

Arab and Jew in the Holy Land

Will the Chosen People Repossess Palestine?

by WILLIAM SCHACK

THE PRESENT disorders in Palestine, the most sustained of the four outbreaks since she became an English mandate, prompt a re-examination of the entire problem; for it is not alone outside provocation and support which have precipitated them but the ripening internal situation itself. That Nazi pamphlets have been found among the Arabs is quite credible — the Nazi mind is capable of spreading anti-Jewish propaganda in heaven and hell. That the Italian radio station at Bari has for the past year been broadcasting anti-British sentiments in Arabic, even going so far as to invent tales of revolt against British rule, has undoubtedly had its effect. That “mysterious sources are subsidizing Palestine Arabs,” with recruits of the “national guards” being given \$30 a month, as a *New York Times* correspondent reports, would, if it were true, have even more influence. The commission of inquiry after the 1929 massacres learned that many of the Arabs who participated in them were bought for a package of cigarettes. Assuming that these “mysterious sources” are also a rival of Britain, we must still understand the situation which lends itself to being exploited by them. With the Italian conquest of Ethiopia, the Japanese invasion of China, the German intention of demanding the return of the Reich’s African colonies, the stage is being set for imperialistic conflict, and it is not impossible that Jerusalem may become another Sarajevo. It is not impossible that Palestine, as an approach to India via the Suez Canal, may again be reduced to the battlefield of the nations she was in ancient times, as the land bridge between the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. But, for the time being, the Arab-Jewish-British conflict is still paramount.

The essence of the Arab protest is that England, as the mandatory power, is for her own imperialistic interest withholding political freedom from the Arabs and that the Jews, in so far as they are settling in Palestine not as individuals but as a nation under the protection of the Balfour Declaration, are one front of that imperialism. That the Balfour Declaration was drawn up under international sanction does not impress them: they still regard it as a British product, bearing the “gold-medal awards” of foreign nations. They can always point back to England’s promise of Arab freedom in return for their revolt against the Turks, which antedated the Balfour Declaration and from which Britain slithered out at the peace conference; nor will they grant the validity of Britain’s alleged exemption from that promise of certain areas, including Palestine, until they see the memorandum in print.

That England’s aim in procuring the mandate was to protect her imperium seems perfectly obvious. If Jewish and other idealists without sense of *Realpolitik* were not so sure that her aim was to be the new Jehovah for the Jewish people, it could be taken for granted. It was an English poet who wrote:

*How odd
Of God
To choose
The Jews.*

How much odder it would have been for Britain to assume the role of a dollar-a-year man! (The Palestine Government’s surplus for 1935 was about \$30,000,000, but England probably didn’t anticipate that it would be such a good thing!)

English spokesmen usually begin by alluding to their country’s benevolent rule in Palestine

ARAB AND JEW IN THE HOLY LAND

and end with the truth. Thus, Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 1927:

As for Palestine, [it is] really a matter of pride to any Englishman to contrast the position of that country even ten years ago with its position today. The wonderful experiment upon which Lord Balfour's statesmanship encouraged this country to embark during the War was giving an opportunity and protection to the Jews to come back to the land of their forefathers, to develop there in their ancient home under a sense of uplifting which they certainly could not feel in many parts of the world.

[The whole of England's naval strategy today depends] on the navy being free to move from this country to the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal . . . the security of which could be maintained if Great Britain was strong on each side of the canal and if the countries adjoining it were, at any rate, in friendly hands and free from hostile intervention.

From that point of view the position we had achieved in Egypt and which we were building up in Palestine and in the Near East was an immense insurance of the whole security of the British Empire, which rested on the navy.

At a luncheon in New York last spring tendered Major Henry Adam Proctor, M.P., by the Zionist Organization of America, Mr. Amery said that Britain "cannot allow the Palestine experiment to fail" because of its strategic value "in the event of an attack on the Suez Canal." One cannot ask for greater candor. There is no point in arguing what British statesmen admit. In view of the increasing agitation for self-rule in Egypt since Mr. Amery was in office (agitation which England appeased last summer in an agreement which cost her nothing) Palestine has become correspondingly more important to England. If we add that even if \$100,000,000 of English capital has been invested in Palestine there is little of what may be called exploitation of native labor in the usual colonial fashion, we may take it for granted that the British are in the country in the interests of a "higher" imperialism.

But is the Jewish colonization also a form of imperialism? The Arab view, which many liberals and communists share, is that it is, in so far as it is taking place under British "protection." Though Soviet Russia has granted autonomy to its many minority peoples, she has persecuted Zionists within her borders. This, of course, is not an expression of anti-Semitism, for the U.S.S.R. has also set aside Biro-Bidjan for development as an autonomous Jewish state, but is based on the premise that Zionism

is a movement exploiting another people. This doctrinaire view had its violent repercussions in England among Jewish laborites and leftists after the Arab massacre of Jews in Hebron and Safed in 1929. Some held to the party line that the event was a glorious uprising of the oppressed against their oppressors; others could not square it with their humanitarian principles, their feeling for kin, and their reason.

Their reason told them what Arab leaders themselves did not deny — that the work the Jews were doing was wholly constructive and that as such they could not regard it as evil. To evaluate this work and to measure the force of the Arab and communist position that, constructive or not, it is imperialistic, it is necessary to give the reader some picture of the country, for, without it, with the best will in the world, one cannot understand the situation.

RESTORING A WASTELAND

ONE HEARS that it is the least fertile part of the Fertile Crescent, without quite realizing that there is no firmly drawn outline even around the Crescent, that it is everywhere broken into by the desert. One hears that Palestine is barren, but *barren* is only a word. One must ride through the hills of Judea, and Samaria and see those stony hills, like quarries reduced to chips; one must feel throat thirst and eye thirst and rejoice at the sight of flowing water, as at Elijah's Pool in Jericho; one must come upon a tree and feel that it is a miracle; one must go by the swamps of Huleh, with its malaria-stricken inhabitants and their sedge-grass huts, and compare it with the flourishing settlements Jews have reclaimed from just such land both before and after the War, at Hedera, Dagania, Rehoboth, the Plain of Esdraelon. Literally, they have made the desert bloom again — in spots. (When forests, planted with such infinite pains by the Jews, are wantonly burned in the present disorders, it is little short of murder.) Industry too has become a life-giving force; and who ever heard of a theater, a symphony orchestra, or a university in Palestine before?

To see the country is to realize that no people would ever migrate to Palestine if they could help it. In the usual sense it is anything but a land of opportunity; but the Jews are making it that. When one thinks of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian Arabs in the post-War



Jaffa-Tel Aviv Road

Drawing by Israel Paldi

period emigrating from their country, which is far less harsh than Palestine, being comparatively well watered and richer in natural resources, one must conclude that the natives of the latter stay put only because they cannot help themselves. It is only a unique combination of forces that compels and enables Jews to settle there: the force of starvation or persecution in other countries; the force of sentiment for Jewish tradition and the ancestral homeland; and, finally, the enabling force of money. Without the hundreds of millions raised by world Jewry for land purchase and reclamation, for medical institutions, education, and research, the sentiment could not have found creative expression. Nor would the further hundreds of millions have come into the country subsequently for investment — partly benevolent, seeking only a limited return, but much of it hopeful for good, substantial dividends, in which it has not been disappointed.

The economic benefits to Arabs of all classes have been enormous. In the first place, Jews have acquired all the land they have by purchase and at prices from three to eighteen times

the value measured by the previous return in rent. They have bought either from large — generally absentee — landowners or from small freeholders. In the former case, they are obliged by law to compensate displaced tenant farmers with a plot of land or cash (\$200–\$300). Where they have bought land from independent fellahen, what has usually happened is that the latter disposed of half their holdings. The proceeds, together with the stimulus of their Jewish neighbors, enabled them to improve their remaining property to a much higher degree of productivity than their total holdings had before. Colonel E. R. Sawyer, Director of Agriculture and Forests, wrote:

The existence of Jewish farms on which modern agricultural methods are invariably employed has not failed to exercise a beneficial and civilizing effect on the neighboring villages. In Sheikh Mywanis, for instance, all farmers with very few exceptions employ European ploughs; there are four harvesting machines and a big threshing plant. Modern methods are employed in laying out new orange groves, and commercial fertilizers are used in imitation of Jewish farm practice.

This refers especially to those areas in which

ARAB AND JEW IN THE HOLY LAND

the fellaheen have sold part of their land to Jews. And all Arab farmers — tenants and freeholders alike — have benefited by the big market the Jewish settlers in the cities have created for their produce.

The government, which is supposed to facilitate close settlement on the land by Jews, has granted them some 18,000 acres of state lands, of which only 21 per cent are cultivable, while it has given Arabs 140,000 acres, all of it cultivable. In the desirable Beisan area it has in fact given them much larger parcels than a family can work, so that speculators have bought up large tracts — and offered them to Jews for sale! When, recently, the government gave the Jews permission to develop some 12,000 acres in the Huleh region which the previous concessionaire, a Syrian, had done nothing with, it exacted \$1,000,000 for it and stipulated besides that the present Arab squatters were to receive one third of the land, after the Jews have drained a large swamp which vitiates the place now!

WHAT THE JEWS HAVE BROUGHT

THE NEW immigration furthermore has brought the Arabs more employment, more education, better sanitation and health. More employment: to unskilled laborers in the building trades, to clerical and technical workers in government offices, to teachers. More education: a trebling of enrollment in the schools since 1920 and a change from the outlived religious to secular schools. There has been a marked diminution in the two worst diseases which had long ravaged the country — malaria and trachoma — and in the death rate.

It has been said that these benefits are not without their serious drawbacks, that Arab employment, for instance, which has been stimulated by Jewish colonization, suffers a decline when the latter slackens. That is undoubtedly true. But one may well ask what would those same Arabs have done if there had been no Jewish activity to begin with. The solution would seem to be in continuous constructive work, avoiding so great an acceleration that it must be followed by a relapse. In the free development of a capitalist economy, such things as real-estate booms, regrettable from a wide social point of view, are inevitable. But the administration's principle of admitting Jewish immigrants only within the economic absorp-

tive capacity of the country aims to control inequalities in employment, thus minimizing fluctuations in the welfare of the Arabs.

They could not have enjoyed the benefits enumerated above if there had been no Jewish colonization, for the newcomers provide a far higher proportion of the government revenues, while receiving a smaller proportion of government aid. Customs duties, land-transfer and industrial taxes, rents — all fall more heavily on them. In 1932, when the Jews comprised twenty per cent of the population, semiofficial estimates placed their contribution to government at 47 per cent of the total. There are those who hold that this is no great sum to pay for the privilege of settling in a country which did not invite them to do so: they are arguing on sentimental grounds, not within the realistic framework I am trying to set up in this article.

Furthermore, Jews do not benefit from the government-supported schools and hospitals but maintain institutions of their own. Of the \$4,500,000 expended on education by the government from 1921 to 1929, only \$300,000 or less than seven per cent went to the Jewish school system. Hadassah, an organization of 50,000 American Jewish women, was a pioneer in the field, erecting its hospitals, clinics, infant-welfare stations, open to Arabs as well as Jews. Its annual budget for the past ten years has averaged about \$400,000. Kupat Cholim, the medical system supported by the Jewish General Federation of Labor (Histadruth) has steadily risen in importance. Its budget for 1936 was \$900,000 — larger than the health budget of the government itself! (Labor contributes 83 per cent, employers fifteen per cent, other sources two per cent.) But the government did not begin to contribute funds regularly to the Jewish health services until the last three years. In 1934 it gave Kupat Cholim \$15,000 and the 1935-6 budget of Hadassah \$18,500. To the new \$800,000 Rothschild-Hadassah University Hospital it has contributed \$31,000.

It is in the light of these realities that one must decide if the Jewish colonization is to be classified as imperialism. A mass migration of a unique order, primitive in its emotional drive, sophisticated in its means and organization, it could more easily be recognized for what it is if there were no intervening mandatory power.

And this without consideration for the Jewish claim to the country by historic association.

WHO ARE THE ARABS?

UP TO THIS point I have been speaking of the Arabs as "they," as if they were all bound by a single interest, presenting a firm, common front to Jewish penetration; and that is the unconsciously assumed attitude of the outside world. It needs examination.

First of all, let us consider the potential ruling class. This is the large landholders, the effendis. About half of the cultivable land in Arab hands is owned by some 250 families; five families own about two per cent of it. It is from these same families that some of the most intransigent anti-British, anti-Zionist leaders have sprung — Haj Amin el Hussein, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and head of the Moslem Supreme Council; Aouni Bey Abdul Hadi, a lawyer; Jamal Bey El Hussein; and, lately, Ragheb Bey Nashashibi, former mayor of Jerusalem. It is a commonplace to those familiar with Palestinian affairs that Arab politics is largely concerned with the bitter rivalries of the Hussein and Nashashibi families. In his dispatch of June 14, 1936, the correspondent of the *London Times* went so far as to say that the present Arab strike and the ensuing open rebellion were directly engineered by Ragheb Bey Nashashibi, smarting from his defeat in 1935 by Dr. Hussein Khalidi for the Jerusalem mayoralty, as a means of bringing the Husseins into disfavor with the government. These leaders want the dominant political power which is theirs by economic right and are therefore hostile to the mandatory power, who withholds it from them in her own interest, and to the Zionists, for whose sake the latter alleges she withholds it. As representatives of a semi-feudal order, the effendis also resent the liberalizing influence of the Jews. If organized Jewish labor gets on better terms with the natives, how long will it be before the hitherto docile Arab labor and the virtually enslaved tenant farmers begin to get notions?

It was from this upper class that the first protests against the Balfour Declaration emanated. They were ready to make use of any argument, reasonable or specious, in their cause nor did they hesitate to invent atrocities in order to incite the Arab masses to follow them. In 1929, for example, they stirred up their

credulous people by spreading the report that the Jews had destroyed the Mosque of Omar. They claimed that the Jews, when they purchased land, did not compensate displaced tenants as provided by law, but a commission of inquiry proved that they had greatly exaggerated the case. They have persistently demanded that the government forbid the sale of land to the Jews, at the same time that they have offered the latter their own land — indirectly, of course, through go-betweens.

But the effendis and their retainers are not the only genuinely anti-British, anti-Zionist Arabs ("genuinely" in contrast to the masses of Arabs who are merely the instruments of their protest). Especially in the revolt of this year, a new force has come to the front — Arab youth. It is a paradox that they who have been able to obtain an education and, with it, a higher consciousness of nationalism only because of the resources brought in by the Jews and English should turn against them. But it cannot for that reason be lightly dismissed as "biting the hand that feeds." For no doubt many of these Arab youths have not, like the effendis, an ax to grind, but are idealists. That is both their strength and their weakness — strength, because they are conscious of fighting for a principle; weakness, because that principle, nationalism, is no longer the all-noble, all-justifying concept it used to be. In their minds, nationalism means political freedom; but we know now that, for the empty-handed, political freedom is empty also. In Palestine, it would mean simply the rule of the effendis, uninfluenced by the masses of Arabs and indifferent to their welfare. The political freedom the young Arab nationalists desire they have a much better chance of winning in a Palestine in which progressive Jewish opinion also has its say.

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

SOME of the young nationalists no doubt grant that the country is impoverished and that the Jews can measurably improve it but are willing to take it, poor as it is, such as it is, so long as it is their very own. This kind of argument makes liberals quail. But to admit its validity is to admit that possession has higher claims than use. On the strength of it, the North American continent belonged to the Indians, and white men had no right to it, as if

ARAB AND JEW IN THE HOLY LAND



Drawing by Jacques Zucker

Young Pioneer

the European migration westward were not as indisputable as the flow of the tides or the succession of the seasons.

What the liberals really mean in standing for self-determination is that no people should be oppressed by another. The whites could not have been kept out of America, but there was no necessity for their treating the Indians as they did — for the Dutch shooting them down for stealing a few peaches, for the New England colonists burning a Narragansett village with all its inhabitants, for the United States to shift the Cherokees from Georgia to Arkansas to Oklahoma to off the map. Properly posed, the question is whether the new Jewish colonization is exploiting the Arabs in any way. To this the answer must be, “No.” It is against Zionist policy to do so; it is against the principles of the labor organization to which the great majority

of Jewish working-class settlers belong; and even the capitalist newcomers are often restrained by a degree of sentiment. To hold, as some do, that the colonization in itself, from the very fact that it competes with the natives for room, constitutes exploitation is to deprive the word of any meaning. (The conception of competition is itself misleading, for the Jews are not forcing the Arabs out of the country. In developing its resources, they are making possible a more intensive settlement for both Arabs and Jews. Far from displacing Arabs, they have enabled thousands to come in from the north, illegally, who have found a place for themselves in the country’s economy.)

To deny the existence of exploitation, however, is not to deny that the new colonization has created difficulties. But it is necessary to draw a distinction between difficulties and

injustices with which the Zionists cannot fairly be charged. If there are pains accompanying the adjustment of Arab-Jewish relationships, they may be regarded as, potentially, the labor pains of a higher order of civilization.

That goal can be reached only when there is free intercourse between the two groups. It is by meeting on common ground, in industry, trade, and agriculture, in homes, schools, and hospitals, that they can allay suspicion and prejudice and come to know each other as human beings and compatriots. There are places now where Jews and Arabs are good neighbors. An extension of the area of good will depends on the realization of the mass of the people that what matters most is the economic well-being of the country.

FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT

THE MOST effective medium for encouraging mutual understanding is a common job. The difficulty, of course, is that Jewish employers are confronted with the Zionist aim of increasing the Jewish population as rapidly as possible. The key to the situation is held, shakily, by Jewish organized labor. For the Jews, of all classes, cannot sanction a division of labor along racial lines, and they know that the higher standard of living they are setting up for the common man in Palestine cannot be maintained without the aid of Arab labor. In fact they once financed a strike of Arab workers in a Jewish-owned match factory and have agitated against the exploitation of Arab hands in the orange groves of certain pre-War Jewish colonies. It is up to them to fight for a common wage for the same kind of work. Competing for jobs on the same level, they will not tempt employers to make their choice along racial lines. Certainly in the building trades, in retail shops, in many factories and farms there is room for Jews and Arabs to work side by side, as they do in government institutions. As a matter of fact, Arabs are employed in Jewish agriculture and industry — a couple of hundred in Palestine Potash alone, the company which extracts the Dead Sea salts and where, incidentally, there has been no conflict with Jewish fellow workers; and Arab entrepreneurs have used some skilled Jewish labor. But that is only a small beginning. Employers, both Arab and Jewish, have a long way to go.

At the moment, this necessity is obscured.

For the increase in the Jewish population in the past decade, from 150,000 to 400,000, has made the Arab leaders aware of the strides their opponents have made toward becoming a majority (a position it must still take them decades to attain) and spurred them to the most intensive resistance they have thus far made. This is the ripening internal situation I referred to in the beginning of the article. In the agitation over which people shall be the dominant majority, the Arab masses forget that they have, among their own kind, always been in the majority without ever being dominant and so cannot become aware of their self-interest.

Besides Jewish labor, there are other forces trying to better the relationship between the races. The Jewish Brith Shalom has been at work for some time. The more recently organized Antifa (anti-fascist group) sent an Arab and a Jewish spokesman to the international peace congress held in Brussels in September.

Impossible as it is to offer a magic formula for adjusting Arab-Jewish-English relationships — the situation calls for hard work, not for magic — one thing is certain, that the masses of Arabs and Jews have nothing to lose and everything to gain by co-operation. Once they realize it and act on it, the acute English angle will be eliminated. Palestine is a mandate, not a colony of England. When Arabs and Jews can get together, she will have to make her exit. Until then, while serving her own interests, she can, incidentally, be a useful umpire in a game whose rules are not too clear to the participants themselves. If those interests impel her to lean backward in favor of the Arabs, that is part of the price the Jews must pay for a guardian who cannot afford to offend Arab opinion outside the narrow limits of Palestine.

Furthermore, even a "higher" imperialism has its dangers. The Iraq Petroleum Company, which has brought one of its pipelines from the newly developed fields at Kirkuk in Mesopotamia to the port of Haifa, is an international consortium in which the two major fascist powers — Germany and Italy — have no part. When war breaks out — it seems soft to say "if" war breaks out — that accessible source of fuel will provide a focus for imperialist rivalry. That is a possibility which ought to accelerate the mutual understanding of Arab and Jew, if reason has any part in human affairs.

Chronicle of Death

It is admitted that force and matter can be neither created nor destroyed and have therefore existed and acted from all eternity.—Flammarion.

No matter how a man may try
No man alive can ever die;
The tortured flesh that he has known
The bated blood, the bated bone,
The hands, the feet, he stretches through
Are elements in which he grew.

A wisp of wind, a touch of air —
There is no dying anywhere
That he can find; no simple peace,
After the body's limp release,
May swallow him; when weight is gone
His spirit will adventure on.

The total life, the total death
Are strange to him who draws no breath;
For now he feels, from end to end,
His own existence curve and blend
Until the mergings both are one
Within a circle going on —
Moving outward faster, faster,
Into something wider, vaster.

In the void of endless space
He will whirl into his place;
He will let his spirit swing
In a great celestial ring,
Held in line with avatars
By the balance of the stars.

All in part, and part of all,
He feels immensity grow small,
Lose its weight, and lose its size,
Till it fall, and till it rise
A minutely measured thing
To his perfect rhythming.
He will catch the pulsic beat
Of vibrations made complete;
Every star and every sun
Will be melted into one,
While he suffers, while he yearns,
Till he turn with all that turns —
Molecules and magnitudes —
Through their colors, through their moods,
Into the harmonic strife
Of an everlasting life.

Hell or heaven will be there
In the distance of a prayer;
If he knows, or does not know,
He must move and he must grow,
He must live within the scope
Of the fear and of the hope,
That in body, blood, and bone
He accepted as his own.

Through the eons, through the ages,
He will wheel in cosmic stages;
He will know and he will see
All that was and is to be.
He will find himself a part
Of that great magnetic heart,
Centered there within the plan
Beating all into its span.

Until a body like a flame,
Without a track, without a name —
Pull the suns and pull the spheres
From their paths of countless years —
Break the circles, break the ties
Of the rhythm of the skies.

Heat, and flame, and waves of light
Will touch and spin him in his flight
Till he move within the course
Of an atmospheric force;
Through the aura, through the spell
Of the forming of a cell,
Faster now he shall be hurled
To the summit of a world
Stirred with power, stirred with form
Of a body growing warm.

He will struggle, he will strain
In the prison of that brain,
Fighting sinew, fighting breath,
To escape back into death —
Till he sense a pulsing urge
Move, and tingle, and emerge —
Till the rhythms in him glow
And his blood begin to flow —
Till again with surging might,
The body and the soul unite
And through visions thinly drawn,
Slowly, he shall be reborn.

Lucy Kent