

*Stephen Wise.
A Giant Among Men*

Editor's Note: March 17 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, founder of the American Jewish Congress. In honor of the Wise centennial, we print below the eloquent and moving eulogy by the late David Petegorsky, former executive director of the Congress, at the funeral service for Dr. Wise on April 22, 1949.

History will inscribe Stephen Wise among the truly great men of our era. It will record that he was a pioneer, a fearless crusader in every worthwhile field of social concern; in the cause of justice and freedom for all men and all peoples; for public morality and social welfare; for the deepening of religion and the extension of knowledge for international peace and understanding. It will tell that he was the beloved and peerless leader of his people who did as much as any man of his time to right a 2,000-year wrong by reestablishing the people of Israel in Israel its homeland, and who did more than any other man to forge the unity of his fellow-Jews in their hours of deepest distress.

History will ascribe monumental achievements to his name; the institutions and movements he created and led; the multitudes he moved and inspired; the battles he magnificently waged and won. And, for all of this, he will be remembered as a great Jew, a great American, a great liberal, a great humanitarian--as a giant among men.

But history is an adequate recorder only of impersonal events. It is an extremely inadequate recorder of persons and human beings. The impersonal records of history will enshrine the accomplishments of Stephen Wise. They will not enshrine the man.

Let us, therefore, while our memories of him are still warm and fresh and vibrant, seek to encompass the man. Let us today testify for the generations that though Stephen

Wise was great as a humanitarian, his real greatness was as a human being. Let us affirm for all who will follow that though he was a giant among men, there was no greater man among the giants.

Last year, Dr. Wise paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi in words far more applicable to Dr. Wise himself than to any other man of our time. He said of Gandhi that he was great because he was "the man who dared to be himself, a man who, being utterly true to himself, became one of the supreme figures of a millenium!"

Superficially, much of the greatness of Stephen Wise may seem to have been in the courage and daring with which he fought on behalf of so many ideals. Actually, his true greatness lay in his daring to be so supremely what he was.

He was a simple man, who dared to remain simple in an age which rewarded cunning and cold calculation and deceit.

He was a man of profound faith and piety; and he dared to retain his faith in a world which mocked and seemed to disprove of any faith.

He was a man overflowing with love; and he dared to continue to love during a generation when hate and prejudice and ill-will stalked the earth and crept into the hearts of millions.

And, above all else, he was a Jew; and he dared to be a Jew, a full Jew, a proud Jew, when so many gifted Jews of his time sought escape from their Jewishness as an avenue to success and happiness.

Stephen Wise was a simple man. His mind knew no cunning, no deviousness, no ulterior motives. Whenever he learned of injustice or cruelty or wrong, he knew simply that they had to be challenged and uprooted. And he took the most straight-forward, the most direct path to the fulfillment of that goal. All the world recognized and honored the integrity that came from that basic simplicity. That is why, as in the case of the Hebrew prophet Samuel, whose name Stephen Samuel Wise bore:

"And all Israel, even from Dan to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel could be fully trusted

to be a Prophet in the service of the Lord."

Because he was a simple, an uncomplicated person, he gave all of himself, and never less than all of himself, to everything he did. He withheld nothing of himself in whatever he did--whether in so historic an enterprise as building a Jewish State or in alleviating the plight of a poverty-stricken person who turned to him for help. And because his gifts of mind, of soul, of heart, of energy, of articulation were so matchless, by giving all of himself all the time, he inevitably became a leader among men in any cause with which he associated himself.

But Stephen Wise was not only a simple person. He was man of profound faith and piety. He had a deep and unshakable belief in God, in moral values, in human beings. His convictions were rooted not in social theories or in political dogmas but in an abiding religious and spiritual faith. Out of the depths of that faith which impelled him in every venture he undertook; the indefinable but inescapable moral authority he exercised over all who had contact with him.

Adversity could not deter him. The intense physical pain he endured for years, vilifications, unpopularity, political reversals--none of these could even momentarily halt him in his relentless quest for justice, for peace, for freedom, for Zion. For his were the faith and spirit of the Hebrew Prophets of old whom, more than anyone else, he resembled, and by whom, more than anyone lese, he was inspired.

To his simplicity and faith, he added an overflowing love, an abounding love for his people Israel, his country America, his family, his friends, his associates, for ordinary and humble men and women. This quality of love--which his family and his intimates knew so well--is, as much as anything, the key to the understanding of his life. He loved his people and his country, each of his fellow-Jews and his fellow-Americans and his fellow-human beings so deeply that he shared personally and intimately the experiences in which they partook.

He shared their sufferings and their anxieties he felt their needs; he dreamed their dreams. And because his was the sharing,

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