

THE RE-READING OF THE BOOK

**A PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE
PALESTINE PROBLEM**

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IT is, indeed, both a great privilege and a pleasure for any Jew to visit the Holy Land; to spend here several months as I have done; and to become, in some degree, a factor in the great enterprise of the rebuilding of Palestine.

As to myself, this errand has afforded me the greatest satisfaction of my life; it has fulfilled a longing I felt throughout many, many years. To say I have been inspired would hardly express my sentiments. "Full of reverence is this place. Surely, the Lord is in this place,"—such was my feeling as I traversed the length and breadth of the land and viewed the holy shrines of Israel, the tombs of the Fathers, the Wailing Wall—the spot where the Temple had stood; the places where kings had fought; the consecrated ground where the prophets had preached; and the psalmists had sung the songs of the Lord. These are the symbols of a glory that was; memories of great things now shrouded in the past.

But even more, I must confess, was I moved by the thrilling spectacle of a new life which unfolds now before the observer in Palestine. This is the new life of our own people charged with such bright promise for the future.

NOTE: The above article and the one following it, "A Practical View of the Palestine Problem," were written by Mr. Rosenbloom during his visit to Palestine in 1922.

I have seen the Chalutzim. The vision of the new heaven and earth is in their eyes; the song of hope and courage of the new Zion is on their lips. Blazing their way as pioneers, they are to be seen everywhere, working on the roads and in the fields, building highways, clearing swamps, constructing, planting and harvesting.

I have seen the Jewish agricultural settlements with their blossoming gardens and fruitful orchards. How great must have been the struggles of the colonists against a long neglected soil, against the ravages of disease, the inroads of marauders, and in the face of the chilling passivity of Jewry at large; more often in the face of its ridicule and cynicism! But how inspiring are the rewards of their unyielding patience, endurance and toil that enabled them to convert, as if by magic, sandy wastes and barren hills into charming beauty and generous fertility!

I have seen the teachers. Keenly alive to the spiritual goal in the rebuilding, they work silently and intently with that persistence which springs from love and devotion. They have already won for Palestine the enormous difficulty of resurrecting Hebrew as a living language; they have secured for our ancient tongue its rightful place as the modern carrier of the thought, learning, and ideals developed by Jewish genius.

Linked by the spirit of a redeemed Zion, the young and old, scholars and farmers, professionals and laborers, practical men, and dreamers have everywhere joined hands to labor for their one com-

mon aim. A great epic is being written by these forerunners of our birth.

But the fairest lines yet to be recorded demand the united efforts of all Jewry; in no other way can we hope to accomplish the great tasks before us to which our own destiny and the history of humanity have confronted us. But united effort implies a common understanding of an ultimate aim and purpose, and a clear realization of the possibilities and limitations within their compass; that is to say, we require a true appreciation of the significance of the sacrifices that the workers of Zion have been making, and a sound interpretation of the reciprocal duty and obligation which events have imposed alike on Palestine, Jewry, and the world at large.

A babble of voices confounds the clear and urgent call of purpose and duty, causing confusion in the ranks of Israel.

Absorbed with the problems of the moment—the problems of ways and means—our leaders have to the present day failed to give us and the world at large an unmistakable definition of the aspirations and motives that animate Israel to restore Palestine; and, consequently, they have not been able to provide the foundation on which all lovers of Zion could agree and unite.

It is deplorable that at this late hour, we find ourselves divided by divergent aims without having accomplished anything of real constructive significance. Indeed, certain Zionists in official capacities have, unfortunately, found it feasible and

possible to utter loose statements as to our purpose and intentions that lend themselves easily to misunderstandings, and which, torn from their context, have been twisted by our enemies, and admirably so, into mere caricatures—damaging caricatures of our aims.

Thus, it becomes essential to bring order out of chaos among ourselves and to decide what measure of importance we are to attach to these conflicting views. How shall we reconcile them so that we may stop drifting, and, as Zionists, harness our energy and devotion to the one common aim?

The fate of Israel is now hanging in the delicate balance which we hold in our own hands. Shall we declare for the perpetuation of our Jewish heritage; or shall we renounce all further right to it? Shall we demonstrate to the living present and to all ages to come that our professed yearnings for Zion have been sincere and vital enough to be translated into reality; or shall we proclaim ourselves a heap of dry bones with no power to stir into action while the breath of life is hovering over it? To my mind, we must find, and very promptly, a clear answer to these questions, keeping in mind what history teaches of our purpose, what the past has to tell of the future, and apply the lesson.

We are now living in the days of the second restoration. Let us turn to the first restoration for guidance, and recall its purpose, which was to rebuild the spiritual center of Palestine as the stronghold of Jewish religion and culture. Its one

significant event was the "re-reading of the book" by Ezra. The reestablishment of the Torah upon a firm foundation about 2,500 years ago has preserved Judaism to this day, and I hope for all time to come, profoundly influencing the spiritual outlook of the whole world.

Today, in the second restoration, we confront the same situation, we are struggling with the very same problems as did our ancestors of the Babylonian exile. These are the lack of a spiritual center, and the great problems connected with the return to the cradle of our ancient glory.

For thousands of years, we have suffered persecution from without and self-imposed restraint from within in order to preserve our distinct spiritual life and our distinct identity. But today, disorganization and disintegration threaten us far more seriously than has ever been the case with any other period in our history.

The important centers of Jewish life in Russia are crumbling, and conditions in western Europe, while allowing greater individual freedom, offer little opportunity for the development of Judaism. The authority of the Torah is shaken; divisions are multiplied, each Jew tending to become a religion unto himself. Our spiritual life, which has stood the test of centuries, is in danger of total extinction.

Those who are for the perpetuation of Judaism must unite to establish a center where Jewish life, philosophy and religion may be developed in harmony with the true spirit of the Torah, and in ac-

cord with the conditions of modern life. We must have a "re-reading of the book," and a reestablishment of the Torah as the cornerstone of a grander order of life to be developed in Palestine. And in so doing, may we not hope that we will again give new spiritual values to the world, and become a light unto the nations to guide and give hope in these troubled days of disillusion and distress.

We were once a source of spiritual teaching to world; our contributions in philosophy and in religion have furnished humanity its code of conduct and ethics; and if the great effort to establish ourselves again as a free nation is to be justified and to succeed, it is only because of our aspiration to preserve our spiritual heritage and to create new spiritual values. It is unthinkable that our lofty ideal should be forgotten in the rebirth of our people.

No one with knowledge of and insight into Jewish history will neglect to emphasize the importance of the Hebrew language in which our great spiritual, cultural, and religious treasures are expressed; but it appears, sometimes, as if concentration upon the mere instrument for the revival of Jewish thought has made some of us forget our ultimate aim—Jewish thought itself—and, as a result, has led to the exaltation of the Hebrew language as the beginning and the end. Hebrew is the key to the vast treasurehouse of Jewish learning and ideals, but it is not the treasurehouse itself.

I am a lover of the Hebrew language, and have always pleaded its cause and development, and sup-

ported it in practical ways; but I regret to see how the enthusiasm of some has made an idol out of the instrument and brought conflict into our ranks. Some of the most conservative have been misled into confusion and dismay by the over-emphasis of Hebrew as a secular language.

Unity of purpose and action may be promoted only by regarding the Hebrew language as a means to our great end—the rebirth of the Jewish people to its cultural and spiritual ideals.

Similarly, the national as well as the political aspect of Zionism, stressed and overemphasized in different quarters, has also proven a great stumbling block to unity.

It is essential for us to regard these elements as altogether secondary; merely as the means whereby the spiritual goal of our movement may be attained.

Who in our days has better understood and appreciated the political aspect of Zionism than Herzl, the father of the Zionist Organization, and yet who has spoken with a clearer prophetic insight than he when he declared that a return to Judaism must precede a return to Zion?

We must, of course, have political guarantees for the right to settle, for the security of property and life, and for the free, cultural, spiritual, and material development in our new-old homeland. But Jewish history and Jewish philosophy cannot bear the idea of political ambition and rule.

We are an old people, and the teachings of our prophets and rabbis have combined with historical

circumstances to convince us of the vanity and futility of political mastery. Hebraism and political guarantees in our Homeland are indispensable requirements, and they dare not be yielded, but if we are to be reckoned a great people, it is because of our spiritual and religious contributions which we are resolved to maintain in full vitality, and to enhance in vigor.

"Israel is a nation only by reason of its Torah and faith."

I am convinced that the multitude of our people feel, understand and recognize all this very well. What shall we gain, for ourselves and for the world, if we do set up in Palestine a petty nation devoid of any individual character and accomplishments of its own? What significance shall there be if, by doing so, we produce more lawyers or even a few more scientists? There are enough Jewish professional men in the world. Many universities in Europe—and in America, as well—think that there are already too many. It is not quantitative but qualitative contribution that the world expects from us.

In this respect, our duty to ourselves, quite naturally, coincides and harmonizes with the duty that we owe to the world at large. "To thine ownself be true and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

The thunder of the extremist opinion may at certain moments break out in loud crashes, but the lingering voice of Jewish longing and Jewish conscience always predominates and, in the end, pre-

vails. Jewish history shows many evidences of the backslidings of Israel to the worship of strange gods, but, in the large perspective, what other people chose a more tenacious, a more consistent loyalty to its God, and to its inheritance.

Upon our single-minded action, guided by a clear realization of our purposes and aims, and the great responsibilities they imply depends the ultimate success of our historic venture.

The acid test which the world is now applying to us will decide whether or not we are capable of reviving as a people. The spiritual ideal of Judaism is the one unifying force that will harmonize our conflicting elements; it is the one powerful lever that will lift us to the full height of our own possibilities, charge with meaning and purpose our own life; lend significance to our remarkable history, and insure for us a noble destiny in the future.

As to myself, I must confess that this platform has been my one guiding hope throughout these many years, and is my basis of Zionism. The restoration of Israel to Eretz Israel appeals to me only because I recognize in its realization the creating force that will bring the world nearer to ideal life; because I have faith that from "Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Within my limitations, I shall bend every effort to emphasize the mutual responsibility that the world, Jewry at large, as well as Palestine, owe to each other. And I shall consider my visit to Palestine an utter failure if I do not succeed to bring

to American Jewry some appreciation of its paramount duty towards Palestine, and to convince it of how inadequately it has matched the great sacrifices so heroically made in Palestine in the process of reclaiming it as our land—our land where Israel has again taken up the threads of its past to weave a civilization that will bring not only rest of body and peace of mind to our own suffering people, but which will also send forth a message of inspiration and guidance to all distressed humanity.

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A PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE PALESTINE PROBLEM

THROUGHOUT my five months' stay in Palestine, I endeavored to divorce myself, as far as possible, from sentiment, from previous viewpoints, and preconceived theories and notions. I traveled, one might say, from Dan to Beersheba, that is, from Metulah to Gedera, and consulted men of all stations and of various views in an effort to reach a correct and impartial conclusion regarding the present and future problems and possibilities connected with the upbuilding of Palestine.

Very soon after my arrival, I forcibly realized that Palestine is a very small country facing many great problems. The longer I stayed, and the more I inquired and learned, the more numerous and complex these problems became. Detailed an-

swers to them, I do not presume to have. A complete solution of all the pressing questions of industry, agriculture, transportation, and finance would require the combined efforts of technical experts in these various fields.

From the very outset, I confined myself to the two broad and fundamental questions. First, can the land, neglected and exploited for thousands of years, be restored to fruitfulness, and in this way support a considerably greater population than it possibly can under present conditions? Second, may we reasonably expect our people, estranged from the soil for these many centuries, to become agriculturists again? The answers I have sought and found by observing for myself, which every visitor in Palestine can quite easily do.

As we travelled through the country from one colony to another, we were invariably struck by a very significant picture. The Jewish settlements were outstanding like oases in the barren surrounding country. It seemed as though the desert had been turned into fertile land, and the rocks into gardens. The land, desolate as it appeared where neglected, or unfruitful as it seemed when under primitive methods of cultivation, had still hidden beneath the soil the ancient fertility which was extracted by means of scientific methods and modern implements. Small as is the whole of Palestine, only a small part of its arable land is cultivated. Thus, of the 2,000,000 hectares of land available for agriculture, only 500,000, or a quarter, is actually exploited. Even this small portion could be rendered vastly more productive by appli-

cation of modern ways and means.

The inevitable conclusion flowing out of these facts is that through the extension of agricultural settlements in accordance with modern practice, the land could unquestionably support a far greater population than may be supposed. The first question is, then, to be answered in the affirmative.

As to the second question, viz., can the Jew such as know him in the Diaspora, develop into a staunch and sturdy child of the soil—perhaps, one example will suffice. As one drives through beautiful Hedera colony of today, he finds an energetic, hopeful, and progressive community. Yet there was a time, and not so long ago, when the entire settlement was almost given up. The colony had been established right in the center of the malaria district, and hardly a person escaped the ravage of the disease. Not a single family was spared the loss of one or more of its members and the colony was virtually wiped out. Yet facing every hardship, the remnant held on. On one occasion, when the prospect was darkest and courage failed most, there was talk of abandoning the settlement. Only ten families of the original fifty remained alive. Assembling in the synagogue, a solemn council was then held, after which the Scroll of the Law was taken out and read, and an oath taken not to give up the struggle.

There has been a good deal of criticism directed against the colonists. Such criticism, I am convinced, is unjust, and has originated mostly with

superficial observers, who, without probing deeply, undertook to reach conclusions by touring the country for a few days and to pronounce judgment accordingly. The colonists have had much to contend with. The complete estrangement from the soil throughout all these centuries; unequal competition with the Arab who lives on the lowest imaginable standard; the constant need to be prepared to offer sufficient defense against attacks; the heavy expenditures for religious, educational, and communal purposes, demanded by the cultural and spiritual standard of the Jew, have all combined to add greatly to the burden. In addition, the locust plague of 1915 and the devastation caused by the World War have radically affected the fortune of the colonist. Indeed, I am led to believe that, but for the havoc of war, the old colonists would need no further assistance. In spite of the hardships, there are no complaints heard. On the contrary, the colonists are proud that theirs was the privilege to be the pioneers in the upbuilding of the land; and they desire nothing more than the opportunity to carry on. In no instance did I encounter any request for charity. What is asked is such help as is available in any other country, and is considered the very life-blood of agricultural and industrial operation—a reasonable credit on fair terms. We must remember that with all its rich natural resources and with general conditions much more favorable, the first development of America was not accomplished without the help of foreign capital. Even today, the American farmer is aided by the Government, as in the case of the recent Farm Loan laws.

Among the colonists I met, there was many a man of the type that has made good in America—the type that represents the flower of manhood. Had these lovers of Zion directed their way forty years ago westward, instead of eastward, a goodly number of them would have unquestionably attained the same material success as did many of their brethren who with similar physical and mental endurance sought their fortune in America. Many of the newcomers, some of whom I saw breaking stones and building roads, were former university students of Russia, who, like the famous Bilu of 1881, left the universities to pioneer in Palestine. These colonists and these Chalutzim with their profound love for the land, their fine prowess of body and mind facing and conquering with unlimited courage all barriers, prove that the spirit of the Maccabees still lives in the Jew.

I pay the fondest tribute to our American Jews for their generous response to the call of suffering and hungry Jewry across the sea, directed to us with the beginning of the war. I cherish the greatest admiration for the leaders who organized the vast mechanism of aid and comfort that ministered so efficiently and helpfully to our helpless brethren. But while in Palestine, I often felt, as must have every one at all familiar with the ills of Jewry that, by far, the more constructive and enduring way to rehabilitate the sufferers in Russia, Poland, and Roumania is to assist in the general reconstruction of Palestine.

By organized relief, we temporarily alleviate the privations of those remnants of our eastern brethren

who are unable to go forth to strange lands in quest of a more tolerable life, and, in this way, we may succeed to preserve in the centers of the Diaspora, which yield the greatest proportions of Jewish immigrants, one or more generations of struggling peddlers and petty merchants, only to have them exposed to ever recurring attacks of malice and to constantly impending destruction, to be saved eventually, who knows how soon, when the first fresh blow strikes again. But by developing Palestine, we unlock to the eternal wanderer the doors of the one land that is ready to receive him with generous hospitality and treat him with friendliness and devotion where, master of his own destiny, he may build for himself and for his children securely and permanently and serve by his life and deed as a beacon light to all his downtrodden brethren in exile and as an inexorable accusation to his persecutors.

Disregarding altogether the more comprehensive aspects of Zionism, as well as the spiritual problems of Judaism, and viewing Palestine from the standpoint of far-sighted relief alone, I feel that our relief agencies should direct their best energies there. By helping in the restoration of Zion, they will contribute most substantially to the permanent cure of the physical ills of the Jew and solve the spiritual problems of Judaism as well. This work must be regarded of greatest moment in the activities of the World Relief for the Jews of eastern Europe.

The restoration of Palestine is no simple matter. It is a solemn obligation and gigantic undertaking;

but the land we can restore to fruitfulness, and the performance of the Jewish pioneer has furnished living proof that the Palestinian Jew is the worthy son of his heroic ancestors. We may rest secure in the conviction that he, for one, will adequately meet in physical and spiritual performance the historic task he confronts.

What is imperatively required is that we Jews the world over also rise to the corresponding level of the situation. We must not allow one party to carry the whole brunt of our common duty and common necessity to rebuild Palestine. The work requires the combined strength of world-wide Jewry. It must join in the crisis and support the splendid sacrifices of the Palestinians with commensurate financial aid. If we do so, we may confidentially encounter all obstacles and discouragements, whatever they may be, with assurance. We will overcome them, and ultimate success will be ours.

In the days of the first Restoration, under Ezra and Nehemiah, although only about 40,000 returned to the Holy Land, those who remained behind realized that the Restoration had a tremendous significance to all Jewry, and lavishly gave moral support and gifts of gold and silver to their brethren who undertook to rebuild the old spiritual centers. Today, we face a similar situation. Those of us who cannot contribute to the upbuilding of Palestine by direct participation, must lend their fullest assistance to those who have assumed the glorious mission.

