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**We all bear witness**

The season of the Holy Days lies behind us, and we are on the threshold of the actual working season of the year. We have to brace ourselves for the workaday lives before us – and hard enough lives they frequently are – and to shelve for some time all thoughts of vacation and celebration. And yet – the specific character of our community never allows us to plunge headlong into humdrum activities without realizing from time to time that they can and must never be allowed to absorb our interests completely. To be a Jew should for ever be a stern reminder not to become too deeply engulfed in material things; but to be a survivor of the vilest persecution and to have been blessed with the opportunity of dwelling in safety after years of unspeakable horror – this indeed should keep us steadily and securely over the level of triviality.

This is by no means to say that the exhortation of the Passover Haggada to tell of the “Exodus of Egypt” should be put into practice by all of us relentlessly for the rest of our days. But it does imply that we have a duty to fulfil towards those decisive experiences of our lives, the duty not to forget them but to pass on their memory to future generations. This duty should not be mistaken as emanating from any lust for revenge. Our demand that justice be done to all individual criminals involved in the misdeeds we suffered is by far the weakest motive prompting our call for the preservation of our collective experience. Considerably stronger is our thankfulness for our own salvation, undeserved though it must seem to us, whenever we view it against the background of the immeasurable tragedy of our people. The strongest motive, however, is our perennial wish that the memory of our dead should be enshrined in a dignified account of their achievements and of their sufferings, of the world in which they lived and eventually were doomed to die, because they had believed too faithfully in its moral foundations.

Recollections and Documents

This great narrative has not yet been written. Certain chapters of it are becoming known as time passes by. They are of great importance as stepping stones to the final history. However, as a period of tyranny and forcibly sealed lips is involved, it is only natural that the source material is scanty as far as the actual happenings are concerned. Nothing could be publicly recorded at the time of the Nazi rule, little could be put down in writing, the printed word was taboo. More than in any other historical epoch, personal recollections and experiences are material of irreplaceable importance. Moreover, letters, diaries, photos, documents, programs of lectures, meetings and performances are sometimes hidden away in our desks and spare rooms; they could equally be used to fill the gaps of our knowledge. Under no circumstances must this material, written and unwritten, get lost; it has to be preserved for the future historian.

It is therefore welcome news that, with the help of the Claims Conference, the Wiener Library is now, to some extent, in a position to supplement its collections in a more systematic and vigorous manner than of late. It may be remembered from a previous appeal published in these columns that, some time ago, the AJR and the Wiener Library, with the able help of Dr. Fanny Spitzer, joined hands to bring together what could be reached in an effort of saving such personal documents from certain destruction. The attempt proved very satisfactory, as far as it went. After some time, however, it petered out, although it is a certainty that by far not all hide outs and odd corners had yet yielded their secret treasures.

Let us then renew our efforts. Let us search our desks and drawers in favour of AJR and the Wiener Library. Everything affording evidence with regard to persecution and salvation will be received in gratitude, examined, copied if need be, catalogued and given a place worthy of its origin.

Personal Interviews

Apart from this collection of documents already available, the Wiener Library intends to call into existence new documents of a similar character. It aims at systematically interviewing all persons who have encountered special experiences but who have not yet been able to put their recollections on record. When all is said about people being loath of being reminded of the time of their sufferings, there remains the fact that others are willing and prepared to fill up the existing archives. True, most of them will have to overcome a strong resistance within themselves; but for the benefit of the vital issue at stake they will be able to conquer their impediments. May they then come forward, offer their own knowledge and also tell us of friends who are ready to do the same. They will be contacted by ladies and gentlemen who, in the name of the Wiener Library, will fix appointments for a first informative talk. Whether this leads to further conversations, whether these are to last an hour or a week, will depend entirely on the decision of the persons who so kindly offer to impart their information. They will, if they wish, be shown the reports made on the basis of the interviews before these are incorporated into the files of the Wiener Library, and any required degree of secrecy will be conscientiously kept.

We all bear witness. We all have the duty to fulfil towards our past. Political developments on a global as well as on the Jewish level are not too auspicious for keeping alive the memory of German Jewry. Complications abound in both fields. If not properly counteracted they might weigh against the desire to attribute to the history of German and thus of European Jewry, its adequate place in world history. Therefore, the appeal goes out to all of us to help counteract them. If we devote ourselves to this task, which is a task everyone is capable of fulfilling in his own private realm, we will have save something of the spirit of our Holy Days into our daily routine.

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