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Some Visitors to Our Shores, 1923.

"SOME VISITORS TO OUR SHORES."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

NOVEMBER 18, 1923, CLEVELAND.



from time to time the American public is favored by visits from prominent personalities from abroad. Some of them come at the behest of some propaganda, as the emisarries of this government or that government, to help us make up our political mind; to guide us in our thinking, in our political action; to help float a loan. Others come here just to study us, to observe this strange people across the Atlantic, and then, after two or three weeks, to go back home and write a book about us. Still others come here to lecture, finding the American platform a much more lucrative one than that of the surfeited and rather bored Continentals. There are few audiences so long-suffering and so gullible as the American audeences. And the Europeans have discovered it.

And some again, like Israel Zangwill, are invited to come by some groups, bodies of Jews who want to be helped and guided, and hope to receive some new revelation, perhaps, from such a great personality. I have often asked myself why we Americans do not send some speakers abroad; not that we could spare them, but that it might be well to show the Europeans that we have something more to give besides money and soldiers.

Here is General Haller, a visitor, a guest of the city of Cleveland today, a man who will be dined and banqueted, a man who is heralded as the savior of humanity--

whatever that may mean. General Haller, of all

Europeans generals, is the most infamous. Do you recall
the mournful processions which the Jews of America were
compelled to organize in the year 1919, as a protest against
the unspeakable pogroms and atrocities in Poland? Well,
General Haller and his legionaires, recruited here in the
United States, were largely responsible for those processions.

Captain Peter Wright, who was a member of the British Commission sent out by Great Britain to study these massacres of 1919 in Poland, reported the worst offenders are soldiers, and the worst soldiers in this respect are those of General Haller's army, which was largely crecruited in America. The favorite pastime of plucking beards and throwing Jewish travelers out of train compartments while the train was in motion; of attacking Jewish quarters, defenseless men, women and children, -- that pastime is largely traceable to the soldiers of this "savior of humanity" - General Haller.

He, too, is a visotor here. The newspapers have it that he has come in behalf of universal peace. But this morning I wish to speak about one who, in spite of all his failings and shortcomings, is a rather lovable personality. I mean Israel Zangwill. There is one virtue, at least, which may be ascribed to him which other visitors from abroad do not possess, apparently, and that is the virtue of frankness. The others come here and flatter us and tell us what a wonderful people we are, and then go home and are much

opinions. And then we are peeved and disappointed.

Israel Zangwill tells us what he thinks of us while he is here, and gives us a chance to tell him what we think of him - which is only fair.

If Zangwill has said certain things which have embarrassed the American Jews, he is not altogether to blame. He was invited here; he was summoned here. A body of Jews which for some mysterious reason calls itself the American Jewish Congress (it might be American and it might be Jewish, but it certainly is not a Congress) found it necessary to invite Israel Zangwill; and Israel Zangwill came and spoke, and confounded everybody.

Why did the Congress invite Tangwill? Is he a leader of men? No. Is he a great statesman? No. Has he the sanest, the most helpful and the most constructive views to Jewish life? No. Everybody knew it. A novelist, a playwright, a brilliant mind, a would-be empire builder, but certainly not a leader of men, nor a statesman. Why was he invited to deliver the keynote address at this American Jewish Congress? It seems to me that Zangwill was brought here to save an institution which was dying, to galvanize an almost moribund congress.

This congress, as you will recall, was called into being during the War by those who believed that the existing Jewish agencies, and more especially the American Jewish Committee, were not competent enough, representative enough, to meet the pressing Jewish needs of the hour. But

now that the War is over people began to lose interest in the congress. A popular election was held throughout the land in order to elect delegates, and the response was pitifully, almost ludicrously, small. The great Jewish community of Cleveland, for example, actually sent some few hundred voters to the ballot to vote for this American Jewish Congress. The institution was passing away, and those who are concerned in it felt it necessary to summon some outstanding, appealing, dramatic personality to focus attention, to revive interest in this decadent institution, and no one in America seemed likely to possess the necessary qualifications to achieve that, and so a desperate call for assistance was sent to Israel Zangwill; and Israel Zangwill came, and Israel Zangwill spoke, and Israel Zangwill said the very thing he was not expected to say.

I might say in passing that it is very likely that Zangwill gave the death blow to this congress idea, and if so, American Israel will not sustain a great loss. No other racial group in the United States, no other national group, finds it necessary to send its constituents to a voting place in order to ascertain the will of the people and in order to be adequately represented.

The trouble with American Israel is not that it is not sufficiently organized but that it is overorganized. I venture to say that there are few people in this assembly this morning that do not belong to a half a dozen local and national Jewish organizations. What we need

is not a new agency and new instrumentalities; what we need is to have all these disjointed and unrelated organizations already in existence and already functioning unified in some central body, so that these efforts in behalf of the defense of Jewish rights here and elsewhere may be centralized and properly focused. An organization like the American Jewish Committee, if it be democratized sufficiently, and if it become more extensive in its constituency, is sufficient for all the needs of American Israel.

Well, Zangwill came and spoke, and delivered the keynote address—twenty-five thousand words, a staggering thing in itself. He covered everything in his address and hurt almost everybody. There was wit there, and epigram, and brilliant pun, but also the smart and the burn, which people do not relish. That address, delivered at Carnegie Hall, was not a logically constructed address, rising from axion to theorem, and from theorem to proof. It was more of a brilliant excursion into almost every field of Jewish thought. It was as if a pent-up, long-suppressed, moody personality were given a chance freely for once to express itself.

And Israel Zangwill did express himself most freely. The first bomb which he threw in that congress was his declaration that political Zionism is dead. He asserted that the Balfour declaration, which is now the foundation stone of the whole scheme of political Zionism, has been turned into a white scrap of paper by Great Britain. He

expressed the belief that Jewry must, in behalf of humanity, in order to avoid another universal conflagration, abandon the hope of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He criticized Great Britain; he criticized the president of the world Zionist organization; he criticized the British high commissioner in Jerusalem; he accused them all of incompetence, of inefficiency; he accused them all of permitting the great historic moment to escape them, and he urged upon all a revision of the Zionist program and a surrendering of the high hopes.

Well, Zangwill was taken literally at his word. But Zangwill is not a man who should be taken literally. I say it with all due deference to him. Zangwill being first and foremost a writer of novels, a playwright, a satirist and a epigramist, would rather prefer a brilliant half-truth to a dull, uninteresting whole truth. He is primarily concerned with irritating men into thinking, with stimulating them, and if he can whip them into doing a certain thing by means of a cutting, brilliant satire, he will do so. These are his implements, his tools. And Zangwill must not be taken too literally.

Zangwill, of course, is not an anti-Zionist.

Zangwill has been a Zionist among the first of the Zionists

for twenty-five and thirty years--one of the earliests of the

desciples of Theodore Hertzal. But Zangwill is principally

a theorist, a maximist--either everything or nothing. Either

England stands by its Balfour declaration, by its letter and

spirit--creates a Jewish homeland in Palestine at once, makes it possible for hundreds of thousands of immigrants to come into Palestine in the briefest space of time, expatriates, ex-appropriates the Arabs, and sends them tracking across the Jordan into Arabian territories beyond the Jordan, and turns the whole country over to the Jews--or it is nothing. That is Israel Zangwill.

Now, what are the facts about Palestine. about Zionism and about the Balfour declaration? facts are quite simple. England, during the stress of the War, needing the popular support of the Jews throughout the world, issued a Balfour declaration, which said and meant to say that England will look with favor upon the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Now that the War is over and imperial Britain is confronted with wast imperial problems. England finds it difficult to live up to the letter and the spirit of the Balfour declaration. Arabs have been disgruntled. The Arabs have feared that Zionism is an encroachment upon their nationalism and their prerogatives. England is afraid of a pan-Arabic movement, because England is the greatest Mohammedan country in the world. England is concerned with pacifying the Arabs primarily.

England, I say, finds it very difficult to carry out into practice her original intention, assuming that her original intention was a sincere and honest one; and so the Balfour declaration has been whittled down; it

has been interpreted and reinterpreted until not alone the letter but even the spirit have been violated.

But that is only the surface truth. The greater truth is this: that the Jews have not helped England fulfill her promises. The Jews have not compelled England to fulfill her promises. England assumed, and was justified in assuming, because the leaders of Jewry the world over had made these positive assertains, that as soon as the War was ended and opportunity was given to universal Jewry to rebuild Palestine, that the Jews the world over would pour into Palestine their soul and their substance, their numbers and their wealth; that they would seize this opportunity which they begged for and craved for, and, as they maintained, was the hope of Israel for centuries.

England expected the rich Jews of England and France and America to give not alone of their wealth but of their organizing ability, of their financial genius, to the exploiting, the upbuilding, the reconstructing of this country. But no such thing was forthcoming. The poor of the Eukraine and the persecuted of Poland, it seems, were the only ones who really, really wanted Palestine. It seems as though they were the only ones who were ready to go there, to live there, and, if necessary, to die there. But they had no substance; they had no wherewithal. And so even they remained in the bloody Gehenna of the Eukraine, to perish by the sword, being unable, not being assisted by their more fortunate brothers, to escape the Gehenna and go

to Palestine.

The more fortunate American Jews and the more fortunate British Jews did pitifully little for the economic rehabilitation of Palestine, with the result that before very long England was compelled to shut down the gates of Palestine against the numbers of Eastern European Jews who wanted to go there, because they said, and rightly so, "We dare not deplete the country; the country is in no position to support the large influx of immigrants; the Jews have not built up, as they promised to do, great national industries—factories, to enable men to earn a living in Palestine." And so many who came to the very gates of Palestine were turned back.

And so England, realizing that the interests of Tewry in Palestine was much more sentimental than real, and much more of a historic hungering for something than a passionate need which would lead men to sacrifice—England decided that rather than tip the balance in favor of Zionism, and thereby irritate and antagonize the Arabs who are there on the soil, who have kinsmen in Syria, in Egypt, in India, very much concerned about their welfare,—England decided to tip the scale in favor of the Arabs, to the hurt, to the disintegration of Zionist policy and Zionist program.

But I believe that the requium, the dirge which Zangwill sounds over political Zionism, the epitaph which he is writing, is a bit too previous. A nation is not built in a day, or in a half a decade. There are men in

Palestine today, Jews who are laboring in the vineyards, building colonies, paving roads, establishing hospitals, building schools and universities—doing that slow, dull, patient, routine labor which must be the groundwork of a great social structure. There is no glamour attached to their labor. It is spade work, ditch work. For they are there, loyal and consecrated souls, in the behest of a great ideal—building. And so long as there is "only a saving remnant" who are thrilled by an exalted ideal, and who are ready to give of their blood and sweat for the recreation of a Jewish life in Palestine, so long is there hope for this ideal.

gloriously attested, however universally accepted by the great powers, can build Palestine or give Palestine to the Jew. There are no gifts in internacional politique. A land is built by sacrifice. Men must purchase with blood freedom and independence and self-respect. Jewry, if it wishes a homeland in Palestine—and it has not yet been sufficiently well established that universal Jewry, especially some prosperous sections of universal Jewry, do wish a homeland for the Jewish people of Palestine,—I say, if Jewry wishes a homeland in Palestine, if it wishes a place where the spirit of the Jew can have a local habitation and a name, a congenial environment, an atmospherewhere the genius of his people may create as prolifically and as marvelously as in the days of the prophets and the seers and

the sages of old, then Jewry must turn to the task of building; then Jewry may work for it, pay for it, and labor for it.

Palestine. If you had a hundred millions you could only buy the place where Palestine once stood. Palestine itself you must recreate by labor until it flows again with milk and honey. If the Almighty himself carried the rest of us to Palestine by a miracle, what would we gain except a free passage. In the sweat of our brow we must earn our Palestine. And therefore the day we get Palestine, if the most joyous, will also be the most terrible day of our movement." And that terrible day of the movement is at hand, and rangwill is too impatient and too restless a spirit to endure the hardships of this terrible day which any great movement must pass through before it is realized.

I believe that American Israel ought to turn more seriously to the task of upbuilding Palestine. It is not a question of politics; it is not a question of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine; it is not a question of establishing a Jewish government in Palestine. The Palestinean Jew does not hanker for it and does not want it. It is not a question of dual allegiance to diasporic nationalism: it is a question pure and simple of seizing a great historic opportunity of building at least one place in this earth where the Jew can live as a Jew, free and self-

respecting, where he can give free expression to his Jewish soul without being compelled to imitate and copy and follow the lead of other cultures and of other civilization.

We are a people--so I, at least, believe--not of the past only; we have a living present, and we have a great promising future; that indomitable spirit and unquenchable genius of the Jew which gave a sacred literature to half the world and a God to two-thirds of mankind; that spirit which expressed itself in law and lore, in philosophy and poetry--a spirit of light and leading,--that spirit is not of the past only: it is in the blood of our people today. And given a chance, given a congenial surrounding, in a land which is replete with stimulating historical association such as Palestine, that spirit may yet create values which will abundantly bless mankind.

Palestine is not meant to be the home of all the Jews the world over. Palestine cannot contain or support the fifteen millions of Jews the world over.

Undoubtedly the greater numbers of Israel will always remain in the diaspora, and remain part and parcel of those lands where they dwell, identifying themselves with the life-political, social, economic, cultural-of the peoples in whose midst the scattered hosts of Israel live.

But Palestine may become a home, a place of refuge, a samtuary for millions of our people, say for hundreds of thousands of our people, for tens of thousands of our people. Isn't that a worthwhile enterprise?

Passing from Palestine he expressed his animate versions about American life in general—the theater, prohibition, the religion, the education of the American people, and I am sorry to say that in this regard Mr. Zangwill was no longer the graceful, brilliant, tactful epigramist. It was very much of a general scold—crude, and, to my mind, did quite a bit of harm to American Israel; for when Zangwill speaks, he speaks not as an Englishman; much as he would try to give that impression, in the eyes of the American people he speaks as a Jew, and his strictures and his dissatisfactions lead men to think that American Israel is generally disgruntled and dissatisfied and cynical. And American Israel is not.

Of course we are an imperfect people; of course we have our failings and foibles and shortcomings.

What people has not? But it need not have been the peculiar task of Israel Zangwill, who speaks as a spokesman of Israel, to have taken the occasion over and over again cynically and contemptuously and slightingly to refer to American life.

Perhaps the most dangerous of his assertions was this: that American Jewry should organize the Jewish vote; that we should vote as a group. Unless we do so, he maintains, we are untrue to the spirit of America and to the spirit of the Jew. But why a Jewish vote? Why not an Italian vote, a Polish vote and a Hungarian vote? Is

America to become a crazy quilt of wrangling nationalities and racial identities, who vote, who participate in the national life of our country, not as citizens, not as Americans but as inheritors of ancient prejudices from abroad? What has the Jew to profit from such a contingency? Will the organization of three million Jews as a political unit give them more power against a ninety-seven per cent vote organized against them?

Then if the American Jew continues his policy of voting as a conscientious, devoted, loyal American citizen, when the time comes that we must organize our political forces to protect us against the overwhelming majority organized against us. God save America and God save American Israel. If we instinctively unite to oppose a candidate who makes racial prejudices his program, a klan representative, and if the Catholics do likewise, we and they are not voting as Jews and Catholics—we are voting as American citizens who see the menace not merely to us but to our beloved American institutions, and the policies and programs of such Jews. Were we not Jews and were they not Catholics, as conscientious, loyal citizens we could not do otherwise but vote as we are voting.

The American Jew need not resort to that dangerous tool known as the Jewish vote.

But one thing Zangwill said which is supremely fine and true, and that is this: that Israel cannot survive without a burning faith; and coming from a

man whom men think cynical, that is a profound observation.

Israel cannot survive -- I would add, Israel should not survive without a burning faith. Palestine is not a substitute for Judaism. For generations, and perhaps centuries to come, the diaspora will have to feed Palestine, culturally and physically, and not Palestine the diaspora.

Our primary problem, the problem of supreme and imminent importance in Jewish life, here and elsewhere, in America and in Palestine, is to keep the faith of Israel, which alone justifies self-separateness, which alone justifies and consecrates his suffering, which alone gives meaning and purpose to all his strivings; to keep that faith burning, alive, vital, in the lives of the sons and daughters of Israel.

The world needs us more as a great faith, as an unyielding and uncompromising set of ideals, touching national and international and private morality, than it needs us as a small political entity in some corner of the world, to be made the football and intrigue of international diplomats and rivalries.

passion, not the political acumen of Israel; the world needs us as the spokesmen of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Malachi and Amos and Hillel and Maimonides and Halevi; the world needs us as the harbingers and the messengers, the channel of divine revelation. And Israel cannot survive, should not survive, unless that faith remains throbingly alive, pulsating

in the souls of the sons and daughters of Israel.

That work, perhaps, is the most profound of the many things which Israel Zangwill, wisely or unwisely, timely or untimely, said in his visit to America.

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