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One Hundred Years of Jewish History, 1949.

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, November 6, 1949

The 100 years between 1850 and 1950 witnessed the most tragic and the most triumphant events in 2,000 years of Jewish history. It was the most revolutionary century in Jewish history - a century of cultural and political upheavals, of struggle, of triumph, of defeat, of vast migration, of unimaginable catastrophies, and of Messianic realization. Much of it followed the universal kaleidoscope of the last 100 years, but much of it was specific and unique to Jewish history. This 100 years began on a high note of optimism. The years between 1850 and 1880 were probably the most hopeful and the most satisfying years that European Jewry had ever known. The whole era was one of progress and enlightenment for Europe, and Jewish emancipation kept pace with the triumphant march of liberalism.

The European reaction which set in after the defeat of Napoleon and with the Congress of Vienna ended with the revolution of '48, and thereafter those marvelous seminal ideas of the French Revolution which, by the way were responsible for the first emancipation of the Jews of Europe in 1791, these revolutionary ideas touching the rights of man, the equality of all men, resumed after 1848 their forward march, and constitutional government and democracy were established in many parts of Western Europe, and these countries where these constitutional governments were established and democratic principles enacted into law, consistent with their constitutional principles, could not deny the Jews of those countries equality and citizenship. In some of these countries Jewish emancipation and the removal of civil and legal disabilities against Jews was more rapid than in others, but by the '60's and the '70's of the last century full rights of citizenship were granted to the Jews of Austria-Hungary, of Italy, of Germany and somewhat earlier they had been granted to the Jews of Belgium, Holland, Denmark. In England, where the formal emancipation of Catholics and Dissenters was delayed to almost 1830, the Jews were finally recognized as equal in status with all other citizens by the fact that a Jew elected to the Parliament of Great

Britain, Lionel Rothschild, was finally permitted to take his seat in the House without being compelled to take the Christian oath. That was in 1858.

Even in Czarist Russia, where the bulk of European Jewry lived, and under economic and political conditions far less favorable than fellow Jews in Western Europe, even there light seemed finally to break through the very heavy darkness. Under Czar Alexander II, who ascended the throne of Russia in 1855, a certain relaxation in the stringency of anti-Jewish laws in Russia took place - laws limiting the rights of Jews to residence in various parts of Russia and limiting the occupations of Jews were relaxed, and the drafting of Jewish children into Jewish miners into the Russian army for periods of enlistment of 25 years or more was discontinued, and Jews were admitted to the legal profession and could hold certain minor offices, and efforts were being made by the government to improve the cultural levels of Russian Jewry.

In those years, then, between 1850 and 1880 - that generation - the Jews of Europe could see an open road ahead, a road which led away from the Dark Ages, from disabilities and discriminations and isolation and ghetto and poverty and misery - a road which led to a glorious new day of freedom and equality, and it was heady new wine which the Jews of that generation drank. They seized every opportunity which the removal of restrictions afforded them. Jews began to enter the schools of Europe and the universities in increasing numbers, and as if after a long thirst, a long drought they began to drink deep of the culture and the science of the Western world. And soon they were forging to the very top in the professions, in the arts and in the sciences of Europe - in law, medicine, in science generally, in journalism, in politics, in philosophy, in literature, in the arts. The number of Jews grew extraordinary large and qualitatively. Their contributions were of a high order. And in these 100 years between 1850 and 1950 the Jewish people gave the world a galaxy of great men too numerous to mention, many of them pioneers in their respective fields of science, of art and of literature. The contributions of some of them were truly

epoch-making, monumental, unequaled by any other people of its size and unmatched by any earlier period in Jewish history. Extraordinary record of greatness! Men of genius, historic contributions made to the sum total of human knowledge by a relatively small group of people - the Jews of Europe during that 100 years.

One must mention but a few giants to understand the quality and the extent of their contribution. One need but think, for example, of Marx whose economic theories have revolutionized the economies of mankind; of Albert Einstein whose scientific theories revolutionized the scientific conceptions of mankind; of Freud whose profound analysis of the inner life of man began a new era in the study of man's psyche. And one can mention others, not of the same extraordinary levels, but of great height in poetry, like Heine, and philosophy like Bergson - in all the sciences and in all the arts, in music, in the theater. It was an extraordinary outpouring of pent up energies - of the mind and of the spirit which contributed mightily to culture and civilization.

And the Jews of Europe moved forward, too, in finance and industry. In an age of expanding capitalism and industrialism the business talents of the Jews did not go unrewarded. The Jews established and developed the railroads of Europe, and many of its principal industries. They became bankers of great prominence. Many Jews acquired wealth, as did many non-Jews. And they served their countries well, loyally, patriotically. They wanted to identify themselves eagerly with the life of the countries where they lived. They quickly assimilated themselves to the life and the manners and the culture of the peoples in whose midst they lived. They came to feel themselves at home, not like their forefathers who regarded themselves as aliens and foreigners because they were made to think of themselves as not belonging. They loved their homes. They took part in all the social movements for the improvement of the life of their fellow-citizens everywhere with whose lives and fortunes they believed themselves to be finally and completely identified.

It was a glorious age, but it was not to last. Jewish emancipation which, as I said, was a by-product of European liberalism, began to decline with the decline of European liberalism which set in shortly after the Franco-Prussian War. National unrest and social unrest shattered the none-too-strong foundations of European liberalism and democracy. Teutonic nationalism, Magyar nationalism, Slavic nationalism in extreme forms became rampant in Europe, and they also became intolerant of minorities living in their midst. Economic reactionary forces in Europe frightened by the rapid spread of Socialism among the masses rallied to defend their privileges, and because Jews were prominent in the liberal movements of Europe, some of them prominent also in the Socialist movements, these reactionary forces centered their rage against them and centered their attack upon them because they regarded them as the easiest target of attack because it was easiest to rally ancient prejudices, distrust, suspicions against them. Rapid financial expansion in the closing decades of the 19th century in parts of Europe often led to disastrous speculation and collapse which involved great numbers of people in ruin - financial ruin, and because Jews were also in finance, they were used as the handy scapegoats for these economic disasters in order to turn the wrath of the people away from the real culprits responsible for these economic collapses.

Demagogues, who desired to ride into political power, found it easiest to inflame the masses and rally them round them - the masses who were clamoring for economic redress, by waving before them this new Jewish wealth and by inciting them to fight not capitalism generally, but Jewish capitalism. All these factors and others contributed to a rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe in the closing decades of the 19th century. And it was not long before anti-Semitism became a political movement in many parts of Europe, and the life of the Jewish people became overcast, endangered and embittered. The glow of the Golden Age vanished. Vile and violent anti-Semitic agitation and propaganda swept over Europe. Jews were branded as enemies of the State, the very states that granted them rights of citizenship just a few decades before, unassimilable foreigners

members of a mongrel and inferior race; all those poisonous arrows in the quiver of the Nazis which the Nazis used with such deadly effect in our day, were fashioned a generation before in the closing years of the 19th century. In 1879 a League of Anti-Semites was founded in Germany. In 1882 the first international Anti-Semitic Congress was held in Dresden. A violent campaign against the Jewish people by way of a sustained attack upon the Talmud took place in Austria. Charges of ritual murder were revived in Hungary and in other parts of Europe.

In France, the home of the rights of man - France, which was the first country in Europe to have granted the Jewish people equality - in France anti-Semitism assumed a most virulent form. The Royalists and the clericals of France remained relentless in their opposition to the Third Republic, and they employed anti-Semitism in their attempt to overthrow it. These clerical groups, in order to compete with Jewish bankers, organized their own Union Generale, a bank, in which the church circles, the Royalist circles, the nobility invested their money, and it soon collapsed, and of course, the Jews were blamed for the collapse. In 1886 Edouard Drumont wrote his notorious book, "La France Juive" which violently attacked Jews and Republicanism and the Free Masons, whose book went into over 100 editions in France. And in 1892 the same Drumont began to publish a daily newspaper in France, "Libre Parole", an anti-Semitic sheet, and in 1889 there was organized in France the Ligue Nationale Antisemite en France. In 1891 32 deputies of the French Chamber of Deputies proposed a law to expel all the Jews from France. And as you well know, in 1893 the infamous Dreyfuss Affair broke upon the world, the attempt to link the Jews of France with treasonable activity against France.

And so, from 1880 on Berlin and Vienna and Paris became centers of anti-Jewish agitation, and the Jewish question never again disappeared from the political platforms of the nations of Europe. The climax, of course, was reached after the First World War with the rise of Fascism and Nazism. The frustration which resulted from their defeat, the sense of hurt national pride and the Empire of Austria-Hungary, the

impoverishment of the middle classes and the military classes, the suffering of the masses - all offered marvelous opportunities for demagogues to ride into power, and the greatest of them was Hitler. And in the '20's and the '30's of this century, political anti-Semitism in its organization, in its propaganda, in its financing reached an all-time high and claimed an all-time holocaust of Jewish suffering and martyrdom.

And, as you will recall, this tidal wave of anti-Semitism washed our own shores in the years between the two World Wars. The years between the two World Wars witnessed the resurrection of the Klan in this country and the sustained attacks of Ford upon the Jews, and the depression years which followed 1929 witnessed the virulent propaganda of the Priest Coughlin and a host of others of professional Jew-baiters.

This political agitation against the Jew was in itself very serious, but it did not stop merely with agitation. Its vehemence found outlet in acts which reversed the process of Jewish emancipation and in acts of Jewish extermination unparalleled for extent and brutality in the annals of mankind.

During the First World War and in the five years which followed it this Jew-hatred wrote a bloody chapter in Eastern Europe. The First World War, as you will recall, had one of its principal battlefields in Eastern Europe where nearly three-quarters of the Jews of the world lived, and the armies moved to and fro over this battle area, and the first sufferers and those who suffered most largely were the Jews living in what was the pale of settlement established by Czarist Russia years before. Tens of thousands of Jewish civilians were slaughtered. But the bloody chapter really began when the Bolsheviks carried through their revolution in Russia in 1917. That, you will recall, was followed by a civil war which lasted quite a number of years. Anti-Semitism soon identified Bolshevism with Jews just as they identified all liberal movements and all revolutionary movements and all Socialistic movements and every movement which the reactionaries disliked with the Jews. And

during that civil war which swept over this very area in which millions of Jews lived the armies of the anti-Bolsheviki, the armies of Kolchak and Denikin and Petlura and the others murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews in a ghastly White Terror the like of which mankind had not witnessed before.

The First World War, you will recall, closed with a victory for the Allied Forces which set out to make the world safe for democracy. And as a result of their victory quite a number of new states, Succession states, were established in Europe - Poland among them, Poland which had 3,000,000 Jews. And these new states which finally won their independence from the empires of which they had been a part up until that time, pledged themselves to grant absolute equality to all minority groups in their midst, including also the Jewish group. But none of these countries ever lived up to its obligations. They repudiated the clauses which protected the rights of minorities in their midst. And in Poland and in Rumania and elsewhere a veritable cold pogrom was set in operation to drive the Jews out of those countries or to reduce them to a state of utter impoverishment and helplessness. Jewish business then was boycotted; Jewish universities refused to admit Jewish students; the civil service became closed to Jews; and every mediæval discriminatory act against Jews was revived, in the years after the First World War.

But the horrible climax, of course, came with the Nazis who rode into power in Germany in 1931 because theirs was a pogrom of actual physical extermination. You have heard the story and it need not be rehearsed here. It began with denying the Jews rights of citizenship, expropriating their wealth, driving them from their country, and when the Nazis began to march through Europe with the beginning of the Second World War, they marched, as far as the Jews were concerned, as the Maloch-ha-movas marches. Wherever it came it spelt the death of the Jews in those countries. Six million Jews were done to death in the gas chambers which the Nazis set up. It meant the practical destruction of European Jewry which a half a century before was so full

of hope and glorious anticipation. There were 10,000,000 Jews in Europe in 1939. There are 3,500,000 today and 2,000,000 of them are in the Soviet Union.

Now, the picture at the close of these 100 years would be altogether black were it not for two great events which took place during this period. The first one is the fact that during these 100 years a great new center of Jewish life was established in the United States, and the center of gravity - of Jewish population, of Jewish life - shifted from the horrible hate-soaked, blood-soaked lands of Europe to the new world where traditions of human freedom and tolerance and brotherhood had been dominant for more than 150 years. In 1850, when this congregation was founded, there were 50,000 Jews in the United States. Today there are 5,000,000 who came here. The Jewish population increased a hundred fold in this century. It began early, the Jewish migration; it intensified to a degree during the 30's and the 40's when, as a result of disturbed political conditions in Austria and Hungary and Germany, Jews from those countries began to come to the United States. It reached great proportions in the 80's following the pogroms in Russia resulting from the assassination of this liberal Czar, Alexander II. A great new community of 5,000,000 Jews was built in the Western Hemisphere while all these horrors, persecutions and waves of hate were sweeping over Europe. It is a community prosperous, at peace, a community loyal, patriotic - patriotic to their country of which they are proud citizens and which they have served in war and peace with great devotion - loyal also to their fellow Jews all over the world to whom they extended most generous help during their dark years of tribulation and suffering. God's Providence did not forsake our people.

The second great achievement of these 100 years was the establishment of the free and independent state of Israel, something which the Jewish people had been praying for and hoping for for 2,000 years. The movement to reestablish the state of Israel came as a reaction to the collapse of emancipation, to the hopes of emancipation of the Jews of Europe as well as in response to this age-old dream of the people to re-

establish its national center in Palestine. Jews reacted differently as all peoples, I assume, would have reacted to these disillusionments, these defeats which they suffered at the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Some of them refused to recognize what was happening, merely discounted these "outcroppings", as they said, of medievalism. These anti-Semites didn't count for anything. They were crackpots - they don't amount anything! They brushed them aside. They refused to recognize the menace inherent in those anti-Semitic agitations, propaganda in Europe. And they hid their heads ostrich-like in the sand. They were the practical people - they knew it all.

Others reacted to this self-same situation by trying to escape from the Jewish fold, and many in Western Europe surrendered their faith, apostatized, adopted the religion of the majority around them and thought that thereby they would make themselves secure and their children secure. They, too, were mistaken because when Hitler began to carry out his program of Jewish extermination, he did not seek to exterminate merely the Jew, but even he who had given up his Judaism a generation before and two generations before and three generations before!

There were still other Jews who faced up to this anti-Semitism courageously, manfully and began to counter-attack through education, through the press, through books, through literature. Jewish men of note began to answer the anti-Semites. Jews in parts of Europe organized in defense groups, societies for the protection of the Jews of Europe. They did their best and did it manfully - with extraordinary skill, some of them, but unfortunately, unsuccessfully. The forces were too overwhelming for them.

And there was another group which said that the Jewish problem in Europe is essentially a political problem which can only be solved in a political way. The position of the Jew in Europe is anomalous. He is a minority everywhere. He has no national center anywhere, and therefore, he occupies a unique and dangerously unique position in the political complex of Europe. The solution of the Jewish problem is to

rationalize and normalize the status of the Jewish people in the world; that is, to establish a national center again for the Jewish people to which they can go whenever forces drive them to leave the places where they are living at the time. And so, the age-old dream, the reestablishment of the Jewish state, began to assume political content in the minds of many of our people in Europe. And following the pogroms in Russia in the early 80's, the first Poale Zion group - Lovers of Zion - came into existence. Following the pogroms in the 80's in Russia, that great - it wasn't a book, it was a brochure, it was a pamphlet, really - written by Leo Pinsker called "Auto Emancipation" appeared which shook especially the intellectual groups among the Russian Jews. Pinsker called for self-emancipation, not to depend upon European emancipation and enlightenment and liberalism which is as a broken reed, but if the Jews want to normalize their life in the world and make themselves secure, they must emancipate themselves through the establishment of a national center somewhere in the world - he did not advocate Palestine particularly, but he advocated the necessity of establishing such a national, political base for Jewish life in the world.

And following the recrudescence of virulent anti-Semitism in France and the Dreyfuss Affair, Dr. Theodor Herzl in the 90's wrote his great Judenstaat in which he summoned the Jews of Europe to mobilize for political action, to build themselves, to rebuild themselves a state. Dr. Theodor Herzl invoked the first Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel and before 20 years past the most powerful country on earth, Great Britain, recognized the validity of the Zionist platform and through the famous Balfour Declaration issued in 1917 it stated that it "looked with favor upon the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine".

You know the later story, the story of how Jews went there from the 80's, through the 90's, through the early decades of the 20th century to Palestine, how they invested their life blood, their sweat, their labor into rebuilding this long neglected land,

how they planted colonies, villages and town and cities, and rebuilt industry and revived the culture and the language, and how, after great struggle and great suffering, the hour of consummation and triumph came in November 1947 when the United Nations, meeting in Lake Success in our own country, acknowledged the right of the Jewish people to reestablish their national state in part of Palestine, and how in May following - May 14, 1948 - the Yishuv in Palestine proclaimed to the world the establishment of the State of Israel.

Today a million Jews live in Israel. Today 25,000 Jews are going to that country every month, and Israel is destined to become, next to the United States, the greatest population center of Jews of the world, and certainly, the most important cultural center of Jewish life in the world.

So as we look over the 100 years which I have scanned, touching only the peaks, for it is a life-time study really, one sees the century as one of great agitation, of high peaks reached and low depths sunk, of heart-breaking frustrations, of appalling calamities, but one also sees signs of life, vitality, vigor, of renewal which augur most promisingly for the oncoming years. Israel today is one-third smaller than it was 10 years ago in population. One-third of our people was destroyed, but as we find in our prophets, "Live thou in your blood - rise from your blood - build upon ruins" - that's always been the secret of our destiny and the key to our survival - so Israel today and through the oncoming years will know how to rise from its suffering and to build a nobler, finer life out of the ruins of the past.

Next week I shall share with you my thinking about the 100 years of religious and cultural history of the world, with special reference, of course, to the religious and cultural history of our own people during this century.