



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Reel  
171

Box  
62

Folder  
3

In the silence of the night, 1910.

# In the Silence of the Night

Abraham H. Silver.

The deep-voiced church-bell of Toledo had tolled forth the hour of midnight, when a silent group of lank and worn forms flitted sinisterly along the shadows of old, decaying houses through many a sinuous, gloom-enshrouded lane. Warily they stole along, mute, death-like; with their fiery, gleaming eyes piercing through the heavy hoods that hid their faces.

Suddenly they halted.

"'Tis this," came the deep, suppressed tone of the foremost, whose gait and mien betokened a leader.

"'Tis this," echoed the group in a cold sepulchral tone.

"Attend!"

"We do, O, most revered Alphonso Barnito—Head of the Holy—"

A movement of impatience from the leader; and the group was silent.

"Remove your hoods!"

And by the shivering rays of a solitary lantern he scrutinized each countenance, flinching each eye before his piercing, searching glance.

"'Tis well"—he muttered at last.

A heavy oppressive silence brooded over the group. Each eye was riveted on the leader in an agony of expectation.

The leader solemnly drew from his bosom a small, glistening poniard, and raising it aloft, cried in a fierce, threatening, subdued voice:

"What to him who betrays the secrets of our holy tribunal?"

"Death!" echoed the low, sonorous tone.

"What to him who betrays the orders of our holy tribunal?"

"Death!" came the cold, morose reply.

"What to him who disobeys the orders of our holy tribunal?"

"Death!" was the weird, eerie whisper.

"Now into the house!—Fernando's—the Jew—at midnight he is praying—the servants are ours—Christ be with ye—into the house!"....

Fernando was praying.

Soft, fading wringlets of incense, writhing and curling, filled the atmosphere with a soft, drowsy perfume. Phantastically played the flitting shadow of Fernando and the flickering, parti-colored rays of the censer upon the walls of the silent, secluded chamber.

He prayed and his swelling, thrilling, doleful tones sounded so hopeless, so melancholy in that gloomy, obscure chamber. He prayed, and his voice with that deep, drone, rich oriental melody sounded so sweet, yet so sad; so lonesome, so despairing. It was the prayer of a yearning, longing heart; of a doomed soul in agony; of a lost wandering lamb lashed furiously by relentless rains and storms. And those tones vexed louder and louder, sweeter and sadder, as if the accumulated woes of his sorrowful life were poured forth in that one earnest, ecstasied prayer—

"Help us Father!—Most High—Most Dear! Deliver thy children—thy lost and straying children . . . my child . . ."

And the body of Fernando shook convulsively, and a heart-rending groan escaped his bosom.

And on the threshold stood Barnito...

He was lost in thought. Something was seething within him. This mystic dimness; that stooping form; those circling, swimming vapors; did he not know them? . . . Did he not "feel" them? . . .

And the withering, vanishing recollections of a childhood scene, long smouldering under the ashes of Time, came back to him: It was in such a chamber, filled with gloomy shadows, that he was; he and many others—of weary, languid eyes—of wrinkled, worn faces, and of such sweet, sad sighs. Yes, yes, he remembers; they were praying. . . . Then there arose a slight tumult—then followed a crash—a cry—he fell—and awoke in the thin, bony hands of an emaciated stranger . . . with flashing



eyes; yes it was here—here—and that swaying, kneeling figure is . . . is his—

"Who art thou?" broke in the shivering, voice of Fernando upon his reveries; "what seekest thou?"

Silence and a sigh.

"Speak! speak! for Heaven's sake—speak! remove that hood!"

Barnito tore down his hood.

Fernando took a step nearer, staggered, shook convulsively, and uttered a wild, maddening shriek—

"David! David! My—"

"Stop!" cried Barnito, "stop! don't speak! into the next chamber, thou—thou infidel! . . . into the next chamber! . . ."

The monks had entered. From the next chamber came the sounds of suppressed sobbing and the occasional whisper of "Father,—David,—my son . . ." The monks stood bewildered. And then the gruff, grumly voice of Barnito was heard—

"Put on this hood!—thou accursed dog—lest thy fellow infidels hinder the execution of our holy mission."

There was a long pause; and again Barnito's voice was heard addressing them—

"Take this Jewish dog! lead him to the most High Inquisitorial Board!—I will quickly follow . . . the password?"

"Arcana coelestia" . . .

A stooping, trembling, hooded form emerged from the darkness of the other room. He was quickly and silently bound, gagged and led away.

\* \* \*

He stood amidst the threatening, blood-besmeared, gapping instruments of torture unflinched; erect, imposing.

His lips were compressed; his eyes flashed fire.

"Remove the hood!"

The figure moved not.

"Remove that hood!"

The form stirred not.

"Tear down that hood!" shrieked the foremost of the tribunal, rising and trembling with rage.

The hand of the torturer tore down the hood.

Before them stood Barnito . . .

## Letter of Commendation

Dear Editors:

The name of our Jewish martyr is a symbol of unselfish devotion and self-sacrifice. Yet no greater reverence could be paid to his life than the dedication of the hearts and souls of Israel's youth to the cause he left to the rising generation for completion.

Your members have emulated the name they display on their banner, by years of unceasing toil for their people. They are the first recruits in the army of Israel's youth. They have taught the hosts of Zion that the hope of redemption lies with the rising generation.

But the task is still unfinished.

Though from all sides our Jewish youth is responding to-day to the call for Zion, our immediate task is one of training and disciplining. Israel's curse during all of its past has been disunity, internal strife.

It must be indelibly stamped on our minds; that if we cannot labor hand in hand, side by side, united, compromising for harmony, burying all personal grievances, sacrificing our pet ideas for the sake of peace and good will; if Young Judaism fails in her attempt for true Jewish brotherhood, then Theodor Herzl has lived in vain.

DAVID SCHNEEBERG.

Sec'y Young Judae.

