



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
149

Box
53

Folder
227

Impressions of my visit to Europe, 1925.

"IMPRESSIONS OF MY VISIT TO EUROPE."

ABBA H. SILVER, D.D.

THE TEMPLE - SUNDAY MORNING,

OCTOBER 18, 1925, CLEVELAND, O.



Travelers returning from abroad in the days before the War, in recounting their impressions, tell of the countries they had visited; of the manners and customs of the people; of the art galleries and of cathedrals they had visited, and of those places which particularly appealed to them, either because of their beauty or because of their antiquity. Nowadays the chief questions put to a returning traveler are not of an esthetic, but rather of a political and economic, nature. How are conditions abroad? is a

question frequently put. Are the nations of Europe recovering from the War? What are the prospects of a lasting peace?

You see, the political horizons of the American people have been broadened since the War to include Europe. The American people knows today what it did not seem to know or realize before the War: that the political and economic mutations abroad have a direct bearing upon conditions at home; and having realized this fact, they are interested in conditions abroad. Where their interests are involved their curiosity is aroused.

Now I am of the opinion that no visitor to a foreign country, however sagacious, however observant, can get to know that country, or is entitled to speak with any degree of authority about conditions in that country. In order to be able to judge accurately one must know not only the tones but the overtones of a people's life--the delicate

gradations, the shadings and the neutral tones; the tremendous complexities, which underlie what seem to be simplicities, in the national life of any people; and no itinerant, even if it be a student, is in position to catch these overtones.

An Englishman, for example, visiting our shores, would see certain things, and he would report accurately, as the Englishmen do, about the things which he saw. Of the things which he did not see he would not, of course, report. But it is the very things which he could not see, the things beneath the surface, the emotional complexes of a people's life, the historical precedents, the antecedents of the visible facts before these things, and not the surface, the apparent visible things, which are the critical and important elements in national life.

For example, we found in our visit abroad that the average European thought of America in terms, first of all, of rich tourists--rich tourists who are out on a spree; rich tourists who try very vehemently to indemnify themselves for the various compulsory prohibitions at home for rather loose and free indulgences on the Continent. We found, for example, that the average European thought of America in terms of a harsh creditor nation, determined to wring every penny from the impoverished debtor nations of Europe. We found, for example, that the average European thought of America in terms of a culturally backward people that was trying to stifle science by means of legislation against evolution. The newspapers abroad this summer gave more

space to what they called the American monkey trial,--they gave more space to the trial in that little hinterland of America, the town of Dayton, than to all the scientific achievements and discoveries of all numerous colleges and universities in the United States. We found, for example, that the average European thought, unconsciously thought or felt about America in terms of American movies and Charlie Chaplins; and the American movie has fairly inundated countries of Europe. And the average European was thinking of America in terms of lynching.

Now all these are certainly facts. We do have our tourists who seem to spread the gospel of free indulgence abroad; we do seem to be insisting upon the collection of our debts, and we did have a Dayton trial, and our movies are attacking the esthetic standards of Europe, and we do have lynchings. These are facts. But how unrepresentative, how inadequate these facts are to account for the real America--the America of millions of hard-working men and women, their homes, their schools, their churches, their universities, their ideals, their faith, their charity. It is these things which do not thrust themselves upon the attention of men and women which constitute the real life of the people.

So that I believe--in fact, I am convinced--that the American is just as likely to have a false picture of the peoples of Europe as the European has of America. And even the traveler is likely to draw erroneous conclusions

from the facts which he sees and sees well, because he cannot pry beneath the surface of things. So that all the conclusions of a traveler must, at best, be tentative, and must be taken guardedly--even my conclusions.

I was impressed with three things abroad. It was only five years since last I visited Europe, and yet after these five years I saw a most remarkable economic improvement throughout Europe. The currency of almost all the countries in Europe has been stabilized; the people seem to be at work. Of course there are multitudinous evidences of poverty and want in all the countries of Europe. But one must remember that these sad pictures were not wanting in Europe even in the days before the War. Germany seems to be prosperous; the German people are working; their shops, their factories, their mines and their mills are working. The farmer, especially, in Germany is well off because he was in position to pay off his debts during the period of high inflation. France is prosperous; the national government seems to have difficulty in meeting its budget, but the individual Frenchman, the hard-working, thrifty Frenchman is far from being impoverished. That is true of Czechoslovakia; that is true of Italy, and even the countries of Eastern Europe.--When one remembers their sad economic plight, even before the War,

It is only such countries as Austria and Hungary, which were so sadly and so brutally mutilated by the Treaty of Versailles, who have not yet been able, especially

Austria, to recover their economic prosperity.

This is my first impression: Europe, that was beaten into dust and threshed, as it were, with flails, has not succumbed economically; it is fast recovering economic stability.

My second impression was that reaction was in the saddle. Liberalism did not emerge triumphant as a result of this last war which was waged for democracy. The forces of reaction are in power almost everywhere,--in England, the Tory; in Germany, Hindenburg, who was hailed during the last election as "unser retter"; in Hungary, Horta, the blood-stained; in Italy, Mussolini, who is now completing the program of destroying democracy in Italy; in Russia, bolshevism. You see, liberalism is the child of peace and security. When people are in danger, in want; when people are afraid, they are never liberal; they are narrow and ingrown and suspicious and afraid of experimentation. And Europe will require at least a decade of peace and security before liberalism--that spirit of fine adventure into the undiscovered worlds of the human spirit, that desire to experiment with new principles and new ideas,--I say, it will take another decade before Europe will grant liberalism its ascendancy in the affairs of men.

And my third impression was that Europe is enjoying today not peace but an armistice and only an armistice. I am not a prophet of evil, but I saw, as all travelers could see whose eyes were open, that everywhere

throughout Europe there was suspicion and fear and hate. The small states, for example, which were created by the Tréaty of Versailles, and which had been carved out of the old empires which had collapsed, were fearful of their independence and were guarding jealously their autonomy. Those nations which had been beaten in the war nurse a sense of humiliation, and also harbor secretly the thought that some day restitution will be made; and the victors in the last war were of course making sure to keep what they took, to safeguard the territorial gains which they made during the last war.

And Europe today is an armed camp. Poland, for example. Poland, a new state, rings today with the tread of soldiers marching; Poland, afraid of her eastern enemy, Russia, and her western enemy, Germany; afriid of itself, of the numerous minorities, the Germans, the Austrians, the Ruthenians, the Jews which have been absorbed into Poland,--Poland today spends the major part of its budget on her army. Even Germany, which is prohibited by treaty from arming, has discovered a way of training its youth by having them join these thousands of Turn Vereins, so-called gymnasium societies which have sprung up over night throughout Germany, where the youth is trained into an almost military discipline, where the young man emerging from such a school can, in the briefest space of time, be turned into an active soldier.

Europe is afraid. There will be no peace in

Europe unless there is a sense of security. The nations of Europe will not disarm unless they feel safe in disarming; and there is no agency in Europe today which can give these people that needed, that all-important, that indispensable sense of security, and until such an atmosphere of safety, of security, is secured in Europe through the establishment of a forceful, potent agency, which will protect the weak against the aggression of the strong, so long will all your efforts for peace, all your prayers for peace, not avail.

The treaty which was day before yesterday entered into at Locarno, holds within it the promise of such a security. If the diplomats who were present there were honest--and I am not inclined overly much to credit them with honesty--if their protestations were more than mere diffident statements; if France and Germany really mean today to forget and forgive and give one another that sense of security and safety by demilitarizing, say, the Rhine zone, and by agreeing to the submission, the compulsory submission of all differences to arbitration; and if England and Italy (as you read) are really prepared to come to the assistance of either Germany or France when attacked by the other,--in other words, if there is honesty and honor and morality back of that treaty, then that treaty will become a landmark in human progress, and that treaty will be a beacon of light to the harrassed and troubled and war-weary peoples of Europe. It may, however, just prove but another lantern of the dead, when one recalls the cynicisms, the immorality and the

thieving instincts of the diplomats of Europe.

As far as the conditions of the Jews in Europe are concerned--and I am sure you are interested in them--one must first remember that the Jews in Europe today, that is, since the War, for the first time in two thousand years are actually free--all the Jews of Europe. Eight years ago half of our people living in what was then Russia were a disenfranchised and alien people; today the Jew is a citizen in every country of Europe. But so inadequate is mere formal political equality that the Jew of Europe enjoying that political equality is still a very miserable and unfortunate and unhappy person today. The Jew of Western Europe has had his life embittered since the War by a relentless and unscrupulous anti-Semitism--an anti-Semitism which emanates from the learned as well as from the ignorant, from the classes as well as from the masses; an anti-Semitism which expresses itself in hostile political alignments against the Jew, in throwing Jewish professors and Jewish students out of universities, and Jewish officials out of public offices; an anti-Semitism which expresses itself in a veritable sea of defamatory and inflammatory books and pamphlets and magazines against the Jew; an anti-Semitism which expresses itself in a most virulent form of social ostracism; an anti-Semitism which oftentimes expresses itself in hostile demonstrations and riots which border on the pogrom.

I witnessed such demonstrations in Vienna. I

was not privileged to see the grand riot which took place on the day before the opening of the Zionist Congress in Vienna. True to form, I was delivering an address that night. That was one occasion when an address of mine kept me out of trouble. We did not see the riot itself, but the following Saturday I stood upon the curb of one of the main thoroughfares of Vienna and saw ten thousand Viennese--ex-soldiers, unemployed, students, professors,--men, women and children--and children!--marching from the Votivekirche in one part of the city to the Karlskirche in another part of the city; from one Christian church to another Christian church, and chanting in unison the refrain, "Juden haraus! Juden haraus!" Three hundred miles east of Vienna that cry would have been a signal for a pogrom.

Now, this bitter, relentless, all-emcompassing anti-Semitism has had certain reactions upon our own people. Some of our people, less sturdy than others, have yielded to the pressure and have sought release from the disabilities of Jewish life through conversion. Conversion is a daily occurrence in Berlin, in Vienna, in Budapest. I remember the day we visited a synagogue in Cologne,--a beautiful synagogue. The shamus was kind enough to take us around to show the synagogue to us, and I admired particularly a beautiful menorah on the pulpit, and I asked the shamus who donated this menorah, and he told me the name, and I commented by saying, "That is a fine gift of a fine Jew." And the shamus said, "Fine Jew, yes. - mach Shabbos.

Two weeks later he was converted, and now he is one of our finest meshumadim in the city."

I have but pity in my heart, I have but pity and no censure and no criticism for these brothers of mine who could not withstand the terrific pressure--and it is terrific--of the outside hostile world upon them. Others of our brothers in Eastern Europe and in Western Europe have tried to meet this rising tide of anti-Semitism by insisting upon their 100% Germanism, or 100% Magyarism. They out-German the German. To hear them speak you would think that their forefathers fought with the Visigoths against the Romans; and yet, sad to say, they convince nobody--not even themselves.

But reaction has set in in Western Europe. The youth is refusing to have its mind befogged by the muddled reasoning of their elders; the youth, which is experiencing this discrimination in every school and in every college in Europe, has determined, wisely and logically, that the way to meet prejudice is not to truckle to a man who despises you, but to recreate your own life into a freer and a fuller independence. And so they, the youth of Germany, the youth of Austria, are proud of their Jewish allegiance; they cultivate Jewish study and Jewish culture, and live their lives as free men, and they are a joy to see and an inspiration.

The economic conditions of people in Eastern Europe is very sad; in fact, the conditions of workingmen in Eastern Europe generally is a desperate one. The normal

status of a workingman in those countries is one of poverty and want and squalor. They work hard; they work long; they get little for their work. But the condition of the Jewish laborer is even more desperate, for he is discriminated against both by the Polish people--and I speak now of Poland principally because in Poland three million of our people live today--these Jewish workingmen are discriminated against both by the Polish people, who boycott their work, and by the Polish government who, when it takes over an industry and makes of it a government monopoly, such as it did in the case of tobacco, for example, throws out tens of thousands of Jewish workingmen into unemployment.

There isn't a Jew engaged on the street cars and the railways of Poland, which are government-owned. An attempt is now made to crush the Jewish workingman even more than heretofore. An attempt is now being made in Poland to revive what is known as the old guild law, a law by which a workingman must first obtain a diploma, a certificate of qualification before he can engage in any gainful occupation. These certificates are, of course, issued by a board composed entirely, or almost entirely, of anti-Semitic Poles, and the consequences may readily be foreseen.

The Jewish workingman will be kept out of every job, just as he has been kept out of government monopoly. And the condition of the Jewish merchant and small tradesman is no better. You see, the Jew in Poland was the middle class; he lived in towns, in cities; he was

the shop-keeper, the small capitalist, the enkepenem. Now the government is forcing tens of thousands of these Jewish businessmen into bankruptcy by unheard of taxation; it has driven thousands of them to ruin, and thousands of them are beginning to flee Poland; they pick up all the few possessions left to them and flee Poland. Heretofore they would come to America. Today they cannot come to America; they go to Palestine, the only place to which they can go and the only haven of refuge for them. Last week twenty thousand visés were issued for Polish Jews, and they were to Palestine. Twenty thousand visés!

Now in the midst of these tragic circumstances in Poland the Polish Jew, it may be said to his everlasting glory, has not surrendered to hopeless despair. The Polish Jew is fighting every inch of the way for his economic self-preservation through the aid, the private aid, of relatives in America; and a thing that you all ought to be proud of, everyone of you, and every Jew living in America, is the generosity with which you assisted your unfortunate brothers abroad. I am told that 60% of the Jews of Lithuania were kept alive in the last ten years by the gifts sent to them by their relatives in America. I say that the Polish Jews, through assistance from relatives in America, private assistance or through public assistance from such great organizations like the American Joint Distribution Committee in New York, are building banks in order to extend a credit to Jewish merchants and tradesmen and Jewish

cooperative laboring groups; they are distributing machinery and tools to Jewish workingmen; they are erecting hundreds and hundreds of trade schools in which to train Jewish boys into lucrative employment so as to be able to compete in the open market.

They have organized a movement--and it is a sad commentary--which is called "the Right to Work." Think of it! The right to work--the right, the inalienable right of a man to keep his family, his children from starvation. And one of the most glorious things that we saw in Eastern Europe was the way our brothers there take care of their children, and of the religious and cultural training of their children. Schools are everywhere. The first concern of the father is to supply bread for his family; his other concern is to supply an education for his children. The father and mother will slave the livelong day and far into the night, for the child will be taught and taught well the faith of his people and the ideals of his race. Why, there is a certain heroic splendor about these countless silent sacrifices which our brothers are making for the sake of the Torah, which brings a pang to the heart of a man who knows how, in this land of fulness and plenty, we are neglecting the Torah. There, in the midst of want and misery, the spirit of the race is nurtured.

In Warsaw I saw slums the like of which I never saw; I saw poverty the like of which I never saw; I saw tenements in which the sons and daughters of my people

live, and they are terrifying. But in Warsaw I found schools and high schools--modern, competent, efficient--where the children of these self-same people living in those slums are trained and educated. In Brest-Litovsk--can I ever forget that city of desolation? - Brest-Litovsk, which was thrice invaded and thrice destroyed, where, to this day, eight years after the war, we found Jewish families living in holes in the ground, in cellars over which the building had crumbled. As you walked down those deserted streets at night you could discover where Jews were living by the flicker of a dim light in a cellar; in Brest-Litovsk, where in what was once a stable, a cold, oblong groove, we saw twenty families living, separated from one another by a partition of a dirty rag,--in Brest-Litovsk we found clinics and hospitals, especially for the children; kindergartens and schools and trade schools.

In Lemberg--do you recall Lemberg?--you recall November, 1918, a few days after the armistice, that pogrom in which four hundred men, women and children were assassinated? - we stood beside the silent graves in the cemetery of Lemberg, and from the lips of an old rabbi we heard the story of these martyred dead; in Lemberg where, in the Jewish quarter, you still see visible all the scars and all the wounds of that bloody tragedy,--in Lemberg we found schools, modern schools, fine schools, where the spirit of our race, unabashed, unbroken, was being nurtured and kept alive. Everywhere I found evidences of rare devotion and rare

✓ loyalty. Especially that is true among the youth. I found children in Warsaw, in Lemberg, speaking Hebrew, boasting of their white and blue ribbon, organizing themselves into Jewish sport and athletic organizations, Jewish boy scouts and Jewish girl scouts. In the midst of that ruin and wreckage I found a palpitating, living spirit and a rare exaltation.

The Eastern European Jew, whom I thought-- reading of what transpired there in the ten years of hell-- the Eastern European Jew, whom I thought to find broken and crushed, I found him not broken and not crushed; his morale is not gone; he does not present the spectacle of a defeated and a despondent race. Prejudice, my friends, and persecution, often degrade their victims to such level where that prejudice and that persecution is almost justified; but in the case of the Eastern European Jew I found not a degradation but rather an exaltation; and I found in their unquenchable spirit, in their unshaken steadfastness another indication of the indestructability of my people.

I have carried away with me from Europe, friends, two resolves, which I should wish to make resolves also of yourselves. One, to work with every ounce of energy, with every ounce of ability which may be mine, for every constructive and forward-looking movement making for peace in the world. The world today needs peace even as much as it needs bread. The major task of your life and my life is to establish peace, is to establish those agencies

and that machinery which will insure a lasting peace. From that will follow disarmament; from that will follow international reconciliation; from that will follow liberalism, freedom, tolerance. The source, the mainspring of all the evils which afflict the world today is fear--fear, suspicion, dread of tomorrow. Once given a sense of security Europe will regain its level-headedness, its common sense, its sense of practicalness. Europe will become a livable place again for men and women and for peoples and minorities.

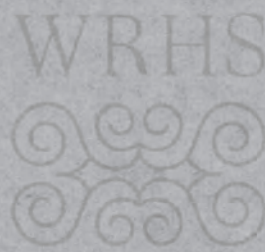
And the second thing which I have taken to my heart is the cause of these brothers and sisters of mine in Eastern Europe. We have done much for them, but I tell you, men and women, they have done even much more for us. We have given them things and money; they have given us evidences of faithfulness and sturdiness of spirit and courage and patience and control. I wish some of our free-born, prosperous American Jews had that hardihood of spirit, that strong and abiding devotion to a fundamental ideal which these poverty-stricken, harrassed, beaten, persecuted brothers of ours in Eastern Europe have.

We must give them in the next years additional help, additional relief; we must help them in their struggle to keep alive physically, and to keep alive culturally and religiously; and we must help those who, unable to continue to live in Poland, and who are now seeking to rehabilitate themselves and reconstruct their broken lives in Palestine,--we must give them a helping hand; we must

enable them to gain economic independence and peace and rest after the weary years of their tragic life.

There is a challenge in all this, friends of mine,--a challenge to you and to me.

--o--



1. Travellers returning from abroad in the days before the war, in recounting their impressions, would tell of the countries they had visited, of the customs and manners of the people, of the art galleries and cathedrals, and of those places which particularly appealed on account of their beauty or antiquity. Now-a-days the chief questions put to a returning traveller ^{are} not of an aesthetic character, but of a political and economic ^{nature}. How are conditions abroad? Are the nations recovering from the war? What are the prospects of peace? ~~Business~~ ^{The} political horizons have broadened in the last decade to include Europe. We know now definitely that what the pol. & econ. mutations abroad have a direct bearing upon conditions at home, and where our interests are involved our curiosity is aroused.

2. No visitor ⁱⁿ a foreign country, however observant and sagacious, can ^{gain} ~~authoritatively~~ ^{authoritatively} speak about that country. To judge accurately we must keep ~~not only~~ ^{the delicate shades} the tones but also the overtones of a people, ~~the delicate shades~~ ^{the shadows & nuances} the tremendous complexities which underlie the surface simplicities in any national existence. And no itinerant ~~spectator~~ ^{person if he has a spirit} is in position to catch these overtones. An Englishman visiting our shores will report accurately on what he saw. What he did not see, he will, of course, not report on. But it is the things which he could not see, the facts that lie beneath the surface, ^{our spiritual life} the emotional complexes, the historical precipitates, the antecedents of the visible facts, which are really the important & critical things. Elements in the life of a people.

3. We found for example that the average European thought of America to-day in terms of (1) rich fruits ^{what are} ~~out of~~ ^a free

then ^{sad} conditions even before the war. ^{Some} ~~There are~~ countries, like Austria, have been so seriously mutilated by the Treaty of Peace, that they have not yet been able to recover economically. But Germany seems to be prosperous. Food is plentiful. The people are willing. The farmers especially are well off. having paid off their debts during the period of inflation. France, too, seems to be prosperous. ~~It is~~ There is no unemployment in France. The government has difficulty ⁱⁿ adjusting its budget, but the people are the thrifty & hard working French, as by no means impermanent. This ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{And as regards Eastern} ~~is~~ ^{Europe} true of Czechs - Slovaks and Italy. ~~that~~ ^{But} when one recalls how unfavorable ^{economic} conditions were even before the war, one feels ^{justified in} ~~optimism~~ ^{optimism} even then -

6. Reaction is in the saddle. ^{Liberalism} ~~Reaction~~ is everywhere cannot be said to be triumphant in Europe as a result of the War for democracy. In England the Tories are in power; in Germany, ^{who was previously claimed as} ~~Hitler~~ ^{Hitler} in Hungary, ^{the Liberal} ~~the~~ ^{the} in Italy, Mussolini. ^{It is too early to say} ~~It is too early to say~~ In Germany one finds the spirit of Potsdam still strong and aggressive, urging war upon the spirit of Weimar. Potsdam still flies the old Empire flag - the red, white & black.

Liberalism is the child of peace & security. Peoples in danger or in want are not liberal. They are narrow and ~~in~~ self-centred; they distrust freedom, & are afraid of experimentation. Europe needs ~~more than~~ a decade or two of tranquillity before the spirit of liberalism can ~~be~~ ^{again} the ascendancy.

7. Suspicion everywhere - & military fear & distrust. The newly formed states, carved out of the old Empires, are fearful for the preservation of their independence; the defeated

nations resent their humiliation, and their loss of territory
the victors are anxious to safeguard their gains -
military preparations go on apace, military expenditures
consume the major part of the budgets of many of the
nations of Europe. ^{affairs of Europe} ~~Island~~ ^{is} an armed camp -
Even Germany which can not arm, has a garrison of
1,000,000 ^{Turnovermen} where the young men are trained with
almost military discipline, ready at short notice
to be turned into soldiers -

There is an armistice in Europe but not Peace.
There will be no peace unless there is security. There
will be no disarmament unless the nations feel safe
enough to disarm. ^{And} There is no agency in Europe ^{today}
~~yet~~ to enforce peace, & create the needed sense of
security. The Locarno Conference may accomplish
it if it is too early to say. It bids within it the
promise of great good. If the diplomats who signed
the treaty are honest - and I am not inclined to
much to credit them with honesty - if their ^{beliefs} ~~beliefs~~
were more than mere different ^{Ex. Sec.} ~~different~~ ^{happenings} ~~if they~~
^{the civil rights in the European countries} ~~mean~~ ^{mean} to plant each other that sense of security -
by pledging us to confident cooperation & to a decisive
language, the Rhine zone, if Engl. & Italy are honest
in their intention to enforce peace by coming to
the assistance, the ~~either~~ ^{one} ~~German~~ ^{Fr.} when
attacked by the other - then Locarno may mark a
milestone in human progress. It may become
a beacon light. ^{that signifies our way towards the future} ~~It may also~~ ^{It may also} become a lantern
for the dead!

1. Travellers returning - nowadays chief questions - pol. horizon
2. No visits to a foreign country - To judge - Tones; gradations -
- no itinerant - Englishman -

3. We found for example that average European thinks of Gen
(1) tourist (2) creditor (3) culturally backward (4) Charlie
Chaplin (5) lynching.

There are facts - unrepresentative -

So that - false picture - Traveller concludes. hesitates

4. Three. (1) Remarkable Econ. Recovery -
- Currency - working - Germany.

(2) Reaching in Saddle - Spirit of Rotterdam
liberalism, child of security.

(3) Suspensions - Military preparedness - Poland -
Germany - Armistice - Security
Locarno.

5. Sens (1) Free - Trade - freedom -

(a) Western Europe - Enlightened

(b) Riots - Vienne - March -

(c) Conventions - (Algerie)

(d) 100% Germanism - Vizigottis - Convince

(e) Youth - reaction -

6. Economic Cond. Eastern

1. Old failed form

2. Right to work

3. Merchants - Palestine

7. In midst of tragic circum. P. Jew - Surrender
- private, public aid.

8. Ref. Cultural Training of children - Splendor

1. Warsaw - Best Leisure -

2. Every where a great loyalty - YOUTH Exp.

9. Not Broken in spirit - Spiritale - As a rule.

- for their unquenchable faith