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There shall be no night, 1940.

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"THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT"
Thoughts on Robert E. Sherwood's Great War Play

WRHS
By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday, November 24, 1940

I do not know whether Robert Sherwood's play, "There Shall Be No Night", would fill all the requirements of a great play, and for our purpose this morning the answer to that question is not of great moment. The play poses a great question, illumines a great problem, profoundly arouses those emotions of pity and terror in order that the soul of man might be purged by experience. The play, "There Shall Be No Night" channels the fears and bafflements, the indignation and the almost shattered hopes of this age into one heroic preachment and men feel freer and steadier and nobler for having listened to this preachment.

In a real sense, "There Shall Be No Night" is a modern morality play in which the eternal forces of good and evil are in conflict, as they were in all medieval morality plays, and in which the eternal themes of the religious epics - "The Fall of Man," the "Reign of Anti-Christ", "Man's Redemption through Sacrifice", and blood atonement and the whole messianic apocalypse are again dramatized in this modern plot through the medium of a timely contemporary drama.

In this play of Robert Sherwood's there is no involved plot, no subtle difficult characters to study and analyze. We are not summoned to view life through the medium of temperament. There are no conflicting motives here, no tangling human relationships. The story is startlingly told. In fact, you know the story before you see the play, because the story is the story of the invasion of little Finland, two years ago, by the Red Army, and the characters of the story are wholesome, spiritually intact, transparent human beings who are carried along ~~on~~ on the waves of this invasion to their tragic destiny. You know from the beginning what their ends will be. There is a premonition of ultimate disaster from the moment the curtain rises. And the story, this simple story, is the story not only of little Finland. It was also the story of little Greece, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Poland. In fact it is the story of the whole humanity invaded and attacked by the forces of degeneration and moral insanity rampant today. In fact it is a timely story

of a seemingly timeless conflict. The people in the play are the symbols of men and women everywhere who don't want war, who want to be allowed to continue to follow along in the even tenor of their lives, who have no grievances against anybody but who at a moment in their lives, through no cause of their own are confronted by situations of shattering implications that they prefer to sacrifice the even tenor of their lives, peace and security, even their very lives, rather than see themselves and their country and the world swept by the tides of bestiality. In other words, "There Shall Be No Night" is a re-statement, a very forceful very moving re-statement of the ancient conflict which in our day has been most tragically sharpened between the hairy man, the Esau in man and in humanity, and the righteous man, the man seeking perfection for himself and for humanity. It is the ancient struggle which has drenched the battlefield and brought untold suffering to generations of man, between the city of righteousness - the culture and civilization built upon justice and human decency, peace, brotherliness; and the city of blood - a culture and civilization built on blood, lust. It is the old conflict between what we call paganism and humanism.

That conflict is dramatically personified in two people of the play, both scientists, both representatives of our modern age in its highest form - Dr. Valkonen and Dr. Ziemssen. Dr. Valkonen is a prominent scientist, a Nobel Prize winner, a benefactor of mankind. This eminent neurologist who has devoted his life to the study of the "true nature and causes of mental diseases" in man in an effort to build up in man those strong defenses against degeneration and collapse - Dr. Valkonen wants to be left alone to continue with his experiments. He is a pacifist, an internationalist. He is a lover of mankind.

On the other hand we have Dr. Ziemssen, also a scientist, an anthropologist before he became a diplomat and a German Consul in Helsinki. He is the exponent of the whole Nazi Philosophy. He thinks of science as dedicated not to the defense of man, but to the conquest of man, to the subjugation of all men to a few men, of all nations to one nation, of all races to one race. "Every great state of the past in its stages of construction has required slavery. "Inferior races must be considered merely as animals". "In the building of the new world state", he maintains, "for the first time since the whole surface of the earth became known, one dynamic race is on the march to occupy that surface and rule it."

And you have the eternal conflict between good and evil - good seeking to exploit modern science for the enrichment of the total life of mankind; and evil seeking to exploit all the facilities, all the equipment of modern science to establish the supremacy of one race upon the permanent enslavement of all other races of mankind.

It was the Russian attack on Finland which called forth from Mr. Sherwood this play of protest. Mr. Sherwood was quick to see this attack upon Finland only as an incident in a larger and more menacing attack not by the Russians, but by the Nazis, in which the Russians were being used. Dr. Ziemssen makes this clear to his colleague, Dr. Valkonen: "All the little communist cells, in labor movements, youth movements, in all nations - they are now working for us, altho they may not know it." "When it", ~~that is to say~~ that is to say, Communism, " has served that purpose, it will disappear down the sewer."

That is one of the sad, frightening over-tones of this play - just this fact - that this brave little nation of Finland is being destroyed by an invisible Satanic force with which it cannot even come to grips directly. Force

uses for its purposes another force - actually its very opposite. It uses it as its lethal weapon - it uses the Soviet Union which was assumed to be the mightiest foe of Nazism, the Soviet Union which recognized the independence of Finland, which defended the rights of small nations, which championed great humanitarian ideals in the world, which so consistently attacked the Nazis, their philosophy - it uses this Soviet Union - this Soviet Union is now being used by this Satanic force to destroy Finland. Finland had respect for Soviet Russia. Dr. Valkonen and his son Erik can not imagine that the Russians would attack them. Why? They are a little puzzled by the Soviet's participation in the rape of Poland. They are puzzled about it, but they cannot bring themselves to the thought of the Great Russian Revolution so despoiling itself and so trampling upon its own convictions as to attack Finland. They refuse to accept that. Uncle Valdemar, however, knows the case. He knows that the Russian Revolution is dead, that it "is now embalmed and exposed in a glass coffin in front of the Kremlin".

To be attacked by an enemy is bad enough, but to be attacked by friends, by erstwhile admired revolutionists, who now turn duped mercenaries, to feel yourself surrounded suddenly by a whole wall of conspiracy, cynicism, you feel yourself suddenly trapped, trapped not only in a material sense, but in a spiritual sense and is to drain the little cup of a two-fold defeat.

Mr. Sherwood makes that clear in the play. But he has also caught the larger implication of Finland's message. Finland was defeated only in a very limited and temporary sense of the term defeat. Finland's heroic resistance was her abiding triumph. It is of that heroic stuff that history is made - not of the shaping of a boundary line. There is nothing more impermanent than political or geographic boundary lines. Those don't make history.

Loss of territory is an incident. It is lost one day and is regained the next. What endures through all time and eternally is the spirit of the race. When the spirit of a race remains unbeaten, uncowed, unbroken, that race remains undefeated, and that race continues to make its contribution to history.

Dr. Valkonen comes to understand this after a while, even as he comes to understand on listening to his colleague, Dr. Ziemssen, what is actually involved in this war. His understanding is of course much more profound than that of his son Erik although his reactions to the course of events is much slower than that of his son. This young, lovable boy, Erik, he, too, doesn't want war. He is deeply in love with a charming girl of the country, Kaatri. They are planning to get married, settle down, build a home. This Erik and Kaatri are symbolic of their entire country, and of the world so often and in so many places broken, defeated or slain by the war. Erik doesn't want war either. He wants to be left alone to follow his career and to love Kaatri. But to him it is quite clear that if Finland is ever attacked, he will fight. He will defend his country. He will defend his freedom. "I only know that if any one is going to take my freedom from me, he is going to pay for it." He knows that "life is not good if it has to be spent in slavery."

Dr. Valkonen is slow to come around to that point of view. He doesn't approve of Erik's joining the army. It is a ridiculous thing, war. Is this to be the climax of generations of scientific progress? What is the use of going up against tremendous odds - Russia against them. Dr. Valkonen was an easy-going pacifist, internationalist, ~~and a socialist~~ as Robert Sherwood himself was before he came to write "There Shall Be No Night." It is only when Dr. Ziemssen opens his eyes to see the deep dark primordial waters beneath, it is only after he comes to grasp the full implications of this Revolution of Nihilism which is represented by the Nazis, it is only after he comes to understand that Finland

is just a sector, although an important sector in mankind's last line of defense against an on-rushing barbarism, that he, the quiet scientist, steps out of his ivory tower, bestirs himself out of his easy-going way of life and decides to don the armor of battle. He comes to understand what Lincoln knew in the days before the Civil War - that mankind is now confronted by an irresistible conflict and that it is impossible for free men or free nations to isolate themselves from this conflict.

So the scientist goes forth to battle, into a seemingly hopeless battle. Dr. Valkonen is a great scientist; therefore also a great mystic. He believes profoundly in man, man whose weaknesses he had studied for so many years. He concludes his great scientific work on the defense of man with a quotation from the Bible. He says: "There is something profound in those words I quoted." "That unknown Jewish mystic who wrote that - somehow, unconsciously, he knew that man will find the true name of God in his own forehead, in the mysteries of his own mind. "And there shall be no night there." "That is the basis of all the work I have done."

Dr. Valkonen has the spirit which renders opaque matter transparent! He marvels that ~~the~~ man is capable of courage, of his power of endurance, his lack of selfishness. And it is this light, this inescapable dynamics in man, this light that gives man the strength to carry on and which defeats death.

So he addresses a group of men in that little school house - a group of men as doomed as he is, in the following way: One of the men says to him: "But how can you deny that the light is going out - it's going fast - everywhere?"

And he answers, "It is just beginning to burn with a healthy flame. I know this, because I have seen it. I have seen it in all kinds of men, of all races, and all varieties of faith. They are coming to consciousness. Look at all the millions of men now under arms, and all those that are fearful that arms

may be thrust upon them. Are there any illusions of glory among any of them? None whatever! Isn't that progress?"

And another man says: "Far be it from me to argue, Doctor - but I can't see the difference whether men go to war because of illusions of glory, or just in a spirit of grim resignation."

Dr. Valkonen says: "There is all the difference. Because those illusions, when shattered, leave men hollow. When men lose their illusions, they say, 'Oh, what's the use? What have we got to live for?' They are devitalized by the conviction of futility. But grim resignation, as you call it, that makes a man say, 'This is an evil job - but I have to do it.' And when men say that, they are already beginning to ask, 'But ~~why~~ why do I have to do it? Why must this evil go on forever?' And when men start asking questions, they are not satisfied until they find the answers. That is consciousness. And for the first time in history, consciousness is not just the privilege of a few secluded philosophers. It is free for all. For the first time, individual men are fighting to know themselves... Forgive me, gentlemen, I forget myself. I think I am lecturing at the Medical Institute. But - the Russians are only a short distance away. This may be my last lecture. So - please permit me to finish...Listen! What you hear now - this terrible sound that fills the earth - it is the death rattle. One may say easily and dramatically that it is the death rattle of civilization. But - I choose to believe differently. I believe it is the long deferred death rattle of the primordial beast. We have within ourselves the power to conquer bestiality, not with our muscles and our swords, but with the power of the light that is in our minds. What a thrilling challenge this is to all Science! To play its part in the ultimate triumph of evolution. To help speed the day when man becomes genuinely human, instead of the synthetic creature - part bogus angel, part actual brute - that he has imagined himself in the dark past --"

Dr. Valkonen feels as does the writer of this drama, that man is awakening!
"This is the Hope! In his new-found consciousness is man's means of redemption."

Dr. Valkonen writes a letter to his wife which, in a sense is the obituary of himself and of his son, for shortly before he goes to his death, he learns of the death of his only son. It is this letter to his wife, whom he seeks to comfort in his own curious way that Dr. Valkonen restates his philosophy; and Sherwood's philosophy of our troubled and tortured age.

"In this time of our own grief, it is not easy to summon up the philosophy which has been formed from long study of the sufferings of others. But I must do it, and you must help me. I have often read the words which Pericles spoke over the bodies of the dead, in the dark hour when the light of Athenian democracy was being extinguished by the Spartans. He told the mourning people that he could not give them any of the old words which tell how fair and noble it is to die in battle. Those empty words were old, even then, twenty-four centuries ago. But he urged them to find revival in the memory of the commonwealth which they together had achieved; and he promised them that the story of their commonwealth would never die, but would live on, far away, woven into the fabric of other men's lives. I believe that these words can be said now of our own dead, and our own commonwealth. I have always believed in the mystic truth of the resurrection. The great leaders of the mind and the spirit - Socrates, Christ, Lincoln - were all done to death that the full measure of their contribution to human experience might never be lost. Now - the death of our son is only a fragment in the death of our country. But Erik and the others who give their lives are also giving to mankind a symbol - a little symbol, to be sure, but a clear one - of man's unconquerable aspiration to dignity and freedom and purity in the sight of God. When I made that radio speech - you remember? ...' quoted from St. Paul. I repeat those words to you now, darling: 'We glory in tribulations; knowing that tribulations worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.'

Some might feel that Sherwood's answer to the question which he poses is inadequate to the problem. It is enough that he has succeeded in opening the eyes of the blind to the struggles now going on in the world and that he opened the hearts of true men...

Somewhere in the play, the words of Rupert Brooke are repeated. And what a fitting close to a discussion of this play. He expresses the hope that some day "Honor will come back, as a king to earth. And will pay his subjects with a royal wage; and nobleness will walk in our ways again, and we will come into our heritage."

It is the Dr. Valkonens and Eriks and Kaatries and Mirandas, the Waldemars- it is these folk, wholesome, spiritually intact, hating war, but preferring it to slavery, that will help men to come again into their heritage.

1) Do not know - Requirements - for an purpose - Poss - Illusions
Profoundly arouses - Pity - Terror - Channels fears into -
Preachment - Free, Steady - Nobles

(a) Modern Morality Play - eternal forces Good - Evil -
eternal themes - Fall & Passion, Man - Redemption thru -
Anti-Christ & mess. apocalyptic - dramatized

2/ No involved Plot - No subtle characters - View thru medium
of temperaments - No complicated motives - tangled human
relationships - Story starkly simple, simply told -
You know - And the characters, whomever, intact, straight
caught up on waves - tragic destiny. You know
what end will be - Punishment -

(a) Good manly story, Finland - Poland etc. - Greece.
Invasion, Manhood - forces of degeneration, Man's instinct
People in Play = Aquils - Flows, heralding

of bestiality sweep over this world.

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The old conflict - 1911-1912 - 1913-1914 - 1915-1916

1917-1918 - Paganism & Humanism -

Dr. Valkonen - "gentle - amiable - vague" - Nobel Prize -

environment new religion - "the nature and cause of mental diseases"

"The Defeat of Man" - "the power of

resistance within himself"

"Continue with his experiments"

Dr. Ziemssen - Sec. Consul General ^{Spain} who was anthropologist before he became a diplomat.

also a scientist - dedicated to the

conquest of Man - subjugation -

Exponent of Nazi Philo. "Every great

state of the past, in its stages of construction, has required slavery.

"Inferior races must be considered merely as animals."

"New World State": "For the first time

since the whole surface of the earth became known, no dynamic race is on the march to occupy that surface and rule it.

3/ It was Russia's attack on F. which called forth from Mr. Thompson this play of protest - but he was quick to see that that attack was only incidental in a larger ^{vast} ~~universal~~ attack, not by Russia

but by Nazis - in which R. was being used. - Dr. Ziemssen ⁽³⁾

"All the little communist cells, in labor movements, youth movements, in all nations - they are now working for us, altho they may not know it" - When it (communism) has served that purpose, it will disappear down the sewer".

4/ Thus on, the sad ^{or rather frightening} overtures, the play is the fact that this dark little country & people ^{very} are being destroyed by an invincible Satanic force with which it ^{could not} even come to grips, but which ^{was} using another force, actually its very opposite, as its ethical weapon - The Soviet Union - ^{the most important element in the picture} which had defended exceeding and hailed its independence - which had defended the principle of freedom & self determination of small nations - which had championed exalted humanitarian ideals, and had so publicly denounced the Nazis - These Finns had respect and even affection for the Soviet Union - ^{Dr. Kallio} though they could even imagine the possibility of a Russian attack - ^{that the Nazis would murder their own people} They could imagine that the great human revolution is dead - and that it is enveloped and exposed in a glass coffin in front of the Kremlin - as Ueli Waldman insists.

To be attacked is bad enough - But to be attacked by friends, to see ^{as well as} antagonists turned duped merc- enaries, to be surrounded suddenly ^{by} conspirators and aggressors and to find oneself in a trap - is to draw the little cup of a two-fold defeat -

5/ But Mr. Sherman also caught the larger message. Finland was not defeated, but in a very humiliating

and temporary sense as ~~it~~ departed. Her heroic undertaking⁴
was her abiding triumph. of that heroic stuff is history
made! Loss, suffering that is an incident. It is lost
on day. It is regained the next. P.O. boundaries are
the most impermanent, all human boundaries. What
endures is the Spirit, a race - of that remain un-
broken - undefeated - unyielding - nothing has been lost.

Dr. Vaalkonnen - comes to understand that, even as he
comes to understand, on listening to his colleague Mr. Ziaussen,
what is actually involved in the Finnish war. - His
understanding is of course more profound than that of his
son Erik, tho his reaction to the course, events is
much slower. Erik doesn't want to go to war. He
is deeply in love with Kaatri. He dreams, marrying her building
a home. It is the symbol as is Kaatri of the beautiful,
sacrificing youth, the world so often run to
many places broken, and defeated in Paris by the army.
west world in which they grew up. But if F.
is ever attacked, he will fight! He will defend his
country. "I only know that if any one is going to
take my freedom from me, he's going to pay for it."
"He is not good if it has to be spent in slavery" (Kaatri)

Dr. Vaalkonnen does not approve of his son's joining
the army. It is all reckless anyway. To fight against
my whispering odds. And war, anywhere is a misadventure.
It was to be the Chinese of a century of racial murders
the intelligent thinking. He is an easy going person.
like Mr. Sherman, himself.

It is only when Mr. Zimmern opens his eyes to see the deep, dark primordial waters beneath - to grasp the "Revolution of Lutheranism" - to understand the Vanishing of Lutheranism - that F. is just a savior but an important savior, Manthorpe's last line, defense against an awakening barbarism - that he crosses himself out, his easy-going, passive, sentimental and downs the battle arms

free men. - Recognizes, as Lincoln did the unrepentable conflict - failure to create in self - either in professional interests - or nat. "neutrality" - or "self-interest" - or appeasement.
b/. Dr. V. is a great scientist for a great mystic. He believes profoundly in man - man whose weakness he has all his life studied. He concluded his sc. work with a Biblical quotation from St. John. There is something profound in those words I quoted - he refers to a father. "That unknown Jewish mystic who wrote that - consciously, he knew, that man will put the true name of God in his own forehead, & in the mysteries of his own mind. And there shall be no night there." That is the basis of all the work I have done. He has the spirit which renders opaque matter transparent!

① Wonderful to see what men are capable of - what courage, what endurance - what utter lack of selfishness!

② It is the light in man which gives the strength that defeats death. (Quote) p. 152 - 154.)

③ Man is awakening! This is the Hope! In his new-found consciousness is his means of redemption -

7/ And so he writes his own obituary - and his sons - for Sholem⁶
before he goes forth to certain death in the trenches - he
leaves, the death of his son. It is in the form of a letter to
his wife - whom he seeks to comfort in his own current
way (Intro p. 175)

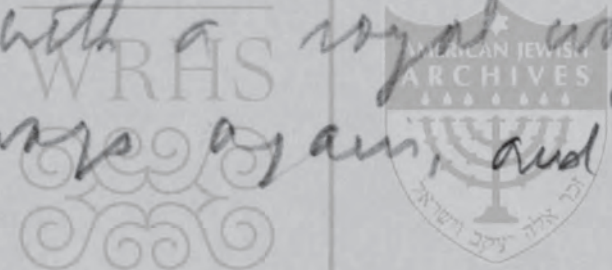
8/ More concrete, break-down of League -
Open the eyes of the blind -

9/ Sad - Hope -

Refist Brooke

"Honor has come back, as a king to earth, and
paid his subjects with a royal wage; and noble men
walks in our ways again, and we have come into
our heritages"

or "proph."



sermon 563

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL
ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 24, 1940

"THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT"

I do not know whether Robert Sherwood's play, "There Shall Be No Night", meets all the requirements of a great play. But it is sufficient that it illumines a great problem, profoundly arouses our emotions of pity and terror, and channels into an eloquent preachment the bafflements, the indignation, the fears and the all but shattered hopes of our generation. One feels freer and steadier and nobler for having listened to that preachment.

It is a modern morality play in which the eternal forces of good and evil are in conflict, in which the everlasting themes of the religious epics are again dramatized - the Fall of ^{Man} ~~Man~~, the Reign of Anti-Christ, Redemption through Sacrifice, and Man's Transfiguration through the Inner Light. It is not merely the story of Finland that is here told, but of all the small nations of Europe who have been invaded and conquered. In fact it is the story of the invasion of mankind by the forces of degeneration and moral insanity. The people in the play are the symbols of men and women everywhere who hate war and who wish to be allowed to follow the even tenor of their lives, but who unwillingly are brought up against certain situations when they prefer to sacrifice their peace, security and their very lives rather than to see the floods of bestiality sweep over them, their country, and humanity.

The playwright has caught the larger message of Finland's invasion. Only in a very limited and temporary sense was Finland defeated. Her heroic resistance is her abiding triumph. It is of that stuff and not of the impermanent and evanescent boundary lines that history is fashioned. Loss of territory is an incident in the life of a people. What endures is the spirit of a race. If that remains unbroken, the race continues undefeated to make its contributions to history.

Dr. Valkonen, the eminent scientist and Nobel Prize winner, who is the

central figure of the play, is an easy-going, peace-loving, internationally-minded individual like so many of us, until his eyes are opened to see the deep dark primordial watters underneath which threaten the foundations of civilization, until he comes to grasp the full implications of the "Revolution of Nihilism" which the Nazis have launched, and to understand that Finland is just a sector, but an important one in mankind's last line of defense against an onrushing and life-destroying barbarism. Then he leaves his ivory tower and dons the armor of battle. He recognizes what Lincoln understood in his day, that mankind is now confronted by an irresistible conflict and that it is impossible for free men or free nations to isolate themselves from this conflict.

Being a great scientist, Dr. Valkonnen is also a great mystic, and he who devoted his life to study all the weaknesses of man, comes to have the greatest faith in him. Man's courage, endurance and lack of selfishness encourage the ~~man~~ scientist in his darkest ~~hour~~ hour to believe that there is hope for the redemption of mankind in the light that is within man's mind and heart. Men are grimly determined to fight this war not because of the glory which is in it, but because of the spiritual necessity to put an end to bestiality, and to give man a chance to rise to the ultimate heights of his evolution.

Perhaps a more concrete solution should have been offered to the problem which the play poses. But the play serves greatly if it helps to open the eyes of men to ~~all~~ see clearly what is involved in the wars now raging over the world, and to look within themselves for that light which alone can illumine the darkness of their days.