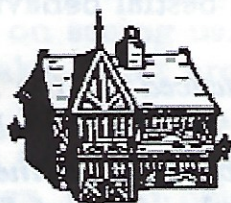


Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen

MIDDLE EAST DIARY 1917-1956



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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.