



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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From Egypt until Now, 1938.

WRHS  
FROM EGYPT UNTIL NOW

By  
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, April 17, 1938



It is discouraging, my friends, to stop and think on this Passover of the position of our people in many parts of the world. 4,000 years after the first Passover and the redemption of our people from slavery, we find millions of our people again living in Egypt, groaning under the yoke of oppression, eating bread of affliction and the horror of humiliation and indignation. It is discouraging when one surveys the world today to find that after so many wars which mankind has waged for the liberation of man, so many bloody revolutions, such untold sacrifices - ten million in the last war alone - for freedom, democracy, a resurgence of tyranny almost everywhere in the world, an unarrested collapse of those great ideals.

But such is, my friends, the heart-breaking nature of progress. It is uncertain. It is not dependable. It is precarious. It is unpredictable.

The moral life of an age is reflected in government, social organizations in international relationship. It does not always or necessarily keep pace with the intellectual life of that age.

It is of course true that the human being is one, that ~~all~~ man is a unit. But all the elements which go up to make this one man do not develop equally or simultaneously or harmoniously. That is true of mankind, too. And this failure to develop simultaneously all along the line results in a tragic lack of balance which handicaps the individual and society and frequently destroys the individual and society.

In our day, science is far more dependable than morals. The greatest care is taken by science to insure accuracy, efficiency and dependability. The utmost caution is taken by science to eliminate chance or variability or the element of surprise. Every conceivable contingency is provided for.

Nothing, of course, is infallible. Accidents, of course, do happen. But science spends itself to the utmost to reduce the coincidences and the incidents of accident to a minimum.

A few days ago I flew some seven thousand miles across this country. Thirty-five years ago, there was no heavier than air plane. The whole science of aeronautics did not exist. Within thirty-five years approximately, in half of a man's lifetime, the great new science was developed, new machinery, new implements. An elaborate organization, an elaborate technique and a trained personnel of was developed plane builders, engineers, mechanics and pilots/- and one travels today thousands of feet in the air, in rain or in snow by day and by night in a shell of a plane at a terrific speed in comfort and in peace of mind. Why? Because one has confidence in the mind, in the scientific mind which built that machine, in the scientific skill which went into the construction of that machine. One has confidence in the dependability, in the reliability in the implements which aid pilots in the navigation of the ship. One has confidence in radio, telephone by which the pilot keeps in communication with the ground and receives weather reports, etc. One has confidence in the radio signals which enable the pilots to keep on a straight course, not to deviate. One has confidence in the two million dollar candle-power revolving beacons which one sees every twenty miles which illuminate

the path across the country, and which tells the traveler that he is being convoyed by an unfailing human vigilance, by a dependable organization, by a science which has made provisions for nigh every contingency. This is what science can do. In fact, science can predict with a fair degree of certainty what advances will be made ten, fifty years from today in any field of scientific discovery.

Less than a century ago, the poet Tennyson predicted in his well known poem, , something which has transpired.

"For I dipt into the future, far as human eye can see;  
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;  
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,  
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales..."

This was written ninety-six years ago. This scientific vision of the poet has, in a very literal sense, come true. The argosies are sailing in the heavens today and are dropping down with costly bales, carrying, conveying man and material from one end of the earth to the other. That is what science can do.

But this same Tennyson, in the same poem also visioned this:

"Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags  
were furled  
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world."

Where is it? Have the battle-flags been furled? Where is this Federation of the world?

This same vision of a Parliament of man was visioned by the prophet Isaiah. And that vision has not come to pass.

Such is the tragig difference, my friends, between the progress of science and the progress of morality. And because there is this tragic lack of one in relation to the other <sup>in</sup> speed, you have a mankind today that is torn, ~~rent~~ rent in twain, pulled in this direction and that

you have the result of chaos and anarchy in the whole of life.

Science does something more which morality doesn't do. When science discovers that a thing doesn't work, it, it scraps it. It is through with it. The scientist in his laboratory, does not repeat the same error over and over again.

But not so man in his moral and spiritual life. He will repeat the same blunder, mistake time and again and even though he has suffered grievously because of an earlier mistake, he will continue to repeat it over and over again.

Before 1914, Europe hoped to maintain peace through a balance of power. There was the dual alliance on the one hand and the Triple Entente on the other. This was the best that the diplomacy of statesmanship which the generation before the war could evolve and that best was no good and that best led to the ghastliest four years of war that mankind has ever known. If science had made such a tragic error, it would have regarded this as a failure and written it down as such. But not so man in his moral life because twenty years after the World War, Europe again tried to establish peace, not through collective security, not through an international organization which would enforce peace, but of one group against another. This is the brilliant diplomacy of 1938. Before 1914, the nations of Europe made mad experiments in the international laboratory namely to insure national prestige, national peace by armament. I don't know how many of you recall the years before the World War. Then as now, the nations were draining their life blood into huge armaments.

Germany began the race then, as in the last few years. The Kaiser challenged the British supremacy on the sea. He said that

"the Trident must be in our hands". And in 1898 he began a huge Navy building program which frightened Great Britain which immediately set about to reorganize its military establishments. It scrapped some two hundred vessels. It began to build Dreadnoughts and Super Dreadnoughts and for half a decade they continued to arm to a breaking point. That experiment led to disaster. Twenty years later, after that disaster, Europe is going through the same experiment. There is again a race for re-armament. Bread and butter is being traded for canons with the inevitable result of war in two years or three years or five years.

All of which, my friends illustrates the road of progress in morals. It is a very hard and difficult one. It is full of recessions, full of pitfalls.

We are in the midst of such an era of heart-breaking disappointment. The recession has set in. These are the dark ages. These are the dark ages. They ~~are~~ have returned. They are not on the way.

The fact that you have automobiles, aeroplanes, telephones, doesn't in the least detract from the cold fact that we are living again intellectually, socially, in the Dark Ages. Because what are the characteristics of the Dark Ages? Intellectual enslavement, bigotry, war and preparation for war. These are the Dark Ages.

The Egypts and Pharaohs have returned. More than one country today is a "house of Slaves". We are again building as they did in ancient Egypt huge store houses so as to make us self-sufficient for another war. The world, my friends, is aflame again. But perhaps out of that flame and fire of our day there may emerge ~~as~~ as once there emerged out of the flaming bush in the wilderness to Moses, a new redemption of mankind. The world needs ~~today~~ today a new Moses and a new redemption, a new spiritual revolution.

Mankind has been worshiping idols of imperialism, of class hatred. The time has come for a new proclamation. "Send forth my people that they may worship me."

My dear friends, out of the story of the Exodus from Egypt mankind may learn a few lessons. And the first of them is this, the lesson of the fleshpots. When the Children of Israel found themselves in the wilderness after then were redeemed from Egypt, when they found themselves without food, ~~when~~ they cried: "Take us back to Egypt, take us back to the fleshpots. We want food." And any nation which hopes to preserve itself must have food. You can talk all you want about democracy but if people are unemployed, if people cannot provide for their wives and children the elementary necessities of food and shelter then they will begin to cry for some fellow who will offer them or promise them the food which they need. The greatest menace to American democracy or to the democracy of any country is not the miserable propaganda of this little group of Fascists or that little group. The greatest menace is prolonged unemployment and human suffering. That is the first lesson that mankind will learn from our Exodus from Egypt.

Secondly is this, the lesson of courage. There can be no freedom without courage. When the children of Israel found themselves on the shores of the Red Sea, the waters of the Red Sea before them and the Egyptians, their horses and chariots advancing towards them, they were seized with fear and terror and at once they cried out to their leader, Moses, "Why didst thou bring us out of Egypt to this? Facing what seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle, these erstwhile slaves lost courage, were paralyzed with fear. The voice of the Lord came to Moses: "Speak unto the people of Israel and let ~~x~~ them march

forward into the sea."

The President of the United States, a few days ago, addressed himself to the American people and uttered this same truth and it is a truth which the American people ought to keep indelibly imprinted upon their hearts and minds. "For to reach a Port, we must sail - sail, not tie at anchor, sail, not drift." A people that is afraid to make experiments, to try new laws, a people which clings to the old just because it is old, a people that is terrified by any slogan any catchword is a people that will sooner or later lose the power and the privilege of self-government. This is another lesson which mankind may learn from our Exodus from Egypt.

Another lesson which mankind may learn my friends is this: That there can be no freedom without law. The first thing that Moses did when the Children of Israel were out of Egypt was to take them to the foot of Mt. Sinai and give them the law by which to utilize that new found freedom so that it would not destroy them by anarchy. No one is free except the man who steep himself in the Torah, in Law." You are free only through the channel of Law. There is no freedom anywhere in the world where a people is governed not by law but by an individual or by a class, by a duke a feuhrer or a commissar. There must be a law over-arching all classes or groups, over-arching society itself to which all men or groups must be obedient. "There shall be one law unto you, to him who is native and to him who is a stranger in the land." This is human dignity. That links up the individual with the infinite, with God himself. Because the spiritual law of life is the law of life.

Finally, the lesson which we learn from the Exodus from Egypt is that freedom must be achieved. It is not a boon granted. It is not a gift offered. It is something achieved through struggle, self-sacrifice, through education.

The generation that left Egypt was found unworthy to enter the Promised land. While nominally and officially liberated, spiritually and intellectually it was still a generation of slavery. They had not yet had time to refashion their minds and souls according to a new pattern of freedom. Freedom must be earned. It must be paid for. You don't get it merely by a revolution.

The former President of the United States, President Hoover, in returning from the countries abroad, recently, made an address before the Foreign Affairs Organization in which he made this very pertinent observation: "The protection of democracy is that we live it, that we revitalize it within our own borders, that we keep it clean of infections, abuses, that we insist upon intellectual honesty, that we build its morals, that we keep out of war."

"That is the greatest service that this Nation can give to the future of humanity."

Lastly, my friends, there is something which we Jews can learn from our fore-fathers 4,000 years ago. I said a moment ago, that when the people found themselves in the Red Sea, the Bible says "they were terribly afraid!" They CRIED unto the Lord that they were afraid. And Moses said to them, "Don't be afraid. Stand by and see the salvation of God. Don't be afraid."

My dear friends, the greatest danger to the Jewish world today here and elsewhere is fear, a fear which we, ourselves, are

are helping to create among ourselves. We are coming, many of us, to imagine foes everywhere. We have come to exaggerate every piddling incident. We have come to misinterpret every innocent remark. We are breathing our own fears into us. We are shell-shocked and our frightened imaginations are running away with us.

Two weeks ago, I happened to be in the City of Los Angeles where I visited in behalf of the United Palestine Appeal and Overseas relief. I found everywhere splendid Jewish communities aware, keenly alert of what is going on in the Jewish world and ready and eager to help. I was very gratified with the response to my appeal everywhere.

I attended a dinner which was given at one of the hotels in Los Angeles by the Pacific Regional Conference of the Jewish Welfare Organizations, a conference which brought to it the leading Jews on the Pacific Coast. It was a great event in every way. We were all delighted with the success of that evening.

Los Angeles, as you know, is a city which has grown up very rapidly and which has attracted to it all sorts of people. It is warm there and men don't care to work. You can loaf in Los Angeles far better than you can in Cleveland.

It has a number of anti-organizations of all kinds. It also has a Nazi group that is very active and nearly all of them German. At this banquet<sup>of</sup>/~~at~~ which I spoke a moment ago, half a dozen Nazis appeared in front of the hotel with placards in which they said some uncomplimentary things about Jews. The manager of the Hotel called the police and the boys were sent home. When I came home to Cleveland, the incident had been magnified many times. People said to me, "Rabbi what happened in that riot in Los Angeles? What did you do when the Nazis broke into the Hall?"

It had become the subject of dinner table. It was bandied about with great relish. That is what I mean by being shell-shocked.

In that city of Los Angeles, for example, there are half a dozen anti-Catholic organizations. In my hotel, I received four or five anti-Catholic pieces of literature that appeared in Los Angeles. I don't know that the Catholics of Cleveland are so terrifically disturbed about the situation in Los Angeles, for example.

I am not unmindful of realities, my friends. And I am not one of those who follows an ostrich policy of hiding the head in feathers so as not to see what is going on in the world. On the contrary, on the other hand, I refuse to be stampeded. I refuse to be driven, as the Bible says, "by the sound of a withering leaf." I refuse to believe myself as homeless in a land where I am completely at home. And too many Jews are working themselves into a frame of mind, as homeless in a land where they should be completely at home like any other people.

"Do not be afraid". A little less apprehension and a little more confidence. A little less fear. A little more of the spirit of fire and indignation. That is what we Jews need. And a little less talk about anti-Semitism with you food at every luncheon, dinner. It will be good for your soul and your mind.

A few years ago, after you got through with a dinner, people talked about automobiles or the stock exchange. Today, with the meal scarcely over, the group starts discussing anti-Semitism. It is a mistake. It doesn't at all follow, my friends, that what happens in one part of the world need happen in every other part of the world. It never happened that way in history. Today you can help by giving

the maximum of aid to our brothers over whom the storms have swept to keep them from going under and to help them live normal, peaceful lives, without fear, without apprehension.

I leave you with this sentence of the prophets. It should like to tell it to all the Jews all over the world. It is the law of Jewish existence.

"Every weapon fashioned against Thee will not succeed. And every tongue that will arise to betray thee will be refuted. That is the heritage of the servant of the Lord...."

This was spoken by Isaiah 26 centuries ago and it has been true, my friends, for 2600 years.



Sermon 507

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE  
TEMPLE, ANSEL ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING,  
AP IL 17th.

### FROM EGYPT UNTIL NOW

In our day Science is far more dependable than morality. The greatest care is taken to insure accuracy, efficiency and dependability. Utmost caution is taken by science to eliminate chance, surprise and variability, to provide for every conceivable contingency. And when science discovers that a thing does not work, it does not make the same mistake over and over again. Not so man in his moral life reflected in government, social organization, and international relationships. Moral progress is uncertain, precarious and unpredictable. That is why, in spite of so many wars, revolutions and sacrifices for the liberation of man, we witness today a resurgence of tyranny, an unarrested collapse of the ideals of freedom and democracy.

From the lessons of the lessons of the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, mankind may learn a few vital lessons. When the Children of Israel found themselves without food in the wilderness, they began to cry for a return to Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to slavery. Without food, there are no free institutions. Prolonged and widespread unemployment and economic misery and hopelessness will drive a people to sacrifice the most precious values of free life for the sake of immediate, if only temporary, relief.

There can be no freedom without courage. Facing the impassable Red Sea, with the Egyptians behind them, the Children of Israel were afraid. But <sup>the</sup> word of the Lord came unto Moses saying: "Speak unto the Children of Israel and let them march forward!" A people which does not have the courage to move forward and to experiment with new forms of social and economic arrangements, will not long remain in possession of the capacity,

or the privilege of self-government. President Roosevelt spoke a magnificent truth the other day when he said: "For to reach a Port, we must sail - sail, not tie at anchor, sail, not drift."

Freedom must be achieved. It is not a gift bestowed. The generation which left Egypt was found unworthy to enter the promised land. It had not disciplined itself into the ways of freedom even though, nominally, it had been liberated. Freedom must be earned through vigilance, self-restraint, through sacrifice and cooperative living, through justice and selflessness.

There are many people today which find themselves in twentieth century Egypts, under the lash of taskmasters. Mankind needs a new Moses and a new redemption.



1/ It is discouraging - for us Jews - 4000 after - to find  
.. .. .. .. Mankind - Wars - Revolutions - Sac-10.  
resurgence of Tyranny - Unaverted Collapse

2). But such is heart-breaking nature -  
It is uncertain -

The Moral life of an Age - as reflected - keeps pace  
Man is One - elements - So with Mankind -  
This Farline - to achieve balance - handicaps, destroys.

3/. In our day, Science far more dependable > Morals.  
Greatest Care - insure - accuracy, efficiency, depend  
Utmost Caution - eliminate - chance, surprise, Variability  
Every conceivable contingency  
No thing, of course, infallible - Accidents - reduce

4). Flow - 1000<sup>s</sup> - across continent - 35 yrs. ago - In less 7 1/2  
a great new Sc - new Machinery, Sp. improvements, elaborate  
org. + personell  
Our Travels - thousands of feet - thru rain - day + night  
at terrific speed - comfortably and at ease.

Why? { confidence in the Mind which built The Plane  
 .. .. Sc. Skill - went into Construction  
 .. .. Devs. of instruments which aid  
 .. .. Radio Telephone -  
 .. .. Signals -

Confidence in 2 M. candle-power Revolving Beams  
Situated Every 10-20 ft. - other Beams lights  
which tell you - Couraged - Vigilance -  
unfailing, defend. human Org.

5/. This is what he can do! Even anticipate - & not  
be deceived. Tennison, less > Anticipation... True!

6/. But same Tennison - And see!

2600 - Isaiah

Such is Diff - And there is another!

7/. When he discovers - a Thing does not work

① Dual Alliance - Triple Entente - Balance of Powers  
Collective Security

② Armament - before 1914 - led to war.

Germany - challenges Br. Maritime Supremacy.

"Trident must be in our hands" - 1898 - Mighty Navy  
200 obsolete ships - Dreadnoughts & Super D. (Race)

So enormously expensive - 1914.

③ Germany - "Middle Europe" - Hegemony - Berlin to Baghdad  
Imperialism - War - Disaster - Doing it again

8/ Age which illustrates - Hard Road -

Recession Again - Dark Ages -

Egypt & Pha. have returned.

פירוק יריד - not only for Jews.

Building Store-Cities -     וְיִבְנוּ עָרִים לְעֹלָם

World aflame again -     וְיִבְנוּ עָרִים לְעֹלָם - Revelation

New messenger - Moses -     מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן

9/ A few lessons for Man Knew to learn from Exodus

(1)     וְלֹא יִבְנוּ עָרִים - Unemployment

(2)     Courage - at Red Sea -

"For to reach a Port, we must sail - sail, not  
be at anchor, sail, not drift!"

③ Freedom must be based on Law - Sinai - אין חוק אין חופש  
אין חוק אין חופש

No freedom then Dictatorship of a man or a class!

" " " will or whim of a Duce etc -

" " ~~for the people~~ in special privilege of the people

But Freedom in Law - אין חוק אין חופש

אין חוק אין חופש

④ Must be achieved - אין חוק אין חופש - (Just Horror)

10/ A few lessons for us Jew in Exodus!

At Sea. Fear!

אין חוק אין חופש

- אין חוק אין חופש - אין חוק אין חופש - אין חוק אין חופש

Fear! grips - Imagine foes every where!

Exaggerate! Misinterpret! Read into!

Los Angeles - Riot - Read into - Shouted - Inflamed,

shell-shocked imagination magnified it - a hiding incident

into a matter of colossal dimensions

Creeping mood of panic! First Victory of Antis.

Making ourselves <sup>shyly</sup> homeless - in our own House!

אין חוק אין חופש - go about your business -

a little less apprehension - less Confidence - & independence -

& spirit

אין חוק אין חופש אין חוק אין חופש אין חוק אין חופש אין חוק אין חופש

No weapon - found - succeed - Tongue - refute - Heritage - Due Reward

'Till the war-drum thrashed us longer, and the  
battle-flags were furled  
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world'



by step more force and coercion must be applied until all liberty—economic and personal and political—is lost.

#### PLANNED ECONOMY AS A LINK TO FASCISM

Let no man mistake that we in America have until now avoided the infection of these European systems. If our own so-called planned economy is not an infection from the original stream of fascism, it is at least a remarkable coincidence.

The leader of German fascism in a speech last week hurled the taunt to democracies that "not a single decent nation has died for the sake of democratic formalities." To the extent that races do not actually die because they forfeit individual liberty, that may be true. But what is far more important is that when true liberty dies then justice and truth die. And intellectual progress and morality die also.

I have no doubt that fascism will fall sometime, just as Marxian socialism has failed already. The stifling of intellectual progress, the repression of the spirit of men, the destruction of initiative and enterprise will offset all the efficacies of planned economy. Even economic life cannot succeed where criticism has disappeared and where individual responsibility is constantly shirked for fear of the state. Even in fascist countries liberal ideals are not dead and will not be downed. Every despotism today lives with fear of liberty at its heart—or there would be no concentration camps.

And I may add that, having listened in many countries to eulogies of planned economy and fascism and of their benefits to the common man, I detected in every case the hope that some day liberty might return. The spirits of Luther, of Goethe, of Schiller, of Mazzini, and Garibaldi are not dead.

#### REVITALIZATION URGED OF DEMOCRATIC IDEAL

Moreover there has been nothing shown me in Europe in elimination of wastes or better housing or security to workers or farmers or old age that we cannot do better under democracy, if we will. Though I had little need for confirmation in my faith, I pray God that this Nation may keep its anchors firmly grounded in intellectual liberty and spiritual freedom. These values can be preserved only by keeping government from the first pitfall of direction or participation in economic life—except that it shall sternly repress, by due process of law but not by edict, every abuse of liberty and honesty.

The protection of democracy is that we live it, that we revitalize it within our own borders, that we keep it clean of infections, that we wipe out its corruptions, that we incessantly fight its abuses, that we insist upon intellectual honesty, that we build its morals, that we keep out of war.

That is the greatest service that this Nation can give to the future of humanity.

### Sterilized Gold

#### EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. GEORGE D. O'BRIEN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 1938

Mr. O'BRIEN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, on December 22, 1936, the Secretary of the Treasury created the inactive or sterilized gold fund in the United States Treasury.

From that date forward the gold acquisitions purchased for \$35 per ounce were not paid for by the issuance of gold certificates but were paid for by Treasury obligations.

By June 30, 1937, the inactive or sterilized gold fund had reached \$1,086,787,223.

During the summer of 1937 we were acquiring such gold for the inactive fund at the rate of \$140,000,000 a month.

On June 14, 1937, I introduced H. R. 7516, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Treasury to pay for gold purchases with noninterest-bearing currency instead of with Government bonds, and provided as follows:

Whereas the Treasury of the United States is purchasing (in pursuance of the Gold Purchase Act of January 30, 1934) gold in the approximate amount of \$140,000,000 each month and paying therefor with interest-bearing bonds of the United States; and

Whereas there is a great excess of gold in the Treasury compared with the circulating currency: Therefore

*Be it enacted, etc.,* That the Secretary of the Treasury, with the approval of the President, is hereby directed to pay for all gold purchases by issuing gold certificates and depositing such gold certificates with the Federal Reserve Board, which shall thereupon issue noninterest-bearing Federal Reserve notes for the payment of such gold purchases.

On February 15, 1938, the amount of gold in the inactive fund had reached \$1,213,602,937.83.

On February 14, 1938, the Treasury announced that the first \$100,000,000 of gold acquired in each quarter of this year would not be sterilized. Instead, gold certificates would be issued. The excess over \$100,000,000 in each quarter still goes into the inactive gold fund and no change is made in regard to the accumulated gold in the inactive fund.

On January 31, 1938, I introduced H. R. 9255, a bill to issue currency for the inactive gold in the United States Treasury, providing as follows:

*Be it enacted, etc.,* That the Secretary of the Treasury, with the approval of the President, is hereby directed to issue gold certificates in an amount equal to the value of the gold in the inactive gold fund in the Treasury of the United States and deposit such gold certificates with the Federal Reserve Board, which shall thereupon issue to the Treasury of the United States noninterest-bearing Federal Reserve notes in the amount of such gold certificates.

By virtue of the Gold Reserve Act of January 30, 1934, all such sterilized gold is the property of the United States.

On December 22, 1936, when the sterilized-gold fund was created, it was done purposely as a deflationary measure to offset an anticipated inflation.

Since November 19, 1937, we have been going through a severe deflation. It appears very plain that the deflationary policy of maintaining the sterilized-gold fund should be reversed.

At this time there is in the sterilized-gold fund \$1,182,974,522.81. Since this gold is the property of the United States, currency can be issued for it and the money spent for public works or other measures to counteract the present deflation and start this additional currency flowing through the channels of trade and industry.

### Sweetpotatoes—A New Cash Crop for South Mississippi

#### EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. WILLIAM M. COLMER

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 13, 1938

On the bill (H. R. 10238) making appropriations for the Department of Agriculture and for the Farm Credit Administration for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1939, and for other purposes

Mr. COLMER. Mr. Speaker, in the pending bill, the same being H. R. 10238, the Agricultural appropriation bill, is found an item appropriating \$20,000 for a pilot dehydrating plant for future experimentation in connection with a Government experiment station at Laurel, Miss. I desire to call the attention of the membership to this item and to throw some light thereon.

I have on my desk in my office a little vial of starch. It is an insignificant appearing little bottle, but about it centers an interesting story, which with your permission I desire to dwell upon briefly.

In 1933 I had a conference with one Dr. F. H. Thurber, a chemist connected with the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils of the United States Department of Agriculture. Dr. Thurber gave me this little vial of starch which he had produced from sweetpotatoes in a small laboratory on the outskirts of the city of Washington. He enchanted me with a most interesting word picture of how he, working in conjunction with other chemists, had discovered that starch could be made from sweetpotatoes. Moreover, he advised me that the Department of Agriculture was considering the establishment of a factory to demonstrate the practical conversion of starch from the lowly sweetpotato on a commercially profitable basis. Many more conferences resulted with Dr. Thurber and with the heads of the various departments of the Agriculture Department. This laboratory experiment was finally authorized on a large scale, and Harry L. Hop-

kins as administrator of the relief forces agreed to furnish the necessary funds therefor. When it became known that the plant would be constructed there was lively competition for its location in several of the Southern States.

#### LOCATED AT LAUREL, MISS.

Through the efforts of Senator HARRISON, the senior Senator from Mississippi, and myself, together with other interested parties, the plant was located at Laurel, Miss., and the Government in the 5 years since its beginning has expended in excess of \$200,000 on this project.

#### A DEMONSTRATED SUCCESS

Mr. Speaker, on many occasions I have visited this plant at Laurel and have observed with increasing interest and pride its steady progress. From time to time it has been necessary to secure additional allocations of funds to continue the experimentation, because necessarily in a pioneering enterprise of this nature many changes in the plans had to be made from time to time. But I am happy to report to you today that this experiment, which started on the banks of the Potomac here, has demonstrated in the plant at Laurel that starch can be profitably and commercially produced from sweetpotatoes.

#### THE PLANT

The plant itself, as you may judge from the amount of expenditures heretofore made, is quite a sizable one. It was erected in 1934 with funds allotted by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. It is leased at a nominal rental by the Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, to whom it was deeded, to a cooperative association of some 400 sweetpotato growers in the vicinity of Laurel, Jones County, Miss. It is operated under the chemical and technological supervision of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, United States Department of Agriculture.

#### PRODUCTION

The process was developed to the extent that during the harvesting season of 1936 it produced approximately 420,000 pounds of starch and 180,000 pounds of a dried byproduct pulp. The latter is a very nutritious food for cattle and was sold for dairy feed. In 1937 there were between 500,000 and 600,000 pounds of starch and a corresponding amount of the byproduct pulp produced. The present, or 1938, season promises to be the banner year for the production by the factory.

Already arrangements have been made to plant twice as many potatoes in the vicinity of the plant by the farmers this year as last year. At first the farmers, wisely, not being advised in the premises, were slow to respond. But the fact that they will plant more than twice the acreage this year is indicative of the fact that they, too, now see the possibilities of this new industry. Moreover, in the beginning the farmers were only paid 20 cents a bushel for their potatoes. Last year, through the assistance of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, they were given a 10-cents-per-bushel additional payment for crop diversion.

#### USES OF STARCH

This starch product is of a very high quality and does not generally compete with the cornstarch produced in other sections of the country. Most of the starch now being produced in this factory is being consumed by cotton mills, but the laundries, particularly in Mississippi and Alabama, have learned that it makes a most satisfactory laundry starch. The textile mill located at Laurel has been using this starch almost exclusively for the past year or more, I am advised, with most satisfactory results. The Bureau of Chemistry and Soils has discovered that this starch can be used most effectively as a dextrin superior to that now imported and used as adhesives for postage stamps, labels, and envelopes.

#### PROFITABLE TO THE FARMERS

One of the most satisfactory results of this new enterprise is that it promises to be a boon to the Mississippi and other southern farmers in States where sweetpotatoes can be grown profitably. One of the crying needs in the South, with the increasing loss annually of our foreign markets, is the

necessity for another cash crop than cotton in our Southern States. It has been estimated that at 30 cents per bushel the farmers in the vicinity of this plant receive a return of about \$60 gross per acre on the average yield of 200 bushels of sweetpotatoes to the acre. This compared with around \$40 per acre from cotton in that vicinity is most encouraging. However, by experimentation in the first years that potatoes have been raised for this purpose, the yields have increased from around 80 bushels per acre to as high as 450 to 500 bushels per acre. As a result it is readily seen that farmers in that vicinity growing sweetpotatoes for the starch plant in 1937 generally made a much greater profit per acre from their potatoes than they did from their cotton. This has resulted in considerable stimulation of the planting of potatoes in that section and has further stimulated the interest of farmers generally in this subject. In fact, as stated previously, there will be more acreage planted than the factory can possibly handle unless this dehydrating plant is installed before harvesting season.

#### DEHYDRATING PLANT

It was for this reason, Mr. Speaker, that we have been so energetically trying, in our efforts before the Appropriations Committee, the Budget, and the Department of Agriculture, to see to it that this appropriation of \$20,000 for this dehydrating plant was placed in this bill and the funds made available at an early date. Heretofore the plant has been enabled to run only seasonably, that is to say that the plant could only operate during the harvesting season. The potatoes would not keep because of their peculiar nature and tendency to mold, and must, therefore, be ground immediately upon being harvested. Now, under the dehydrating process it will be practical to operate this and similar plants the year round. This dehydrating process is simply receiving the potatoes during the harvesting season, grinding them and subjecting them to the action of certain chemicals, either in vapor or in liquid form. The cell walls of the potato tissue thus become very permeable to liquid. As a result most of the juice of the potato can be pressed out by mechanical means. The Government chemists have discovered that the use of sulphur dioxide; that is, the fumes of burning sulphur, is the cheapest chemical to use; and that this process is much cheaper than the evaporation of water by heat. It is possible by this means to press out as much as 80 percent of the water in the sweetpotato in the form of juice; whereas, without this mechanical treatment, it is possible to only extract about one-tenth as much juice using the same pressure.

#### NECESSITY FOR THIS APPROPRIATION

My colleagues will, therefore, observe the necessity for this small appropriation of \$20,000 in order to further continue the experimentation for this drying process. In other words, it appears that this is the final adjunct necessary to fully demonstrate the commercial practicability of the establishment of many such plants as we now have at Laurel. It will insure what we have hoped and dreamed of for the past several years, namely, the erection of hundreds of similar plants by private industry throughout Mississippi and other sweetpotato-growing States.

And, Mr. Speaker, in this connection I desire to make this public announcement of my gratitude to the members of the Appropriations Committee for their wisdom and their sympathetic hearing of our cause before the committee and the placing of this most meritorious item in this appropriations bill.

#### FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

That this experiment, and that is all that it has been up to this time and the only way that it could justify its construction and existence, has justified our faith in it is now unquestionable. We are all grateful to those wizards of chemistry, who in the silence of their laboratories have hour after hour and day after day conducted their experiments. We salute those who have had the wisdom and the foresight to go along in this worth-while undertaking to establish a new industry to benefit mankind and to help the farmers in finding a new market for an old product.



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Maryland W.V. -  
New Renaissance -

AMERICAN  
ARCHIVES

Refractibility - Airplanes -  
aircraft - but not  
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How to find - here - search  
2600 yrs ago

only 96 yrs ago

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye can see;  
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;  
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,  
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales . . .  
Tennyson—1842