

Theodore Herzl by Alex Bien  
Translated by Maurice Samuel

Just as every American school-boy draws inspiration from the life of George Washington, so should American Jew be familiar with the life of Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism.

Bien makes it clear that the idea of the rebirth of the Jewish state is nothing new with Herzl. It has in fact, for centuries been the sustaining force of our forefathers giving them faith and courage when the world outside offered nothing but bitter hatred. Only with the French and the American Revolutions and their ushering in of the democratic state, have the Jews in some measure abandoned the Zionist theory. This with the hope that the new democracies would give them the freedom and peace of mind that one enjoys as a full citizen of this country.

Herzl was born into this non-Zionist, assimilationist atmosphere of western Europe, born into it at a time (1865) when the Jews had just lately received equal rights and thus when hopes for the future burned brightest and dreams of equality seemed within early grasp.

As a newspaper reporter and literary critic Herzl was sent to Paris where covered the Dreyfus trial. Outside the gates of the Ecole Militaire he witnessed the ceremony in which Dreyfus was ignominiously stripped of his insignia and paraded among the troops. At the same time on-looking French civilians shouted "Down with Dreyfus! Down with the Jews!"

At that painful, shattering moment, Bien relates, Herzl realized that the liberation from the ghetto had been a failure and that anti-semitism existed and would always exist so long as the Jews themselves remained within foreign states.

The solution was clear. Recall the Jews to their ancestral homeland. Reconstitute them as a nation. Let them control the territory on which they dwell.

Then, and only then, will they be free people; because they will be free from the distrust, fear, and dislike of the Gentiles.

Many people at first thought Herzl mad, thought him an impractical dreamer, but for nine years until his death in 1904, he gave his life to Zionism. Bien relates in an absorbing manner how Herzl negotiated with the leaders of the governments of the world, how he enlisted the support of wealthy Jewish philanthropists and fired the zeal of the downtrodden Jews of Poland and Russia. For Herzl literally organized millions to thought and action where before there had been only frustrated, helpless longing.

"If we will it, it is no dream," said Herzl. And with boundless energy and amazing persistence he worked and fought for the Jewish State.

Theodore Herzl is a wonderful book that every Jew should read.

Sidney Silvian

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