
MAX NORDAU

8. Jewry of Muscle (June 1903)¹

Two years ago, during a committee meeting at the Congress in Basle,² I said: "We must think of creating once again a Jewry of muscles."

Once again! For history is our witness that such a Jewry had once existed.

For too long, all too long have we been engaged in the mortification of our own flesh.

Or rather, to put it more precisely—others did the killing of our flesh for us. Their extraordinary success is measured by hundreds of thousands of Jewish corpses in the ghettos, in the churchyards, along the highways of medieval Europe. We ourselves would have gladly done without this "virtue" [i.e., the Christian virtue of corporal mortification]. We would have preferred to develop our bodies rather than to kill them or to have them—figuratively and actually—killed by others. We know how to make rational use of our life and appreciate its value. If, unlike most other peoples, we do not conceive of [physical] life as our highest possession, it is nevertheless very valuable to us and thus worthy of careful treatment. During long centuries we have not been able to give it such treatment. All the elements of Aristotelian physics—light, air, water and earth—were measured out to us very sparingly. In the narrow Jewish street our poor limbs soon forgot their gay movements; in the dimness of sunless houses our eyes began to blink shyly; the fear of constant persecution turned our powerful voices into frightened whispers, which rose in a crescendo only when our martyrs on the stakes cried out their dying prayers in the face of their executioners. But now, all coercion has become a memory of the past, and at least we are allowed space enough for our bodies

to live again. Let us take up our oldest traditions; let us once more become deep-chested, sturdy, sharp-eyed men.

This desire of going back to a glorious past finds a strong expression in the name which the Jewish gymnastic club in Berlin has chosen for itself.³ Bar Kokhba was a hero who refused to know defeat.⁴ When in the end victory eluded him, he knew how to die. Bar Kokhba was the last embodiment in world history of a bellicose, militant Jewry. To evoke the name of Bar Kokhba is an unmistakable sign of ambition. But ambition is well suited for gymnasts striving for perfection.

For no other people will gymnastics fulfill a more educational purpose than for us Jews. It shall straighten us in body and in character. It shall give us self-confidence, although our enemies maintain that we already have too much self-confidence as it is. But who knows better than we do that their imputations are wrong. We completely lack a sober confidence in our physical prowess.

Our new muscle-Jews [*Muskeljuden*] have not yet regained the heroism of our forefathers who in large numbers eagerly entered the sport arenas in order to take part in competition and to pit themselves against the highly trained Hellenistic athletes and the powerful Nordic barbarians. But morally, even now the new muscle-Jews surpass their ancestors, for the ancient Jewish circus fighters were ashamed of their Judaism and tried to conceal the sign of the Covenant by means of a surgical operation,⁵ . . . while the members of the "Bar Kochba [Association]" loudly and proudly affirm their national loyalty.

May the Jewish gymnastic club flourish and thrive and become an example to be imitated in all the centers of Jewish life!

Source: "Muskeljudentum," *Juedische Turnzeitung* (June 1903). Republished in Max Nordau, *Zionistische Schriften* (Cologne and Leipzig: Juedischer Verlag, 1909), pp. 379–81. Trans. by J. Hessing.

NOTES

1. Max Nordau (1849–1923), physician, avant-garde literary critic, novelist. One of the most controversial and influential authors of his day, he was among Herzl's earliest supporters.

2. Congress in Basle, i.e., the Second Zionist Congress, held in Basle, Switzerland, during the summer of 1898.

3. At the Second Zionist Congress, Nordau and Max Mandelstamm (a Russian ophthalmologist and Zionist leader who supported Herzl) proposed a program to promote the physical fitness

of Jewish youth. In response, the Bar Kochba gymnastic club was founded in Berlin in 1898. Similar clubs were soon established throughout Europe.

4. Bar Kokhba (Simeon bar kosevah) (d. 135 c.e.) led the Jewish revolt against Hadrian that broke out in 132 c.e.

5. According to Josephus (a Jewish historian), Hellenized Jews, who in accordance with Greek custom wrestled in the nude, would often undergo surgery in order to disguise their circumcision.

SEVENTH ZIONIST CONGRESS

9. Anti-Uganda Resolution (July 30, 1905)¹

The Seventh Zionist Congress declares:

The Zionist organisation stands firmly by the fundamental principle of the Basle program, namely: "The establishment of a legally-secured, publicly recognised home for the Jewish people in Palestine," and it rejects either as an end or as a means all colonising activity outside Palestine and its adjacent lands.

The Congress resolves to thank the British Government for its offer of a territory in British East Africa, for the purpose of establishing there a Jewish settlement with autonomous rights. A Commission having been sent out to examine the territory, and having reported thereon, the Congress resolves that the Zionist organisation shall not engage fur-

ther with the proposal. The Congress records with satisfaction the recognition accorded by the British Government to the Zionist organisation in its desire to bring about a solution of the Jewish problem, and expresses the sincere hope that it may be accorded the further good offices of the British Government where available in any matter it may undertake in accordance with the Basle program.

The Seventh Zionist Congress recalls and emphasizes the fact that, according to Article I of the statutes of the Zionist organisation, the Zionist organisation includes those Jews who declare themselves to be in agreement with the Basle program.

NOTE

1. The Seventh Zionist Congress, held in Basle from July 17 to August 2, 1905, was the first congress after Herzl's death in July 1904. The previous congress (August 1903) debated an official offer from the British government, which was willing to allocate a territory for Jewish resettlement in

Uganda, East Africa. At that congress, Herzl advanced the Uganda scheme for serious examination, while simultaneously emphasizing that "our views on the land of Israel cannot and will not be subject to change; Uganda is not Zion and will never be Zion. This proposal is nothing more than

Source: *The Jewish Chronicle*, August 4, 1905, p. 21.