

CHAPTER I

'The Middle East is a delicious meat, but it poisons those who eat it.' Gobineau.

Introduction to Zionism

My interest in the return of the Jews to Palestine is as old as my eighty-odd years. As a child my mother used to relate that her grandmother, Mary Seddon, whom she remembered as a 'gypsy-like old lady', was so keenly interested in the return of the Jews to their old home, that she collected a handful of Jews in England, bought a white donkey and started off for the Holy Land, immediately after the Napoleonic wars. The old lady was an eccentric but determined in her mission. She got as far as Calais with her white donkey but her following had deserted; her husband had to cross the Channel and bring her back, donkey and all.

My second contact with the Jews was in 1903 when I was stationed at Nyeri in Kenya. I wrote my diary on 28.x.1903:

There is a plan afoot to offer the Jews a home on the Uasin Gishu Plateau. I hope they refuse for it is just asking for trouble. In the first place, the Jews' Home is in Palestine, not in Africa. The scheme would only add to political confusion and, God knows, there will be enough trouble here in fifty years when the natives get educated. Also, the Jews are not good mixers—never have been; they have their own religion, customs and habits and would constitute a most indigestible element in

East Africa if they came in any numbers. Why not persuade the Turks to give them Palestine? The Arabs are doing nothing with it, and the Jews with their brains and dynamic force would be a tremendous asset to Turkey.

This ill-advised scheme appears to have started early in 1902 and came to the ears of Sir Charles Eliot, then High Commissioner of East Africa, who forwarded to the Colonial Office a letter from the East African Syndicate in which it was stated 'there are rumours that it is also intended to establish a colony of Jews in the Naivasha Province of Kenya'. Lord Lansdowne, in reply on October 15, recommended a postponement of the scheme. There was, for some reason, a desire for a rapid colonization of Kenya and it was suggested that a colony of Finns be settled in the Kenya Highlands. A haste to achieve solvency and pay for the expensive Uganda Railway produced a series of undigested brainwaves. British settlers were not entering the colony as fast as the Colonial Office wished. Eliot frowned on the Finnish scheme and it was dropped to be replaced almost at once by the scheme of colonization by the Jews. Joseph Chamberlain, who was in sympathy with the Zionist movement and disgusted with Russian persecution, pressed for Jewish colonization in East Africa; but the Jews naturally looked to Palestine whilst a section of them regarded the East African Scheme as 'an antechamber to the Holy Land, a place of apprenticeship'. 5,000 square miles of Kenya were offered to the Jews with the promise of self-government under a Jewish governor. The Zionist Congress in 1903 voted for acceptance of the offer and a Commission was sent to Kenya to report. The Commission arrived in November 1904 and visited the Uasin Gishu Plateau, but what with elephants by day and lions by night, together with an encounter with Masai warriors in full war regalia, they decided that Kenya was no place for Russian Jewry. The Zionist Congress endorsed the Commission's decision and the proposal was dropped. An ill conceived catastrophe had been averted and Kenya was saved from a complication which would have only added to her difficulties of today.

In 1910 I visited Odessa where I witnessed a pogrom which had a lasting effect on me, binding me more closely than ever to a National Home for the Jews in Palestine. What I saw in Odessa

on my thirty-second birthday still remains for me one of the most terrible scenes I have witnessed. I record in my diary:

3.III.1910. *Odessa*

I have been shocked beyond belief. I have seldom been so angry and yet so impotent as I have been today. I would never have believed that human beings could behave worse than the most savage and cruel wild beasts; worse, because their behaviour was intended to be cruel and brutal and what they did was done with relish; I witnessed a Pogrom in the streets of Odessa. I was having dinner with our Consul General Smith when it started. There was some running and shouting in the streets. Smith and I went to the front door of the Consulate and saw people running excitedly in all directions and much hysterical shouting. Smith said 'I fear this is a pogrom, we had one here some years ago; we must keep off the streets as the Russians become quite irresponsible and the police become immobile; now you will witness one of the vilest facets of the Russian character'. We watched. The streets were well lit and we could see well in both directions; there was also a small square in front of the house. Russians, many with bludgeons or knives or axes, were rushing all over the place, breaking open barricaded doors and chasing the wretched Jews into the streets where they were hunted down, beaten and often killed. One old man was axed on the head quite close to us. I was longing to interfere and beat up some of these Russian wild beasts but Smith restrained me—fortunately. A young woman chased by a Russian rushed frantically into the Consulate and collapsed on the door-mat; her pursuer pulled up short on seeing us. I abused him in English; Smith said 'For God's sake, don't provoke them; they're mad'. Another Jewish youth was chased, beaten into the gutter, viciously kicked, robbed and left unconscious. By this time, the streets were in an uproar, much noise but not a policeman in sight. A large window of a store was smashed and the shop entered, looted and thrown into the street. The climax arrived when a Russian passed the Consulate dragging a Jewish girl of about 12 years old by her hair along the gutter; she was screaming and the man was shouting. I have no doubt she would have been outraged and then murdered. I could not help it, I heard

old* Hales' voice whispering 'Do something'. So I dashed out, kicked the Russian violently in the stomach with my heavy Russian boots and landed him a good blow on the jaw; he went down like a log and I carried the child into the Consulate. Smith said 'We shall get into trouble for this'. Trouble indeed, when compared with the fate of this child. I am overcome with anger and compassion this evening.

Smith has been in Odessa for ten years. He tells me that some years ago when the Russian revolution was in full swing, it was decided to have a pogrom in Odessa. Many Jews were warned of their impending danger and succeeded in bribing the revolutionary leaders not to molest them, but some 400 Jews were nevertheless killed. The pogrom lasted three days and was organized by the Minister of the Interior in order to demonstrate to the Tsar that the people were not yet fitted for self-government. On the first day of the pogrom all the police were withdrawn from Odessa, and remained away for three days. After that time, an order went forth that the military must stop the massacres; this was effected in a few hours. Some of the rioters, on being shot in the streets, bitterly complained that they had not had their full three days promised by the authorities. Smith assured me that the above was strictly accurate and that a full report with proof had been sent at the time to our Foreign Office.

I am deeply moved by these terrible deeds and have resolved that whenever or wherever I can help the Jews, I shall do so to the best of my ability. There is no word in the British language to describe such vile and bestial behaviour.

I was also much influenced by the Divine Promise that the Holy Land will forever remain Israel's inheritance. Also that the Holy Land is inseparably intertwined in the Jewish Faith and the Jewish people. The upbuilding of Palestine by Jews and for the Jews is a fundamental Jewish religious duty. Also by Balfour's statement: 'The position of the Jews is unique. For them race, religion and country are interrelated as they are interrelated in the case of no other race, no other religion and no other country on earth.'

* The headmaster of my private school, see p. x.

Mr Eban has said of Israel 'Her difficulties are the only possessions which nobody has ever tried to take away.' Nothing, except the opportunity to build a National Home in Palestine, has ever been given to the Jews; they have for 2,000 years been despoiled by humanity, despised, ostracized and abused.

Before starting on my Diary I should like to make some general remarks and comments on Jews and Zionism.

In 1917 I was transferred to Egypt to take charge of General Allenby's Intelligence Section. I arrived in Cairo on May 24, having embarked on the 'Transylvania' at Marseilles on May 3. We were torpedoed on the 5th when I spent five hours in the water before being scooped up by a Japanese Destroyer. The Intelligence Section was divided into two parts—Political and Field. I was in charge of Field; the late Sir Wyndham Deedes was in charge of Political. Now, for the first time in my life, I found myself in close working association with Jews and soon recognized their intelligence and valour. I employed some fifteen, all refugees from Palestine, all of splendid physique and to my astonishment fair-haired and blue-eyed. They worked as a team, the leader being Aaron Aaronsson. This remarkable man was the most daring and unassuming agent, the equal of the Dutchman Pretorius whom I had previously employed in Tanganyika. I am not at liberty to divulge many of his exploits as it would publicize methods better kept secret. This splendid man was killed in an air accident over the British Channel during the Paris Peace Conference; at the time sabotage was rumoured, but there are no grounds for such a suggestion.

I had not yet (December 1917) come into direct contact with Zionism; on December 2, 1917, I write at Rafa in my diary:

2.XII.1917. Rafa

The political state of Palestine is somewhat complex and presents several problems difficult to solve; the elements are Turk, Arab, Jew, Syrian and a host of minor influences, with a powerful German control over the whole country. We also have the petty jealousies of France and Italy who regard our every action with suspicion. I cannot pretend to understand the problem completely as a whole, but the Arab and Jew elements have been uppermost, I have a fair idea of their attitudes towards us.