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| Zangwill, Israel |
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| Israel Zangwill was a British-Jewish author, journalist, and activist. Among his best-known literary works are the novel *The Children of the Ghetto* (1892), and the melodrama ‘The Melting Pot’ (1908). In Jewish political circles, Zangwill was well known both for his role in the Zionist movement and as the founder of the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO). Like other modern Jewish thinkers, Zangwill pursued a Jewish identity that balanced tradition and assimilation. Initially attracted to the Zionism of Theodore Herzl, Zangwill later founded the ITO, which sought a Jewish home in any plausible location as a result of the Kishinev pogroms of 1903, Britain’s subsequent offer of an autonomous Jewish home in Africa (the Uganda Plan), and Herzl’s death in 1904. But Zangwill also argued that the growing importance of the American Jewish community should become a cultural centre of Jewish life by means of the creation of a vibrant, evolutionary, Jewish religion and culture, uniting Jewish history with American creativity. Zangwill eventually abandoned both Zionism and American idealism as solutions. In a 1923 address to the American Jewish Congress, which alienated many listeners, he pronounced political Zionism dead, arguing that the restrictions of the Balfour Declaration and the demographic superiority of the Arab population would doom the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine — a prediction that resonates today. Zangwill also criticized the American Jewish community for its failure to demand social justice in the political arena. After 1923, Zangwill was a marginal figure in Jewish discourse, though today there is renewed scholarly interest in his work. |
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