



## 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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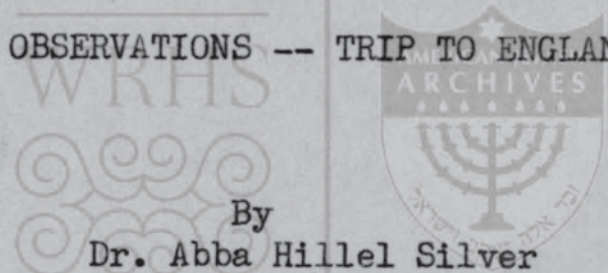
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Observations - trip to England, 1942.



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OBSERVATIONS -- TRIP TO ENGLAND



By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, April 5, 1942



My dear Friends:

I am very happy indeed to be back here. Since I saw you last I have traveled considerably -- some ten thousand miles by air and some two thousand miles by land. It is nice to be back among my family, friends, community. I am sorry that I missed being with you for the Seder the first day of Passover as I had planned to be. My plane was delayed four days in Lisbon and I was unable to get here in time. Four days delay these days on the Clipper is just nothing. I spoke to people who had been waiting in Lisbon for four months and over. Fortunately I had what they call priority, and I was able to get a seat on the first plane out. It was only a seat. It took us four and a half days to get back whereas it took only two days to go over. Two nights of the four we spent on the plane and the other two nights at some of the stop-overs. The first night on the plane I sat up all night and it took me some time to get the kinks out. The second night I had the extreme privilege offered me to sleep on the floor. I stretched out my seary bones.

I had my dreams too. Father Jacob saw angels. (I, too).

While I missed the Seder with my family and the congregation, I did have Seder. On Wednesday afternoon, our plane stopped at a city where I never intended to stop or never wanted to stop -- a city in Brazil I didn't know existed -- a place called Belem. We were told that we would spend the night there. As I stepped out of the plane, I asked the officer representing the Clipper whether there was any Jewish community there. I tried to explain to him, and it was very difficult to explain. He didn't speak English, and I didn't speak Portuguese. But you know, with a little -- -- I made it clear to this goy that it was Passover night and that I should like to go to a synagogue. Were there any Jews in Belem? He thought there were and he would make sure.

That afternoon, at five-thirty, he came with the leader of the Jewish community and with a delegation of the shool and he invited me to come to services.



I was very happy to attend. After the services this Portuguese man invited me to his home for Seder. It was the first Sephardic Seder I had ever attended. It differs from ours, but in the main it was a beautiful Seder spent in the circle of his family. About nine o'clock we were sitting around and chatting when there was a knock on the door. I expected Elijah to come in. Instead of Elijah it was a delegation of Jews. They said: Rabbi, we just heard you are in the city. We represent the Ashkenazi Jews. We have a synagogue and we are celebrating Seder. We would appreciate it if you would come to our Seder, too. And I said: It is up to my host. If he will excuse me, I will be very happy to go. Of course my host graciously allowed me to go. So I had my second Seder.

Important little city at the mouth of the Amazon, with a Jewish community of two thousand souls.

But I was destined to have more than two Sederim, for the next morning we traveled on to one of the important islands of the Carribean....I was informed that I should not mention the name of the Island. When I arrived there late Thursday afternoon, I picked up a newspaper and read that services would be there the second night. So of course I went to the services. I was welcomed and I met quite a number of our boys, American soldiers in uniform at the services. After services I was invited to my third Seder. And I sat down with 200 American Jewish soldiers and we had a most glorious Seder. Matzoth were sent to that city by the Jewish Welfare Board. A representative of the Jewish Welfare Board conducted the Seder. These splendid American boys joined heartily in the spirit. Among the 200 ~~men~~ boys were some from Cleveland. I was happy to take messages to their folks. So I had three Sederim. And as a gift, they gave me to take along with me a package of Matzoth. When I got to New York at Customs, the officer in opening my package -- and he was a fine looking Irish lad -- looked at me and winked and said: These Jewish ~~biscuits~~ biscuits have certainly traveled some.



It is yet difficult for me, good friends, to collect and to organize all my impressions and all my experiences which I had in that very crowded visit to England. These impressions came on thick and fast and overlay one another. It will take some time for me to bring them in to focus.

During my short stay in England I visited ten cities, nearly all of them the principal cities of England -- London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, and others. In every city, I addressed a gathering, a meeting, a luncheon. I met people, interviewed people, was interviewed, saw the sights of the city, visited institutions, munitions factories -- a very crowded experience. And some of these experiences, some of these impressions I should like to acquaint you with, and I should like to share them with you this Sunday morning and on other Sunday mornings.

I came to England perhaps at the most distressed and despondent hour in the experience of the English people. The Empire was staggering under the terrific blow which it had recently received in the Far East. The wounds of Malay, Singapore, Rangoon, Java, Burma were fresh. The enemy was knocking at the gates of India, and were threatening the invasion of Australia. The English people I found to be baffled, wounded, somewhat humiliated that this had come upon them after two and a half years of war. For them this was not the beginning of the war. They <sup>were</sup> ~~xxx~~ asking themselves what was wrong. There was heart-searching everywhere. What was wrong? Was there anything wrong with them, their people, their government? At public meetings, in public places I sat and chatted with people.

The country, I was told did not have the same morale as it did after Dunkirk. The mood which prevailed was somehow not the same. That mood, the mood which prevailed after Dunkirk was a mood of exaltation. Nor was it the mood which prevailed during the terrific bombings over the ~~six~~ country.



The mood in England which I discovered now was not one of vast, marvelous and amazing spiritual fortitude, but it was a mood of depression. I found life hard in England. Life was being restricted to the most basic necessities. The few remaining comforts of life are rapidly vanishing. A spartan mode of living was steadily being self-imposed by the people on themselves. Everywhere your turn you come face to face with restrictions on travel, railroads, traveling by automobile. No man in England is allowed more than five gallons of gasoline a month. The prospect of all private cars being off the roads of England is being discussed. Food is not plentiful though no one is starving. Bread is abundant. Fish may be had. Meat is scarce. So is sugar. Butter is rare. Eggs are almost non-existent. One egg a month per person.

I remember speaking one night in Southport, one of the smaller cities of England and putting up in a small hotel. It happened to be operated by a Jew. This man attended the meeting in the evening which I addressed. In the morning at breakfast, I had my first and only poached egg in England. When I mentioned it I was told: Rabbi that was the greatest tribute paid to you in the whole of England. There is very little fruit in England. The sight of an apple or an orange is rare. Whatever oranges there are are reserved for the children you see. Food rationing in defense industries is supplemented so that the workers in heavy industries have enough to eat. No one is hungry in England. But there is very little variety in food even in the most expensive hotels. You are allowed so much--if you have a lot of money you can buy so much only perhaps of a better quality, but no more.

Newspapers in England had to be reduced in size and in circulation. There is a penalty in England for wasting paper -- any paper -- even bus tickets must be saved. <sup>Most</sup> ~~No~~ articles purchased in the stores are given to you without being wrapped.



In the wealthier homes, the women of the household are now doing their own housework, their own cooking, cleaning, or serving at table. And they do it in fine spirit. Servants are now wrking in munition factories. Larger homes are closed down. People have moved into apartments and flats first because of the lack of servants, and secondly because of the high cost.

Taxes are exceedingly high, both income tax and sales tax...Yet with all these restrictions which touch everyone in almost every situation in life, I found absolutely no grumbling, no grouching -- and among all sections of people. They take it in their stride. They realize that it is necessary. And the English race has character. And that character manifested itself in these magnificent ways under the stress and tension of this terrible war.

They possess a deep quiet patriotism, the life of which is not the same anywhere in the world. It is not the flamboyant, breast-thumping kind of patriotism. They don't talk patriotism. They don't wave the flag. They seem to have a deep pride in their country and are making every sacrifice to save England. And when a new law is passed imposing further restrictions -- and they are constantly piling up further restrictions,--the average Englishman asks himself: How best can I obey that law? Not -- How readily can I get around it?

During two and a half years, I found that England has suffered physically a great deal in air attacks. These blitz attacks upon English cities are most devastating. What we read in the newspapers during the past few months and what we heard over the radio fail to give full evidence of their devastation and attacks. I came there nearly ten months after the last great blitz attack. Much of the rubble and debris had been cleared away. Yet in a city like London, you can stand in the heart of the city where once were fine buildings, shops, stores, banks, public institutions, look about you fora quarter of a mile and see nothing



but space covering an area as from Ninth Street to Twenty-second Street -- from Euclid to St. Clair Ave. I saw that in the City, on the Ast End and along the docks. In some cities where the wreckage has not been cleared away, you feel as though you are walking through the ruins of Peompey. Sometimes the facades are still there, but looking within you see nothing. The cities have been burned far more by fire than by bombs. There were times when the Nazis sent over 1500 planes at once, dropped incendiary bombs from dusk to dawn. The water supply was inadequate to cope with it. Fires raged for days on end. Today they are far better able to cope with this type of attack. Emergency water supplies have been established. There are water tanks, water pools at almost every block. The whole country is now organized into a vast system of fire-wardens. The stations everywhere are adequately equipped. English men and women stand watch twenty-four hours a day for a repetition of such an attack. So that physically, the cities of England look bad, badly done up. Many houses are boarded up. Many windows have been smashed. There are brick and concrete shelters in the middle of the streets.

You miss seeing children in cities like London and Manchester. The children have been sent away to the country-side to be safe from air attacks. Yet, the cities of England carry on.

There has been remarkable improvisation and remarkable adjustment. Those who have been bombed out find lodgings elsewhere. Factories before the war were congested into restricted areas. Now the factories are more widely distributed and their production today is far higher than a year or two ago. Shops, theatres, cinemas, concerts, lectures go on as usual. Life goes on even during black-outs which take place every night in every city in England.

And your first experience with a London black-out is unforgettable - ghastly. London at best is not a bright, brilliant city. When you add to this



every window blacked out. It is a frightening experience. When you walk into the darkness you feel all around you that life is moving swiftly but unseen. You see dim pencil lights streaming from automobiles - this tends only to accentuate the darkness. Yet groups carry on. Every meeting I addressed in England in the evening was assembled from people who came from their homes, most of them on foot through the blackout to the meeting.

England is prepared to receive additional hammerings from the skies. They realize that they are only twenty miles from the front, that a bomber can fly from France to England in five minutes. They are prepared against invasion. There is less talk and less thought of invasion in England, but thought of invasion is not discounted. The island is prepared ~~is~~ is one vast fortress. Soldiers are everywhere. And the invader who would attempt invasion of England will have to be prepared to pay an appalling price for such invasion.

Yet in spite of these depredations, the crimping of life, the morale of the English people is good. It is the average Englishman who had from time to time to keep up the morale of the government and to save the officials at times from fumbling. The average Englishman is prodding on his government at this time to action. The English people have grown impatient. What they have come to fear is the incompetence in high places, impatience with a long series of disasters and defeats. Official explanations no longer explain things satisfactorily to them. While I was there they were demanding for an explanation of why one hundred ~~thousand~~ British troops had to surrender in Singapore. I heard it said more than once that one hundred Russian troops in Singapore would never have surrendered. People are disgruntled with the bureaucracy. They are impatient with what their nation is doing in the war strategy -- the lack of imagination and daring of their leaders in their war strategy. They can no longer be consoled that time is on their side. Somehow they feel that they are being tied up. And I found that to be a good sign.



The hero of the hour in England is General Douglas MacArthur. And his appointment to Supreme Commander was hailed with joy and relief by the British. Here at last, they said was a general who would fight, who does not interpret an evacuation as a victory.

I found a great reliance in England on America's production. The landing of our troops in Ireland, in Australia did a great deal to hearten the English people. There was also great reliance on the Soviets, the Russians. I was rather startled at first to find picture placards of Churchill and Stalin. I saw many placards of Roosevelt and Churchill. That was understandable. But the placard of Churchill and Stalin - that was rather strange considering what the Tory attitude towards the Soviet was.

The gallantry of the fighting forces of Russia, the high resolve to win or to die -- which is the only spirit that will ever win this war -- that has caught the spirit of the average Englishman.

I found in England a great demand for more intensified girding for war, the sort of thing we have here in this country, a still further revision of peacetime economies set up to expedite production for war purpose. They demand that government take more and more control and responsibility of the vital industries and the distribution of income in England. There is a fine and wholesome demand for a government truly national in character in place of the coalition government at present. Everywhere there is demand for an end to compromise and procrastination. They want speed. These three motifs you find in England in their speaking, thinking and writing.

I found also -- and it is not surprising -- a demand for a clearer definition of war aims. The day I arrived I read an editorial in the London Times called "The Inspiration of a Plan." The time has now arrived where the fighting nations -- the united nations should be given a clear and concrete plan for world reconstruction



after the war so that the fighting peoples will know exactly what they are fighting for. What new world are we fighting for? The Atlantic Charter is too vague, is too abstract. The Four Freedoms of which our President spoke are too vague and too abstract. They want a more specific plan. You cannot keep a people fighting long making sacrifices for long merely on propagand or on hate of their enemies. You must offer them something positive, the feeling of fighting for a nobler and juster order for themselves and their children.

What about the British Empire after the war, they are asking themselves? They have been shocked by the fact that the colonies in the British Empire evidenced absolutely no loyalty in this war for the British Empire...And I must say for the English that they are given to self-searching, to self-criticism....Self-criticism is the first step to self-help. They feel that the type of imperial organization before the war will no longer be valid after the war and that it can't be maintained after the war regardless of what happens. What new concept will there be in regard to national sovereignty after the war? What about the economic stabilization after the war? What about the individual? How will he be made more secure? What charter of liberties and what economic security will men have after the war? As yet no clear answers have been given. The people are worried about it.

I am inclined to believe that we in the United States will be asking ourselves the same questions and demanding concrete answers.

One incident happened during my stay in England which answered the question whether war ever destroys freedom, if war destroys all freedom and all rights. But England gave a clear-cut negative answer. After two and a half years of war you find not an essential human liberty invaded by political action in war. The English people still speak up. Their criticism would make some of our Congressmen envious... When I was there the Daily Mirror, something like our Hearst Paper was particularly indecent in its cartoons and editorials in attacking some form or another of the government. So much so that an official of the government was going



to invoke the emergency power of the government and shut down the paper. And within twenty-four hours every newspaper in England, competitors of the Daily Mirror, every important leader spoke up <sup>not</sup> /in defense of the Daily Mirror but at the thought that the suppression of free speech would be resorted to by Great Britain. Mind you, this was the time when the British Empire seems to be breaking up -- the darkest hour in British History. They know that in our eagerness to defend liberty, we must not destroy it. That was a very heartening experience.

There are many other things that I should like to tell you. But I must leave it for the hour is late, until next Sunday morning. I should like to tell you about my mission to England, the personalities I met, what they said to me and what I said to them. Of course what they <sup>to me</sup> said/is more important than what I said to them.

I am happy to say that I carried with me the feeling that I was proud to be associated with such a people, that I was proud to have my country associated with such a people. I came away ~~feeling~~ that that people is entirely dependable in this great struggle and that in linking up our destiny with the destiny of that people we have done wisely.



1) Happy - Since 10000 or - 2000 - Good to the back -  
Sorry - 000 - as I had planned - Delay 4 days - long wait  
9 weeks - Priority - seat - 4 1/2 d - 2 days - 2 weeks on  
plane - stop-overs at 2 places en route - Sot ap - floor  
But while I missed 30 - We landed but WEL. afternoon  
Bellem - have had hand - Amazons - ingured  
next evening = Cambrian - 200 - J.W. Board  
Sang - (moral) Three Sectors - High her Portage 531

2) As get diff. not - collect - orange - short-circuited  
thick fast - overlaid WRHS 1 min focus -  
visited 10 Cities - one night stands - 15 pounds  
Sir Montague Barker - Harrogate - Vallet  
Every day - meetings - interviews - people to see - Eight  
Beethams - Teas (Bath-shops) - London Jens then  
Jens - Frictions - push with thems - Off with  
Will share with you -

3) Came to Eng - most desperate fun - Empire stopping  
Doctors - 1 day - Europe - Raymond - Banner - Jane  
Gabe / Archer - ambush - Baffled - wounded - anxious  
be unhated - After 2 1/2 - What was Henry ? Not the



<sup>Don't want to be a</sup> <sup>Not a</sup> <sup>The happy Eng. - the war has</sup>  
shocked to basic necessities, comforts, life was really so airless.  
A Spartan mode of life was steadily being self-imposed. Many  
restrictions on travel, <sup>many trains with much</sup> no use of private cars at all. ~~For~~  
nearly all things are sharply rationed. <sup>5 lbs. a month</sup> Sharp penalties for black-  
marketing (hoarding). Food is not plentiful, tho no one is  
starving. Bread is abundant, fish may be had, meat is  
<sup>so is sugar</sup> butter is rare, <sup>an</sup> egg <sup>per person</sup> a month.  
(South port - "Aardale" - Jew. proprietors <sup>priced</sup> - (egg for breakfast). Very  
little fruit. Oranges for children under six. Rationing for  
working in defense, <sup>in defense</sup> people <sup>unhindered</sup> by factory canteens.  
People do not <sup>so hungry</sup> - but there is little variety <sup>in diet</sup> in  
what is to be had even in the most expensive hotels.  
Newspapers have had to cut down <sup>in size</sup> their circulation. There is  
a penalty for working paper, even a loss of rights. An article  
published in a store is never wrapped. In the weather. Lower  
women can do their own housework - There are <sup>few</sup> other  
in sewing - servants have few with war work. <sup>large houses</sup>  
the wealthy closed down - for <sup>and money</sup> but help. There are hints  
beyond where money cannot go - You may buy a better suit  
1 dress - a shoe - a shirt - but no more than the few hint  
set for all - unless you wish to ~~be~~ violate the law -  
Englishmen are law-abiding - Taxes are exceedingly high  
Income Tax - <sup>sales tax</sup> - And yet - no protesting or proving - Talk it in their stride.  
Realize that it is necessary - see how character - what more de-  
+ a deep + great patriotism - Not plumbeant, best - cheap -  
angry + deep pride in their England - and Eng. is worth saving  
for -



4) Souly tried England - "Blitz" - More devastating <sup>(after 9 months)</sup> London  
acres destroyed City - East End - Dock Area - Hardly a street  
untouched - facade - Some sections - "Ruins Proper" -  
Destroyed not only by bombs - land mines - but by fires  
caused by incendiary bombs - Some up to 1500 ft high -  
drop 10,000 ft from dusk to dawn - Whole city ablaze  
- Water main burst - not enough water pressure -  
Everywhere "Emergency" water supplies - tanks - pipes  
not an important city unscathed - streets as if  
out - public buildings - churches - ancient monuments -  
blasted - Total or partial ruins - Incalculable  
damage done - no time + no material + no labor available for  
big-scale repairs + rebuilding - Cities look drab -  
buildings close up - houses boarded up - streets unsightly  
brick + concrete shelter in middle of streets -  
no children - and yet cities carry on - remarkable improvisation  
adjustment - Bombed out find lodgings elsewhere -  
Factories now aided by defuncted - + producing more  
shops - theatres - cinemas continue before -  
go on - as usual - life does not halt even  
during Black-out - ever - night - everywhere is busy  
First experience with a London Black-out is  
a weird & shortly after. indeed. School children <sup>with a candle - but</sup> ~~power~~ <sup>light</sup>  
- get used to it - & you hear life streaming all about you



tho you do not see it - All the mass meetings - were during black-outs - Held earlier - but were held & well attended -

Cities prepared for next Blitz - better prepared. Fire-~~works~~ system of volunteer fire-~~works~~ <sup>+ stations</sup> in operation covering entire country - perfectly equipped - to meet any emergency - & citizens are on guard 24 hrs. a day -

They are 20 miles from front - They know their ordeal is by no means over - They will face whatever comes with great fortitude.

Invasion - less talk & that, it - but not discounted - Island is our last fortress - And invader must be prepared to pay awful price for such an attempt -

5) <sup>9 people</sup> Morale is good. - ~~Don't know~~ It is they who have had time to again to keep up morale & their spirit - to save it from blue funk - to put it into action.

People impatient with manipulations & debates - & official explanations which do not explain. There has been a resentment & bitter demand for all the facts - Singapore!

People - disappointed with Col. Blimp - Brass Hats - red tape & bureaucracy - lack of imagination



daring in war strategy. Time on their side? (2)  
want action! Speed! "Tied up at the top"

Hero - Mr. Arthur - Appointment Supreme Commander  
of Allied Forces in Antipodes - boiled with joy &  
relief! At last a general who will fight - who  
does not regard an evacuation as a victory!

There is great chance on Am. - landing of Am.  
troops in Ireland - in Australia - has heartened  
that gallant people.

Also on Soviet! - Churchill & Stalin! Churchill  
& Roosevelt, a rather strange meeting - when  
one considers the Tory attitude towards Soviet -  
Soviet plan of Chamberlain

But the dauntless spirit - the fighting ~~power~~ <sup>prizes</sup>  
- the refusal to retreat - has aroused admiration -  
and has made them proud of their allies - themselves  
in view of their own military weaknesses displayed  
in recent months

There is a demand for an even greater girding  
for the war. (1) Revise still further the pre-war econ.  
structure & system of econ. resources - State resp. for  
control of vital industries & distribution of income  
(2) National Govt. in place of coalition Govt. (3) End of



procrastination & compromise. ~~the~~ Service instead  
of profit - country in hand party. Speed in place of  
delay. - Socialization of England

6/ Need for clear def. of War aims. "The Inspiration  
of a Plan". What 'new world' are we fighting for?  
Atlantic Charter - 4 freedoms too abstract, too  
vague. For a compelling drive & a ~~new~~ long  
sustained & unselfish effort - free people must  
have prospect of something fairer, juster, nobler  
to look forward to as compensation for blood  
& sweat and tears - Propaganda - negative -  
something positive to offer - Ad. world must not  
be rebuilt on ruins - Empire - colonial power  
What freedom? How much national  
sovereignty? What econ. obligations? What form  
of inter. organizations to ensure peace? What  
charter / whether & what econ. security will  
new laws after the war? Plan has not yet  
emerged, and people are plainly worried abt it.

7/ Freedom - Press -

8/ Will see it then - to a new world