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HERTZ

THE RT. HON. LORD
ROTHSCHILD
MEMORIAL SERMON

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The Rt. Hon.

Lord Rothschild

P.C. G.C.V.O.

MEMORIAL SERMON

BY

The Very Rev. Dr. J. H. Hertz

CHIEF RABBI OF THE UNITED HEBREW CONGREGATION
OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

MONDAY, APRIL 19th, 5675—1915

AT

THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE, LONDON.

The Rt. Hon.
Lord Rothschild
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בקש ד' לו איש כלבבו ויצוהו לנגיד על עמו.

“The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart; and the Lord hath appointed him leader of his people.”

I Samuel xiii. 14.

Woe to the generation that does not worthily mourn the loss of a great and good man, say our Teachers. It is in obedience to this solemn warning against ingratitude towards the righteous who have departed this world, that we are to-day assembled in this House of Worship. At such a Service it is usual that the life of him to whose memory it is consecrated shall be reviewed. As, however, the story of the remarkable career just ended is now well-known to all, I need only trace its lesson and significance within and without the House of Israel. And I hope to do so by means of the Scripture text I have read: “The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart; and the Lord hath appointed him leader of his people.”

“A man after God’s own heart.” This is high praise, no praise could well be higher ; but applied to that rare personality it is no idle panegyric. Justice, Mercy and Reverence were the guiding stars of his existence ; and his whole life was but a translation of the Prophet’s teaching : “ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God ? ”

הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ד' דורש ממך כי אם עשות
משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלהיך.

Nathan Meyer Rothschild was a perfect combination of the Englishman and the Jew. The keynote of his character therefore was Justice, the sacred ideal of both Judæa and England. In all spheres of his multiform activity, his name was a synonym for dealing justly, for chivalrous integrity and stainless honour. Famed for his instinct for right, for his astonishing intuition and wonderful judgment, men sought and followed his counsel in communal and humanitarian endeavours, in national and international questions. Such unique homage paid to a man recalls the words of Job,

“When I went forth to the gate unto the City,
 The aged rose up and stood.
 Unto me men gave ear, and waited,
 And kept silence for my counsel.
 After my words they spake not again ;
 I chose out their way.”

(Chap. xxix.)

The influence for good or for evil of any dominating character is immense. His example was of the highest and the best ; and by his death many sides of English life are indeed notably the poorer.

As to his loving mercy—and in this he merely continued the fine tradition of his House and Family—his charity was unquenchable, world-wide, well-nigh boundless. And it was no indolent alms-giving which is often worse than the disease it is intended to heal. This lover of children, patron of schools and hospitals, friend to the wounded and helper of every good cause irrespective of creed or party—*wisely* considered the poor. In numberless cases the blessing of them that were ready to perish came upon him ; but wheresoever possible he showered his lovingkindnesses upon his fellow-men unawares. Still more Jewish was the whole conception of charity that

animated him. Jewish usage has really only one word צדקה, for both Charity and Justice. Therefore this great-hearted Jewish gentleman held that in remembering the poor he was doing not "charity" but Tzedaka, justice; merely dealing justly by the poor and suffering. Thus his vast benefactions resulted in no self-righteousness. He walked humbly with his God.

He was a man of deep reverence, unostentatious piety and fundamental simplicity. It was by his express wish that he was laid to rest in accordance with the olden, severely simple rites of Jewish burial, in plain shroud and Tallis. In this Synagogue, wherein sixty-two year ago he was Barmitzvah, he was for many years Warden; here he worshipped for well-nigh two generations. Never will I forget the spontaneous words he addressed to me before this very Ark two years ago at my induction into the Chief Rabbinate: "I give the Torah into your keeping, to bring up the congregations of Israel in your charge in conformity with Din Torah." He walked in the way of his fathers, and he reared his children

loyally to walk in that same way. He was impatient of the individualism that would rend in twain the unity of Israel; and distrustful of all revolution in religion. He agreed with the rabbis (Tosefta, Ab. Zara, I), "If the young in contradiction to their elders, tell thee, 'Come with us and we will rebuild the Temple,' follow them not; for often the destruction of the elders is construction, and the construction of the young is destruction." *בנין ילדים סתירה.*

And his religion informed his whole life; He remembered the work-day to keep it holy, and he took his civic duties sacredly. Love of country he considered the highest of religious commands, even as it is written in Jeremiah the Prophet: "Seek ye the welfare of your city and pray unto the Lord for it; for in its welfare shall be your peace." *כי בשלומה יהיה לכם שלום.* His patriotism, unassailable even by preachers of race-hatred, was an ethical passion. He perceived the imperial, universal, Messianic aspect of British citizenship. For British patriotism is not the mediaeval demand that the citizens of any

one country all think alike, believe alike ; that they be of the same blood or that they even speak the same language. Britain's mild sovereignty respects the personality of the ethnic groups found within the borders of its world-wide dominion ; nay, it fosters the linguistic heritage, the national individuality even, of Irishman and Welshman, of French Canadian and Afrikander Boer ; and encourages them all to develop along their own lines. Anyone therefore who deems that patriotism exacts from him the purposeless sacrifice of his religious tradition and historic memory—that man is an alien in spirit to the Anglo-Saxon genius, and is unworthy of his British citizenship. Like his father, Baron Lionel de Rothschild of blessed memory, he declared that too high a price might be paid for emancipation ; that civil and social equality would be dearly bought if they entailed the neglect of communal duty or the weakening of the bond of religious brotherhood.

He was a man after God's own heart—doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with his God—*ויצוהו ד' לנגיד על עמו* and the Lord

appointed him to be a leader, *Naggid*, of his people. Not only Anglo-Jewry, but the whole world looked upon him as the leader of his far-flung brethren. And as for the Jewish millions in Semi-Asia and the Near East, it seemed to them as if the dignity and office of the *Naggid*—who in his day was hailed נשיא גליות כל ישראל “Prince of all the Diasporas of Israel”—had come to life again. And he was, perhaps, proudest of this role which both Jew and non-Jew assigned to him. He brought to it devotion, understanding and tireless sympathy. Thus none watched with greater anguish the misery of the Jew in Poland, where the woe that is inseparable from a theatre of war is doubled by the wave of inhumanity that has swept over that unfortunate land. Yet, despite this new Jewish agony that passes the endurance point, and despite the terrible disillusionments that the the twentieth century brought Israel, he never lost faith in humanity, or wavered in his infinite trust in Great Britain. He believed with a perfect faith that in a land allied with Britain six million human beings would not long

remain equals of their fellow-subjects in duties, but outcasts in rights.

When Jews of prominence die, we often have occasion to cover them with apologies as with flowers. When we reflect how intensely they lived for their own ambitions, how feebly they raised their voices on behalf of their persecuted brethren, how heedless they were whether their children exchanged Israel's heritage for worldly advantage—we are driven to find excuses for them in the "spirit of the age," in their un-Jewish upbringing, in the great temptations of their social station. But at the burial of this foremost Jew of the world in prestige and power, there were no flowers, and no apologies. The world has lost a king of philanthropists; and England has lost a great citizen whose death, especially before the War is over, is a national disaster. Anglo-Jewry has lost one who was a living refutation of anti-Semitism; but Israel—helpless, rightless, but not hopeless—has lost its Naggid, a man who was "as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great

rock in a weary land." And it has lost him, its leader, spokesman and champion, at a world-historical crisis, when it most bitterly needs him. In the words of the Prophet, "And they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son." וּמָפְדוּ עָלָיו כַּמִּסְפָּד עַל הַיְחִיד.

Genius travels in wide orbits; and long we may have to wait before there arises another such prince in Israel who has written his name in the hearts of his fellow-men. His place in history is secure. Through his love for Israel his name remains for all time intertwined with Israel; and thus he becomes a sharer of Israel's immortality.

Father of Mercy, Who art our Rock and our Redeemer for ever, take we beseech Thee, the soul of our departed brother Nathan Meyer the son of Lionel de Rothschild into Thy keeping. Have mercy upon him, pardon all his transgressions, for no mortal is sinless before Thee. Grant him Thy recompense for all his meritorious deeds unto Israel and all his lovingkindnesses unto the children of men. Remember unto him his strivings and prayers for

his country in this time of alarm and sorrow, and fulfil Thou his yearnings that her righteousness speedily triumph. O Lord, in Whose hands are the destinies of nations, gird our hosts and those of our Allies with strength and courage and victory on land and on sea ; bless and preserve our Sovereign ; and with Thine own wisdom guide all the counsellors of the realm.

Thou who healest the broken-hearted and bindest up their wounds, grant Thy heavenly consolation unto the mourners ; sustain them in their affliction, and send Thy light and Thy truth unto them, that throughout their days they may continue their works of loyalty, piety and compassion. He will destroy death for ever ; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces ; and the reproach of his people shall he take away from off all the earth : for the Lord hath spoken it. Amen.

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