



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
237

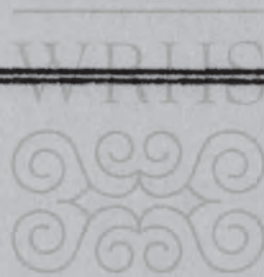
Taking stock of the year 1925, 1925.

"TAKING STOCK OF THE YEAR 1925."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE. SUNDAY MORNING.

DECEMBER 27. 1925. CLEVELAND.



The year 1925 is not likely to prove a red letter year in the annals of mankind. By the standard of the last few years the year 1925 was rather an uneventful, undistinguished year, both at home and abroad. And perhaps it is better so. Eventful years are, as a rule, years of great catastrophes, and a people that has too crowded a history is usually a very unhappy people. The year 1925 may be said to have continued the convalescent period which began with the close of the year, and in such a slow and precarious period it is encouraging if mankind does not find it necessary to record a relapse. That in itself is sufficiently encouraging.

Economically the nations of Europe during the past year continued their advance towards stability. Many of the peoples of Europe of course still have a hard and thorny financial road to travel--a nation like Poland or like the mutilated states of Austria and Hungary; a country like Great Britain will still have to face the amazingly serious problem of unemployment, and a country like France has still to face the problem of adjusting her national budget. But by and large the economic situation of 1925 warrants continued optimism and hope.

As far as the political situation is concerned, no important political changes within the respective countries of Europe were recorded during the past year. Conservatism and, in some instances, extreme reaction, were in the saddle in almost all the countries of Europe. The idol of 1925 in

in governmental circles was Mussolini--the idol and the exemplar, and men of his ilk, men of the type of Chamberlain and Hindenburg and Horthy and the various dictators of soviet Russia dominated the affairs of the European peoples.

Democracy has certainly not fared well since the war. It has, in fact, proved very unpopular throughout Europe. For the time being Fascism, whose dark prophet is Mussolini, whose doctrine is the dictatorship of the minority backed by force,--for the time being Fascism is in the ascendancy in most parts of Europe, even in such countries, such free lands as France and England; and it is astounding to note with what equanimity the lovers of freedom, who a few years ago railed with such gusto against the red tyranny of Russia, accept the black tyranny of Italy. No organized group, for example, in the United States has in the last few years, seeing the crumbling institutions of freedom, of parliamentary government in Italy,--I say no organized group in the United States, for example, has raised its voice in protest. Yes, one,--the American Federation of Labor, and only because and only when Mussolini outlawed the strike as a means of settling industrial disputes. To such low levels has disinterested freedom, love of freedom, fallen in our day.

In the all-important work of establishing peace Europe has made marked progress during the year 1925. The League of Nations has gained in prestige and in authority, largely due to its prompt and effective handling of the dangerous situation which arose between Greece and Bulgaria a

few months ago which threatened another Balkan war. The effectiveness, the decisiveness with which the League handled that delicate and difficult situation won for it additional respect in the eyes of the world. Of course it still remains true that the League would not have been as decisive or as effective if one or the other of the parties involved belonged to the group of major powers in Europe. Of course it still remains true that the League of Nations did not or could not speak as forcefully during the equally critical situation which arose some time ago between Italy and Greece in Corfu. Of course it is true that the League did not find it within its competence to speak in the horrible Moroccan war, and in the even more horrible Syrian massacre, or in the case of the English man-handling of Egypt. It is true that the League is still under the sanction and the domination of three or four of the great Western European powers. It is as yet not a free agency, not at all autonomous.

But it is also true that as the League continues to gain in the confidence and in the respect of the peoples of the world through its interventions in behalf of peace through the accumulative achievements, it will be in position to emancipate itself progressively from the domination of these great powers--the allied nations.

Locarno has been another milestone in 1925, a milestone on the road of international understanding and peace. The treaty of Locarno has been hailed with extreme, I might almost say excessive joy all over the world; the treaty which

stipulates that the contracting parties are to submit hereafter all disputes to compulsory arbitration; the treaty which specifies that England and Italy will come to the aid of either France or Germany when attacked by the other; the treaty which demilitarizes the Rhine zone, which has been the plague spot of Europe for so many centuries.--this treaty has been hailed with great rejoicing by the peoples of the world.

Now it may well be, as Briand, spokesman for France, said upon the signing of this treaty, that Locarno is the draft of the constitution of a new European family; it may well be, as another statesman declared, that Locarno is the pride of modern diplomacy and the hope of the people. That will all depend upon the honesty of purpose and the steadfastness of the resolution of the nations signators to the treaty; for remember that Locarno is only a treaty, and treaties as you well know may become scraps of paper; treaties may be abrogated; treaties may, by mutual consent, be nullified; treaties are not warrants for enduring peace. But we are ready to take the most optimistic and the most hopeful view of the situation; we are ready to see in the signing of this treaty the earnestness on the part of the nations of Europe to preserve peace, and as such regard it as a great achievement of the year 1925.

Germany has definitely been brought back into the concert of the nations of Europe and into the League of Nations, and that is a decided gain. But Russia is still without the pale; Russia still remains uncovenanted and

there can be no enduring peace in the world, there can be no economic stability in the world with Russia, actually great and potentially even greater, outlawed and isolated. Dr. Benesch, the great statesman of Central Europe, expressed the thought which is the prayerful thought of the whole of mankind today. The time is not far distant, he said, when there will be a second Locarno, when the whole of Europe will arrive at an agreement with Russia. That must come. It is the last danger spot in the European situation.

The League has followed up the logic of Locarno by beginning preparations for a great international disarmament conference. The League is now ready to take leadership in the indispensable work of lifting the burden of taxation from off the bowed shoulders of the peoples of Europe imposed upon them by excessive armaments,--land and sea and air armaments. It has convoked a preliminary conference for the month of February, at which time a program will be outlined for this great international disarmament conference which it plans to summon before very long. To this preliminary conference the United States has been invited. It is our hope that the United States will accept the invitation; it is our hope that the United States, which called the first armament limitation conference since the war in Washington in the year 1921, and which since that time, since 1921, has done practically nothing for the cause of world peace,--that the United States will join this conference, for we, too, are desperately in need of a limitation of armament. The United States is

today spending eighty cents of every dollar of revenue upon national defense; for pensions, for bonuses, for payment of national debts incurred in wars. Eighty cents of every dollar are spent on war.

So much for the credit side of the ledger. On the debit side in this movement for universal peace may be placed the imperialistic war which France has been conducting in Morocco; in that scandalous, horrible war upon civilians which France has been conducting in Syria--Syria, where the bankruptcy of the Colonial policy of France has been underscored with a massacre of defenseless civilians. The Christian nations of Europe are still exploiting, oppressing and devastating the non-Christians and so-called backward nations of Africa and of Asia. They are still putting the "white man's burden" upon the shoulder of the colored races, and greed, the worst kind of selfishness and greed and rapacity which have dictated all the colonial expansion policies of the peoples of Europe, the white races of Europe for a hundred years, are still the dominating motif in their relations with the so-called backward races of the other continents. And just as all the wars of the past hundred years were caused by the rivalries among the great powers of Europe for the privilege of exploiting these weaker and backward nations, so will all the wars of the future be caused by this imperialistic rivalry and rapacity of the European nations.

There is a war brewing today in Mesopotamia.

English merchants and capitalists cast a longing eye upon the rich oil fields around the vilayet of Mosul, and so England proceeded through diplomatic maneuvers and political machinations to have the district of Mosul included within the kingdom of Irak over which Great Britain now has a mandate, so that these oil fields may, from now on, be exploited without let or hindrance by the capitalists of Great Britain. But Turkey looks upon Mosul certainly with greater right than England--looks upon Mosul as belonging to it, to its territory, and Turkey, which is not even a member of the League of Nations, maintains that the League has no right to take territory away from one nation and give it to another without the consent of the nation involved. But Turkey has been overruled and the Angora government is now thinking war.

There is really no solution to a problem such as this except moral self-restraint on the part of the great peoples of the world. The small nations cannot control them; the League is as yet too powerless to control them. They must control and discipline themselves.

As far as America is concerned, the year 1925 has been a year of peace and prosperity. Our industries have thrived, our commerce has expanded and, with the exception of one serious coal strike, which is now in a fair way of being amicably adjusted, the year 1925 has been one of industrial peace. The Federal income taxes have been lowered to the great relief of the citizens of the country, and our debts with the foreign countries are in the way of being adjusted.

Our nation played a commendable role in China during the past year. The Chinese are growing restive under the exploitation of foreign peoples, too. The Chinese, the oldest and the most historic race in the world, are beginning to demand absolute national autonomy and self-determination, and the Chinese have begun to boycott foreigners and foreign goods, and, as you know, there resulted serious riots and bloodshed. At once the European nations, especially Great Britain, saw an opportunity to intervene in China and to clamp on the hand of control and despotism even more, but the United States, which has always had, traditionally had an enlightened, wise, long-visioned policy towards China, prevented such aggression and suggested the convoking of an international conference to substantiate even more the rights of the Chinese people.

And the American government has been instrumental in adjusting or in attempting to adjust a boundary dispute which has irritated two of the countries of South America for a long time,--now the famous Tacna-Arica dispute.

In 1925 I make bold to say that all forms of racial and religious intolerance continued to be on the wane. The common sense and the broad-mindedness of the American people continued to assert themselves, and while intolerance is far from being dead, and while prejudice and bigotry in one form or another will continue to be, still, they are no longer assuming those menacing shapes and that ruthlessness which they assumed in the years immediately following the war.

The broad-mindedness of the American people found, I believe, its most authoritative and eloquent expression in the now famous address of President Coolidge delivered at Omaha before the national convention of the American Legion. We may look forward to a continued dissipation of that intolerance which coalesced and concentrated immediately following the war.

But another form of intolerance cropped up during the year 1925--an anti-scientific bigotry which culminated in the concerted attack upon the teaching of the doctrine of evolution, and which found its dramatic expression in the now famous Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. Orthodoxy is today waging relentless warfare upon progress. It is the fifteenth century again fighting the twentieth century; and the war has just begun. The first victim in this struggle was the arch-enemy of scientific progress itself--Mr. Bryan, the brave crusader in behalf of a lost cause, or rather the pathetic Don Quixote fighting chivalrously for antiquated, discarded dogmatism. It is an age old struggle; it really never began and it really never will end; it will go on as long as man endures--the struggle between tradition and progress, between the past and the future, between what was and what ought to be, between yesterday and tomorrow; and it is incumbent upon devotees of progress and disciples of civilization to organize themselves and to be on the alert during the next years, for the mass attack of the forces of reaction will be powerful. The forces of reaction

are likely to win every battle in the next generation except the last one. The last battle, the last victory, the ultimate victory always belongs to truth, to knowledge.

As far as the conditions of the Jews are concerned in the year 1925, you will recall that I spoke of their economic condition upon my return from Europe. I called your attention then to the sad plight of half of our people, almost nine millions of them today living in Eastern Europe and in Russia, and spoke of their economic distress. I did not speak about the condition of the Jew in Russia for I was not there and could not bring you first hand information. I suppose economically the Jew in Russia is no better and no worse than the other people, except in this: that he was a small tradesman of Russia, and bolshevism, to a large degree, has wiped out that institution, and thereby wiping out the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of our people.

But I want to call your attention not to their economic plight this morning but to their spiritual plight. There is great danger that the whole of Russian Jewry, over three millions of your Russian Jewry, which, up to the time of the war, was the great reservoir of Jewish learning, of Jewish thought and, above all, of Jewish loyalty and spirit,--that the whole of Russian Jewry is in danger of being wiped out, not physically as much as spiritually.

There has been an appalling slump in their intellectual life and in their cultural life and in their religious life. The young Russian Jews are growing up Godless.

faithless, atheists, mockers of their faith and of their people. The Russian government, which, as far as freedom of religion is concerned, has been more medieval and more reactionary than the czarist government at its worst,--the Russian government has officially prohibited the teaching of religion to the youth, and so a Jewish father is not privileged to teach his child the religion of his people, the ideals of his race. The soviet government has even carried on a systematic campaign of irreverence towards religious doctrines and principles.

So that in Russia today our Hebrew schools are shut and our academies are non-existent. Our brethern have no way of transmitting to their own children the precious heritage of three thousand years. There is no solution for that problem, either, except the change of policy on the part of the bolshevik government or the collapse of the bolshevik government. There are still in Russia "the saving remnant" of a few faithful and loyal ones who surreptitiously, secretly, like the Moranoes in Spain, are teaching their children their faith, their Bible, their ideals. It is to them that we must look for perpetuation of Judaism in Russia.

The year 1925 has seen a remarkable development in Palestine, an inrush of thousands of new immigrants who bring with them enthusiasm, loyalty, devotion in the task of the upbuilding of Palestine. That augurs well for the future not alone of the community in Palestine but of Jewry the world over. In America Jewish life during the past year moved on

space steadily, firmly. One of the most significant signs of the times has been the increased attention which the American Jew has given to the problem of religious education. His mind is turning a bit from the heretofore all-absorbing interest of philanthropy to the new and tremendously important problem of the religious education of the youth, which, unfortunately, we neglected in the last two generations.

In our own community of Cleveland during the past year we gave much of our time and our thought and our substance to the intensification of a program of religious education for the thousands of unaffiliated children in our community; but of this we shall have occasion to speak later on.

In closing, friends, let me say this: the year 1925 marks the end of a quarter of a century--the first quarter of the twentieth century. All in all it has been a marvelous twenty-five years. Scientifically, I venture to say we have made more rapid progress in the last twenty-five years than we have in the last five hundred years. The inventions, the discoveries, the perfected mechanism; the progress made in physical science, in chemistry, in chemistry, in medicine, in psychology; the progress made in almost every branch of human thought has been short of miraculous. Think of the wireless and the radio and the airplane and the X-ray; think of the profound discoveries to curb disease, and the remarkable advances in the science of surgery which have been made in the last twenty-five years, and you will realize

that mankind has moved, and marvelously moved.

At the same time remember that this quarter of a century witnessed the ghastliest, the most destructive of all wars known to the human history. Clearly, the one does not exclude the other; clearly, scientific progress does not necessarily mean human well-being; clearly, the accumulation of knowledge and machinery does not of itself mean the augmentation of well-being and happiness in the human family; and clearly mankind needs much more than increased comforts and increased luxuries and increased knowledge and increased machinery and better methods of locomotion and better methods of transportation and quicker ways of navigation. Mankind needs much, much more for its well-being than that, and I hope the next quarter of a century will focus more of the energy of the wonderful mind of the human race, will focus more of human thought and human intelligence upon the problems, ethical and spiritual,--the problems of social adjustment, the problem of a more equitable distribution of the goods of life, and the problem of international peace and comity, and the problem of culture, than it has in the past twenty-five years.

That is the great thought which we ought to take into the years ahead of us; not by strength and not by power, but "by my spirit, saith the Lord." Strength and power alone will not make us a happy people; strength and power may destroy us completely. It is the spirit--the spirit of justice and of truth and of peace and of love; it is the spirit of God

which will lead our race up and up and on the terraces to our
ultimate destiny, to our ultimate cause.

--o--

