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

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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80th anniversary of the Temple, 1930.

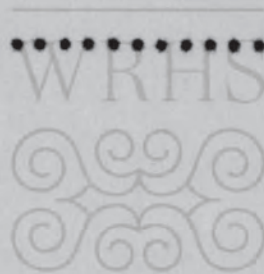
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EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

OF

CONGREGATION TIFERETH ISRAEL.

CLEVELAND HOTEL

MAY 26, 1930.  
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NEWTON D. BAKER: Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen, I remember reading once in Bergson's rather long essay on "Laughter," in which he undertakes to analyze and trace to their sources the causes that induce the phenomenon in which we all rejoice known as laughter, that he says some of the causes are quite obscure, and he illustrated it by an incident which happened in France, of a man who went into a country parish church, took his seat on a rear bench alongside of another Frenchman, and listened to the sermon of the pastor.

The pastor spoke with great eloquence and great vehemence, and so controlled the emotions of his congregation that at times he had them laughing and at other times deeply moved to tears, and then by the mastery of his art he would summon them back again from distress into a pleasant frame of mind, and so seemed to hold them in the hollow of his hand. But throughout all this the other occupant of the rear pew with the visiting guest remained entirely unmoved; he neither smiled nor wept, and when the congregation was dispersed the visitor said to this chance acquaintance on the rear seat, "Explain this to me. This man has spoken with apparently very great eloquence; he has controlled the emotions of his congregation; everybody in the church but you has laughed or wept at his command, and you have remained entirely unmoved. What is the explanation?" His friend said to him, "Well,



sir, you see, I belong to another parish."(Laughter)

Now it might well be, I suppose, that since in a secular way I belong to another parish than that to which you all belong, you might fear that there was some lack of sympathy between us; but as a matter of fact, I have no such fear. I have long known that these parish differences are the superficial differences among us, and since Mr. Strauss, of New York, and I have been joint chairman of the National Conference on Jews and Christians, I have had occasion more deeply and more fully to realize how entirely superficial most of those differences are.

Nevertheless, since we do belong to different parishes, it will not be expected that I can indulge in any illuminating remarks either about the past, from a religious point of view, of your temple, or about its future. From a civic point of view, I might very well give myself the pleasure of adding to what your chairman has said about the Temple. When I first came to Cleveland in 1899 almost the first thing I heard was that I must go to hear Rabbi Gries, and when I did go to the Temple to hear him, I found that he spoke with the flaming eloquence and conviction of an ancient prophet, and I soon learned that he and the Temple under his leadership were among the great civic interests and institutions of this then growing city, and I think if Cleveland can be said to have come to a realizing sense of its own civic soul in the last thirty



years, that the contribution which he made and which the Temple then made, and is now making to that cause, is a very substantial contributing force.

But I pass by the Temple in order that I may draw some larger conclusions for your reflection tonight. The smallest church in the world is in Minnesota. I do not know its denomination, but it was originally built to seat seven persons. Regular services have been held in that church for something over forty years, I am told. I remember a church, not quite so small, down in my native village, a little Episcopal church to which I went as a child. It is a very shabby little place. When I first knew it it was only half its present size, and now it is only half the size of any other church. I was taken to it as a child; our family belonged there. When I reflect back upon my boyhood in Martinsburg, one of the things that rises in my mind is that little church. Around it clustered memories of the most sacred character; and I suspect that church was a little snobbish. If I can remember the attitude of the people who attended in my boyhood, there was a notion among us that it had kind of a cultural monopoly in the community. We had no doubt that the adherents of other churches would all go to heaven in the end, but we thought with a little more difficulty than with us. (laughter).

I think there were some people in that church



who had a very special feeling of its superiority because it had a kind of hagiology of its own; and perhaps there was a Roman tint to some of the worshippers there who had committed to some of its saints a special intercessory value. But however it may be, there was that modest little village church which had for generations sheltered a select company of cultured people who were valuable members of that community, and who through that church traced back their own right to think well of themselves and their mission, and to think highly of their calling in this world, back through generations and centuries of people who preceded them in the same faith and of the same ideals.

Now of course there is no sort of comparison between that little unpretentious church and this great temple with which you have decorated the eastern end of our city, and which challenges the eye and summons the admiration of all beholding it; and yet underneath the stone of your temple, back of its splendid exterior, there is something higher and finer than the temple of stone, and that is the temple of the spirit and the tradition it represents. And so I get to the thing I want to talk to you about, and that is the value of traditions in this world. There probably never was a time when one needed more to reflect on that subject than now, because this modern world of ours is dizzy with its own inventions.



Science has been prosecuting its inquiries into all of the unexplored recesses of the unknown, in bringing out new laws and new substances and new combinations and inventions. Vendors have taken the results of research science and as engineers between science and practice have made the bridge over which we now march in a material splendor, the like of which the world has never seen; and every day summons forth some new contrivance and contraption that adds to the comfort often, and often to the discomfort, of mankind. And as we moderns look at this modern world of ours, we are, in the first place, immensely proud of it, and perhaps justly; and then I think we are bewildered by it, and we imagine that progress means more electric lights and more radios and more airplanes and more contrivances of a physical kind; and I think we are likely to forget that with all the great scientists and all the great inventors we really haven't added much to the part of life that counts most,-- the moral part, to the contributions that were made first by Moses and Isaiah and Plato and Jesus.

We talk about the present generation, particularly the younger generation, about whom some of us elders are very much troubled, and we wonder what kind of a world they are going to make of this world of ours, with the new found freedom, with the complete breaking down of conventions and the apparent absence of traditional control.



Scientists are now writing books of "Why We Behave Like Human Beings," and "The Mind in the Making," and we are being told on every hand that the laws of the mind are finally being ascertained, and the endocrine glands, if they are in good order, make geniuses of us, and if the endocrine glands happen to get into a state of malfunction, that we may be any kind of a thing (laughter).

No doubt there is a very great deal of truth in all of it. The last word has not yet been said by scientists, and the solemn fact in this world is that science is much, but it is far from all. After all, human life is made for happiness, and happiness does not come out of things but comes out of thoughts, and after you have got money enough to buy a certain degree of comfort, the money that you add to that is all invested in discomforts (laughter).

I had a very striking illustration of it not a great while ago. I happened to be dining at a New York restaurant. The head waiter, who knew me by sight, came over to me and said something about a political convention which was going on at the moment - and which I will not repeat because it has more or less controversial characteristics - but the phrases in which he made his observation struck me so forcibly that I immediately asked him something about himself. A very handsome young man he was, and he said, "Oh, Mr. Secretary, I am Greek." Of



course then I thought it was necessary for me to tell him how much I knew about the Greeks, and I began with Homer, which gave me a fair start. He held up his hand and he said, "No, I am a modern Greek." (laughter). I then said to him, "Of course the modern Greek is a great dramatist." Then he discussed modern Greeks for a few minutes, and then made this extraordinary statement. He said, "I make my living as a waiter in this restaurant, and when I take off my waiter's clothes I go to an apartment which I have here in New York, where I live, and the walls of that apartment are lined with classical Greek writings, and I spend my leisure living with Plato and Aristotle and Sophocles and Euripides and Aeschylus; and no man is richer than I. I am only a waiter when I am making my living, but when I am living I live with the greatest minds that have ever been at work" (applause).

Now of course you and I all know people who have a half a million dollars and are dreadfully grieved because they haven't a million. Can't we take a lesson from that waiter? And isn't he richer than any of us with all the money we may have? And aren't really the permanent and enduring satisfactions of life the intellectual and the emotional satisfactions?

I remember a story that Dr. Oliver Wendall Holmes used to tell of an old lady whom he knew. She was nearly ninety; she was very ill, and thought fatally ill.



Dr. Holmes thought it would be very interesting to discover what remained in her mind after having lived ninety years, after having lived through the American Revolution, and seeing this young country, originally a scattered group of colonies, grow from that unpromising beginning into one of the most puissant and superb nations the world has ever seen. Her experience covered this long range of extraordinary events; and so he went over to have a talk with her. As he sat by her bedside he said to her, "Mrs. Jones, you have lived a long time; you have seen wonderful things take place in the world. What, in this long life of yours, has really given you the greatest satisfaction?" The old lady thought about it for a few minutes and said, "Well, I always was very fond of my victuals." (laughter).

That is a very humorous illustration, but what she had was the satisfaction of the wants she had, and if we will just cultivate ourselves to have spiritual wants and intellectual wants, they can be satisfied for the asking, and when we come to be ninety and look back upon our long lives, we will not sigh because we didn't have yachts, because we were not able to play golf three days a week; we will not be dissatisfied because we had a Packard and not a Rolls-Royce, but we will say, "I began early to want the things that are intrinsically true and intrinsically beautiful, and I found that without a penny in my pocket I could see the most beautiful things in the



world, I could hear the most beautiful things in the world, and I could have the company and companionship of the very elect intellects of the world."

Well, now, that is a far cry, perhaps, from tradition, and yet is it a very far cry? We treat the present world as though it had just begun when we came in it. As a matter of fact, it has been here a very long time, and when we try to draw rules of behavior, we draw them sometimes a priori and from abstract considerations. We forget that no man was born on his first birthday, but that he comes into the world carrying with him the traditions of his people and his race, and that the nobility of those traditions affect every thought he subsequently thinks.

And so now I get down to what seems to me the significance of the Temple. Here is a Temple eighty years old. It represents a people who for four thousand years have stood in the world welded together into a compact mass in defense of their ideals by a common tradition. In this modern world, which needs more than anything else cement to draw it together, where disrupting influences are at work all the time,--the thing this world needs for international peace, for international cooperation, is the cement of a common tradition. And what Israel has had for four thousand years mankind needs now more than it needs any other one thing: a recognition of its common



interests which are superior to all of the disrupting influences that at present threaten.

And when I see a great congregation like this, I think it serves these purposes; that the children who are there at the Sabbath school will look back on it in the future year, as I look back on the little church in Martinsburg; they will not have so lowly a picture of it from a physical point of view; they will remember its splendor and its beauty, and they will realize the profound truth that nothing can be too splendid or too beautiful as a shrine for the religious things. But the chief thing they will remember about it is that it was there they heard the moral precepts upon which their own lives were successfully guided; that it was there they heard the tradition of their people from its earliest history down to now, and got caught up in the cementing influence of that tradition, and were made to feel that the things which were loyal to them were worthy, and the things which were disloyal to them were unworthy.

Who are the greatest people in the world at the moment? I am speaking of nations now. Quite obviously the British. I recognize the fact that it is still true, as ~~Coolidge~~ said fifty or sixty years ago, that every great idea in the world had to pass through France in order to be generalized and disseminated. I think that is still true. The efficiency of the French intellect and the facility of



their language still make them the great generalizers and disseminators of the great modern civilization. But the greatest people in the world at the present moment are not the French. In all human likelihood the British are the greatest. That little island for generations has governed half of the people in the world and half of the land in the world; and they have done it not so much by force of arms,--Great Britain has had a good many wars,--most of them fought by other people,--they have done it not by force of arms but by force of character.

Those of you who are familiar with the Britisher as he lives on his own island realize that there are certain traditional courses drawn up which it is possible for an Englishman to follow. There are certain things that are not done, and because they are not done, because they are antagonistic to the British tradition, they are just not done by any of them. During the war in the trenches the Tommy - not the cultured class from Cambridge and the other universities, not the cultured class in the nobility and the aristocrats, but the Tommy from the streets of London, had limits of propriety, of contact, which enforced upon him a consideration for the rights of others and a regulation of his own conduct which were as fixed as iron bands about him. And they are deepset in the British character, as a part of the tradition of being an Englishman.



And so what this modern world needs is to recognize the fact that we cannot manufacture out of hand a moral and cultural civilization; that we can make arbitrary rules of conduct based upon a priori and abstract reason, but we have to recognize the experience of the race as the basis of any acceptable morality; that we have to re-endow the generation to whom we are about to leave the governors of this world with this blessed thing called tradition.

That is the message that I have to convey. I congratulate this great Temple congregation and the fact that it is dedicated to a great tradition. Whether or not Renan was right in his belief that monotheism was born of the sameness of the desert, I of course cannot know; but Israel has been the guardian of monotheistic religion; Israel has been guardian of certain great fundamental morality, the tradition of which, beginning with Moses, lasts down to the present hour. They are a part of the tradition by which modern society must be saved, if it can be saved at all. As your Temple is so splendidly representative of that tradition, I pray that she may continue her mission, that her prosperity may go on unabated, that her walls may be filled to overflowing, so that it will be necessary for her to subdivide and set up other congregations that may follow in her spirit and be a blessing not only to the community in which she now flourishes, as her present



congregation has been ever since I have known it, but that the blessings of her fidelity to all this tradition may extend to all mankind. (applause).

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MR. FELIX M. WARBURG: Mr. President and ladies and gentlemen, I am so absolutely in accord with what our good friend has said, and I have such admiration for him for a great many years, that I would like to subscribe to every word he has said and take my seat. I appreciate that you agree with me. I also approve the way you applauded the young singer. You might prefer to hear him than my speech. But the master of ceremonies has decreed differently, and I will try to be concise.

When I heard the last song it showed a picture to me differently than it impressed you. I heard this song the last time in Russia. I heard it sung in a colony of Jewish farmers who had lived in the city of Moscow, some of them in Kieff, and who had seen better days, perhaps as good days as you have here. They were transferred by a cruel fate to nothing. They were then saved by us from the gutters of Moscow and brought to self-support in the colonies. I spent a Saturday with them in the colonies. I witnessed a gathering of them on a Thursday evening, about two hundred people in a room of small



dimension. I saw the heads packed closer together than yours. The expressions were much more worn than yours, naturally, but the same light of ideals and love spoke out of their eyes. There wasn't a word of complaint; there was only the feeling of appreciation that they were helped over the terrible years that had been behind them; and when they sang at the end of the Sabbath the same song, perhaps not in the same spirit, I admired the courage of the people who had gone through what they had gone through, and greeted their Sabbath with their candles and sang their Sabbath eve full of hope and joyous melody, under circumstances as tragic as anyone could experience.

I took the cut of this room and the cut of that room, which I never forgot. I felt how happy you are to be here, and how courageous all over the world are the people who have gone through these terrible times, and with the idealism of Judaism before them, living and willing to live for the next few years until they are called away.

It is that spirit which this song has brought back, and while I am usually in a smiling humor, you must excuse me if this feeling of remembrance, which you have introduced in a pleasant way, has brought back a picture which is strong and powerful, but also very promising.

Tonight I am here not because you are eighty years old. That is a thing which does not impress me so much. As the speakers before me have said, Judaism



is so terribly old that eighty years is nothing. For the congregation of Tifereth Israel in this city to have achieved eighty years of success is something to be pleased about, but nothing extraordinary. But what is extraordinary is the work that you have done during that time. I come to Cleveland tonight for two reasons. Foremost I wish to tell your Rabbi Silver that I admire him tremendously. I came to tell him that. He is much more interesting to me, naturally, than this anniversary. He is a leader in the work which lies before us as Jews,-- a fighter, a dreamer, a prophet; and young Rabbi Silver's type is a thing to be cherished, to be honored with, to be hoped with, and to support in every possible way. We haven't got enough of it. I know what I am talking about, and that is why I am here to tell you. On his shoulders one does not hesitate to put weight; and wherever you will place it, be it ever so far away or nearby, your congregation and Judaism can rest assured that the responsibility of sober thinking expressed in beautiful words will always come wherever you are. (applause).

My second reason why I am here is that Cleveland is a teacher to us who have been so interested in social work. The master mechanic of social work, Mr. Baker, is with you. We in the rest of the United States are taking leads out of his book, out of your Cleveland book. We have formed unions, we have formed federations,



we have joint distribution committees, including every layer of Judaism, and have succeeded in doing so. You have done the same; you have done your bit in joint distribution work; you have done your bit in federation work, but you have gone further: you have done your share in the building up of a civic pride and a civic expression of good citizenship which you call Community Chest, which is extraordinary. New York is still in the status where some of us believe in city wide community chests. We have studied it, we believe in it, but you have gone one step further: you have done it and we have not.

It is true in our outrageously large city it is hard to concentrate on anything, it makes no difference what; there are so many things going on at the same time that the public gets dizzy, and they cannot concentrate on one thing, until you set the pace and you set the machinery going, unless you make a superhuman effort. A few years ago I came here and discussed with the people who are leaders in the Community Chest just how you are doing it, and I was amazed at the thoroughness of your co-work. I am told that your congregation has done its full share in it, and it is that spirit of community building which I praise and which I love. I cannot compete in making suggestions for social work in a town where Mr. Baker lives, and where my friend Mr. Goff used to live and started the Community Chest right here. You have taken



this over; and I bow to his name, I bow to his genius, and I know some of the work which Mr. Goff has set into motion has been very much helped and assisted by many of the members of the Jewish community in this town. I pay that respect with a great deal of reverence, and I know what Cleveland has done in showing the way in that respect.

You can't get away from the serious problems of that kind. I want to refer to an experience which I had somewhat similar to Mr. Baker's. He mentioned Homer. I went to Harvard years ago to see the Greek play. I had a book with me to assist me. I met Professor Wheeler there, and he asked me in the hotel, "What are you doing in Boston?" I said, "I came to see the Greek play." We went to the play. I was delighted; I was able to follow the Greek. After the play I saw Professor Wheeler again. He said, "How did you get on?" I said, "Awfully well. I could follow without the book to quite an extent." And he smiled and said, "Do you know, Warburg, it is a good deal easier to understand a foreign language when it is pronounced by your own countrymen." (laughter).

I felt somewhat hurt. A little later in New York when a modern Greek play was given by the modern Greeks I did not understand a single thing. (laughter).

Those are the experiences and those are the appreciations which we all have to learn, and I frankly confess that I have received from the people for whom I



have worked and with whom I have had the privilege of working shoulder to shoulder, infinitely more than what I have been able to give. I could point out to you all the friendships that have been based on work done together; the people who started with nothing but the knowledge of their specific work - and that is a lot - and no advantages and no introductions, and to see these people brought into the sunlight, to give them the platform that they can be heard, and to follow their lead is the greatest privilege that I know of.

Now you have shown the way in a good many things. There are many more things to be done in your community, even though your social work has been so excellent, and until some of the pressing things, such as the fight against the everlasting increase of nervous breakdowns and insanity, and other difficult things we find in our rapid city living, are conquered, neither you nor I have the right to rest. We have to form church groups, we have to learn from each other. You have formed congregations, and friendly congregations; you have formed city wide groups and Community Chests. We have to form chains that are even larger than that. I came here to tell you I had the privilege of talking to a smaller group today, and Rabbi Silver was very, very envious today because I was allowed to speak twice today. (laughter).

United States Jewry, as well as other faiths,



have to come together to fight the things which have to be fought, and to help the things which have to be helped. I had the privilege just recently to be in London, and much as I share the admiration of Mr. Baker for the English, and I subscribe to every word he said, the English nation has a good heavy load to carry, and it is very easy to criticize, and it is very easy for the Jews to criticize - they are awfully good at that. We have been successful in getting the groups of Jewry together. We have a united front; may we remain a united front and may we remain a disciplined front, where the whole regiment is not out of step because Isaac can't keep step with the rest.

We need a strong public opinion; we need a patient public opinion. We are now worried about many problems, be it soviet Russia, be it Palestine, be it Roumania, or almost everywhere where there are Jews living. There is only a degree of anti-Semitism; we find it everywhere, and we can only overcome these handicaps by helping people abroad to keep up their courage. I advise the people here by asking them to put their heads high, their chests out, and saying we are willing to work for our brethren wherever they are suffering. My experience has been that that pride and that self-respect wins you respect and wins you the satisfaction that you can do your bit for your fellowmen.



Just now Palestine, of which Rabbi Silver has long been an admirer, and which I have been won over to, has some problems to solve. I have had the great privilege of seeing a good deal of the prime minister. He wants to do the right thing. Let us be patient, and let us protest whenever something does not seem right, when we know all the facts,--let us protest and await to see what the results are. I am quite satisfied that the government in England wants to do the right thing with the mandate, and I hope that the future will show that my confidence has not been misplaced. Meanwhile, you who know how to ride and manage high horses, hold your horses.

It does not do any good to break loose and criticise, and you create bad will, when a man is sent to a country to meet friendly people who are to be helped by him. A snarling crowd is not apt to get the best treatment. I say this because wherever I go people want to know why things are permitted in this way or that way. Patience, pride, orderliness are qualities which I think bring us further than protests. I have been asked today by nearly everybody whom I meet what the situation is. I would like to give you at the same time the assurance that things are watched, that things are not as bad as some people like to express them that carry chips on their shoulders.

I cannot speak to you of the religious value of your Temple. After you have listened to such eloquence



as you did yesterday from your rabbi, after you have heard about the work and about the value of religion from your other speakers, all I can contribute of the value of religious work is my hope that that part of the Temple work that you as Jews belong to,--that the charity work is still within the Temple boundaries; and that is a field in which I have been somewhat busy. From the standpoint of that active work of helping people who are less fortunate than you, I congratulate you in what you have done in helping those of our people in this land who need assistance. You fortunately are saved the sight of those lands where today conditions are much better than they were, but where they are by no means as they should be.

As a messenger of good wishes, as a messenger from New York, I congratulate you most heartily, and I thank you on behalf of those Jews whom you have helped abroad, and I thank you also for your willingness to help them again when you are called upon. I am here as nothing else but a messenger of good will, a messenger of peace, and a messenger of hope. (Applause).

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