Jews & American Politics

From Outsiders to Insiders

The Election that Transformed a Jewish Issue into a National Issue:

Ulysses S. Grant and the Election of 1868

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GENERAL

GRANT

AND THE

JEWS.

BY

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Your military genius we can, at present, afford to pass over; the war is, thank God, ended; and we pray that a beneficial Providence may forever avert renewed bloodshed. But you are now standing before us in a new capacity. You have sheathed your sword, and you come before the nation as a statesman, you now aspire to the proud position of Chief Magistrate of a community of thirty odd millions of people. And here your military qualifications, be they never so eminent, cannot exclusively serve you as a recommendation.

If the dignity of a President of the United States is not to dwindle down to a mere name and shadow, if the Constitution, under which the nation has acquired its present greatness, to the admiration, to the envied astonishment of the world, is to be preserved, we require for this exalted station a well-titled statesman; a worthy bearer of the heavy responsibilities; above all, a pure, a noble, a great character.

You will, therefore, no doubt, approve, General, of our desire to enlighten our minds as far as possible, as to your statesmanlike qualifications, a desire which is but natural and legitimate, for citizens who are anxious to exercise their franchise in a conscientious and intelligent manner.

But, unfortunately for this important, this momentous question, there is an almost entire lack of material which might afford us any light for our object. You, General, have deemed it proper against all usage, against all tradition, to wrap yourself in an impenetrable silence, thus leaving your views, your opinions, and your principles involved in utter darkness.

Whether this be simply the custom of the taciturn but energetic warrior, whether it be the cautious proceeding of the shrewd diplomatist, who adhere to the doctrine of using his language only to conceal his thoughts, or whether it be, as your enemies maintain, the manifestation of an habitual procrastination, laboring under a chronic selfishness, produced by the fumes of ambition and jealousy; that, General, is up to the present an insoluble enigma to us.

It becomes, therefore, our imperative duty, all the more carefully to subject your actions, your utterances in unguarded moments, and especially your written documents to a searching examination.

Your proceeding on the occasion of the surrender of the secretaryship of the War Department was to say the least of it, of a very equivocal character. In the differences between the President and yourself consequent upon this event, you have indeed suffered a most signal moral defeat. For in the face of the unanimous written testimony of five cabinet officers, a combined testimony, which gave a flat contradiction to your assertions, nobody can entertain any further doubts as to the veracity of the President. It is said that you denounced on the occasion of a cabinet council during which you were questioned by the President in reference to your breach of faith in surrendering the War Office to Mr. Stanton, was expressive of so much contention, that this alone was equivalent to an acknowledgment of your guilt. They say that you stood there, looking wonderfully small, the picture of apologetic confusion, in fact like a school-boy who had been caught napping, stammering forth some unintelligible excuses. If this account were true, the conclusion might be drawn from it to your honor, that so far you have acquired no great perfection in the ambiguous game of diplomacy, and that it is not too late for you to withdraw from the field of politics, a field on which you have made an unfortunate debut and on which you are sure to end with a deplorable fracaso.

But these events transpired at a time when your nomination for the Presidency was an acknowledged fact; you had already thrown yourself bodily and soul into the arms of the radical party; you were wining already under the lash of their fanatical leaders.

Not that in the contemplation of these circumstances any mitigation of your guilt could be found; not because a deeper investigation of them would exonerate you in any way, until we forego a closer scrutiny on this occasion, but because we have to deal with a document which emanated from your own pen and went forth to the world over your signature on the 14th December, 1862: Your famous army order in regard to O-Beem-Jew! -a document which furnishes a better guide to your character, to the standard of your edification, to your sense of justice, to your humanity, to your understanding of the foundations on which the nation has become great, to your qualification for the Presidential chair, which throws a stronger light finally on the mind and on the heart of the man Grant, than the most intimate study of your life could preserve.
in this great blessing, for whose sake the law has actually been
made to act backwards, in that country your action must alike
provoke and disgust every spectator.

We confess that we are at a loss for expressions properly
to characterize your conduct in this affair, and we do not know
whether to be more astonished at the ignorance, the injustice
of the act by which it manifests itself in your edict of 17th De-

We have the glaring injustice of your order of that
generally.

The victim now of your medieval thirst for oppression
became according to medieval examples—the Jews!

In searching the whole history of the Jews, we do not find
an analogous case to the one before us, later than the year 1241:
that is, more than six centuries ago. At that remote period
we meet with an occurrence of which we read with astonish-
ment and abhorrence, but which bears a remarkably strong re-
ssemblance to the one in hand. King Henry III of England,
one of the worst and most cruel Monarchs of that country pun-
ished and fined the Jews of London, in the sum of twenty thou-
sand marks or perpetual imprisonment, for a crime which the
Jews of Norwich had committed. The chronicle mentions,
further, that “the whole reign of this King was but a repeti-
tion of acts of the basest extortion and trumped up charges against
his subjects.” In order to further illustrate the barbarous cus-
toms of that period, we will simply add, that prisoners of war
were then drawn and quartered alive.

To you then, General Grant, it has been reserved to revive
those scenes of dark and bloody ages in this our nineteenth
century, and that in the United States of America, a country
which calls itself the most enlightened in the world, and which
is held up to “the oppressed nations of the Old World as the
naylim of freedom.”

The insulting and contemptuous mode of expression con-
tained in your General Orders No. 11 alone, would suffice to
characterize the spirit of its author, if even its contents were
less barbarous. You say therein:

“THE JEWS, AS A CLASS, violating,” &c.

Again:

“ALL THIS CLASS OF PEOPLE are furnished,” &c.

And again:

“No passes will be given to THESE PEOPLE,” &c.

You presume, General Grant, to stigmatize the Jews in
America as a CLASS, and to grossly insult them as a whole;
but you did not know, Sir, when you attacked them as a
CLASS, you really in your ignorance did not know what you
were doing.

For we are obliged to assume that you are ignorant of
the history and the traditions of a people, whom you thus un-
took to disgrace; we must suppose that you are ignorant of
the part they have played in the civilization of the world, of
the numerous events which illustrate their greatness and their
loyalty—that you are ignorant, in short, of what is known to
all the world besides; for without such total ignorance we can
hardly imagine that even you would have wantonly done the
thing you did!

We regret that the narrow compass of a paper like this
does not permit us to enlighten you with the completeness
to which the great subject invites, and that we must restrict
ourselves to giving you a few short quotations from writers
whose authority you will possibly respect.

The Rev. H. H. Milman, Dean of St. Paul’s, a celebrated
Christian Divine, opens the first chapter of his History of the
Jews, in the following strong terms:

“THE JEWS, without reference to their religious belief, are
among the most remarkable people in the annals of mankind.”

Miss Hannah Adams, a lady of Boston, who was active in
the conversion of the Hebrews, wrote about them, half a cen-
tury ago, in her History of the Jews:

“From this time we are indebted for the Scriptures of the New

as well of the Old Testament; to them were given the prophecy.
awers, the first financiers, the first merchants, the first artists in every branch have originated from their ranks. And if in a country where few persons can trace their pedigree beyond their grandfather, antiquity and purity of race is a title to consideration, we may, according to the Rev. Mr. Milman, also add they are of the best blood, for he says, in speaking of them in his celebrated work: "They are perhaps the only unambiguated race which can boast of high antiquity."

France mourned only lately the demise of her Minister of Finance in the person of a Jew; England, great, languid, powerful as she is, and one of the most enlightened nations of the world, has placed the helm of her government in the hands of a Jew; and a Jewish banker has held for years, and holds at the present moment in his control the wealth of the world, and with it wields the destinies of nations!

So much as to the status of the Jews in the old world! and now for America!

We need not dilate in vainglorious self-praise on their record in this country; for unanimous would be the verdict in their favor if the votes of the nation were taken on the question.

Religious, loyal, industrious, thrifty, benevolent, sober, they stand recognized in society, and by the nation, as the models of good and virtuous citizens. Look at your criminal records, and see whether you find any Jews implicated in crime, or if at all, in what proportion to their number! A Richmond magistrate thus speaks of the Jews, and his testimony may find a place here:

"I was Commonwealth Attorney of the City of Richmond for twenty-one years, and in that long interval, I only prosecuted three Jews, and two of them were most honorably acquitted, there being not a particle of evidence to sustain the charges. During my fourteen years of service as a magistrate, only one Jew was before me for trial, and he was acquitted. In that long period, I do not remember ever having application for public charity from any individual of either sex or any age, belonging to that faith, and so far as I am aware, no Jewish child has ever received the benefits of our free schools, for which their parents without pay pay their taxes."—(National Freeman.)

And their record during the war stands equally favorable. You, General, know better than any man, that their homes are

bleeding on every battle field; you know that every camp of Jews marched to the front and stood the brunt of each battle with unshaken bravery; you know that many distinguished officers in both branches of the service were Jews. For, or their faith did not interfere with their patriotism; they felt as American citizens should feel, and as such they came forward and loyally did their duty.

And as American citizens, if on no other grounds—are they entitled to that respect which you have refused them? Your veto on insult does not degrade them in the eyes of this nation, which has as its own; but the disgrace you sought to impose by your infamous General Orders No. 11 falls back upon yourself!

For, as American citizens, they now rest on your declaration. As American citizens, they tell you that they consider you null for the first office of this Government, that you are unworthy of the dignity of a President of the United States.

A perilous time may be in store for this country: great power may have to be entrusted to the hands of a President, and what would become of the nation if a man presided over her destinies who goes back to King Henry III. of England, for his model?

And as to your insult to the Jews as a religious brotherhood, to a whole people who have not been ostracized for the faith or crime of a few of its members in so shocking a manner, since the days of Hannan, we have only one word to say to you: henceforth be it known that you have been and are an American President.

As a CLASS, you have stigmatized and expelled us: as a CLASS, we rise up and vote against you, like one man!

We are numerous, we are influential, we are wealthy, we are influential on the whole continent, we are as one family, wherever our influence reaches, every Jew—no matter what political party—every Jew, with the vote he can command, will endeavor to defeat, and with God's blessing, will defeat you.

With this assurance, in the name of all American Jews, I have the honor to sign myself, General,

Yours, obediently,

New York, June 1868.
A. J. D.