



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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172

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63

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105

Jewish Publication Society, 1925.

1. In this age - It is indeed refreshing to come from.
2. The People of the Book.
 - ① Esp. time of Am. until last decade
3. Our race - sterile.
 - ① In midst of unprec. prosperity -
 - ② Apart from an occasional super
 - ③ The few scholars
4. In real of rd speculation - we did nothing.
 - ① Mind of brain - nothing -
 - ② Prophetic - Echo - leadership. Taussig is Kohler.
 - ③ Hunger - repetition. Plato in ter.
5. Youth to maturity nothing to seek.
Hebrew - Kit Or - Bible - commentaries.
6. Drifting - we were not rooted. project program.
tempest - new doctrines.
 1. Sociologic phase. O. T.
 1. In a rel. - ... Italeri - Pakudach.
 2. Mitah.
 2. Rel. Communism - Pol. Consider - Ulcun.
 1. few People as Essent. appt. of Jud. Art Bill
 2. Mission, Self-preservation.
 3. Secular Nation also

- . (c 300) / 68 / 6022,

7. Nothing known. we suspected -

1. Change. but possible - Study. Student learning
2. We can realize... channels
3. J. P. Society - no prejudice
4. Same as history etc.
 - ② Public - groups, ③ Movement
 - ④ Classics ⑤ Anthology, ⑥ Disputed
 - works, ⑦ Plata, ⑧ Bellevue
5. Open Forum.

8. Remove Refractor. - Sun. Create.

1. but 5 part only.
2. Am. Dr. at valley & dead line.
- richest province Golden Age

9. ³Shrubby Every where.

1. Better policy - Bialist
2. Veh. university - col

1. We have been an Echo
2. The foundations of an Empire.

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver's Address at the Annual Meeting of the Publication Society, Held in Pittsburgh, Sunday, March 22-25

"In this age, friends, in which so much of our energy is absorbed in fund solicitation and in various kinds of therapy against anti-Semitism, it is good to find one's self in an assemblage of men and women such as this, who have been summoned here by the appeal not of spectacular philanthropy, or a racial scare, but by the quiet, winsome appeal of Jewish thought and Jewish learning. Frankly, I feel it refreshing to get away from the noisy mart, where men are variously engaged in traffic and commerce or charity, or where men are feverishly arguing and gesticulating against all kinds and manners of conveyed or applied anti-Semitism, and come here among my fellow-Jews and find people eager to exchange counsel or to listen to a discussion of things that really matter, the abiding and enduring things, the things of the mind and the things of the spirit.

"It seems strange but nevertheless true that the people of the Book, the people whose dynamic genius expresses itself in its fullest in books; the people whose life, as sustained right down the ages by the spirit which lives in the letters of a Book, it seems strange that this people of the Book has in the past wandered into alien fields, where it found a dry and broken cistern in place of the wells of living water.

"We are forgetting that we are the people which gave life to the Book, which derives its life from the Book. And that has been particularly true in our own land here. Up to quite recently, up to the last decade that was very true of American life. Recently the events of the world and certain events in our own land have thrown us back sharply and uncomfortably to a realization that the educational and intellectual and scholarly needs of American history are the most vital and most immediate needs.

"Our race, in this land at least, was becoming culturally sterile. In the realm where we most excelled in the past, in the realm of ethics, or theology, of spiritual creation, we here in America produced nothing of first rate importance. Apart from a few inspired sermons and a few ethical pamphlets, we here in this land enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and brought nothing comparable to the monumental achievements of our forefathers in the Middle Ages and certainly nothing comparable to the achievements of our fellow non-Jews today as records their contributions to the problems of orientating traditional faith here, as to bring it into consonance and accord with modern thought and modern life.

"The few scholars who remained faithful and who in quiet concentration carried on the work in the field of Jewish learning, these few scholars were gifts—gifts which Europe sent to America.

"You take, for example, the department of religious thought and speculation, that department in which the mind of the Jew from the earliest times was most alert, inquisitive and active. We are accustomed to think of the religion of the Jew and the spiritual values of Judaism. We forget that the Jew has had a marvelously equipped intellectual apparatus, the mind, which functioned triumphantly right down the ages. A mind that was constantly seeking, searching, debating, selecting, rejecting all the meat and casting the rind aside of every philosophic notion or wisdom that the world presented to him, or everything which might be used in augmenting the spirit of the race, in

intensifying Jewish life and Jewish religion.

"The Jew never isolated himself, the Jew never ghettoized himself mentally. The Jew welcomed the charm and the grace and the beauty of foreign culture into the tents of Shem, whether it was Saadia or Maimonides or Gabirol, the Jewish mind was ceaselessly thinking. It was seeking to readjust itself and its faith to the most advanced scientific and philosophic thought of the particular age. It wanted Judaism to be vigorous and alive and effective in the lives of men and not an embalmed bit of antiquity, an historical curio.

"Now this learning somehow was dormant in American Israel, with the result that the Jew in America had

with that ancient hunger for divinity that throbbed through the soul of Israel from the time of Abraham to this day, that this hunger is surfeited and stilled in Israel.

"Our people hunger for religious thought; our people thirst for the waters of salvation. Our people stood in the midst of their life's perplexities and they sought for some steadfast purpose. They were seeking, but what did we give them? Knowledge? Truth grounded in the past of our race? Inspiration which derives from the vast traditions? No. We gave them as food certain hackneyed repetitions, moral platitudes washed down with a shallow intellectualism. We didn't satisfy their hunger. From

swept over us likely to overthrow us and any gust of any new doctrine that had any novelty in it was a spectacular menace and threatened to overthrow us.

"We groped in the dark. You take for example, the various movements which developed in Jewish life in this country in the last generation or two and see if these movements were directly traceable to the lack of acquaintanceship with Israel's literature and the tradition of our people. You take, for example, the sociological phase in American Jewish religious life. Some of our leaders discovered that Israel had in olden times Prophets and that these Prophets preached of righteousness and justice. When the Western world rediscovered the Old Testament in the last fifty or sixty years, they began to lay stress upon the social side of religion as against the exclusively theological side of religion, and so our leaders carried away by what was transpiring in other folds, began not only to imitate them, but to excel in imitating them. They began to reduce Judaism to a system of glorified almsgiving. They reduced Judaism to a grand system of sociology. They stripped it to the bare bone of physical formalism. So that in place of a religion such as Israel has, a religion rich in colorfulness, a religion quickened with divine impetus, a religion which held the promise of communion with God to those who seek Him in truth and in cleanliness of heart, in place of a religion of majestic grandeur, of intensity, the religion of a Halevi, the religion of a Luzzatto, we gave them ethical maxims. They forgot, or perhaps they did not know, that the code is after all only the spokes rotating from the central religious impulse within the flame that rises from the heart of religious mystic spiritual fervor.

"They spoke glibly of Micah's definition of religion. 'Thou hast been told, O man, but to do justly, to love mercy,' and they expostulated upon these two principles of Micah's definition and somehow overlooked to dwell upon that last, the most important part of religion and of Judaism, 'To walk humbly with God.' Religion, according to Judaism, is walking humbly with God. 'Walk with Him and be thou perfect.' Religion is the seeking of kinship with divinity and reaching for divine comradeship. 'I belong to my beloved God and my beloved God belongs to me.'

"This sociological trend of American Judaism would never have been set in motion if the leaders and the led had been grounded in the traditions of the people, in knowledge, in acquaintanceship with the mind and spirit of our race which twenty-five centuries labored to produce. And not having that acquaintanceship, they groped in the dark, they followed a will-of-the-wisp. They were an echo of what others were doing and what others were thinking.

"You take, for example, this very movement that developed in Jewish life. It had its precedent in other lands. This attempted to reduce Jewish life to a religious community. This attempted to make of Judaism a religious denomination. Brushing aside lightly with disregard to fact and history that the people of Israel was just as great an essential of Judaism as the Bible of the Jew, for the people created the Bible. These leaders of our people not grounded in the soil, the rich soil of the intellectual life of the people, suddenly rediscovered the mission of Israel, and

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Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

lost his prophetic voice. The Jew became an echo. The Jew lost leadership in spiritual matters. He became a timid, wistful follower. He lost the power to make tremendous affirmation. Lacking the past he could not project himself into the future. He was aimlessly drifting. There was a drought in our land, a famine. A famine not for bread, but for the word of the living God and with the rare and blessed doles of occasional grace that a Schechter or a Kohler gave to the starving mind and soul of American Israel, there was famine everywhere in the land, and the people were hungry for the word of the living God.

"Don't tell me, friends, that the Jew has lost himself in materialism and that the Jew is not concerned

the child to the grown man in the past we had nothing to give them.

"In our religious schools we lacked text books. We lacked juvenile literature for the growing boy and girl; for the Jewish man and woman we had no authentic, attractive literature to give them. Why, even the Bible, our Bible, the story of the spirit of our race, even our Bible, was not accessible to them except in an alien garb. And as far as the commentaries of the Bible and as far as the expositions of the Bible were concerned, these things were entirely in non-Jewish hands.

"What was the result? The result was that up to comparatively recent years we were drifting, we had no roots and not having any roots in our past, in three thousand years, why we would be subject to any tempest that

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER'S ADDRESS AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PUBLICATION SOCIETY, HELD IN PITTSBURGH, SUNDAY, MARCH 22-25

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it came to them as a new revelation, that mission of Israel, which was propounded in matchless magnificence by that Isaiah of the exile to whom Israel and Israel's faith, and Israel's mission were one. They preached the mission of Israel, forgetting the part of that mission was the preservation of the Jewish people—self-preservation.

"Then recently there has developed another tendency for Jewish life, due I maintain to the absolute lack of intimate knowledge of the deep channels of Jewish life and thought. In Jewish life there are cross currents and there are eddies that have always been in every generation, but there have always been a few deep channels where the mighty waters of the race course all the time, and must continue to move along these channels. There has developed in recent years a secular nationalism among us. People have arisen who speaking in the name of the Jew, speak of him merely as a racial or nationalistic or a possible political entity without reference to his religious mission and his religious destiny. These people speak also of the Jew as though he were like, or should become like unto other peoples, forgetting that of the Jew it was said, 'He cannot, he must not be entirely like unto other nations.' They speak of secular nationalism as regards the Jew, as if the Jew who endured the hostilities of eighteen centuries, the augmented fate of the world's exile and inquisition in order that he might emerge as another Montenegro or another little kingdom of the Hadjes.

"To the Jew, life without the flaming theophany was no match. To the Jew, political life, national life without a spiritual and religious motive was inconceivable. To the Jew 'Israel and the Torah and God were one.'

"I say, friends, we were driven groping in the dark, because we did not know. We could not even develop properly. We could not even change and evolve consistently, consecutively because we did not know our past. To change you must first know what you are changing from and why. Even the torch of the revolutionist is kindled by the student's lamp. Before a Robespierre, before a Mirabeau, there has to come a Rousseau and a Voltaire and a Diderot. Knowledge, accurately followed, must persist in logical evolution, whether it is in politics or in morals or in religion. And our leaders have been blindly thrust in the dark, hiding, groping, following imitations because we were not following definite tendencies, not knowing what these tendencies were.

"So that some years ago the more thoughtful Jews of America began to realize that if American Israel is ever to live an intelligent creative life it must begin to study, it simply must begin to read, to read its own literature. It must begin to understand how our forefathers met the problems which in all likelihood are the self-same problems the world is facing today; how they met the philosophic innovations of their days; how they adjusted themselves to life and what was their strategy? And a group of these peaceful, far-visioned men organized this society under whose auspices you are assembled this evening, the Jewish Publication Society of America. Undramatical, unspectacular, unheralded because things of the Book cannot receive the universal acclaim that things of the body do. But quietly and steadily, through a period

of almost forty years, this society, bound to no dogma, associated by no prejudice, championing no cause except the cause of truth and of Jewish truth, this society quietly, but steadily, carried on the work of enlightenment. It opened the treasure troves of our past. It opened windows in our minds. It gave us history. It gave us biography. It gave us an intelligent understanding of the great movements which have taken place in Jewish life. It gave us for the first time an intelligent translation of the past things which have been written in mediaeval Jewish literature in the original. It translated our Bible for us, that Book which is the authentic record of every mode of human life. That Book which has molded the lives of countless generations of man in the four corners of the earth. That Book which has inspired so much of the noblest creation in art and literature. That Book which after twenty-five centuries is still as fresh and as vigorous and as charming and as moving as it was the day it left the mouth of the sage, seer or psalmist. That Book which is still potent to inspire a modern drama like Jeremiah. That book which is still interesting enough to evoke a new drama of Moses. That

Book which is still vigorous enough to dictate human thought in the twentieth century. That Book this society made accessible to us, to thousands who are no longer able to read and study it in the original.

"This society has also set about to publish the best of Jewish classics. This society has given us intelligent discussion of modern Jewish problems. This society is taking upon itself the duty of issuing contemporaneous Jewish history upon which we can build intelligent thinking. This society has been a veritable sesame to the treasure troves of our people's past, and really it is helping to remove the reproach which was once made of the Jews.

"A great rabbi once said, speaking of the laxity of his day and the ignorance that prevailed in his day, very much like the ignorance prevalent today: 'Children, our fathers plowed fields. Our fathers sowed seeds. Our fathers harvested and threshed and baked the bread—the bread of life—and we haven't mouths with which to eat.' Our fathers wrote books, great books, epoch-making books, and we haven't the eyes with which to read them. An organization such as this is helping to remove this reproach. It is giving us eyes to read, and perhaps is helping us somehow to be able to sow seeds; for I am a man of faith, and I believe in the future of Jewish life in America. I believe that we are moving toward the golden age of Jewish life in this land. I believe that American Israel is not a valley

of dry bones. I believe that the spirit of our race is sturdy today in the midst. We are the richest brethren in universal Israel. We are perhaps the largest center of Jewish life today, with a possible exception of one. We are a people comparatively well organized. We are here a blending of all elements of the diaspora, and the last few years and the war and the events which followed the war have enkindled a Jewish loyalty which has done a reconnaissance of Jewish life which augurs well for the future. There have been more scholars and academies for Jewish learning established in our lands in the last fifty years. There is a renaissance, there is an awakening, and I believe that American Jew, if he intends increasingly to foster Jewish learning, such Jewish scholars, in order to make possible for Jewish thinkers to devote themselves quietly in their studies to their important work, to enable them to publish their work, if American Israel continues to organize its education facilities so that every Jewish child will have a Jewish education not a smattering of a few pretty Biblical stories and a few charming anecdotes, but an intensifying Jewish training, a training into the literature of the past of his people, and inculcating in them a love for their past and a hope for the future, I feel we can look forward to the golden age in this land that will eclipse the golden age in Spain.

"I am encouraged in this belief not only in America but throughout the



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world there seems to be a steady growth in Jewish life. When I read of one Jew giving one hundred thousand dollars to help Jewish writers; when I read of another Jew giving his entire fortune to translate the classics into Hebrew—not as we are wont to do—to translate the Hebrew into the vernacular, but to translate it into Hebrew; when I read of a Ber-covitch, of a Tchernichevsky, and a Schneyer and a Frishman, the literature of whom excels the best of the Spanish Jewish literature, I feel justified in my confidence. And when I read with prayerful joy in my heart that within ten days on Mount Scopus the Hebrew University will be formally opened, I cannot help but feel that we are seeing 'the footsteps of the Messiah.' For however humble the efforts of that university will be, and they must be humble, they are still prophetic and symbolic of future greatness.

"It is the ingathering of the spirit. It is the renaissance of the spirit of a people that will not be crushed. The doors of the third Temple are opening and 'the spirit of the race' which wandered in a hundred alien abodes, unabashed and wistful, she is returning to her own mounting, her own threshold. In a hundred fields we

Officers Elected

The following officers were elected to serve the ensuing year:

Simon Miller, Philadelphia, president; Adolph S. Ochs, New York, first vice president; Horace Stern, Philadelphia, second vice president.

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(The address of Dr. Silver was stenographically reported by Miss Caroline Lowenthal.)

ROUMANIAN JEW LEAVES ESTATE FOR DORMITORY AT BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY

Will Accommodate Both Christian and Jewish Students

Bucharest, March 24 (J. T. A.)—An estate of thirty million lei for the purpose of establishing a dormitory at the University of Bucharest, was left by Anton Gross, Roumanian Jewish merchant, who died here.

The trustees, according to the will, are to be the president of the Jewish Temple in Bucharest, the Rabbi, the dean of Bucharest University and a representative of the Roumanian Ministry of Education.

One-half of the dormitory is to accommodate Jewish students, the other half, Christian students, according to specifications of the will.

