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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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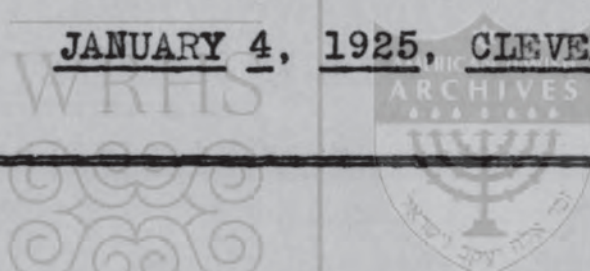
Taking Stock of the Year 1924, 1925.

"TAKING STOCK OF THE YEAR 1924."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING.

JANUARY 4, 1925, CLEVELAND.



JOSEPH T. KRAUS  
Shorthand  
Reporter  
CLEVELAND



The year 1924 was not signalized by any epoch-making event in national or international affairs, although the year did not want its full quota of interesting and more or less significant occurrences. In the field of international politics and economics the efforts of 1924 are directed largely to the carrying out of the program of stabilization which was made necessary by the universal upheaval, the last war. One quite definite, and in a way quite remarkable, step was taken during the last year in this direction of stabilizing the economic life of Europe. I refer, of course, to the acceptance by the allied nations and Germany of the so-called Dawes plan of reparations. This plan has made possible the extension of a huge loan to Germany to assist her in organizing financial affairs, and this loan has made possible the first substantial payments by Germany in reparations. Given time, and above all, sincerity on the part of both sides, this plan promises, though it does not guarantee, a brighter economic future for the peoples of Europe.

The Dawes plan, of course, only indirectly makes for the pacification of Europe. It would be a mistake to assume that a plan which is purely economic, and which is aimed purely at facilitating certain financial settlements as between victor and victim, would by itself, as a matter of course, bring about the pacification of the turbulent European nations. There is, of course, no imminent danger of war in



Europe. The nations are too exhausted. The defeated nations are altogether too beaten and cowed; the victorious nations are all too exhausted to indulge in the luxury of carrying on a universal war. But it would be a mistake to assume that the heart of Europe is at peace, that the nations have grounded their arms forever. National vanities and racial hates and the hungering passion for revenge have only been driven underground. Some day they may reappear, unless permanently checked.

There has taken place during the year 1924 one momentous event looking to the permanent pacification of Europe, the one which may become a turning point in the history of mankind. I refer to the protocol which was adopted by the fifth assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva, signed by forty-seven nations, whereby arbitration in international disputes is made compulsory, and whereby that measure of international security is assured to each and every member among the signatories which alone would induce or encourage a nation to agree to disarmament.

During the liberal regime of the last few months, MacDonald in England, Herriot in France, republicanism triumphant in most parts of Europe, the sentiment which has been struggling for expression in the hearts of the masses of Europe for years, was finally given physical expression at a great international conference; but at the last session of the council of the League in Rome, the new prime minister, through his foreign secretary, Austin Chamberlain, of the new conservative government of Great Britain, requested delay in the further



✓ consideration of this protocol, and the delay was granted until the forthcoming assembly in March. Now, it remains to be seen whether the new reactionary government in England will help this movement, this earnest attempt, or whether it will thwart it; and only time can tell.

As far as America is concerned in its relations to Europe, we are still playing a lone hand. Our main concern at the present time in international statesmanship is to collect our outstanding debts. What we propose to do about this protocol, what we propose to do about the world's court, which the President of the United States and Secretary of State highly indorse and commend, is yet a mystery. The Senate has not yet spoken and the irreconcilables of the Senate havenot yet been heard.

As far as the individual nations of Europe are concerned, there has transpired in the last year a great shifting of political power. England began 1924 with a conservative government. Later that conservative government was voted out of power and a new government, a labor government, the first labor government in the history of the British Empire, under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald, voted into power. It was apparent from the outstart that this government could accomplish little and could not endure for long, because it was a minority party whose actions depended upon the co-operation of the liberals and the conservatives. In November the labor government of England was thrown out of office by an overwhelming vote and the conservatives were reinstated. What



the international policies of this conservative government will be may be inferred from its actions in the first few months of its existence--the decision to establish a base, a naval base at Singapore, which the labor government had vetoed; and that criminal act of aggression in Egypt. The British government during the next five years will undoubtedly be a very conservative, perhaps reactionary, government, with vast imperialistic ambitions.

France began the year 1924 with the militaristic and imperialistic Poincare in power, but the year had not advanced far when that government was discredited and the people overwhelmingly voted into power not alone a labor government but a very radical government. Herriot assumed control of the affairs of France, and at once there was noticed throughout Europe an easing off of tension and a better feeling among nations. The defeat of MacDonald has weakened the power of Herriot in France. What the future holds in store one can only guess at.

Germany is finding herself. Her political life is still very much confused. The last elections did not return any one great majority party to power; but it has proved one important fact; that the German republic is there to stay. It seems likely that with the Dawes plan, and with the good will on the part of the allied nations, Germany will in the very near future regain much of her lost strength and prestige.

In Italy, in 1924, we have evidence of the failure of force, whether it be the force of the masses or the



force of the classes. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in Italy, the Black Shirts under Mussolini, has led to assassination, to political crimes, and the year 1924 in Italy closes with a vast number of riots in every part of the land. Mussolini will go before very long, and Italy, to save herself, will return to a sane, democratic form of government.

Very little can be said about Russia in 1924, because we know so very little. Lenin died in 1924, and with him the chapter in Russian history closes. Trotzsky at the present time seems to have been discredited by the Communists in power. The new economic policy which Lenin introduced at the closing years of his life has, from reports, been abandoned. The doctrinaires are enthroned again, and it seems likely that new and more desperate experiments in pure communism, which are destined to as sad frustration and defeat, will again be tried in Russia during the next year or two. France and England have recognized Russia during the last year,--The United States still keeping itself sanctimoniously aloof from contamination with this people, although it does deign to do business on the side with Russia.

In the United States the year 1924, economically and financially, from all appearances was not a very satisfactory year. Until the nations of Europe are restored to normal economic existence, so that they can buy our surplus products, there will be in our land closed shops and factories and unemployment. Politically, the year 1924 saw the rise of a third party, a very significant phenomenon;



a third party which represented definite liberal and progressive sentiments; a party with whose principles one may differ but whose legitimate place in a nation no one can question. The party has received the support of close onto five millions of men and women at the last election, which is a remarkable showing for a party without organization, without funds, without the press. I make bold to say that a liberal party is here to stay in American political life.

The year 1924 brought to our doors the uninvited oil scandals which besmirched the fair name of America, and which revealed to us the menace involved in the attempts of unscrupulous business to control legislation and government. The year 1924 saw enacted the immigration bill which was based on an utterly new principle of racial discrimination, and which, to my mind, is destined to do a great deal of harm to the body and soul of America. With that immigration bill there went an utterly unwarranted and uncalled for Japanese exclusion act, which was a gratuitous insult, which was a reflection not upon the Japanese but upon the American people, and which stirred the slumbering embers of racial hate and suspicious and distrust along the Pacific which years may not extinguish. That has been our contribution in 1924 to national discord.

As far as Jewish life in America is concerned, the year 1924 saw the tidal waves of anti-Semitism recede still further, as they inevitably have to recede. Among a people trained by a hundred and fifty years in



democracy, among a people which waged a terrible civil war to establish the rights of the suppressed and the denied people, among a people that has a marvelous tradition of government and the rights of men, and above all among a prosperous people, prejudice of any and every kind can have but a temporary and passing place.

The Rabbis make a keen observation somewhere: Satan (the devil) has no opportunity to do mischief except in times of distress and suffering. The reason that there has transpired so much of prejudice and anti-Semitism and racial and creedal hates in the war-torn Europe is because Europe is war-torn and distressed and suffering. Men's minds are confused and men's passions are aroused. But in a land such as ours, where there is comparative peace and prosperity, the mischief maker may have his day, but his day is never long.

In 1924 American Israel witnessed the continuation of a remarkable renaissance in the interest of Jews; in their religion, in their educational problems, in their cultural institutions. I do not know how many new temples and synagogues were dedicated during the past year. There were very many. I do not know just how many schools were opened during the past year, but there were very many. Our Rabbinical seminaries are expanding. The Hebrew Union College has added another building to house its students, whose number is increasing yearly. Its library has been most remarkably increased. That is similarly true of the Jewish theological seminary of New York. Two weeks ago the Jewry of New York



in one week raised a million dollars for Jewish education.

Now, to me, that is one of the most heartening things about American Jewish life today. The Jew is finding his soul. The Jew is beginning to learn that it is not enough to found eleemosynary institutions--orphanages and hospitals and homes for the aged to take care of the physically dependent, but it is of equal importance, if not of greater importance, to take care of the spiritual and cultural, desperate needs of our people. If we are to survive at all as Jews, we ought to survive as enlightened, well-informed, culturally-creative people. We must make our heritage, our marvelous heritage of three thousand years, vigorous, alive and telling in the lives of the rising generation. The non-Jew has far excelled the Jew in his understanding of, and his contributions to, educational institutions. During the year 1924 there were thousands, literally, of generous gifts made by non-Jews to various educational institutions of America. Some of the outstanding ones have undoubtedly been brought to your attention. Within the last few months Mr. James Buchanan Duke set aside a fund of forty millions of dollars to found colleges, institutions of learning, and to support other agencies. Mr. George Eastman within the last few months gave an additional twelve and a half million dollars, making a total of close onto sixty millions of dollars of contributions, largely to educational and cultural institutions. One individual, a Mr. Harkness, gives a million dollars to establish a school of drama at Yale university.



Now, these men know just why they are thus generously supporting educational institutions. The soul of a people and the might of a people needs stimulation and culture. I do hope that the time will come when our well-to-do Jewish citizens, in making provision in their wills for the support of charitable institutions, a very laudable and commendable and highly necessary cause, will also remember those institutions of learning, whether they be conservative or orthodox--Rabbinical seminaries, Jewish libraries, Jewish religious schools, temples and synagogues; so that the soul of Israel may have a chance to develop and express itself beautifully and harmoniously in this blessed land.

In our own community of Cleveland during the past year, some very important things have transpired. Our own fellowship dedicated this beautiful sanctuary, and the fine religious school in connection with it, in the cause of man and for the service of God--a monument to the faith and the loyalty of the men and women of Congregation Tifereth Israel; a structure which all have come to regard with love and admiration as among the most beautiful ecclesiastical structures in the country. It has been called the most beautiful synagogue in the world. Whatever its external beauty may be, what appeals to me, to my co-workers, is the fine spirit of sacrifice and good will that made this edifice possible.

Our sister congregations in this city have not been backward, either, in extending their facilities, in erecting or inaugurating the erection of new buildings.



Judaism is alive and vigorous in our community. And perhaps the most hopeful sign is the formation in our city of the Bureau of Jewish Education within the last few months. The Bureau of Jewish Education, of which I shall have occasion to speak again before very long, was organized by men and women alert to the serious problem of having in our midst in the Jewish community of Cleveland some 12,000 Jewish boys and girls who are receiving absolutely no religious training whatsoever, whether in a Sabbath school or in a Hebrew school or in private instruction in the home. This bureau has set for itself the task of providing educational facilities for these unschooled, the thousands of them, whether they be of orthodox homes or reformed homes. The bureau has set for its goal the reorganization of the Hebrew schools in our city upon a more sound financial basis, so that ultimately they can become self-supporting. The bureau is setting for its goal the establishment of high schools and normal schools in our city.

In other words, we are seriously, as a community, beginning to wrestle with the problem of Jewish education in our midst, and I shall call upon you all before very long, each one of you, to contribute your utmost to this tremendously important work in our community.

What ought this nation to do in 1925? What is the biggest thing confronting the world in 1925? The most important contribution which America can make to international peace and concord the coming year is the convoking of another international conference for limitation of armament.



The Washington Conference succeeded in but a very limited degree in stimulating international disarmament. You will recall that soon after the Washington Conference was held, I made bold to criticize its accomplishments at the time, when most people were acclaiming it to the skies; that I said then that what was limited were not the arms with which the next war will actually be waged, but those arms which have become antiquated and which the nations themselves desire to scrap as unnecessary, namely, large warships. The construction of large warships was limited by agreement, but the construction of auxiliary craft--light cruisers and submarines, and above all, airplanes, those instruments by which the next war will be waged,--that has not been at all restricted. And during 1924 the great nations of Europe have embarked upon a vicious and relentless program of competition in air crafts and in submarines, and the consequences of such a competition in the future must be exactly what they were in the past--inevitably war!

When nations arm themselves to the teeth they must fight; and the provocation will present itself. And America is being stampeded by propagandists, by naval officers, by people interested in the manufacture of arms and in the construction of ships and airplanes. The American government is being stampeded against its will--and I shall say that to the credit of the President--into this cutthroat competition.

Now, a conference called during the coming year to limit armament in these new fields will go a long ways



in making less probable a universal war and a universal catastrophe.

The year 1924 closes a quarter of a century. One-fourth of the twentieth century has come to a close. During the past twenty-five years many revolutionary scientific discoveries have been bestowed as a boon upon mankind. Mankind has made tremendous strides in the development of the automobile and the airplane and in the discovery of the wireless and the radio. The science of medicine has made marvelous strides in controlling disease and eradicating disease. There has been a universal increase in prosperity and in physical well-being. But the last twenty-five years have also witnessed some of the most terrible things in the annals of mankind. The last twenty-five years witnessed a Russo-Japanese war, and Balkan wars, and the greatest war and the most disastrous war of all times. The last twenty-five years have witnessed a relentless competition among nations to exploit the backward peoples of the earth, which enterprise must lead to private warfare. The last twenty-five years have witnessed a materialization, in a sense a degradation, of the spiritual life of the human race. The greatest energies of the race were poured into the tasks of acquisition, of attainment, of things, and the spiritual life and the spiritual reservoirs were empty; so that in 1914 civilization collapsed in its own tracks.

What the next quarter of a century will hold for mankind no one can tell. It may be a marvelous



twenty-five years. We have learned our own power. Mankind has discovered the high limitless potencies which it has for self-magnification and for the control of its own destinies. Most nations today are democratic nations; old tyrannies have been destroyed; medieval superstitions have been uprooted; the mind of man is freer, the hand of man is more powerful.

In the next twenty-five years man, if he wills it, may create an order of society much finer, much nobler, much sweeter than now exists today. It may be within the next twenty-five years mankind will evolve that technique which will make international peace a reality. It may be. It is not at all certain. It may also be that in the next twenty-five years, if we lack leadership and power and will, mankind will be plunged into a pit of darkness and self-destruction. Nothing is assured; nothing is underwritten. Everything is in the power of man and the will of God.

And so men must resolve, each man, that insofar as it lies within his power, he will, during the next year and the next years, do his utmost in helping those movements and those causes which contribute to the well-being and the spiritual exaltation and the economic and the political emancipation of mankind.

That is our promise and our challenge for the future.

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