. The new ideas to which they are trying to conform themselves are in direct opposition to every one of their fundamental principles, so that they resemble a book containing on the same page some ancient fable with foot-notes criticising, ridiculing and abusing it in every possible way. In this shape these institutions, denying and parodying their true character, seem objects of ridicule and scorn to cultivated

minds, and even to the uncultivated, sources of annoyance and painful perplexity."

The ^{present} era of science, ~~which is this era~~--claims Nordau, has destroyed man's faith in these institutions; and yet these institutions continue. With what result? With the result that character is destroyed. What is character? Character is an integration, a unity, of self; character is brought about by an individuality--possessing certain few, simple, dominant convictions which are true to itself, which are sufficient to guide and influence and determine it. A man has character when he has what we call principle; when he has in his life a unified, harmonizing, ingrowing conviction.

Now we are in a European civilization; convictions have been destroyed; faith has been undermined; character has been destroyed. And where there is no character, says Dr. Nordau, degeneration must set in, as it is setting in (so he claims) to destroy civilization.

He goes into great detail to prove his thesis. On these conventional lies of our civilization he has five chapters; one called "The Lie of Religion," another called "The Lie of a Monarchy," a third called "The Political Lie," the fourth called "The Economic Lie," and the fifth called "The Matrimonial Lie."

Perhaps of these five his first chapter, the Lie of Religion, is the least constructive and the least helpful to us today. Perhaps ^{in 1883,} in his day, forty years ago, when the

book was written, there was enough of dynamite in this chapter to have set man to thinking, to have ~~shaken~~^{wakened} them. But as we read it today, the chapter seems rather naive--perhaps we might say antiquated. Mordau lived during the period when the theory of evolution had first burst upon mankind, but which theory had not yet been understood in its deeper significance. The theory of evolution at the time was accepted as dogma, as a finality; and its implications were clear: nature was ruled by blind, unchanging forces, controlled by constant and unyielding laws; nature was not possessed of a will power or an intelligence from within; that these laws dethroned God, dethroned the soul, dethroned religion.

And Mordau accepted all these naive and early conceptions concerning the theory of evolution. He calls religion "a physical relic of the childhood of the human race." At best it is a functional weakness of mankind. Religion is based on fear; God is the creation of that tendency in man to anthropomorphize, to place a will-power, a conscious will-power, a somebody, back of every natural phenomenon; the soul is an illusion; immortality is merely an expression of man's disinclination to die, of man's inability to conceive of himself annihilation; religion is a figment of man's imagination.

And Mordau presents a religion of his own which men ought to accept. In place of God the ideal of solidarity of the human race; in place of the church the lecture hall and

assembly room, and in place of the ritual, the ballot.

Nordau was even more vehement in his denunciation of religious forms than of the content of religion.

He said: "I can understand why some people are religious: there is a sentimental yearning for it. Well and good. But for people today to believe in religious forms and in religious ceremonies, in churches, in rituals, in a Bible, in priests and dogmas, that is a lie--a living lie."

He had a very wrong estimate of the Bible, did Dr. Nordau, ^{and} He recanted in later life. He said: "The morality of the Bible is revolting; the concept of the universe in the Bible is childish; its literature, its second-rate ceremonies, are coarse; their origin is in barbarism; they are Asiatic or African. They have no meaning for people today."

Of course it is too late in the day to begin a refutation of these contentions. Suffice it to say that we know now that the theory of evolution, at least, does not dethrone God; that science does not prove the non-existence of God or of the human soul; that it does not deny immortality. Suffice it to say that we know now that the lecture hall can never take the place of the church, and the ballot box of the church ritual. Suffice it now to say that the origin of things does not determine the value of things. Because a ceremony was begun ten thousand years ago in the jungle life and in the jungle instincts and in the jungle needs of the human race, it does not necessarily follow that that ceremony

or that practice or that rite or that custom no longer has value and relevancy for us today.

It is not what the origin or the beginnings of a thing are; it is what the thing itself means for us--how it reaches our soul, how it touches the mainsprings of our emotions, what function it has in our life today. You might as well look with disfavor and contempt upon a symphony of Beethoven because, forsooth, music began with the beating of a tom-tom in some hut or cave of a primitive savage. You might hold Shakespeare in contempt because, forsooth, literature began in some rhythmic sing-song of a battle hymn of savages; you might look with contempt upon a magnificent cathedral because the first architectonics of the human race were miserable huts of reeds and rushes and twigs.

It is not what the beginning of a thing is that counts: it is what it has come to be. And civilization is just this: the real interpretation which every age puts upon things which, somehow, seem to be, in their essence, at least, eternal.

There is not very much. I ^{think} say, that is constructive in Dr. Nordau's attitude and opinion concerning religion, and I fear me that he most felt that in his declining years. But there is much more of meat in his second chapter on the lie of monarchy and aristocracy. There all that brilliant wit of Nordau (which I had the good fortune ^{to} ~~of seeing~~ ^{see} in action ^{in 1920} a few years ago in London), all his gift of satire, his destructive satire, comes into play. And that chapter won

for him the undying hostility of all these classes.

Of course he hates monarchy, but, he says, absolute monarchy is a logical thing; constitutional monarchy is a lie. Absolute monarchy is based on the theory of the divine rights of kings, and one who assumes that premise, that kings have divine rights, a mission and commission given by divinity, then one ought to believe in absolute monarchy, or ~~constitutional monarchy~~. Where people insist upon loyalty to a constitution and at the same time insist upon loyalty to a monarchy, there is that conflict, and there is that incongruity, and there is that rift, says Nordau, which is ~~a lie~~ and which makes for a living lie in our civilization.

He was not a ranting democrat. If there is anything true about Nordau it is true that he was an aristocrat in the finest sense of the word; not only in his bearing and in his courtly manner and in his speech, but he was an aristocrat in thinking.

Nordau did not believe in human equality. He said that, too, is one of the conventional lies of our civilization, one of the lies of democratic civilization. Liberty? Yes. Fraternity? Yes. Equality? Oh, no. Nature is against it. It is an intellectual fiction. The struggle for existence denies equality; our whole progress in civilization depends upon leaders--the leadership of the few exceptional, gifted ones, upon the very inequality of which we complain.

Republicanism, he said, is a good thing, "but do not be captivated by words and slogans and catch phrases.

A republic, if it is to be a progress and a truth, must be founded upon a number of social, political and other institutions, entirely different from those existing at present." At present a republic is a lie because the ground has not yet been cleared for a real republic. "As long as Europe continues to live in its present form of civilization, a republic is a contradiction and an unworthy play upon words. A simple political revolution, which would turn any one of the existing monarchies of Europe into a republic, would be merely imitating the acts of the apostles to the heathen, during the early part of the Middle Ages, who converted the pagans from their false forms of worship, by simply giving their gods, festivals and ceremonies, Christian names." It is only a question of the juggling of names between present day monarchies and present day republics.

"The entire effect of such a revolution would be limited to pasting upon the shop-worn, unsalable goods, a lot of new labels, which would deceive the people into thinking a new stock of goods had been procured. A republic is the last link of a long chain of development. It is the form of government in which the ideal of self-government finds realization--the supreme power residing ultimately in the whole people and directly exercised by them. This form of government, if it is organically genuine, and not merely an external, pasted on or painted resemblance to a republic, is inherently incompatible with hereditary privileges and distinctions, with the enormous influence wielded by accumulations of capital

and monopolies, with the power of an army of office holders and with any restrictions to the free liberty of thought, speech and action of the grand masses of the people. But to leave the organization of the State as it is, and merely to change the name of the government from a monarchy to a republic, is like the well-known trick of the publishers who manage to smuggle forbidden works into another country, by substituting for the title-page another, taken from some innocent fairy-tale or prayer-book. What was the Italian republic of 1848, or the Spanish republic of 1868, and what is the French republic of 1870, but monarchies with their thrones standing vacant for a while, monarchies parading under the mask of republicanism."

I said that Mordau was an aristocrat. Mordau even believed in hereditary aristocracy; he believed in families of aristocratic bearing and culture and prestige, in which families the trust of aristocracy, the pledge of aristocracy, the promise of aristocracy was handed down from generation to generation; he believed in that kind of aristocracy--that it makes for finer bodies and finer souls, that it makes for character. But the aristocracy of today, the nobility, he says, that is sham, that is an anthropological fake, as he calls it. They are not the fittest, they are not the aristos, they are not the best, they are not the most capable, they are not the most heroic, they are not the standard bearers; they do not excel in body, they do not excel in character. That is patent aristocracy, that is

aristocracy made by patent, by the will of a monarch or a king; ^{it} that is aristocracy made by wealth, and that is a lie.

There should be an aristocracy, but that aristocracy should exist on one condition, namely, that they remain true to the tradition of the aristos, and they welcomed into their ranks everyone who evidenced exceptional ability of character and mind and soul--an aristocracy that assumes the burden and the responsibility of the leadership of the world. That is the kind of aristocracy he believed in.

Nordau speaks of the political lie. He hated government interference; he hated the inequalities which existed due to taxation, where the poor man is taxed while nominally the rich man is taxed. He hated the idea of representative government which is not representative. He was not an anarchist; he believed in government. He says, "You cannot get three people together but what, before long, there will be a certain set of regulations or agreements of mutual subordination for a common purpose, which is government." But he believed in a simplified government; he did not believe in all the cluttering, confining, annoying restrictions which bureaucracy (which Spencer called the coming slavery) imposed upon men.

Government, to Nordau, was to be like a traffic officer--to keep the traffic moving, not to interfere with traffic; to keep the traffic of the human soul moving and not to interfere and inject itself into the lives of individual men. That is a condition to which we are coming in the

United States today. There is a passion for government interference; there is a passion for law-making; there is a passion for petty regulations, that slowly but surely, even if unconsciously, is deliberately circumscribing, ultimately destroying, the elemental human rights which men ought to enjoy in a democratic government. And Nordau forty years ago foresaw it in 1883.

Nordau speaks of the economic lie. He speaks of the inequalities which bring so much of misery and unhappiness into the world; he speaks of what the city life has done for men. Our civilization today is an urban civilization, a city life civilization; and the city life has created a wage-earning class; our factory system has created a class dependent not upon the soil, not upon something which they command, not upon something real and constant, but upon a shifting, uncertain job; and that has brought uncertainty and instability into the lives of the workingmen.

Nordau is not a communist; Nordau exposes the folly of communism. He says the love of property and the influence of property is fundamental, even as the influence of sex in the human race, and it is one of the essential things in civilization; but a man is entitled to his property, the things he owns and the things he has achieved; and he is entitled to the use of that property; and he is entitled so to protect his offspring that in their early years they would be amply provided for. But no man has a social right, claims Dr. Nordau, to bequeath a fortune which society has

helped to make to his offspring, to be handed down through generations, thereby corrupting succeeding generations through idleness and the lack of the need of work; thereby creating an idle, parasitic, lazy class in civilization; thereby creating men who live for luxury and not for productivity.

And Mordau believes that the only cure of all our economic ailments can be effected through the abolition of inheritance. He says that is not radical; in England they have had a law for hundreds of years that only the first born inherits his father's wealth; all others are disinherited. He says, "I want to apply that same law even to the first born." And he has a prophetic warning at the close of his chapter on the economic lie, and as I read it anew, I knew the man spoke ^{in 1843} ~~forty years ago~~ as a prophet spoke.

He said: "Great catastrophes are looming up on the field of political economy and it will not be possible to ignore them much longer. As long as the masses were religious, they could be consoled for their wretchedness on earth by promises of unlimited bliss in the future. But today they are becoming more enlightened and the number of those patient sufferers is daily growing less who find in the Host a satisfactory substitute for their dinner and accept the priests' order on the place waiting for them in paradise with as much pleasure as if it were some good terrestrial farm of which they could take immediate possession. The poor count their numbers and those of the rich and realize

that they are constantly growing more numerous and stronger than the latter. They examine the sources of wealth and they find that speculating, plundering and inheriting have no more rational justification for existing than robbery and theft, and yet the latter are prosecuted by the laws. The increasing disinheritation of the masses by their deprivation of land and by the increasing accumulations of property in the hands of a few, will make the economic wrongs more and more intolerable. The moment that the millions acquire in addition to their hunger, a knowledge of the remote causes to which it is due, they will remove and overthrow all obstacles that stand between them and the right of satisfying their appetite. Hunger is one of the few elementary forces which neither threats nor persuasion can permanently control. Hence it is the power which will probably raze the present structure of society level with the ground, in spite of its foundations of superstition and selfishness--a task beyond the power of philosophy alone."

Do you see Russia in all this? That was Nordau's first thesis--we are living a lie. And his second thesis was this, that our present day art and ~~our present day literature~~ give evidence of this fact: that we are degenerating. Nordau says that there is growing evidence everywhere about us, especially in our art, and especially in ~~our present day~~ *our* literature, of decadence, of degeneracy; the type of degeneracy that characterizes the criminal degenerate--a physical, psychic degeneracy.

Nordau applies the science of psychiatry and psychology to art and literature and finds that they are rotten to the core, that they are suffering from a malady, and that malady is simply this: that our civilization today is so involved, that our civilization today is so cluttered up, that it has exerted too much of a strain upon the nervous system of the human race. We cannot bear the burden of civilization because we have not cleared the ground for a healthy, normal civilization. We have speeded up life; we have put tremendous mechanical forces at work in the world producing things and things and things! But our emotions have not kept pace with our intellect. Emotionally we are still five hundred or a thousand or five thousand years in antiquity; intellectually, mechanically, scientifically, we are living at a breakneck speed, and this incongruity, this rift, is telling upon the nervous system of the human race. It is breaking it, it is demoralizing it, it is making for degeneracy!

And he talks of Tolstoi and Ibsen and Brandes and Swinburne and Nietzsche, and shows, rightly or wrongly--I am not defending his thesis now--the writing of these men, their style, their teaching, their points of view, are that of a degenerate criminal; of men who have lost their hold upon reality, of men who have lost the restraint and the discipline of real culture and real civilization, of men who are drifting aimlessly because they cannot control their emotions, even as a nervous person cannot control his muscles.

He speaks of the so-called modernists, the so-called realists, and all the filth that has come into modern day literature, which is exalted as being evidence of the emancipation of the human soul from the shackles of convention. He says that is a lie, they are not evidences of emancipation; they are evidences of enslavement to all that is corrupt in the body politic. And like a prophet of old, with that model passion of Isaiah, he calls on sane, healthy, normal human beings to organize and stamp that snake to death which is poisoning the whole system; and for six hundred pages he diagnoses, with the close reasoning of a mathematician and the close analysis of a physician, the maladies of the present day; and he concludes his great work with this tremendously powerful paragraph.

single space

He says: "We in particular, who have made it our life's task to combat antiquated superstition, to spread enlightenment, to demolish historical ruins and remove their rubbish, to defend the freedom of the individual against State oppression and the mechanical routine of the Philistine; we must resolutely set ourselves in opposition to the miserable mongers who seize upon our dearest watchwords, with which to entrap the innocent. The 'freedom' and 'modernity', the 'progress' and 'truth,' of these fellows are not ours. We have nothing in common with them. They wish for self-indulgence; we wish for work. They wish to drown consciousness in the unconscious; we wish to strengthen and enrich consciousness. They wish for evasive ideation and babble;

we wish for attention, observation, and knowledge. The criterion by which true moderns may be recognised and distinguished from impostors calling themselves moderns may be this: Whoever preaches absence of discipline is an enemy of progress; and whoever worships his 'I' is an enemy to society. Society has for its first premise, neighborly love and capacity for self-sacrifice; and progress is the effect of an ever more rigorous subjugation of the beast in man, of an ever tenser self-restraint, an ever keener sense of duty and responsibility. The emancipation for which we are striving is of the judgment, not of the appetites. In the profoundly penetrating words of Scripture, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.'"

And that is why I speak of Dr. Max Nordau as the true orthodox. He is not a preacher who has come to denude and destroy the very moral foundations of our system; he is the man who has come to preserve; but to preserve not the sham, not the externalities, but to preserve the foundation, the heart, the soundness of our moral law; and in that he is one with all the seers and the prophets of the human race.

And he is an optimist, an extreme optimist. He believed in the regeneration of society even as he saw its degeneration; he believed that there is in this vast cosmic scheme an urge, a vital urge, which was constantly evolving new and higher forms, and which was driving man, if man would not stop it, let and hinder it, to higher levels of purer air.

And Nordau asks for a clearing of the jungle so as to permit this clean, fine, wholesome spirit which is urging, driving, propelling in the soul of man, to be given free expression.

That is Nordau, the thinker--a modern prophet in every sense of the word. A word about Nordau, the Jew, and I shall be through. Nordau was a Zionist; Nordau was a Nationalist; Nordau believed in the regeneration of Israel as a people upon Israel's ancient soil in Palestine. There was no compromise in his position; it was to him a dogma, a creed--even as he did not believe in dogmas and creeds in anything else. Nordau became the champion and the spokesman of this great renaissance of Israel.

Nordau hated the sham and the hypocrisy of Jews. Nordau hated the Jew who denies himself, because that, to him, showed lack of character, which makes for degeneration. Nordau hated what he calls the luftmensch, the materialistic Jew, who was losing his soul in the obesity of wealth, who was corrupting himself through the gifts bestowed upon him by his emancipation.

Nordau called with a clarion voice for an enlightened, proud, purposeful Jewry the world over. He knew the tragedy of Jewish life. He witnessed the pogroms of 1882; he witnessed the Dreyfus affair; he knew the condition of eight millions of Jews in Eastern Europe. He called the luftmensch the "men of the air,"--men who had no solid foundation upon which to stand. He knew their tragedy and

he knew their needs; he loved his people and he returned to them from the glittering civilization of Western Europe, and from the academies and the universities, from the life and light and sweetness of French civilization; He went back to the bleakness and the gloom and the poverty and the misery of his own people; He returned to help them, and it is no wonder that, after years of service, when he died universal Israel stood by his open grave and mourned the passing of a prophet and the passing of a Maccabee.

--C--

