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A world without Jews, 1935.

WRHS
A WORLD WITHOUT JEWS
With Special Reference to Robert Nathan's New
Book "Road of Ages"



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver
At
The Temple
On
Sunday morning, March 3, 1935

Robert Nathan has written an interesting book called "Road of Ages." It is not a great book but the subject, the theme of it is quite intriguing. All the Jews of the world are exiled to the Gobi Desert -- Mongolian Central Asia. The story of it takes place on the long trek of these exiles to their new place of habitation. It is a sort of reversal of our historic exiles. Then the Jews were exiled from one place and scattered all over the world. This is an exile from all over the world to one place.

The theme was undoubtedly suggested to the author by the recent experiences of our people in Germany, by the emigration from that country, by the threat of the Nazis to undermine the Jews throughout the world. The subject, as you can readily see, is a tremendous one. The treatment, however of the author, seems to be a bit inadequate. The subject seems to be too big for his splendid elegant style of writing. Here and there in the book you come across great unique passages of true poetic quality. Here and there you come across a scene or an incident that is indeed very moving. And occasionally the author does seem to pull aside a curtain which reveals very profound insight. By and large, however, the book is rather disappointing.

The author seems to have stumbled on a tremendous, a colossal theme. The two ideas which impress the author and which dominate the book, in characterizing these exiles marching from all parts of the world to their new habitation are first, that they present the

very heterogeneous character and secondly that in spite of their common misfortune they quarrel with one another. The author seems to be greatly impressed by the fact that their common distress has not made them over, that in spite of the distress all share in common, they still insist upon keeping alive their differences of opinion. And the climax of the book is a bloody riot between the Communist Jews on the one hand and the Socialist Jews and others on the other, in which arms and legs are broken, men and women trample over each other and kill one other.

After I read the book, and I read it sympathetically, I asked myself, "Why shouldn't Jews quarrel among themselves quite as much as any other people?" Why should you expect that the emotional reactions of Jews should be different from those of other people? The fact that these Jews are in exile, under terrific strain, terrific emotional strain certainly should not contribute to a more calm and self-possessed and tolerant outlook on life than that of other people. A comfortably situated people that lives in security and peace and enjoys the ordinary processes of living -- such a people may well be counted upon to develop attitudes of tolerance, of good will, of patience. And these people, by the way, do not develop these attitudes. What right has one to expect that a people who live under constant strain, distress, exile show a greater measure of patience and tolerance than that possessed by other people whose lives are much more normal than that of the Jewish people?

I am afraid that we Jews have made a sort of fetish of Jewish unity in the eyes of the world. We all talk about it as though that is the supreme and the one thing that is sadly lacking in the lives of Jews while it is present in the lives of all other people. It is not so. A religious communion may possess a certain degree of unity. A religious society which has one creed, one organization, one hierarchy, one leadership may be said to have a certain unity and even then there are schisms, breaks. Protestantism, which is not Judaism, has a hundred and fifty sects. That certainly is not unity. In a religious communion you could have some approximation of unity. But for a people -- it is impossible!

A people cannot have one program, one platform, one outlook. It has hundreds. Take the United States. Have we one economic outlook here? Have we not reactionaries, progressives, radicals, liberals, strife, bloody riots? Did we not have a civil war -- four long years of strife?

The Jews are a people? As soon as we recognize this historic fact that we are a people, then we shall get over our indignation and resentful surprise when we discover disunion, so to speak, in the Jewish ranks. When you add to this fact that we are entitled to the same amount of disunity as other people, that we are a scattered people living in all parts of the world, possessing different backgrounds, molded by different civilizations and cultures, speaking different languages, you will marvel at the remarkable unity that we do possess. We do possess more critical moments. But in questions

of self-defense, in matters pertaining to Jewish life all over the world, in philanthropic work, in behalf of the sick, disabled, we do unite -- more readily and better than other people. We are entitled to our religious sects, our group conflicts quite the same as are other people.

Uniformity is not a healthy ideal at all. Our Rabbis long ago understood human nature much better than we do. They said that one who looks over a great gathering of people ought to proclaim a blessing: "Blessed be He because He did not make all our minds alike." Those who talk loudest about Jewish unity are usually those people who want you to accept their program.

It is good, my friends, that we do not have one organization to speak for all of us Jews. It is highly desirable that, scattered as we are all over the world, that we do not have one man or one organization to speak for us. It is well for the non-Jews in the world to know that we are a people and that we have different parties, adherences and programs in our midst. All Jews should not be stamped or judged by one group of Jews just for the same reason that all Americans should not be judged by one group of Americans.

So that it is a surprise to the author that in this imaginary world which he creates -- the whole of Jewry in exile, marching to the Gobi Desert -- that there is so much disunion and conflict. It is quite natural and moral that he should have discovered it. This idea is not particularly new.

I was intrigued by this book for quite a different reason. I asked myself, "What would really happen, if all the Jews were exiled to the Gobi Desert?" I know what would happen to the Jews and the Gobi Desert. In less than a generation it would become a great commercial and cultural center. I know that Jewish resourcefulness and initiative. They would do to the Gobi Desert what they did to other deserts, clear the waste places, drain the marshes -- as they are doing in Palestine at this very moment. We have lived in exile for so long that one more exile wouldn't make much difference.

The author senses this. Even while on the march through the desert to their exile, in wagons, in automobiles and other conveyances, the Jewish financiers, capitalists and merchants are made periodically to talk about how they will flood the markets with utility goods, etc. They don't seem to be particularly crushed in spirit. So I know what would happen to the Jew -- what would happen to the Gobi Desert.

What would happen to the world if sixteen million Jews were suddenly forced to become exiled to the Gobi Desert, isolated, quarantined or annihilated? What would happen to the world if this had happened to the world, two-three thousand years ago, in the days of Abraham or Moses. Would the world today be richer or poorer because of it? That is a legitimate question to ask.

A great English Essayist said that the whole Western civilization has been molded by two civilizations and only two civilizations, the Greek and the Jewish. The Greeks gave to the people of Western Europe

art, philosophy. The Jews gave religion and moral and social codes to the world. These two peoples, alone, fashioned and molded European civilization.

Now if one of these never had existed or had been destroyed, would Europe be richer or poorer? Poorer, of course, by half! The Nazis, in their crude vulgar way sensed this when they divided the whole of mankind into two peoples, the Aryans and the Jews. To the Jewish group they ascribed all those ideas which they dislike -- democracy, liberalism, humanitarianism, international brotherhood, peace -- things which had the Jews been destroyed two, three millennia ago, then these ideals might never have percolated into the minds of these warring, dogmatic barbarians of Western Europe.

What would have happened to the world? If it had been a world without Jews it would have missed, my friends, the "God idea" of Israel, the idea of one God, oneness, unity, the kind and merciful God, the God who is the Father of all men. The world would have missed Israel's code of moral law beginning from the Ten Commandments running through all the prophetic teachings which are dominated by justice. "Thou shalt pursue justice and love charity and peace and brotherhood."

If Israel had been destroyed in the days of Abraham and Moses, all the world would have missed the Bible, the "Book of Books" that book which has worked its way so marvelously into the song, and speech, art/literature of every people of Western Europe. Can you think of European Art and European Literature, not to speak of European

philosophic thought with reference to the inspiration which these artists, painters, sculptors and poets derived from Biblical themes? You would have to scrap over half of the best in English Literature if the Bible had not been known. Carlyle said: "In the poorest cottage -- is one Book, wherein for several thousands of years the spirit of man has found light and nourishment and an interpreting response to whatever is Deepest in him." "The English Bible," said Macaulay, "is a book which, if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power."

If the Jews had been destroyed long, long ago, the world would be missing today, not one great religion, but three of the great classic religions -- Judaism, Christianity and Mohammendanism. For Christianity and Mohammedanism, are derived from Judaism and are an evolution of Jewish thought and Jewish teaching. And more than half of mankind, with its one-half billion Christians and three hundred fifty million Mohammedans would have missed and would be missing today, that impact of religious ideals which we call Christianity and Mohammendanism.

Why, if the Jews had been destroyed, then you would have to go through your city of Cleveland today and imagine it ~~xxx~~ with all of its numerous churches removed, for they are all expressions of Jewish ideals. They are all dedicated to the teachings of a Jew. You would have to remove from your library shelves a considerable amount of its best and most classic literature. You would have to tear out of your

speech many idioms for many of them are taken from Jewish Literature, not to speak of legal codes and moral ideals. The world would have been by far the poorer if the Jews had not existed.

The Jewish group today is perhaps more creative, more alive intellectually and spiritually and gives more of tremendous values to civilization today than it has since Biblical times. Would the world today be richer or poorer if Albert Einstein were taken out of the realm of Physics and Sigmund Freud out of the realm of Psychology and psycho-analysis, Bergson, etc? Would the world today be any poorer if Jewish musical geniuses, Jewish artistic geniuses, Jewish medical geniuses, if Jewish writers, diplomats, sages, jurists, legalists were wrenched out of the world? I think it would be poorer, and by far. Our enemies sense how great is the contribution of the Jews to the world. The Nazis have by force endeavored to wrench the Jews from Germany. The Jews dominate the thought of Germany. How does the Jew dominate? Why by the power of his mind. That power given to him is not any gift but is his by virtue of his genius and ability.....

Two thousand years ago the Jewish people gave to the world a religious teacher who dominated the thought of accepted religious thought up to the present day and for the next few thousand years it is likely that another Jewish man is going to dominate the world in the economic field -- Karl Marx. 160 million people today are already living by the light of his teaching. Would the world be poorer or richer without the influence of these two figures. Would the world be richer or poorer today if Spinoza had not lived?

I am persuaded that if the Jews were annihilated today or sent to the Gobi Desert so that it would be out of contact with the world, the world would lose a very gifted race, a race which has some qualities which are not so nice, a race which some people call stiff-necked. But we must take it for what it -- a race. Considering its numerical smallness it has become one of the major races of the world.

If all the Jews disappeared, I wonder what the anti-Semites would do? After all, their stock-in-trade would be gone. If all the Jews disappeared tomorrow the Nazis would invite them back again. They wouldn't know how to carry on their propaganda without them. I was asked not long ago if I thought Judaism would die in America. No it will not die. The banks wouldn't let it die. The banks have too much invested in Jewish securities to let them die. There is no danger, of course, about Jews going to the Gobi Desert. The Jews are not quitting the scene. Our Jewish destiny has never ended up in the desert. Jewish destiny has led, always rather, through the desert to the promised land. The reason is that while in the desert, we always carried with us the Ark of the Covenant, the faith of a people, in itself, in its God, in its destiny which enabled our people to pass through a desert. It enabled them to be a Pilgrim people.

The Jews are a very hard and tough people. The Rabbis knew it long time ago. Among the nations, it was one of the toughest. That is the people of Israel. People think of us as weak. We are not weak. We are very strong. For what people has been stronger? What people has been able to endure more and what people has been subjected to more abuse, undermined, persecuted, exiled, for two thousand years and has survived?

We have been happy, my friends, to walk down the Road of Ages, because we have always had with us the Rock of Ages and always with us in our persecuted moments there came to us the comforting words of our ancient prophets: "There is a voice calling in the wilderness. Clear the way for the road. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God, for a people is marching, marching to its destiny. When thou wilt pass through the rivers, I will be with thee and the great waters shall not overflow thee. When thou wilt pass through the fire, thou wilt not be burned, and the flames will not kindle against thee." That is the way that has kept Israel marching on the Road of Ages.



"In the poorest cottage - is one Book, wherein for several thousands of years the spirit of man has found light, and nourishment, and an interpreting response to whatever is Deepest in him".

Carlyle

"The English Bible -- a book which, if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power."

Macaulay.

1/ Robert Nathan - "Road of Ages" - not great - All Jews - Suggested
Subject is tremendous - It was evidently too big - elegant
Here and there one comes upon
But - disappointing - Author stumbled - colossal - enormous

2/ Only 2 ideas dominate -

Neither idea - In any land of recent immigration - present
quarrel - like every other people!
Author impressed - not made over by - even - cannot agree
Beaten, robbed - in midst of distress - keep alive distress
The climax - a bloody riot.

3/ But why shouldn't Jews even - keep alive
If it is natural for - why not for Jews? If non-J. Communists
Why do we expect diff. emot. reactions
Certainly distress, exile - A comfortable people

4/ Jewish Unity - Fetish!

1. A Rel. communion - schisms - 150 Prot. Sects -
2. But a people! no one program - The United States -
3. Jews are a people! Once you realize - indignant surprise -
4. We are entitled
5. Add to this - scattered people - backgrounds - marvel
6. Overestimates -
7. Uniformity - not desirable - all prob. to tell the
8. Those who talk loudest of unity -
9. It is worse not to have one organ - Non-Jews!

5/ I am intrigued by subject from a diff. angle -
What would happen to world if -

I know what would happen to Jews - Gols. -
In less than a generation - a great comm. + cultural

Jewish resourcefulness would do to jobs - Palestine -
We have had to live in exile - frightened
The author senses this -

6. But what would happen to world - exiled - isolated - paranoid -
or annihilated?

What would have happened to world - Abraham. Means -
Would world to-day be richer or poorer?

7. Matthew Arnold - Nazis -

(1) World would have missed God - our - place

(2) " " " " Israel's moral code - 10 Commandments
justice - love - charity - brotherhood - peace

(3) " " " " 2 of the great religions
all that they have meant to $\frac{1}{2}$ humanity

(4) " " " " Bible - Book, Books -

(a) Entered into song, speech

(b) How many W. Europ. artists etc. derived their insp.

" " plays etc.

(c) Take Biblical themes, heroes out of world's life. Void!

(d) Carlyle - Mercantile (Job) -

(e) Your city -

8. To-day. - If you take Jews & J. contributions - play mus etc
without an Eastern - poor.

Prejudices - Nazis -

In every field - original text - books!

2000 yr ago - Jews - Marx - 1600 yr -

7/ If Jews were removed - gifted - heaven - stiff-necked
" " " " " Antisemites, do?
Banks -

10/ No danger! ~~Not big~~

Not quitting scene -

Not going Goli down - end up - 10/17/77

"Clean the way"

- 7/23/77 7/23/77

We are a Pilgrim people - Ark

We are a hard people - 7/23/77

11/ Faith - Promise.

Our Root has continued to Age -

"Look & Live"

7/23/77

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