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The Nerves of Jerusalem

1.

On Sunday afternoon, September 23, 1928, Constable Douglas Duff was patrolling the Old City when he ran into Jerusalem's current district commissioner, Edward Keith-Roach. The pasha of Jerusalem, as he was known, was on his way to the *mahkameh,* the Muslim religious court, and he invited Duff to join him. One of the court building's windows looked out over the Western Wall. Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, was to begin that evening, and people were gathering for the Kol Nidre service marking the start of the fast. Suddenly Keith-Roach saw that a screen had been set up in front of the wall—an ordinary collapsible screen, of the type that people sometimes use in their bedrooms, Duff later wrote, a few wooden frames covered with cloth. The screen was being used to separate male and female worshipers. Duff had noticed it earlier that day but had given it no thought. Keith-Roach remarked that he had never seen it there before. This comment was the opening shot for the tumultuous battles that raged in the following months. Hundreds of people would be killed, leaving absolutely no doubt: the conflict over Palestine was going to lead to war.

Duff suggested after the event that had the district commissioner kept quiet, the day might have passed peacefully. A commission of inquiry set up later heard that the Muslims had known about the screen in advance; they had learned of it by chance, the result of an argument between the wall's Sephardic and Ashkenazic beadles. Whatever the case, Keith-Roach pointed out the screen, and

the sheikhs hosting him at the *mahkameh* launched into an emotional protest and demanded that it be removed. Any physical alteration to the site, even the temporary addition of furniture, prompted the Muslims' suspicion that the Jews were trying to find a way to give the wall the status of a synagogue, as a first step in taking it over. Unless the screen was taken down, the sheikhs said, they would not be responsible for what happened. In fact, keeping the peace wasn't their responsibility, but the vague threat was the sheikhs' tactic for getting their way.[1]

Keith-Roach tried to make light of the issue and cheerily promised that he would remove the screen himself. He went down to the wall, together with Duff, where they found the Ashkenazic beadle, Noah Baruch Glasstein, an old man with a noble appearance. Keith-Roach was blunt: the screen had to go because the Arabs demanded it. The beadle asked to leave the screen standing until the end of the prayer service. Then he would find some non-Jewish workers to take it down. Keith-Roach agreed and proceeded to pay what Duff described as a "courtesy visit" to the Hurva Synagogue.

The two men found Attorney General Bentwich among the worshipers, and told him about the screen. Bentwich asked that nothing be done until after the fast was over, but the district commissioner stood his ground and maintained that the Arabs should not be provoked.[2] Duff returned to the wall; the beadle, in tears, promised to take the screen down during the night. The constable went to report to Keith-Roach at his home in the Old City's Christian Quarter. Keith-Roach had guests, and Duff's impression was that the wall was no longer on his mind. He poured Duff a glass of whiskey and told him only to make sure the screen was gone by morning.

From his memoirs, Duff emerges as a violent man, a racist, a misogynist, and a fool, but he seemed to sense that the screen meant trouble. He took out his pad, wrote down an order in the spirit of Keith-Roach's instruction, and had the commissioner sign it. Afterward Duff even went to his office to have the order officially stamped. He then returned to the wall, where the screen was still in place. He warned the beadle that if he found it there at seven A.M. the next day he would destroy it. At six-thirty on Monday morning, Duff went into action. First

he called in reinforcements. His men reported immediately, he later wrote, because they knew from experience that when Duff called, there was action. About ten armed policemen assembled; Duff told them to take steel helmets. “We stormed down the narrow alley of David Street,” he wrote, as if going into battle. Arab residents urged them on, calling “Death to the Jewish dogs!” and “Strike, strike!” At the wall the police found a small group of old men and women—and the screen. Duff grabbed the beadle by the shoulders and shook him. The old man, alarmed in the extreme, could not get word out; apparently he hated violence in all its forms, Duff noted dryly.

Duff ordered one of his sergeants to destroy the screen. In the meantime, worshipers had gathered; Duff complained of “the smell of overheated and underwashed femininity” that hung in the air. In his description, what ensued seemed like a battle of the sexes: the women screamed hysterically, banged the policemen’s heads with parasols, and tried to tear their clothing. He described them as “angry ladies,” as if he were at a demonstration of suffragettes. One worshiper, dressed in a black caftan and a broad-brimmed hat trimmed with fur, gripped the screen and shouted in English that he would never let it go, even if they killed him. Duff and his troops dragged the man out of the Dung Gate and threw him into Kidron Valley still gripping the remnants of the screen. The man was unhurt except for a few scratches, Duff wrote.

His superiors were furious, with good reason. Duff had used excessive force without good judgment. The storming of the Western Wall and the violent clash with worshipers on the morning of Yom Kippur caused, not surprisingly, a great deal of tension. Now Duff brought out his written orders, congratulating himself on his foresight. He was not dismissed and was allowed to remain in his position. The Arabs considered him a hero, he wrote, while the Jews marked him as a target. He recorded three attempts to murder him: once they’d tried to drop a boulder on him, once to run him over, and on another occasion they’d shot at him. Luckily, he said, he lived, otherwise he would have been buried in Bishop Gobat’s cemetery on Mount Zion. It was a “most unsatisfactory resting place” in his view—one day archaeologists would surely dig there to uncover the walls of Jebusite Jerusalem.[3]

2.

Jews had prayed at the Western Wall since the Middle Ages. They considered the wall, one side of a narrow alley, to be the sole remnant of the Second Temple. It was holy to the Muslims as well, considered part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where, according to the Islamic faith, the prophet Muhammad had tied his horse, Al-Buraq, before setting off on his night journey to heaven. For Jews, the wall is the most sacred place in the world for prayer; for Muslims the two mosques on the adjoining Temple Mount are of lesser importance than the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. As part of the Temple Mount, the Western Wall was under control of the Waqf, the Muslim religious trust.

Under the Turks, the Jews were allowed to pray by the wall more or less undisturbed. They longed for the coming of the Messiah, when the Third Temple would be built on the Temple Mount, in place of the two great mosques, but the messianic age did not seem to be close. The Jews of the *chalukkah* days, mostly helpless old people with no interest in claiming ownership of the wall, never posed a real threat. Thus, over the years, a fairly flexible modus vivendi had evolved. Officially, the Jews were subject to a whole series of prohibitions; in practice, a wink and a bribe eased relations with the Waqf, and on special days, especially the High Holidays, the Jews were allowed to blow the ram's horn, or shofar, at the wall and set up an ark and benches. Annie Landau told Colonel Kisch that, to the best of her memory, the Jews had from time to time put up a screen to separate the men from the women.[4]

Keith-Roach knew all this, so he was a little perplexed by the sheikhs' insistence that the screen be removed. The sheikhs, however, connected the screen to the Zionist program and the Balfour Declaration and feared that in the new climate, treating the wall as a synagogue was but a first step in expropriating it from the Muslims. Similarly, the Waqf's leaders had once explained to Ronald Storrs why they refused to let the Jews install chairs at the wall on a permanent basis: first they'll put out chairs, they'd said, then wooden benches, then stone benches. The next thing would be walls and a ceiling to keep out the sun and the cold, and suddenly the Muslims would have a building on

their property. This was the Palestine conflict in a nutshell. Ah, what does the world know about the nerves of Jerusalem? Ronald Storrs sighed. The collision of passion and politics lit a dreadful fire—few knew this as well as he did.[5]

The Palestine conflict was more than a struggle for land; it was also a battle for myths, religious faith, national honor, and history. Jews and Arabs fought it out with a primal fervor that led inevitably to violence; on many occasions they failed to distinguish between reality and words and symbols; more than once they preferred to believe in fictions and fantasies.

The battle was never-ending, conducted in every arena. One of its theaters was a committee appointed to reach a consensus on place-names in Palestine—an impossible task, of course. Not only did the Jews and Arabs have different names for the towns in which they coexisted—the Arabs called Jerusalem Al-Quds and Hebron Al-Khalil—but the Jewish committee members also demanded that exclusively Arab areas be given Hebrew names: they wanted Jenin and Tantura to be called Ir Ganim and Doar. The minutes of committee meetings frame these disputes as scholarly, devoid of politics. In truth, these arguments were over sovereignty. The committee was a subcommittee of a colonial body that established the English spelling of geographical names all over the world. One of its British members wrote, “I have now been a member of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for nearly fifteen years and I think it is fair to say that Palestine has given the Committee more trouble not only than the rest of the Colonial Empire but than the whole rest of the world together.”[6]

The Jews wanted the government to use the country’s Hebrew name, Eretz Israel, or “the Land of Israel,” but they settled for the strange formulation of Palestine E.I., which appeared on all official documents, including coins and banknotes. One Arab leader, Jamal al-Husseini, petitioned the Supreme Court to eliminate the letters E.I. from the country’s stamps, but his suit was rejected. Colonel Kisch suggested getting people to call the fifty-piastre coin by the biblical name of *shekel*. If the expression took hold the authorities would have no choice but to recognize it, he thought. The idea didn’t work.[7]

Anthems and flags were also inflammatory issues. The Hebrew press was full of reports of British soldiers, officers, and administrators who did not stand

up when the “Hatikva,” the Zionist anthem, was played at public events.[8] Miss Landau once sat down demonstratively when the song was played, together with officers of the military administration. “We have known traitors, but not many traitoresses,” *Ha’aretz* wrote, comparing Landau to Jacob de Haan.[9] On the other hand, when administration officials did stand up for the Zionist anthem, they could expect a protest from Frances Newton.

Indefatigable Newton, a one-woman lobby, once discovered that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* included the Zionist flag—two blue stripes on a white background with a blue Star of David—among the flags of the world and defined it as the flag of Palestine. She dashed off a letter of protest; the editor responded that the encyclopedia indeed seemed to have been “somewhat premature”; in the next edition it corrected itself.* The Zionist movement, for its part, protested to the publisher of an American encyclopedia in which the Nebi Musa riots were attributed to a chain of events that began when a Jew defaced a Muslim flag.[11]

Both Jews and Arabs made great efforts and invested no little money in shaping history to their tastes. The Jewish Agency took it upon itself to fund a book in English, its object being “to put an end to the false concept that the Jewish exile from its land was absolute and that the Arabs found here a land empty of Jews.” The author, Ben-Zion Dinaburg (later Dinur), came from Russia; from 1921 on he was an instructor at the teachers college run by David Yellin in Jerusalem. There is probably no one who did more than he to adjust the history of the Jewish people to fit the Zionist argument. He stressed Jewish historical continuity and its uniformity throughout the world, as if there were a single Jewish narrative and a single chronology. He dated the beginning of the exile from Palestine to the seventh or eighth century C.E., far later than other historians and scholars; only then, he argued, when the Arabs occupied Palestine, did the country lose its “Jewish character.” Thus Dinur cut the Exile down to little more than a thousand years.[12] The Zionist Organization also initiated research projects designed to prove that many of the Arabs had arrived in Palestine only recently.[13]

The Arabs also went to great lengths to promote their national culture and

construct historical arguments aimed at denying the Zionists' claim to the land.[14] They borrowed some of their symbolic initiatives from the Zionist movement, including forestation activities. The Arabs realized the importance of propaganda and urged every citizen to purchase a small Arab national flag to finance the struggle and every Arab child to learn to say, "Down with Herbert Samuel." George Antonius established the Arabic Language Academy.[15]

When the Arabs were permitted to bury Mohammed Ali, the brother of the leader of India's Muslims, in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Zionists brought to Jerusalem the furnishings of Theodor Herzl's study in Vienna. They had failed to arrange for Herzl's reburial in Jerusalem. On the other hand, the movement succeeded in purchasing a rocky cliff by the Dead Sea where a small band of Jewish rebels had made a last stand against the Romans—Masada. It cost £3,000.[16]

The Zionists also continued to pursue the possibility of acquiring the Western Wall. In May 1926 Judge Gad Frumkin, who had contacts in the Arab community, was put to work on the matter. He began negotiations with owners of several nearby houses, with the aim of opening a new access road to the wall from David Street. The operation was delicate; as a British-appointed judge, Frumkin was not supposed to be involved in such things. Kisch addressed his letters to the judge as "personal and confidential" and paid him with a personal check for £25, which could be interpreted as expense money, an agent's fee, or a bribe.

At the same time, Kisch managed to persuade the Jewish millionaire Nathan Straus of New York to provide £5,000 to buy a single house in the area. The owner, from the Khalidi family, was prepared to sell. Kisch told Straus that he was privileged to be involved in this national enterprise, and proposed that the deed to the house be made out in Straus's name to provide some cover. Under no circumstances should Judge Frumkin's involvement be revealed, Kisch warned.

Frumkin wrote to Straus directly, relating how Jewish philanthropists, among them Moses Montefiore and Baron Rothschild, had tried to purchase the wall in the previous century but had failed. There was now a historic opportunity, he explained, asking for $100,000 to "secure the goodwill" of the owners of the

houses adjacent to the wall. Straus feared he was being misled; the Arabs were demanding “fantastically exaggerated prices,” he complained, and there his interest ended. The Western Wall was too expensive for him.[17] He preferred to invest his money in a health center that bore his name. But Kisch would not give up. As a central, national shrine the Western Wall would energize the Zionist movement and strengthen its position vis-à-vis the ultra-Orthodox and world Jewry, as well as the British and the Arabs.

The British were committed to preserving the status quo of the holy places as they found it on their arrival, but they could not decide whether to follow the status quo set by law or by practice. The question produced a prodigious correspondence and a myriad of legal and historical opinions.[18] The Western Wall was only one of such holy places. The authorities were also called in to settle disputes between different Christian sects at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and at other sites. There was the monk who placed a ladder in someone else’s cell, the nun who lit a candle at an hour assigned to another nun, a wall erected without permission, a passage opened without consultation. Every case was extremely sensitive and sometimes led to an altercation.[19]

More than once the authorities had to intervene in conflicts between Jews and Christians, particularly in Jerusalem. Only there would the deputy district commissioner be required to resolve a conflict caused by young Russian immigrants and the bodies of two pious women of the tzar’s household. One was the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Queen Victoria’s granddaughter and the tzarina’s sister. Her husband, Grand Duke Sergei, had been murdered in 1905, after which his widow had joined a convent and devoted her life to good works. She was murdered during the revolution, together with her servant, also a nun. Their bodies were spirited out of Russia, first to China. After many adventures, they turned up in the Holy City to be buried. Deputy District Commissioner Harry Luke had seen many religious ceremonies in Jerusalem, he wrote, but had never attended one as moving as this. Two simple wooden caskets arrived at Jerusalem’s tiny train station, two weeping Russian nuns broke out in a sweet mournful song, and the small Russian fellowship set out slowly in the direction of the Orthodox cemetery on the Mount of Olives.

Suddenly a messenger approached on horseback and reported to the deputy commissioner that a group of Jewish pioneers from Russia with revolutionary fervor still hot in their veins were planning to disrupt the tzarist princess's funeral procession on Jaffa Street. With diplomatic dexterity, Luke redirected the procession to a path running along the southern slope of Mount Zion.[20]

In another incident, the editor of *Do'ar HaYom,* Itamar Ben-Avi, was put on trial for slandering the Christian religion. The story began with an embarrassing item: Hans Herzl, the son of the founder of the Zionist movement, had converted to Christianity. *Do'ar HaYom* commented that, unlike Jesus of Nazareth, Herzl's son was at least not a bastard. The ensuing trial threatened to turn into a Jewish-Christian scandal of international dimensions, but it ended with the imposition of a small fine. When Jewish archaeologist Eliezer Sukenik announced the discovery of an ossuary inscribed with Jesus' name—Yehoshua or Yeshua ben Yosef in Hebrew—Colonel Kisch immediately demanded that he deny the story, to avoid giving the impression that Zionists were challenging the status of Jesus' traditional burial site.[21]

At one point, the Latin patriarch lodged a protest with Ronald Storrs against a production of *The Jewess,* an opera by Fromental Halévy. One of the opera's protagonists is a cardinal, and his portrayal upset the patriarch. Storrs himself was obliged to intrude between the two parties and bring about peace, which he did with great delight. Experienced, intelligent, carefully suppressing his disdain, Storrs suggested turning the cardinal into a judge; the patriarch was pleased. But the compromise set off a debate in the Hebrew press. *Ha'aretz* wrote that whether the cardinal appeared on stage in a red gown with a cross hanging from his neck or in a black robe without a cross was of no significance. The militant *Do'ar HaYom* argued, however, that the governor's intervention had brought a "new inquisition" to Jerusalem.[22]*

On occasion the Jews complained about violations of the status quo at the Western Wall. Hebrew linguist Eliezer Ben-Yehuda noticed, on one of his walks around the Old City, that Arab workers were doing some sort of repair work there. He rushed to inform the Zionist Commission, which sent Ronald Storrs an emotional letter. Storrs called in his engineers, who proposed that instead of the

Waqf the government should make the necessary repairs, as part of the work of the antiquities department. Thus Storrs navigated between the official status quo and actual practice. Once he proposed that the Waqf install benches for the Jewish worshipers, so demonstrating its ownership of the wall.[24†]

3.

The incident on Yom Kippur 1928 eventually led to a wave of violence, not only as a result of Keith-Roach's gaffe or Duff's disastrous handling of the affair. The horrifying proportions were rooted in the building tensions in internal Arab and Jewish politics. Political rivals within both camps were competing to demonstrate their patriotism, each side accusing its opponents of being overly submissive on the national issue. Both Arab and Jewish politics made demagogic use of religious symbols; both were easily drawn into extreme positions and lost control of events. Among the Arabs internal politics were driven largely by the ongoing rivalry between the Nashashibis and the Husseinis; among the Jews, the competition was between the followers of Ben-Gurion and of Jabotinsky.

The mufti was accused by his opponents of despotism and corruption. Unlike the Zionist leaders, Husseini could not point to any real progress toward Arab independence, and felt threatened. At one point the mufti's camp split, and some of his followers joined forces with his rivals.[26] He benefited from the screen incident and accused the Zionists of plotting not only to take over the wall but also to destroy the mosques on the Temple Mount and rebuild the Temple. This, he said, was part of a larger plan to seize control of the country and expel the Arabs. Setting himself up as the chief defender of the Islamic holy places, the mufti was able to reinforce his image as a national leader.

The Zionists had no plans to destroy the mosques, and building the Third Temple was not on their agenda, but they certainly exploited the religious yearnings for a temple, especially in their fund-raising efforts. Zionist publications around the world used images of a magnificent but imaginary domed structure on the Temple Mount to symbolize the national dream. The American consulate in Jerusalem sent Washington a drawing distributed by

Arabic propagandists, who had taken it from a Zionist publication in the United States, *Das Yiddishe Folk*. The illustration shows Herzl gazing out over a vast stream of people, all on their way to Jerusalem, which appears as an Arab city, although a Zionist flag waves atop a building looking much like the Dome of the Rock. Zionist propaganda also appropriated as a symbol a Muslim minaret the Turks built on the Old City Wall, which Jews call David's Tower.[27]

The term *national home* made allusions to the Temple, because the Hebrew word for home, *bayit*, is also traditionally used to refer to "the House of God." A few months before the Yom Kippur incident, the Yeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem held a post-Passover celebration. The main speaker was Menachem Ussishkin, who banged his fist on the table and declared, "The Jewish people wants a Jewish state without compromises and without concessions, from Dan to Be'ersheva, from the great sea to the desert, including Transjordan." At that moment in his speech he looked like a prophet, Chaim Halevi wrote to his parents. Ussishkin concluded by saying, "Let us swear that the Jewish people will not rest and will not remain silent until its national home is built on our Mt. Moriah," referring to the Temple Mount.[28] Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, the Zionist chief rabbi, had intervened in the screen uproar, strengthening the impression that religious yearnings and the Zionist plan were one and the same.

All this provided a foundation for the popular Arab belief in the Jewish threat. The fear was authentic, and the mufti exploited it. He played with a smoldering fire that suddenly flared into a great conflagration.[29] Zionist politics had a very similar dynamic.

4.

As the head of the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann continued to concentrate power and prestige in his own hands, but as the years went by he had to cope with internal opposition on two fronts, one led by David Ben-Gurion, the other by Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Over time, Jabotinsky's Revisionists had become Weizmann's main opposition.[30] Ben-Gurion worked to consolidate his position as the leader of the Jewish community in Palestine; he thought in organizational

terms. Jabotinsky divided his efforts between the larger Zionist world and politics in Palestine; he was more a man of words. Jabotinsky promoted heroism and symbols of independence; as in the past, he frequently complained that the British regime was evading its obligation to assist the Jews and was discriminating in favor of the Arabs. He drew his power from Zionist indignity.

A few days after the screen incident Jabotinsky arrived in Palestine to begin a new career as an insurance agent. He settled in Jerusalem and soon became the editor of *Do'ar HaYom*, replacing Itamar Ben-Avi. He worked on organizing the Revisionist Party, which established a youth movement called Betar, an acronym for the Yosef Trumpeldor Alliance and also the name of the last outpost of the Jewish uprising against the Romans. Betarists wore paramilitary uniforms, and, like the Revisionists and their leader, they claimed to be more patriotic than all the other parties and youth movements.

Summing up the public response to the situation at the wall, Jabotinsky wrote, "Other than ourselves, who have broken away from the majority, everyone has forgotten to be insulted." True, the leftists made very fine speeches, Jabotinsky noted, but it was hard to fool an experienced firebrand like himself: "Behind the elegant words one feels no sense of urgency."[31] Ben-Gurion had stated that the wall should be "redeemed," predicting that this could be done perhaps "in another half a year," but he rejected the emotional phraseology and hysteria he attributed to Ussishkin and Jabotinsky. He recalled publicly that Jabotinsky had opposed sending reinforcements to support the settlers at Tel Hai. He warned against confrontation with the Arabs, urging instead a confrontation with the government.[32] Still, Jabotinsky won this particular round of the patriotism contest; the wall affair was good for him, just as it was good for the mufti.

5.

The screen incident sparked a series of protests on the part of the Arabs, including proclamations, telegrams to the League of Nations, and a one-hour general strike.[33] In the days that followed, Arabs assaulted the wall's beadle. The

Zionist Executive in Jerusalem also petitioned the League of Nations and complained to the district commissioner about construction work the Muslims were carrying out nearby. A few days later the beadle was attacked again because he tried to put out chairs. Two of the Arabs involved were sentenced to six months in prison in a lightning trial. The mufti sent a cable of protest to the king of England. Rabbi Kook followed up with a similar telegram.

Throughout October Palestine was without a high commissioner; Plumer had left in July 1928, and his replacement, Sir John Chancellor, was not due to arrive until November. Chancellor was an impressive man; Edward Keith-Roach compared him to "a good-looking Shakespearean actor."[34] He was strikingly handsome in his uniform. Born in Edinburgh, he was fifty-eight years old when he came to Palestine, with a career as an army officer behind him and twenty-five years of colonial service in Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, and Southern Rhodesia.

The Zionist Organization prepared a dossier on Chancellor; it attributed to him the belief that the Zionists had unlimited cash. A gracious man, ignorant of the complexities of Palestine, he expressed astonishment that no philanthropist had yet been found to buy the Western Wall. The Zionist delegation that met with him before his departure from London received the impression that he might help purchase it. Chancellor told the Zionists that he felt particularly privileged to assist their great ideal, although he asked that this comment not be made public. He brought many hopes and plans with him, but three years later he admitted sadly that the people of Palestine were no happier than they had been when he came. He'd had no luck—the tranquillity he found upon his arrival turned out to be an illusion. As the mufti wrote, "Although the surface of the waters are now quiet the deep waters are in a very troubled condition. I regret to see the wicked fire of abhorrence is blazing under this layer of ashes."[35]

Once in Jerusalem, the high commissioner frequently met with the mufti; at times they spoke for hours. The two discussed the details of Jewish worship at the wall, whether the Jews should be allowed to blow the shofar, whether there should be lights and a rug, and, if so, a large rug or a small mat. The mufti complained of the noise the Jews made; the high commissioner replied that he

could not dictate to anyone how to pray to God or how loudly. Chancellor had the impression that the mufti was a bit scared and was being pushed by young extremists.[36] Husseini had said so himself, the high commissioner noted. He had no control over some of his men. The atmosphere was tense, with more provocative articles, leaflets, and speeches.

In the months that followed the tension swelled. The mufti convened an international conference for the protection of the wall, and four hundred delegates attended. The British government issued a statement defending Douglas Duff's actions. In May 1929 Arab ruffians threw stones at Jewish worshipers at the wall; one of them was hurt. The next day the beadle was beaten yet again. In June Arabs disturbed a Friday night service at the wall, banging on drums and playing flutes, in accordance with an old religious custom, and they continued to do so the next week, despite the district commissioner's demand that they desist.

In July Rabbi Kook protested that the Arabs were demolishing a wall near the Western Wall. More assemblies were held, more protests were issued, more articles were published. At the beginning of August Jewish worshipers were pelted with stones once again. The Zionist Congress, which had convened in Zurich, protested that the authorities were allowing the Muslims to build a new mosque at the site. It was "an absurd dispute," wrote Edwin Samuel.[37]

6.

More than just political manipulation, the fight over the Western Wall created very real turmoil among the Jews. Chaim Shalom Halevi often wrote about the tension in letters he sent to Vilna. Private letters written by a son to his parents, they excel at documenting the force of the Jews' pain and anger, indignity and hatred, more than any statement written for publication. Halevi, now on summer recess from his university studies, was still waiting for his parents and sister to immigrate. He was still working as a clerk at the Hadassah hospital and giving private lessons. He found it very difficult to concentrate on his work. "My brain and my heart," he wrote to his parents, "my mind and my feelings" were

preoccupied with the “horrible acts” carried out by District Commissioner Keith-Roach and police officer Douglas Duff. “My heart hurts too much and the wound has not yet healed so it is still impossible for me to evaluate the matter,” he wrote; but the incident’s significance went, he thought, far beyond the wall itself.[38]

A few weeks before the tension turned into outright violence, Halevi wrote his parents something the public would understand only later: the conflict in Palestine was about the hatred between two nations. “They hate us and they are right, because we hate them too, hate them with a deadly hatred,” he said. This was the truth, he insisted, behind the Zionist movement’s nice language and goodwill. Realizing the Zionist dream would lead to pushing the Arabs out of the country, Halevi believed that one day “Nothing will be left of them.”[39]

Halevi thought he knew best how to deal with Jew haters, and he resented the Zionist establishment’s conciliatory response. A few days after the screen incident the Yeshurun Synagogue received police permission to conduct a large procession marking the Sukkot and Simchat Torah holidays, but the Zionist Executive objected. “Kisch fears a demonstration,” Halevi wrote. “He believes in working peacefully, by persuasion, by pleading and receives—nothing.” The procession was intended to be a religious event, but Kisch was afraid that it would turn into a political provocation. He instructed Yeshurun to cancel the gathering, and it agreed to his request. Kisch, Halevi said to his parents, had also agreed to switch the new ark at the wall with the previous one; the new ark was larger than its predecessor and so violated the status quo. Halevi imagined him groveling and begging to be allowed to keep even the old ark. “And yesterday, the insult happened and the new ark was taken away.… Mr. Kisch is a diplomat and has to live in peace with the government, concede to it, concede and concede.” For this reason, Halevi believed that the Jews should demonstrate not against Keith-Roach, but against Kisch.[40]*

Halevi imagined the Arabs and the English laughing at the Jews for their weakness, and nothing infuriated him more. Ridicule was much worse, much more painful and disgraceful than the Arabs’ hatred, he wrote, quoting the Roman emperor Caligula: “Hate me but fear me.” In general Caligula was

insane, Halevi thought, but in this case he expressed a profound truth that was vouchsafed only to lunatics. The Jews had lost their dignity: “Up until now I could meet an Englishman or an Arab and look him straight in the eye—we were worthy opponents. He hated me and I him and we fought each other. Now that’s not the case. I would blush on meeting a non-Jew. He has seen us at our worst, in our weakness, and I no longer see hatred in his eyes. This little puppy, the Jewish Yishuv, knows only how to squirm and bark loudly; he cannot arouse hatred. He is not worth hating.” For Halevi, the events at the wall were “the most horrible defeat of our Zionist government.”

Halevi comforted himself with dreams of revenge. “History knows no mercy,” he wrote. “It does not understand politics and diplomacy. It will avenge this nation whom they—the top men—humiliated and scorned. It will avenge the people who became pawns in their hands.” His parents apparently had a difficult time identifying with the force of emotion that Halevi conveyed. “That is the distance from the Exile to the Land of Israel,” he wrote, but unfortunately even some of the country’s residents had lost their “free spirit” and “proud gaze.” He was referring to, among others, Chaim Kalvarisky, who was running around trying to mitigate the tensions with the Arabs. “This worm,” Halevi wrote, “this detestable provocateur walks through the streets of Jerusalem and no one goes up to him in Jaffa Street to give him a slap on the face that will make his ears ring. No one! So what can we say? Are we a nation, a living nation? No! We are not! We are a dead carcass, decomposing, rotting, stinking, a carcass with which everyone does as they wish.” These were harsh words, and Halevi knew it. “My hair stood on end and a shiver ran through me when I wrote this, but the things I see around me are so horrible, so terrible and frightening, that I cannot hold back the anger, so close am I to despair.”[42]

In this mental state Halevi joined the Committee for the Western Wall established by his beloved teacher Joseph Klausner. He thus became a rebel, as Klausner planned to use his disciples without regard for the Zionist Executive’s policy.[43] Halevi’s decision to join was not easily made. He told his parents that he had given it much thought. “Yes!” he decided in the end. “We should rebel against the Zionist Executive and the National Council, we should come out

against them and defy their order to hold back. We should shout and make the earth shake. Blessed be the ones whose blood still throbs and boils, who raise their voices against their leaders and say, Make way, because, in its thousands and tens of thousands, the nation is going to redeem the wall, which you sold in your apathy and abandoned in your politics!”

The events of the summer reached a climax on August 14, 1929, on the eve of the Ninth of Av, the fast day marking the destruction of the Temple. The Committee for the Western Wall debated what to do. Halevi reported “fear, abjectness, and servility” among the committee’s members, but after much argument his position and that of his friends triumphed. “There will be action,” he wrote. “I cannot do otherwise,” he explained, inspired by a verse from the Psalms: “It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law.”[44]

7.

That night thousands congregated at the wall. Halevi was an usher. The mood was very angry, he told his parents, but order was kept and the police did not intervene. Joseph Klausner went home; Halevi remained at the wall until after midnight. The next day, the fast day itself, Halevi went to Klausner’s house to report on the situation. Later several hundred young people demonstrated at the wall.[45] Most of the protesters belonged in one way or another to the Battalion for the Defense of the Language; some were probably also from Betar. A few had come from Tel Aviv. The police allowed the demonstration to proceed, but the protesters then violated the conditions of their permit: they made political speeches, waved the Zionist flag, and sang the “Hatikva.”[46]

The Muslims responded two days later with a counterdemonstration, which they held on the prophet Muhammad’s birthday. At the end of the Friday services in the mosques, a number of worshipers left the Temple Mount and broke into the wall area, beating Jews and defacing Torah scrolls. In the evening they held a torchlight procession. The next day they attacked the wall once again and interfered with the worshipers. Chaim Shalom Halevi organized several dozen young people to defend the people praying. “The situation in the city has

gotten out of hand," he wrote. "Every day there are attacks and stabbings."[47]

In this atmosphere a small incident was enough to set off a conflagration. Avraham Mizrahi, seventeen years old, seems to have been murdered because the soccer ball he was playing with, not far from the Arab village of Lifta, rolled into an Arab family's tomato patch. A girl grabbed the ball and hid it among her clothing. When Mizrahi and his friends tried to get it back, the girl started screaming. Within minutes a fight developed. Someone hit Mizrahi on the head with an iron rod and shattered his skull. That same evening another fight broke out, and an Arab pedestrian was injured. "It was most desirable for the maintenance of the status quo that they should both die," the high commissioner's aide-de-camp wrote in his diary.[48] Mizrahi died of his wounds; the Arab recovered.

The police imposed a series of restrictions on Mizrahi's funeral, but it nevertheless turned into a demonstration. The police used force to quell the protesters—Douglas Duff again. When he returned from the funeral, Halevi wrote to his parents, "Even though our Jews are a bit to blame, the police were immeasurably cruel and a shiver runs through me when I recall the scene of savagery and beatings that I saw four hours ago."[49]

High Commissioner Chancellor and some top figures in the British administration, as well as a few Jewish leaders, were out of the country at the time—to escape the summer heat, they had gone off on vacations or to the Zionist Congress in balmy Zurich. Kisch quickly flew to London to warn the Colonial Office. Sir John Shuckburgh, assistant undersecretary of state, cut his vacation short and returned to London to handle the crisis; he sent a firm telegram to Jerusalem. Filling in for the high commissioner was Harry Luke. The problems he faced were not new, wrote Edwin Samuel, his secretary. "If military reinforcements are called for in time, trouble often does not break out and the man who called for them gets a reputation for being 'windy.' If, on the other hand, as in Luke's case, he does not call for them until too late, he is blamed for the subsequent disorders."[50]

8.

Sir Harry Charles Luke was then forty-five years old. Born in London, he had studied at Eton and Oxford. His career in the Colonial Service had taken him from Sierra Leone to Barbados and Cyprus. From Palestine he would go to Malta, topping off his service as governor of Fiji. In 1921 he had sat on the commission of inquiry looking into the events in Jaffa and had participated in its dubious report. Thoroughly English and colonial, he tried to conceal his origins, but everyone gossiped about them: his father was a Hungarian-born American Jew named Lukach, they said erroneously. Ben-Gurion described Luke as a coward.[51]*

With hindsight, Luke tended to attribute the British failure in Palestine to the Balfour Declaration, as if it were an original sin, but he believed that like a Greek tragedy, the war for the country was predestined. There was no point in the dialogue between Jews and Arabs that he initiated in the summer of 1929, but at least Luke could tell himself, as everyone else did, that he had done his best. He invited the mufti for lunch and urged him to maintain the peace. Afterward he also spoke with Chief Rabbi Kook.

He went to great lengths to organize a kind of cease-fire; according to his diary, the initiative came from the Jews. He managed to bring together the three men who represented the Zionist Organization in Kisch's absence and several senior Muslims. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi was the most prominent Jewish political figure; the ranking Muslim representative was Jamal al-Husseini, a close associate of the mufti. They went to Luke's home on Thursday afternoon, August 22, 1929, the day after Avraham Mizrahi's turbulent funeral.

Luke served tea and suggested that he absent himself, but the men insisted he remain. Somewhat ceremoniously, he expressed his pleasure in convening the meeting, and said that he would like it to end with an agreement on a soothing announcement to be issued in advance of the Muslim prayer services on Friday, the next day. Then he left for his office and told the group to telephone him when they had reached an agreement.

On the face of it, the meeting was merely a conversation between community leaders, but it was conducted like any diplomatic conference of representatives of two national movements, a summit conference in a sandbox. First, the Arabs

and the Jews blamed each other for the situation—an established rite in most talks between the two groups; they always began with an exchange of historical accusations. Then they got down to a practical discussion. In principle, everyone agreed to issue the announcement Luke had requested. The draft submitted by the Arabs said that the Jews recognized Islam's right to Al-Buraq, as they called the wall, and the Muslims recognized the right of the Jews to visit the site, in keeping with the status quo that had preceded the recent tension.

But the Jews objected that the term Al-Buraq was not sufficiently clear. Did it mean just the wall itself or also the area in front of it? And besides, they said, they were not authorized by the Jewish people to sign a historical agreement regarding the status of the wall. They had come only to arrange a kind of cease-fire. They wanted a general declaration that would attribute the events to an unfortunate misunderstanding and call for peace. An argument ensued.

Toward evening the men called Luke and notified him that an agreement had been reached. He came home and found there was no agreement. They all continued to talk until 9:30 P.M. and achieved nothing. Luke pressured them to at least announce that they had met; he thought that such a statement would be sufficient to calm tempers on Friday. According to Luke's diary entry, the Jews agreed but the Arabs refused. They set another meeting for the following Monday. Luke called Amman and asked for reinforcements to be at the ready.[53] Had the Arab and Jewish leaders published a call for restraint that night they could, perhaps, have prevented the bloodbath that began just a few hours later. Perhaps not. Luke deserves to be remembered as the first peacemaker in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The previous day, Chaim Halevi had told his parents that they were not coming to a land of peace. "We must conquer the land," he wrote, "and every conquest requires sacrifices, so anyone who comes to participate in the conquest needs to be prepared to make sacrifices."[54] In Hebron all was quiet that night; three weeks earlier the local police force had received a new chief.

14

Hebron, 1929

1.

In the early-morning hours of Friday, August 23, 1929, thousands of Arab villagers began streaming into Jerusalem from the surrounding villages. They had come to pray at the Temple Mount; many were armed with sticks and knives, and the city was filled with a sense of tension and violence. Harry Luke, as acting high commissioner, requested reinforcements from Amman. Toward 9:30 the Jewish merchants began closing their stores. About an hour and a quarter later, the mufti promised the Jerusalem police commander that the worshipers were carrying sticks and knives only out of fear that the Jews might try to create some sort of provocation. When one of the preachers made a nationalist speech calling on the Islamic faithful to fight against the Jews to the last drop of their blood, mufti al-Husseini urged his community to keep the peace.[1]

At roughly 11:00 A.M., twenty or thirty gunshots were heard on the Temple Mount, apparently intended to work up the crowd. Several hundred worshipers swarmed through the alleys of the marketplace and began attacking Jewish pedestrians. Edwin Samuel, Luke's secretary, was in his office, not far from the Nablus Gate. The sound of the mob was indistinct and seemed to come from far away; Samuel at first thought he was hearing the buzz of a swarm of bees.[2] A crowd had gathered beneath his window. Luke quickly got the mutfi on the phone and demanded that he take control of his people. The mufti came to talk to the mob, but Luke's impression was that the religious leader's presence was not

calming people down—in fact, it seemed to be having precisely the opposite effect. Later, the mufti explained that by the time he'd arrived, the crowd had been joined by Arabs injured by Jews, which made keeping the peace very difficult. Edwin Samuel remembered the flash of the rioters' daggers glinting in the noonday sun.[3]

At midday, Edward Keith-Roach was on a tour of the Old City. Near the Jaffa Gate, he saw a Jew running for his life, followed by a crowd of Arab thugs waving sticks. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi also saw a man fleeing from a gang—he may have been the same one. Ben-Zvi had been sitting in the Zionist Executive office on Jaffa Street. At first he was told that the worshipers were dispersing quietly; then he heard there were problems. He rushed to the Jaffa Gate, where he met the man, bloody and injured. Before being rushed to the hospital, the man managed to tell Ben-Zvi that he had been sitting in the doorway of his son's shop when the first of the worshipers came down from the Temple Mount and pounced on him.[4]

While this was taking place, the tensions had reached the Jewish Mea She'arim neighborhood, and two or three Arabs were murdered there. A report from the American consulate, which documented the events in nearly minute-by-minute detail, determined that the killings occurred between 12:00 and 12:30. Afterward there was much controversy over whether the day's first victims had been Jews or Arabs.[5]

Violence spread quickly throughout most of the city and into its suburbs. "Shots could be heard from both sides of the house," wrote Shmuel Yosef Agnon, a resident of Talpiot. In all the noise he heard a voice calling, "*hawajah,*" "sir" in Arabic, and realized the Arabs were close. He later recalled, "The shooting grew louder. I rubbed my ears; I wondered whether my sense of hearing had been impaired. Suddenly came the alarming awareness that we were all alone in Talpiot, there was no one to defend us … there was no answer to the Arabs' gunfire from the English side. The English had deceived us."[6]

The police were, for all intents and purposes, helpless. The force had only 1,500 men in the entire country; the great majority were Arab, with a small number of Jews and some 175 British officers.[7] Since the general situation had

shortly before been judged peaceful, a larger police force was deemed unnecessary; in fact, as later noted by an aide-de-camp to High Commissioner Chancellor, the country's internal security was maintained largely through the force of Lord Plumer's personality. The Arabs in the force were reluctant to act for another reason: they were afraid of killing rioting Arabs and then becoming the target of vendettas by the victims' families. While waiting for the reinforcements Luke had requested, many administration officials were required to attach themselves to the police force, even though they were not trained; the Jews among them were called up but then sent back to their offices.[8] At some point, several English theology students from Oxford who happened to be in the city were deputized. Until extra troops arrived, Luke had the city's telephone lines disconnected and declared a curfew.

While only Jews were being attacked, the British police held back from the mob. The same aide-de-camp to Chancellor later judged this was a wise decision. Had they shot into the Arab crowd, he reasoned, the Arabs would have turned their anger on the police, and the British force would have faced the mob defenseless. The police were very tired the first day of the riots, having slept little the previous night.[9]

In the Yemin Moshe neighborhood some residents greeted the Arabs with gunfire, although most of Jerusalem's Jews did not defend themselves. The Haganah defense organization, set up in the aftermath of the Jaffa riots, was still only a loose confederation of local cells, not all of which obeyed the central command; it had no real ability to take action. In Jerusalem's Rehavia quarter, the Haganah met in Ben-Zvi's backyard. Margery Bentwich, the attorney general's sister, lived not far away; she described a parade conducted by a few youngsters in the neighborhood's streets. They carried sticks and looked to her like the rabble in some Shakespearean play. At the outbreak of violence, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi demanded that weapons be distributed to the Jews but was turned down. In the days to follow he repeated the demand and was again refused.[10]

2.

When Superintendent Raymond Cafferata received an order to leave Jaffa and assume command of the police force in Hebron and the surrounding area, he considered the post a challenge. “Divisional work especially in an area like this is awfully interesting and full of experience and incident,” he wrote to his mother. He had about forty villages under his control, he said, and “some of them are dashed bad ones and there is always tons of crime.” Bandits would cross the border from Transjordan to attack camel caravans; every other man was armed to the teeth, Cafferata remarked. The environment stimulated his love of adventure.[11] There were about 20,000 people living in Hebron then, mostly Muslim Arabs, with a few hundred Jews—800 according to the Jewish Agency; Cafferata put the number at 600.

Cafferata came from a good home—his father was a Liverpool solicitor—but he had been lax in his studies. In an unpublished memoir, most of which was burned, Cafferata wrote that he was frequently beaten by his teachers; once or twice he was expelled. Apparently, he excelled at soccer, a talent noted many years later by his commanders in his personal file. At the age of seventeen he began working as a railroad clerk and hated every minute of it. Then, he wrote, fate smiled upon him and World War I broke out. Like many young men, he lied about his age, claiming to be twenty-one, and enlisted in the army. He took part in the battle of Flanders; his commander described him as an excellent officer—energetic, efficient, bold, and capable, winning the confidence of his fellow officers and men. The king of Belgium decorated him. After the war Cafferata joined the Royal Irish Constabulary and took part in suppressing the riots in Ireland. From 1921 on he served in the Palestinian police. When he was transferred to Hebron in early August 1929, he was thirty-two years old and a bachelor. His friends called him “Caff.”

The transfer had happened very quickly: Cafferata’s predecessor had to return home suddenly, leaving barely enough time for Cafferata to pack his personal belongings. There was another problem as well: he had just met the love of his life. “It is a bit hard having to leave,” Cafferata told his mother. Peggy Ford-Dunn was visiting Palestine, and the two had met at the Jaffa hockey club. He felt lonely in Hebron—there were no British people in the town except

for two elderly missionaries. He spent his first days getting organized, renting the house that had served his predecessor. He had to pay the rent in advance, which also came as an unpleasant surprise, but at least the house was furnished; except for linens, it had everything. The house was large, and Cafferata felt a little odd living there alone after so many years of army camps. He also had to buy an automobile. A five-horsepower Citroën cost him fifty-five Palestinian pounds; it was more economical than American cars, he remarked. He hoped the bad roads in the area would not wreck it.[12]

His many preoccupations may explain why Cafferata did not have more time to devote to Hebron's problems. He would later tell a commission of inquiry that he had managed to meet only a few local Arab leaders, and had not yet become closely acquainted with the small Jewish community. When news of the escalating tensions in Jerusalem reached Hebron, Cafferata sent plainclothes men into the streets to find out what was going on; the Hebron police had no intelligence network. He himself visited some nearby villages and met with the mukhtars to get a sense of which way the wind was blowing. His impression was that the Arabs in the region had no serious grievances. The harvest was good; with the exception of some minor brawls here and there, everything was fine, they told him. They did not mention the Jews.

Cafferata spoke to the city's Jews as well. He learned that they had been living in Hebron for generations, that they knew their Arab neighbors well and regarded many of them as friends. In fact, the Sephardic community had been living in Hebron for eight hundred years, the Ashkenazim for perhaps one hundred. Some were connected to the Slobodka Yeshiva; others engaged in trade, crafts, and the dairy business or made their living as moneylenders. The Zionist Anglo-Palestine Bank had a branch in the city. A few dozen Jews lived deep within Hebron, in a kind of ghetto where there were also several synagogues. But the majority lived on the outskirts, along the roads to Be'ersheba and Jerusalem, renting homes owned by Arabs, a number of which had been built for the express purpose of housing Jewish tenants. The rent they paid was a significant component of the town's economy, and relations between the landlords and their tenants were generally good.

After the British conquest, as Jewish immigration increased and the Zionist program progressed, and as the Arab national movement developed, tensions arose in Hebron as well. Arabs harassed Jews on a daily basis, cursing them on the streets and even on occasion waylaying and beating them. On the face of it, the incidents were mostly minor, boys throwing stones at Jewish houses and breaking windows, or a few young Arabs disturbing Jewish prayers at the Cave of Makhpela, Abraham's burial site. But by 1923 the local Jewish committee believed the episodes were political in nature and attributed them to the Muslim-Christian Association, which, the Jews claimed, was spreading hatred. The association was teaching the Arabs unpleasant songs about Jews and inciting them against their neighbors. The Jews had made several complaints that the Hebron police force was not doing enough to protect them.[13]

The force under Cafferata's command was quite limited: there were eighteen constables on horseback and fifteen on foot. Of these, eleven were elderly and in bad physical condition; only one was Jewish. Cafferata had consulted with Abdallah Kardous, who was acting district commissioner, and with the deputy commander of the Gaza police, who visited him a few days before the violence broke out in Jerusalem. Both assured him there was no cause for concern; regardless of events elsewhere, Hebron would remain quiet. Being new in the city, he had no reason to doubt these assessments, and, indeed, all was peaceful in Hebron—until the early afternoon of Friday, August 23.[14]

At 2:45 Cafferata reported nothing unusual, but having heard of the trouble in Jerusalem, he decided at 3:00 to station three of his men at the outskirts of the town; their task was to search for weapons in the cars coming back from prayers in Jerusalem. The passengers who stopped spoke of what was going on there, and the rumor that Jews were killing Arabs spread quickly. People soon began gathering at the municipal bus station, intending to travel to Jerusalem. One man, Sheikh Talib Markha, made a speech. Cafferata went to the station to persuade the crowd that the rumors were baseless; as he approached, Sheikh Markha fell silent. Everything was quiet in Jerusalem, Cafferata lied, estimating the crowd at around seven hundred. He sent some men to patrol the Jewish houses and went along as well, taking eight mounted policemen with him.

Cafferata noted that many Jews were standing on their roofs or balconies. He ordered them into their homes, but they ignored him.

Near the small hotel run by the Schneurson family Cafferata encountered Rabbi Ya'akov-Yosef Slonim and his daughter. By one account they were on their way to Cafferata's house. Cafferata's own impression was that they were running back and forth in the street shrieking for no apparent reason. Slonim harangued Cafferata and demanded protection, interrupting himself to trade shouts with the crowd. This drew showers of stones. A Jewish woman screamed at Cafferata from her balcony. In the meantime he managed to persuade Slonim to go back into his house. The exchange between the two men was later the subject of much debate; the principal charge was that Cafferata had spoken rudely. No one disputed that he had done everything to ensure that the Jews remained in their homes.

After getting the rabbi and his daughter off his hands, Cafferata turned his attentions back to the crowd. On horseback, he and his men, using only their clubs, tried to disperse the people. At around 4:00 Arabs began gathering at the Hebron yeshiva and hurling stones. The only people inside the yeshiva were the sexton and a student, Shmuel Halevi Rosenholz, twenty-four years old, born in Poland. Hit by a stone that came in through one of the windows, he attempted to leave the building and found himself facing a group of Arabs. He tried to retreat back into the yeshiva, but it was too late: the Arabs grabbed him and stabbed him to death. The sexton managed to hide in a well and escaped. The Jews prepared to bury Rosenholz immediately, before the onset of the Jewish Sabbath. Cafferata feared that the funeral would inflame the rioters, so he ordered the attendance limited to six people.

Cafferata then proposed to Abdallah Kardous that he summon all the mukhtars in the area and assign them responsibility for preserving the peace. The Arab officer objected; he believed that passing the burden to the Arab leaders would only ignite more violence. By 6:30 Hebron was quiet again. Cafferata nevertheless asked for reinforcements from Jerusalem; he was told that none were available. He tried his colleagues in Gaza and Jaffa, who promised to help.[15] Some two and a half hours later several mukhtars from the region visited

Cafferata. They had heard that Jews were slaughtering Arabs in Jerusalem; apparently the mufti was demanding they take action and threatened to fine them if they refused. Cafferata promised that everything was now peaceful and instructed them to go home and stay there.

Indeed, Jerusalem had calmed down by that time. The day's dead amounted to eight Jews and five Arabs. Fifteen Jews and nine Arabs had been injured. During the night the residents of Talpiot were evacuated, after having spent four hours entirely unprotected. One of them was the Hebrew University's Joseph Klausner. His neighbor, Agnon, later remembered that while they were crouching, bullets flying around them, Klausner said with great pathos that he would choose to remain in Talpiot except that his wife was ill. But they were soon rescued and sent to join refugees evacuated from other neighborhoods. Before leaving his house, Agnon hastily packed several manuscripts into a leather briefcase, but in the crush and panic he lost them. "It had already occurred to me that I should leave my writings and trust them to God's mercies, as all these distraught people could not stand and wait for me," he wrote. But then a neighbor lit a candle, and they found the manuscripts.[16]

The Jews from Talpiot were brought to a community building on HaHabashim Street. Rehavia's residents spent the night in Ratisbonne Monastery. According to Margery Bentwich, the wretched events of the day were all because of the wall. "This business of the wall, how pitiful it is indeed. Is it a symbol of former glory? Much more of present humiliation. To see a man fling himself on the stones, kiss them, isn't it revolting? Like praying to an idol —as if a stone had ears. The best thing that could happen … were to raze it to the ground.… Strange that such a great number of people can die for an untrue idea and so few can live for a true one." Raymond Cafferata slept in his office that night.[17]

3.

On Saturday, August 24, 1929, at around 7:00 A.M., the Sabbath morning-prayer service was about to begin at the home of Eliezer Dan in Hebron. Dan was Rabbi

Slonim's son. The previous night, a few dozen Jews had huddled there, too afraid to stay in their own homes. Among those present at the morning service was Y. L. Grodzinsky, a tourist from Poland who had arrived in Hebron on the Thursday before. The prayers had just begun when Grodzinsky looked out the window and saw several cars packed with Arabs bearing sticks, swords, knives, and daggers driving in the direction of Jerusalem. As the vehicles passed the house, the Arabs spied the Jews and drew their fingers across their throats to signify slaughter.

A short time later Sheikh Markha walked past the Schneurson hotel. Schneurson invited him inside and served him a glass of tea. According to the hotel owner's son, Markha said there was no reason for concern. Nothing would happen. They could leave the hotel door open. The sheikh himself testified that Schneurson had even escorted him to the door, arm in arm. They were friends, the sheikh said. The previous day he had chased away several Arab boys who were trying to harm Jews.[18]

Masses of Arabs from the surrounding villages had in the meantime begun to stream into Jerusalem. At the Dan house, an argument ensued. Though he was a tourist, Grodzinsky was angry at the police order to remain indoors. If the police could not protect the Jews outside, they would not be able to protect them inside either, he said, and proposed that the group go to Cafferata immediately. Some of the men then went out to look for the police commissioner, but on the way they encountered a hail of stones. One of the Jews claimed that when they reached Cafferata he sent them away; they were forbidden to leave their homes, he repeated over and over again. Cafferata himself denied that he had seen them that morning, and Grodzinsky backed him up: after going halfway, the delegation returned to Dan's house.

Cafferata had, however, also observed the convoy of armed Arabs setting out for Jerusalem. Being short of policemen, he did not try to stop them—in fact, he was pleased they were leaving the city. At around 8:30, Arabs began throwing rocks at Jewish homes. The police chief together with all eighteen mounted policemen tried to chase away the rioters. At this stage, they were still not armed with rifles. Then he noticed several Arabs attempting to break into an isolated

Jewish house, the Heichal home. Two young Jews emerged from the house, and Cafferata and his men tried to protect them with their horses, but one of the young men was hit by a stone and the second was stabbed, right by Cafferata's horse. Both died. Next the rioters attacked Cafferata himself; he fell off his horse but was not hurt. He went to fetch another horse and a rifle and took the opportunity to call again for reinforcements from Jerusalem.

As prayers continued at the Dan house, Grodzinsky noticed a group of attackers approaching. "Here come the Arabs," he said, and the worshipers halted the service. "We went to reinforce the door and ran around the room like madmen," Grodzinsky recalled. "The shrieks of the women and the babies' wailing filled the house. With ten other people I put boxes and tables in front of the door, but the intruders broke it with hatchets and were about to force their way in. So we left the door and began running from room to room, but wherever we went we were hit by a torrent of stones. The situation was horrible. I can't describe the wailing and screaming.

"In one room my mother was standing by the window shouting for help. I looked out and saw a wild Arab mob laughing and throwing stones. I was afraid my mother would be hit, so I don't know how, but I grabbed her and shoved her behind a bookcase in the corner. I hid another young woman there, as well as a twelve-year-old boy and a yeshiva student. Finally I went behind the bookcase myself.

"Suffocating, we sat on top of one another and heard the sound of the Arabs singing as they broke into the room, and the shouting and groaning of the people being beaten. After about ten minutes the house grew still except for some stifled groans. Then there was loud gunfire, apparently from the police."

Outside, Cafferata found himself facing a huge throng attacking Jewish homes. He ordered his men to shoot directly at the mob and began firing himself. One man was hit, but Cafferata continued to shoot because he saw no one fall; another two or three Arabs were hit, and the crowd began to disperse. Cafferata galloped to Jews Street, where he had stationed some of his men to keep the rioters at bay. In spite of the police presence, the mob was running amok. Cafferata shot again and knocked down two Arabs, his report stated. People tried

to escape through the marketplace, and in their flight looted both Arab and Jewish stores.

A scream came from one of the houses. Cafferata entered the house and later described what he saw: “an Arab in the act of cutting off a child’s head with a sword. He had already hit him and was having another cut but on seeing me he tried to aim the stroke at me but missed; he was practically on the muzzle of my rifle. I shot him low in the groin. Behind him was a Jewish woman smothered in blood with a man I recognized as a police constable, named Issa Sherrif from Jaffa.… He was standing over the woman with a dagger in his hand. He saw me and bolted into another room, shouting in Arabic, ‘Your honor, I am a policeman.’ I got into the room and shot him.”

Grodzinsky: “I barely managed to get out of my hiding place. It was difficult to move the bookcase because of the bodies that lay piled up against it. My eyes were dark from the sight of the dead and the wounded. I was overcome with terror and trembling. I could find no place to put my foot. In the sea of blood I saw Eliezer Dan and his wife, my friend Dubnikov, a teacher from Tel Aviv, and many more.… Almost all had knife and hatchet wounds in their heads. Some had broken ribs. A few bodies had been slashed and their entrails had come out. I cannot describe the look in the eyes of the dying. I saw the same scene everywhere. In one room I recognized my brother’s wife, who lay there half-naked, barely alive. The entire house had been looted, it was full of feathers and there were bloodstains on the walls.…

“I approached the window and saw policemen. I asked them to send a doctor. That same moment some Arabs passed by carrying a dead man on a stretcher. When they saw me they set down the stretcher and threatened me with their fists. I returned to my hiding place. A moment later I heard voices. They were the voices of the wounded who had gotten up and also of people who had been miraculously saved by hiding in the shower room behind the toilet. Apparently the Arabs had gotten as far as the toilet and killed one of the people there.

“I recognized my brother among the injured. He had a hatchet wound on his head and a large bruise on his forehead, probably from a rock. I threw water on him and he stood up, but died of his wounds a few hours later. Dubnikov had

apparently died of suffocation. His murdered wife lay next to him. I again approached the window and asked for doctors, because many people could have been saved with prompt medical help. One of the policemen outside answered me in Hebrew—soon, he said. About a quarter of an hour later some cars came to take us to the police. We began taking care of the wounded."[19]

In a letter to the high commissioner, the Jews of Hebron described other atrocities: sixty-eight-year-old Rabbi Meir Kastel and seventy-year-old Rabbi Zvi Drabkin, along with five young men, had been castrated. Baker Noah Imerman had been burned to death with a kerosene stove. The mob had killed pharmacist Ben-Zion Gershon, a cripple who had served Jews and Arabs for forty years; they had raped and killed his daughter as well. Yitzhak Abujzhdid and Dovnikov had been strangled with a rope. Yitzhak Abu Hannah, seventy years old, had been tied to a door and tortured until he died. Two-year-old Menachem Segal had had his head torn off. The letter detailed other acts of rape and torture. There are photographs of hands and fingers that had been cut off, perhaps for their rings and bracelets. Houses, stores, and synagogues had been looted and burned. Some people had survived only because they had lain under bodies and pretended to be dead. Toward 10:30 A.M. the riot ended and the Arab villagers returned to their homes.

Sixty-seven Jews had been killed. Most were Ashkenazic men, but there were also a dozen women and three children under the age of five among the dead. Seven of the victims were yeshiva students from the United States and Canada. Dozens of people had been wounded, about half of them women, and quite a few children, including a one-year-old boy whose parents had both been murdered. The American consulate reported that nine Arabs had been killed.[20] The Hebron Jews were buried in mass graves; the survivors, including the wounded, were taken to Jerusalem.

While the atrocities were taking place in Hebron, several Arabs from the village of Kolonia attacked the Maklef family in their home in Motza, a Jewish village just outside Jerusalem. They murdered the father, mother, and their son and two daughters, as well as two guests staying in the house. After the murders they looted the house and set it on fire. Only one son, Mordechai, was saved;

years later he became chief of staff of the Israeli army. “A dreadful week has passed,” Chaim Shalom Halevi wrote to his parents. He found it hard to return to his daily routine, and could not understand how other people managed to do so. He felt that life would never be the same again.[21]

4.

David Ben-Gurion compared the massacre in Hebron to the Kishinev pogrom, and he would later use the Nazi expression *Judenrein* to describe Hebron after the Jews left. “The pogrom was committed by Hebron’s Arab masses,” wrote Rehavam Ze’evi, who edited a book on the event. “All the Arabs of Hebron did this,” he noted, “[w]ith the exception of individuals who provided shelter for their Jewish neighbors.” He added the Hebron massacre to the historic roster of anti-Jewish persecutions. “Pogroms, slaughters, and massacres have been part of our nation’s history in their Diaspora and now this horrifying spectacle has been repeated in the Land of Israel,” he wrote.[22] But he was wrong.

The murder of Jews in Hebron was not a pogrom in the historic sense. Unlike attacks on the Jews of Eastern Europe, the authorities did not initiate the Hebron riots, and the police did not simply stand aside. Raymond Cafferata did his best, but the Hebron police force was just too weak to be effective. Thirty years later David Ben-Gurion wrote, “What can a lone British officer do in a city like Hebron?” He could have been writing about British rule in Palestine as a whole. The British could do very little.

The riots struck at the professional honor of the men responsible for law and order in the country and also violated their sense of fairness. Eric Mills, assistant chief administrative secretary, said that one of the bitterest moments of his life was when he, an Englishman, saw what had happened under the British flag. At the same time, the police forces’ actions to save the Jews did not necessarily reflect sympathy for the Zionist enterprise. Cafferata wrote to his mother that he would not be surprised if there was another outbreak of violence and Palestine became a “repetition of the Irish show,” unless the government accepted some of the Arab demands. He believed the Arabs would not be satisfied with anything

less than a revocation of the Balfour Declaration, and he criticized the government for refusing to do this.[23]

The attack on the Jews of Hebron was born of fear and hatred. The Muslims believed the Jews intended to violate the sanctity of Islam, and that the Zionists wanted to dispossess them of their country. According to the American consulate, the Jews were also murdered for economic reasons, as merchants and as moneylenders.[24] The Arabs hated them as foreigners—most had come from Europe and America. And a few probably attacked Jews out of some appetite for murder, without any clearly defined reason. Many of the rioters were not from Hebron but from the surrounding villages.

Most of Hebron's Jews were saved because Arabs hid them in their homes. The community confirmed this, writing, "Had it not been for a few Arab families not a Jewish soul would have remained in Hebron." The Zionist Archives preserves lists of Hebron Jews who were saved by Arabs; one list contains 435 names. Over two-thirds of the community, then, found refuge in twenty-eight Arab homes, some of which took in dozens of Jews. "Arabs were hurt defending their neighbors," one Jew testified afterward. Dr. Abdal Aal, an Egyptian doctor, received a letter of gratitude from Colonel Kisch for the assistance he rendered the Jews of Hebron; in addition to the care he gave the wounded, he himself protected an entire family.[25]*

Some of the saviors may have expected a reward in exchange for their help. Still, most saved the Jews out of human decency, putting themselves at risk, acting in the tradition of hospitality that had induced Khalil al-Sakakini to open his home to Alter Levine so many years earlier. In any case, Jewish history records very few cases of a mass rescue of this dimension.

In Jerusalem, the violence continued. Shmuel Yosef Agnon feared for the historical archive he had left in his home. He went from person to person, trying to enlist help; people had other concerns, however. "People laughed with broken hearts at this man who came to tell them of crumbling manuscripts at a time of such terrible trouble," he wrote. In the end Avraham Krishevsky, a member of the Haganah, declared, "An archive like that is worth even human lives," and went with Agnon to Talpiot. The papers were scattered throughout the house and

yard; Agnon did not know what to save first, and Krishevsky pressed him to hurry. He quickly gathered up some manuscripts and went back to the city. Joseph Klausner's house had also been ransacked and his library vandalized.[27]

Among those wounded in Jerusalem that day was insurance agent Alter Levine. Soon after the disturbances began, several Arabs from the village of Lifta entered Romema, Levine's neighborhood, and opened fire. Levine, his wife, and his daughters lay on the ground for hours until British policemen beat back the rioters. The house was damaged. Levine sued for compensation.[28]

The violence spread across the country; Arabs even tried to penetrate Tel Aviv. The British called in reinforcements from Egypt and Transjordan, but despite the additional forces the atrocities continued. Events in Safed were much like those in Hebron. Colonel Kisch met five girls who had seen their parents murdered.[29] Arab spokesmen reported acts of terror perpetrated by Jews, including the lynching of Arab passersby and the murder of women and children. In a few cases, the Arabs claimed, Jews attacked people who had given them refuge. The Jewish Agency investigated some of these charges and concluded that "in isolated cases" there were Jews "who shamefully went beyond the limits of self-defense." One memorandum reporting that Jews had broken into a mosque and set sacred books on fire bears a scribbled note: "This unfortunately is true." When the violence finally subsided, 133 Jews and 116 Arabs were dead: 339 Jews and 232 Arabs were injured.[30]

Shmuel Yosef Agnon changed his attitude toward the Arabs in the wake of the Hebron events. "Now my attitude is this," he wrote. "I do not hate them and I do not love them; I do not wish to see their faces. In my humble opinion we should now build a large ghetto of half a million Jews in Palestine, because if we do not we will, God forbid, be lost."[31]

High Commissioner Chancellor returned to Palestine on August 31. Colonel Kisch returned the same day; he had been in London for the birth of his son. Chancellor considered the possibility of bombing some Arab villages from the air, but decided against it. A few days later, his aide-de-camp wrote in his log that all was quiet in Palestine.[32] Chancellor published a statement condemning the violence against the Jews and found himself, like Raymond Cafferata, caught

in the middle; the Arabs decided to be insulted. Chancellor issued a second, more diplomatic statement, and then the Jews decided to be insulted.[33] After a visit to Hebron, Chancellor wrote to his son, Christopher, that he could not express the sense of revulsion that had gripped him. “I do not think that history records many worse horrors in the last few hundred years,” he said.[34] He wanted to go home. “I am so tired and disgusted with this country and everything connected with it that I only want to leave it as soon as I can,” he wrote.[35]