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Nebi Musa, 1920

1.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, April 4, 1920, Khalil al-Sakakini walked over to Jerusalem's municipal building, outside the Old City's Jaffa Gate. It was his custom to do this each year, to watch the Nebi Musa procession. Passover, the Greek Orthodox Easter, and the traditional Muslim procession to a shrine associated with Moses—or Nebi Musa to Arabs—all happened to fall that year during the same week of the "cruelest month." The outbreak of violence that marred the celebrations, driven by the mixture of "memory and desire" evoked by T. S. Eliot, was in essence the opening shot in the war over the land of Israel.[1]

"The Nebi Musa festival in Jerusalem is political, not religious," Sakakini wrote. At this time of year, Christians from all the countries of the world would flock to Jerusalem, he explained, and so Muslims had to mass in Jerusalem as well, to prevent the Christians from overwhelming the city. They came from all over the country as well as from neighboring countries, tribe after tribe, caravan after caravan, with their flags and weapons, as if they were going to war, Sakakini wrote. The Turkish authorities used to position a cannon next to the Lion's Gate in the Old City and escort the procession with large contingents of soldiers and police. The religious aspect of the holiday was designed only to draw the masses, otherwise they would not come. Food was handed out for the same reason, he wrote.

Sakakini liked to watch the celebrants, and he liked the poems they chanted. He believed that poetry was good for fostering national identity and proposed

that every village establish a “Council of Poets,” which would compose new works and teach the village’s young people the traditional dances. “We will teach them to use weapons and to dance with the sword and other things to ensure their hearts will reawaken; the era of chivalry will renew itself and the nation will be fired in a new forge,” he wrote.*

When he arrived at the city square, sixty or seventy thousand people had already congregated there. Some were from Hebron and some from Nablus. They carried banners and waved flags. The VIPs stood on the balcony of Jerusalem’s Arab Club, but not all of them were able to deliver their speeches because of the commotion and noise. One man angrily tore up the text of his speech.

The time was now about 10:30. In the Old City, Arab toughs had been brawling in the streets for more than an hour. Gangs surged through the walkways of the Jewish Quarter, attacking whomever they passed; one small boy was injured on the head. They broke into Jewish stores and looted. The Jews hid.[2]

Meanwhile, the speeches from the balcony of the Arab Club continued. Someone waved a picture of Faisal, who had just crowned himself king of Greater Syria. The crowd shouted “Independence! Independence!” and the speakers condemned Zionism; one was a young boy of thirteen. The mayor, Musa Kazim al-Husseini, spoke from the balcony of the municipal building; Aref al-Aref, the editor of the newspaper *Suriya al-Janubia* (“Southern Syria”), delivered his speech on horseback. The crowd roared, “Palestine is our land, the Jews are our dogs!” In Arabic, that rhymes.

No one knew what exactly set off the riots. In testimony given to a British court of inquiry, people said that a Jew had pushed an Arab carrying a flag, or that he’d spat on the flag, or that he’d tried to grab it. In another version, the violence began when an Arab pointed at a Jew who was passing by and said, “Here’s a Zionist, son of a dog.” Many testified that Arabs had attacked an elderly Jewish man at the entrance to the Amdursky Hotel, beating him on the head with sticks. The man had collapsed, his head covered with blood. Someone had tried to rescue him but was stabbed. People said they had heard gunfire.

“The furor almost turned into madness,” Sakakini wrote. Everyone was shouting, “The religion of Mohammed was founded by the sword,” and waving sticks and daggers. Sakakini managed to get out of the crowd unhurt. “I went to the municipal garden, my soul disgusted and depressed by the madness of mankind,” he wrote.[3]

2.

During the preceding year, relations between Arabs and Jews in the city had worsened considerably. A confrontation had taken place between Mayor Husseini and Menachem Ussishkin, who had been appointed head of the Zionist Commission when Chaim Weizmann returned to London. David Eder, who had always managed the commission’s affairs in Weizmann’s absence, did not like his new boss. The two had little in common: Eder was very British, Ussishkin very Russian. Eder was often quiet, Ussishkin loquacious. Eder was temperate, almost inconspicuous, while Ussishkin was bombastic, insistent on getting the respect he thought was his due. Eder believed that the success of Zionism depended on working with restraint and avoiding flagrant spectacles so as not to aggravate the Arab population. Ussishkin believed in large demonstrations of national pride. Inevitably, his introductory meeting with the mayor was hostile from the start, and it quickly deteriorated into explicit talk of war.

The two men needed an interpreter—Ussishkin spoke Hebrew, Husseini Arabic. Ussishkin needled him: How is it, he asked, that the streets of Jerusalem are full of potholes and thick with such awful dust? The mayor explained that the city engineers were unable to pave the streets with asphalt because the streets were not flat. Furthermore, asphalt is dangerous, he said, and people and animals could slip on it. Ussishkin would not let up. Certainly it must be possible to level the roadbed, he said. The mayor explained that there was no money.

Then Husseini asked how things were going at the Paris Peace Conference. Ussishkin said there was still no treaty but everything was pretty much settled: Syria would be put under French protection, and Palestine would remain with the British. “The Arabs will not consent to that,” Husseini responded. Ussishkin

interrupted him. “Look, I said everything is settled,” he repeated, and mentioned that Prince Faisal had agreed to the Jewish national home in Palestine. As far as Husseini was concerned, the Arabs in Palestine had not authorized Faisal to make concessions in their name. He had nothing against the Jews, he said. Those who already lived in the country were welcome, but the Arabs opposed the immigration of more Jews. He tried to explain to Ussishkin that style was important. The Zionists did not understand Arab culture, he said, and they spoke to the Arabs in a contemptuous and patronizing way.

For example, the mayor went on, there was supposed to be a ceremony to commemorate the first anniversary of the British conquest and suddenly the Jews demanded that the invitations be printed in Hebrew. Ussishkin argued that Hebrew was the language of the majority of Jerusalem’s residents, but Husseini was unimpressed. First, most of the Jews understood Arabic, he noted. Second, most of them did not understand Hebrew. Third, the demand to print the invitations in Hebrew was meant solely to force the municipality to give in to Zionist demands. The municipality would not give in.

Ussishkin did not deny that Jews had injured Arabs. These things could be resolved, he said, but on no account would the Jews concede their national demands. There was no room for compromise. We do not want war, he went on. In fact, we are doing everything to prevent war. Yet the Jews are not afraid of war, he said, if it is necessary. As his excellency knew, Ussishkin told the mayor, the Jews were currently equipped with everything needed for war. A war would hurt both sides, but the Arabs would suffer more, he concluded.

There was little left to say. Ussishkin reminded the mayor that the Jews had wandered the wilderness for forty years before reaching the Promised Land. Musa Kazim al-Husseini smiled. It had taken forty years because the Jews had not listened to Musa, he said, and suggested that they listen to Musa now, lest it take them another forty years to get where they wanted to go. Reporting back to the commission, Ussishkin summed up the meeting: Husseini was an enemy of the Jewish people.[4]

Throughout 1919, the leaders of the Jewish community warned the authorities of Arab plots against Jews. In Jaffa the Jews reported the activities of

an Arab terrorist group called the Black Hand. Its members planned attacks on Jews in order to deter other Jews from settling in Palestine, the Zionist Commission claimed. And before the Nebi Musa festival that year the commission had warned the British authorities that the procession was liable to deteriorate into violence. In the end it passed without incident.[5] Then in the winter of 1920 the Arab leadership organized demonstrations calling for independence, condemning Zionism, and opposing the British. The authorities permitted the demonstrations, and thousands attended. The demonstrations were generally peaceful, although here and there some demonstrators and Jewish pedestrians exchanged blows.

As the day of the 1920 Nebi Musa celebration approached, the Zionist Commission again warned the authorities to expect disturbances. General Louis Bols, the chief administrative officer, promised that his forces were prepared for all eventualities. The Jewish residents of Jerusalem sent a representative to Governor Storrs to talk about the procession; he assured the man that everything would be done to prevent the celebration from degenerating into riots.[6]

Still the Jews were wary. “The pogrom is now liable to break out any day,” Ze’ev Jabotinsky had written to Chaim Weizmann. Weizmann was on his way to Palestine from Egypt. When he arrived in Jerusalem he went to see General Allenby at the Augusta Victoria castle, where he found another guest, Herbert Samuel, who had come to assess the situation in Palestine on behalf of the British government. General Bols was there as well. Weizmann warned of the tension in the city. A pogrom is in the air, he said. Bols and Allenby reassured him that the army was in control of the situation, and wished him a good Passover. Weizmann went to Haifa to celebrate the Seder with his mother, who had recently settled in Palestine. His son Benjy, soon to be bar mitzvahed, was with him. After the Seder, they returned to Jerusalem.

An incident at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre gave a hint of what was to come. Richard Adamson, a soldier, found himself in a bizarre situation. He had been sent to keep order in the church, which is built over the supposed site of Jesus’ grave. A large crowd of Christians had gathered for the traditional ceremony of the holy fire. Each year, fire would appear in a small cell close to

the sepulchre; the fire supposedly came from heaven, an annual miracle. It is “a brilliant mystery,” Ronald Storrs wrote, “half political, half pagan, marred sometimes by drunkenness, savagery, and murder.” While Richard Adamson was keeping watch, the church door burst open and a throng of Arabs poured in. Adamson saw one man about to deal a death blow to the patriarch, but before he could do anything, the holy fire suddenly appeared. The thug retreated in panic and the patriarch’s life was saved.[7]

The next day, a Sunday, Storrs went to St. George’s Cathedral for Sunday worship, accompanied by his father and mother. At the end of the service, someone informed him of disturbances near the Jaffa Gate. “It was as though he had thrust a sword into my heart,” Storrs later wrote. He rushed to the British headquarters, located in the Austrian hospice, near the Nablus Gate. General Bols had already summoned his staff for an emergency meeting. Without warning, Chaim Weizmann stormed into the room. He had just heard news of unrest in the city and demanded concerted action to restore order.[8] Weizmann was extremely upset and angry; he had, after all, given the British advance warning of the riots. Storrs reminded him that the Zionist Commission had warned him of riots the year before as well, yet everything had gone peacefully.

In truth, Storrs had blundered. A few days earlier, he had issued warnings to Arab community leaders, but had done nothing else. He would later argue that his critics did not understand the difficult circumstances: the Old City streets are steep, narrow, and winding, with many stairways—impassable to cars and horses, he explained. A whole family could be murdered out of sight or sound of police stationed not a hundred yards away. And then there was the city’s psychology, Storrs claimed. In Jerusalem, the sudden clatter on the stones of an empty petrol tin could cause a panic. Finally, the police available to him were inexperienced and not properly trained. They weren’t English, and many were Indian. Storrs had a total of 188 men, including just eight officers.[9]

Storrs could have learned from the experience of the Turks, who usually deployed thousands of soldiers to keep order during the Nebi Musa procession. The peaceful celebrations of the previous year should not have misled him. As a political man, he should have realized that the events of the previous weeks,

including the incident at Tel Hai, the crowning of Faisal, and especially the heightened passions of nationalism, were liable to cause trouble, just as the Jewish representatives had warned and the assessments available to him had confirmed.[10] He failed not only in preventing the riots, but also in suppressing them: three days went by before they were stopped.

Several hundred Jews had spent the previous month organizing themselves for self-defense. Many of them belonged to the Maccabee sports club, and some had served in the Jewish Legion. Their training consisted largely of calisthenics and hand-to-hand combat with sticks. Khalil al-Sakakini saw them some hours after the Nebi Musa riots broke out, marching in formation, four abreast, carrying truncheons and singing. Sakakini mocked them, saying they reminded him of the words of a poet: “When the field has emptied, the coward sets out alone to war.”[11]

In command was Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who had been discharged from the British army sometime earlier as an “indiscreet political speaker” and a “firebrand.” Jabotinsky had given too many speeches and had inundated top officers with imperious letters, accusing them of hostility to the Zionist movement.[12] After his discharge, he and his wife, Johanna, and son, Eri, settled in Jerusalem, where Jabotinsky translated poetry and published articles in the daily newspaper *Ha’aretz.*

Jabotinsky had frequent guests. He lived in the center of town, not far from Feingold House, which served as Chaim Weizmann’s residence in Jerusalem, and close to the offices of the Zionist Commission and the central post office. His house was a popular meeting place for commanders of the Jewish Legion, staff and members of the Zionist Commission, and the people of the Hadassah medical mission. Some of the guests took up residence on the ground floor, which housed a kind of studio apartment. Jabotinsky hosted writers and journalists, among them Ahad Ha’am and Itamar Ben-Avi, the son of the lexicographer Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. Ben-Avi, an advocate of the new secular Hebrew identity, thought the language should be written in the Latin alphabet; Jabotinsky agreed. Another guest was Pinhas Rutenberg, who had helped set up the Jewish Legion and been a minister in the Russian revolutionary government.

Ronald Storrs compared Rutenberg to the Egyptian sphinx—his head was hard as granite, he wrote—and believed that in a time of crisis both Jews and Arabs would be willing to obey him. Rutenberg was involved in the initiative to organize Jewish self-defense in Jerusalem.

Jabotinsky made a point of training his volunteers in the open. He considered acting freely and visibly a matter of principle, defending his views against members of the labor movement, who wanted to set up an underground defense organization. Training and inspections were held in a schoolyard; on at least one occasion Jabotinsky took his people out for a parade through the city. Headquarters were in two rooms in the offices of the Zionist Commission, which donated the space. The commission kept the authorities informed about the enterprise and asked that the defenders be equipped with weapons. The British rejected the request.[13]

When the riots broke out, Jabotinsky and Rutenberg went to look for Storrs but couldn't find him; apparently the governor was still in church. Toward noon they met in the street. Storrs was a frequent guest of Jabotinsky's and also a friend of the family, especially fond of Eri. "No more gallant officer, no more charming and cultivated companion could have been imagined than Vladimir Jabotinsky," Storrs wrote in his memoirs, using Jabotinsky's Russian name. He also quoted an English translation of a poem by Chaim Nachman Bialik, "Take Me Under Your Wing," that Jabotinsky had prepared for him. But Storrs also believed that Jabotinsky was liable to bring Palestine to war.[14]*

Jabotinsky suggested deploying his self-defense group; Storrs demanded to know where he kept the group's weapons and ordered Jabotinsky and Rutenberg to hand over the pistols they were carrying. Actually, Storrs said, he should jail them for bearing arms. Then he asked the two men to come to his office later that afternoon to discuss the possibility of establishing an unarmed Jewish guard unit. One of Storrs's aides favored the idea; Storrs himself opposed it.

Then he changed his mind and instructed Jabotinsky to report to police headquarters in the Russian Compound together with two hundred of his men in order to be sworn in as deputies. The volunteers made their way to the compound, and Colonel Popham, Storrs's aide, began to administer the oath.

Suddenly an order was received to desist. There was no need for the defense group, Popham was told, and the men were all sent home. The authorities had also invited Arab volunteers to join the security forces; these too were sent home.[16]

Rachel Yanait, a labor leader and educator, heard about the riots from her neighbors. That day David Ben-Gurion had come to visit her and her husband, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. The three had talked politics until noon. Those weeks were the climax of a fairly stormy political campaign: the Jews in Palestine were electing representatives for the first national assembly. When they learned of the disturbances, Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi quickly headed toward the center of Jerusalem. The Arab landlord locked all the doors and closed the shutters. Yanait then decided to see what was happening in the Old City. She reasoned that if she dressed elegantly, she would not be arrested. From an old suitcase she took a dress she had worn only overseas and a small hat that had been her mother's back in the Ukraine. Then she set out, but not before shoving a pistol into her pocket.

She was allowed to enter the Old City and for some hours wandered around without any clear destination. The alleys of the marketplace were empty; from time to time she heard the sound of a mob. She got lost; a Russian nun passed by and Yanait asked her the way to the Jaffa Gate. The frightened nun did not answer and hurried on her way. Near the Holy Sepulchre she caught a brief glimpse of two soldiers carrying a wounded man on a stretcher. She thought she identified the two soldiers as Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi, but it must have been an illusion. Ben-Gurion in fact spent most of the day at the Zionist Commission's office outside the Old City. Yanait went on, saw Storrs from a distance, and then ran into Nachman Syrkin, a socialist Zionist thinker and Russian-born American in Palestine on a visit. They walked together to the Jewish Quarter and suddenly found themselves in a cloud of feathers. Arabs were ripping open the quilts and pillows of their victims; to Yanait and Syrkin this was a well-known sign of a pogrom.[17]

At the end of the first day the British imposed a night curfew; given the weakness of the police and the army, the curfew should probably have been

enforced day and night. As Monday dawned, the disturbances began again and grew worse. Several dozen rioters had been arrested the night before but were allowed to attend morning prayer and then released. Arab toughs continued to attack passing Jews and break into Jewish homes, especially those in buildings where most of the residents were Arabs.

Rabbi Zorach Epstein related that vandals broke into his house and made off with everything. They took the mattresses, the blankets, the pillows, the quilts, the silver candlesticks, and his wife's jewelry. Then they raided the Toras Chaim Yeshiva, tearing up Torah scrolls, throwing them on the floor, and setting fire to the building. Two pedestrians were stabbed to death. The Old City was sealed off; even Jews who sought to flee were not allowed to leave. That afternoon martial law was declared. Private Richard Adamson later remembered that he and his comrades had frisked Arab women in particular. It turned out that most of the illicit weapons had been concealed on their bodies.[18]

The looting and burglary continued. A few homes were set on fire, and some tombstones were shattered. In the evening, the soldiers were evacuated from the Old City. A court of inquiry later termed this "an error of judgment." The Jews living in the Old City had not been trained to protect themselves and had no weapons; Jabotinsky's volunteers had concentrated their efforts outside the Old City.[19] That decision also turned out to be a mistake.

On Tuesday morning vandals burst into the courtyard of Hannah Yafeh, not far from the Gate of Forgiveness, leading to the Temple Mount in the Muslim Quarter. Three Jewish homes adjoined the courtyard; since the beginning of the riots their occupants had been virtually under siege. When the attackers broke down the doors, the residents fled to the upper story. The rioters smashed furniture and took valuables before ascending to the upper floor, where they began beating the Jews. Moshe Lifschitz was hit over the head with an iron rod and was critically injured. His children were beaten as well. Then the attackers took turns raping Lifschitz's two sisters, one twenty-five years old and married, the other fifteen.

In the meantime, two of Jabotinsky's men, both carrying hidden pistols, had put on white coats and entered the Old City in a Hadassah ambulance. One,

Nehemia Rubitzov, had served in the Jewish Legion, having enlisted in the United States. Originally from the Ukraine, he had immigrated to America, sold newspapers, worked as a tailor, been active in the Jewish tailor's union, and studied at the University of Chicago. Years later, Ben-Gurion claimed that he had personally enlisted Rubitzov in the legion. When Rubitzov first applied to the legion he was turned down because of a minor leg problem. He tried his luck at another enlistment office, changing his name to Rabin for the purpose, and was accepted.

Upon entering the Old City, he and his comrade, Zvi Nadav, tried to organize the residents to protect themselves, and instructed them to prepare rocks and place boiling water on their roofs to throw at the rioters. Then they helped get some of the Jews out of the Old City. One of them, Rosa Cohen, was Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen's niece. She had arrived from Russia only three months previously. Red Rosa, as she was known, was a Bolshevik who had managed a military explosives factory in Russia. No Zionist, her intention had been to settle in the United States, but she had attached herself to a group of young immigrants who had come to Palestine on the *Ruslan.** She and Nehemia Rabin would fall in love, marry, and within two years have a son, Yitzhak.[21]

Outside the Old City, several members of Jabotinsky's self-defense force got caught up in a gunfight with some gypsies who were camped between the Jewish neighborhood of Mea She'arim and the Arab quarter of Sheikh Jarrah. Khalil al-Sakakini was a witness: "I hate the Jew when he assaults an Arab and I hate the Arab when he assaults a Jew and I hate all humanity when it is a humanity of hatred and hostility," he wrote. At some point, the Muslim-Christian Association demanded that Storrs resign and the Jews be disarmed.[22]

The British army sent several men to search Jews for weapons. One of the places they looked was in Chaim Weizmann's apartment, where they found nothing. At Jabotinsky's house, however, they found three rifles, two pistols, and 250 rounds of ammunition. Altogether, nineteen men were arrested and imprisoned, but not Jabotinsky. Indignant, he went to Kishla, the prison at the Jaffa Gate, accompanied by attorney Mordechai Eliash, and demanded that he be arrested. The police obliged, but a military judge released him because he had

not been at home when the rifles were found. A few hours later, he was arrested again.

Storrs came to the jail to see for himself that Jabotinsky was being properly treated. He personally led his friend to a more comfortable cell; he tried to be polite, Jabotinsky later wrote, “like the owner of a palace ushering a guest into his anteroom.” Storrs ordered that his prisoner receive a bed with a mattress and a washbasin. Jabotinsky’s food was brought to him from the adjacent Amdursky Hotel; he was served wine as well.

Afterward, Storrs went to Jabotinsky’s apartment and, with the help of Johanna, his wife, packed two suitcases with clothing and other items, including paper and a fountain pen. When he brought all this to the jail, the governor opened the suitcases for a security check before they were given to Jabotinsky, all according to the rules. Jabotinsky later wrote, “You have to live with the English for seven straight years, as I did, in order to become familiar with this muddle and this chaos from which, like a swamp plant, little by little, without rules and without any predetermined pace, their order develops, sometimes belatedly.” In this incident, though, the muddle of Jabotinsky’s arrest, release, rearrest, and preferential treatment exemplifies the conflicts, the contradictions, the hesitations, and the helplessness that characterized British rule from the very beginning.

Jabotinsky was brought to trial a few days later, accused of possessing weapons and disturbing the peace. The chief witness for the prosecution was Ronald Storrs. The hearing was confused and rather comical: Storrs claimed he “did not remember” Jabotinsky telling him about the self-defense organization.[23]

After the riot, Storrs went to pay an official condolence call to the chairman of the Zionist Commission, Menachem Ussishkin. “I have come to express to his honor my regrets for the tragedy that has befallen us,” he began. “What tragedy?” Ussishkin asked. “I mean the unfortunate events that have occurred here in recent days,” Storrs said. “His excellency means the pogrom,” Ussishkin suggested. Storrs replied emotionally that there had been no pogrom. He knew very well what a pogrom was—an attack on Jews under the sponsorship of the authorities.

Characteristically, Ussishkin did not let up. “You, Colonel, are an expert on matters of management and I am an expert on the rules of pogroms.” There was no difference, he asserted, between the riot in Jerusalem and the Kishinev pogrom. He was not saying this, Ussishkin said, to Governor Storrs but to Storrs the English gentleman. What depressed him was not the death of a few Jews—in Russia more had died. He was despondent because of the betrayal. History would remember that the pogrom had occurred during the tenure of Ronald Storrs. How would the colonel feel if his sister had been raped, or his daughter-in-law? His regrets were useless and his explanations were of no help. He, Ussishkin, could not accept them, just as the world did not accept the Jewish explanations about the crucifixion of Jesus.

Storrs asked whether he should resign. Ussishkin said it was too late. Had he been a decent man, he would have resigned when the riots broke out. Storrs made no response. He hoped that the next time they would meet under happier circumstances, he said, and went on his way.[24]*

Jabotinsky had meanwhile been convicted, among other things, of possessing the pistol he had handed over to Storrs on the first day of the riots. Sentenced to fifteen years’ imprisonment, he was sent by train to a jail in Egypt; his guards put him in a first-class carriage. The day after arriving they returned him to Palestine, to the prison in the fortress of Acre. No one knows why he was sent to Egypt or why he was brought back; on his return trip he again traveled first-class. His trial and sentence created an uproar. The London papers, including the *Times*, protested, and there were questions in Parliament. General “Squib” Congreve, commander of the British forces in Palestine and Egypt, did not wait for the *Times* editorial. Even before it appeared he wrote to Field Marshal Henry Wilson, complaining about the sentences given to the Jews convicted of possessing weapons. “They [are] much too severe compared with those passed … for worse offenses and I shall have to greatly reduce them. Jabotinsky to one year instead of fifteen and the other nineteen to six months instead of three years.”[16]

The final tally was 5 Jews dead, 216 wounded, 18 critically; 4 Arabs had been killed and 23 wounded, 1 critically; 7 soldiers had been wounded, all

apparently beaten by the Arab mob. One of the Arab dead was a small girl. She had been shot before the eyes of Edward Keith-Roach. He had left the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after services and walked into sudden shooting. The girl fell from the window of her house—a stray bullet had hit her in the temple.[27]

3.

More than two hundred people were put on trial in the aftermath of Nebi Musa, among them thirty-nine Jews. One of the rapists who had assaulted the Lifschitz sisters was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Haj Amin al-Husseini and Aref al-Aref were each given ten years for incitement to riot, but they were no longer in the city—the two of them had fled.[28*] Mayor Husseini was removed from his post and replaced by Ragheb al-Nashashibi, a member of a powerful Jerusalem family involved in a long and bitter feud with the Husseinis.

"There had been no clashes like these for a hundred years," Moshe Smilansky wrote in *Ha'aretz,* asserting that the conflict was one between two nations. The same newspaper ran an article by the historian Joseph Klausner containing the warning "If the Arabs imagine that they can provoke us to war and that because we are few they will easily win, they are making a huge error. Our campaign will include all 13 million Jews in all the countries of the world. And everyone knows how many statesmen, how many opinion makers, how many people of great wisdom and great wealth and great influence we have in Europe and America."

Not only did Klausner's statement exploit yet again the image of the world-dominating Jews, but it was also among the first expressions of the reversal that would eventually take place in Zionism's purpose. Instead of seeing the Jewish state as a means of saving the world's Jews, the Zionists were now demanding that the world's Jews defend the Jews of Palestine.[31]

The Zionists blamed the riots on the British: "This regime has declared open war on the Jews of Palestine," wrote one labor movement leader.[32†] General Allenby had to defend his men against an even more serious accusation: his political officer, Richard Meinertzhagen, claimed that several of the military

administration's officers had initiated the riots to prove there was no chance of carrying out the Jewish national home policy. Allenby's chief of staff, Colonel Bertie Harry Waters-Taylor, had given Haj Amin al-Husseini explicit instructions on how to "show the world" that Palestine's Arabs would not stand for Jewish rule, Meinertzhagen maintained. The officers involved were antisemites and anti-Zionists, under the sway of Arabic romanticism, he charged. Meinertzhagen also called the riot a pogrom. Ten years previously he had visited Odessa, where he had stumbled into an anti-Jewish pogrom, and he had never gotten over the shock of it. He registered his accusations directly with Foreign Secretary Curzon. Allenby threatened to resign; Meinertzhagen was ordered out of Palestine.[33]

Meinertzhagen had his own reason for blaming the riots on his colleagues. Only four days before Nebi Musa, he had written to the Foreign Office that all was quiet. "I do not anticipate any immediate trouble in Palestine," he predicted.[34] Thus he attributed the events to a plot hatched by British officers. In his diary, Meinertzhagen sounds like something of a lunatic and is therefore a doubtful source for such a serious charge. But his accusations did represent a general feeling.*

The Zionist Commission tried to support the conspiracy theory with a line of circumstantial evidence. They noted that the Arab milkmen who had come to Mea She'arim that Sunday morning had demanded to be paid on the spot, which was unusual. They would no longer be coming to the neighborhood, they explained. Christian storekeepers had marked their establishments in advance with the sign of the cross, so they would not be looted by mistake.[36] An earlier commission report had accused Ronald Storrs of deliberately fanning the flames of Jewish-Arab tension, according to the time-honored British method of divide and rule. Storrs supported the Arabs because he was afraid that the Jews would take over the country and get rid of him, the report claimed, adding that one of Storrs's Arab aides had sabotaged Weizmann's attempt to purchase the Western Wall.[37]

The court of inquiry appointed to investigate the riots reached a more logical conclusion. Governor Storrs, it found, had failed because of overconfidence; he

had believed that the police force could preserve order during the Nebi Musa procession just as it had done in previous demonstrations. “Overconfidence” was an understatement; “arrogance” might have been a more accurate choice. More than anything else, Storrs was guilty of criminal negligence.[38] The Nebi Musa riots revealed an administration lacking central coordination and a uniform policy: different men acted according to contradictory orders, divergent worldviews, and unreliable intuitions. “The trouble about Storrs is that he had neither the confidence of the Arabs, the Jews, or the British officials here,” David Eder wrote.[39]

The conclusions reached by the court of inquiry came as no surprise to anyone who had been in Jerusalem at the time of the riots: the security forces had not been prepared and the main victims were the Jews. Beyond this assessment, the court, made up of two generals, a colonel, and a legal counsel, put together a historical survey of Palestine, beginning with Jewish sovereignty in ancient Israel, which had lasted for a mere three hundred years, they noted. The Balfour Declaration “is undoubtedly the starting point of the whole trouble”; there could be no doubt that the Zionists’ intention was to establish a Jewish state. In their assessment, Chaim Weizmann, a moderate, had lost control of the Zionist movement, which was now in the sway of extreme elements. They portrayed the movement as nationalist and dictatorial, with a clear plan to expel the Arabs from Palestine. Thus they reached the conclusion that Arab fears were not unfounded.

Bolshevism flowed in Zionism’s inner heart, the court stated. Many of the Jews coming to settle in Palestine brought Bolshevik views with them. The court mentioned one such person by name: Lieutenant Jabotinsky, identifying him with the Poalei Zion Party, which the court called “a definite Bolshevist institution.” The association of the fiercely antisocialist Jabotinsky with a Marxist party was not the only nonsense in the report. The court proudly asserted that 152 witnesses had been heard speaking eight languages: “English, French, Arabic, Hebrew, Yiddish, Jargon, Russian, and Hindustani.” The court did not know that “Jargon” was a dismissive Hebrew term for Yiddish. The historical survey took up more than half the report. It is not an intelligent document, and it

was never published. By July 1920, when it was signed, the military administration had been dismantled and replaced by a civil administration. This was another one of Chaim Weizmann's notable achievements.[40]

4.

Immediately after Passover, Weizmann set out for San Remo in Italy, where the British and the French were holding final discussions over the Mandate in Palestine. He made a stop to see Allenby in Cairo; while speaking of the events in Jerusalem, he burst into tears. "I'm tired, worn out, crushed, and sick of the whole world," he wrote to his wife, telling her how much care he had taken during the riots to ensure the safety of little Benjy. "It was just as though we were in a mouse-trap, cut off from the whole world, not knowing whether we would wake up alive after nightmarish nights." He needed her, he wrote to his wife, he wanted to pour out his heart to her. "The whole of the outside world is so awful," he wrote. No, perhaps it was not true to say that the English had organized the pogrom, but they had undoubtedly played a passive role in it. With the exception of Wyndham Deedes and Richard Meinertzhagen, they were all wolves and jackals, he wrote.

Yes, he had checked the prices of the carpets she had asked him to buy in the Jerusalem bazaar, but that was before the days of terror. He had managed to buy only a rug for the stairway. He had not bought the large carpet she had asked for. "One doesn't care and one doesn't think," he wrote to her.[41]

But in San Remo he did what he knew how to do. The French representatives had expressed many reservations about the inclusion of the language of the Balfour Declaration in the Mandate Declaration. Only after the exertion of Zionist pressure on the British, who in turn persuaded the French, did the conference conclusively decide to incorporate the commitment to establish a Jewish national home in the terms of Britain's mandate to govern. Furthermore, the nature of the government in Palestine had yet to be determined. The shock of the Nebi Musa riots, and Weizmann's presence as a firsthand witness, led to the conclusion that a civil administration would be more effective and less

inflammatory than the military forces. The British acted on the basis of the same considerations that led them to issue the Balfour Declaration: they wanted to prevent the country being given to the French and they submitted to Zionist pressure.[42]

David Eder was in San Remo as well. He had been in London for the Passover holiday and on his way back to Jerusalem made an overnight stop at the Hotel Royale. In the afternoon he had tea with Weizmann, Nachum Sokolow, and Herbert Samuel in the hotel lobby. Prime Minister Lloyd George suddenly appeared. Samuel rose to greet him, and Lloyd George asked Samuel to come with him. Twenty minutes later Samuel returned and informed the Zionists that the prime minister had authorized him to tell them, confidentially, that he, Samuel, had been offered the post of high commissioner in Palestine's civil administration. "Well, my darling," Weizmann wrote to his wife, "our trials have come to an end."[43]

5.

Upon returning to London, Weizmann worked to obtain Jabotinsky's release from prison. One of the people he petitioned was Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill. Weizmann assumed that when Samuel arrived in Palestine a few weeks hence, Jabotinsky would be freed. But a storm was raging among the Zionists in Palestine. Jabotinsky had become a symbol of injustice, and his ongoing imprisonment fed anti-British sentiment. In a protest in Tel Aviv, people took down the street sign bearing Allenby's name and replaced it with Jabotinsky's name instead. In a bold, rare gesture, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, soon to be appointed chief rabbi of Palestine, violated the sanctity of the seventh day of Passover and while still in synagogue signed the petition protesting the arrest of Jabotinsky and his associates. Hundreds of other worshipers did the same.[44]*

Jabotinsky spent his time in jail translating poems by Omar Khayyám and a few of Arthur Conan-Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales. But he was far from calm. He felt abandoned. "He is in a pathological condition and I really have some

fears for the state of his mind. He is tremendously excited and working himself up to ever greater excitement," David Eder wrote to Weizmann, in his capacity as psychiatrist. He also reported a plot that had reached his ears—an attack on the Acre prison to free Jabotinsky by force. Weizmann was furious. A jailbreak might well mark the beginning of a Jabotinsky dictatorship, he wrote. "From the heights of Sinai he will summon the Jews to the struggle against Perfidious Albion, against Samuel, against the Zionist Organization, which sold out the Jews, etc., etc.… All this loud, adventurous, pseudo-heroic cheap demagogy is repulsive and unworthy. Behind it no doubt there hides petty, raw ambition."[46]

He had never been so angry with the Zionist leadership. When he wrote to Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson he did so in Russian, because only in that language could he berate them in a way that expressed his rage. "The hysterical state" into which part of the Jewish population had apparently worked itself, he wrote, "the spirit of bitterness and vindictiveness," the "pressures," the "enormous exaggerations," the "constant shouting of 'wolf,'" the "cheap heroism" and "false martyrdom"—all these brought him to sympathize with the British administration more than ever before. Above all he was enraged because the politicians in Palestine were trying to interfere with the work of the Zionist leadership in London.[47]

The internecine wrangling could not dim Weizmann's achievement. A chapter had come to an end. Now the building of the land would begin, Weizmann wrote to his wife. In San Remo, Lloyd George had parted from him with the words *You have got your start. It all depends on you.* "Hotels are always optimistic," Weizmann wrote at the time, thanking Vera for her support. He had in the meantime sent their Benjy to Paris, and given the carpet to a colonel who promised to get it over the border without paying customs. He would bring her the amber necklace and the halvah himself.[48] Ronald Storrs, who would now be leaving Jerusalem, quickly sent a letter of congratulations to Herbert Samuel. A "great adventure" awaits you, Storrs wrote in red ink. In truth Storrs thought the appointment of a pro-Zionist, Jewish high commissioner "mad."[49]

7

A Steady Gaze and a Firm Jaw

1.

With the army about to transfer power to the civilian administration, Generals Waters-Taylor and Bols held a farewell reception for Arab community leaders; Khalil al-Sakakini served as their spokesman. He told the two generals that they were admirable as individuals, but they were leaving the Arabs with open wounds. One of the things he was referring to was the appointment of Herbert Samuel as high commissioner. He requested a favor of the two British officers: “Please convey to Europe that we do not trust Europe, we do not respect Europe, and we do not love Europe.”[1]

Since returning from Damascus, Sakakini had established excellent ties with the top figures in the military administration. Some of them studied Arabic with him. The director of the education department consulted him on the Arab educational system and appointed him and his wife, Sultana, to the board of education. Within a short time he became head of a teachers college. Sakakini put the same energy into his new work that he devoted to politics, and believed that the two fields complemented each other. “We need schools that will instill in students the spirit of freedom, pride, independence, courage, sincerity, and other such principles that can serve to raise nations from the depths of degeneration and enable them to shake off the semblance of servitude they have worn for generations,” he told the director of the education department. He founded a library for his students and required them to take daily cold showers, as he himself did.[2]

At some point in 1919 he moved to the western side of the city, not far from the Ratisbonne Monastery. Some of the city's better-off Jews had begun to build their homes in the area, and the place would soon turn into a fashionable neighborhood called Rehavia. There was an old windmill, and the Sakakini family rented it to live in. From time to time Sakakini would run into Alter Levine, who tried to be friendly. Levine arranged and cosigned a loan for Sakakini at the Anglo-Palestine Bank and bought young Sari al-Sakakini candy and pajamas. Sakakini recorded all this in his diary.[3] He and Levine responded to the news of Samuel's appointment quite differently: Levine published a poem in *Ha'aretz*, signed with his pen name, Asaf Halevy the Jerusalemite. It was a hymn to a new age. "The dawn enraptures and casts its light *We said it would come … We rebelled against the mist* Because our hearts yearned / For the sun."[4] Sakakini, on the other hand, prepared to resign from the teachers college.

The resignation was an act of protest and was not well received. Ronald Storrs summoned Sakakini and issued a warning. He had heard that Sakakini was among those Arab public figures who were encouraging Arab officials in the British administration to quit their jobs—an error, in Storrs's view. The administration would simply hire Englishmen or Jews in their place and would not take them back. Storrs tried to dissuade Sakakini from leaving his job. In England, he claimed, no one asked what anyone else's faith was. He, Storrs, had never known whether his school chums were Catholics or Protestants or heathens. The British government considered Samuel an Englishman and had appointed him on the basis of his qualifications.

Storrs was aware that the Arabs viewed Samuel first and foremost as a Jew, he told Sakakini. Had a Christian been appointed the Jews would claim that the high commissioner was acting against them because he was an antisemite. The government had preferred to appoint a Jew precisely to avert such a possibility; Samuel would be able to carry out British policy without anyone claiming that he hated Jews. In fact, many Jews were aware of the government's intention and opposed the appointment. Some Jews had told Samuel, Storrs averred, that during the first few weeks of his tenure he would need British policemen to protect him from the Arabs, but afterward he would need Arab policemen to

protect him from the Jews. Sakakini was not persuaded. He made sure everyone knew why he had resigned—he would not work under a Jewish high commissioner. From exile, Aref al-Aref warned that the appointment would lead to bloodshed.[5]

In response to Samuel's impending appointment, Captain James Pollock considered going home. "No really self-respecting Britisher can stay here," he wrote to his father. "Britain may be about to commit the greatest injustice that has ever been done by any nation in modern times." He felt as if he were standing on the edge of a volcano, he wrote. Later he calmed down somewhat, but he still expected disaster. "All faith in British honesty and justice has gone from the Arab of the Near East," he wrote. The country would be handed over to the Jews, despite the wishes of the Arabs. The Jews would come from southeastern Europe—rich, educated Jews would not leave England and New York. Britain needed God's mercy, Pollock wrote. Allenby also opposed Samuel's appointment. The choice was extremely dangerous, he warned Foreign Secretary Curzon.[6]

Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, the highest-ranking British soldier in the Middle East, reiterated that the British had no business being in Palestine and the sooner they left, the better. For years Wilson had been warning the government that the empire could not afford the luxury of spreading itself too thin. Great Britain should withdraw from all lands that were not its own, he maintained, and concentrate its strength in England, Ireland, Egypt, and India. "The problem of Palestine is exactly the same … as the problem of Ireland," Wilson wrote, "namely, two peoples living in a small country hating each other like hell." Only a powerful authority could enforce its will on both parties: "[E]ither we govern other people or they will govern us," he maintained. Britain had to control Ireland because it could not afford to lose it; Britain could not control Palestine because it did not have the force to do so.

Over and over again Wilson castigated the civilians—he called them the "frocks"—for not understanding that spreading Britain's forces over such a large empire would bring about its decline. Again and again he demanded that Palestine, or "Jewland," as he called it, be abandoned: "The best thing we can do

is to clear out of Jewland as soon as we can and let the Jews run that country as quickly as they can." Wilson, whose military career had taken him from one end of the empire to the other, saw no strategic value in Palestine.[7] General Congreve felt the same way. "It is a beastly country and most unpopular with the soldiers," Congreve wrote to Wilson. This was hardly surprising to him, since the government expected the army to impose peace between the Jews and the Arabs, as a result of which it had to fight both of them.[8] It was in this climate that Samuel packed his bags.

2.

He landed at Jaffa in July 1920, wearing a white uniform and a steel-spiked pith helmet, also white. A purple sash crossed his chest, displaying the medal his king had bestowed on him when he set out. His stiff collar was embroidered with gold, as were his large cuffs; he wore a slender ceremonial sword against his left thigh. Samuel looked like an operatic character—elegant, handsome, younger than his fifty years, very colonial. A special boat had been sent to bring him from Italy; now a fighter plane circled above it, and a cannon fired a seventeen-gun salute to honor his arrival. An incident occurred immediately: Meir Dizengoff, chairman of the Tel Aviv municipal council, made a welcoming speech in Hebrew, even though it had been agreed in advance that he would speak in English, as the Arab mayor of Jaffa did. "It was wrong of him to have done so," Samuel commented. He was surrounded by exceptional security precautions; the Zionist Commission had warned that the Arabs were plotting to blow up his train on its way to Jerusalem.[9]

Once Lloyd George's government had thrown its weight behind Jewish aspirations in Palestine, it could not have appointed a more suitable man to the post of high commissioner. Herbert Samuel had not been chosen for the job because of—or despite—his Jewishness, nor for his abilities and experience. Samuel was sent to Palestine because he was a Zionist.

The scion of a wealthy Liverpool banking family, Samuel had been raised in a home where Jewish dietary laws and the Sabbath were observed. The family

was active in the Jewish community and in politics; another son was a member of Parliament. Samuel studied at Oxford and went into politics himself, joining Lloyd George's Liberal Party. He served as postmaster general, and as home secretary he instituted daylight saving time in Britain, proposed the law allowing women to stand for Parliament, and was involved in suppressing the riots in Ireland. Bernard Shaw thought he would become prime minister.[10]

From the time of his 1915 proposal calling for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, Samuel had been involved in every stage of the Zionists' success: the Jewish Legion, the Balfour Declaration, the Versailles peace conference, the Mandate. He had intervened countless times on problems Weizmann had laid before him, and Balfour frequently asked him to persuade the Zionists to moderate their demands. Samuel's letters to his son reflect both a commitment to political Zionism and a profound spiritual and cultural attachment to the movement. He compared events in Palestine to a mummy rising up from its sarcophagus, shedding its shroud, and returning to life. He and his wife took Hebrew lessons.[11]

But Samuel was plagued by doubts before he accepted the post. Perhaps it was not wise to have a Jewish commissioner govern Palestine—his appointment was liable to make things more difficult for both the Zionists and the British.[12] He raised the issue with the prime minister as well; Lloyd George thought the difficulties were not insurmountable. Encouraged, Samuel's optimistic, liberal, and rationalist nature quickly reasserted itself. He was imbued with a deep historical consciousness and thought a great deal about the future. He believed that with prudence and restraint it would be possible to establish a Jewish state in Palestine without war. For the time being, there would be no Jewish state, he wrote to his niece, only limited immigration and settlement, accomplished cautiously. Five years down the road the British could perhaps increase the rate of immigration and add to it gradually. Fifty years from now there might be a Jewish majority and Jewish rule for all practical purposes, and possibly a generation later a Jewish state might be plausible. The opportunity to realize all this, he continued, infused him with "a fine enthusiasm." In a letter to his wife he wrote of "the joy of creation." His elderly mother also advised him to accept the

appointment. He had lost his seat in Parliament a year and a half previously and was without gainful employment.[13]

Chaim Weizmann treated the new high commissioner as if he were on his staff. Before Samuel arrived in Palestine, Weizmann ruled that he was “weak, frightened and trembling,” altogether too cautious. “He will need a big shaking up before he understands the real situation,” Weizmann wrote. But the Jewish public received Samuel as if he were the Messiah, the redeemer of Israel. They sent him parchment scrolls inscribed with praise and poetry written in ancient Hebrew calligraphy; they wove his picture into tapestries, just as they did with the image of Theodor Herzl.[14] He was a Jew, a Zionist, and an Englishman—thrice worthy of adulation. The Zionists identified themselves and their political vision with European culture. They had always sought to tie their fate to one of the great colonial powers in Europe.

3.

The Zionist movement arose in Europe, drew its inspiration from Europe, and was part of Europe’s history. Its nationalism, romanticism, liberalism, and socialism were all products of Europe. The movement’s founding fathers had from the outset charged it with a cultural mission. The Jewish state in Palestine, Theodor Herzl wrote, would be Europe’s bulwark against Asia: “We can be the vanguard of culture against barbarianism.”[15] Writer Max Nordau believed the Jews would not lose their European culture in Palestine and adopt Asia’s inferior culture, just as the British had not become Indians in America, Hottentots in Africa, or Papuans in Australia. “We will endeavor to do in the Near East what the English did in India,” he said at an early Zionist Congress. “It is our intention to come to Palestine as the representatives of culture and to take the moral borders of Europe to the Euphrates River.”[16] The Jews in Palestine defined their European self-image in contrast to the Arabs and to the Jews from Arab countries, such as the Yemenite Jews, who had settled in Jerusalem.

“We are here in Palestine the more cultured part, and there is not in Palestine any other part that can compete with us culturally,” Mordechai Ben-Hillel

Hacohen wrote. “The great majority of the country’s residents are fellahs and Bedouin, all of them wild, whom world culture has still not reached.” Hacohen foresaw little change. “It will be a long while before they learn to live lives in which there is no robbery, thievery, and larceny; lives in which they feel shame and embarrassment at walking around half-naked and barefoot; lives of possessions and property and established boundaries; lives in which there is a need for level sidewalks and paved roads, organized schools and charitable institutions, courts without bribery, and so on.” Many writers, journalists, and politicians shared Hacohen’s view, often describing the Arabs as “savages” or “semi-savages,” the opposite of the “cultivated” Jews. Hacohen also had a penchant for comparisons between the Arabs and the Sephardim—both were Levantine, not to be imitated and to be kept at arm’s length.[17]

Aharon Avraham Kabak, a teacher and author, wrote about the differences between children whose parents had come from Russia and Galicia, who were “a storehouse of mental energy and intellectual talents,” and children whose parents had come from Yemen. Of the latter he said, “The Yemenite child, after so many generations of idleness, penury, abjectness, and servility under the fierce Yemenite sun, brings with him, together with Oriental sharp-wittedness and wiliness, a tendency for delusion, negligence, slowness of movement, with bodily lethargy and weakness of the nerves.” Educator Shmuel Yavnieli said of the Yemenite Jews, “They are people who need education. They cannot, in a cultural sense, take any action. This action, so necessary for our rebirth, can only be taken by young Ashkenazi people.”[18]

According to Ze’ev Jabotinsky, “We Jews have nothing in common with what is called the ‘Orient,’ thank God. To the extent that our uneducated masses have ancient spiritual traditions and laws that recall the Orient, they must be weaned away from them, and this is in fact what we are doing in every decent school, and what life itself is doing with great success. We are going to Palestine, first for our national convenience,” he wrote, and second, “to sweep out thoroughly all traces of the ‘Oriental soul.’ As for the Arabs in Palestine, what they do is their business; but if we can do them a favor, it is to help them liberate themselves from the ‘Orient.’”[19]

Here and there Jews made attempts to acculturate into the Orient. People put on Arab headdresses, made Turkish coffee in Arab coffeepots, and learned Arabic. Some Hebrew writers and artists tried to create a blend of ancient Hebrew culture and contemporary Arab culture. The upright, independent Hebrew farmer who appeared in the new Hebrew literature, art, and folklore, was inspired by an Arab ideal: the son of the sheikh.[20] But such borrowings were in no way an abandonment of Western values and convention. Alter Levine, one of the first of this school, held his own cultural world in great esteem. A series of letters sent to his wife and daughters, who were in Vienna for rest and relaxation, reads like a book of etiquette for nineteenth-century European society women. Levine wrote to his wife, Gittel, in Yiddish. She did not have a good command of Hebrew; to his chagrin, she could not read his poetry. In one letter he enjoined her to have herself photographed in a fur coat. The coat should be worn open and have a drooping collar and a flower on the lapel. She should put on pearls and a hat—a pretty hat, he demanded. He wanted his Gittel to wear a silk glove on one hand and leave the other hand bare. Likewise, he insisted that she wear silk stockings and small, dainty shoes. The picture was supposed to be a winter portrait, and Levine intended to have it copied in oils.

He wrote to his daughters in Hebrew but inserted key words in German. He wanted them to learn languages (French, German, and English), take dancing and piano lessons, and listen to a great deal of music, especially Beethoven and Meyerbeer. They should read, he instructed, and send him book reports. He also urged embroidery and tennis. From Jerusalem, he told them what to eat—lots of goose fat—and advised them on personal hygiene: “A woman’s beauty and delicacy are reflected in her attention to her delicate hands and the way she cleans her nails.” He ordered them to use Odol, a popular mouthwash in Vienna at the time, and to have massages.

He wrote to them about undergarments and bid them not to wear girdles. They were girls from Jerusalem, he reminded them, and they should beware of a permissive “counterfeit culture.” The real Europe, prewar Europe, Levine explained to his daughters, was rational, all harmony and cleanliness, diligence and beauty, order and tolerance. This was the culture he wished to instill in them.

Like Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen, he identified Europe with Zionism. Arab culture was the opposite, "primitive," and lacking "harmony."[21]*

Khalil al-Sakakini was also steeped in European culture. Like Levine, Sakakini read widely, from William Shakespeare to Friedrich Nietzsche. He too tried to mold his children, down to the very last bourgeois detail. "How happy I will be when I get up from supper and enter the living room and Sari sits at the piano to play and sing, or plays the flute or violin," he wrote. He hired a Jewish piano teacher; Sultana al-Sakakini also liked Beethoven.[23] While Levine shared his cultural affinities with the Jewish community in Palestine, Sakakini's admiration of European culture was exceptional among the Arabs. In fact, Sakakini felt uncomfortable about this inclination of his: "I do not want to shed my Orientalism," he wrote. "I cannot be other than a son of the East."[24]†

In the Zionists' adoration of Europe, England held a special place. The HaPoel HaTzair publishing house produced a 1921 booklet containing an admiring collective portrait of the English. The author was identified only as "P." Because of "their courage and immense will, the English will triumph and succeed wherever they turn," he wrote. "In their competence at establishing colonies, they are superior to almost all the nations of Europe." P went on to say: "It is puzzling that most English boys like to put themselves at risk. You will always find dozens of volunteers willing to participate in a dangerous hunt, to climb up a tall tree, to swim across a surging river, and so on." This is how they built an empire: "With these characteristics the English succeeded in enforcing their rule over far lands, subjecting many peoples, and all treat them with deep respect, even in places where they are not loved because of their iron hand."[26] The Hebrew reader could rest assured: the Zionist movement had chosen the best governmental subcontractor in the world.

Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacohen considered the English cultural allies. "England will come to establish a government in Palestine and will link us with Europe," he wrote in his diary. To Chaim Weizmann the Turkish regime was "of inferior culture," while the British applied "honest European methods."[27] Some years later, David Ben-Gurion amplified this view: "We have come here as Europeans. Although our origin is in the East and we are returning to the East,

we bring with us European civilization and we would not want to sever our connections and those of the country with the civilization of Europe. We see in Great Britain the chief standard-bearer of this civilization in the world and Palestine should serve as the bridge between East and West. We do not see a better representative of western civilization than England."[28]

Cultural identification affected political outlook, and vice versa. "We stand with Europe," *Ha'aretz* asserted six months before Samuel's arrival. "Here in the East one thing is needed more than any other: European order and European government. This condition is more important than all the other conditions—even national rights." The newspaper praised the British and the French for having educated the nations living in their colonies to live lives of "law and order." Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote similar things.[29]

As Europeans, the Jews in Palestine felt stinging indignity when the British described them as "natives." They resented the authorities' tendency to consider the two populations in Palestine as equal—Jewish natives and Arab natives. Senior Zionist official Frederick Kisch felt that the treatment of both peoples recalled the attitude of the British to the colored populations in their colonies, and he quoted officials who had compared events in Palestine with the situations in Sierra Leone or Fiji. Relating to Jews and Arabs in the same way brought the Jew down to the level of the Arab, Kisch insisted. He demanded that the British be enlightened as to the difference between the European Jew and the Arab, who treated his wife as if she were a beast of burden—he rides a donkey, and she walks on foot, heavily loaded with baggage.[30]*

There were some in the British administration who viewed Zionism as a cultural movement with a European mission. "They are eager to visit in our homes," Hacohen wrote, "we being the only Europeans in the country."[32] Others, however, felt no such affinity. "On the whole the British administrator—especially in the lower ranks—prefers the native to the Jew, not out of any reason of unfairness or antiSemitism, but simply because the native is a much simpler proposition than the Jew in Palestine," Chaim Weizmann wrote. Humphrey Bowman, director of the education department, felt that English officials found it easier to relate to Arabs than to Jews; the connection was based

on a common inclination to freedom, daring, and adventurousness. Not that the average English official was antisemitic, Bowman wrote. On the contrary, nearly all of them counted Jews among their friends. According to Bowman, they were impressed by “spiritual Zionism,” the revival of the language, the establishment of the university. They did not like political Zionism, though, because it threatened the status of the Arabs. William Ormsby-Gore wrote, “One can’t help noticing the ineradicable tendency of the Englishman who has lived in India or the Sudan to favour quite unconsciously the Moslem against the Christian and Jew.” One Zionist activist remarked in his memoirs that the English were in the habit of saying “our little friends” when speaking of the Arabs.[33]

The place of Zionists in the social firmament was an emotional and cultural issue, and since it touched on the new identity the Jews wished to create in Palestine, it had political ramifications as well. Given the Zionists’ claim that their return to the land of their fathers was a natural right, not something granted to them as a gift, they should have been pleased to be called “natives”; their foreignness weakened their claim. “I am no stranger in this country, even if I was born and bred in the far north,” Weizmann said at a meeting with Arabs in Jerusalem. During the final stage of drafting of the Mandate document, Weizmann wrote to Samuel and demanded that it not refer to the Jews as a “native population.” The natives were the Arabs.[34]

4.

Before Samuel took over from the military government, the chief administrative officer asked that he sign one of the most quoted documents in Zionist history: “Received from Major General Sir Louis J. Bols, K.C.B.—One Palestine, complete.” Samuel signed.[35]*

He remained in Palestine for five years, a glorious era, according to Judge Gad Frumkin: “A period of spiritual elation, of national maturation, of enhanced Jewish self-respect, of the sanctification of the name of Israel in the eyes of the gentiles and especially in the eyes of the Arabs.” Frumkin was hyperbolizing, but in essence he was right. Samuel led the country in its first steps into the

twentieth century. When he went home he left behind a fairly efficient administration, a generally stable economy, a measure of law and order, and relative tranquillity. The principal effect of his achievements, however, was to advance the Zionist interest. The Arabs considered him an enemy and claimed he left the country worse off than when he arrived.[37]

Samuel's black mustache, always well trimmed, exuded a kind of military vigor and frigid aloofness. "He had a rather wooden face with a searching, almost furtive expression," wrote District Commissioner Edward Keith-Roach. It was easier to squeeze a tear out of Cromwell's statue than to sway Samuel from his position, they said of him in Parliament. Frederick Kisch, who married Samuel's niece, described his routine audience with the high commissioner as a cold shower. Margery Bentwich, the sister of Attorney General Norman Bentwich, had Samuel for tea and considered him pompous. "H. S. is stiffish and must always be feeling very uncomfortable as he never seems able to forget and shed his office—at any rate in company. He seems more the official than the man."[38] Even his letters to his son exude a kind of stern, almost formal, correctness.

He lodged in the north wing of the Augusta Victoria castle on the Mount of Olives. "Government House," as it was now known, had a hundred rooms, was pleasant in the summer, and proved hard to heat in the winter. At first Samuel devoted a fair amount of time to organizing the household. His wife had remained in England to pack and arrange for the rental of their house. She and their two small children joined him six months after his own arrival, by which time he had already seen to furniture and books, a soup tureen, silverware, and curtains. The reception hall would be furnished at government expense, but they could not be extravagant, he cautioned his wife—the lifestyle in Palestine was simpler than in England.[39]

The house had come equipped with a French chef, who soon departed for home because his wife was ill. General Allenby loaned the Samuels his own chef from Cairo as a temporary expedient. The gardener at Government House prepared a list of seeds he wished brought from England. Local women, Russians, took care of the bedding, but it would be well to bring a pair of

personal servants from England, Samuel advised his wife. A house had been prepared for them on the grounds. Samuel's wife had shipped one crate after another; the first contained a Torah scroll. She had not sent his top hats, however. "I am anxious to discourage the use of high hats in this country," Samuel had written. Beatrice Samuel pondered what duties she should fulfill, as the country had never had a first lady. She decided that her job was to be nice.[40]

The high commissioner also tried to be pleasant to everyone. He toured the Zionist agricultural settlements and thought that the residents were happy people. On the Sabbath following the Ninth of Av fast he descended the Mount of Olives on foot to pray at the Hurva Synagogue in the Old City, bringing his top officials with him. Crowds gathered to see and cheer him. At the synagogue he had the honor of chanting the week's reading: Isaiah, chapter 40, which promises the redemption of Zion. Samuel remarked with satisfaction that his atrocious pronunciation made it impossible to determine whether he spoke Hebrew with an Ashkenazic or a Sephardic accent, so no one would be insulted. It was the most moving ceremony of his life, he wrote.*

He ordered the immediate release of Ze'ev Jabotinsky and also pardoned two senior Arab figures who had been arrested in the Nebi Musa riots. During a visit to the new principality of Transjordan—also under British control—he was asked by local Arabs to rescind the convictions of Aref al-Aref and Haj Amin al-Husseini and allow them to return to Jerusalem; he acceded immediately. He made frequent visits to Arab villages and regularly conferred with the leaders of the Christian communities. He was pleased and astounded by the country's tranquillity; his term as Britain's postmaster general had been turmoil in comparison, he wrote.[42]

Soon after his arrival he found himself facing two surprises. Despite the impatience displayed by the Zionists, the movement, hobbled by an acute financial crisis, was not yet ready to carry out its program.[43] One manifestation of this was the low immigration rate. Samuel offered the movement 16,500 immigration permits, but the Zionists were willing to make do with 1,000. In a letter to branches of the Zionist Organization around the world, the leadership instructed its officials to warn people not to liquidate their businesses in the hope

of soon setting out for Palestine. The time had not yet arrived for that, the Zionist Organization in London announced; for the moment, patience and discipline were called for. Samuel was disappointed, and Weizmann thought it necessary to apologize to him. He explained that American Jewry was at fault, for not taking care of the movement's financial needs, but the money would come, he promised. In the end, 8,000 Jews immigrated that year while just over 1,000 Jews left the country.[44]

Samuel's second surprise was the discovery that not everyone considered Palestine a strategic asset worth funding. The British treasury informed him soon after his arrival that it would not finance this adventure: local taxes, tariffs, and other income would have to cover all the administration's outlays and development expenses. The treasury even sent him a bill for the railroad tracks the army had laid during the conquest of the country; the railroad was now being used by civilians and the treasury saw no reason why Palestine should receive it as a gift. Samuel might have been better off suggesting that the army dismantle the tracks and take them back to London, but instead he tried to argue with the treasury and failed. The track running from Rafiah to Haifa cost the Palestine administration a million pounds sterling. In a letter to his son, Samuel wrote that the only troubles he had in Palestine were in London. "There is a very strong current running in favour of economy and the prevailing question is 'Why should we be spending all this money in Palestine?'"[45]

In this atmosphere Samuel found it difficult to obtain a development loan for the country or to persuade his government to fund the construction of a port in Haifa Bay: the price was too high. "It has been repeatedly pointed out," the War Office maintained, "that Palestine is of no military value from an imperial point of view. It should be regarded as an entirely separate administration and the troops in the country should be … at the disposal of the civil power." Colonial Secretary Churchill himself warned the government that in the 1922–23 fiscal year the garrison in Palestine, 8,000 men, would cost British taxpayers more than £3.3 million.[46]

Churchill inherited responsibility for Palestine once the Mandate was implemented. During and after the war he had expressed doubts about Britain

taking upon itself the realization of the Zionist program; he supported having the United States do it. At one point he had proposed that Britain simply give up Palestine. Churchill was concerned with not only the financial cost but also the political cost: the confrontation between the Jews and the Arabs would only cause problems for Britain.

He had been one of the first public figures to meet with Chaim Weizmann, soon after the latter's arrival in Britain. Even though Churchill was not caught up in the same fervor that produced the Zionism of David Lloyd George and Balfour, he shared their sense that the Jews were highly influential and therefore their goodwill was worth acquiring. He believed that the "international Jew" had brought down Imperial Russia; the revolution was a "sinister conspiracy" the Jews had hatched against Western culture. He called the Bolsheviks "a bacillus," an expression frequently applied to Jews in antisemitic publications. The Zionists, he theorized, would "provide the antidote to this sinister conspiracy and bestow stability instead of chaos on the Western world."*

In the spring of 1921 Churchill took Lawrence of Arabia with him to Jerusalem. During his stay in the city he painted its vistas in oil; Samuel politely called the paintings "effective." And then, "One Sunday afternoon," as Churchill remarked contemptuously, he crowned Prince Abdullah king of Transjordan. This allowed the British to say that they had fulfilled all their obligations to the various parties.† Musa Kazim al-Husseini, the former mayor of Jerusalem, demanded that Churchill revoke the Balfour Declaration, close the country to Jewish immigration, and undo the partition between Palestine and Syria. Churchill responded with a firmness that bordered on disrespect. Even if he could revoke the Balfour Declaration he would not do so, because the national home policy is "manifestly right" and would benefit all the inhabitants of Palestine, he asserted. He promised the Arabs that the policy would not be fully implemented immediately: their generation and also their children and their children's children will have passed from the earth before the Jewish national home is realized, he reassured them; and in the meantime British rule would continue. Of course, Churchill's comments also implied that the Arabs would not see independence in Palestine in their lifetimes.

As for the Zionists, Churchill gave them to understand that the pace of developing their community depended only on their ability to raise the necessary funds; the Zionist movement leadership in Palestine was pleased. When Churchill went to visit the Jewish settlements, he was received, justifiably, as a great friend. On the night before his visit to Tel Aviv employees of the municipal council cut down several trees and stuck them in the sand next to Meir Dizengoff's house to make an impression on the guest. The crowd that gathered at the house to greet Churchill was so tightly packed that one of the trees was knocked down and the deception was revealed. "Mr. Dizengoff, without roots it won't work," Churchill commented. *Ha'aretz* editor Moshe Glickson, who had arrived only a year and a half previously on the *Ruslan*, declared that Churchill had displayed "moral fortitude."[51]

A few days before Churchill went home, the mufti of Jerusalem died. The Muslim establishment needed a new religious leader, and Samuel agreed to the appointment of Haj Amin al-Husseini. Twenty-six years old and an up-and-coming figure, Husseini was ambitious and forceful. Bernard Wasserstein, Samuel's biographer, always sympathetic and often admiring, described the appointment of Husseini, however, as "a profound error of personal and political judgment"; many share this opinion, citing Husseini's militant strain of Arab nationalism. But, in fact, the appointment was entirely reasonable.

Husseini came from the right family: his grandfather, father, and elder brother had all served as mufti. He was not able to get himself elected in the first round of voting, but displayed an ability to organize broad public support for himself. Husseini's late brother had done much to help the authorities, in return for which the British decided to grant his widow and five children a "political pension," almost ten times higher than the pension they were entitled to by law. It would be difficult to exaggerate the value of the services the previous mufti had rendered to the government, an internal memo noted. The Husseini family had already lost the post of mayor; the new mayor was a member of the rival Nashashibi family, and that was another good reason to leave the post of mufti with the Husseini clan. In this matter, Samuel acted in accordance with the advice of Ronald Storrs, who was more experienced than he, intimately

acquainted with Jerusalem politics, and knew Husseini well.

In early April 1921 Storrs took Husseini to meet the high commissioner and Samuel was favorably impressed. Husseini said he believed in Britain's good intentions toward the Arabs and undertook to use his family's influence to maintain the peace in Jerusalem.[52] He kept his word. The Nebi Musa celebration went by that year without incident. Jerusalem remained peaceful several months later as well, when other parts of the country were in turmoil. In fact, Jerusalem remained tranquil for years.

Husseini would later lead the Arab struggle to evict the British from Palestine, something Samuel could not have predicted, just as he could not have conceived that the Jews would also one day act to expel the British.[53]

Some months after his arrival, the high commissioner established an advisory council of twenty members. Half were British officials, and the rest consisted of public figures—four Muslims, three Christians, and three Jews. The forum met once a month at Government House and discussed education and transportation, the water supply, health, and other issues that, while important, were not explicitly political. Samuel tried to evince open-mindedness and a cooperative sympathetic spirit. In a letter to Lord Curzon, the foreign secretary, he wrote that he had no wish to impose British will autocratically, to govern a country "flowing with licensed milk and registered honey." The advisory council members had no real power; they listened and expressed opinions. The atmosphere was friendly, and votes were unnecessary, since they always reached a consensus, Samuel wrote many years later, as if he still believed in the optimism he had conveyed upon his arrival.

The advisory council had no impact on legislation, though, and over the years fairly extensive laws were enacted. In 1922 a kind of constitution was instituted, a document issued by the king in the Privy Council. The public was granted the right to express its opinions of proposed legislation drafted by the high commissioner's legal counsel, but the actual legislative process was not democratic and not liberal. The document prescribed the death penalty as well as collective punishment.[54]

5.

The high commissioner represented the king of Great Britain. When Samuel wore his official uniform and summoned to the Mount of Olives carefully selected notables in order to make government proclamations, he seemed to speak with the collected might of the British Empire itself. The high commissioner had the authority to pass laws; there was no elected parliament to check his power. The judicial system was formally independent, however, and from time to time the judges made rulings that contradicted the government's position; but fundamentally the courts considered themselves part of the regime, not an independent estate whose job it was to restrain it. The "fourth estate" was free to criticize the regime only to the extent that the high commissioner allowed. He was, on the face of it, an omnipotent ruler.

In reality, this was an illusion. The high commissioner had trouble doing anything at all without approval from the Colonial Office in London. Ostensibly, there was also international oversight: Britain ruled Palestine by virtue of a League of Nations Mandate, and a league commission was charged with ensuring that the administration acted according to the Mandate document. In this sense, Palestine was not a regular crown colony and did not belong to the empire; its inhabitants were citizens of Palestine.*

The League of Nations Mandates Commission had no teeth, however. Real influence was concentrated in London. The colonial secretary had the authority to confirm or void laws initiated by the high commissioner, the expenditures he proposed, and the appointments he wished to make. Besides the Colonial Office, other government ministries had interests and opinions that also constrained the high commissioner. But colonial secretaries did not hold the post for long. By the end of Britain's thirty years in Palestine, the colonial secretary had been replaced no less than seventeen times. During the same period there were seven high commissioners. This left most power in the hands of the Colonial Office's senior officials; possibly one in a thousand documents actually reached the colonial secretary's own desk, Edward Keith-Roach wrote.[56]

The correspondence between the high commissioners in Jerusalem and the

Colonial Office in London, a huge quantity of paper, reflected an ongoing battle of wills between the man in the field and one “Sir Humphrey” or another, the archetypical omnipotent bureaucrat who acted on the assumption that he knew what should be done better than the high commissioner did. As often as not helpless, the high commissioner could only grit his teeth and make excuses for his superiors, trying at least to conceal how short his reach was. Indeed the high commissioner often acted as if his job were to lobby London, rather than to represent a regime with great power.*

Samuel took advantage of Churchill’s 1921 visit to Palestine to get him to make several decisions on matters that Samuel had not been able to resolve in his contacts with the Colonial Office. He had been trying for some time to persuade the office to commence the construction of the Haifa port. Everything favored the project, but the bureaucrats were blocking it. He was also trying to expand the train network, a good source of government revenue. All he had requested was a meager allocation of 200 Egyptian pounds to conduct a preliminary survey. The high commissioner sent a memorandum, number 675, but the officials turned him down. He had to send many more dispatches before they approved the expense.

For months, Samuel added, he had been trying to obtain authorization for the repair of the western leg of the Jerusalem-Jaffa road, between Jaffa and Ramie. Experts had proposed filling in the potholes with stones; in Jerusalem there was a quarry that could supply the material. The office had turned this down as well. Samuel shared his frustration with Churchill. There was heavy traffic on the road. The potholes were causing damage to automobiles, whose owners had paid high license duties. The scandal had already been reported in the local press. Even worse, tourists from all over the world had no choice but to use this road.[58] Samuel’s distressed memorandum on the Jerusalem-Jaffa road—the Jaffa-Ramle leg—was addressed to the colonial secretary, a man concerned with a worldwide empire that held sway over hundreds of millions of people. The high commissioner’s position in this system sounds, from his letters, like that of a most junior village chief.

Yet he headed a government of departments, quasi ministries, each one

responsible for a defined area: finance, justice, education, immigration, health, agriculture and fishing, antiquities, commerce and industry, public works, trains, mail and telegraph, customs, surveys, statistics. To coordinate the system the high commissioner was aided by a secretariat; the chief secretary, the number-two man in the British administration, more than once served as Samuel's temporary replacement. Their fundamental assumption was that the administration existed to develop the country and provide services. Much of the responsibility for daily life devolved to local officials, or district commissioners. While their titles, job descriptions, and range of powers changed from time to time and place to place, one thing remained constant: these men were the most senior representatives with whom most of the population came in contact; they were the face of the civil administration. Among their duties were tax collection, security, and the trial and sentencing of criminals.

The position was an excellent one for a man in the first stages of a colonial career. "For a junior colonial administrator there is nothing to compare with one's first independent territorial command. I was lucky to get Ramallah," Edwin Samuel later wrote.[59] Of course, his name did not hurt him, although his father was no longer high commissioner at the time. Ramallah was then no more than a large village of about three thousand inhabitants; Samuel's jurisdiction included the surrounding villages. Typically, the local chief, the *mukhtar,* served as liaison between commissioner and village. Some mukhtars were chosen for the job with the consent of the villagers; others were imposed by the government. Some, as members of the village's principal family, inherited their position; others had to compete with rivals to get the job. In the larger villages there might be several mukhtars. They recorded births and deaths, and sometimes also functioned as judges. They were in charge of internal security and tax collection, keeping a few percent for themselves.[60]

Before taking up his position in Ramallah, Edwin Samuel went to consult an old acquaintance, Mayor Ragheb al-Nashashibi of Jerusalem. "What should I do if a Mukhtar refuses to come and see me when summoned?" Samuel asked. "The Turks would have flogged him," Nashashibi noted. "You won't, but he isn't sure enough of that to run the risk.… So he'll come as soon as you call."

They came, and Edwin Samuel frequently went to them as well. He spent most of his time as district commissioner visiting the villages under his jurisdiction, two or three a day. He drove in his own car, flying the government flag, or rode on horseback. He generally gave advance notice of his arrival; the mukhtars received him ceremoniously, slaughtering a sheep. On occasion he lodged in the villages. The mukhtars presented their requests—this one wanted a classroom, that one a new road, here they needed seeds, there a doctor. Sometimes they complained of robbers and asked Samuel to intervene in local conflicts or conduct reconciliation ceremonies. They would eat, drink, talk about this and that, and then get around to the main purpose of the visit: tax collection.

Edwin Samuel did not like being in the position of taking the villagers' money. He saw wretched farmers, at times burdened with heavy debts. Like James Pollock, who had also served in Ramallah, he occasionally listed a village's arrears as "lost debts" that could not be recouped. The tax, a kind of tithe that had been imposed by the Turks as well, was supposed to reflect the harvest, but in fact the amount was set in a process of bargaining between the commissioner and the mukhtar.

More than once Samuel resorted to threats, delivered in broken Arabic. In English, he would speak to the villagers in quasi-biblical language: "If you pay now what I ask, oh my children, I shall be as dew upon your fields, as honey on your lips. But if you do not, then I shall come as a wolf in your sheep-fold by night and you shall be consumed as by fire on your threshing floor." Then, when he saw their eyes fairly popping out of their heads, he said, he would tell them to scurry home and bring something on account. A tax collector, sitting at his side, would keep the record. Samuel was assisted by a force of fourteen policemen; their principal task was to defend the tax collectors when they traveled on the roads with money in hand.

He tried to impose various modern farming methods such as iron plows, but came to the conclusion that it was better to leave the village in its backwardness; it had a certain romantic charm and confirmed his self-image as a man of progress. "I was someone from the twentieth century back in the eleventh century with all the powers of feudal baron," he wrote. "The peasants might be

miserably poor and illiterate, but they were *mine*. I protected them against tyranny from my own liege lord and expected them to pay me homage accordingly."[61]

In the cities, district commissioners supervised the work of the municipalities. Since all municipal matters required approval from the civil administration, supervision included everything from writing the budget to preventing people from pasting notices on walls, from the control of epidemics to zoning plans. The municipalities were glad of the administration's intervention in such matters because the government also took responsibility for urgent needs, funding the water system in Jerusalem, a hospital in Tel Aviv, and so on. Like a village mukhtar, a city mayor served as a kind of liaison between the populace and the authorities; real power rested with the district commissioners.[62]* Indeed, the authorities tended to treat the mayors as high-level mukhtars. During the first years of the Mandate, mayors were appointed, not elected. "The result is that the people have far less share in the government than in Turkish times," Herbert Samuel maintained.[64]†

The administration grew from year to year. Herbert Samuel worked with twenty departments, the last high commissioner with more than forty. Parallel to the dramatic increase in the population, the number of civil servants rose also. Samuel began his term with fewer than 2,500 employees; toward the end of the Mandate there were more than 30,000.[65] The administration was the largest employer in the country, and salaries consumed 75 percent of its budget.[66] "The Holy Land with its large administration and its small area is like a baby wearing his father's clothes," critics wrote. Arab locals complained about contradictions, duplication, and lack of clarity: "We see a Tower of Babylon in Palestine," they stated. Every commissioner in Palestine "rules as he likes." Furthermore, they added, the government is amateurish, and in fact the director of customs and duties "is an actor by profession."[67]

As the years went by, one was less and less likely to find an actor collecting duties, or the organist or the Glasgow distiller that Ronald Storrs had identified among the first members of his staff. As in other parts of the empire, British bureaucrats in Palestine increasingly belonged to the colonial administration

ranks trained in London according to fairly stringent political and professional standards.

6.

The administration officials were supposed to be “English gentlemen”—demobilized officers or university graduates. If a man had gone to private school, was an active sportsman, and looked good, he could probably get a job in the colonial service. Instructions regarding the candidates’ physical appearance almost created a kind of pedigree breed. The criteria referred not only to a man’s style of dress and his manner of speech but also to his physique, the color of his hair and eyes, the shape of his mouth, and the state of his fingernails. “Weakness of various kinds may lurk in a flabby lip or in averted eyes,” one of the service’s veteran members enjoined his colleagues, “just as single-mindedness and purpose are commonly reflected in a steady gaze and a firm set of mouth and jaw.”

Young men frequently followed their fathers into the colonial service and in going overseas continued a family tradition. Their enlistment, however, was often the result of their inability to find suitable employment at home and of the expansion of the colonial administration. There was considerable demand for colonial jobs, and at a certain point demand surpassed the supply. Service was always temporary, a few years in Malta, a few in Tanganyika, a few more in Sierra Leone, then a few in Jerusalem.

Manly, chivalrous, imbued with a sense of moral mission, colonial officials were supposed to carry the principles of British administration overseas—proper, fair, apolitical management.[68] But their image of themselves reflected a fiction: they were hardly neutral, and they did not come from the elite of British officialdom. The salaries of government officials in the colonies were lower than those of parallel rank in England, and consequently the colonies did not attract the most talented young people.

The British themselves filled no more than 10 percent of the jobs; a majority of employees were locals. In the early 1920s there was a notably high proportion

of Jews and Christian Arabs, far beyond their presence in the population. The Muslim Arabs were severely underrepresented. Over the years their share grew, while the percentage of Jews in government service declined until it was below their presence in the population, although they filled a disproportionate number of senior positions. The segment of Christian Arabs remained relatively high. The fact that the British took pains to record the national and religious identities of the officials and to produce statistics belies their claim to have set up a professional, apolitical administration. British Jews in the bureaucracy were counted as Jews.[69]

The Palestinian Jews in senior positions were prominent principally during Samuel's tenure. Together with the British Zionists, they held the key positions in his administration, complained Lieutenant Colonel Percy Bramley, the director of public security in Palestine. In fact, Bramley wrote, Samuel's was a "Zionist-controlled government." The high commissioner, the chief secretary, and the attorney general were good people, wrote Colonel Stirling, who governed in Jaffa, but the fact that the British had chosen these particular people for these positions "blackened the good name of England in the Middle East and led to the downfall of our reputation for fair play."[70]

The British believed their main job was to ensure that everyone live together peacefully. More often they found themselves caught in the breach between Jews and Arabs. Harry Luke, Storrs's assistant, blamed the Balfour Declaration for having created an impossible situation. The declaration led, inevitably, to partition—not a new thing, Luke commented, in the land of King Solomon.[71] The British were supposed to bring culture to Palestine, but in contrast to France's cultural imperialism, they did not seek to impose their values or their identity on the colonies. They tended to keep their distance from the population, at most displaying folkloristic wonderment at the native heritage and some interest in preserving it.[72]

This reluctance was not just a political consideration; it also reflected a romantic tendency to relate to Palestine as the land of the Bible and treat it as a huge wax museum. Architect Charles Robert Ashbee, an adviser to Storrs, made tremendous efforts to save Hebron's glassblowing craft from extinction. His

ideal Palestine was backward, to be sure, but so harmonious and heartwarming. To him, the Arab villagers personified beauty and dignity. The Jews who had come to the country had brought with them the squalid ugliness and disharmony of the cities of southeastern Europe and America. Ashbee couldn't imagine a worse combination.[73]*

In keeping with their stance, the authorities refused to prohibit child marriage, an accepted practice among Arabs and Jews from Arab countries. A Jewish women's organization launched a campaign to halt it, but the administration tried to evade the issue. Member of Parliament Eleanor Rathbone intervened to little effect. In the early 1930s Rathbone was still protesting the Palestine administration's tolerance of the marriage of thirteen-year-old girls; the age of consent was raised to fifteen only in the mid-1930s.[75] Some of the leading figures in British government, among them David Lloyd George, lent their names to an organization that defended Arab child marriages, warning Rathbone that protests against the practice were part of the Zionist movement's plot to take over the country. After robbing the Arabs of freedom and opportunities for economic development, the Zionists now wished to impose their moral norms on Palestine. The British administration also resisted granting women the right to vote. "Seeing that strong objections are entertained not only by Moslems but also by certain Jews to the participation of women in public affairs, you will, I am sure, agree that it would be impracticable to lay down a general rule in Palestine," an official of the Colonial Office wrote to Rathbone.[76]

The British were swept away by the charms of the colorful human mosaic they found in Palestine. Luke enumerated the servants in his home: they had brought the nanny from England; Vladimir, the butler, was a "white" Russian refugee from the Soviet Union who had been a counterrevolutionary officer. There were also red Russians in Jerusalem, loyal to the revolutionary regime. Luke had brought his valet, a Turk called Halil Ali, from his previous posting in Cyprus. Ahmed, the cook, was a black Berber from Egypt, the kitchen boy was an Armenian who had one day turned out to be a girl in disguise, and the housemaid came from the Russian convent on the Mount of Olives. When Edwin Samuel described his household, he mentioned, along with the nanny and

the houseboy, “our two Yemenites.”[77]

At times the British wrote of the Palestinian population with arrogant, derisive irony. Edward Keith-Roach described the Arabs as “a naturally indolent people.” He wrote, “Arabs are a pleasant people to live among, and their long loose garments cover a multitude of sins.” Keith-Roach related how the mayor of Jerusalem had demanded that he dedicate the new public toilet the municipality had built not far from Zion Square. According to Keith-Roach, he had to “induce” the municipality to build the structure, which would continue to function for many years to come. He claimed also to have “induced” the mayor to do without the opening ceremony: “For once, a public building was opened without speeches,” Keith-Roach wrote with an air of victory, his wit a sign of progress and wisdom, so different from the backward population whose leaders were ignorant, corrupt, power-hungry, honor-seeking and, especially, less intelligent than he.[78]

In his memoirs Humphrey Bowman ridiculed the errors he saw on the English signs Arabs put up in buses and other public places. In fact, as director of the department of education he bore responsibility for these mistakes, but to his way of thinking his job did not include ensuring that the Arabs were fluent in English.[79] A similar sense of superiority guided the first British judges to arrive in Palestine.

7.

One sunny morning seven men went out onto the roof of the courthouse in Jerusalem to have their picture taken. Six of them were judges of the appeals court; one was apparently the bailiff. The courthouse was located in the Russian Compound, in a nineteenth-century structure built as a tzarist hospice for pilgrims. The photograph shows a domed roof tiled with stone; in the background is another picturesque dome and, at a distance, some cypress trees. The six judges sit on a stone railing, the bailiff behind them wearing boots, jodhpurs, and a military jacket with large pockets and metal buttons; a leather belt cuts diagonally across his chest. In his hand is a ceremonial staff, under his

nose a large mustache, and on his head a tarbush. Ramrod straight, punctilious, not young, he looks as if the Turks had forgotten to take him with them when they fled the city.

The judges at his feet radiate an avuncular, almost genial air. All are in black robes with white starched collars. Two are Muslims, one a Christian Arab, and one, Gad Frumkin, is Jewish. The three Arab judges in the picture also wear tarbushes, while Frumkin's head is bare. In the center sits Chief Justice Sir Thomas Haycraft, together with the other British judge. Both are wearing white wigs, a professional tradition and status symbol they brought from home. They do not appear to feel ridiculous; rather, they convey superiority. The wigs on their heads separate them from the local judges—only British justices were entitled to wear a pile of horsehair.

The British judicial system was considered far superior to the Ottoman system it had replaced. Nevertheless, the authorities saw no reason to grant the local population all the advantages of British justice. For years they ruled that "the customs and habits, mode of life, mode of thought and character of the English people are very different from those of the inhabitants of Palestine." Hence it would be a "grave injustice" to impose British common law, with which the people are not acquainted, on Palestine.* Thus, unlike courts in Britain, there were no juries in Palestine; the assumption was that juries would be too political and corrupt. During the Turkish era, one lawyer wrote, the position of judge was analogous to that of "a waiter in a hotel, where it was officially forbidden by the management for waiters to accept tips."[80] Bribes were common currency, people's way of influencing decisions that determined their fate. Years went by before the population began to trust that the British administration was indeed honest and fair. The reduction of corruption in the judicial system was one of the main British achievements. The judges also believed that the natives had to be educated to respect the independence of the courts.[81]

In principle, the court system did enjoy a great deal of independence from the government. But when the judges had to address political matters they often tended to adjust their rulings to the needs of the administration, and their individual political positions also influenced their decisions. Still, the courts

maintained a fiction that the great national conflict, so dominant outside the courtroom walls, was dwarfed among the robes, as if it were just one matter of contention among countless others that could be resolved disinterestedly. The system thrived because everyone involved preferred to subscribe to the fiction of the courts' impartiality and accept the courts' conventions. The population of the court was spectacularly contentious and diverse; at the same time there was a familial air, as if everyone knew everyone else—judges, attorneys, plaintiffs and defendants, rapists, thieves and murderers, con men and terrorists, prostitutes, clerks and bailiffs, reporters, onlookers, Jews from all corners of the world, Arab citizens, Christians of all sects, and British bureaucrats. In their various languages and particular brands of humor, the people of the court enacted their conflicts and compromises, loyalties and betrayals, all laced with politics.

The judges lived their own fiction. The chief justice of the Supreme Court in Jerusalem carried himself as if he were the lord chief justice of England. Edward Keith-Roach wrote that those who entered the judicial departments in the colonies were the ones who had failed at the English or Irish bar. Still, the courts in Palestine were considered one of the more effective judicial systems in the empire, alongside those of Ceylon and Cyprus.[82]

8.

Herbert Samuel was proud of the achievements of his five-year administration: the construction of nearly a thousand kilometers of roads, progress in the fight against malaria, two hundred new classrooms, punctual and effective rail and postal systems. Measures had been taken to protect antiquities. Samuel cited other achievements, but what seemed to please him most was the budget surplus he left behind of about a quarter of a million pounds. Except for the cost of maintaining the army, the British taxpayer had not been required to finance Palestine, and even the army had reduced its expenses by 80 percent, Samuel declared.[83]

From time to time the Mandatory administration took loans to cover a deficit, but so long as there was relative tranquillity, the government managed its

finances prudently and conservatively. In the period preceding World War II it spent only 10 to 12 percent of its budget for health and education; the same was true in other colonies as well. In Britain itself, nearly 50 percent of the budget went for welfare services.*

Both the Arabs and the Jews frequently claimed that the budget was not distributed equitably. The Zionist movement argued that the Jewish population provided a greater proportion of the Mandate's revenues than the services it received, meaning that the Jews were financing Arab welfare. Chaim Weizmann complained to Samuel that the Jews were funding part of the Arab educational system.[85] The Arabs, for their part, remonstrated that the government's tariff policy favored Jewish industry and harmed Arab interests, and that high taxes were required to fund a bloated administration that principally provided for the needs of the expanding Jewish population. Most of the new roads were paved to serve the Jews, they argued.[86]

The British not only allowed the Zionist movement to bring capital and to purchase land, they also granted the Jews important economic concessions, including the franchise to produce electricity and the franchise to exploit the resources of the Dead Sea. Tariffs were intended to bring money into the public purse, but they essentially aided Jewish industry while putting pressure on the Arab population, especially the villages. Moreover, Jewish workers in government service demanded and received higher salaries than Arab workers. But the large gap between the strength of the two economies, Jewish and Arab, was not for the most part a reflection of British economic policy, but rather of the momentum of Zionist entrepreneurship.[87] The government encouraged economic separation between Jews and Arabs.[88] To the Zionists, an independent economy was part of the aspiration for political independence.

Herbert Samuel believed the tensions between Jews and Arabs could be neutralized through the benefits of effective health and education systems. He tended to view the conflict in social and economic terms, which was an illusion. The conflict between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine was not principally economic but national. The prisoner of his conception, Samuel repeated it again and again, as if that would make it real. His reports to his king reflected his

indefatigable optimism.*

Soon after his arrival Samuel had set out on horseback to visit Malha, an Arab village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He was hosted in the home of the most important family in the village. Among those who greeted him there was one of the leading provocateurs during the Nebi Musa riots, who had been released from prison on Samuel's order. Samuel was glad to see the man. He wrote to his wife that "all that agitation is as dead as if it had taken place a hundred years ago." With amazement, he told her that the bloodshed had been "forgotten."[91] Everything is quiet, Samuel wrote to Chaim Weizmann as well, in one of his optimistic reports: "you could hear a pin drop." Less than a year later the country was burning.

8

Jaffa, 1921

1.

Beyond the orange groves, southeast of Jaffa, in an Arab neighborhood called Abu Kabir, stood the Red House, named for the color of its upper floor. A high wall surrounded the courtyard; within was a well and a barn. In the spring of 1921 the Yatzker family was renting the place; no other Jews lived nearby. Yehuda Yatzker was fifty-five and had come, some six months earlier, from Russia, where he had been in the livestock feed business. In Palestine he became a dairy farmer and kept several cows. The house itself was fairly spacious: in typical Arab style, the front steps led into a large central space from which other rooms branched off. The Yatzkers rented some of these rooms to boarders, all of them Jews. “The house attracted people who were searching for seclusion, quiet, and a cheap place to live,” Yatzker’s daughter, Rivka Yatzker-Schatz, later wrote.

One of the tenants was a chemist-inventor who wanted to produce cheap blocks for building, and there was a poet or two waiting for inspiration and a publisher. Also living in the house was Josef Chaim Brenner, an author, editor, translator, and journalist, a man of some fame and many admirers. His room contained a simple table and a crate to sit on; he slept on a folding cot.[1] At the time, he was editing the letters of Yosef Trumpeldor, recently killed at Tel Hai.

This was not a good time in his life. Almost forty, he had just separated from his wife; she had taken their son, Uri, and gone to Berlin. Brenner had been born in the Ukraine. He studied in a yeshiva, then abandoned religious orthodoxy, and began writing articles and stories in Hebrew. He served for a while in the

Russian army until the Russo-Japanese War broke out, in 1904. Unlike Trumpeldor, Brenner deserted rather than fight in the war and escaped to London, where he put out an influential Hebrew literary journal, *HaMeorer.* In 1909 he settled in Jerusalem. For a short time he worked as a laborer and then joined the staff of the socialist-Zionist weekly *HaPoel HaTzair.* During World War I he taught at the Hebrew Gymnasium high school in Jaffa. When the Turks expelled the city's residents he went to the north with his students, and after various wanderings settled in Tel Aviv and again earned his living as a teacher and editor. He published his first stories in the periodicals he edited.

Brenner radiated an air of boyishness; he was dreamy, romantic, melancholy, and very Russian; when he came to Palestine he grew a thick beard, which added to his charisma. "We all clung to him with love," wrote one of his followers. Hailed as a prophet of Hebrew secularism, he was a gaunt man with jutting cheekbones, which gave his face a distinctly Slavic look, but his admirers saw in him a Hebrew masculinity, charged with an almost erotic passion for the land. One night after a lecture, some of Brenner's disciples accompanied him on his way back home. "Suddenly Brenner fell down onto the plowed field," wrote a follower, "took a handful of earth, kissed it and, weeping, cried out: Land of Israel, will you be ours?"[2]

Brenner's writing was vehement and combative, sometimes rancorous and hostile. Philosophically, he sought to detach himself from Jewish life in the "Exile," as the Diaspora was then called. In his stories Diaspora Jews were contemptible, degenerate, shifty, and filthy. His depiction was almost antisemitic, and he frequently found himself at the center of fierce controversies. His critics accused him of self-hatred. In truth, though, the new Hebrew culture never replaced his Jewish identity. Moreover, Brenner belonged to a Jewish literary environment that mostly flourished, in Hebrew and in Yiddish, more powerfully outside Palestine than in it. The great Hebrew literary figures such as Bialik, Ahad Ha'am, and Tchernikovsky had not yet settled in Palestine, and S. Y. Agnon had just left for a long stay in Europe. In fact, once he had moved to Palestine, Brenner found he actually preferred living among the Jews of the Exile to having Arabs for neighbors.[3]

In an article he wrote for *Kuntress*, one of the publications of the labor movement, Brenner described an incident with his Arab neighbors. He had come home; the neighbors were sitting on their doorstep, and Brenner greeted them. They did not respond, and he felt hurt. “The lack of response was deliberate, malevolent,” he wrote. He thought he saw an expression of triumph on the face of the Arabs, as if to say, “We managed to restrain ourselves from returning the Jew’s greeting.” Brenner, in his anger, wondered whether the Arabs in Palestine really were the descendants of the ancient Hebrews, as some people said—they hardly deserved such a lineage, he thought.* Either way, he had to walk past them, whether they wanted him to or not, Brenner wrote, but he would prefer to deal with a neighbor in Kovno, Lithuania.

As he continued on his way home, a “colossal Arab” leaped out at him. To his surprise the giant turned out to be a boy of about thirteen. Brenner tried to strike up a conversation but understood only a few words, and he agonized at not having learned Arabic. He imagined the boy was telling him about his tribulations and felt a paternal responsibility for the boy’s future: “Indeed, it is for me to bring light to your eyes, to bring you into the human fellowship,” he wrote. Previously Brenner had written of the Arabs, “We are arch-enemies.” He understood that the Arab-Jewish conflict was one of two national movements. “Living in tiny Palestine,” he wrote, are “no fewer than six or seven hundred thousand Arabs who are, despite all their degeneracy and savagery, masters of the land, in practice and in feeling, and we have come to insert ourselves and live among them, because necessity forces us to do so. There is already hatred between us—there must be and will be.” Everything belongs to them, Brenner noted as he gazed at the citrus groves around him.[5] A Muslim graveyard lay across the street from the Red House. He related to the Arabs with alienation and arrogance, anxiety and hostility.

The week of Passover went by quietly. But on Saturday, April 30, 1921, the residents of the Red House were concerned that there would be clashes between Jews and Arabs in the city the next day, May Day, when the socialist Jews held a parade. Brenner suggested that they guard the house at night—Zvi Schatz, Rivka Yatzker’s husband, had a rifle. As it turned out, the night passed without

incident. The following morning Rivka and her husband set out for Tel Aviv on a donkey, taking their little girl Devorah and Rivka's mother with them. Yehuda Yatzker and his son Avramchik escorted them and then returned. The three boarders, Brenner among them, remained at home.

Rivka and Zvi Schatz wanted to see the May Day parade in Tel Aviv. They found a large crowd at the workers' club waving red flags and a picture of Karl Marx. Suddenly they heard gunshots. Rivka Schatz sent Zvi to find out what was happening, but he returned with only vague information.[6] Maybe a police officer had fired for some reason, perhaps it was Toufiq Bey al-Said, one of Jaffa's most senior police commanders. Schatz made no further inquiries, as he was frantically trying to obtain a vehicle to evacuate the people from the Red House: Jaffa was raging with a kind of violence unknown in the country since the World War.

2.

The first shots had apparently been fired to disperse a procession marching from Jaffa to Tel Aviv without a permit. The parade had been organized by the Jewish Communist Party, officially called the Socialist Workers Party, though its opponents used an acronym of the party's Hebrew name to nickname it "Mops," which means "pug dog" in German. The previous night the party had sent boys out to distribute leaflets in Arabic and Yiddish emblazoned with slogans calling on the workers to topple the British regime and establish the Soviet Union of Palestine. That morning, police officer Said had appeared at the party's headquarters in Jaffa, warning the sixty people present not to participate in the demonstration. But they managed to slip away and headed for Tel Aviv via Menashia, a border neighborhood populated by both Jews and Arabs.

Meanwhile in Tel Aviv, a large May Day parade had been organized by Achdut HaAvoda, the major Jewish labor party at the time, and sanctioned by the authorities. Tensions ran high between the rival parties. At some point the communists and Achdut HaAvoda people ran into one another, and a fistfight ensued. The police chased the "Mopsies" members back in the direction of Jaffa,

where the Communist parade clashed with Arabs, who were equally unsympathetic to a Soviet Union of Palestine.

A commission of inquiry later appointed to investigate the riots found that the fight between the communists and Achdut HaAvoda was the spark that lit the fire. The American consulate in Jerusalem concluded, in contrast, that violence between Jews and Arabs was bound to erupt in any case.[7] Whatever the reason, dozens of witnesses—Jewish, Arab, and British—all told the same story: Arab men broke into Jewish buildings and murdered the occupants; women came afterward and looted. Bearing clubs, knives, swords, and in some cases pistols, Arabs attacked Jewish pedestrians and destroyed Jewish homes and stores. They beat and killed Jews, children included, in their homes; in some cases they split the victims' skulls open.

In testimony reminiscent of the Nebi Musa riots of the previous year, many witnesses recounted how the mob had torn apart quilts and pillows and scattered the down in the alleys, just as Russian thugs did during pogroms. The commission of inquiry later described the riots as "an orgy of pillage." Many witnesses identified their neighbors among the attackers and murderers; in some places Arabs had come to the defense of Jews and gave them refuge in their houses. A number of witnesses said that there had been Arab policemen among the rioters.[8] About 45,000 people lived in Jaffa at the time, roughly half of them Muslims, a third Jews, and the rest Christians.

3.

At about noon two British officers were walking through the alleys of the marketplace in Jaffa's Muslim Ajami neighborhood. They were on vacation and had come to visit the city along with their wives. After making their purchases they suddenly found themselves surrounded by an angry crowd; people ran around them hysterically, brandishing wooden boards and iron rods. Reginald Samuel Foster was not sure what he was seeing—there was a man taking knives from people and sharpening them on a stone; the knives were very long, he later testified. He had a feeling that something horrible was about to happen. Foster

and his companions slipped into the nearby French hospital to protect the women, he explained. He went up to the building's roof, where he heard gunshots. His friend, Sergeant Major Euclid Brooks Wager, had remained on the ground floor; his wife had fainted from the excitement. Wager then went up to the roof himself but did not see much and soon came back down to check on his wife. Foster in the meantime saw a crowd trying to break down the gate of a nearby building.

The crowd's target was an immigrants' hostel, run by the Zionist Commission; about a hundred people were staying there that day. Most had arrived just weeks or days before. Sometimes the young men and women living at the hostel would walk down to the beach with their arms around each other, and the locals said they were polluting Arab morality. How could it be that Britain, a country committed to Christian morals, was allowing such people to take over the country? This argument would be repeated in the years that followed.[9]* The hostel, both a Zionist stronghold and a den of iniquity, was thus an obvious symbolic target. On the other hand, perhaps the house had no symbolic value but was simply an unprotected site full of defenseless people in the heart of a neighborhood of Arabs run amok.

When the attack came most of the hostel residents were in the dining room, where they had just finished lunch. At close to 1:00 P.M. they heard shouting from the street, according to twenty-five-year-old Rachel Rudenberg, a new immigrant from the Ukraine, in her testimony six weeks later. Some of the immigrants went out to the yard, locked the gate, and leaned against it with their backs to keep the mob from storming the hostel. Rocks began landing in the yard; suddenly there was an explosion. Then they heard the sound of gunfire. A few minutes later another bomb went off. Most of the residents fled to the second floor of the building; Rudenberg and a few others hid in the reading room. The gate in the yard was rammed open, and the mob poured in. Through the window of the reading room Rudenberg saw a policeman. She told the others that everything would be all right, the police had arrived. But the shooting did not stop. At first she thought the police were firing in the air to disperse the crowd, but she soon realized that the policemen were aiming at the building.

Rudenberg and her companions retreated into a back room and blocked the door with chairs and tables. Someone banged on the door and tried to break in, and the hinges began to give.

Out in the yard the mob was running wild. One immigrant was killed by a policeman's bullet, fired at short range. Others were beaten with sticks and stabbed. Inside the building the rioters continued to batter the door, trying to break it down. Nineteen-year-old Shoshana Sandak, who had arrived from Lithuania five months previously, recounted the scene: the door began to splinter; the bookcase pushed up against it inched forward. Five women fled through another door into the courtyard, with a policeman on their heels, firing his pistol.[11] Three managed to escape.

Devorah Meler, the house mother, was trapped in a corner with one of the girls, who hid behind her. A policeman wanted to get at the girl. Meler shielded her, and the policeman struck Meler on the head. She tried to placate him with her gold necklace, but the policeman was not satisfied. Meler motioned that she had nothing more to give him. He gestured that she did have something he wanted and began to unbutton his trousers. As she tried to escape, he shot at the floor to frighten her and began to lift up her skirt. Meler tried to flee again and he shot at the floor a second time. Finally, she managed to shake free and run; the policeman fired his pistol in her direction but missed.[12]

Some of the immigrants escaped into the street. Reginald Samuel Foster, still on the roof of the French hospital, heard a woman scream and made out several men chasing a girl of about fourteen. The girl fell. Foster saw a man beat her head with an iron rod. Sergeant Major Wager, still going up and down from the roof to care for his wife, saw a man running; others ran after him and grabbed his clothes, bringing him to the ground. As he lay on the road the crowd beat him with an iron rod, jumped on his body, and then jabbed at him with the rod. A few minutes later Wager saw another man fall; he was beaten to death with wooden boards.

Wager later reported all this to the commission of inquiry. He was asked whether he had considered going out to the street to see whether he could do something. His answer summed up the British dilemma in Palestine: "When we

found it was a question between the Jews and the Arabs we did not think it was for us to interfere.… Which were we to stop?”[13]

4.

Herbert Samuel tried his best to bring a halt to the riots. He was stunned, as was his wife. One administration official recalled the high commissioner consulting with his staff, while Lady Samuel paced back and forth in the long corridor at Augusta Victoria, muttering over and over, “They are killing our people, they are killing our people.” Samuel sent his two most senior officials, Wyndham Deedes and Norman Bentwich, both ardent Zionists, to Jaffa. At the same time, he called for reinforcements from Egypt; Allenby sent two destroyers to Jaffa and another to Haifa. The administration declared a state of emergency. The press was subjected to censorship, and in the days that followed, newspapers appeared with blank spots.[14]

Samuel met with Arab representatives and tried to calm them. Former Jerusalem mayor Musa Kazim al-Husseini demanded that he suspend Jewish immigration. As two or three small boats holding some three hundred immigrants were even then approaching Palestinian shores, Samuel asked Allenby for permission to redirect them to Port Said or Alexandria. Allenby refused. Samuel permitted the commissioner of Ramle to announce the suspension of immigration, and the boats, which were not allowed to land, were forced to return to Istanbul.[15] At the same time, Samuel notified Haj Amin al-Husseini that he had made his final decision to appoint him mufti of Jerusalem.

Weizmann, Ussishkin, Jabotinsky, and Ben-Gurion all happened to be out of the country. Thus David Eder, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, and Arthur Ruppin took the helm of the Jewish community, and Nachum Sokolow, who was visiting Palestine, joined them. The minutes of their meetings reveal a sense of terror, indignation, and helplessness. They pondered the future of the Jews in Palestine but were most concerned with immediate questions, such as how to explain the riots to the high commissioner. The Zionist movement had always taken the position that Arabs and Jews could live together peaceably in Palestine. But now,

Ben-Zvi argued, “if the entire Arab world is against us, we must say so.” One of his colleagues disagreed. Any statement confirming that the Jewish presence in Palestine inevitably led to violence would only serve Arab propaganda, he said. The Zionists should continue to argue that the clashes were the result of deliberate agitation and did not express the Arabs’ true national sentiments.[16]*

Sokolow demanded that Samuel revoke the suspension of immigration. He was simply rewarding terror, Sokolow said. He suggested halting immigration quietly, without an announcement; the Zionist movement would cooperate, he promised. Such surreptitious action would not have helped, of course. To assuage the Arabs, a public announcement was precisely what was needed. Samuel showed Sokolow the draft of his statement and, Jew to Jew, Zionist to Zionist, the two began to bargain over the wording and then continued to argue about the riots. Samuel warned that Palestine was liable to become another Ireland. Sokolow said there was no reason to worry—a small gang of Arab nationalists had stirred things up, but there was no basis for saying that the entire Arab world opposed Zionism. “You are wrong,” Samuel corrected him. “This is a war of the Arab nation against the Hebrew nation.” Members of the Zionist Commission described the events as a pogrom. “I was in Kishinev during the pogroms,” Rabbi Y. L. Fishman told his colleagues.[18] Kishinev was cited the way Samuel cited Ireland, as one trauma to trump another, claim versus claim.*

5.

All this time Zvi Schatz had been running around pleading with different members of the recently established Tel Aviv defense committee, trying to persuade them to send a vehicle to evacuate the residents of the Red House. His daughter Devorah Yatzker-Schatz later related that until he mentioned Brenner, no one paid any attention. By the time a car was found, it was close to five in the afternoon. Leaving his wife and daughter in Tel Aviv, Schatz drove to Jaffa, accompanied by an Arab policeman. Meanwhile, three Jewish beekeepers had appeared at the Red House, the Lerer brothers from the agricultural settlement Nes Tziona, who had come to inspect the hives they had left in a nearby citrus

grove. So there were now nine people to be evacuated, but only three places in the car. The three Lerers went: Zvi Schatz remained behind in the Red House. The Lerers later said that Brenner had insisted they go.[20]

By late afternoon the news from Jaffa had reached the Sarafand military camp, about twelve miles away. The Jewish Legion, which no longer existed but had not yet been officially disbanded, was billeted at the camp, and several soldiers set out in the direction of the riots. Wyndham Deedes, who was kept apprised of the situation, agreed that the men be given rifles. In addition Pinhas Rutenberg, Jabotinsky's partner in the Jerusalem self-defense efforts, had arrived in Tel Aviv and was helping the Jews organize.[21] The next morning armed Jews went into the streets of Jaffa to take revenge. Arab accounts of the Jewish violence are very similar to the Jewish testimonies about the Arab riots. The Jews looted homes and stores. They broke into Arab houses, beating and killing the occupants; in one house, a woman and child were murdered. A hunchbacked Arab and his children were killed in an orange grove; their bodies were disfigured. A Jewish policeman took part.[22]

Still no one returned to evacuate the people left in the Red House. At around eleven on Monday morning, the six remaining occupants apparently decided to make their own way to Tel Aviv. They locked the door and set out but managed to get only a short distance. By the Muslim graveyard near the house, they ran into the funeral of an Arab boy killed the day before, the son of policeman Mahmoud Zeit. Had they stayed at home, they might have lived. Confronted by the crowd of mourners, the six men had no chance. Brenner and Schatz were shot; the others were murdered with sticks and hatchets. The bodies were discovered in the evening by a search party that included labor leader Berl Katznelson. By the time the police consented to move the bodies, one of them had disappeared; it was never found. The murderers had mutilated the victims: Brenner was found lying on his stomach, naked from the waist down. An eyewitness said that in his hand he held a bloodstained piece of paper with a few lines of writing on it.[23]

The bodies were finally taken for identification to the foyer of the Hebrew Gymnasium high school and were then buried in a common grave. The road

leading to the cemetery was named after Yosef Trumpeldor. “What a harmonious end!” wrote Rabbi Benjamin, one of Brenner’s friends. “What a beautiful death!” Brenner had been in no hurry to flee, he said, and had not been afraid of dying. S. Y. Agnon wrote that Brenner “sanctified his life in his death and sanctified his death in his life.”

Brenner himself might have said the same about Trumpeldor. In fact, the two men became part of a single myth. They were particularly well suited to being mythologized. Like Trumpeldor, Brenner had been an object of worship while still alive, almost a patriotic symbol, and like Trumpeldor he was shot by Arabs. Thus the shots that killed him, people said, had been meant to kill Zionism. The headstone over the communal burial site reads: “A fraternal grave for holy and pure souls … in their blood the people of Israel will live and in their sanctity be sanctified.”* In addition, the national myth created around Brenner’s death served to expiate a sense of guilt: Brenner, like Trumpeldor, could have been saved.[25]*

The tension in Jaffa continued for a few more days, spreading to the nearby settlements of Petach Tikva, Hadera, Rehovot, and Kfar Saba. Samuel ordered that the Arab rioters be bombed from the air. A total of 47 Jews and 48 Arabs were killed in the disturbances, and the wounded numbered 146 Jews and 73 Arabs.[27] Palestine was at war, as Samuel told Sokolow, and war required a new kind of thinking.

6.

A few days after the events in Jaffa, the Tel Aviv municipal council discussed the future employment of a worker whom the minutes identify only as Mohammed. Someone had vandalized the council’s generators, and there was a suspicion that the culprit was Mohammed. One of the council members proposed firing Mohammed, but the others preferred to defer the decision for a week or two. In the meantime, they decided, Mohammed would continue to receive his salary, although he was suspended from work. Ten days later the council discussed the issue again. They would have been happy for Mohammed to go back to his

home in Jaffa and remain there but were concerned that this would make a “bad impression on the public.” They decided to give him a different job, away from the generators.[28]

Between the council’s first and second discussions, Tel Aviv had ceased to be part of Jaffa; the high commissioner had granted the town independent status. Tel Aviv had begun lobbying for municipal independence prior to the May riots; the events in Jaffa only served to spur the British to grant the town autonomous status, just as the Nebi Musa riots in Jerusalem a year earlier had influenced the decision to include the Balfour Declaration in the language of the Mandate.[29] In fact, Tel Aviv’s autonomy was the most important Zionist achievement since Britain was given the Mandate. It was a cornerstone of Jewish autonomy in Palestine. Splitting Tel Aviv from Jaffa also formalized the principle that had moved the Jews to leave Jaffa in the first place: separation between Jews and Arabs.

Tel Aviv had been founded by Jews who were tired of living among Arabs. The formation of the town had not been a political act; nor was it necessary for security reasons. The founders of Tel Aviv simply wanted a European quality of life. “After my wedding in 1888,” wrote Rachel Danin, a Jewish resident, “my father rented us an apartment in Jaffa, close to the road leading to the port, next to the Arab marketplace. The place was squalid; our apartment was full of smoke from the Arab houses, especially their bathhouses. The Arab houses were extremely close to ours and the close quarters were excruciating, especially when our son, Moshe, was born. The filth, the cursing, the nasty habits of the Arab children created a bad atmosphere in which to bring up a child.…

“We adults also felt isolated in this foreign environment; there was no cultural life and the Jews were scattered in different places in the town. The harshness of our life gave my husband Ezra the idea of creating a neighborhood some distance away from the Arabs—different, modern, where the houses wouldn’t be on top of one another or attached like barracks.… He imagined a neighborhood where every resident would have a garden with flowers and chickens—a garden city.”

Ezra Danin’s new home in Tel Aviv had five bright and airy rooms. “The

large, spacious bathrooms were not at all common," he wrote. "You can't imagine how happy the children were to see a faucet when they were used to waiting for Abu Halil or Abu Hassan to bring water in skins that stank; sometimes we would wait the whole day for Abu Halil to do us the favor of bringing our precious water. But in Tel Aviv the children could run to the faucet whenever they wanted, turn it on and, wonder of wonders, water came out … without Abu Halil."[30]

After the May Day disturbances, thousands of Jewish residents fled Jaffa for Tel Aviv, where they were housed in tent camps on the beach. Caution was necessary. Tel Aviv was still dependent on Jaffa; most of its residents worked there, and food and other services were supplied by the Arab city. One Arab fruit and vegetable vendor was given a note confirming that he had helped save Jews during the riots and the residents of Tel Aviv were thus obliged "to treat him with friendliness." Whoever harmed him would be severely punished. The home of another Arab had been damaged by his neighbors because he had given shelter to Jews; the people of Tel Aviv were called on to contribute to a special fund established for him, "so he does not think there is no support for a person who does good to a Jew in this or any other way." Dizengoff tried to maintain working relations with the Arab leadership in Jaffa. At a festive gathering held at Tel Aviv's Segal restaurant a year after the May riots, Dizengoff welcomed his colleague the mayor of Jaffa in a thoroughly Zionist way. "Both Jaffa and Tel Aviv will soon be beautiful European cities," he promised.[31]

These were faint gestures of goodwill, however. *Kuntress*, which Brenner had helped edit, reacted to the events in Jaffa with an article entitled "Entrenchment." Its message was clear: We wanted peace, and you, nefarious brother, have rejected our outstretched hand. We have no choice but to be here. We have burned all our bridges—Palestine is our last stand. So we will not be forced out. Quite the contrary: we will work even harder to build our homeland. And we will not forget what you have done to us. The article's language seems to have been influenced by the Haggadah, which the Jews would have read on the first night of Passover, just a few days before the riots: "And the more they afflicted them," the article read, "the more the children of Israel multiplied and

grew." *Kuntress* referred to the Palestinian Jewish community as "the children of Israel" and as "us"—first person plural—as opposed to "the Arab"—third person singular. On May 1 the age of innocence had ended, *Kuntress* declared. Henceforth, the Jews could trust only in themselves, in the spirit of Brenner: "To the extent that we still have the breath of life in us, we will rejoice at the opportunity to spill our blood and the blood of others for a Jewish homeland."[32]

Only a few months earlier, news of the dreadful pogroms in the Ukraine had reached Palestine. According to various estimates, between 75,000 and 200,000 Jews had been murdered. The Zionist newspapers expressed deep emotional identification with the tragedy, describing the victims as "sheep led to the slaughter." The rabbinate called for a day of mourning and the suspension of all work; a collection was taken up. Then Yisrael Belkind, an educator who had led one of the first groups of immigrants in the early 1880s, initiated an operation to bring some 150 orphans from the Ukraine to Palestine. In 1903 he had established an agricultural school for children whose parents had been killed in the Kishinev pogrom. As in the case of the Kishinev children, Belkind's current plan gave rise to many arguments. Local leaders wanted to know who would pay for the children's care and what kind of education they would receive.

Compared to the dimensions of the catastrophe, reaching out to the orphans was essentially a symbolic gesture. But as Ahad Ha'am had written about the rescue of the Kishinev children, "It is such a beautiful idea!" Moreover, it was the original Zionist idea: the Jewish state in Palestine was to be a refuge for persecuted Jews from other lands. Max Nordau, a founding Zionist, proposed bringing to Palestine, within a few months, 600,000 immigrants, regardless of the country's economic absorption capacity.[33]

However, the clashes in Jerusalem and Jaffa made the local Jewish population acutely aware of its dependence on the Jewish communities of the world. *Ha'aretz* made an emotional appeal: "Do not leave us alone at the front. Do not slight the blood of the pioneers you sent ahead of the nation! Come to us in your masses, come to us in your multitudes to strengthen the Hebrew position, to bring us more working hands, more hands for defense!" This was the voice of a Jewish community in distress. Zionist representatives called on the Jews of the

world to donate money to Palestine. Zionist thinking had entered a new stage. No longer a means of saving the Jewish people, Palestine turned into a national objective in its own right: “All our hope is in immigration, all our strength is nothing without the uninterrupted flow of people and resources to the country,” *Ha’aretz* wrote. Jewish politicians in Palestine, among them David Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson, continued at the same time to fulminate against the Diaspora and to accuse Chaim Weizmann of all sorts of blunders.[34]

There is no evidence that the Jaffa riots were premeditated. Arab leaders and spokesmen, first and foremost Musa Kazim al-Husseini, condemned them. Haj Amin al-Husseini shifted his position as a result of the violence; he had been a vocal advocate of terror against Zionism, and though the appointment he received from the British did not soften his view, he turned to mostly legitimate political means to further the Arab cause and worked to prevent repetition of the rioting.[35] The Arabs put together a petition that they submitted to the League of Nations, in which they expressed their grievances; the essence of their demands —independence and democracy—remained unchanged through the end of the Mandate. The petition noted that the Arabs of Palestine included hundreds of young people, graduates of universities, among them architects and engineers, doctors and lawyers and teachers, and that many Arabs held senior positions in the governmental services of other countries. There was then sufficient Arab talent and experience to establish a stable, representative parliamentary government in Palestine, in accordance with the universal principles of self-determination accepted by the international community after the World War, they wrote.[36]

Khalil al-Sakakini was in Cairo as the riots were taking place, serving as the principal of a school. During the day he spent much time sitting in coffeehouses, smoking and meditating on the transformation the Arab world was undergoing, from a traditional society to a modern one, and thinking about the meaning of Levantinism. “The European city has made contact with the Oriental man before it has reached the Oriental woman. So the man is left between two elements—the European city outside and the Oriental woman inside. It would seem that the influence of the woman is stronger than the influence of the city,” he wrote.[37]

7.

Herbert Samuel moved quickly to appoint a commission to investigate the events in Jaffa. A more astute body than the Nebi Musa court of inquiry, the commission was headed by Sir Thomas Haycraft, the chief justice of the Supreme Court in Palestine, and included among its members Harry Luke, aide to Ronald Storrs. The investigation focused on similar questions: Were the riots premeditated? Would it be fair to consider the riots an antisemitic pogrom? Had the authorities done everything in their power to halt the disturbances? The commission ruled that the rioting had broken out spontaneously, and that its perpetrators were not Jew haters but opponents of Zionism. In addition, the commission deemed that actions taken by the authorities had been satisfactory, although it confirmed, in understated language, that policemen had participated in the riots and the pillage. The corruption and weakness of the police, it argued, reflected the policemen's low pay. Most of them were Arabs; few Jews were willing to serve under the conditions the force offered.

Unlike the Nebi Musa court of inquiry, the Haycraft Commission did not go back to the dawn of history. It placed the blame squarely on the Arabs but evinced a great deal of understanding for their motives. Zionism scares them, it said, and the Zionists were not doing enough to mitigate the Arabs' apprehensions. In the process, the commission made an anthropological observation: Arabs are more obedient, but have a predilection for violent outbursts; Jews are less obedient, but also less prone to violence.

The commission's report angered the Jews in England. The *Jewish Chronicle* published a fitting Zionist response: "Imagine the wild animals in a zoological garden springing out of their cages and killing a number of spectators, and a commission appointed to enquire into the causes of the disaster reporting first and foremost that the animals were discontented with and hostile to the visitors who had come to see them! As if it were not the first business of the keepers to keep; to know the habits and disposition of the animals, and to be sure that the cages were secure!"

Spokesmen for the Jewish community in Palestine were also enraged. A few

days before the report was published, on November 2, 1921, the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Arab thugs again went on a rampage through the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem's Old City; five Jews and three Arabs died.[38] The Arabs were killed by explosives thrown by the Jews.

Jewish leaders demanded that Jerusalem commissioner Ronald Storrs be dismissed. "Leave!" *Ha'aretz* trumpeted, repeating this demand daily over a period of weeks. Storrs's way of governing, the newspaper insisted, was amateurish and romantic. "Can one look on spilling of Jewish blood as entertainment, as the Romans did?" the newspaper asked.[39] The anger was justified, though not because Storrs had incited the Arabs against the Jews, but rather because he had arrogantly believed his personal prestige was sufficient to hold them back. He had given the Arab leaders several warnings to control their community, and when disturbances broke out nevertheless, he behaved as if the violence were a personal slight. He found the angry criticism of his management by the Jewish leadership even more insulting. David Ben-Gurion described Storrs as "one of the top bloodstained officials of iniquity," and maintained that his presence in the country was a danger to the Jewish community. The Arabs were murdering the Jews because that was their nature, Ben-Gurion explained, but pogroms—that is, the murder of Jews under state sponsorship—were not a necessary part of reality. The fact was that the Turks had known how to keep the Arabs down.[40]

Storrs took cover behind a wall of patronizing sarcasm. "I am still unable to understand how I did not emerge from [the Zionist criticism] an anti-Semite for life," he wrote. And, he added in a sentence he later chose not to include in his memoirs, "Never was a Goy more mercilessly pogrommed."[41] He continued to treat Palestine as a colonial pet—fun to bring up, but not worth getting in trouble over with the neighbors.

Some villages whose residents had participated in the riots were heavily fined. A few of the rioters were brought to trial; one man was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, and a boy was given a public lashing. When three Jews, including a policeman, were convicted of participating in the murder of Arabs, the Jewish community raised a hue and cry: "There are judges in England,"

wrote historian Joseph Klausner, “who are concerned with nothing but justice and truth; but in Palestine, the land of the prophets, the prophets of truth and justice, where is truth, where is justice?” The consequences of the court’s decisions, Klausner wrote, would be serious: “The foundations of the world crumble the moment justice is brought to its knees.” The Supreme Court later acquitted the Jewish defendants on the grounds that they had acted in self-defense, but the crisis of confidence between the Jews and the authorities continued. Some months after the riot, three Arab men were tried for the murder of Brenner, but they were acquitted because of reasonable doubt.[42]

Police officer Toufiq Bey al-Said resigned from the Jaffa police force. One day, he was walking down the street when a man addressed him from behind. When Said turned around, the man shot him. The bullet pierced his skull and Said died on the spot. An Arab newspaper claimed he had been murdered as revenge for his part in the attack on the Jaffa immigrant hostel. A Hebrew newspaper responded that the accusation was vicious slander—Jews do not engage in acts of revenge. That was not precisely true, since HaShomer, the Jewish self-defense organization that operated in the Galilee before World War I, did avenge attacks on its members.

A man named David Bar was charged with Said’s murder but acquitted.[43] The real perpetrator was never apprehended. He was Yerahmiel “Luka” Lukacher, a legendary figure from the Galilee. Apparently, he had been sent by HaShomer veterans to avenge Brenner’s death. Lukacher came from Russia; his acquaintances remembered him as a handsome man, full of personal charm, a pioneer and adventurer, a romantic bandit and Communist spy. David Ben-Gurion once hinted that Lukacher was planning to murder him over ideological differences. Some time after Said’s death, Lukacher returned to the Soviet Union and disappeared.[44]

8.

In early June 1921 Samuel gave a speech at Government House on the occasion of the king’s birthday and stressed Britain’s commitment to the second part of

the Balfour Declaration—the provision stating that the establishment of a Jewish national home would not hurt the Arabs. Immigration would be allowed only to the extent that it did not burden the country's economy, he said. Samuel's speech conformed strictly to the declared policy of his government, but those who heard him received the impression that he was trying to appease the Arabs at the expense of the Jews. David Eder was outraged. "The word 'traitor' crossed my lips," he wrote to his colleagues.[45]

Eder had always been among the moderates who believed it was important to make approaches to the Arabs: he had rejected the tendency toward separation, including the severing of Tel Aviv from Jaffa, and had not ruled out the possibility that the Jewish state might be part of a regional federation with Arab countries. But after the events in Jaffa Eder was moderate no longer. Terrorism exacted a heavy price; not least it impaired people's ability and willingness to consider problems rationally. Eder responded to the Jaffa riots with a proposal to cancel the Mandate. Better to let the Jews handle the Arabs on their own, he said, estimating that in Palestine there were 10,000 Jews able to bear arms, at least 3,000 of whom had already served in the army. In his testimony to the commission of inquiry, Eder said that the Arabs in Palestine had been taught by their leaders to respect nothing but force. So long as they believed the Jews were armed with justice but not with guns, he maintained, they would continue to regard the Jews as legitimate targets for murder and pillage.[46]

As he returned from Samuel's speech, still furious, Eder determined to cable Weizmann and demand that he immediately begin working to oust Samuel. Once he had calmed down, Eder called Samuel, and a conversation between the two persuaded Eder that ousting the high commissioner would cause more problems than it would solve. Eder opted for a boycott of official ceremonies in which the high commissioner participated.[47] The lines were drawn between these two English Jews, both of them Zionists. Samuel had been concerned that the Arabs would consider him a Zionist agent. Now he found that the Jews thought he was an Arab agent. "Until yesterday he was like God; now he is castigated as a traitor," Arthur Ruppin wrote in his diary.

Ruppin, a dry, Prussian-born jurist and economist, and a founder of Tel Aviv,

identified with Samuel. The best thing would probably have been to put down the Arabs by force, he wrote, but being a liberal, “European, and a rather pure man,” Samuel was not capable of doing this. “In that sense I feel a spiritual identification with him,” Ruppin stated, deciding that if the Zionist program required the use of force, he would resign his position in the movement. He estimated that Samuel would probably leave. “The job is too burdensome for a Jewish man,” he wrote. Samuel’s presence in Palestine also made matters difficult for the Jewish community. “He is a Zionist,” Ruppin noted, “and so we cannot complain about him.” But when Samuel threatened to resign over the Jews’ stinging criticisms, the Zionists retreated somewhat; they did not want him to leave, even though they resented him bitterly.[48]

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and other National Council members sent Samuel extremely emotional letters, expressing a sense of tribal indignity. As a Jew, Samuel was expected to be “one of us” above all else. But in fact he represented the British Empire and was responsible for the Arab population as well, and did not intend to deny that responsibility. So the Zionists felt betrayed, or at least acted as if they did.[49] It was hard to know when they truly felt victimized and when they were feigning bitterness as a tactical move.

Chaim Weizmann, cautious, astute, and now a man of abundant experience, perfected this tactic as a diplomatic art. His expressions of pessimism were deliberate, carefully governed and measured.[50] To his colleagues, Weizmann denounced Samuel as a coward: “There he is, trembling and imploring everybody to ‘make peace’ with the Arabs, as if we were quarreling with them,” Weizmann said. He was particularly angered by a decision Samuel had recently made to hand over hundreds of thousands of dunams—a measurement equal to four acres—of government land in the Beit She’an Valley to a Bedouin tribe.[51] One of Weizmann’s aides had returned from Palestine with “a great deal to say about our nonentity of a hero,” he wrote to Ahad Ha’am.[52] The aide, Frederick Kisch, claimed that Samuel was being too fair; “he established a sort of ‘fifty-fifty’ attitude as between Jews and Arabs,” instead of favoring his own people. His inclination, Kisch maintained, was to mold Palestine into a colonial territory with a single population of natives, Jews and Arabs.[53] But Weizmann’s letters to

Samuel following the riots expressed not anger but great appreciation, almost commiseration, and a near-abject willingness to help. “It is essential that we appreciate his very difficult position, supporting him with all our power,” he wrote to David Eder. “To embarrass him would play into our enemies’ hands at home and abroad. We are on trial. We must show patience and forbearance.”[54]

Weizmann’s “enemies at home” were not the Arabs but David Ben-Gurion and Ze’ev Jabotinsky, whom he considered too hotheaded and reckless. Ben-Gurion railed against the “Jewish Commissioner,” criticizing his cowardice and his frailty.[55] Jabotinsky continued to send the Colonial Office anti-British rants, which led one of Winston Churchill’s aides to inform his minister that Mr. Jabotinsky was “a little crazy.”[56] Denunciations of British “betrayal” were seen as proof of patriotic loyalty. Weizmann, always navigating between the extremes, demanded that the Zionists display more understanding for Samuel.[57] He had obviously considered the possibility of forcing Samuel’s dismissal, but had decided it would be best to leave him in office. “Respect him but suspect him,” Weizmann stated, quoting a Hebrew proverb.[58]

In fact, Herbert Samuel had not betrayed Zionism; his emotional and political commitment to the national-home policy was undiminished. His royal birthday speech has often been described as an expression of a “major public shift” in his political vision. According to one theory, the events in Jaffa had pushed him to change his position. His British-Jewish background was also cited: he could handle Arab nationalism, but his definition of himself as a British Jew did not allow for Jewish nationalism.[59] None of this was true. Samuel was and remained a Zionist.

To the end of his life, Samuel believed that Zionism would achieve its goal gradually. His son Edwin, who had arrived in Palestine before him, expressed this view succinctly. Zionism should work slowly, he wrote his father as early as 1917: “Nothing can be lost by waiting and colonising slowly and introducing development carefully while a lot can be destroyed by rushing.” This was the position Samuel articulated to Lloyd George on the eve of his departure for Palestine, and it echoed Chaim Weizmann’s own belief.

No less committed to Zionism than Weizmann, Samuel was, however, aware

of the ever-deepening fear that governed relations between the Jews and the Arabs; he knew that on both sides there were those who were deliberately fanning that fear. As a consequence, he felt the Zionists should exercise restraint and abstain from symbolic gestures liable to anger the Arabs. He came to regard the Arabs as a minority in need of protection. As a Jew and a liberal Englishman he would be ashamed, he wrote, if it turned out that the establishment of a Jewish state involved injustice toward the Arabs. “Nothing could be worse than if it were to appear that the one thing the Jewish people had learnt from the centuries of their own oppression was to oppress others,” he wrote. But when he defended the rights of the country’s Arabs, he was referring only to their economic, religious, and cultural welfare; he did not view them as a separate nation. He believed wholeheartedly that a Zionist Palestine coincided with the interests of England.[60] And since that was his government’s position as well, there was, for him, no issue of conflicting loyalties.

The Jaffa riots brought home to Samuel that his job was going to be harder than he thought; he had been misled by the calm that greeted his arrival. The riots made him aware that he was dealing with a war between two nations. But Samuel was by no means too “pure,” as Ruppin had written. His objection to suppressing the Arabs harshly grew out of a cold calculation: such suppression would only increase the violence, which first and foremost would harm the Zionist interest, he explained to Nachum Sokolow.[61]

Samuel warned that the British public would not consent to advancing the Zionist program on the bayonets of the British army. The tension between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was likely to raise hostile questions in Parliament, and the foundations of Britain’s Zionist policy were not stable enough to withstand such assaults, he asserted. Some of the British newspapers were evincing growing sympathy for the Arabs; there were rumblings that the British presence in Palestine threatened to cost too much money.[62] Field Marshal Wilson continued to oppose Britain’s role. Winston, he said of Churchill, appears to think he can govern Palestine with hot air, airplanes, and Jews. Wilson himself doubted that anyone would agree to be governed with hot air and airplanes; he also detested the tendency of the politicians to avoid taking responsibility by granting self-

government to small nations not trained to rule themselves. Inevitably those nations would fall into the hands of extremists. Altogether, he simply could not understand what the British were doing in Palestine, he wrote.[63]

At one point, Weizmann succeeded in getting his hands on a document from General Congreve's London headquarters stating that, as in Ireland, the army could not avoid taking a position in favor of one side or another, and it was clear enough that in Palestine its sympathy was with the Arabs. The British government would never countenance a policy that made Palestine for the Jews what England was for Englishmen, the document said. Weizmann sent copies to Balfour and Prime Minister Lloyd George. "The Colonial Office is rather upset about the circular having got into my hands," he wrote. "I have told them that I am going to press this point until the Government makes up its mind whether it is going to remove such officials (or tear up the Mandate)."[64]

Churchill and Samuel both acknowledged to Weizmann that most British officials could not be counted sympathetic to Zionism. "The policy of the Balfour Declaration is an unjust policy," one of them, Charles Robert Ashbee, stated, quoting George Adam Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land:* "Palestine is emphatically a land of tribes. The idea that it can ever belong to one nation, even though this were the Jews, is contrary to both nature and the Scripture."[65] Cooperation between the Zionists and the British seemed about to collapse. But in fact the relationship was growing ever stronger. On Tuesday, July 22, 1921, Weizmann arrived at Balfour's home to discuss the situation. At Weizmann's request, Balfour had invited Prime Minister Lloyd George and Colonial Secretary Churchill.[66] Also present were the cabinet secretary and another official from the Colonial Office. It is doubtful whether anywhere in the empire there were many other national leaders able to arrange such a high-level meeting. Weizmann led the discussion; Lloyd George and Balfour went out of their way to please him. Churchill put forward some arguments but ultimately behaved cooperatively, almost obediently. The encounter was extraordinary from every point of view.

Weizmann first reported on a dispute with leaders of the American Jewish community that he had won. Lloyd George complimented him. Balfour then

suggested that he give the prime minister an overview of the state of the Zionist movement. Weizmann complained about the situation in Palestine, saying the tension made it difficult for him to run the movement. He complained about Samuel's royal birthday speech, arguing that it contradicted the Balfour Declaration; without immigration the Jews would never be able to establish a majority in Palestine. Churchill disagreed with Weizmann's interpretation; Lloyd George and Balfour conceded that the speech had been unfortunate. The Balfour Declaration had always meant the eventual creation of a Jewish state, they said.

This statement promised more than the British government had ever said before; Churchill was surprised. He maintained that nine out of every ten British officials in Palestine were opposed to the Balfour Declaration, and that many Jews rejected it as well. He contended that a representative government should be established in Palestine; Weizmann was opposed, since the Jews were a minority. Lloyd George also disagreed with Churchill: "You mustn't give representative government to Palestine." Churchill proposed that the matter be brought before the cabinet.

Weizmann further argued that suspending immigration encouraged Arab violence. The threat to the Jews was so severe, he said, that rifles were now being smuggled into Palestine—without his authorization, of course, he added cautiously. Churchill responded: "We won't mind, but don't speak of it." As if he could not believe his ears, Weizmann asked whether he had understood the secretary correctly. Did the prime minister of Great Britain sanction Zionists smuggling rifles into Palestine? Apparently, he did. Weizmann would soon thereafter budget money for the purchase of weapons.[67] Everyone present agreed that the suspension of immigration was a temporary measure; when Churchill asked how many immigrants the Zionists wished to bring to Palestine, Weizmann had no answer. Churchill commented that the country should not be flooded with immigrants without means. They all agreed on this as well. Within a few months immigration resumed.

The men continued to talk, Weizmann rejecting as utter nonsense Samuel's report that Palestine was an imposition on British taxpayers. Lloyd George and Balfour concurred; Churchill did not. Weizmann then dismissed as "absurd" the

charge that the Jews were stealing the Arabs' livelihood. Lloyd George broke out laughing. He asked how much money the Zionists had invested in Palestine and was "much struck" by the answer he received, Weizmann later recorded. Churchill brought up Musa Kazim al-Husseini: he was coming to London at the head of an Arab delegation and Churchill heartily wished the Zionists would reach some sort of accommodation with the Arabs. Weizmann said he could not come to terms with the Arabs unless he was sure of the government's position. "Frankly speaking," Lloyd George said, "you want to know whether we are going to keep our pledges." "Yes," Weizmann said. Balfour nodded positively. "You will have to do a lot of propaganda," Lloyd George advised, adding that Samuel was "very weak and has funked the position."

The prime minister got up to leave; at some opportunity, Balfour should probably repeat one of his pro-Zionist speeches, he suggested. When he reached the door he suddenly said, "Bribe the Arabs." Weizmann cautiously said that would be immoral but added, with the British dryness he had, with much effort, acquired over the years, that bribery was no longer so effective because British policy had driven up the Arabs' price. Two years ago he could have easily bought his way into becoming an Arab national leader.

Balfour walked the prime minister to his car. On his return Balfour told Weizmann that he had Lloyd George's support and high regard. Was there anything else he could do? Balfour asked. Weizmann demanded that responsibility for the defense of Palestine be taken from Congreve, whom he described as an enemy. Churchill consented.[68] Weizmann proposed for the government's consideration a series of actions to reinforce the Jewish community in Palestine: removing administration officials opposed to a Jewish police force, punishing Arab villages when their residents caused damage to Jewish settlements, strengthening the settlements, granting the Jews economic franchises, and increasing Jewish involvement in the selection of immigrants.

Field Marshal Wilson wrote, with much justification, that only one thing could explain this wholesale kowtowing to Weizmann: "The 'Frocks' seem to think, and I wholly disagree with them, that by handing over Jewland to the Jews they will make friends of those other Jews who govern finance in Chicago,

Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, etc.”[69]

9.

The Zionist movement in Palestine had prior to the riots set up new administrative institutions. The Zionist Commission, always a temporary body, was transformed into the permanent Zionist Executive, a kind of cabinet, which would head the new Jewish Agency, officially responsible for cooperation with the administration but acting as an unofficial Jewish government. David Eder left the commission’s helm to return home; in his place came Frederick Kisch, a British Jew and a great patriot.

Had Kisch been sent to Palestine as part of the colonial apparatus, he might have served his country better. A former British officer, a colonel, he had been born in India; his father, from a family whose origins were in Prague, had been the director of the Bengal mail. Kisch had served in the Royal Corps of Engineers, was wounded in Flanders, and had been transferred to one of the intelligence headquarters in London, where he dealt with various diplomatic matters. One day in June 1917, his commander summoned him to meet Chaim Weizmann. Kisch had been put in charge of organizing a diplomatic mission for Weizmann.

In his search for a replacement for Eder, Weizmann naturally turned to the British establishment. He consulted Lieutenant General Sir George Macdonogh of intelligence, and Macdonogh, “a loyal friend of the Zionist movement,” according to Weizmann, sent him to Kisch. The young colonel had wanted to remain in the army, but he had not been promoted and was filled with a sense of frustration and failure. From Weizmann’s point of view Kisch was an ideal choice; his father was a Zionist and he himself was a demobilized officer with diplomatic and political experience, including an assignment to the British delegation at the Versailles peace talks. He was meticulous, precise, and coolheaded, the very traits that Weizmann admired in the English. Moreover, he saw himself as a British officer, which would make his contacts with the administration much easier. Kisch dressed like an Englishman, spoke like one,

and thought like one; he invited other Englishmen to tea and played cricket with them. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he knew no Hebrew.

Weizmann warned him that the Jews might not accept him because he was too much of an Englishman, while the British might come to regard him as an Englishman "gone native." Weizmann was right. Kisch generally received the authorities' understanding, but not always their agreement. He usually obtained the Jewish leaders' agreement, but not always their understanding.[70] He was up against the same tangle of conflicting expectations and loyalties that made things so difficult for the Jewish officials serving in Samuel's administration and for Samuel himself. "It is not that these people are bad Jews," Kisch said, "it is that each is too much of a Jew." He wrote that Samuel had forbidden dogs to be brought into his house, out of respect for his Muslim guests, and had also prohibited his waiters from wearing tarbushes, so as not to anger his Jewish guests. One of the administration's men protested this caution in his own way: he bought a dog and called him Tarboosh.[71]

Like Chaim Weizmann, Kisch believed the British could and should do more than they had done to move the Zionist cause forward; he too was never satisfied and always felt unjustly treated. But despite his frustrations, he shared Weizmann's belief that, ultimately, British colonialism needed Zionism as much as Zionism needed the British administration.

The Zionists would have needed the British even if Palestine had been empty of Arabs, Kisch wrote, because the Zionists did not understand the fundamentals of governing a country. It might well take them another fifty years to gain enough experience to run an independent state. "We have to learn from [the British] not only the technical methods of public administration but standards of public administration, as to which so few of our people have any experience or understanding," he explained. He had no doubt about the importance of the British presence. As he put it, "The Mandate, all the Mandate, and nothing but the Mandate."[72] However, in London, two officials in the Colonial Office, one senior and one junior, were taking stock: what, really, had Britain gotten out of the Balfour Declaration?

10.

The fifth anniversary of the declaration had just passed when Sir John E. Shuckburgh, assistant undersecretary for the colonies and head of the Middle East Division, was concluding a routine morning meeting in his office. Shuckburgh asked one of the participants, Sydney Moody, to stay behind for a private chat. A graduate of Eton and Kings College, Cambridge, Shuckburgh had served in India; Moody, twelve years his junior, had studied at Oxford and spent several years as district commissioner of Safed. He had been sent back to London to study and would later return to Palestine to work for the British administration in Jerusalem. Discussing Palestine, the two men were close to despair, Moody remembered. They talked about the illusions, the constraints, the doubts, the disappointments, and the trap. The notes Moody made of their conversation reflect a sense of helplessness, confusion, shame, and anxiety. In the twenty-five years that followed, no one better expressed the frustrations of Palestine.

He saw no purpose to the Mandate and no way out, Shuckburgh said. His office had tried to bring about a settlement between the Arabs and the Jews, but seemed to have failed. The Arabs were embittered, the Jews were dissatisfied, constantly accusing British administration officials of taking an anti-Jewish line. “We are unfortunate in our clients,” Shuckburgh said with a touch of self-righteousness, almost self-pity.

He felt that Britain was operating in the dark, with no idea what it was doing or where it was going. There were only two options: to implement the Zionist policy by force or to abandon it. Protracted equivocation was not possible, Shuckburgh said. Britain could not hop from one compromise to another, the first embarrassing and the next degrading. This two-faced policy was not appropriate for the British government, and it disgraced him personally. The matter was particularly complicated now because Palestine was no longer considered a strategic asset. The House of Lords had concluded that the region was not a source of power but of weakness.[73] Shuckburgh had heard these things in army circles as well.

Soon afterward, Shuckburgh sat on a panel of military experts convened to examine the strategic value of Palestine. There was no clear agreement. Some participants thought in terms of the previous war: if the Turks were to return to Palestine they would endanger Britain's position in Egypt; Palestine was needed to defend the Suez Canal. Shuckburgh contributed the "imperial interest," as he liked to say: "To lose Palestine is to lose Arabia." The air force maintained that holding Palestine facilitated contact between Egypt, Iraq, and India—and kept the enemy away from Egypt. The first lord of the admiralty complained about Palestine's ports; Cyprus was a better base for protecting the Suez Canal, in his view. To the general staff, Palestine was not necessary to defend the canal; the forces stationed in Egypt were sufficient. In fact, the need to defend Palestine was liable to place a burden on the army in Egypt. The chief of the general staff ridiculed the thesis that Palestine was important as a link between Egypt and India: "If we are to hold and garrison increasingly broad areas of the earth's surface in order to confine foreign aerodromes to a safe distance from our own territories, we shall presently, as the range of action of aircraft increases, have to hold most of the world." The occupation of Palestine had greater moral than strategic value, he said. The secretary of state for war summed up the discussion: while, in present circumstances, Palestine was not of real strategic value, it was desirable to keep it. Who knows, maybe one day oil would be discovered there. It was unfortunate, Shuckburgh said, that one could not depend on military experts—they were always in dispute and kept changing their positions every six months.[74]

During that same period calls were made in the press and in Parliament for the unilateral evacuation of Palestine: there was no way out of the Arab-Jewish predicament, and the whole thing was too expensive. Against this background a book was published in 1923, written by *Times* correspondent Philip Graves, presenting a well-argued political and military case for continued rule of Palestine. Graves's fundamental assumption was that if Britain left Palestine, the country would descend into anarchy and war and before long another power would invade. Turkey, France, or Italy—any one of these would endanger Britain's hold on Egypt. Graves mentioned the Suez Canal and the air route

between Egypt and India. He furthermore argued that rule of the Holy Land, guarding the Western world's holiest sites, enhanced Britain's honor and prestige, and was therefore worth the price. But even a person willing to forgo Palestine's sentimental value, he added, should remember that tearing up the Balfour Declaration would mean losing the support of America's Jews. This prospect should not be taken lightly, especially given the great influence the Irish already enjoyed in the United States, Graves maintained. Breaking a promise made to the Jews would push many of them into the arms of communism.[75]

Shuckburgh had once spoken with David Eder about Arab-Jewish relations. "Why don't you bang our heads together and make us agree?" suggested Eder.[76] Shuckburgh had liked the idea. Recalling his private chat with Shuckburgh, Moody remembered his boss making a similar suggestion. They should summon the Arabs and Jews, he said, and tell them something like, "Look here, we have made certain promises to both of you. We promised the Jews a National Home in Palestine. We promised the Arabs national independence. Now you must agree together. We will give you independence provided you agree on a basis of settlement about the National Home. Now you must get round a table and come to some mutual arrangement. We give you six months to make up your minds. If you have not reached a settlement in that time we will simply resume our liberty of action and regard our promises to Arabs and Jews in Palestine as non-existent and simply govern the country as we think best quite unembarrassed by preconceived policy." No independence and no national home. Of course, Shuckburgh added cautiously, it should be made clear that even if they reached an agreement the British would not get up the next day and leave. First they would ensure that the agreement worked.

Shuckburgh seems to have been thinking of Jewish autonomy in the framework of an Arab state. If the Arabs would only consider the matter, he tried to convince himself, they would reach the conclusion that his proposal would bring them closer to achieving independence; the Jews, for their part, would agree out of fear of losing Britain's support and having to face the Arabs alone. He became quite enamored of the idea: he would no longer have to live with the feeling that his country was breaking its promises; British rule would enable a

compromise between the two sides; Palestine would be a placid crown colony. He asked Moody what he thought. Yes, Moody agreed, the compromise Shuckburgh was proposing would finally release them from the anguish of contradictory promises.

Moody had a great many thoughts and doubts that he did not share with the assistant undersecretary; in his records of their conversation he placed those thoughts in brackets. Palestine was an underdeveloped, underpopulated country, and only the Jews could develop it for the good of all its citizens, because only they had the necessary money, enthusiasm, and manpower. No, they apparently did not intend to develop the country for the good of the Arabs as well, but Moody thought of the Jewish colleague in his office who was always telling him why the British should help the Jews—a Jewish Palestine would be stuck like a bone in the windpipe of an Arab empire. Moody thought that good. He opposed Arab unity.

Palestine required patience, Moody told his superior. A solution would turn up: one just had to hold on. Whoever digs in the longest wins. The British taxpayer would in the meantime continue to finance the army's expenses, but these were progressively declining. He supported Shuckburgh's proposal of Jewish autonomy in an Arab state, but with great hesitation. His conscience plagued him: yes, the Jews would receive a measure of self-rule, but he knew they were clinging to the Balfour Declaration and would see Shuckburgh's initiative as a betrayal.

Moody recalled the scene. He had sat in a leather armchair; Shuckburgh faced him, his back to the fireplace. Moody noted that his trousers were baggy at the knees. He asked his boss whether he thought Britain had gotten its money's worth when it gave the Zionists the Balfour Declaration. Sir John responded like a gentleman in distress. He was inclined to think that the Balfour Declaration had not been worth it. Nevertheless a bargain had been struck, and even if Britain was disappointed, that did not affect the binding nature of the bargain.