

JEW AND ARAB

IN PALESTINE I asked myself many times: have I told the truth about Palestine? Was I justified in claiming for years that we have not harmed the Arabs economically; that the Arabs were better off with us than without us?

I made no scholarly study of the question. For that I had neither the time nor the specialist's knowledge. However, while traveling about the country—visiting towns and villages, houses and hovels, observing women and children—I came to an inescapable, no longer theoretical, conclusion: the closer an Arab settlement lay to the zone of Jewish colonization, the better fed and better housed were the inhabitants. The houses were cleaner and larger; the trees were more numerous. The stores more elaborate. The children were friendlier; Arab boys on bicycles and Arab-owned automobiles were seen more frequently. The reverse was also true. The farther an Arab village was situated from a center of Jewish colonization, the more dirt and mud were visible; the larger the number of blind wrecks—men in rags and women in tatters. The hungry, bare-foot children suffered from sick, inflamed eyes; their camels were scrawny, the donkeys undersized—desert creatures without the romance of the desert.

I discussed the subject with Jews, Englishmen and working-class Arabs with whom I had occasion to chat several times. The Jews confirmed my observation. The Englishmen brought dozens of additional examples; the Arabs made no denials whenever questions of fact, and not diplomacy were involved. Jews who had lived in the country almost half a century and had a romantic weakness for the Arabs, agreed with me. They agreed that the general well-being of the Arab had been increased, even though they were profoundly shocked to hear that friends had reproved me for driving with an Arab chauffeur from Haifa to Tel Aviv, or that a little Jewish boy in Jerusalem had called out "Arabi assur," "the Arab is forbidden", when I was about to get a shoe-shine from an Arabian bootblack.

Today the Arabs have more and better paid work; they have easier and humaner working conditions. No such change would have been possible without Jewish colonization. English officials, outwardly ultra-courteous, furnished me with handfuls of material which demonstrated how influential Jewish colonization had been in raising the economic standard of the Arab. However, to discourage me, they would say evasively: "But that's not the problem; that's not the difficulty in Arab-Jewish relations." When I finally urged one

such Englishman to speak up, he took out a fresh cigar, muttered what might have been "you know" or "I'll tell you", and proceeded to tell me something of his family troubles. His mother and elder brother lived somewhere in Australia. Their only income was a meager pension from the English government, not enough to keep body and soul together. He, the Jerusalem official, had to support both because the older brother was a ne'er-do-well who spent his days at tennis. Two years ago he had passed a bad check. If not for the help of the Jerusalem brother, he would have been jailed. "And can you imagine", said the English official, "that he never so much as sends me a card! Furthermore, this only brother of mine is my bitterest enemy and would be happy to hear that a Bedouin's knife had dispatched me. He eats my bread but the good-for-nothing doesn't wish to be beholden to me. Marxists, they tell me, believe only in economic motives. How idiotic! The lowest of the low seeks dignity above all else. If he doesn't get it, he is prepared to destroy the whole world. I have told you a story. You can deduce the moral."

True enough, an old story with an old moral. Cain and Abel—economically equal! Had they been what the Englishman called "Marxists" they could have lived in peace—the one with his sheep; the other with his fields. But Cain also wanted his "dignity"—that God should smile when he laid his sacrifice on the altar. An old story—Joseph and his brethren; Isaac and Ishmael; Jacob and Esau. The Esau problem is not simple. Richard Beer Hoffmann in his dramatic poem, "Jacob's Dream" has revealed the full tragedy of being Esau. "Give me a pot of lentils; I am hungry. Take the birthright for the pottage." But after the mess of pottage has been eaten, the hunger stilled, one is a man again. "I want my birthright too." Jacob seeks to persuade Esau that he does not need the birthright; that the difference between Jacob and Esau is not the difference between greater and lower, but merely a difference in kind. But Esau is not persuaded—he wants what the Englishman calls "dignity"—the birthright for himself and for his children.

Is this the crux of the Arab-Jewish problem? My Englishman's knowledge of Nietzsche is slight; he has probably never heard of Alfred Adler, but I feel that he is right. Intuitively, he has grasped the essentials of the question. There are probably no absolute Jacob natures or Esau natures. The "nordic" theoreticians are pathologically obsessed with the notion of superiority. Prob-

ably one is cast for the role of Jacob or Esau not so much because of spiritual differences as because of historic conditions. Nevertheless the time comes when Esau rebels against his state. If he cannot have the birthright, he does not want Jacob to have it either—or else, let Jacob have it at a distance so that Esau's eyes will not grow sick with envy.

Lenin understood this when, in the years of military communism, he bestowed a sense of "superiority" on the wretched Russian worker. The Russian proletarian was hungry and cold. Instead of a pot of lentils, Lenin gave him a vision of a pot of meat in times to come. For years the worker's chief gratification came from the new aristocratic rank he had secured during the revolution. Hitler, too, understands the secret. He intoxicated all German youth with a sense of "superiority" to erase the Esau stigma. Germany may have to forego the pot of lentils for years, but as long as the young men can march along the streets and believe that they are not inferior to France and that Europe is terrified, all is well.

One can prove to an Arab in Palestine that

he has lost nothing through Jewish colonization. One can show him all the advantages that have accrued to him; one can persuade him that in the future he will profit still more from Jewish immigration. He will understand and agree, but the Esau-worm will, nevertheless, gnaw at his heart. The mess of pottage is conceded, but where is the birthright? "Jacob says that he will not lord it over me. I believe him; I believe that he will not wish to lord it, that he will respect my rights—but his very existence is a violation of me, because Jacob reminds me, even through his benefactions, that he is Jacob and I am Esau—at any rate,—Esau for the time being."

Perhaps the problem of Jewish-Arab relations belongs to the realm of psychology rather than economics or politics. We must have good economists and diplomats in Palestine. Our life with the Arabs, however, demands the presence of competent social physicians. The labor movement, above all, must discover the therapeutic measures which will heal the sore spots in the relations between Jew and Arab.

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