THE ARABS OF PALESTINE

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THE ARABS OF PALESTINE.

PALESTINE was a geographical expression, to which a political definition was given by the British Mandate in 1922. The area defined had never formed an administrative unit, still less an independent political unit. None of the peoples who have at any time lived in it have belonged in it exclusively, or have held it all. For four thousand years it has given place to nomads, colonists, conquerors and refugees. The people who call themselves Arabs have lasted the longest in " Palestine," perhaps because they were the most accommodating and the most amorphous. At the present time they have been cornered and driven back on the hinterland by the Zionist experiment of a modern National State within this " geographical expression."

Biblical Links.

Although the Arabs first conquered Palestine (Southern Syria) under the Caliph Omar four years after the death of Mohammed, there had been Arabs connected with the Country long before that. Arabs and Jews alike are " People of the Book " ; and it is impossible to understand the powerful influence exerted by the tradition of their origins upon the mentality of either race without going back to the beginning of the Old Testament. The Arabs claim to be the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son by the bond-woman Hagar. If it had not been for the later and miraculous birth of Isaac (the traditional progenitor of the Jews) to Abraham's wife Sarah, it would have been this Ishmael who would have been the natural heir of Abraham in the land of Canaan. But, thwarted once in the inheritance, the " Arab line " was to be thwarted again. Abraham's son Isaac, it will be remembered, had twin sons, of whom the first-born was Esau and the second Jacob. According to Jewish and Arab tradition, Esau sold his birth-right to Jacob for a mess of pottage, and Jacob then succeeded in tricking his blind father, Isaac, into confirming to him the blessing of the first-born. Esau, cast out from his birthright, became the progenitor of the Transjordan Edomites, from whom Herod the Great was descended. These traditions have been accepted by the Jews, at least since the coming of Islam. They have not, however, agreed with the Arabs that it was Ishmael and not Isaac whom Abraham was prepared to sacrifice to God, and therefore that it was on behalf of Ishmael and not of Isaac that Abraham inherited the blessing of God (Genesis XX *vv.* 16-18). Nor have the Jews put the same emphasis as have the Arabs on the words with which Isaac sought to comfort his son Esau, " Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and the dew of heaven from above ; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother ; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck "

(Genesis XXVII *vv.* 39-40). But all this has underlaid for centuries Arab thinking both in and beyond Palestine, and fostered at once the Arabs' traditional sense of nearness to and rivalry with the Jews.*

Although the descendants of Ishmael and Esau lost their rights of primogeniture among the descendants of Abraham, considerable contact remained between the two groups until the Jewish Dispersal after A.D. 70. In the book of Exodus, for example, it is stated that the Israelites under Moses were accompanied in their journey into the Desert by a " mixed multitude " which has always puzzled commentators. It has been pointed out that the Hebrew word is *erev*, the unvocalized spelling of which is the same as *arav*, meaning Arab ; and that on all of the few occasions on which the word appears in the Bible it would make as good or better sense if it were translated as " Arab."

Later the Talmud recounts how the Arabs disputed before Alexander the Great the Jewish claim to exclusive rights in Palestine, and were defeated by Jewish dialectic. But in most of the later Jewish traditions and legends the Arabs appear as poor peasants in the land of Canaan, people whose empire lies outside. It seems, for example, that the Nabatean Kings, who in the last century before Christ controlled the country from south of Aqaba on the Red Sea through Transjordan and the Hauran as far as Damascus, were Arabs.

The Nabatean kingdom and then that of Palmyra rose to eminence on the fringes of the Roman Empire which had scattered the Jews, and Arab dynasties attained great importance in that Empire, as did that of Ghassan in the fifth century A.D. But it was not until the coming of Mohammed that Arab power and culture, integrated in the new Faith, came decisively to dominate the whole of the Semitic world, from Arabia to the Mediterranean.

In Palestine (as elsewhere) the Arab conquest meant the defeat and eclipse of the Christian Byzantine Empire, and the supremacy of Islam in the Holy City of Jerusalem. Yet for four centuries these Arab rulers, whose empire was to run from the heart of Spain to Indonesia were, according to the standard of the times, civilized and tolerant. Their virtues, however, have been forgotten in the West. This is because the name of Islam became historically connected, first with the Seljuk Turks whose conquest of Palestine (1072) closed the Holy Places to Christian pilgrims and brought sporadically down upon the Levant during four centuries the invasions of the Crusades, and, secondly, with the Ottoman Turk, under whose unimaginative rule from 1516 to 1918 Palestine and its neighbours stagnated.

Arab Values.

All the same, since the nineteenth century, there has been a renewal of interest in the Arabs and of scholarly study of their language and

* The writer of this pamphlet is deeply indebted for the historical survey which follows to Nevill Barbour's book, " Nisi Dominus," Harrap 1946.

history. It followed the breath of excitement caused by Napoleon's shaking-up of Egypt, which started strange tremors through the Turkish dominions.

Arab townsmen in Jerusalem and elsewhere, who had become almost accustomed to the disdain of the Turk, remembered that once the Arabs had been a great, as they were still a proud and humorous people. Their Arabic language, which the Turk had never adopted, had been the *lingua franca* of a vast empire, the medium in which scientists, physicians, philosophers, poets and historians had written, and in which the lost learning of Aristotle had been preserved for Europe. Although the prime bond of Arab citizenship had always been the acceptance of Islam, the second, which could make " Arabs " of all who adopted it, had always been the Arabic tongue. So, in " Palestine " (the name derived from the Arabic Falastin, the Philistine Country), the Arab conquest had made " Arabs " of the remnant of the old Canaanitish stock, which itself had absorbed members of all the various nationalities which had ever been in Palestine—Hittites, Israelites, Samaritans and Philistines. This stock, rejuvenated with the infusion of Bedouin blood, and a new faith which enshrined so much familiar to Palestine, had continued to absorb all the various groups which became embedded in it. So also many Greeks, Crusaders, Lebanese and Egyptians by the nineteenth century had become Palestinian Arabs.

These townsmen remembered too, at a time when religion had ceased to be much more than the basis for local taxation and communal division, that originally the acceptance of the Quran* in its incomparable Arabic had meant the brotherhood of all believers, and a privileged position for the other " people of the Book "—the Christians and the Jews. Now Turkish discrimination, and centuries of rivalry and intrigue, had divided Arabs sharply among themselves into splintered religious communities, a state of affairs which was to the obvious advantage of the Turkish overlord.

Muslim-Christian Relations.

Although these divisions were common to the local government of Jerusalem as of other places, the mixed Christian and Muslim Arab population of the Holy City, and of other mixed Palestinian towns, lived generally on terms of sympathy, which was to be a revelation to many British officials in the years of the Mandate. Although Christians had long formed a minority in Palestine, where the majority had for centuries been Muslims and peasants, they had far more in common with their Muslim neighbours than the West ever realized. Not only did they share in each others festivals and social life (though not inter-marrying), but they held many similar religious views. Jesus, for example, who has no place in Jewish tradition, was to the Muslim the last of a great line of Jewish prophets before Mohammed, the last and greatest of the Prophets of God. At the Last Day, Jesus with Mohammed would judge all the Souls,

* Commonly and incorrectly transcribed " Koran," the sacred writings and precepts, which for Muslims are the Word of God, revealed through Mohammed.

in Jerusalem, the City sacred to Islam as well as to Judaism and to Christianity. In the early days all the Faithful had turned towards Jerusalem at the hours of prayer, and it was traditionally from the Rock of Sacrifice in the old Temple Area that Mohammed was carried up to heaven. The beautiful shrine of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is held throughout the Arab world to be the most lovely Arab monument on earth, and the third holiest place in Islam.

For many Christian Arab scholars in this century and in the nineteenth, as for Professor Arnold Toynbee,* Islam was an heretical form of Christianity, and one which, at a time when debased and virtually polytheistic versions of Christianity were current in the East, was distinguished by its steadfast monotheism. They stressed its puritan revival of faith and morals in the first centuries, and indicated similarities with the Protestant Reformation, in that Islam discarded the priestly hierarchy and images, insisted on the equality and direct responsibility before God of the souls of the faithful, and on the necessity and efficacy of individual prayer, of study of the Quran, and of faith and good works. In face of Western attacks on Muslim morals, and particularly on the marriage law, Christian Arabs were among the first to show that Islamic law was an improvement on current custom in seventh century Arabia, and that in modern times Muslim practice had been more faithful to its religious principles than that of some Oriental, and certainly of many Western Christians. They pointed out that Muslim women, unlike their Christian sisters, had always enjoyed rights of property, and that their modern subjection and ignorance was as much due to the general poverty of the Near East and to Turkish customs, as to a degenerate tradition of Islam.

In Palestine at least, therefore, the Arab renaissance in the towns and the revival of dreams of Arab independence were shared by Christian and Muslim alike. Both communities played their part in the literary renaissance which had first become important among the Christians of Lebanon (where it produced, among other things, a new translation of the Bible into an Arabic which even those without a classical Arabic education could understand.)

Struggle against the Turks.

This renaissance, at first mainly literary, became a definite political force from the day in the eighteen seventies when Ibrahim Yaziji recited to a secret meeting of Arabs his famous ode beginning " Arabs, awake ! "

It produced, despite the repression of the Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid, organized sedition and rebellions which finally were to help to break the Turkish yoke. In 1903 Ibn Saud occupied Central Arabia ; the next year, in Paris, the " League of the Arab Fatherland " issued a manifesto envisaging an Arab Kingdom, but promising to " respect all foreign interests already engaged in our territory, and all the concessions granted up to date by the Turks . . . . the autonomy of the Lebanon, the *status quo* in the Christian sanctuaries

* See for example the essay " Islam and the West " in " Civilisation on Trial." O.U.P. 1948.

in Palestine and in the independent princedoms of the Yemen and the Persian Gulf." When the Turkish Revolution of 1908 failed to bring any real measure of decentralisation, Nationalists began to demonstrate openly, and to look increasingly for help towards England and France.

On the outbreak of the First World War many Arab leaders besides Hussein, Sharif of Mecca, hoped that alliance with the Western powers, and subsidiary military actions with Lawrence and others, would hasten the independence of Turkey's Arab provinces. In May 1916, twenty notables were hanged in Beirut and Damascus for their " participation in the plot . . . to tear Syria, Mesopotamia, and Palestine from the Ottoman Empire in order to erect an independent principality." Among those executed were two Palestinian leaders. In Palestine itself Arabs were being insulted, flogged and hanged for pro-Ally sympathy. Some still carry pock-marks from diseases caught in Turkish prison-camps. A growing number, however, were hearing news of the proclamations of the Allies, and began to look forward to the day when the Arab world, while preserving the unity imposed by the Turks would enjoy a very great measure of local autonomy which, though at first supervised by British advisers, would lead rapidly to complete independence. When they saw the Allied forces under Allenby triumphantly enter Gaza and then Jerusalem, and finally beat the Turks at the battle of Megiddo in Galilee, they believed that the day had come.

The Mandate a Blow.

The establishment of the British Mandate over Palestine, on the contrary, constituted a triple blow to Palestinian Arab aspirations. First, their country was for the first time in history to become a separate political unit, cut off from the other Arab areas to which it belonged. The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 resulted in France taking over, as its sphere of influence, Syria and the Lebanon, to be governed under Mandate, while the British established separate mandatory administrations for Iraq and Transjordania. Secondly, within Palestine itself the Arabs were to be indefinitely denied the national independence which they believed that they had been promised in the McMahon* correspondence, and to come under a British administration which, in effect, would leave less power to the local Arab leaders than they had wielded under the Turkish. Thirdly, the imposition of a British Mandate was found to involve " the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people " on the lines of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Even had agreement to this plan, secured by Dr. Weizmann, the Zionist leader, from Feisal, been accepted by Feisal's father, Hussein of Mecca (which it was not), it could still in no sense be binding on the Arabs of Palestine.

The new Palestine was roughly equal in size to the Principality of Wales or the State of Massachusetts, being just over 9,000 square

* Letter from Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt to the Sharif Hussein, promising, as one of the British war aims, the independence of the Arab lands but without definition of their frontiers. (Oct. 24th 1915). British White Paper (1939) *Correspondence between Sir H. McMahon and the Sharif of Mecca, Cmd. 5957.*

miles. More than half this was made up of the Beersheba Desert in the South (the Negeb), and almost another quarter by the mountain masses of Galilee and Judea, large parts of which could not be cultivated. It was bounded on the north by the French Mandate of Syria and the Lebanon, as defined by the Franco-British convention of 1920 ; on the west by the Mediterranean, and on the south by Egyptian and Hejaz territory. On the east, by the decision of 1924 which declared only " Cis-Jordania " to be Palestine in which a Jewish National home had been promised, it was bounded by the British Mandated territory of Transjordan, from which it was divided by the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea.

Population of Palestine Between The Wars.

The total population of the Palestine area was estimated in 1914 at 689,281, and in 1922 at 752,048. The overwhelming majority were still, as in 1834, Muslim peasants closely identified with the Palestinian soil, from which they uncomplainingly wrested a living. As Sir John Hope Simpson was later to write of them in his Report (1930, p. 66) " The fellah is neither lazy nor unintelligent. He is a competent and capable agriculturist, and there is little doubt that, were he to be given the chance of learning better methods, and the capital, which is a necessary preliminary to their employment, he would rapidly improve his position. . . . The fellah is tremendously anxious for education for his children, and in one year alone the fellahin voluntarily contributed over £816,000 towards the building of schools in their villages." These peasants were in every sense one with peasants on the other side of the Jordan, and in the adjacent portions of Syria. Above them there was an aristocracy of landowners who had lived in the Country for centuries, and were in their way as instinctively bound to it as were the fellahin themselves. These included such families as the Abdulhadis, the Toukans, the Husseinis, the Nashashibis, and the Khalidis. While essentially Palestinian, these were townsmen and educated people, familiar with the aspirations of the greater Arab world. Many had suffered in the cause of Arab Nationalism, although under the Turks they had been eligible for any post in the whole Ottoman administration, including the highest. In Palestine nearly all officials had been Arabs. There was also a middle class of shopkeepers, schoolmasters and religious personages. These also were essentially Palestinian, but at the same time sympathised in a greater or less degree with Arab aspirations in general. Although there were a few Christians among the inhabitants of most of the towns of Palestine, the majority of the Christian Arabs (some 13% of the total population) lived in compact groups in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Ramallah and Nazareth, in which towns they constituted a great part of the population. Whether descendants of families which had been Christian centuries before the Muslim invasion, or of Crusading families, they also were attached to the Holy Land by the deepest ties, and had always played an important part in its cultural, commercial and political life.

The Jewish Invasion.

By 1922, the date of the first British Census, the total population of Palestine was about three quarters of a million (including Nomads); of these, Jews numbered some 83,790, or 12%. They were mostly members of old religious communities, some of them long settled in Jerusalem and other historic towns, handfuls of nineteenth century colonists, and some thousands of immigrants recently arrived in the country. This trickle of Jewish immigrants (soon to become a flood) and the acute realization of the Arab majority that it threatened not only to delay Arab independence in Palestine, but even to take away for ever the ground of independence, dominated Arab politics through the years of the British Mandate. During these years the Arabs of Palestine watched while all the neighbouring countries achieved independence or some real measure of it. Saudi Arabia and the Yemen had become Sovereign States after the Turkish collapse. Transjordan, under Hussein's son, the Emir, later King Abdullah, which had always enjoyed a large measure of Sovereignty, in 1929 received representative institutions, and by the Treaty of 1946 with Britain, complete independence. Iraq, like Palestine originally a mandated country under Britain, had seen the mandatory regime terminated in 1932, and, under the royal house of Feisal, had been admitted the same year to the League of Nations. In Syria, negotiations with France for the early independence of the Country had resulted in the 1936 Treaty, the full independence of Syria and the Lebanon being implemented at the end of the Second World War. Egypt's sovereignty was unquestionable by 1936. The Arab community of Palestine alone watched its chance of independence receding rather than approaching. By 1948, the year in which the British " threw in their hand," although the Arab community numbered some one and a quarter millions, the Jewish community in Palestine, far more determined, wealthy, better organized and supported by the U.S.A., had reached nearly three quarters of a million. Years of Arab protest, of rebellion, and of boycott, had led to a political and economic weakening of the Palestinian Arab community as a whole, and to the discrediting and exile of its national leaders.

Arab Protest.

As early as 1919, and again in 1920, the Arabs of Palestine had shown their hostility to the suggested terms of the Mandate by two serious outbreaks of violence. In the 1920 disturbance forty-seven Jews were killed and one hundred and forty-six wounded. Mr. Winston Churchill's official interpretation of the Mandate (June 1922) failed to convince the Arab leaders that the British Government had at no time contemplated " the disappearance or the subordination of the Arab population, language or culture in Palestine. . . ." Hebrew had already been constituted an official language on an equal footing with Arabic. Alarmed by this and other realities, the Arabs proclaimed a policy of non-co-operation with the Government so long as it adhered to the Balfour declaration.

The Arab resistance was organised round Palestinian Muslim-Christian Associations and the Palestine Arab Congress, which in May 1921 elected four Muslims and two Christians. They unsuccessfully demanded in London a Palestinian Constitution with a democratic government. The British-made constitution, published in 1922 fell far short of their demands, and the Arabs decided to boycott elections for the suggested legislative council, because in their view, this council was a mockery. With its ten official members, its eight Muslim and two Christian Arabs, and its two Jews, under the chairmanship of the High Commissioner with reserved powers, its decisions would be worthless. Because of the Arab boycott, the legislative council was never formed, and six years later Palestine was still without any form of representative government, although both Arabs and Jews held subordinate positions in the British administration. In 1928 the Arabs presented the High Commissioner with a strongly worded resolution, drawn up by the Seventh Arab Congress which had met in Jerusalem, demanding that, " after ten years of absolute colonial rule in Palestine " a democratic system of government should be granted " in accordance with the Covenant of the League of Nations and pledges and declarations made to the Arabs by the Allies."

In 1929 there were more serious riots in Jerusalem, Hebron and Safad, provoked by feeling against the Jewish " invasion " and a Jewish community in Safad was massacred. A commission of enquiry under Sir Walter Shaw reported that the fundamental cause of the riots was Arab fears of Jewish immigration and land purchase. It suggested closer control of immigration, and protection for Arab peasants and tenants.

After 1933 these Arab fears, which had subsided a little since 1930 with the growing prosperity of Palestine and the slackening of Jewish immigration, were raised to a new pitch by the waves of Jewish refugees seeking safety from Hitler. In 1935 alone, 61,854 legal Jewish immigrants came into Palestine, and in the next year 29,727. The Jews had rejected a second Government offer of a legislative Council, and the country was still bureaucratically governed. Since the middle twenties, however, increasing control of the affairs of the Jewish Community had been vested in the *Jewish Agency*. No similar Arab Agency had been constituted. In this situation the more uncompromising Arab parties, led by Haj Amin al Husseini (Mufti of Jerusalem and President of the Supreme Muslim Council) and the more moderate parties, led by Rageb Hashashibi, made common cause. In November 1935 they presented a memorandum demanding the establishment of democratic government, the prohibition of the transfer of Arab land to Jews, and stoppage of Jewish immigration until the absorptive capacity of Palestine had been determined.

Results of Arab Rising.

These demands were not met, and the Arab leaders then resorted to three years of costly and sporadic rebellion, attempting to gain by force what they had failed to win by negotiation. Superficially they

succeeded. The British White Paper of 1939 definitely rejected the Peel plan for the partition of Palestine (1936), promised Palestine independence after ten years, limited Jewish immigration for the next five years to a total of 75,000 and after that subjected it to Arab consent. But in reality the 1936-39 rebellion very seriously weakened the Palestinian Arabs.

Not only had the initial six-months strike disrupted Arab commercial and economic life and interrupted Arab education, but the years of violence and uncertainty had eaten into the moral and material resources of the whole Arab community. After two years of strain, the local Arab committees and the Higher Committee in Jerusalem were split in two by old family feuds ; and of the total of some four thousand Arabs killed and wounded during these years, an ominous number had been killed by fellow-Arabs. These years of fighting not only led to the differences between the two main Arab parties becoming almost irreconcilable, but to the exiling by the British of leaders, like the Mufti, who had by far the largest and most dangerous public following.

From then on this majority was left leaderless and, in a sense, as disgruntled and irresponsible as the Jacobites were in the British Isles in the eighteenth century. Once exiled, too, the ex-Mufti and his colleagues began naturally to look for support to any potential enemies of the British like the Nazis, who had (in their eyes) the added grace of being anti-Jewish. From the point of view of real Arab interests this proved disastrous, though easily understandable. Not only could the Arabs of Palestine and their supporters in the Arab States be painted as " Fascists," but any belated attempts of the British in Palestine to delegate responsibility could only lead to their advancing the remaining " anti-Mufti " leaders, who never had the allegiance of the majority of Palestinian Arabs, either of the country or of the towns.

When, later, a few progressive leaders did arise inside Palestine—like the Labour leader Sami Taher of Haifa, or Musa Alami of the Arab office and the Land Development Society, they never had any real backing from the British. When Sami Taher was murdered in 1947 by supporters of the Mufti, his murderers were never brought to court. After 1939,. therefore, and during the second World War, with the Arab Higher Committee and all Arab National Committees outlawed, and a strict censorship imposed on the Arab press, the Arabs had nothing to take the place even of the rudimentary organization which had mounted a popular rebellion against British policy and the Jewish " invasion " ; they remained for the most part passive spectators, sat back on the promises of the White Paper, and stagnated politically.

The Jews Strengthened.

The Jewish community, on the other hand, which had lost some 255 civilians and police killed and some 390 wounded during the Arab rebellion, in a real sense came out of the years of disorder stronger than before, despite the hated White Paper of 1939. While their Arab opponents were disarmed, and liable to death sentences in military courts if found guilty of possessing rifles, the Jewish

community kept the official arms which they had been issued to protect their lives and property. These, with the para-military training received in the emergency, were to form the basic equipment of the " underground " war which, from 1945 to 1948, they were to wage so successfully against the British and then against the Arab League.

The real and common danger of the Jewish community had in fact as greatly strengthened Jewish, as it had weakened Arab organisation. It also led to important economic concessions for the Jews, for example, over the building of a port of their own at the rapidly growing Jewish city of Tel Aviv. When the world war broke out in 1939, the Jews volunteered in large numbers for the British forces, dropping their bitter feud with the British over the White Paper in the common fight against the Nazis. This naturally meant that the Jewish community in Palestine was given increased responsibilities by the Mandatory Government, as well as that further military training which, once the war was over, was to be used to further Zionist ends in Palestine, first against the war-weary British and then against the Arabs.

Economics under the Mandate.

Between 1922 and 1948 the standard of living of the Palestinian Arabs was unquestionably raised. Their health improved, their birth-rate became—at 30.7 per thousand—one of the highest recorded in the world, the infant mortality rate fell, by 1944, to below 1% ; their childrens' chance of education increased ; peasants, merchants and industrialists visibly prospered. These gains, however, were surpassed by those of the Jewish community, which aimed at economic as well as at political and cultural autonomy in Palestine, employing Jewish capital exclusively to set Jews to work or to learn. It was naturally this Jewish community, with its great outside resources and its acquired techniques, which advanced more rapidly than the Arab. So, for example, between 1922 and 1944 the Arab rural population increased from 477,693 to 733,870.* and the average income per head, which in 1936 (for a rural Arab population of some 580,000) was just over £7 per year, in 1944 reached £27. Inflated wartime prices, however, meant that its purchasing-power had not advanced in anything like the same degree. By 1944 too, the Arab landowners had taken advantage of the war-time rise of prices to pay off accumulated debts to Arab creditors. But during the same years the Jewish rural population had gone up from 15,172 to 138,220, and the rural income per head, which in 1936 (for a rural Jewish population of 55,300) had been about £34, by 1944 reached £63.

Similarly in education, although the Arab advance was notable, it was small compared with Jewish achievements. The Jews, for instance, who had early gained responsibility for their own schools,

* Doreen Warriner, " Land and Poverty in the Middle East," Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1948, Chapter IV.

by 1944 had 97% of all their children between five and fourteen in school,[1] the Arabs only 32½%. There had indeed been an improvement, especially in the chance of schooling for Arab boys of certain ages, but the chance of secondary education for Arab boys, let alone for Arab girls, was pathetically small, not only by comparison with the Jewish community, but also absolutely. Again, unlike the Jews with their Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Palestinian Arabs had to go outside Palestine for their university education. In commerce, too, the Arabs were hindered by lack of capital and cut off by customs and currency barriers from their Arab neighbours.

Arabs lose ground.

Contrary to the widely accepted view that the increase in Arab wealth in Palestine was directly due to Jewish immigration, the Arabs claimed that much Palestinian Jewish wealth had accrued at their expense. For example, by 1931 there were some 30,000 families of landless agricultural workers among the Arabs and certainly more by 1948. Although not all these had lost their holdings as a result of Jewish purchase, a large number certainly had done so. The lot of these landless labourers was the most wretched of all : it was against the official Jewish policy to employ Arabs and there were few Arab owners who could give them more than low-paid or casual work, either on the land, or in the towns into which they drifted. Then, building and other contracts in Arab areas sometimes went to Jewish firms employing Jewish labour, although similar contracts in Jewish areas hardly ever went to Arabs. There was, for example, a notable case in 1936 in Jaffa, when the Government gave the contract for three Arab schools to a Jewish firm, despite the protests of the Arab Labourers' Federation. More custom would certainly have been diverted from Arab undertakings of all sorts to Jewish, if the high wages paid to Jewish labour had not usually made the price asked for Jewish work higher than that asked for Arab.

All this meant that, to the Arab in Palestine, the Jews by no means seemed to bring the blessings with which the outside world credited them. The Palestinian Arabs knew that their own standard of living and education was superior to that of Arabs anywhere else, with the possible exception of the Lebanese. This was important, but it was not of the first importance. The fact of first importance, which most Palestinian Arabs stubbornly refused in practice to take seriously, was that they were weaker, less well organized, less united, worse-educated, less wealthy in their own country than was the Jewish community.

It was not enough that in 1946 Arabs still had a majority of some 600,000 over the Jews, and still, owned some 47.4% of Palestine, as against the 6.6% owned by the Jews, and the 46% held by the Government (mostly in the Beersheba desert).[2] The Arab majority was leaderless, politically inexperienced and unrealistic. Its hold on the

[1] A Survey of Palestine. Vol. II. Government Printer, Palestine, 1946.

[2] A Survey of Palestine, Government Printer, Palestine, 1946. Vol. I. pp. 255-8, p. 376.

land was insecure, because perhaps one quarter belonged to indifferent owners many of whom had shown themselves ready to sell to Jews for high profit. The rest was splintered among tens of thousands of small-holders, some 63% of whom (over a typical area surveyed) owned less than five acres and the remainder less than two. Even with the skill and capital invested by the Jews, a Palestine acre produced on an average less than a quarter of an acre in Western Europe. This capital was not available to the Arab small-holder ; his poverty and, therefore, his temptation to sell his land for a high price were great. Similarly, in the towns, Arab industries and businesses were mostly tiny affairs, which could neither afford nor benefit from the introduction of modern machinery, nor hope to increase very markedly either the output or the wealth of those concerned in them.

These weaknesses were only brought home to the Palestinians when it was too late, after their histrionic attempt to prevent the establishment of a Jewish State in half of Palestine had led to the loss, not only of that half, but of nearly three-quarters of the Country, and to the destitution of three quarters of a million of their people.

The Palestine War and After.

The immediate ground of the Arab-Jewish war of 1948 was the decision of the United Nations General Assembly (November 29th, 1947) that the only solution for the problem was the ending of the British mandate and the setting-up of an Arab and a Jewish State in Palestine, with an international enclave for Jerusalem (an Anglo-American Committee the year before had advised against partition). The decision was a victory for the Jewish community which had been insisting that all Jewish refugees who needed asylum should be allowed into Palestine regardless of the White Paper or Arab interests. By the time that the British withdrew from Palestine, at midnight on May 14th, 1948, the Arabs and the Jews had been butchering each other for months, with British troops and policy showing less and less tendency or ability to interfere. From the first outbursts of violence in December 1947 it was obvious that the Palestinian Arabs had never realized the type of enemy with whom they were faced, and that they were even less organized or directed than in 1936. Fights with the Jews were undisciplined local outbursts. Each locality was supposed to look after its own defence, in many cases reinforcing volunteers with Syrian and other adventurers who had slipped into the country. The death of the Palestinian leader, Abdul Qadir al-Husseini in April, the massacre of over two hundred Arab villagers by Jewish terrorists, and the successes of the Jewish (illegal) army, the Haganah, in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, Acre and Tiberias had very quickly completed the demoralization of the Palestinian Arabs.

They pretended that they had counted on the British keeping order until the May withdrawal, when the armies of the Arab States promised to take up their cause. But in reality, they, and the Arab States, were completely unprepared and incapable of meeting a

modern enemy as ingenious, determined and united as were the Jews. By the time that contingents of the forces of Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan entered Palestine separately in May 1948, the towns of mixed population in Palestine were in Jewish hands, as were the modern Arab areas of Jerusalem, and the old City was being besieged. Most of the members of the professional classes and their families had fled months before, and were now followed by thousands of townsmen and peasants, whose utter helplessness was brought home to them by the first serious Jewish attack.

Although hundreds of Palestinian Arabs were still operating as guerrillas after May, and many more had attached themselves to the volunteer forces of Fawzi Qawuqji in Galilee, none of the invading Arab armies ever seriously attempted to use them or to rally them, and the ex-Mufti never entered Palestine. The Palestinians, all the same, played an important part in holding the old City of Jerusalem, until they were reinforced by Transjordan's Arab Legion on May 18th. They also supported the Legion's actions at Latrun and elsewhere, and kept a semblance of order, administration and first-aid work going among the civilian population. After May, however, decisions were no longer in their hands, and the fate of Palestine depended on the mutually exclusive designs of the various Arab States, who have continued to use the passions and divisions of the defeated Palestinians to further their own ambitions.

By the time of the first United Nations truce, from June 8th to July 9th, 1948, it was clear that the Arab armies had lost their potential advantages against Israel, and it was only the outcry of the Palestinian Arabs which led to the renewal of fighting from July 10th to 18th. The fall of Lydda, Ramleh and Nazareth during these days completed the disillusionment of the Palestinian Arabs, and added tens of thousands to the refugees, who poured back into areas still held by the Arab forces, and into the neighbouring Arab countries.

Subsequently, during the second United Nations truce, from July 18th, despite loud protests, the Israelis extended their hold of the Negeb at the expense of the Egyptian forces, until they held it all except for some fifty square miles round Gaza, and finally brought Egypt to make a separate armistice ; during October and December 1948 they drove the Lebanese and Fawzi Quawuqji's forces out of what remained to them of Galilee, and secured an armistice early in 1949. By April 1949 Israel had also secured concessions in the central sector of Palestine from Transjordan, whose army alone had shown quality, but was small and sprang from a bare country. The Iraqi army had already handed over to the Arab Legion in part of this central sector, increasing its already heavy responsibilities, and had returned to Baghdad, refusing to negotiate with the Jews.

Distribution of the Refugees.

Although the United Nations had begun to come to the relief of some seven hundred thousand Arab refugees in September 1948, none of the efforts of the U.N. Mediators, or subsequently of the Conciliation Commission or of the Middle East Economic mission

under Mr. Gordon Clapp succeeded in persuading Israel to allow their return. In the spring of 1950 some 200,000 of these refugees were in the Gaza enclave administered and claimed by Egypt, where about 105,000 Arab Palestinians still had their own roofs over them ; about 220,000 were in the Judaean hills in what remains of central Palestine, where also 299,000 of the old population still lived. This area has been claimed, and in fact administered, by Transjordan since September 1948, as the Western province of the " Royal Hashimite Kingdom of the Jordan," to which it was formally joined in April 1950. Another 88,000 Palestinians were refugees in Transjordan proper (where a normal population of nearly 400,000 live in an area roughly equal in size to Scotland, two thirds being desert). A further 100,000 refugees were in Syria, about the same number in Lebanon and some 5,000 in Iraq.* About half of these refugees were in semi-organised refugee camps. Perhaps 160,000 Arabs were still in the areas of Palestine now controlled by Israel, which now cover nearly two-thirds of Palestine. Here, in 1947, some 900,000 Arabs, out of the total Arab population of 1,320,000, had been living. Just over 700,000 of them had their homes in those parts which were to be constituted into a Jewish State by the U.N. partition plan of 1947 ; the remaining 200,000 lived in the additional areas seized by Israel during and since the 1948 war.

Arab League Divided.

Meantime the Arab states were at logger-heads over the future of Palestine. Egypt backed a shadow " All Palestine " government behind the discredited ex-Mufti, and, with Lebanon and Syria, refused to recognise Jordon's incorporation of central Palestine. The Palestinian Arabs there and in Transjordan, although they owed so much to King Abdullah and the Arab Legion and some already held posts in the joint administration, were too much embittered to do more than passively accept the situation.

In this unhappy situation, constructive proposals put forward by the Clapp Mission (November 17th and December 28th, 1949) for " pilot projects " in the Arab States to raise the whole standard of living of the Middle East, and to absorb the refugees into useful work until a settlement is reached, met with little response. Only in Jordan are plans going forward to reclaim land, and to integrate Palestinians into a form at least of representative government. But here, as elsewhere, unemployed, proud and ruined Palestinians are often unwilling to settle down to anything. They vaguely believe that in the economic collapse of an isolated Israel, or in the renewal of war, lies the only hope of their people.

S.G.T.

* S. G. Thicknesse. " Arab Refugees—a Survey of Resettlement Possibilities." Royal Institute of International Affairs. 1949. p. 6.