

STEPHEN WISE
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not merely of intellectual or abstract understanding, but of love, his efforts to ease their suffering, to satisfy their needs, to give substance to their dreams, were suffused with the passion of love. He could brook no delay, nor would he calculate any consequences: personal or financial or social or political.

And that love which flowed from him in turn evoked the affection of millions the world over in greater measure, certainly than any other Jew, and probably than any other public figure, of our time. During the war, in the Jewish resistance movements in Europe, the code word for the U.S. was "Stephanie," -- for to Jews fighting for freedom, Stephen could mean nothing else but Rabbi Wise and the United States. Jewish soldiers and chaplains have reported that when they landed in remote corners of the globe, when they reestablished contact with Jews who had been isolated for years under enemy rule, the first question with which they were greeted was, "Is Stephen Wise still living?" And the knowledge that he was still with them brought to these Jews relief and reassurance.

That sense of security which they felt did not come from the fact that the influence of Dr. Wise was so great. There have been Jews of our day whose influence in the councils of the mighty in the political chambers of the world, was far greater than his. But the masses of Jews the world over knew that there was no other Jew whose devotion and love for them was fullest assurance that he would make their problems his own, and that he would toil restlessly and ceaselessly for them.

It was out of this abounding love for the people--not the people as an abstraction, but people as human beings--that he drew his deep and abiding faith in democracy. From the people he drew warmth and inspiration and strength, and he therefore continually sought

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the people. "I seek my brethren," was the theme of his life. Thus he became the articulator of the hopes and desires and needs of millions of people and thus he fulfilled in such measure God's command to Samuel: "And the Lord said unto Samuel, listen to the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee."

Above everything else, Stephen Wise was supremely a Jew. And being a Jew for Dr. Wise meant not an "accident of birth," a phrase he found so distasteful. It meant being the proud heir to 4,000 years of Jewish tradition, of Jewish learning, of Jewish achievement, of Jewish suffering, of Jewish nobility, of Jewish dreams. It meant being the heir to the teachings and ideals of Moses and Isaiah and Amos and Hillel and Rabbi Akiba and Maimonides and Herzl.

And just as he gave to everything all of himself--all of his abilities and all his faith and all his love--so he gave to everything he touched all of his Jewishness, all 4,000 years of his Jewishness. He sought to give living expression to those teachings; to compensate for all the sufferings; to help fulfill all the dreams. His Jewishness was the oldest and most integral part of himself. In giving himself to whatever he did, he gave--and had to give--all of his Jewishness. Thus he became for the world the supreme and noble symbol of Jews and Jewishness.

Out of that Jewishness there came his uplifting and ennobling dignity, his fierce pride. For as the inheritor of the tradition of prophets and princes, of scholars and saints, there was no one, however exalted, before whom he need cringe; no one, however mighty, to whom he need apologize. Thus he taught an entire generation of Jews to walk proudly and with dignity, to act with firmness in the right.

Thus, by daring to be so supremely what he was--a simple man, a man of faith, a man of love, a Jew--he became one of the great of this earth. Thus he wrought so much and of this earth. Thus he wrought so much and wrought so enduringly. And thus, as he grew greater, so grew the affection in which millions held him.

The Bible tells of the Patriarch Abraham that "Abraham died in a good old age, old and full of years, and was gathered unto his people." Stephen Wise, who has passed away with a fullness of years, fullness in time and achievement given to so few, had been gathered unto his people, unto the hearts of all people, long before this day. And long after his passing, men and women--the great and humble, colored and white, Jew and Gentile, here, in Israel, in all lands--will continue to gather him unto their hearts; to bless his name and his works; to be inspired by his example.

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