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“Modern Jewish Problems,” 1914 February 22.

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Modern Jewish Problems.

A DISCOURSE, AT TEMPLE KENESETH ISRAEL,
Philadelphia, Pa., February 22nd, 1914,

BY

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Of The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio.

There is one Jewish problem which affects profoundly the Jews of every land. One-half of the Jews of the world are groaning under the yoke. Israel's cry of affliction, of "Juden-schmerz" is heard 'round the world. How will our brethren be emancipated from the bondage of oppression under the Russian Pharaoh. No Jewish problem is comparable to it. Beside the bloody pogrom, or the bloodless pogrom, more destructive and devastating, all else sinks into nothingness.

Do we fear that the Jews of Russia will perish? Strange, is it not, none believes that Israel will be destroyed, even though it seem but a toy, helpless in the grasp of the giant Russian monster? The world has faith that whate'er betide with Russian despotism, Israel will survive.

The fearful pressure of the Russian Government upon her Jews compels burden upon all the free peoples of the world. Hundreds of thousands are driven into compulsory exile, to seek escape from hunger and starvation, from cruelty and the peril of death.

No language is strong enough to condemn Russia's inhumanity to Russia's own children. Of what crime against Russia have they been guilty? They are guilty of the same sin as are we. They have been born Jews and they refuse to desert the religion of their fathers. They scorn to betray their historic heritage.

If anything can be worse than the inhumanities which outraged even a callous world, worse than the governmental injustices which threaten the lives and happiness of millions, more iniquitous in the sight of civilization, are the political persecutions, destroying inalienable human rights—the God-given right to life, to liberty and the free pursuit of happiness. And the assault upon the right of conscience, upon human brotherhood and upon justice constitutes a crime against the very cause of civilization. How long yet e'er Russia will be summoned before the bar of public opinion to answer judgment before the tribunal of the nations?

When the crisis has passed and the pogroms have ceased and the ritual murder trial has ended, how quickly and easily we forget—we sons and daughters of Israel, who live in lands of freedom, who suffer no disabilities under the law.

Then anti-Semitism, with its myriad manifestations, is imagined to be the perplexing Jewish problem. Prejudice and hostile discrimination and social ostracism wound our sense of justice and disturb our peace of mind and soul. Over our heads hangs no Damocletian sword, but we are tormented and tortured by the pin-pricks of prejudice.

Exclusion and ostracism are most difficult to explain and yet more difficult to solve. Historic Israel has outlived the sword and the fire, the rack and the thumbscrew. Our unfortunate brethren have survived pogrom and butchery and the slander of ritual murder. We would ignore altogether prejudice and ostracism and social disabilities did they not warn against a greater peril. The burning sparks of hate and antagonism have power to set a land afire.

What is the cure for prejudice? Who is ready with the panacea? The antitoxin for this dangerous poison still awaits discovery. The cure is NOT in lamentation, nor in the bitter outcry of despair. False is the diagnosis that prejudice always has been, is, and forever will be; that prejudice is inborn and that hate is eternal. Such interpretation is both un-Jewish and un-American—un-Jewish in its rejection of the Messianic faith and of the expectation of justice—un-American in its denial of democracy. Prejudice *has been* through the centuries and in many countries. It *is* with individuals called civilized; but that it will be forever, it is un-Jewish and un-American to believe.

We must live down the historic hates, and endeavor to break down the barriers which the centuries have erected. Education, in time, will conquer world-wide ignorance. The growing sense of justice will overthrow age-old injustices. Shall we believe that the brotherhood of men will never receive true interpretation and just application?

How do we interpret the Jew to the nations? Do we wail, "We are in exile, everywhere in the world"? "Unless we dwell in our ancient fatherland we cannot live a Jewish life." Do we emphasize racial glory and appeal for racial separateness? If we proclaim national hopes and look forward to a national destiny apart from America, do we not justify the

charge that we are aliens and foreigners, and can never be assimilated?

Fruitful source of evil it is to proclaim or to imply that Jewish hopes and ideals are impossible of fulfillment in America; that our hearts center in Palestine. Unwise and perilous it is to create and deepen the false impression, already too prevalent, that Jews are an alien race in the midst of the nations.

Not sojourners in the land are we. The Jew came to America more than 250 years ago, with the Puritan and the Knickerbocker and the Cavalier. The Jew is here to stay. This is his land as much as any man's. Not even our recent newcomers are foreigners in the land of their adoption. Surely we who were born upon the soil of freedom are not alien in our own fatherland.

The true American spirit was revealed by Washington, writing to the Jews of Newport: "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship"; and by Lincoln, speaking in Independence Hall—the Declaration of Independence "gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but to all the world for all future time."

We can live a full and true Jewish life in America as well as in any land of the globe. Never in all the history of mankind has there been a country whose ideals and government more nearly realized the Hebrew prophecies. We are not less Jews because we are patriotic Americans, nor less American when we are loyal Jews.

Blessed are we who live under the aegis of the flag interpreted by Woodrow Wilson as "Alternate strips of parchment, upon which are written the rights of men, and little streams of blood, to vindicate those principles."

Our loyalty to America is not because it has been a land of promise, offering untold opportunities to the poor and to the oppressed of the world; nor because it has been a land of reality, where glorious promises have been fulfilled; but because it is our America, because its ideals and principles are our ideals and principles. Just as Zangwill's tribute to "the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labor and look forward." I love the very conception of America—the interpretation of Washington, the founder, and of Lincoln, the saviour of the Union—America, a land consecrated to liberty and justice!

Does not intellectual anti-Semitism present the most urgent Jewish problem? Behind the disguise of scholarship and under the pretense of scientific inquiry, the intellectual Anti-Semites would rob Jews of the distinction of their birthright. Even liberals in theology and radicals in religion, are persuaded to minimize the value of the Jewish contribution to human civilization? In Germany, a Chamberlain would emancipate mankind, fallen under the perversion of Semitic teaching; and a Sombart warns against the Jew as an economic peril. In England a Coit fears the Jew as a menace to national ideals, and even in America, a Warner conjures a Jewish specter. Yet, even the Jew haters are compelled to confess, though complainingly and regretfully, that Jewish principles dominate civilization, and that Hebrew ideals and Israel's moral law are the foundation of the established order.

When the ignorant world would relegate Judaism to the museum of antiquities we may smile with patience, but when the intellectual world refuses Israel due recognition and would discredit the significance of its historic contribution we cannot keep silent.

No people has contributed more than Israel to the religious thought and civilization of mankind. None has given to the race loftier and truer ideals and hopes more glorious.

Greece and Rome and Judea are often compared and contrasted. Each has given its distinctive contribution. Greece stamped its enduring impress upon art and architecture, upon culture and philosophy. Rome developed forms and institutions of government, and laid the foundations for law and the organization of society. Judea was gifted with the genius for religion. Immortal is its inspiration to the religious aspirations of the race. The Hebrew proclaimed the moral law to mankind. Matthew Arnold wisely taught: "The revelation which rules the world even now is not Greece's revelation, but Judea's—not the pre-eminence of art and science, but the pre-eminence of righteousness."

Ex-President Charles W. Eliot interprets the success of the Jewish race all over the world as "entirely due to its ideals, which have been of rare significance and rare strength and power."

Strongly Judge Stafford, of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, emphasizes the Jew's devotion to justice: . . . "The Jew saw with a clearness of vision never granted

to any other, and held to it with a courage as stubborn as ever stood against tide of battle—he saw that whatever the opposition, no matter what the persecution, no matter what the apparent power of the oppressor, justice was sure to triumph in the end. That is the vision and the faith that have made his record glorious. Those are the wings of song. That is the burning coal of prophecy. The reign of Messiah—what is it after all but the final, the permanent establishment of justice. . . . Israel's ideal of justice has taken permanent possession of the human mind."

The ideal of justice is the supreme goal of the race—of the human race. The Hebrew Messianic prophecies have become the dreams and the hopes of the noblest spirits of the present age.

Neither persecution nor pogrom, neither anti-Semitism, physical or intellectual, nor prejudice, nor social ostracism, presents *the* modern problem for the Jews of America. The question with us is not whether we shall be inspired with courage for martyrdom, or whether we shall have strength to refuse to surrender or to compromise the faith of our fathers. Is not our problem, Will we, Jews of America, free from peril and persecution, continue true and loyal Jews?

In every great city of the land we stand face to face with a moral crisis. Crimes among men and shame among women sully the historic name of Israel—crime and shame heretofore unknown among Jews.

We stand face to face with a religious crisis. The synagogue has failed to hold its sons and daughters, the immigrants and their children. How deeply we are concerned about the religion and moral life of the unfortunate poor and the immigrant. Why are we so altruistic? Why so blind to our own needs, to the necessities of our men and women, of our youth, of the children of the temples?

Israel has been loyal under the hammer of oppression and through the fires of persecution—the most marvelous illustration in history—a whole people loyal, through one hundred generations.

Not forever can we live upon the memories of the dead past, however glorious. The living generation awaits a message for the living present. Liberty is testing us more than the fires of persecution. Are we as loyal under freedom as were our fathers under oppression? Can Judaism be a religion for free.

men—a teacher and leader and inspirer of free men? That is the problem!

The Jew in America is free. Why does he not rejoice in his glorious birthright! Are there not thousands who show disrespect to Judaism, as though it were a dead religion, or an antique curiosity among the living. Jews frequent not the temples on Sunday, and most surely worship not in the synagogue on Saturday. There is no Holy Sabbath in modern Israel. Einhorn's characterization of the Sabbath and Sunday is still a pointed truth—the Sabbath is bartered and the Sunday is gambled away. An unbridged chasm yawns between the religious life of childhood and of manhood. In spite of all our emphasis on Jewish education, more Jewish children are out of than in the organized religious schools. And our youth—who is guiding and inspiring their religious and moral life? There is a hiatus between the religious school and the realities and the responsibilities of life. In no field of human endeavor do we tolerate a like chasm between childhood and manhood. Neither is our religious life real and vital. The religious attitude and spirit are not dominant; they are scarcely significant with us.

Not sufficient is the answer that our religiosity must not be judged by attendance at public worship; that we are not commanded to go to the temple and the synagogue. Every generation according to its customs! Of old we were commanded to appear by the altar of God thrice every year. Who would have believed that we in the modern time would obey so literally. The synagogue and the temple are the public manifestation of our spiritual and religious life. Let them not be mere monuments of material splendor, but symbols of spiritual power. The Jew cannot win moral world leadership if Judaism does not guide and inspire Israel's sons and daughters now, in this country and century!

Strong men and women, face to face with the stern problems of life, are seeking for a religion or a philosophy which will grip them with power, which will sustain them through sorrow and struggle and suffering. The thousands are quite convinced that present-day religions have no satisfactory answer to give to life's doubts and questionings. "Their creeds are unbelievable; their ceremonials meaningless, and their doctrines irrational." Men and women do not seek life's answer in church or temple. If there spoken by minister or

rabbi, they are not present to hear it.

Yet I believe the world is experiencing a real heart hunger for a life conviction. It yearns consciously and unconsciously to satisfy its spiritual thirst. With intense eagerness it awaits the message of the prophet who will inspire life and the living in the twentieth century. Where is and where preaches the unknown prophet with the power to give true interpretation to life's purposes and destiny?

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and might. What is its meaning? Love God with thy whole life.

With life—the reverent acceptance of life as blessing and obligation and appointment. Life is not a chance for success and fortune, nor an opportunity for fun and pleasure. Nor would we Jews interpret it as ascetic denial of pleasure, demanding surrender of joy and the world.

And the purpose of life—is it not a right use of life's powers and endowments? Is not man under the consecration of the law of service? The law of service transforms every relation of life—father and mother, husband and wife, brother and sister, friend, all are to be loyally served. Every action of daily life is affected thereby. Life is not struggle and strife, but service. Supreme in man is the desire to be of service. The power to serve makes one's life of value.

Divine is our human life—the divine lives with the human—God is within man. No interpretation is more ennobling. No appeal has power to grip us more strongly. Human life must be lived in harmony with, not in contradiction and antagonism to, the God idea and the God ideal. Glorious is our human life, with the inborn nobility of our nature, with its divine possibilities. Wonderful our old Bible's majestic conception of man, fashioned with innate God likeness, whose flower and fruit are to be godliness.

The stamp of history is upon the Jew. With head uplifted he may walk among men. The Jew is an historic personality, associated with the great events of history. He knew the people of antiquity, he beheld the monuments of ancient empire. They all have perished—the Jew alone lives.

"The fall of actual Israel is witness that ideal Israel forever lives." Significant is Matthew Arnold's magnificent contrast between "Israel's visible Jerusalem in ruins, and true Israel lifting up to the nations the banner of righteousness."

Is the modern Jew a lifter-up to the nations of the banner of righteousness? Yes! If he be loyal—if he live as moral exemplar—as moral teacher—by law and by life! The Jew *must live up and not down*—not down to the gross and sensuous and material and immoral, but up to the refined and spiritual and idealistic and moral, seeking the ennoblement of life by the choice of the higher pleasures, treasuring the enrichment of life through the powers of the body and the mind and the spirit.

The world needs moral leadership and religious leadership. The very foundations of religion have been shaken. Our generation is groping religiously and has gone astray morally. Ancient Hebrew prophets proclaimed the ideal—mankind is to be regenerated through righteousness—the enthronement of justice is the hope of the oppressed. Mankind believes that ancient Israel gave Messiah to the world and therewith its life mission was fulfilled and completed. Israel created the *Messianic faith* in the heart of mankind and *must keep that faith alive* until the Messianic ideals shall be triumphant among the nations. Age-old Judaism, mother of religions, must prove that it is not a dead religion, nor to be numbered among the dying, but a vital world force in the twentieth century. How can Judaism give proof? Through living Jews who will be loyal—loyal to God, loyal to Jewish ideals and loyal to the noblest aspirations of mankind.

World leadership is the destiny predicted for the Jews of America. With every passing generation the Jewish world-center gravitates more toward America. The stream of Jewish life flows steadily westward. Are we of America prepared for leadership? Israel once was spiritual leader and teacher among the nations and races of the earth. We are the heirs to the finest spiritual heritage ever bequeathed to any people. We are the heirs, but are we the possessors of the spiritual heritage? We do not possess the truth unless truth possesses us. Moral pre-eminence and spiritual leadership belong only to those willing to live for the principles and the ideals and the moral law.

History calls the Jew to be loyal under freedom, to take his historic place as a leader and teacher of men, as the servant and messenger of God—to be a light unto the Gentiles—a light-bringer to mankind.