



## 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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I go through my files: 1914-1918, 1939.

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I GO THROUGH MY FILES: 1914-1918

By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

WRHS  
At  
The Temple



On  
Sunday, October 29, 1939



It is good, my friends, for a man to keep a record of his public utterances and to review, from time to time, these utterances. And I assure you it is a very sobering and humbling experience. One is brought face to face, when one does that, with the impartial judgment of time on his opinion. And it is a relentless judgment. One can't but realize, when one does that, what little warrant one has to have pride of opinion, to be cocksure of himself, or to resort to over-confident dogmatic pronouncements or prognostications.

Time, history, life, frequently make a mockery of our best reasoned judgment and frustrate our verdicts and our hopes. I am sure that there are men today - writers, journalists, lecturers - who are just as sure about things happening today and their consequences, and who speak with just as much authority placed upon what they regard as invalid judgment as the men and women did during the first world war, twenty-five years ago. I am inclined to believe that they will be as equally disillusioned when they come to read, twenty-five years later, the record of their present utterances.

The fact of the matter is that no one really foresaw the truly great events which actually did transpire in the last half century, the events which gave a wrench to history. No one really foresaw the tragedy of the last world war. No one really foresaw the entrance of the United States to the last world war. No one really foresaw the Bolsheviek Revolution of 1917. No one really foresaw the rise of the Fascists to power in Italy or the rise of Nazism to power in Germany. No one really foresaw, come to think of it, the attack on and the annihilation of German Jewry. Here and there there were writers who alluded to certain possibilities, certain eventualities, certain things that might happen. But mankind as a whole, I mean thoughtful men and women did not expect these things actually to happen and were not prepared for them. They did not permit the possibility of these things happening to enter their calculation



History does not follow any logical syllogism because history follows life and life is illogical. The move of one pawn on a chessboard may force the reorientation of all the the pieces on a chessboard. You cannot foresee the infinite number of pawns on the chessboard of history. All this is brought home to you when you go through your files through a period of years.

It is also impressively borne upon one how modest a man ought to be in his opinion and how modest one ought to be about expressing matters not within his control, and how much men ought to avoid a certainness, a dogmatism, a cocksureness in expressing an opinion on world events.

I was in school when the last world war broke out in 1914. I was closing my college career. The war touched us then as a surprise, as sensational news. We were tremendously excited, of course. We watched the war, at first fascinated, as one watches a great show, a colossal drama. We speculated about it. We took sides. We estimated its possible duration - but always as something quite removed from us, on the other side of the ocean, as a European affair.

Only as days followed days and war was prolonged and the frightful toll of human victims kept mounting, day by day and month by month, only as the shattering tragedy unfolded before our eyes, only as it kept getting nearer and nearer to us through relief agencies and reports and propaganda did we really try to evaluate it and ask ourselves: What does it all mean? Can any light come out of that darkness, and any sanity out of that madness?

As yet, the issues in the world war were not clearly defined. My sympathies were with the Allies from the very beginning. We understood the militarism represented by the Kaiser's Reich, the implications of the invasion



of Belgium, and the sinking of the Lusitania. And we spoke of things often in the pulpit in the harassed days of my ministry.

And steadily as the war lengthened and became more desperate, our sympathies for the Allies became increasingly more active. We didn't want the great democracies of England and France to be defeated. And when the Russian Revolution finally overthrew Czarism, the last inhibition was removed from the advocacy of military aid to the democracies by the United States. By the time I came to this pulpit, the United States was already in the war.

In looking over my files, I find that I advocated the war. This was in a farewell address to the Jewish soldiers and sailors in August, 1917 who were departing for the war. "As a child of a Jewish race, I am not a war advocate. The prophets have proclaimed that there would be a permanent peace and we have always spoken for eternal peace. But the present war is not a war for victory for us. We are not looking for gain. We are in this World War to do away with the reasons for war. We are not fighting the Germany that gave us the poets, the philosophers, the musicians, the artists, but against the German autocrats who are entirely responsible."

I find myself endeavoring to persuade myself and others that with the entrance of the United States into the war, the issue had been clarified. In a New Year's message, in September 1917 I said the following: "If it shall please God that the coming year mark the Nehilah of the Great Atonement of Humanity, then Israel, too, will behold the close of its day of affliction. If this war which began in sin is to end in redemption, if, after this deluge of blood and tears, the rainbow of promise is to appear over a ruined world, then the rights of peoples must be firmly established and absolute equality must unreservedly be granted unto all the children of men. This war will prove the most futile, the ghastliest tragedy of the ages, if, at its close, one vestige



of political or economic bondage remains, one group of men be kept shackled in disabilities and discriminations. The moral and spiritual gains of this struggle must be comensurate with the terrible sacrifices it entailed. Out of the crucible of burning pain, humanity must come forth purged of all its dross, its weaknesses and its prejudices, its lusts and its follies.

"the war began in sin in the greed of dynasties, in the lust of empire, was not a moral value at stake when the war began! But so stupendous did the struggle wax, so gigantic in its proportion, so harrowing in its toll of human misery, that out of its own volcanic soul a new motive and a new purpose has been evolved. Humanity, bleeding and tortured, in the fury of despair, has seized the reins from the hands of the masters and is guiding the forces which they have loosed into new channels of moral reconstruction.

"Already this new motive has already been proclaimed in no uncertain terms by a great people - Democracy. And Democracy means equality of opportunity for people and peoples, for individuals and for the groups.

"And if the resolution of America is as firm as its protestations are loud, then humanity will not lay down its sword until the world is free."

Confident with all other patriotic Americans, I clung to this vision. It was President Wilson who said: "Make the world safe for Democracy!" I felt that with all other people of my generation who were standing on the threshold of a new epoch. I was not aware of the frightful complexity and obduracy of things. I was not fully aware of the limitations of all human life, particularly of organized human life. I did not realize then as one comes to realize in later life, the heartbreaking predestinarianism of human progress. I was not aware of that Legend of Sisyphus who was condemned in hell eternally to roll to the top of a hill a large stone, which had no sooner reached the summit than it fell back into the plain again. I did not bear in mind the wisdom of that



legend of our own sacred text that at the gates of Paradise, there is an angel with a flaming sword, a revolving sword, which forever barred mankind from fully entering Heaven. So, in my youthful enthusiasm I was not able to perceive any limitations even if I could have perceived them. The war, I was sure, would achieve a fresh new stage in the moral advance of mankind.

My first cold plunge into reality came, as I looked back over these files of mine, to the war itself, at the Front. I went to Europe in the summer of 1918. I was in France three months and I saw war as it was, not from a safe and glamorous distance, but in the mud and filth of dug-outs and trenches which I visited, amid the reek and chloroform odors of field and base hospitals and in the organized drab business of killing and mangling men and then trying to put them together again, and of destroying man's handiwork. That was my first cold plunge into reality.

I recall my New Year's sermon preached to my congregation when I returned from the Front in September of 1918 and which was something of a shock to my congregation. They expected me, I am sure, to talk of the glory and the heroic sacrifices of the people at the Front, to deliver a patriotic address full of fervor for the war, and the promise of victory. Instead, I spoke of the dead and the dying and the suffering and misery in the world of Hell, of the aches in the hearts and minds of men and women and children.

I did not turn pacifist. My religious tradition is not that. It never was that. I did not lessen my service to my country. I gave a great deal of my time to the selling of Liberty Bonds in all parts of the country. I felt that the war must be won inasmuch as we were in it. But more than ever, I desperately clung to the hope of building something amidst the ruins. I



clung to the hope that perhaps these tears would wash away some of the sins of mankind, that somehow, after the war, when our men returned from the war, they would set about cleansing and purifying their own life and destroy all that was ugly and unworthy of sacrifice. I was called upon to make speeches, and I myself spoke in the city and throughout the nation on the theme of the "War Smashing Dividing Line Here at Home" - "Here At Home, Soldiers Will Change Conditions".

"After our men are through crushing forever the menace to human peace and national comity they will come back and set about deliberately and determinedly to smash the lines here at home and they are going to smash every line that confines and limits the onrushing spirit of freedom seeking men and women.

"They are going to smash ruthlessly and relentlessly every line of social injustice, every line of economic wrong, every line of political reaction, every line of religious prejudice and intolerance that exists here in this land and that confines and stultifies the spirit of onswEEPing ambitions of freedom loving men and women.

"Why should we permit life to be starved and shriveled in little groups because of lack of opportunity; why should not each son of God be given a chance to develop himself, the chance of education, the chance of infinite opportunity to make of himself the best that he is capable of; why not smash the line and permit the sons of God to become great with the greatness of life?

And so, right along a hope, a pathetic hope. I find myself thinking that out of this desperate hope of mine, that somehow, some good would come out of this evil, against the ravages of hate and revenge would come reconstruction for mankind.

Then came the Armistice. Then came the long heart-breaking drag of peace negotiations. Then it became clear that while some problems might be solved



many would not, the most urgent problems would not be solved. And a frightful reaction set in. I again saw how the hopes of mankind were being destroyed by mankind, one by one, and how the old time diplomacy, imperialism and political corruption began to entrench themselves in the world. And I find myself, as I go through the files, speaking on "The Sins of the Allies", and "Is the Treaty of Peace a Peace Treaty?"

And then, in place of that emancipation that I looked for after the war, I saw a stampede of bigotry and intolerance, riots, raids, red-hunting and red-baiting, espionage laws which might have had some justification during the war being carried over to peace time. It became very difficult in those days to express one's free opinion in this city even as it became difficult anywhere in the United States. The country was afraid of Bolshevism and all liberalism was trampled under by this fear of an all-conquering Bolshevism. And so I find myself, in the months immediately following the Armistice, trying to organize in this city with the aid of some friends, the City Club, and to reopen public forums in high schools and on the Public Square of our city in order to re-establish the principle of free speech in a free country after the victorious consummation of a war which was to make a whole world safe for democracy. In those days there swept over this land a fear and distrust of all immigrants languages and of foreigners, a movement to suppress the entire foreign/~~work~~ in the United States, a movement called "Americanism" which was but another version of Hitlerism in a spiritual sense. I find myself speaking before Temples, civic organizations on the subject "Immigrant vs. Foreigner", trying to stress what Americanism really is, trying to justify the immigrant who had just finished serving in the war. I tried to stress that an immigrant is not necessarily a foreigner, nor is a native American necessarily an American. A foreigner



is one who remains forever hostile to the ideals of Americanism. And a native-born who is similarly hostile, remains fundamentally a foreigner. An immigrant who comes here and throws his destiny and his life into the life and love of America - he is the American.

Thus there came to me slowly through those searching years, when the world was rocked and its foundations laid bare, the realization that war never builds any dream world, that it does not ennoble it and that it often achieves the very opposite of what it intends to achieve, even if the war is won. I saw clearly then that the reconstruction of our society must be achieved by the slow work of patient planning and building in peace-time, by patient and none too eager and emotional workers. I realized then, as I realize now, that it is sometimes necessary to resort to war to curb a ruthless aggressor if there is no other way out. But war will forever remain an evil. It is always a blackout not only during the period of war, but for long long periods thereafter. Sir Edward Grey, when war was declared in 1914 by Great Britain, said: "This day will mark the beginning of the going out of lights in Europe, and I am afraid that we shall not live to see the day when these lights will be rekindled."

And that was prophetic. In 1918, when I crossed the Atlantic to go to the Western Front, I crossed on the Rochambeau. One of my first experiences was the blackout. No man dared to smoke a cigarette on deck. When I entered Paris, it was at night, and I had never been to Paris before. My impression was that it was a city of ghosts. And twenty-five years later, I fled from Europe again overtaken by war, and again all around me were evidences of blackouts. And through these twenty-five years -- this is the saddest of sad things -



the world has evidenced, because of the World War, one blackout after another of thought, human freedom, tolerance, of all humanity. What you have in the world today is blackness with only a few slender tapers keeping their lonely vigil in a darkened world.

It is therefore from my own files, from my own experience today that I must draw my attitudes to this new world war, and my appraisal of the events of this world war which, in a real sense, is a child of the last world war. It is a necessary war. It could not be otherwise as long as that power-drunk madman reigns in Europe. There is but one way of stopping him, and that is war. But it is an evil, an unspeakable evil. And knowing my experience of the last twenty-five years, I cannot put my hope on this war, much as I would like to. I see it through no apocalyptic eyes. It speaks to me today no words of promise. I realize today what I did not realize then, that "there is no seeking of dainties in the grave". And I must think now, not so much of this war but of what will follow the war, of how Europe will have to begin anew where it left off not this year, or last year, but where it left off in 1914, after nearly a half century of peace. The world will have to begin again. We hope that it will not repeat the mistakes of 1919. After the war, it will be the task of those who eat the bread of understand and drink the water of wisdom to set about building habitations fit for human beings. And it will be the task and the opportunity then of the American people to cooperate in this task of building habitations fit for human beings to live in. Not by giving that kind of leadership which some self righteous, all too righteous Americans would like to give to the Europeans based upon the assumption that they are the wicked ones, and we are blameless ones, that America can help Europe by pointing the way but America must not move a foot in that direction. That kind of help is no kind of help at all.



Ideas, ideals, thank God, there are aplenty in the world. What mankind needs is the willingness and the determination on the part of great nations to work, to give noble cooperation in the realization of these ideals, and it is not worthy of Americans to speak of the desirability of a League of Nations and then to refuse to enter it. It is unworthy of the American people to speak of the desirability of joining the war and then not join it...

It is good for us now, and after the war to beat our own breasts and say: "We have sinned. We too have sinned." We have refused to enter <sup>in</sup> to any fraternity of organization and by refusing to offer any substitutes for it, and by refusing to do anything for it.

I shall not sit in judgment upon the people abroad. I shall commiserate with their suffering. I shall hope and pray for a righteous outcome of this war. When it is over, I shall summon the American people to join a real war in a real way by backing up with their sacrifices. I shall join again in another effort to build <sup>an</sup> international society based on mutual understanding, law, justice and peace.

Perhaps if you were to go through the files of your minds, your thoughts would be very much like mine.



1. Good - keep record - review - assure you - sobering -  
Not face to face - impartial judgment - subtleties  
Realize what little warrant - pride of opinion - cock-sure  
dogmatic pronouncements - confident frequent utter  
Time, History, life - making - best-possible judgment  
frustrate our verdicts as well as our hopes

There are men, to-day, writers - just as sure - Speak  
with same authority, based - discussed

For the fact of the matter is - we are really for sale  
Here and there a writer - altered - did not expect  
them - we prepared - enter into calculations

History does not follow - logical syllogism

The more of no small power -

All this impressively brot him to you - Fibs

How modest a man should be - Spunk



2) ~~at~~ School 1914. War trucked us as surprise, as sensational news. We were human  
duly excited, naturally. - We watched it at first forecasted as one watches a  
great show - a colossal drama - We speculated abt. it - we took sides -  
we estimated its possible duration - but always - as something just removed  
from us - on the other side, the ocean - a European affair.

Only as the frightful toll kept mounting - and its shattering human tragedy -  
and as it came thru reports, thru papers, thru relief efforts, nearer & nearer  
did we begin to apprehend it & evaluate it - to think thru it to some  
light & sanity. No issues as yet clearly defined. 2 groups, pro & con - at  
war. Our sympathies with Allies. We scarcely understood the militarism  
of the Kaiser Reich - and the implications of the invasion of Belgium, & the  
sinking of the Lusitania - we spoke of it in the fullest.

~~As~~ steadily as the war lengthened and became more desperate, our sympathies  
for the Allied cause became increasingly more active. We did not want the great  
democ. Eng. Fr. heathen. And when the R. Rev. Dr. Martin Garrison the last  
intervention was removed from an advocacy of military aid to the democ -  
by the time I came to Cleveland, in June, 1917 - the U.S. was already in the  
war. - ~~at~~ from

I In looking thru my Files - Farewell to Robert La Follette - Aug. 1917.

II New Note which Amer. introduced. Sep. 1917. Chry to it!

— In common with all patriotic Amer. - I chry to a U.S. plan -  
Wilson's Vision - End War - Safe for Democracy

— & Feet Exalted! On their hold!

— I was young! Frightful complexity & obscurities, things

— Not enough aware of limitations of social life -

— Heart-breaking pedestrianism of human progress

— Legend of Sisyphus - condemned in hell, <sup>eternally</sup> to roll  
to top of hill a large stone, which had no sooner reached the  
summit than it fell back into the plain again -



- אסתר אשת מרדכי - was main way to Paradise

- my youthful enthusiasm and idealism ~~was~~ perceived no limitations to man's ~~total~~ ethical will. & would have consented to more if perceived -

- This was indeed achieved a fresh, new stage in the moral advance of mankind - and I was a war enthusiast.

3. My first cold plunge into reality - was the night, the war itself at the front. - Summer, 1918 - 3 months -

- War as it was - "red in Tooth and claw" - not from a safe and placid distance, but in mud & filth & dug-outs and trenches - amidst <sup>blue</sup> red & champagne field hospitals - the <sup>organized, chaotic</sup> business of killing & maiming men - and destroying their handiwork -

- I was profoundly shaken!

⑤ I recall my New Year Sermon upon my return - something of a scandal & shock, almost a scandal -

- Expected me to talk gloriously - heroic deeds, boys at Front & patriotic speech full of praise for the war & America, Victory

- Instead - I spoke of the dead & the dying - the suffering & misery of a world in Terror - of what war does to hearts & minds of men, women & children - for my mind was filled with Death.

4. I did not turn Pacifist. My real. fact. is not that -

I did not begin my service to my country at war - "Liberty or Death" - War must be won!

But more than ever, & more desperately, clung to hope of

How could they see Germany from among Ruins - Sanitary streams  
III - crashing through - || Warn against Hate Germany - Scout Germany



If Reaction after Armistice. Long drag of peace negotiations -  
- Some problems would be solved - many would not - B. Thiers.  
- I find myself - as I go thru files - talking - "Since the Allies"  
"Is the Treaty of Peace - a Peace Treaty".

- Suppression of Free Speech - Dr. Stamped to Byrdy withdrawal -  
Raiders - riots - Espionage laws carried over into peace time  
"The Red Terror and The White" Fear, Bolshevism

- Apr. 1919 - City Club - reopen public forums - East End  
Public Square

- "Americanism" - Force - Hated of Immigrants -  
Suppression of Foreign Lang. Press

"Immigrant vs. Foreigner" - Dec. 1919  
Americanism is not anti-foreignism -

6). Thus there came to me <sup>slowly</sup> through the searching years - ~~the~~ when  
the world was rocked and the foundations thereof were laid bare - the  
realization that was brilled no dream worlds - does not  
purge the human race a curse it - often achieves the  
very opposite of what it intended to achieve - even if it is not  
ruined by revolts in victory.

- Reconstruction of our society - slow work of patient building  
in peace time - by patient and non-to easy emotional workers

Sometimes it is necessary to resort to war to curb a  
unholy oppressor - when there is no longer any other choice -

But always it is a Black-out - not only during period  
of war - but very long after war ends - Sir Edward  
Grey (Quote)



— Rockhamham - Paris - Left Europe 1939 - Black out - And (5  
25 yrs - a dread procession of lights quenched - Thought -  
Freedom - Tolrance - Humaneness, Only a few  
lonely topos keeping their lonely vigil in a darkened world.

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?/ It is from my life - my experience - that I draw my attitudes  
to appraise the events of this war - the child of last war -  
It is necessary! It could not be other wise - as long as the power -  
dumb madman reigns in Europe - but it is Evil -  
unspeakably evil.

— Knowing my experience of 2 1/2 yrs. ago - I cannot put high  
hopes upon it - much as I like too.

— I see it thus no apocalyptic eyes - It speaks to me no  
words of promise - { There is no seeking of dainties  
in the grave }

— After its war - and Hitler is broken - Europe will have  
to begin anew - avoiding the mistakes of 1919 -

And those who eat the bread of understanding and drink  
the water of wisdom - will set about building a habita-  
tion fit for man.

8. Leadership -



I GO THROUGH MY FILES: 1914-1918

Sermon, The Temple, October 29, 1939

It is good for a man to keep a record of his public utterances and to review them from time to time. I assure you it is a sobering and humbling experience. One is brought face to face ~~to face~~ with the impartial judgement of time, ~~on his opinion~~. And it is a relentless judgment. Time, history, life, frequently make a mockery of our best-reasoned judgment and frustrate our verdicts and our hopes. I am sure that ~~there~~ <sup>there</sup> are men today - writers, journalists, lecturers - who are just as sure <sup>of their opinions about</sup> ~~about~~ things happening today and their consequences as men and women ~~did~~ <sup>were</sup> during the first World War, twenty-five years ago. I am inclined to believe that they will be disillusioned when they come to read the record of their present utterances twenty-five years ~~late~~ <sup>from now</sup>.

The fact of the matter is that no one really foresaw the events of the last half-century. No one really foresaw the tragedy of the ~~last~~ <sup>first</sup> World War; the entrance of the United States into the ~~last~~ <sup>first</sup> World War; the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917; the rise to ~~power~~ <sup>power</sup> of the Fascists in Italy; or the rise of Nazism to ~~power~~ <sup>power</sup> in Germany. No one really foresaw the attack on and the annihilation of German Jewry. Here and there, there were writers who alluded to certain possibilities, but mankind as a whole, I mean thoughtful men and women, did not expect these things actually to happen and were not prepared for them.

History does not follow any logical syllogism, because history follows life and life is illogical. The move of one pawn on a chessboard reorients all of the pieces. No one can foresee the infinite number of pawns on the chessboard of history. All this is brought home to you when you go through your files <sup>covering</sup> ~~over~~ a period of years.

It is also impressively borne <sup>upon</sup> ~~upon~~ <sup>you</sup> ~~one~~ how modest a man ought to be in his opinion and how modest <sup>he</sup> ~~one~~ ought to be in expressing opinions on matters not within his control, and how much <sup>a man</sup> ~~one~~ ought to avoid a certainness, a dogmatism, a cocksureness in expressing <sup>his opinions</sup> ~~himself~~ on world events.



I was closing my college career when the <sup>First</sup> ~~last~~ World War broke out in 1914. The war touched us then as sensational news. We were tremendously excited, of course. We watched the war fascinated, as one watches a great show, a colossal drama. We speculated about it. We took sides. We <sup>E</sup> ~~A~~ estimated its possible duration but always as something quite removed from us, on the other side of the ocean, as a European affair. Only as the war was prolonged and the frightful toll of human victims kept mounting, day by day and month by month, only as the shattering tragedy unfolded before our eyes, only as it kept getting nearer and nearer to us through relief agencies and reports and propaganda did we really try to evaluate it and ask ourselves: What does it all mean? Can any light come out of that darkness, and any sanity out of that madness?

The issues in the <sup>World</sup> ~~World~~ War were then ~~not~~ yet clearly defined. My sympathies were with the Allies from the beginning. We understood the militarism represented by the Kaiser's Reich, the implications of the invasion of Belgium, and the sinking of the Lusitania. I spoke of these things often ~~during~~ in the harassed early days of my ministry.

Steadily, as the war lengthened and became more desperate, our sympathies for the Allies became increasingly more active. We did not want the great democracies of France and England to be defeated. When the Russian Revolution finally overthrew Czarism, the last inhibition was removed from the advocacy of American military aid to the democracies. By the time I came to this pulpit, the United States was already in the war.

In looking over my files, I find that I advocated the war. This was in a farewell address to the Jewish soldiers and sailors who were departing for war in August of 1917:

As a child of the Jewish race, I am not a war advocate. The prophets have proclaimed that there would be a permanent peace and we have always spoken for eternal peace. But the present war is not a war of victory for us. We are not looking for gain. We are in this World War to do away with the reasons for war. We are not fighting the Germany that gave us the poets, the philosophers, the musicians, the artists, but against the German autocrats who are entirely responsible.

extract



I find myself endeavoring to persuade myself that with the entrance of the United States into the war, the issues had been clarified. In a New Years's message, in September, 1917, I said the following:

If it shall please God that the coming year mark the Neilah of the Great Atonement of humanity, then Israel, too, will behold the close of its day of affliction. If this war which began in sin is to end in redemption; if, after this deluge of blood and tears, the rainbow of promise is to appear over a ruined world, then the rights of peoples must be firmly established and absolute equality must unreservedly be granted unto all the children of men. This war will prove to be the most futile, the ghastliest tragedy of the ages, if at its close one vestige of political or economic bondage remains, if one group of men is kept shackled in disabilities and discriminations. The moral and spiritual gains of this struggle must be commensurate with the terrible sacrifices it has entailed. Out of the crucible of ~~burning~~ pain, humanity must come forth purged of all its dross, its weaknesses and its prejudices, its lusts and its follies.

The war began in sin, in the greed of dynasties, in the lust of empires; there was not a moral value at stake when the war began! But so stupendous did the struggle wax, so gigantic in its proportions, so harrowing in its toll of human misery, that out of its own volcanic soul a new motive and a new purpose has been evolved. Humanity, bleeding and tortured, in the fury of despair, has seized the reins from the hands of the masters and is guiding the forces which they have loosed into new channels of moral reconstruction.

Already this new motive has been proclaimed in no uncertain terms by a great people <sup>a</sup> democracy. And democracy means equality of opportunity for people and peoples, for individuals and for the groups.

And if the resolution of America is as firm as its protestations are loud, then humanity will not lay down its sword until the world is free.

President Wilson said: "Make the world safe for democracy!" I felt one with all other people of my generation who were standing on the threshold of a new epoch. I was not aware of the frightful complexity and obdurateness of events. I was not fully aware of the limitations of all human life, particularly of organized human life. I did not realize then as one comes to realize in later life the heart-breaking, pedestrian crawl of human progress. I was not aware of the reality of the legend of Sisyphus, who was condemned eternally to roll to the top of a hill a large stone, which had no sooner reached the summit than it fell again back into the plain. I did not bear in mind the wisdom of that legend of our own sacred text that at the

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gates of Paradise, there is an angel with a flaming sword, a revolving sword, which forever bars mankind from entering, ~~Eden~~. The war, I was sure, would achieve a fresh new stage in the moral advancement of mankind.

My first cold plunge into reality came at the Front. I went to Europe in the summer of 1918. I was in France and I saw the war as it was, not from a safe and glamorous distance, but in the mud and filth of dugouts and trenches which I visited; amid the reek and chloroform ~~odors~~ of field and base hospitals and in the organized drab business of killing and mangling men and then trying to put them back together again.

I recall <sup>the</sup> ~~my~~ New Year's sermon <sup>I</sup> ~~preached~~ when I returned, in September of 1918. It was something of a shock to my congregation. They expected me, I am sure, to talk of the glory and the heroic sacrifices of the people at the Front, to deliver a patriotic address full of fervor for the war, and the promise of victory. Instead I spoke of the dead and the dying, of suffering and misery in the world of Hell, of the aches in the hearts and minds of men, women, and children.

I did not turn pacifist. My religious tradition is not that. It never was that. I did not lessen ~~my~~ service to my country. I gave a good deal of my time to the selling of liberty bonds in all parts of the country. I felt that the war must be won, inasmuch as we were in it. But more than ever, I desperately ~~clung~~ <sup>clung</sup> to the hope of building something ~~amidst~~ the ruins. I clung to the hope that perhaps these tears would wash away some of the sins of mankind, that somehow, after the war, when our men returned, they would set about cleansing and purifying their own <sup>lives</sup> ~~life~~ and destroy all that was ugly and unworthy of sacrifice:

After our men are through crushing forever the menace to human peace and national comity they will come back and set about deliberately and determinedly to smash the lines here at home, and they are going to smash every line that confines and limits the onrushing spirit of freedom-seeking men and women.

They are going to smash ruthlessly and relentlessly every line of social injustice, every line of economic wrong, every line of political reaction, every line of religious prejudice and intolerance that exists here in this land, and that confines and stultifies the spirit of onswEEPing ambitions of freedom-loving men and women.

extract



extract

Why should we permit life to be starved and shriveled in little groups because of lack of opportunity; why should not each son of God be given a chance to develop himself, the chance of education, the chance of infinite opportunity to make of himself the best that he is capable of; why not smash the line and permit the sons of God to become great with the greatness of life?

As I review my files, I find myself thinking in those days that somehow, some good would come out of this evil, that out of the ravages of hate and revenge would come reconstruction for mankind.

Then came the Armistice, and the long heart-breaking drag of the peace negotiations. It became clear that while some problems might be solved, the most urgent problems would not be solved. A frightful reaction set in. I saw how the hopes of mankind were being destroyed, one by one, and how old-time diplomacy, imperialism, and political corruption were entrenching themselves again all over the world. I find myself, as I go through my files, speaking on "The sins of the Allies", and "Is the Treaty of Peace a peace treaty?"

In place of that emancipation that I had looked for after the war, I saw a stampede of bigotry and intolerance, riots, raids, red-hunting, and red-baiting. It became ~~very~~ difficult in those days to express one's free opinion in this city, even as it became difficult anywhere in the United States. The country was afraid of Bolshevism. All liberalism was trampled under by this fear of an all-conquering Bolshevism. And so I find myself, in the months immediately following the Armistice, trying to organize in this city, with the aid of some friends, the City Club, and to reopen public forums in high schools and on <sup>Cleveland's</sup> the Public Square, in order to re-establish the principle of free speech in a free country, after the victorious consummation of a war which was to have made the whole world safe for democracy. In those days there swept over this land a fear and distrust of all immigrants and foreigners, a movement to suppress foreign languages in the United States, a movement called "Americanism", which had the same emotional wellspring as Hitlerism. I find myself speaking before temples and civic organizations on the subject "Immigrant versus foreigner", trying to stress what Americanism really is, trying to justify the immigrant who had just finished serving in the war. I tried to stress that an immigrant is not necessarily



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a foreigner, nor is a native American necessarily an American. A foreigner is one who remains forever hostile to the ideals of Americanism. A native-born <sup>American</sup> who is similarly hostile remains fundamentally a foreigner. An immigrant who comes here and throws his destiny and his life into the life and hope of America <sup>he</sup> is the American.

There came to me slowly through those searching years, when the world <sup>had been</sup> ~~was~~ rocked and its foundations laid bare, the realization that war never builds man's dream world, that it does not ennoble man, and that even if the war is won it often achieves the very opposite of what it intended to achieve. I saw clearly then that the reconstruction of our society must be achieved by the slow work of patient planning and peacetime building, by patient, ~~non-too-eager~~ and unemotional workers. I realized then, as I realize now, that it is sometimes necessary to resort to war to curb a ruthless aggressor if there is no other way out. But war remains an evil. War blacks out civilization not only during the period of the actual conflict but for long, long periods thereafter. When war was declared in 1914, Sir Edward Grey said: "This day will mark the beginning of the going out of lights in Europe, and I am afraid that we shall not live to see the day when those lights will be rekindled." His words were prophetic. In 1918, when I crossed the Atlantic to go to the Western Front, I crossed on the Rochambeau. One of my first experiences was the blackout. No man dared to smoke a cigarette on deck. When I entered Paris it was at night. I had never been to Paris before; my impression was that it was a city of ghosts. Twenty-five years later, I fled from there a Europe again overtaken by war, and again all around me was the man-made midnight. And through these twenty-five years <sup>this</sup> is the saddest of sad things <sup>the</sup> the world has evidenced, because of the World War, one blackout after another of thought, human freedom, tolerance, ~~of all humanity~~. What <sup>we</sup> you have in the world today is blackness, with only a few slender tapers keeping their lonely vigil in a darkened world.

It is, therefore, from my own files, from my own experience that I must draw my attitudes to this new World War. It is a necessary war. It could not be otherwise as long as that power-drunk madman reigns in Europe. There is but one way of stopping him, and that is war. But it is an evil, an unspeakable evil. And knowing



my experience of the last twenty-five years, I cannot put my hope on this war much as I would like to. I do not see it through apocalyptic eyes. It speaks to me no words of promise. I realize today what I did not realize then, that<sup>#</sup> there is no seeking of dainties in the grave<sup>Q</sup>.

And I must think now not so much of this war, but of what will follow the war, of how Europe will have to begin anew where it left off; not this year, or last year, but where it left off in 1914, after nearly a half-century of peace. The world will have to begin again. Pray to God that it will not repeat the mistakes of 1919. After the war, it will be the task of those who eat the bread of understanding and drink the water of wisdom to set about building habitations fit for human beings. It will be the task and the opportunity of the American people to cooperate in this building, not by giving that kind of leadership which some self-righteous, altogether too righteous, Americans would like to give<sup>to the</sup> Europeans, based on the assumption that they are the wicked ones and we are the blameless ones; but by pointing ~~the~~ the way and by setting out on the way ourselves.

Ideas, ideals, thank God, there are aplenty in the world. What mankind needs is the willingness and the determination on the part of great nations to give noble cooperation in the realization of these ideals. It is not worthy of Americans to speak of the desirability of a League of Nations and then to refuse to enter it.

I shall not sit in judgment upon the people abroad. I shall commiserate with their suffering. I shall hope and pray for a righteous outcome of this war. When it is over, I shall summon the American people to join a real war in a real way by backing up their sacrifices. I shall join again in another effort to build an international society based on mutual understanding, law, justice, and peace.

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Perhaps if you go through the files of your minds, your thoughts would be very much like mine.