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A Study in Racial Conceits, 1924.

"A STUDY IN RACIAL CONCEITS."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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A long time ago one of the wise men of our race declared that God created in the beginning only one man--- Adam. So that thereafter, and in all succeeding generations, no man should be justified in saying: "I come from a better ancestry than you come from." This wise man must have anticipated the great racial conceits and rivalries of our day. Not so long ago men waged warfare about religion. Today, in the civilized countries, men are more or less ashamed of fighting about religion. I say civilized countries--with the possible exception of the United States. It seems that our own country, which was the last country in the world to emancipate itself from slavery, might yet be the last country in the world to emancipate itself from religious bigotry. That seems to be the price which we must pay for our splendid isolation and our provincialism.

But the civilized nations by and large, in western Europe, are more or less ashamed of fighting among themselves today on religious grounds. And so, inasmuch as they require some high sounding slogan and some palpable excuse for their rivalries, for supremacy, they have hit upon another, to them, cogent and highly real cause, namely, racial superiority. Once upon a time it was: "My God is better than your God." Now it is: "My grandfather was better than your grandfather." Once upon a time it was: "My church: superior, excellent, perfect." Now it is: "My race: superior, excellent, perfect."

Once upon a time it was these distorted religious views that lent themselves so readily to militaristic exploitation; now it is these pseudo-scientific, distorted views of heredity and group psychology which lend themselves quite readily, quite accommodatingly, to the self-same militaristic exploitation.

Now, it is clear that no one brags about his superiority unless he has some mischief up his sleeve. If you wish to make a friend of some one, the last thing on earth you do would be to try to impress that man with your superiority and your excellence and your nobility, as against his inferiority and lack of excellence and nobility. That is the way to make enemies; that is the way to break friendships. Similarly, a religion which becomes competitive instead of expository, a religion which, instead of limiting itself to the inculcations of its doctrines and the propagation of its ideals, dwells with great insistence upon its primacy and its superiority and its excellence as against other religions, that religion is not so much concerned with truth as it is with dominion and mastery and exploitation.

And it is so with a race. Whenever you find a race that spends a lot of mental energy in publishing to the world its innate qualities of greatness, its remarkable virtues, its purity, its originality, its creativeness, as over against other races which do not possess these virtues and potencies to the same high degree, you may be sure that that race is bent upon some mischief; that it is seeking to

exploit; that it is looking about for some justification to cover up its nefarious purposes.

No man brags unless he is a coward or a bully; and no race brags unless it is afraid or bent upon some mischief. That is a very simple truth, well worth having in mind.

Now, when did this system of race castes, this lie of race supremacy, originate? It might be surprising for you to know that it is of comparatively recent times. It began, I believe, with the exploitation of the backward nations by the western European peoples. It began somewhere in the seventeenth century, and gained prestige and momentum in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as the European nations, for the time being strong and dominant, began to conquer, subject, despoil and exploit the so-called backward nations. They sent their hordes of marauders and despoilers to the Western Hemisphere, to Asia, to Africa; they devastated, they impoverished, they enslaved, they destroyed. And then the people back home, whose emissaries these adventurers and exploiters were, perhaps because their conscience pricked them, perhaps because they anticipated even greater aggression, began to look about for some formula, some mock pious, mock serious, opera bouffe theory of race to justify themselves the exploitation of backward races, and they hit upon this theory: that by the grace of God, by the fiat of the Almighty, there are certain strong races, and there are certain weak races; there are certain masterful

peoples, and there are certain subject peoples. Some races are created; some races are endowed mentally, spiritually, physically with those qualities which make them and justify them in being the rulers and the masters of the world; and other races are so mongrel, so inferior, so poorly endowed, that they should by right, and for the sake of racial eugenics, remain permanently subject races and minister to the needs and manifest destinies of these chosen peoples of the earth. That is the basis of race rivalry.

Now, this culminating theory has been broadly exploited in the last few generations. England used it to justify its hold on India. England, because of its high church terminology, evolved a very high-sounding and beautiful phrase--a slogan--which covers a multitude of sins: "The White Man's Burden." A backward race is a burden upon the white man, and the white man must assume the responsibility of educating and developing this backward race, and on the basis of this mock pious slogan--the White Man's Burden--India has been bled white.

The Southern states in our own country employed the same theory in justifying slavery. The negro belongs to an inferior race; he does not belong to the human race at all; he is by birth, by ancestry, a beast of burden and can never rise, and therefore may legitimately, and even ethically, be retained as a slave. Prussia used it during the war in her propaganda. The Nordics in the last decade have used it very generally and very hilariously to justify their putative

exploitation of other races; and it has been the dearest, most precious argument of the anti-Semite.

During the last war this theory of race received astounding prestige and momentum. Every little people began to talk about race; every little people began to present its credentials for self-determination on the basis of racial homogeneity and racial purity, and as a corollary there developed within each one of these states, or statements, a distrust and a hate of every national within that state who could not trace his ancestry back to what they thought was a common racial stock of the majority; Germany for the Teuton; France for the Gaul; England for the Anglo-Saxon; Russia for the Slav. And the Jew, who in every land is in great evidence, because of his racial uniqueness, came in for a double measure of this distrust and this hate. Even America--which of course has no common ancestry, America, into whose composition there entered a hundred races,--even America has today become the stage for this swashbuckling, rampant, furiously earnest racial conceit and pretense.

This is all by way of introduction to what I have to say. The sad thing about this race rivalry and race conceit, as far as we Jews are concerned, is that very often some of us, who lose patience and become terribly unhappy because of these taunts of our enemies as to our racial inferiority, oftentimes resort to the very weapons of our enemies and retort in kind. And that is sad; that is tragic. Very often Jews stoop to the very method and manner and

technique of the Jew-baiter. "You say that I am of an inferior race." "I say that you are of an inferior race." You say we are different and we can never meet." I say, certainly we are different, and we can never meet, and I am glad of it, because I am from a better stock than you, and I would be degenerating if I were to permit myself to mix and mingle with you."

It is often like children fighting about the respective merits of their fathers. "My father is better than yours." And the other boy says, "No, my father is better than yours." And so on and so on, until they come to blows and go back home to their unsuspecting fathers in tears. Except that these "children" fight with big words and high sounding, profound phrases; except that these "children" are more ingenious, while the others are more sincere.

The Jew who falls into the trap of answering the anti-Semite in kind is indeed a sorry spectacle, for he descends from the high citadel, his traditional stronghold, his moral stay and strength, namely, humanism, universalism. "Have we not all one father?" "Hath not one God created us all?" He leaves that high safety and fortress of his life and descends into the dark, dank valley of racial pretense, lies and chauvinism, there to match arguments and strength with an adversary who is bound to outwit and outclass and outnumber him; where he is bound to lose. For the Jew, however imposing his credentials and his arguments may be, can never convince his enemy that he is superior, and having

failed, as he must fail in such an enterprise, he cannot then turn about and seek the cooperation of the very men whom he has just now maligned and depreciated; nor can he claim moral and spiritual leadership in the world, when he has just now been indulging in a stupid racial self-conceit and bragga-docio.

When the Jew puts on the same armour and uses the same weapon as the anti-Semite, he becomes of the same clan; he loses his strength, his mainstay, his message and his mission in the world. He is lost. And this is exactly what our friend who wrote this book, which I am to discuss this morning, did. This is exactly the trap into which he fell.

This book is called, "You Gentiles" -- a rather aggressive, provoking title. And the spirit of aggressiveness and provocation, the desire to nettle, to hurt, to make people uncomfortable, seems to prevail in the entire book. The general thesis of this book is that the Jew and the gentile - and by gentile he means the European peoples, or more exactly, the Western European peoples - that the Jew and the gentile can never meet because they have nothing in common; they are by race, by temperament, by predisposition, mutually opposed; they have mutual, exclusive conceptions of life--exceptions which cannot be harmonized, but which, to his way of thinking, must eternally wage war with one another.

Let me let him speak his mind, so that I do

misrepresent him. "To you," he says (meaning the gentile) "life is a game and a gallant adventure, and all life's enterprises partake of the spirit of the adventurous. To us (meaning the Jew) life is a serious and sober duty pointed to a definite and inescapable task. Your relations to gods and men spring from the joy and rhythm of the temporary comradeship or enmity of spirit. Our relation to God and men is dictated by a somber subjection to some eternal principle. Your way of life, your moralities and codes, are the rules of a game--none the less severe or exacting for that, but not inspired by a sense of fundamental purposefulness. Our way of life, our morality and code, do not refer to temporary rules which govern a temporary and trivial pastime: they are inspired by a belief in the eternal quality of human endeavor. To you morality is "the right thing"; to us morality is "right." For all the changing problems of human relationship which rise with changing circumstances you lay down the rules and regulations of the warrior, of the sportsman, the gentleman; we refer all problems seriously to eternal law. For you certain acts are "unbecoming," whether he be a knight or a decent fellow. We have no such changing systems of reference--only one command.

"All your moral attributes are only varieties of Queensberry rules. Honor, loyalty, purity--these are sets of regulations; the best of you will not swerve from them; you will die in their defense--like the gallant gentlemen you are; but you will not brook the question whether your system of honor is founded on right, whether loyalty has

relation to intelligence, whether purity has relation to the state of mind. Honor means but one thing today--to do the honorable thing, whether it be honor in duelling, honor among thieves, honor of women. Loyalty means the quality of being loyal, independent of right or wrong. Purity means the chastity of the body, or the denial of desire--as such; it is related to the game, not to God.

"For us these distinctions do not exist, for we are serious in our intentions. We will not accept your rules because we do not understand them. Right and wrong is the only distinction we are fitted by our nature to appreciate. We are puzzled by your punctilios, your quaint distinctions, your gentleman's *comme il faut*s. We are amazed when you fight for them; we are struck dumb when you die for them--a song on your lips. Not that we do not know how to die for a cause. But we must die for a serious cause, for a reason, for right, for God; not for a slogan without meaning, for a symbol for its own sake, for a rule for its own sake. We will die for the right--not for "the right thing."

"The difference in behavior and reaction springs from something much more earnest and significant than difference in beliefs. It springs (this is the important thought) from a difference in our biologic equipment. It does not argue the inferiority of the one or the other. It is a difference in the taking of life which cannot be argued. You have your way of life, we ours. In your system of life we are essentially without "honor." In our system of life you are essentially without morality. In your system of life we must forever appear graceless; to us you must forever appear Godless."

And so on and on for two or three hundred pages. That is the new discovery: that, biologically, Jew and gentile are so constituted that they cannot understand their different conceptions of life, and therefore cannot cooperate. He rides his hobby to death. He says, "Take for example, sport. Sport is very popular among gentiles. It is not at all popular among Jews. It is popular among gentiles because the gentile essentially conceives life as a game, as a sport; the Jew is too serious for sport." Ah, but you point to the hundreds and the thousands of Jewish boys and girls who love sport and indulge in it. The author has for his simple answer: they are just imitating the gentile.

The gentile like war. That is a game; it brings with it adventure, chivalry. He loves it. His pretensions about his wish for business is only a pretense. The gentile will always love war; the Jew never loved war. With all my love and high regard for my people, a reading of my history leads me, compels me, to the conclusion that the Jew waged wars as often, as needlessly, as stupidly, at times as cruelly, as any gentile nation. The Old Testament, so-called--the Bible--rings with the alarms of war. It is to the great credit of our race that some of the mighty spirits of our people were great enough and heroic enough to lift themselves from that morass and reach out for the higher levels of peace and international comity. But so did the great spirits of every people reach out for international peace. The masses the world over are still in the jungle

world, blood-thirsty and eager for any kind of a fray which will give them excitement and the promise of booty.

The gentile, says the author in another chapter, is essentially polytheistic; the Jew is essentially monotheistic. The gentile is polytheistic because he is essentially an individualist; he is himself. In a game every man must fight for himself or for his side. The Jew is a monotheist because the Jew is able to subject his individuality to the absolute one. The gentile will never be a monotheist; the Jew always was monotheist. But this, too, is hardly deserving of serious consideration, for anyone who has even a smattering of history knows that the Jew passed through the same stages of polytheistic, polydaemonistic, religious superstition as any other primitive people. Again our Bible is our evidence. Gods and spirits and demons and satans and angels filled the world of the primitive Jew, as it filled the world even down through the Middle Ages. It was only after the titanic struggles of the centuries on the part of great prophets that the official religion of the Jew became a pure monotheism. But the popular religion to this very day in many parts of the world remains very much polydaemonistic and very much superstitious. And the gentile world, a little behind the Jew in his religious revelation, in some instances has caught up with him.

The Jew has a peculiar religious genius which enabled him to advance a little beyond other peoples, a little

ahead of other peoples. But that is no saying that other peoples may not some day meet him, as they have in many instances met him. It is not a question of racial endowments and biologic equipments; it is a question of one race having a knack for certain things which enable it to be a leader in that particular sphere. But other races may follow it and may adopt its view. But the gentile, because he regards life as a game, has discipline; for you cannot play the game without a rigid discipline. The Jew has no discipline. The Jew has no discipline in his institutions, in his home, in his synagogues. And that, too, is traced to the fact, strangely enough, in this chapter, the gentile is no longer an individualist, because if he were he would not submit to discipline. The gentile in this chapter is already one who can submerge his individuality and submit to discipline; and the Jew, in this chapter, becomes the great individualist, and because he is an individualist, he does not yield to discipline. He says, take any Jewish eleemosynary, philanthropic institution and compare its regime, its order, its methods of administration, with non-Jewish institutions, and you will see the difference at once. One is orderly, well-managed, efficient; the other is disorderly, ill-managed.

What the author seems to have in mind--if he has anything particular in mind--is a comparison between some eastern European institution, among a people which has had little advantage, either of culture or prosperity, with an institution in England or in America, which has had the

advantages of prosperity, of wealth, of culture. He compares the two to the disadvantage of the one. But if he were to compare the gentile institutions in those same countries--in Poland, in Russia, in Roumania, with the gentile institutions in England and in America, he would find the same contrast. It is not a matter of race equipment; it is a matter of stage of development, of cultural progress, and nothing more.

Take science. He says the gentile has contributed a great deal of scientific knowledge in the world, not because he loves science, but because science is a game. He likes the game. The Jew does not like science, and therefore he has made no original contributions in the realm of science. Ah, but you say: Einstein, Loeb, Michaelson..... The author is quite ready with an answer. He says these are exceptions!

In other words, the gentile is not serious; the Jew is serious. The gentile loves the game; the Jew loves God; and because these two races are at poles asunder, having these contradictory views of life, they will never meet. Never the twain shall meet. The Eastern European tried to meet the Western European; tried to assimilate the customs, the manners of speech, the habits of the gentile. It didn't do him any good. The gentile spurned him. Anti-Semitism is as great in Western European countries as in Eastern European countries. The Jew might try intermarriage as his means of solving this problem. Submerge him, lose all identity through intermarriage. In a few generations there

would be no Jew. Ah, says the author, that, too, is impossible. In the first place, it would take too long; and the author seems to have no patience with anything. In the second place, the gentile does not wish the Jew to intermarry, and in the third place, even should he intermarry, who can tell but what three or four or ten generations hence some bit of this racial strain will assert itself in the Western world again, unbalance European civilization again, and become the source of strife again. So there is no hope of merging, there is no hope of assimilation.

What is the hope? Here it is: "If, then, the struggle between us is ever to be lifted beyond the physical, your democracies will have to alter their demands for racial, spiritual and cultural homogeneity within the state. But it would be foolish to regard this as a possibility, for the tendency of this civilization is in the opposite direction. There is a steady approach towards the identification of government with race instead of with the political state, and since this is largely beyond your conscious control, it is perhaps as foolish as it is futile to expect a change."

So there we are--up against a blank wall of despair. All this brilliant reasoning and this marshalling of pseudo-scientific facts have brough the author up against a stone wall of despair and hopelessness. In order to accomplish his purpose, in order to bolster up that rickety superstructure of racial fantastic notions, this author has

had to do five things. He has had to indict the whole gentile world of lack of seriousness, lack of morality, lack of purposefulness in life, lack of real religion, lack of real ethics. He has had to indict the Jew of lack of originality in science, in art, in scholarship. He has had to deny, as he does deny most furiously, the value of progress in civilization, and the force of education in changing men, in molding their character. What a man is today he is because ten thousand years ago his ancestor was; what a man was primordially he will remain eternally. Education, progress, are of no consequence in changing the biologic constitution of an individual or of a race.

And he has had to underestimate and ignore, even, the common human interests, the ideals which are common to all men of whatever race and whatever group--the ideal of love and kindness and justice and fairness and tolerance and cooperation. He has had to sneer at them and deride them.

Now, I say that this author is a distinctly pathetic figure. Evidently prejudice has gotten under his skin. He is young, he is impatient, he is intolerant. He has forgotten that marvelous sense of Jewish humor, and he has lost that badge of all of his tribe--Patience. If he had stopped to think what tremendous strides the Jew has made just within the last one hundred years, if he had stopped for a moment to compare what and where we were a hundred years ago, to what we are and where we are today, he would have perhaps grown a bit more optimistic of what we may be and

where we may be a hundred years from today.

A hundred years ago the Jew enjoyed no political equality, very few business opportunities, no secular educational rights; he was an outcast, a pariah, a dweller of the ghetto. Today, in most parts of the world, the Jew has political equality, the Jew has unrestricted commercial and business opportunities, the schools and high schools and universities and academies of learning are open to him; he can go freely and move freely and breathe God's air freely.

Can we not hope that, having made these strides through one short, brief century, after what seemed to be a hopeless sixteen centuries of oppression, of discrimination,--can we, ought we, not today, with the same spirit of tolerance, continue, that we might yet gain, as some of us have in some parts of the world gained, full social, political, religious, commercial equality with all of our other fellow human beings? "Blessed be ye who waits." For men must wait who believe in God.

The Jew and gentile are different. Of course they are different. No two men are alike. No two within one family are alike. Certainly no two in two different families are alike; no two in two different races are alike. But what of it? For men to cooperate they must not be similar. For you and me to work together, all of our views must not be identical. We can discover, you and I--Jew and gentile, Englishman, German, Slav, Asiatic, African,--we can discover our common human needs, our common human cravings,

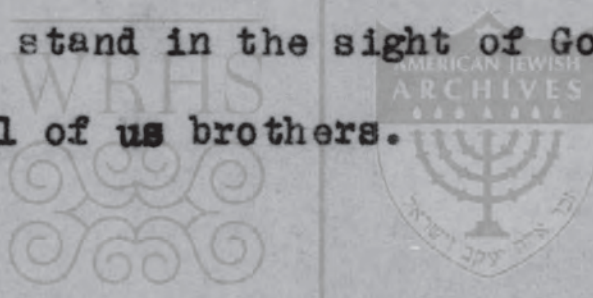
as men; not as Jew and gentile and German and French, but as men--children of God, human beings. We can discover our common human needs at once and apply ourselves cooperatively, each bringing his own gift, his own point of view, his own contribution,--apply ourselves cooperatively to the solution of those problems.

He wants us to change. Why should we change? Why should we want to judge the gentile? Why should the gentile want to judge us? Why, there is as much of racial difference in the gentile world,--between the Slav, the morbid, morose Slav, who does not like sport, who does not like many of the things that the Anglo-Saxon likes,--there is as much difference between the Slav and the Anglo-Saxon as there is between the Anglo-Saxon and the Teuton; and there is as much difference between the Teuton and the Gaul as there is between the Gaul and the Jew. Of course races are different. History, climate and geography have placed a characteristic stamp upon every human group. But what of it? Why dwell upon these differences? What earthly good can we do to the gentile and to the Jew in underscoring constantly the things that separate us? Why cannot we meet as men and women of the twentieth century, and discover what all of us, as human beings, wish for, hope for, crave for, namely, the spirit of love and cooperation, peace, good will, justice, righteousness, truth?

The rainbow is beautiful because the rainbow is not made up of one color, but is made up of many colors,

that blending and fusing into one. This paper is white because every color has gone into the making of this color. White is white because it is the sum total of all colors. And the human race is the human race, one and indivisible, because many temperaments, many dispositions, have gone into the making of it.

Let each man walk in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of our God, but God, by whatever name he is called, is one. Let each race follow its natural bents and its natural aptitudes, and bring its gifts, soul and mind and heart gifts, and lay them upon the altar of the common humanity. For beyond race, nationality and creed, we stand in the sight of God as men, his children,--all of us brothers.



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