

pronounced as two syllables. The accent in Hebrew words tends to be on the last syllable, though there are many exceptions. For the convenience of readers a glossary of Hebrew and Arabic terms used in the book appears at the end of the volume.

I cannot begin to express my gratitude to the many people in Israel who helped me while I was there and in some cases after my return. Rather than offend any by omission from a long list, I prefer to leave all of them nameless and thus exclude none from my heartfelt thanks. In my own country I am especially indebted to Moses Miller, John Stuart, and Harriet Black Magil, all of whom read the manuscript and made valuable criticisms and suggestions. I am also grateful for the assistance of the personnel of the Labor Research Association of New York, the Labour Research Department of London, Zionist Archives of New York, the Public Information Office of the government of Israel in Tel Aviv, and the Foreign Press Department of the Histadrut, Tel Aviv.

A.B.M.

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I. Meet the People

I first met Israel on the ship that took me there. It was an April crossing, mildly stormy. And the Soviet steamer *Rossia*, an Hitler heirloom—acquired as reparations—was carrying a group of Palestinians and about-to-become Palestinians to the greater storm lashing their homeland and its still unborn state. Imperceptibly our lives aboard ship began to assume a distinct pattern. These Palestinians had a sense of organization, and soon we were all drawn into it: the meeting to welcome the refugees, the non-religious Passover seder, the circle of discussion and play. We became part of a compact community, a microcosm of the Yishuv itself. And through the tapestry of our talk there wove the crimson thread of far-off battles: Mishmar Haemek, Kfar Etsion, Castel, Ramat Rachel—names that for these men and women were laden with life and labor.

The moving spirits in the group were three young men of Hashomer Hatsair,* a Left labor Zionist organization which had become part of Jewish Palestine's second largest party, the United Workers Party, known as Mapam. These men were returning after two years of work in the Hashomer Hatsair youth movement in the States. One of them was a former American, another had been a refugee from Germany, the third was a former Polish Jew. Now all three were Palestinians—soon to become Israelis.

What struck me about the returning Palestinians was their serenity. They were going back to a land at war; their homes were battlefronts; their relatives and friends were in arms. Yet they showed no tension or fear, no flicker of regret at leaving America, no hint of wanting to be anywhere but in Palestine. The deep

*For an explanation of Hebrew and Arabic terms see Glossary of names and terms, p. 219.

identification with their own country flowed like a calm stream through them all.

And the children, the fabulous children of Palestine, who made the ship their playground: blond, eleven-year-old Gjora, an ardent Dodger fan, who spoke with equal ease the prickly Hebrew of Palestine's youth and the flat English of the sidewalks of New York; his five-year-old sister, Orna, a self-confident lady of charm; and dark, thirteen-year-old Ora, who played the recorder (a popular instrument in Jewish Palestine), and danced with her father a wonderfully rapid, intricate dance that left the spectators more breathless than the dancers. Every Israeli speaks with pride of the sabras, the native-born Palestinians, those sturdy, self-reliant youngsters into whom the best of the land has been poured.

At Naples there came on board the survivors—some fifty men and women of the concentration camps. These were the tough ones, the undefeated, who had fought back, and now, after going through their hachshara (training) in camps of Hashomer Hatsair and Hechaluts, were on the last lap of the long trek to Palestine. They burst upon us like a sudden gust of clean air. Mostly in their twenties or early thirties, these were men and women who had been to hell and back. But they were reluctant to speak of past horrors; they were looking ahead. Who could tell that behind the warm blue eyes of twenty-one-year-old Ruth—bluer than the number tattooed on her arm—lay, like live coals, the memories of nine months in Auschwitz?

The ship throbbed with the new arrivals. They brought into our quiet community a new sharp sense of life, a dynamic thrust toward the future. That night we held an impromptu meeting, and all of us were strangely moved by words that at other times would have seemed commonplace. Berman, a warm, humorous man, who recited Sholom Aleichem magnificently, caught the ironic symbolism of that homecoming. "Imagine how Hitler—wherever he is—must feel that in this ship, which once belonged to him, Soviet Russia is taking Jews to Palestine!"

In the sunset Haifa came into view—Haifa, lying in the lap of Mount Carmel, the blue apron of the Mediterranean folded about her.

JEW AS ISRAELIS

My most powerful first impression of Israel was its people. In this tiny strip of land Jews of many nations were becoming one nation. Though that process was far from complete, I found the Jew of Israel already noticeably different from those out of whom he came. He is developing under different conditions and in separate nationhood. And he has his own distinctive virtues and vices. This Jew is usually self-confident, self-assertive, a man who lives and works with gusto. He—and when I say he I mean she too—tends to be an affirmative personality, with a sense of strong possessiveness toward his country.

Another impression the visitor gets is that despite the many political cleavages, large numbers of the people have a sense of personal participation in every national achievement. This is part of the pioneer tradition in a country which required so large a measure of organized group effort to settle and develop it. The Yishuv has changed much since those days. It has become more sharply class-divided with all that this implies, even though the gap between classes is not as great as in more mature capitalist countries. But many of the old values still persist, especially in so small a land where everyone is everyone else's neighbor. And the pioneering era is of course far from over.

All this does not hold for large numbers of the most recent immigrants who have entered the country since the establishment of the Jewish state. Those who have had to spend wretched months in detention camps or been forced to live in decaying Arab shacks, and have encountered the barbed-wire glances of so many of the settled people, do not feel at home. And these survivors of the Hitler holocaust are a caution against leaping to the all-too-facile conclusion that Israel has solved the Jewish problem. That problem arises everywhere, as it did in Germany, out of social and political reaction. And the policy that Israel's government pursues in the international sphere is a factor in strengthening or weakening the forces that generate anti-Semitism and other forms of national discrimination.

The abnormal conditions under which both the old settlers and the newcomers have lived in recent years have brought with them a complement of crime such as Americans know only too well. When

I was in Israel there was an epidemic of car thefts in Tel Aviv. Some of these were attributed to members of the former terrorist organizations, the Irgun Tsvai Leumi and the Stern group, who apparently were unable to rid themselves of habits formed in the days when they were fighting the British. Yet one still finds a surprising number of people who are free of the usual corruptions prevalent in the United States and other developed capitalist countries. I think of the prominent Tel Aviv physician, who has been living in Palestine over twenty years and in all that time hasn't bothered to buy a car; he is fond of reading American novels and he used to say to me: "I don't understand the chase after money. I simply can't understand it." I think of the tailor who mended a hole in my trousers pocket and refused to accept any payment on the ground that it was a trifle and had taken only two minutes. I considered him a unique exception till I had a similar experience with another tailor. I think of Margalit and Dani, twenty-one-year-old sabras, city-bred, who gave up comfortable homes and the opportunity of pursuing professional studies to become members of the kibbutz Bet Haarva at the Dead Sea, where the salt had to be leached out of the soil before it could grow anything and the sun was like a hot whip on the flesh. I think of others like them, warm, generous folk, who are not feverishly trying to "get ahead" and the devil take the hindmost, and who do not predestine their children to careers of "making good"—that is, making money.

All this is part of the social physiognomy of that interesting Jew, the Israeli. But this Jew is not the starry-eyed, classless abstraction you meet in books on Palestine. Mostly he is a worker or farmer or small merchant or artisan or professional person. But he may also be a capitalist, and the capitalists of Israel are no different from their breed in other lands. During the war of liberation, while the best sons of Israel were shedding their blood, there were business men who sold the army shoes and uniforms that fell apart, and others who profited on the people's food.

Poverty in Israel is as bitter as elsewhere. The recent immigrants have found new privations and deceptions in place of the old. Policemen's clubs on the heads of men and women demonstrating for work and bread are no softer in Tel Aviv than in New York or

Paris or Rome. One can say that with the maturing of Jewish nationhood there are maturing within it all the evils of capitalism.

This is a land of many contradictions and the Jew of Israel fairly bristles with them. His faith in himself and his country reflects an achievement, a vitality, and progressive aspiration that are real. But this faith is also based in part on illusion: the illusion that Jews are superior to other peoples and especially to Arabs; the illusion that the worker, and not the capitalist, is master of the country, that some kind of socialism is being built in Israel which will make it possible to escape the capitalist afflictions of other lands; the illusion that in the thirty-year partnership between Zionism and British imperialism—if the relations between two such unequals can be called a partnership—the Jews somehow outwitted the British; the illusion that in a similar "partnership" with the United States the Jews will again get the better of the bargain.

And Israel is free of anti-Semitism, but not of a chauvinism that at times verges on racism. This was nourished by the war in which Jew was pitted against Arab. But the racist tendency was active even before the war and its roots go back to Zionist nationalism. In Israel there is this paradox: apart from the violence and vandalism unleashed in the liberation war, one finds only in the Irgun Tsvai Leumi and the Stern group those sadistic attitudes toward Arabs that are common toward Negroes in the American South—and not only in the South. On the other hand, whereas in America many liberals oppose discrimination and speak up for Negro rights, their counterparts in Israel on the whole show an extraordinary insensitiveness to the injuries suffered by the Arabs.

It is also true of the youth that not only has the best of Israel been poured into them, but quite a bit of the worst. Thanks in great measure to the Zionist schools, large sections of the youth have become infected with a chauvinism that sometimes assumes frightening proportions: it is chiefly from the youth that the protofascist Irgun (now the Freedom Movement) has drawn its supporters.

I am attempting here a composite portrait, and in actual life there are many variations. My impressions would today also be modified by the recent immigrants who have arrived in such vast numbers. Yet the Jew I have described is undoubtedly the core of the country. In the restless crucible that is Israel there is being

formed a distinct new national type—distinct not only from non-Jews, but from the Jews of other lands as well. Those who have come to Israel from some fifty different countries represent diverse national elements, and they are by no means fully blended as yet. The Polish, Russian, German, Hungarian, and other European Jews still retain much of their national characters, while the Oriental Jews, coming largely from the Arab and Mediterranean countries and comprising nearly a quarter of the Jewish population, belong to a world of their own—a socially submerged world in many ways more Arab than what we of the West identify as Jewish. But all these national ingredients are combining to form an indigenous Jew—an Israeli.

THE LIBERATION WAR

I arrived in a land at war. It was such a war as a novelist with a sense of history and drama might have contrived. In the land of the ancient Hebrews a modern Hebrew state is born—and in the very act of birth forced to fight for existence. Six million Jews are murdered—and a new indestructible Jewish nation, numbering less than a million, affirms its right to live and be forever free of Maidaneks, of pogroms hot and cold. After the lost illusion of British beneficence, Israel turns on the hand that fettered it. The minute men of '48 versus the Arab Hessians of George VI. Once again David conquers Goliath.

It was a tiny war with a massive impact: a people's war that thwarted and wounded the world's mightiest imperialist powers. Out of it came sagas and symbols. One of them was Negba. Negba is the name of a kibbutz or communal farm about thirty miles southeast of Tel Aviv. It is at the gateway to the Negev, though not in the Negev proper. It was founded in 1939 by a group of Polish Jews on land bought in defiance of the British White Paper, which greatly restricted Jewish immigration and land purchase. By backbreaking labor these settlers had converted the tough soil into one of the garden spots of the country.

I first met Negba in the persons of David Mandell, his wife, and two children on the ship that brought me to Palestine. They had been visiting relatives in the States and were taking back with them equipment for their kibbutz. Mandell was a simple, hearty

man. Time after time he was called on to lead the singing on the ship. Looking at this attractive family, no one would have thought they were returning to a country at war, to a home that would soon become a battleground.

The next time I saw David Mandell he was wearing a steel helmet. He ran to greet me as I arrived at Negba in an army truck two hours after the beginning of the first truce in June, 1948. Our truck stopped at the water tower. Huge holes had been ripped through its concrete flanks. Mandell led me farther. And I beheld the tragedy and the glory that was Negba. No building had escaped; most had been hit hundreds of times. Walls and roofs had been battered till they were little more than debris. Modern stone stables and barns had been wrecked. Dead horses and cows lay in the fields and the crops were withering in the sun.

I visited Negba again in the latter part of September during the second truce. It was even more of a shambles than before. In the nine days of fighting between the two truces the Egyptians had made desperate efforts to capture it. They had attacked with planes, artillery, and tanks, they had hurled masses of infantry against Negba. At one time they had it surrounded on three sides, only to have the gallant defenders break through the ring of fire. The enemy wrecked two wells that supplied the kibbutz with water and for ten days nobody washed or shaved, while small quantities of water for drinking and cooking were brought in perilously from a neighboring kibbutz. And all the defenders were living in underground shelters like moles.

I asked for my friend, David Mandell. He was no longer there. He had been wounded in the shoulder by Egyptian gunfire while laying mines. A comrade working beside him had been killed. All told, eighteen members of the Negba settlement, including one woman, had been killed, plus eighteen of the Israeli soldiers sent to reinforce them. The Egyptian dead numbered hundreds.

As I walked the desolate lanes of Negba, I understood why it had won for itself the proud name of Negbagrad.* I understood

*In July, 1948, a leaflet addressed to the defenders of Negba was issued by the staff of the southern front of the Israeli army. One paragraph of the leaflet, which was entitled "Negbagrad," read: "Our hearts are firm and we are confident that those who began by holding fast in the Stalingrad manner will quickly and surely end the struggle in the manner of Stalingrad."

why Negba could never be conquered. And why it would rise again.

THE LAND

"Erets" they call it. Erets means land and is short for Erets Yisrael, Land of Israel, the traditional Hebrew name for Palestine. But Erets has come to mean more than a way of saying Palestine. It is freighted with the past—not only the ancient past, but the more recent past of the Hitler scourge and the titanic struggle to rescue the doomed. This is a history-laden and history-tormented land, and what it has been flows like a river through what it is and will be. Stand in the communal settlement of Ayn Charod, one of the largest in the country, and you gaze across at the bare stone face of Mount Gilboa where King Saul and his three sons fell in battle with the Philistines. Go up to Mount Carmel and you walk with Elijah who there won his victory over the prophets of the alien god Baal. Not far from the place where the Israelis fought bitterly to capture Arab-held Latrun, which commands the main road to Jerusalem, was Modin, the town of the Maccabeans. From the hills of upper Galilee down into the burning Negev desert history's footprints cover every inch of soil.

Into this ancient land has been thrust a modern society—drawn from many nations but from one people—a society full of eager change, bursting at the seams. And more living than the relics of remote centuries are the bloodstained footprints of the wanderers through the fascist wilderness. The battered ships that came in the night and disgorged their weary cargo; the ships that did not come, that were caught by British guns or swallowed up by the sea; all the stormy surge toward survival and freedom compressed into a few years—these have had a far deeper impact on Israel than the legends of the distant past.

The coming of the modern Jews to this land didn't originally make much sense. Neither from the standpoint of soil, climate, economic possibilities, or political relationships did Palestine commend itself. People in Israel sometimes joke about it: "When Moses was leading the children of Israel out of the wilderness, why did he have to stop here? Why couldn't he have gone a little farther . . . to California?" But there they are. And the irrational impulses that

brought the first Zionist settlers to Erets have become submerged in the living organism that is Israel.

Much of the fascination of Israel comes from the fact that it is a test-tube country. Historic processes which ordinarily take centuries to complete are here being compressed into a short span of years, concentrated with an explosive power that makes it a land of extraordinary contrast and complexity. And what was originally possible only on a laboratory scale has become part of the social structure of a country that has largely—though not entirely—outgrown the laboratory stage. This feeds illusion. Unique institutions like, for example, the communal farms, have caused many to conclude that Jewish Palestine's economy is something new under the sun. Actually something rather old and commonplace—capitalism—is dominant and growing in Israel, relentlessly shaping its society and bending unique institutions to its will. Yet these institutions will not simply disappear as capitalism marches on. They are one of the *forms* of social development whose content is being determined by the relationship of class forces in Israel and in the world.

The past and the present have combined to give little Israel, with a population smaller than that of the Bronx, a large meaning. Here the three dominant world religions meet; here thousands of survivors of history's greatest slaughter have found a haven; here the tensions of national conflict have more than once reached the explosion point; here the politics of oil and imperial strategy collide with anti-imperialist struggle and the politics of freedom. Israel is involved in the world and the world is involved in Israel.