

JULY 1963

Lord Samuel.

1) It would be redundant to add yet another to the many obituaries of Lord Samuel which have appeared in the world's press. He was a Founder Member of the Union, better known perhaps in this connection for his activities as President of the World Congress of Faiths. As a statesman and philosopher he shares with General Smuts and Dr. Radhakrishnan a unique position in the history of our time. For his physical endurance and prolonged activity in advanced old age he challenges comparison with Churchill. Such men are rare.

Leon Roth.

2) I forget who it was who remarked that as a man grows old he finds himself moving through thinly populated country. The founders of the Union were not young men and it is not perhaps unexpected that so many of these Letters should begin with an obituary, but Leon Roth was not old, and he never seemed as old as he was. As a friend and companion he was unique and irreplaceable. I remember our meeting more or less accidentally in Madras one Christmas. As I walked back from his lodging to mine on Christmas night I was thinking how fortunate I had been to have his companionship, and it then occurred to me as perhaps a little unexpected that I should be feeling that way on that day about the company of a devout Jew.

Not that he was normally a soothing companion by any means. At the Centre for Spiritual and Religious Studies they used to call him affectionately "the prickly pear"! He was a thorn in the flesh of persons with a panacea and inadequate powers of exposition. "But I want to know", he used to say, like Socrates, "I don't understand. What do you mean by such and such? Surely you can elucidate".

He could also be very intolerant of obtuse or woolly-minded questioners. "But the fellow was so stupid", he would explain, when one expostulated afterwards. Hypocrisy he detested most of all. "The man is simply a holy fraud", he commented on one revered religious leader, provoking me thereby to reply in verse:-

"Shall I compare thee to an April shower?  
Thou art as bracing but less temperate.  
Thy rough winds scatter shrewdly and with power  
Spell-binding blossoms meant to fascinate.  
Sometimes too high the eyes of credence range  
Sometimes too low in murky matter dimmed.  
Of each extreme, however, rich, if strange,  
Roth's ruthless shears the lush excesses trimmed.

So the cocked beard, the tilted head, the eye,  
Above the opposition-downing tongue,  
Twinkling, its woundy saltness to bely,  
Go bristling forth to mock at old and young;  
And Daniel the appointed of the Lord  
Gets his quietus as a holy fraud".

His reply cannot, alas, be quoted in full because it would reveal the identity of Daniel. But the final couplet is typical. When he had "brought the question to the Highest Court",

"The Judge Archangel listened, gave the award:  
T'is not a holy, but unholy fraud".