

Mr. Ch. N. Bialik.

(Translation)

The sacredness and solemnity of this moment forbid us to desecrate it or abuse it by exaggeration. Wherefore it is our duty to say openly and frankly in the presence of this great gathering that the institution which has now been inaugurated by our distinguished guest, Lord Balfour, is but a beginning, is an institution existing almost in name only. At the moment it is but an empty vessel which has yet to be filled; a child whose future has not yet unfolded. Nevertheless, I am confident that the thousands now gathered here and with them the tens of thousands of Israel scattered in all corners of the earth feel that the inauguration held today on this spot is not an empty dream, that it is a great and holy day unto God and unto our people. We are all deeply conscious that Israel has at this moment lit on the Mount of Olives the first light of the Dedication of his spiritual life. Today it will be heralded to all Israel in all parts of the world, that the corner-stone of Upper Jerusalem has been laid. For this strange nation, known as Israel, despite all the storms which for two thousand years have swept over it to destroy it and uproot it—this nation, I say, has pledged its loyalty to the Kingdom of the Mind and Spirit for ever. In this Kingdom, Israel is like a fresh young tree with strong roots; Israel has planted his feet on this soil and will not stir from here. Numberless years of accursed exile have not changed his spirit; countless years of corruptive poverty have not undermined his fundamental character. Forced by necessity to forego the comforts of daily life for the external life of the spirit, he has learned in the days of his downtrodden poverty to subordinate his physical to his spiritual needs, to subject his material wants to the demands of the spirit. Within this kingdom the Jewish Nation has created its chief possessions and institutions, which have kept it alive, despite its poverty, through two thousand years of wandering, have preserved its inner freedom within the shell of its outer bondage, and have preserved us for this great day, the day of the inauguration of the University of Mount Scopus.

The national school in its various forms—the Cheder, the Yeshiva, the Talmudic School—has been our strongest fortress in our long and difficult struggle for existence and for the right to exist in the world as a separate and independent nation. In times of distress we sought refuge within the walls of this fortress; there we sharpened the one weapon still remaining to us—the Jewish mind which never rests.

One cannot but recall what one of our sages has said in words charged with bitterness and sorrow. When he read the verse: "And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them," he said bitterly: "I will not reject them neither will I abhor them; what is there left for Israel *which is neither rejected nor abhorred*". Everything that has ever been bestowed on Israel has been taken from him, except the Torah; were it not for this we would not be a peculiar nation among the peoples of the world.

The word "Torah" has been elevated in the eyes of our people to the highest sublimity. In the eyes of the nation the Torah has become a second nature, abstract and on a higher spiritual plane, which accompanies or even substitutes its actual existence. The saying "Israel and the Torah are one" is not a phrase only; a foreigner would scarcely understand or grasp its meaning just as the term "Torah" in its full national meaning and implication cannot be translated fully and adequately. In this sense the Torah connotes neither religion nor faith alone, neither ethics nor precepts alone, nor wisdom alone, nor a combination of all of them; it is a sublime conception, a mystical conception drawing its power from the depths and heights of the cosmic conception. The Torah is at the same time the instrument of the Lord, with which he created the Universe, and the End for which the Universe was created. The Torah preceded the Universe; it is the Sublime Idea and the Living Soul of the Universe; without it there is no existence and no *raison d'être*. "The study of the Torah is greater than the erection of the Temple." The Torah is higher than the Priesthood or Kingship. "No one is free unless he studies the Torah". "The Torah elevates man above all things". "Even an

idol-worshipper who studies the Torah is equal to the High Priest".
"An educated bastard is preferred to an ignorant High Priest".

Upon such conceptions the Jewish Nation has been reared for almost seventy generations; in accordance with these ideas it has built its temporary homes in the Diaspora, for their sake many have died a martyr's death and for their sake the Jewish nation has been preserved. The Jewish National School was founded a short time before the destruction of the Temple and has persisted until today. This type of education extending over generations has developed in Jews a sixth sense, as it were, in all spiritual matters, a most subtle sense which responds before any other, and is common to all Israel. Not a single Jew in any part of the world fails to intensify his interest in the Torah when tyrannous decrees are passed and executed upon him. Even the poorest Jew devotes himself to the education of his children, sometimes spending half his income or more for the purpose. In his daily prayers the Jew even before beseeching God for his daily needs, prays: Bestow upon me, O Lord, knowledge, wisdom and understanding." Our revered mothers pouring out their hearts before God because of their poverty and want—what was their first supplication? "May it be Thy will that the eyes of my son shall shine with the light of Thy Torah." I am sure that if God were to appear to one of our mothers in a dream asking her in the words of the Bible "Ask me what shall I give unto thee? she would answer as did Solomon in his time "I do not ask for riches, nor yet for honour, but O Lord of the Universe, may it be Thy will to grant my son wisdom and understanding of the Torah, and knowledge of good and evil."

Gentlemen, you all know what happened to our national spiritual fortress in the Diaspora in recent years. Despite the inner strength and the unfailing energy which the nation has spent in building and protecting it, it could not withstand the storm. By the decree of History we were shaken, our foundations undermined, and dazed we stood staring at our ruins. For this is the curse of the Diaspora: Whatever we do cannot prosper; everywhere and always we have sowed much and reaped not even the tenth part; the winds in their sweep first destroy the toil of Israel and in a moment

annihilate the work of generations, root and branch. As a result of bitter experience and suffering, of disappointments and shattered hopes, we have slowly come to the conclusion, that, without a real home-land, without national rights, our life is as nought, economically and spiritually. Without Palestine there is no hope for the salvation of Israel, in no place and at no time. Our conceptions of national, economic and spiritual life have meanwhile undergone fundamental changes. We do not divide between the national and the spiritual, as we do not divide between the Jew and the non-Jew. We now interpret the Torah not according to the School of Shammai—that the heavens were created first—nor according to the School of Hillel that the earth was created first—but according to our sages—that both were created simultaneously at the command of the Lord; the one without the other being incomplete and unreal. The nation has meanwhile extended the theological term "Torah" to the more comprehensive and universal term "culture". We have realised the fact that all nations that desire to prosper and develop must create civilisation and culture, must create them with their own instruments and materials and with their own distinguishing marks. As to our nation in the various countries of the Diaspora, who will deny that it has created culture? I wonder whether there is on this earth a centre for cultural development altogether without Jews. But since the works of the Jew in the Diaspora are included, almost without exception, among those of other nations, they vanish as a distinctly Jewish contribution and are never registered to the credit of the Jew. Our cultural account in the world is therefore all debit and no credit. The Jewish nation is in this respect in a very difficult position. While actually the champion of truth and a proletarian people, producing by means of the capital of others for others, it nevertheless appears to others, and frequently to ourselves that we are parasites, having nothing of our own. A nation which values its honour will never accept such a situation without resistance. It will one day rise up and say: "It is enough for me; I prefer a piece of dry bread at my own table than a feast in the house and at the table of others. I prefer one small university, my very own and

under my own authority, erected by my own hands from the foundation unto the coping stone rather than thousands of temples of knowledge where my share of the work of erection is not recognised. Let my food be little and bitter, but let me feel the sweet joy of my handiwork."

Urged on by this desire, we have escaped to this country where we seek neither riches, power nor glory. What of any of these can this small and poverty-stricken country give us? We desire only an individual's right to physical and spiritual work. We have as yet achieved very little. We have barely had time to wash from our feet the dust of the years of wandering and to discard our many patched clothes. No doubt many years of toil and suffering will pass before we completely rid this country of its barrenness and its swamps. Up to the present we have made only a slight beginning but even at this early date we have already felt the need for a home for the spiritual work of the nation. Such is the time-old nature of this people; it cannot exist three consecutive days without Torah. Even at this early hour we have cultural needs the satisfaction of which cannot be delayed.

We have moreover difficult problems to face with regard to the cultural welfare of the Jews in other lands. Certain nations just beginning their careers as nations, think, in their innocence that they can spiritually starve, by means of the numerus clausus, this nation full of years, which has a tradition of four thousand years of learning. We must therefore hasten to light in our spiritual home, the land of our fathers, the first light of the Dedication of Torah and Science and of all Jewish cultural work, before the last light is extinguished in other countries. This we hope to do in the institution on Mount Scopus whose doors have today been opened.

Gentlemen, there is an ancient Jewish legend which tells us that at the time of our redemption, all the Jewish synagogues and schools in the Diaspora, together with their foundations would be lifted up and would be transferred to Palestine. Naturally, this legend cannot be realised in full. The institution of Torah and learning which has been established on Mount Scopus, will be

quite different in building material, in content, and in form from the old schools. But, Gentlemen, among the ruins of those sacred institutions there still remain perfect slabs of stone, hewn stones which can be used as foundation stones for our new institution. May we have the wisdom to raise the learning and science which shall come forth from this institution to that moral height to which our forefathers raised the Torah.

We should not deserve to celebrate this great day should we be satisfied with a poor imitation of the work of other nations. Knowing that true wisdom learns from all people we shall open wide the gates and windows of this institution in all directions to admit all the good and sublime which has ever been and is being created by the mind of man. Yet not being novices in the Kingdom of the Mind and Spirit, we feel that while learning from others we also have something to contribute. And I am confident that the same moral principles, which have been laid down as the fundamental principles of our schools, like those enumerated in the abridged Torah known as the פירק קנין התורה, shall become the possession of all humanity.

Gentlemen, thousands of our young men and women, listening to the inner promptings of their hearts, stream from the four corners of the world to this country to rescue it from its present state of desolation and ruin, prepared to give to their country their best energies and their youth. They plough among the rocks, drain the swamps, and cut roads with song and rejoicing. These young people have learnt to exalt simple, rough toil to the sacredness of a religion. We must light this holy fire within the walls of the institution which has now been opened on Mount Scopus. Let some build Lower Jerusalem with fire, and others Upper Jerusalem, "For Thou O Lord hast burnt her with fire and with fire shalt Thou rebuild her."