

THE MIDDLE EAST REVISITED

I—HOPES AND HANDICAPS OF THE NEW ISRAEL

By the Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery

To revisit Palestine, or at least that part of it which is now Israel, after 25 years is an almost bewildering experience. When I was last there it was still essentially a primitive agricultural Arab country in process of being tidied up by a handful of British officials. Occasional Arab policemen in British uniforms and now and again a fair complexioned British administrator, surveying his work and thinking it good, reminded one where lay the ultimate authority of government. Scattered Jewish agricultural settlements sprouting here and there were the outward and visible response to our declaration that Jewish settlement in Palestine was a matter, not of sufferance, but of right. A straggling Jewish suburb was growing up outside the walls of the Holy City. On the sand dunes north of Jaffa an enthusiastic pioneer, the late Mr. Dizengoff, had started an all-Jewish town which already boasted 25,000 inhabitants and a brick works. But in the main, Palestine was still Arab and primitive. The Arab peasant, with his white *keffiyeh* and sloppy dark brown cloak, provided the human element in the country landscape, as the fez-wearing *effendi* did in the towns. The camel and the donkey were everywhere the visible mainstay of agriculture and transport.

BUSY MODERN CITIES

All that has vanished. The British mandate has left no traces, other than good roads and solid buildings and, no doubt, much in the way of sound administrative and municipal tradition, none of which bear any visible mark of their origin. There are still some 170,000 Arabs in Israel. But, except in parts of Galilee, like Nazareth, or in stray villages which wisely refused to share in the panic-stricken exodus of their compatriots, they seem to have disappeared or at least faded into the background. The motor-tractor and the mechanized reaper and binder have replaced the camel and the donkey on the fields, while the main roads hum with the unceasing traffic of lorries, omnibuses, motor-cars, and motor and push bicycles. Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Israeli Jerusalem are busy modern cities which will soon muster a million and more inhabitants between them, while smaller towns and villages are proliferating everywhere. The whole place swarms with a new population, western in restless, creative energy as well as in social habits. Open shirts and shorts have displaced the *burnous* of the men and often even the veil and black draperies of the women. The predominant impression, especially in the younger generation, is one of robust health and exuberant vitality. It is a population of many physical types, ranging from European Jews as blond as any Germans to swarthy Yemenis as dark as Indians.

A NEW NATION

This Israel, however, is something much more than a miscellaneous collection of Jews from all the ends of the earth. It is a new nation; an entirely new shoot from a very tough old root. It has its own national language, Hebrew, which everybody speaks, at least in public, and which is the only language of older residents and of the young as well as of all public signs and notices. Above all, it has its own outlook, which is purely local and purely forward looking. Whatever the background from which these men and women have come—for so many of them a background of unbelievable horrors—one feels that they have put it all behind them and are concerned only with the tasks immediately ahead in what is now their very own country. History for them begins on the spot. Their only concern now is with making the most of every inch of the ground maintained or won in the fighting, and for the rest to live in peace with their neighbours.

For the full agricultural use of their little country the one indispensable requisite is water. A pipe line is already being laid from the river Yarkon, north of Tel Aviv, to the Negeb south of Beersheba, and is to be reinforced next year by water piped from the actual source of the Jordan at Dan. It is hoped in this way to irrigate an additional 60,000 acres a year over the next three years. Farther south, in the

more strictly desert part of the Negeb, boring is actively proceeding. Most of the water found so far is brackish. But much of it is not too brackish for cultivation, while enough fresh water for domestic purposes can be distilled by the simple device of a glass frame to catch the heat of the sun.

In the extreme north the draining and irrigating of the Huleh marsh is being completed. At Huleh, as elsewhere, where there is surplus local water, fish cultivation is being developed on a large scale and on scientific methods by selective breeding and by the free use of fertilizers to stimulate the plant life on which the fish feed. One cooperative fish farm that I visited markets annually over 100 tons of fat carp. Much, too, needs to be done to cope with soil erosion by the restoring of old or creating new terracing. All this work will only be worth while for the sake of quality crops such as citrus fruit, olives, vines, tobacco, and of industrial processes for their further utilization. There is, for instance, an interesting process by which a superior form of nylon can be made out of castor oil. In all this field invaluable work is being done by the admirable Research Institute at Rehovoth which owes its inspiration to so distinguished a scientist as President Weizmann.

All the same Israel's leading men know that full scope can only be given to the ever-increasing numbers, as well as to the innate genius of their people, by the boldest possible parallel development of industry, shipping, and commerce. It is a new Phoenicia that they envisage, a new focus and *entrepôt* for trade between the Mediterranean and the Middle East. A small Israelite merchant navy is already in existence and there are high hopes of its rapid expansion. Haifa harbour can already handle an import of over a million tons a year. They mean presently to more than double it. Tel Aviv is planning an important port, and a large area of derelict Jaffa is being demolished to accommodate it.

INDUSTRIAL CENTRES

At both these cities, as well as at other centres, large areas are being scientifically laid out and equipped for industrial production. Natural conditions preclude any great development of heavy industry. Israel has practically no raw materials, other than those it can grow. There are, however, possibilities of magnesium production on a large scale in the Dead Sea once the technical problem of corrosion, which at present limits the industrial use of that metal, can be overcome. It is on technical skill, invention, and enterprise in the field of the lighter industries that Israel must rely. So much for Israeli hopes.

The obstacles to their realization would, by normal standards, appear almost insurmountable. All the difficulties of our own economic position are there in a fantastically exaggerated form. Israel's exports cover barely 10 per cent. of an import figure which is mounting up to a rate of £120m. a year. Somehow or other, by loans, release of sterling balances, and, above all, gifts and investment by American Jewry, the immediate gap may be closed. But gifts and loans cannot go on indefinitely. Exports will only grow slowly, and their expansion is limited by the high cost of living due to internal inflation and by enormously high wages. Add to this immigration at a rate never yet attempted anywhere else. Nearly 500,000 must have come in, or are on their way, since we abandoned control in 1948. The Israeli Government is ineluctably committed by its history and by national sentiment to let in every Jewish immigrant who wants to come or is driven to come. Much of the recent immigration from Arab countries is of little economic value. Nothing short of the most stringent austerity and of the most drastic devaluation can cope with such a situation. The economic and social strains which that will set up will be a severe test of what is at present a stable political structure. Above all, Israel needs real peace: a reduction in her present excessive expenditure on defence and the resumption of normal economic relations with, at least, her own natural hinterland in Jordan. That is Jordan's no less urgent need. But of that in a further article.

To be concluded.

THE MIDDLE EAST REVISITED

II—AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BRITISH STATESMANSHIP

By the Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery

To cross the few yards which separate the modern Jewish Jerusalem from the crowded, narrow *sukhs* of the Holy City behind the walls is to step suddenly out of the twentieth century into the Middle Ages. Jordan, indeed, is very different from Israel. But that does not mean that there has not been marked progress in the past 25 years. The good roads and public buildings of Cis-Jordan still bear witness to the work of the British administration. But private building continues active and housing and life generally are of a very different standard from pre-British times.

Olives cover the steep hillsides, which are often carefully terraced, and the



valleys are well cultivated. Relatively primitive, judged by Israeli standards, Arab agriculture is by no means contemptible. But there is still much room for the extension of hillside cultivation. In Transjordan a generation of peace from Beduin raids and of orderly government has seen both an extension of cultivation and an improvement in methods. Better utilized, however, Transjordan, not to speak of the Jordan valley itself, could carry a larger population than its present 350,000 to 400,000.

It is here that the Arab refugees, so anxious and heartbreaking a problem at the moment, may in the end prove a blessing to the country as a whole. Many of those with some small means of their own—the wealthy mostly cleared out early for Cairo or Beirut—or with some industrial or commercial skill have already established themselves on their own. Amman, which in 1925 was a village of some 10,000 inhabitants and by 1947 had grown to some 45,000, now boasts anything from 120,000 to 150,000. Its streets are crowded with mechanical traffic and roads are being improved everywhere. That still leaves, however, anything from 350,000 to 450,000 refugees still herded together in camps in Jordan alone, over and above some 250,000 in other Arab countries. They are being kept alive by international charity, which obviously cannot go on for ever. What is needed is a systematic scheme of irrigation and colonization to convert dependents into producers; such a scheme as, after the first world war, dealt with the resettlement in Macedonia of the Greeks driven out of Asia Minor, to the ultimate advantage both of the refugees and of Greece.

ARTIFICIAL DIVISION

For this the first indispensable condition is peace between Israel and Jordan. For one thing, the compensation due to the refugees for their property in Israel will be forthcoming only as part of a general settlement. Even more important, the agricultural development of Jordan can succeed only if there is a market for its produce. The market is there in Israel next door, a market which could easily absorb all Jordan is ever likely to produce in the shape of cereals, meat, and dairy products. Cis-Jordan used to have an export of fine olive oil by rail direct to Egypt or shipped from Haifa, 25 miles from the Jordan frontier. It cannot face the cost of the only present route, by road to Jerusalem, 4,000ft. down and up the Jordan depression to Amman, 200 miles by train to Damascus, and then over two mountain passes to Beirut. There can be no real progress while the present fantastic division between two naturally complementary halves of what should be one economic area is being artificially kept up, and while both countries are wasting far too much of their resources on unnecessary preparation for war.

No one realizes that better than the wise, realist statesman who presides over the affairs of Jordan. King Abdullah knows what it is possible to secure from Israel. He also knows what he has to give, not only on the economic side but also in removing the menace of the one Arab military force that in the recent war showed itself both able to fight and willing to fight. The Israelis know it too, and are as anxious for a fair deal as he is. Such a

deal, on the broad basis of the existing frontiers and of the principle of compensation for the refugees was, it is generally understood, all but concluded not long ago. The obstacle so far has been the Arab League and the widespread belief—one can only hope mistaken—that the British Government has been anxious somehow to keep that essentially unreal and artificial organization in being.

A political association, to have any natural cohesion, requires a substantial common ground of interest, political and economic, as well as some unity of outlook. Egypt is an Arabic-speaking country. But her people differ in many respects from Arabs, properly speaking, in outlook as well as in racial origin. Her interests, real and emotional, are far more concerned with the Upper Nile than with the countries between her and the Turkish and Persian borders. These do form a natural unit for mutual development and defence. With the exception of Israel they are also one in speech and ways of thought. But the material and strategic reasons for including Israel in the building up of a true cooperative system in that part of the world are, or should be, conclusive, for us at least.

Egypt, on the other hand, seems primarily concerned with the Arab League as an instrument of Egyptian policy. From that point of view Egyptian statecraft tends not only to view with comparative equanimity the continuance of the feud with Israel, but also to regard with apprehension any shifting of the balance of power within the League itself.

The one clear conclusion with which I have returned from revisiting the Middle East is that it is no use our concentrating on building up a peaceful cooperative nation grouping in western Europe, or on re-establishing the situation in Korea, if Russia, in her central position, is free to erupt into the Middle East. So long as the Middle Eastern countries are divided and discordant there is always the danger of one side or other looking to Moscow. So long as they remain impoverished and neglect social welfare for military ambition, so long will they not only be weak for their common defence but be breeding grounds of Communism.

THE RUSSIAN THREAT

We are more directly threatened by that danger than the United States or any other Power. For Russian domination of the Middle East would not only sever our vital communications with the Commonwealth east and south of Suez but would open all Africa to Communist aggression. Moreover we have a far longer experience of Middle Eastern problems and can command a much greater measure of confidence from all concerned in our impartial good will as well as in our power to help.

That is true of Israel no less than of the Arab countries. I found among leading men in Israel everywhere a sincere recognition of the fact that, but for Britain, there never would have been any Israel, and a desire to get back to those relations of mutual cooperation in promoting the welfare of the whole Middle East which underlay the imaginative statesmanship of men like Lord Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Milner, and General Smuts. Even in the fighting services, where the feeling that Mr. Bevin's policy loaded all the dice against them in 1948 might be expected to be most bitter, the memories of old comradeship in the war and a genuine admiration for our methods make for a real eagerness to renew close relations. Nothing in this sphere would be more warmly welcomed in Israel than the offer of a few places at our three Staff Colleges and other service technical establishments.

Behind our good will and our help in promoting peace and prosperity in the Middle East, however, there must also be the power to protect and to make it worth the while of the lesser States to be on our side, if the danger from Russia should materialize, and to help with their forces and their facilities. We must retain a strong force in the Middle East. The one obvious place for that force is the Suez Canal zone, where it can both guard that indispensable link in our communications and serve as a support for the countries to the north of it. The increasing gravity of the world situation certainly emphasizes the importance of strategic as compared with purely political considerations. Good will, a sense of our responsibility and, above all, the power to back it, could, within a very few years, completely alter the face of the Middle East.

Concluded

The first article appeared yesterday.