

שפת פרח שושן

ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON SPEECH DAY OF

JEWS' COLLEGE (בית המדרש לרבנים)

L O N D O N

9th of Nisan 5684

(13th April 1924)

By MRS. FLORA SASSOON

OXFORD

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

BY FREDERICK HALL, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

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With Mrs. Flora Sassoon's Compliments.

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*Chairman's Address delivered on the Speech
Day of Jews' College, which was held
at the College on Sunday, the 9th of
Nisan 5684, 13th April 1924, by
Mrs. Flora Sassoon.*

MR. EMANUEL, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN.

 HAVE much pleasure in opening this meeting and welcoming the President and Members of the Council, the Members of the professorial staff, the Students, Visitors, and Friends of Jews' College on this occasion.

Although I had the privilege twenty years ago of presiding in this hall at a lecture delivered by a great friend of this institution, the late MARCUS NATHAN ADLER, yet I consider it a great honour to be the first lady-chairman at an Annual Speech Day, which is always a festive occasion in the annals of the College, and all the more so to-day as we are celebrating the Seventieth Birthday of SIR ADOLPH TUCK in a very tangible form by adding his portrait to those of a large number of worthy men—he not the least worthy among them—and I wish him a long life of continued good deeds.

The Chief Rabbi has honoured me by delegating to me the handing of the English Diploma qualifying for the Rabbinical Diploma conferred by Jews' College on RABBI GOLLOP, whom I heartily congratulate.

Another pleasing celebration will be the presentation of a Testimonial to MR. KILNER, who has served the College faithfully and usefully for nearly a jubilee of years, and to whom our best thanks are due.

I feel it therefore my duty to express first of all my heartfelt thanks to the Council of Jews' College for so kindly inviting me to preside over this assembly. SIR ADOLPH TUCK thought that I was *this year* the ablest person to take the chair! At the time I wondered if it was not the rule since the College was founded to have a lady to preside and therefore there was not such a happening before, then why should I have been thus honoured? On the other hand, why did it not happen in the whole of the sixty-eight years? To this I found an answer, that the leaders may have thought, that the Chairmanship of the Speech Day is like the קטרת (incense) in the Temple, as the Gemara in אחת לששים או לשבעים שנה היתה באה : כריתות ו' ע"ב says : של שירים להצאין (once in sixty or seventy years the remains of the incense [of every year] used to accumulate to half the quantity needed for one year), and if the שירים (remains) are kasher, and הצאין (halves) are kasher, then a woman may also come in! We have a precedent in the Bible, that in troublous times Barak told Deborah : אם תלכי עמי 'If thou wilt go with me, then I will go, but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go' (Jud. iv. 8). After the victory, Deborah addressed the men of Israel, and said (Jud. v. 2 f.) : בפרוע פרעות בישראל, בהתנרב עם, when I will apply this to the present occasion, for which I say the men invited me to take the lead to-day, for which I say ברכו ה' (bless the Lord). And I will continue in the words of Deborah : מאן מלכי רבנן 'Hear, O kings,' שמעו מלכים ; who are the kings? The Rabbis ; האזינו רזונים ; 'hearken ye great men, 'אנכי לה' 'I am for the Lord'.

There was a particular thing which women used to do in Talmudic times, (כתובות י"ז ע"ב) ררדוגי דמשחא ארישא דרבנן, which Rashi explains: הנשים נותנות שמן בראש התלמידים, (the women used to anoint the heads of the disciples with oil), which I think was symbolical of שמנה של תורה (the oil of the Torah), and only women had this privilege, because as the Gemara נשים במאי זכיין ברכות י"ז ע"א says: באקרוי בנייהו לבי כנישתא. (What is the זכות (merit) of the women? It is the taking of their children to the Beth Hammidrash.) In showing my appreciation of the honour conferred on me, I should like to point out in a few words the thoughts which exercised my mind from the moment I consented to take upon myself the duties of the chair; so we shall turn to the time when this College was founded about seventy years ago. What was the object of its foundation, and what was expected of it? It was to spread תורה ואורה (Torah and Light) in the British Empire for the Jews. The Scrolls of the Torah in the Holy Ark do not speak, except through the Rabbis of the communities, who show the people the way they should go, and the work they must do from before the birth of the child until after the death of the man. An institution like Jews' College stands for combining three of the greatest ideals in Judaism, I mean the ideals of תורה יראת שמים ודרך ארץ (Torah, fear of God, and good manners). Here in this building resound day by day, week by week, year in and year out, the sacred words of the Torah and Talmud, of Prophets and Psalmists, of Tannaim and Amoraim, of Halakhists and Aggadists, of Saboraim and Geonim, of Commentators of the Bible and the Talmud, of Singers and Sages, of Rabbis and

Codifiers. Their wisdom and teachings, their songs and homilies, their ethics and interpretations are being taught and explained here. This place therefore resembles a life-giving well, which supplies strength and vitality to our communities far and near. The gates of this house of study and learning ought to be sought by more young men than is unfortunately the case at present. If we consider the fact which puzzled the greatest minds of the world, of ancient times as well as of more recent days—I mean the problem: ‘What supplied our people with the supernatural strength to overcome all the sufferings and tortures, all the persecutions and hatred of thousands of years and as many enemies?’—there could be found no other answer than the historical truth that the Torah was the chief force which kept us alive. Considering the fact, one is surprised that in *our* age, which sees in learning and education the highest glory and greatest pride of national life, our brethren and sisters, Jews and Jewesses, should with indifference turn away from our unparalleled Torah and literatures, our glorious past and history, jeopardizing the future of our holiest heritage, our religion and teachings which were the great aim of the pious founders ע"ה. The ברכות רז"ל in מאי דכתיב אוהב ה' שערי ציון אוהב ה' שערים ח' ע"א say: (what is the special meaning of the verse ‘The Lord loveth the gates of Zion?’ (Ps. lxxxvii. 2).—It means the Lord loveth the gates which are prominent through the study of the Halakhah), and the Gemara in מימיהן של אבותינו לא פרשה ישיבה מהן יומא כ"ח ע"ב says: from אברהם אבינו onwards, and even in the bondage of Egypt, they had a Yeshibah. As long as, observed an

ancient heathen friend of Rabbi Meir, the synagogues and houses of learning re-echo the words of the Torah, the hand of Esau cannot touch them. When, however, these sacred places are left by Jews, generally then they have to feel Esau's hatred (Gen. Rab. 65, 16)—an old experience in a new form. There was, and is, only one safeguard against the enmity and misunderstanding of the whole world, and that is the upkeep of the Torah.

More recently we find a trend of mind in our own community which tries to deride and minimize the worth of the Torah by declaring it childish and useless. I may quote a personal experience of the 'childish' influence of the Torah. Last summer, when we visited Baden-Baden, we made an excursion to a neighbouring famous place known to most people—Heidelberg. When we returned in the evening, I was agreeably surprised to find a letter written to me by my little grandson, who was then not yet eight years of age, which concluded with the quotation: **וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מַמְלַכְתָּ** (and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. xix. 6)). Well, which of us would not wish that each Jew, humble or high, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, young or old, men and women, would be **וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה'** (and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord (Isa. liv. 13)), and be filled with the meaning and strength of this immortal promise to Israel of **עַם סְגֻלָּה** and **מַמְלַכְתָּ כֹהֲנִים**? How can teachings which endeavour to implant the highest ideals of honour and truth, of sobriety and temperance, be accounted useless? Already in the second century the Rabbis, **קִירוּשֵׁין מ' ע"ב**, disputed whether learning is more useful or whether deeds ought to

be more appreciated. The scholars agreed with Rabbi 'Akiba, who said learning was greater than deeds, for learning leads to good deeds. Rabbi 'Akiba proved the sincerity of his belief by sanctifying the Holy Name of God in time of persecution. In our age, our duty might at least be to live according to the Torah and the ideals of Judaism.

This is my humble view of what Jewish learning ought to be, and has to perform in our days. We want students. The larger their number, the greater is our hope and trust in the future, and I may be allowed to appeal now to all those who have the love of the Torah in their heart to come forward and assist the authorities of this College in establishing bursaries for young men who are willing to become Rabbis and Teachers in Israel. There is an old story in 'ירושלמי חגיגה פרק א' הלכה ז' of three Rabbis who visited a city. When they entered they asked for the guardians and officials of the city. The magistrates and officials were introduced to them. The Rabbis were surprised, and said: 'Do not ye know who the guardians of your city are? They are the students and the teachers of the Law.' What was true many hundred years ago is equally true to-day. The sons of the Torah, those who learn and teach the Law, who spread the word of God, they are the real guardians of our people. The Talmud in אומה זו כגפן נמשלה זמורות שבה אלו חולין צ"ב ע"א says: בעלי בתים אשכולות שבה אלו תלמידי חכמים (this nation is compared to the vine tree; the branches thereof are the landed proprietors, its clusters are the scholars). It is their happy lot to work in the sanctuary of the Lord to further peace in Israel and among mankind, and to bring the

children of our race nearer to our Father in heaven, as we read in yesterday's Haftarah **והשיב לב אבות על בנים** (and He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children (Mal. iii. 24)). So it is likewise the duty of every Jew to esteem and appreciate, spiritually as well as materially, the endeavours of the Talmide Hakhamim, and to support such institutions as Jews' College, which was erected by its pious founders to rear Talmide Hakhamim.

In conclusion, a word to the students. Our sages, in **שלשה זירים הן של מזבח ושל ארון ושל**, יומא ע"ב ע"ב, said: **שלחן של מזבח זכה אהרן ונטלו של שלחן זכה דוד ונטלו של ארון עדיין מונח הוא כל הרוצה ליקח יבא ויקח שמא תאמר פחות הוא ת"ל בי מלכים ימלוכו ר' יוחנן רמי כתיב זר וקרינן** (there are three crowns: one of the Altar, one of the Holy Ark, and one of the Table. That of the Altar, Aaron took by his merit; that of the Table, King David took by his merit; that of the Holy Ark is still lying there, for whosoever would wish to have it. Should you perhaps think that this is so because that one is the least valuable [of the three]? In order that you should not think so, it is said (Prov. viii. 15): 'It is through me (i.e. the Torah) that kings become rulers.' Rabbi Yohanan asked thereupon: 'How is it that there is written Zar (i.e. stranger) and we read Zer (i.e. crown)? That is to say: If one deserves it, it becomes for him a crown (Zer), but if one does not deserve it then it becomes estranged (Zar) from him.' I wish you to acquire in your scholastic career this **כתרה של תורה**, the Crown of the Torah, **להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה** (in order to enlarge the knowledge of the Torah and make it solid).

*The Chairman's Reply to the vote of thanks
proposed by Sir Adolph Tuck, Bt.,
and seconded by Mr. Otto Schiff.*

I AM much obliged to SIR ADOLPH TUCK and to MR. OTTO SCHIFF for their kind words addressed to me, and to all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the way in which you have expressed your approval. I was greatly pleased to be present on this occasion to listen to the very learned address of the Principal, DR. BÜCHLER, and I am sure you all join me in appreciation of it.

And just one word more before I resume my seat. In the *first* מסכתא (treatise) of the Talmud, ל"א ע"א ברכות it is said: אל יפטר אדם מחברו אלא מתוך דבר הלכה, which means, when parting from a friend one should mention a דבר הלכה, and if one Halakhah makes a happy parting, then how much good must come from many Halakhoth? Therefore I will quote to you the *last* passage of the whole Talmud in נדה ע"ג, which says: תנא רבי אליהו כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא שנא' הליכות עולם (it was taught in the School of Eliyyahoo, that he who studies Halakhoth daily, may be assured of being a son of the world to come, as it is said (Hab. iii. 6): the eternal ways are His, read not הליכות i.e. ways, but הלכות i.e. he who studies them, the Halakhoth, to him belongs the future world). What is the difference between *Halikhoth* and *Halakhoth*? *Halikhoth 'Olam* is the general walk of all Colleges, but it is *Halakhoth* for a Jewish College.