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149

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53

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245

Christian friends of Israel through the ages, 1926.

"CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF ISRAEL THROUGH THE AGES."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING

FEBRUARY 28, 1926, CLEVELAND.



The festival of Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jews of Persia from complete destruction which threatened them with the result of the evil machinations of Haman, who was a minister of King Ahasuerus. Haman, who was goaded on by his blind hatred of Mordecai and his people, persuaded the none to wise king to permit the extermination of the entire race of Israel within the 127 provinces of the king. Haman slandered the people by filling the ears of the king with malicious lies about their disloyalty and disruptive influence in the empire--the self-same charges which the descendents of Haman give today--by the promise of enriching the depleted coffers of the king with the booty taken from these innocent victims.

We are told that the loyalty and steadfastness of Mordecai and Esther frustrated the plans of Haman, and Israel was delivered. Now this deliverance is not a unique episode in Jewish history. As you well know, in our own checkered career there were many such dark moments when a portion of our people was threatened with complete annihilation, and when the prudential intervention of some one saved the people. Unfortunately for us, we never ran short of our Hamens, and some member of this noxious breed was always to be found in every age and in every land among the rulers, nobility or laity or clerics or writers or politicians.--someone who made it the sweet concern of his

life to embitter the life of the Jew.

These Hamanites are too many to mention, and there is a danger of mentioning them too often; for we may unconsciously permit ourselves to overlook the fact that while there were many of such dark souls who sowed the destruction of Israel, there were at the same time in every land and in every age some few noble, beautiful souls--not of our people--who championed our cause, defended our interests, and at critical moments advocated our cause.

In the literature of Purim there is a prayer which concludes with this interesting phrase, after enumerating the names of those who on this holiday should be mentioned in benediction, in gratitude,--the prayer concludes "not a Jew" but who helped Mordecai in the perilous hours of his people's dire need; also Harbonah should be mentioned with blessing.

And so I say, that while there have been many Hamans--and our annals are replete with their unsavory names--there were at all times some--not as numerous as their sinister competitors--but there have always been some whose names will forever be emblazoned upon the pages of Jewish history for their beautiful and selfless service to a defenseless people in its critical hour. They are few in number but their numbers increased as the era of enlightenment approached.

Just for example in our own age, while we do not lack our full quota of hate-purveyors today, we have

been blessed with a host of friendly kindred spirits in the Christian world who have magnificently pleaded our cause; so that, for example, in a country like England, where we are prone to point with the finger of accusation at the anti-Semite Chesterton, or Belloc, you must also be ready to mention in blessing the name of Balfour, of Cecil and of Wedgewood; when in Germany you have your Ludendorffs and your Hitlers and all those who foment hatred against our people, you also have numerous writers and scholars. I think of one now, one of the true, one of the real righteous among the gentiles, an eminent scholar and a great student,-- Strack, who devoted years of his life to establish a friendlier contact between Jew and non-Jew, and make Jewish thought and the Jewish faith more sympathetically understood by the German people; when in Russia, for example, you could have pointed in the last generation to the Black Hundred and to all the pogrom makers; to Pobdendienostzer and his dark hosts of medievalists; you could also point with pride to a Tolstoy, and a Gorki, and a Korenko, who, unsolicited, gave to the defense of our people.

And so in our own land, in these United States, when you are prone to point to a few anti-Semites,-- to a Ford, to a Burton Hendricks, you must not overlook to mention in gratitude and in blessing the names of the hundreds of outstanding Americans who, when this tidal wave of prejudice began to inundate our shores rose splendidly to our defense; you must also think of the Eliots, of the Tafts,

of the Hughes, of the Wilsons. And I sometimes think that it would be a beautiful thing if this holiday of Purim, which is utilized to stress the evil doings of the Hamens, if it were also used to mark the service of the Philo-Semite and not merely of the anti-Semite,--of our friends throughout the ages.

I would like to mention this morning a few of these, an outstanding few whose services became integrated in the very life of Israel. I shall mention a few not because they are the only ones, but because from the work of the few we may judge the contribution of the many. One name which ought to be mentioned at all times in circles of Israel, in benediction, is the name of a Christian cleric from the Catholic Church as raised to the level of a saint, a man who lived in the twelfth century and founded the great Christian order. I refer to St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

St. Bernard touches Jewish history at one of the most critical moments in our national experience. He lived during the second crusade in 1147. He himself, Bernard, launched the second crusade; his voice was the most powerful in Christendom, even more powerful than that of the pope.

The Jews knew what a crusade means. Fifty years before, in 1096, the first crusade left its mark of terror and blood upon all the Jewish communities along the Rhine and along the Mosul, through the territory through which the crusading hordes marched; they slew, they mutilated, they robbed, they burned, they destroyed,--every crime

conceivable was perpetrated by these uncontrolled and undisciplined hordes, who were recruited from the off-scouring of Europe, who were on their way in sort of a holiday mood to recapture the holyland from the Mohammedans. And now fifty years later another such crusade is announced, and the memory of the first is still vivid with blood in the minds of our people. A certain Rudolph, a vindictive son of Haman, began to stir up the mob against the Jew. "Why go to the East to fight the Mohammedans, who are the enemies of Christ? Here are the Jews who are the enemies of Christ. Kill them. They are the usurers; they are the evil perpetrators; they are our enemies." And the massacres began.

The Jews appealed first to the archbishop of Mainz who was not unfriendly to them, but his voice was not powerful enough to check the crusading mob, and he in turn turned to the strongest personality in Christendom, Bernard of Clairvaux, for help, and Bernard, in that critical moment in our people's history, was not found wanting. He sent letters to be read in every church in every city through which the crusaders would pass, that no one is permitted to molest a Jew; he threatened with the anathema of the church and with ex-communication anyone who would instigate the masses against the Jew. "He who abuses a Jew," wrote St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "is like unto one who would abuse the Savior himself."

But he was not satisfied with the mere dispatch of a letter, but on learning that Rudolph was still

carrying on his inflammatory propaganda among the masses, he left his home in France and traveled through Germany and personally confronted Rudolph and denounced him as a traitor of the church, endangering his own life in the act; for by that time Rudolph had so enraged the mob that they were ready to turn even upon St. Bernard and destroy him. Bernard did not succeed in avoiding all bloodshed, but it is due to him that the annals of the second crusade are not as saturated with the blood and the tears of our people as the first crusade. So that his name may well be mentioned in atonement for good and for blessing.

I am thinking at this moment of another Christian who played a great role in Jewish history, one with whom you are probably not very well acquainted.-- Johann Reuchlin. Johann Reuchlin lived in Germany at the close of the fifteenth and at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In other words, just prior to the Protestant Reformation, which began, as you know, with Luther in 1519. Johann Reuchlin was the greatest scholar which Germany possessed, and the greatest humanist; that is, he was a churchman, a loyal orthodox member of the Catholic Church, but at the same time he was a great lover of pagan literature, of the classics of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and a great lover of Hebrew literature. He was the greatest non-Jewish Hebrew scholar in Germany and in Europe in that century. He had Hebrew teachers; he engaged the services of learned rabbis to induct him into the knowledge of the

Hebrew Bible, of the Talmud, and even of Jewish mysticism, of cabala. He was the most revered and beloved churchman in Germany in his generation.

At that time there arose an apostate, a renegade, a Jew who gave up his faith, by the name of Johann Pfefferkorn. Johann Pfefferkorn was by trade a butcher, by accident, I suppose, an ignoramus, and by choice a thief. He had been apprehended once and had been sentenced to the gallows, but through the intervention of some friends he was saved. Following his miraculous deliverance from the gallows he changed his religion, and like all newly made converts he became possessed of that exceptional zeal of the one hundred percenter, and at once became one of the bitterest enemies of his erstwhile brothers.

Johann Pfefferkorn, by the way, is not a unique character in Jewish history. Unfortunately we have quite a brood of these renegades throughout the Middle Ages who left their people because the lot of their people was too heavy to bear, or who were enticed by the tantalizing emoluments or rewards offered by the prevalent faith, and who were not satisfied merely with the change of faith but who turned in venom and in hatred against their brethern and brought upon them calamity after calamity. Had I time and were the very mention of these names not bitter upon the lips, I would mention a whole catalogue of these, from Nicholas Donin in France, who in the thirteenth century succeeded in having all the books of the Talmud publicly burned, to Pablo Christiani,

who forced the great Rabbi Nachmanides into a public disputation, through Paul de Santa Maria, whose name before he was converted was Rabbi Solomon Levy. He induced Henry III of _____ to exterminate the Jews in his country, and through _____ whose name was Joshua Lorky, he forced another public disputation upon the Jews of Spain, which ended in riots and conversions, and Johann Pfefferkorn was one of those converts.

He became the ready tool of the Dominicans of Cologne, whose interest it was at that particular moment to make the lot of the Jews in Germany miserable, and under his name they began to publish a series of inflammatory pamphlets aimed against the Jew. Johann Pfefferkorn supplied them with the data and the information, for he, himself, could neither read nor write German or Latin, and they composed these pamphlets. In these screeds Pfefferkorn maintains that all the Jews are perjurers and that all the Jewish physicians killed their patients. He maintains that the reason why the Jews do not go over to Christianity is a three-fold one. First, because they are permitted to become money-lenders; secondly, because they are not compelled to attend Christian services and to listen to Christian sermons; and thirdly, because they are permitted to retain their books, especially the Talmud, which is a source of iniquity, and which is responsible for all their stiff-neckedness; and he advises the rulers to force all the Jews to attend services in the Christian Church and to listen to sermons.

He did not know that the Jews even in those days did not care to listen to sermons. And lastly he advises that all the books of the Jew be confiscated and suppressed--all the books except the Bible. Remember that the confiscation of a book at a time when there was no printing to amount to anything meant a frightful loss to the owner, and involved the possibility of a whole generation growing up without the knowledge of the law.

He was not satisfied merely with the writing of pamphlets, but he went to the Emperor Maximilian, did this Johann Pfefferkorn, and brought letters to him from the emperor's own sister, who was a nun and lended a ready ear to the gossip, to the slander of Pfefferkorn; and the Emperor Maximilian gave Pfefferkorn a mandate enabling him to search every Jewish home and every Jewish synagogue for books and suppress them. On his way back to Frankfort, where Pfefferkorn intended to begin his campaign, he stopped over at to see Johann Reuchlin, the greatest Hebrew scholar of his age, in order to win Reuchlin over to him and to use Reuchlin's name in justification of his contemplated massacre of books. Johann Reuchlin, however, refused to become partner with Pfefferkorn, and he also pointed out to him certain defects in this mandate which he had from the emperor. Pfefferkorn, undismayed, went to Frankfort, and on a succoth morning went over in the synagogue and in the presence of the town councilors demanded of the Jews the surrender of all their books.

The Jews knew what this campaign of exterminating Hebrew books meant and what it was likely to result in, and so at once they appealed to the Archbishop Uriel of Memmingen, who at once wrote a letter ordering the priests of Frankfort to desist from confiscating Hebrew books, and Pfefferkorn was left high and dry. But that did not discourage him. He made a second trip to the emperor and received a second mandate, and later on made a third visit to the emperor and received a third mandate, which third mandate enabled Pfefferkorn to solicit the opinion of the great scholars of all the European universities concerning the question of the advisability of destroying Hebrew books, and among these scholars to be consulted was Johann Reuchlin. All the other university scholars in their zeal for the true faith returned a verdict of guilty; Hebrew books tend to libel and slander all Christianity and should therefore be destroyed.

Johann Reuchlin alone wrote a magnificent report in which he exonerated the Hebrew books from any such accusation, in which he befriended the faith of the Jew and in which he also took occasion to subtly suggest how despicable a character Pfefferkorn was. This report by Johann Reuchlin dumfounded the Dominicans and made them furious. Reuchlin had turned against them and had championed the cause of the Jew; and so they at once turned against Reuchlin; they published a pamphlet called "The Hand Mirror" in which they called Reuchlin every conceivable name under the sun.--

a heretic and an apostate, a man who had been bought off with Jewish money, a traitor to the church. Reuchlin, the dignified nobleman, pled innocence against it, and he wrote a book in retort called "The Mirror of the Eye" in which he takes Johann Pfefferkorn publicly to task, exposes thirty-four of his lies, branding him publicly as a scoundrel and a scamp, shows the conflicting forces that are manipulating him, and summons all friends of true learning to come to his defense; and at once the battle of the books was on. All the humanists, all those who were free spirits of the age, who were longing for emancipation, intellectual freedom, rallied to the support of Johann Reuchlin, and all the dark forces of medievalism rallied to the support of Johann Pfefferkorn; and this struggle was the first shot fired for modernism in Europe. Nine years later Martin Luther nailed to the doors in Wittenberg church the ninety-five theses, and the Reformation was on.

Johann Reuchlin's name, too, ought to be mentioned in gratitude and in blessing. I must pass on to another, for the time is limited. I should like to call attention to another Christian priest, a Jesuit priest by the name of Henri Gregoire, a Frenchman. Henri Gregoire was influenced by the humanistic and liberal tendencies of the eighteenth century. He lived during the French Revolution. A few years before the French Revolution he won a prize offered by the University of Metz with a book on the improvement of the physical, moral and political conditions

of the Jews. He was elected to the states assembly, and later on to the national assembly, and in this national assembly, on October 1, 1789, this Jesuit priest, Henri Gregoire made a motion that France grant the Jews absolute political equality and raise them, who up to that moment had gone throughout the world serfs, to the position of full citizenship. In his remarkable eloquence he cried out: "This morning 50,000 Frenchmen rose as slaves; it is up to you to decide whether by nightfall 50,000 shall be free again." This was the first time in 1800 years that a Christian voice was raised, in other words, for the complete political, social and economic emancipation of the Jew. And two years later, September 27, 1791--I would like to have you remember that date--France, the first country in the world, granted the Jews the rights of citizenship, and began the era of Jewish emancipation which has continued to this day. The name of this Jesuit priest, Henri Gregoire should be mentioned in gratitude.

Just one word about another man, not a clergyman but a great layman, a great writer, a great poet, one of the choice children of God.--Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing, the first great poet of Germany; Lessing, the friend of all liberalism, the champion of all tolerance; Lessing, the dear friend of Moses Mendellsohn. Lessing wrote two great works in defense of the Jew, two plays, one called "Die Juden," in which Lessing clearly turns to his German fellow citizens and says to them that all forms of prejudice against

the Jew are merely survivals of medievalism and fanaticism; and in his masterpiece, one of the masterpieces of the world's literature, "Lessing for the first time in the literature of Europe, in 1800 years, portrays the Jew as a Jew, a man of nobility of character, of refinement, of taste, of broadness of mind, tolerant, kindly, not at all the Shylock of Shakespeare of the Jew of Malta of Marlowe, but a human being sympathetically presented. And in that great drama, too, Lessing retells that marvelous story of the three rings, which I had occasion to speak of at one of the Temple meetings not so long ago. The result of these writings of the master writer of Germany was to raise the Jew in the esteem of the intellectual minds of Germany, to prompt them to look upon the Jew as an equal. Lessing's name, too, should be mentioned in gratitude.

Had I the time I would tell you of another non-Jew, another great writer, Emil Zola, whose name ought to be mentioned in gratitude by a grateful Israel. Emil Zola, probably the greatest writer of France in his day, appears on the Jewish scene at the time of the infamous Dreyfus affair, that Dreyfus affair which shook France to its very roots. The clerical forces and the militaristic forces had united to stem the rising tide of liberalism in France, and they used the Jew as an excuse for their propaganda, and so Captain Alfred Dreyfus, you will recall, was accused of treason, of selling secret government information to Germany; he was tried and convicted, degraded, sentenced and sent to

Devil's Island to rot there for the rest of his life.

There were a few liberal souls in France who knew that a great injustice had been committed, that a terrible miscarriage of justice had been perpetrated, and they loved truth and France too much to be silent, and among these was this Emil Zola. Soon after the conviction there appeared a statement in one of the great Parisian dailies signed by Emil Zola--"J' Accuse!" (I Accuse) in which Zola accused the mightiest man in France of deliberate miscarriage of justice, of deliberately victimizing an innocent man, and he called to the conscience of France to rise in indignation and to save Dreyfus. Zola was arrested; Zola was twice tried; Zola had to flee to England. But it was the result of the selfless, magnificent service of Zola, Loubert and others, that before very long Dreyfus was returned from Devil's Island. Dreyfus was vindicated in 1906; Dreyfus was not only vindicated but promoted in the army and made a member of the Legionnaires, and the whole dark brood were defeated. Zola's name, too, should be mentioned in gratitude.

So on this Purim day, my friends, when we think in sorrow of the homes, let us think in gratitude and joy of these men and men like unto them, who in our hour of need came to our defense, not only to our defense but to the defense of human rights, of fundamental justice and of essential humanity. God be blessed that these men lived in His world.

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