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Journey's end, 1930.

SERIES IV

SERMONS

Folder: 359

Sermon title: Journey's end, February 2, 1930

Sermon code/number: 318



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"JOURNEY'S END."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

FEBRUARY 2, 1930, CLEVELAND, O.
.....



The records of the last war have been written and can be written in terms of statistics,--so many men killed, so many men wounded, so much money spent. The can be written in terms of treaties of peace,--so many nations victors, so many nations vanquished, so much territory gained, so much territory lost, so much indemnity to be paid by so many nations to so many nations. They can be written in terms of the political changes which resulted from the war,--this nation went bolshevic, that nation went fascist, so many republics established, so many dictatorships.

The story of the war can also be told in terms of international relationships,--so many efforts made since the war to establish peace among nations, the machinery for the adjudication of international disputes. And the story of the war can also be told in terms of moral values,--such a lowering of the standards of private morality took place as a result of the war, such a let-down in social discipline, and such a vast spiritual confusion.

But the real records of the war, my friends, in terms of vital human experience, in terms of the men who fought in the war, what the war meant to them,--those records can only be told in great literature. Occasionally a great book or play or poem will, in a measure, do justice to that universal tragedy which tore and mutilated so many

so many millions of human souls, and which engulfed a generation in horror and pain and death. I am afraid that the coming generation,--and in a sense, that coming generation is already here, for those who are twenty or twenty-five years old today were only children when the great war broke out,--I am afraid that the coming generation will be little impressed with the statistical records of the war, with the political records of the war. Those things which will come to them by way of their text books and their school will hold for them a sort of vague interest, which will grow less and less with the receding years; and even the information which will undoubtedly be conveyed to them, to the young boys and girls, to the men and women of tomorrow, that in the five years between 1914 and 1918 five millions of men were killed, and some twelve millions were wounded,--even that information will give them perhaps only a momentary mental jolt, for, after all, a man's pity has to be spread very thin for five millions killed.

But the boy and girl of today, and the man and woman of tomorrow, may be moved to pity and horror and thought by a book, which, in a simple, straightforward and unadorned manner, will tell the story of one man, or two or three or four men,--simple men, trapped in the mesh of that tragic conflict and ground into death, and defeated by it. The whole ghastly tragedy of the last war can be

made vivid only in terms of a single human personality or a few human beings. It has to be focused in order to be realized and understood; and a book such as "Sergeant Grisha," and "The Unknown Warrior," and "Journey's End," and "All Is Quiet on the Western Front," which does just that, which tells the story of a human being, or a few human beings, throbbing with the pain and the agony of the war, riven by an inexorable doom, unable to escape and beaten down into bloody pulp,--a story like that may succeed, where the records and statistics and preachments and propaganda may fail, in opening the eyes of men and women to all the insanity and blood and brutality of the thing called War.

I watched the men and the women as they left the theatre the other night after witnessing Journey's End. It didn't look very much like a theatre audience filing out after a show. I saw in the looks of some of them something which made me feel as though they, perhaps for the first time, had looked into the torn, bleeding heart of humanity, as though their own hearts ached unutterably.

When I first saw the play in Paris last summer, when the last curtain fell on the last scene in this play, with young Raleigh, straight from school, who had come to the trenches, inexperienced, romantic, enthusiastic, a splendid young boy, lying there dead, his back broken by a shell; with Captain Stanhope, this brave

old man of twenty-one, whose nerves had been shattered by three years of continued infantry fighting on the Western front, and who was making a desperate effort to save his courage by drink, walking up the stairs of that rat-infested dugout to his certain doom, with the walls and roof of that catacomb of death and desolation crumbling in in the wake of the great offensive which had just then been begun, and the last candle light flickering and dying under the dirt and the debris of the collapsing dugout, with all the actors in the scene or off the scene dead or facing death,--I felt, as that curtain dropped over that scene, as if my own world had suddenly come to an end. One felt so utterly helpless, miserable, hopeless. And for days and weeks the actors in this drama haunted me.

There was Osborne, the fine, understanding English schoolmaster, representative of the best in that great character-building system of public school education in England, whom a blind fate had dragged down into that hell hole,--Osborne, about to go out on a raid which was to cost him his life, thinking of his two little youngsters back home, and his wife, leaving his watch, his rings, and a letter as the last mementoes of a great love which was to be quenched in the mud and filth of No Man's Land.

There was Hibbert, a poor malingerer. One could only pity him, the little world he was trying to crawl out of. He couldn't stand the strain any longer. He

would rather be killed outright by his captain for deserting than to be compelled to face again the trenches,-- not at all an English phenomenon on the Western front. And Trotter, the stolid, the unimaginative, the man who in the midst of that universal horror was thinking of his little garden back home, and of his hollyhocks, and of England in springtime. And the sergeant-major, that whimsical cockney, whose humor only serves to accentuate even more the darkness and the somberness of that tragedy,-- all those actors in that drama, each representative of an army of similar Raleighs and Stanhopes and Osbornes and Trotters and Hipperts, and each one walking up the stairs to his death, not knowing why, or not questioning why,-- just like doomed men led to a sacrifice. That scene burned itself into my mind, and I am sure into the minds of tens of thousands who have seen that play.

If anything can help to rid this world of its war madness, surely a play like this, not over-dramatized, in fact, underkeyed, real, honest, ought to be able to do that.

The greatness of the play, apart from its dramatic merit, is, to my mind, the fact that it never stoops to cheap and vulgar war sentimentalism. Not once throughout the play are you aware of what the war is all about; not once is any character made to mouth the heroics of war,--about fighting for one's country, or saving the

world, or about victory, or making the world safe for democracy,--no heroics, no romanticism.

The author, when he sat down to write the play, brushed all that cheap claptrap aside as vulgar and unreal and insincere. Here were just men who were trying to do their duty because it was the decent thing to do. The world is not against them because it made them do these things, because these were the decent things to do. The world might have enabled them to do fine things back home because they were the decent things to do. But they were not consulted. They didn't want the war; they didn't make the war. They loathed it; they hated it. They didn't know whether it was right or wrong. They killed the enemy not because they hated him but to save being killed themselves. And all that they knew of war was not the flying banners, nor the trumpets of victory, or all the heroics with which we who stayed home were fed; what they knew of the war was the unutterable weariness and horror and pain and filth and stench. If they had any illusions at all when they came to the front, they were soon blasted out of them by the war.

Here was young Captain Stanhope, who was the hero of all the young people at school, who was now a burnt out, whiskey-drenched old man of twenty-one, afraid to go back home on a leave because he couldn't trust his own nerves any more; and here was young Raleigh, just fresh

from school, a splendid young fellow who had worshipped this Stanhope as his hero at school, and now sees how the war had ravaged his hero; and he too is disillusioned, and all the actors in the drama find their ultimate disillusionment in death,--not in victory, not in a return home, acclaimed as heroes, but in death,--beaten down, their blood--as in that chapter of the Bible which I read this morning--their blood run into dust and their flesh into dung, in an unknown sector on the Western front.

The lives of these unhappy people are not without their grandeur. One pities them when one sees them coming and going, like so many items, like so many wheels and cogs in a blind, huge war machine grinding them down. One pities them but one is not ashamed of them. They die as men. One is ashamed of the whole system which makes this possible,--of the oldish men back home, whose schemings and covetousness and ambition have sent these millions of Stanhopes and Raleighs to their death.

There are no women in the play, and yet over and over again, through some chance, unpremeditated remark from one character or another, one becomes so poignantly aware of the burning fires of longing in the hearts of these men,--a wife, or a mother, or a sweetheart back home. One becomes aware of that other side, of that coarser, more animal lust which is never separated from the life of the soldier.

Here, my friends, is a portraiture of war in

remarkable vitality,--honest and remorseless. Here is the crowning achievement of the twentieth century's civilization in terms of international morality. Here all the paths of glory lead to that dirty dugout on the Western front, and here all the wisdom and the knowledge and the vision of the greatest statesmen of the world, in the generation before 1914,--all their wisdom and cunning and rudeness led to this sector, and to hundreds like them, and where Osbornes and Trotters and Stanhopes and Raleighs and Hipperts are trapped on barbed wire and torn by shells and riddled by machine guns and choked by poison gas.

Journey's End is a great, tragic monument to that ill-starred and unhappy generation which expiated by blood the blunderings of the world in a long line from the Black Sea to the North Sea.

There is another play which similarly plumbs the depths of war in terms of human experience, a play by a Frenchman, Paul Raynal, translated into English, called "The Unknown Warrior." The play The Unknown Warrior is not as free from nationalistic idolatry as Journey's End, but it is great, nevertheless, in revealing the horror, the Calvary, the hell through which a simple human soul, the soldier, the unknown soldier, the millions of them passed during the war.

It is a play of three characters only,--the soldier, his father, and his sweetheart. The soldier comes

home on a leave, a leave which he obtains through a desperate promise to return after four days, and to go upon a military exploit which would mean his certain death. He took the chance because he wanted so much to see just once his beloved, who was betrothed unto him. He comes home and learns that the four days have been cut down to four hours. Within four hours he must return to the front to face death; and he learns during those four desperate hours that his whole world had crumbled around him.

His father talks to him about war in the old fashioned way, about the glory of war, and the romanticism of war, and the young man cannot understand him, and the father fails, of course, to understand his son. The soldier finds while he has been passing through the hell at the front, his father, an oldish man, has been living quite comfortably at home, rather proud and complacent that his boy was fighting for his country at the front, doing his duty for France. And he finds that his beloved, during the months and months of absence, had also experienced a change of heart, and that that covenant with death which he had made in order to get home and be with her, if for only a little while, was a vain and futile sacrifice. One is profoundly moved by this great drama, The Unknown Warrior.

The thought which I stressed a moment ago about the straightforward honesty and integrity of Journey's End

telling the truth about war, is brought out again in this play. The father says to his son:

"The war has uprooted you, hasn't it?

"It's the same for everyone," says the son.

(Father) "Everyone is not where you are.

(Son) "Every one who is where I am, then.

(Father) "The most humble post.

(Son) "I am not vain.

(Father) "The most dangerous!

(Son) "I am not dead.

(Father) "The most strenuous!

(Son) "I am in perfect health.

(Father) "A private soldier.

(Son) "There's a job to do, and it's got to be done.

(Father) "Plowing has to be done. Did you plow?

(Son) "I have done.

(Father) "To set an example.

(Son) "Maybe.

(Father) "But afterward you left your workmen to their irksome necessary tasks.

(Son) "Danger changes everything.

(Father) "Others are better fitted for it than you.

(Son) "Because my life was easier than theirs? Well, now I find it harder than they do, so we are even.

(Father) "But is it your place?

(Son) "What are the armies defending? Our country? Then I must do my bit. Our culture? I was brought

up on it. My place is where I am. If I ever listen to the blessed silence of Armistice Day, I want to be able to look back and know that I have done neither more nor less than anyone else. I don't want to boast or blush before anyone. Then, when the war is over, I shall have nothing to fear from the sly smiles of those who took cover when things looked ugly. I do not think they will smile long when they see me.

(Father) "You are not even an officer.

(Son) "Why should I be?

(Father) "Your life would be a little easier.

(Son) "I loathe war so bitterly that I want to feel it in my very bones.

(Father) "You are as stubborn as ever.

(Son) "I hope so.

(Father) "I shouldn't think you were very easy to command.

(Son) "Do you imagine I obey an individual?

(Father) "Whom then?

(Son) "My conscience.

(Father) "Your conscience?

(Son) "I knew there were such things as wars. If I wanted to avoid them I could have changed my nationality. I knew perfectly well what I was committing myself to. And I stick to my bargain.

(Father) "Bargain! But without enthusiasm! Without pride!

You see, the father is still thinking in terms of enthusiasm about war, pride about war.

(Son) "There can be no pride in keeping one's word.

(Father) "Without ardor! Without exaltation!

(Son) "Those feelings are not laid down in military law.

(Father) "Do you think you can get on without them?

(Son) "Yes; I am proof of it.

(Father) "Things must have changed then.

(Son) "They have.

(Father) "How?

(Son) "War has lost its prestige. Men used to worship its banners and trumpets, its blood and bravery! But now they give it its real name: drudgery. The most wearing, monotonous, disgusting of drudgeries. One day I said to my friends: 'Perhaps you will write on my tomb: He died of drudgery in the service of his country.' That is war, far more dreary than terrible, far more stupid than glorious.

(Father) "Are there many who think like you?

(Son) "Many! All of us."

Out of the heart of this unknown soldier there wells up in his moment of intense agony this prayer. It is the prayer of all the unknown soldiers of the last war. He says to his beloved:

"If you can forget me, how will the future remember?"

I know too well the history of wars and the thoughtless peace which follows them. This time one might have hoped. . . but no, it is certain. . . nothing will come out of it, nothing will be left but the ravaged desolation of the battle-fields. Everything will begin over again. The nation will wear mourning in its usual correct indifference. There will be processions. Generals will read speeches at the unveiling of hideous war memorials. As they have always done! Understand me, I don't want sorrow. I am not jealous of the happiness which will come after us. I know quite well it is for the future that we undergo this disgrace of war, that out of our renunciation will spring their gladness. But our memory! At least let that remain! Let not the sand of the centuries hide the great monument of our outpoured agony. Let it be mixed into the happiness of years to come--a handclasp down the years. A new world will come after us. And as the faiths of old builded their church on the tomb of a saint, so Europe must rebuild herself on the great tomb of all those dead who have no other epitaph. Let her remember us and pity us. Let not our suffering be forgotten! Let it be an amazement and a horror forever! Nineteen-fourteen began like any

other year with flowers and smiles. Spring came, delicate, and fragrant as ever! Why not? It did not know, any more than we, the treachery that summer was storing against mankind. August! With its soft delicious days! Deceiving days, terrible days, days of sad memorial, when can they be blessed again, when can they be pardoned? . . . I will tell you, I would have France celebrate the first of July as soon as the war is over. And remember us! It is impossible we should not be there in spirit on that day, to remember and be remembered. . . . That we should be forgotten is our only torment. Soon it will almost seem there has been no war when the grass grows green over the trenches. But what we have done will not end with peace. The future will profit by our sacrifice, almost without knowing it. At the frontiers of the past we stand immortal... As, when you open the window of a house by night and hear in the distance the barking of dogs who guard you, so in the days of peace you will hear our voices calling. Remember us. Only remember us."

"Our lot is cast," says this unknown soldier. This is the hope. . . if the unknown soldier could speak, this is what he would say:

"We have been chosen to stamp out the plagues

that must not come again. We shall be known as the slaves of mankind. The future will be told our story as a legend of hell. The most wretched will take heart when they think of us. That is what we shall have done for the future! War may kill us; but we shall kill it. Both of us shall die together. It shall be so! However much the wise may shrug their shoulders and talk about human nature! That is no reason. In nature, war is individual. A creature will always fight for bread, or money, or power, or love; but that is not war. War outrages all instincts, the highest and the lowest. We shall outgrow it as we have outgrown slavery and human sacrifice. Just as we look with horror on the racks and scourges of the Middle Ages, so the future will feel its gorge rise at the sight of our machine-guns and bombs. They will think of those who made them with disgust and feel shame that they come from their stock. That is what our generation will have done. And not for France alone! But for her enemy as well! For all those who have fought, even for those who have looked on. That is what we shall have done. We must die that the world may have life and have it more abundantly. . ."

Will the world remember the Stanhopes and the

Raleighs and the Osbornes, and the unknown warriors?
Will their death in war mark the end of war? Will their
sacrifices bring to the rising generations life, and life
more abundantly? This generation, my friends, and the
next one, will have to answer that question. The
questioners are now dead these twelve or fifteen years,
and plows have now passed over their graves.

But the question remains, and perhaps
that question will be heard at the naval conference in
London, and the conferences in Geneva, in the chancellories
of the world. For unless this question is answered, our
entire Western civilization will before long reach its
Journey's End.

--O--

1. The records; the last war has been vainly written. (1) Statistics - so many killed so many wounded, so much money spent (2) Treaties - These nations victors - then defeated. They gained so much territory. They lost. So much indemnity is ~~being~~ paid for so many years by these nations to that. (3) Political changes - As a result, the war these nations went Bolshevik. this Fascist. Republics established here - what a mess then (4) International Relations - a more earnest and determined effort to have peace. (5) Moral tone - a lowering of standards in private morality, a let-down in social discipline, and a vast spiritual confusion.

2. But the real records, the war, in terms of human experience, - in terms of what the war really meant to those who fought in it - can only be told in great literature. And here and there, a great book, a great play, a great poem, will succeed in a measure in doing justice to that colossal tragedy which tro & mutilated millions of human souls and overwhelmed them with horror, suffering and death. The coming generations will not be moved by the statistical or pot records of the last war. They will have for them only an intellectual interest, which will waver with the succeeding years. Even the inspiration which ~~will be conveyed~~ ^{is being conveyed} to the young people, to mention that in 5th year 1914-1915 - 5 m. men were killed, will give them only a momentary mental jolt. Once pity is spread very thin over the fate of 5 m. people. It may be moved to pity and horror and that by a book or a play which, like Sergeant Griseba, Jennings and, The Unknown Warrior, All's True, tells in faithful and unadorned frankness, the story of one or 2 of these soldiers, caught in the pathos hopeless mess, that terrible ^{struggle} war, and, what it did to them their souls and their bodies, their hopes and their ideals.

3. When forthright peace preachers and propagandists will fail, a book, thereby with the pain and agony of simple men presented by the blind force of war, and ground down

[illegible]

the modest, all the human ~~at~~ ~~around~~ talks
laying ^{and by England in 1890} his little garden back house and, the
holy ~~but~~ ^{the} Sergeant-Major a whimsical
cookery, whose native humor seems by contrast
to emphasize the ~~sentiment~~, the tragedy - all, then
the by me - go to their deaths not knowing or not
questioning the reason why - just doomed men led
to the sacrifice. - an unforgettable scene -

4. The features, the play. Apart from its dominant, is
that it uses stunts to cheap, was sentimentalism, but
no character is made to march any heroes
about patriotism, or the ideal for which they were fighting,
or victory, or saving the world. The tragic pomp & solemn
circum of war, the another brushed aside as so much
clap-trap, false and unwise. No hero, no
romanticism! Here are men who are doing their
duty because it is the decent thing to do! They
did not want the war. They do not want
the war. They loathe it. They fear it. Only
their manliness & their duty make them
carry on. My Just trap kill weary
What is the reason that acts in the drama
may have had the war has blasted out of them. Pauline
who knew high long back home, who as a youth was the
peer of his school is now drenched in whiskey, desperately
battering up his courage with liquor and afraid to
go home on a bare back. He can no longer trust
himself. Young Raleigh, who was happy as his

They do not know whether the war is right or
wrong, ^{Sometimes they feel as tho they had purchased right of} ~~they are told to~~ They still can't see. They
hate but ~~see~~ they to some being pulled. They
see them only the unmitigated weariness and
~~death~~ boredom + horror + pain, war —



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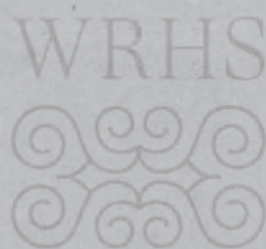
Here in school, now finds him - a soul ravaged by war -
and he, too, is disillusioned - And all find their ultimate disillusionment in death. (over) but without
panders - justifies them - ashamed -

5. There are no women in the play - And yet here and
there, from ~~a~~ ^{unprecedented} ~~chance~~ ^{remarks} one is made aware of the
deep fissures lying in their men for wife, for mother,
for sweetheart - and also, as with men in war, of
the coarser animal lusts which can never be
separated from the soldier's life.

6. Here is a portrayal of war in remarkable fidelity - honest + remorseless.
Here is the crucial achievement of 20th century civilization
in terms of intern. morality. All the paths of material
triumph & glory lead to this dog out in the W. front.
And all the wisdom & learning & vision, the world's
greatest statesmen led to this - to nothing, St. +
Rat. + Inst. 17 other + 400,000 - dying in filthy
filth & dirt, tormented by shelling, gassed by mustard gas, + this goes
on every day, every hour, every minute, every second, every
year lives - for what? Jr. End is a gripping tragedy
monument to that ill-starred, ^{unhappy} generation who
effected the sins of a shattering world in
the fields glory honor, death from the Black Sea
to the North Sea -

7. Another play - by Dr. Paul Raynaud. "Le Tombeau
des L'Arc de Triomphe" - "Unknown Warrior"
thinks the depth, war in terms of human exp.
as powerfully as J. End - altho not as free

There is a certain pander to their likes. They
do like men. One hates them, one is not
ashamed of them. One is ashamed of those who
sent them here. The Jews were, back home, where
scheming & other circumstances but this to
pass.



from ^{heroic and} Nat. idolatry as J. Eud. (Plays 3 ch-9)
Fr. Olden - his Father - his Sweetheart - Olden
return home on a leave obtained at great price
offered to carry them, ^{in his return, a reward} a military ~~offer~~ which means
almost certain death for going on a few days leave.
^{to see his sweetheart} He had counted on days leave. He leaves - only
knows - He finds his father romancing about war &
victory - failing to understand his ^{son's} when he remains
cold to it all - ~~as~~ He also finds that the loving his
beloved has ended during the long absence -
and that his covenant with death for the sake of
her is still there - is a vain & futile. His mind
crumbled about him - (p. 44-53)

8. From the heart of this soldier the question asked.
(all France & all Ham. then walk up
this outburst of pain & hope - (p. 178-80)
and (184)

9. Will they be remembered? Will they have
ended war? Will the world have life &
have it more abundantly? -

This generation must answer the Unt.
Soldier. Else our Civil. will have reached
its prime end -