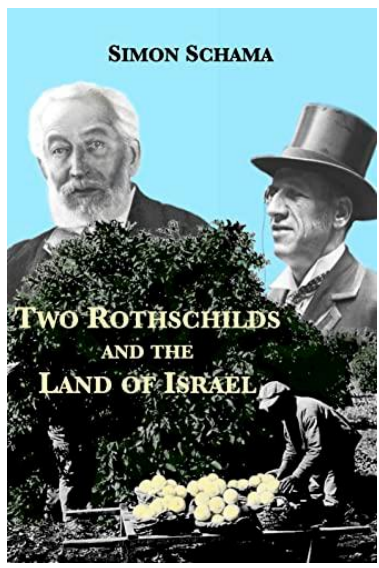




kindle

Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel

van Schama, Simon

Gratis Kindle Instant Preview: <https://read.amazon.com/kp/kshare?asin=B0C6HBGRGR>

38 Highlights | Geel (38)

Pagina 13

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 13

Notwithstanding the imperfections inevitable in both theory and practice, it was manifestly the sustained application of Rothschild means to the ideal of a Jewish regeneration in Palestine which alone made the subsequent resettlement at all feasible. In 1914 Weizmann who, of all the major Zionist leaders, came by far the closest to comprehending Baron Edmond's motivation and the tenacity of his commitment, quoted his characteristically pithy verdict on both the importance of his work and its limitations: 'without me', he is reported as saying, 'the Zionists could not have accomplished anything; without the Zionists my project would have died'.⁴

Pagina 20

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 20

What, as we shall see from the ill-fated encounter between two ineffably aristocratic tempers, Theodor Herzl minded most about Edmond's reluctance to fall in with his plans was his refusal to play the role he believed ought naturally to be allotted to the peer of Jewish plutocrats — to finance the Jewish Trust or Bank which might unlock the door to Palestine.¹³ It was a piquant irony that Herzl of all people should fail to see that in so doing Edmond would be reverting to the very stereotype he was most anxious to eradicate, and would vindicate the most lurid anti-semitic speculations regarding the power of the Rothschilds to suborn empires, subvert the international order and place their foot firmly within the door of the Sublime Porte. There was an ugly symmetry between the assumptions behind Herzl's proposals and the half-fanciful, half-earnest notions of anti-semitic utopian socialists like Charles Fourier who, in *La Fausse Industrie* (1838), magnanimously offered the crown of Judah to Baron James partly as an enticement to salutary expatriation: The restoration of the Hebrews would be a fine prize for MM. de Rothschild; like Ezra and Zerubbabel they could lead the Hebrews back to Jerusalem, there to re-establish the throne of David and Solomon and found a Rothschild dynasty upon it.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 21

But if, unwitting or otherwise, Edmond de Rothschild meant to stave off the crises inherent in monopoly capitalism by the classic resort of exporting it where the orange grows, by that same token he was spectacularly unsuccessful. So far from making money it will be apparent that the settlements and industries at his charge, to use a recurrent phrase, had mangé de l'argent. Even before 1900 something like forty million francs were expended on enterprises which, for the most part, were demonstrably incapable of paying interest much less actually showing a profit. Half a million francs were written off in the single endeavour to establish an above-ground wine-press at the Judean colony of Rishon Le Zion in the early 1890s.¹⁷ The agreement setting up the company to market Palestinian wine in 1896 by which Edmond was to absorb half the losses but refrain from taking any share of the profits, was typical of the 'conditions' attaching to his finance. Patently they were not of the sort to attract more authentic imperialist adventurers such as Rhodes or Goldie. But then if, in his Palestinian capacity, Baron Edmond was no mere philanthropist neither was he out to make a colonial killing. What he was investing in on so fabulous a scale was neither business nor charity but a set of convictions about the Jewish future.

Pagina 22

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 22

should be remembered, flowered amidst the sweatshops of the Russian Pale where its orators and journalists were fiercely competing for the allegiance of a Jewish proletariat with socialist Bundists and the Menshevik and Bolshevik fragments of the Social Democratic Party.

Pagina 36

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 36

keeping, money-changing and hawking. As the massive but chronically uncoordinated Russian economy lurched painfully towards industrialization a disproportionate number of Jews, along with members of other minority groups such as the Old Believers, were to be found in the vanguard of its capitalists and entrepreneurs.³⁴ In the Ukraine the sugar industry was dominated by Jewish tycoon dynasties like the Galician Brodskys, the Balakhovskys, the Zaitsevs and Halperins. Like counterparts in Hungary and Rumania, Israel Brodsky had bought his way into a concern belonging to a landowner in the 1840s and had then expanded, using up-to-date German plant. Forty years later his family owned twenty sugar mills and sixty outlets throughout the Empire. From their headquarters in Odessa they exported not only to the Balkans but to metropolitan Turkey and Asia Minor as well. In Lodz, the booming textile centre of Congress Poland, there were a large number of Jewish concerns, employing for the most part Jewish labour.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 37

Likewise Grigorii Polak who founded the first freight and passenger service on the Volga, and (since Jews were prohibited from direct exploitation) shipped crude oil from the absurdly under-developed Caspian wells, was underwritten by the Paris Rothschilds. One of the Polak dynasty, Mikhail, was to be spared destitution during the course of the Revolution by Edmond's foresight and as a direct result became a Palestinian rather than a Russian entrepreneur.³⁶ The Rothschilds also supported the firm of Dembo and Kagan which in the 1870s constructed the first pipeline for Baku oil. In the prodigious figure of Baron Evzel Gunzbourg and his son Horace — ennobled by the Elector of Hesse-Darmstadt — there was a financier of almost Rothschildian stature if not wealth. Gunzbourg was the founder of the first private bank in Russia and together with Abraham Zack dominated the St Petersburg money (or rather debt) market. Aside from discounting bills and financing railway expansion, Gunzbourg was an essential link in the chain of connections with the Paris and Amsterdam exchanges where the Russian government borrowed astronomic sums to keep them from total insolvency. Between 1889 and 1893 it is said that 3.9 m. francs were raised in Paris alone — and such sums would have been inconceivable without the good offices of the Rothschilds. The Russian Jewish captains of cash and industry were not just comparable to their French counterparts; they were actually enmeshed in a direct economic relationship.

Pagina 48

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 48

True the Russky Evrei, very much the organ of the Jewish bourgeois élite, admonished the Lovers of Zion for playing into the hands of the anti-semites and abandoning the struggle for human rights within Russia. But having borne the burden of the ill-fated liberal demonstration and seen its impotence when faced with violent reaction, they were prepared to subscribe to the sharp dictum of Zacharias Frankel who had declared that 'for the Russian Jews there is only one way out: to leave Russia and settle under a sky where the law recognizes human rights'.

Pagina 58

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 58

Alphonse de Toussenel, who in *Les Juifs, Rois de l'Epoque* provided the standard anti-semitic text until superseded in the 1880s by the pseudo-eugenics and ethnological hocus pocus of Comte Arthur de Gobineau and the poisonous polemics of Drumont's *La France Juive*. Like Marx, de Toussenel obliged the Jew to bear the whole burden of sin for nascent industrial capitalism but in addition isolated him as the perpetuator of its intrinsically most exploitative and worthless forms. Both he and another important socialist writer, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, who exercised a preponderant influence on the early development of French socialism, emphasized that neither the Jew nor his victims were capable of freeing themselves from these besetting vices by behavioural therapy. They were so ingrained as to have become naturally unnatural and, they hinted, hereditarily transmitted. Proudhon insisted that:

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 59

They were, in short, economic anti-beings positively inviting chastisement or even worse. 'Not for nothing', Proudhon insisted, 'have the Christians called them deicides. The Jew is the enemy of mankind. That race must be sent back to Asia or exterminated.'⁷⁰

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 59

One can only guess at the degree to which Edmond de Rothschild was affected by the sinister undertow of anti-semitism in French public life and politics. After the Affaire Dreyfus its uglier manifestations were to be made dramatically evident. Though others of his family and the French Jewish élite were to turn a blind eye to its political implications Edmond himself became increasingly apprehensive about the Jewish future in the years leading up to the Great War. Anti-semitism was not, after all, a monopoly of the left. Not a few of the ancienne race nobility, especially among the Legitimists, some of whom had been entertained in Baronne Betty's (Edmond's mother's) salon, greeted the revelations of the Panama Scandal in 1892⁷¹ as prima facie evidence of the defilement of French institutions by the slime of Jewish money. Edmond, moreover, was sufficiently exercised by the runaway success of Drumont's *La Libre Parole*, which had made such capital out of the wretched ends of Cornelius Herz and Baron Jacques Reinach, to respond to Zadoc Kahn's request that he help finance a counter-broadside, *La Vraie Parole*, in 1893. But much to the disappointment of the young Austrian editor, Isidore Singer, the promise, if it were made, does not seem to have been kept.⁷² Certainly Edmond preferred the practical effect of his Palestinian demonstration that Jews were indeed fit for occupations other than money-changing and stockbroking, to any more overt political gesture.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 65

More surprisingly perhaps, the French Rothschilds continued to be devoted to the Jewish community over which they presided with prodigious flair and expertise. They had all received a religious education and upbringing in addition to the disciplines of French classical learning, and very early on in adulthood assumed the offices at the apex of the Jewish institutional establishment. Both Alphonse and Gustave took their seats on, respectively, the Consistoire Central and the Consistoire de Paris before they were twenty-five. Both succeeded to the Presidency (Alphonse after James's death, in 1869) and remained in harness for long unbroken stretches, Gustave dying in office in 1910.⁸¹ It may have been Edmond's relatively junior place in this constellation — though he too of course took his seat on the consistories — which gave him an added incentive to strike out more adventurously on his own. But as a dynastic group the Rothschilds indisputably dominated the communal institutions of Parisian, and thus of French, Jewry. They were to be found not only on its governing bodies, but presiding over charitable associations like the Comité de Bienfaisance (Benevolent Committee) which distributed annually around half a million francs to deserving causes like schools, hospitals, burial societies and the Jerusalem community.⁸² They patronized scholarly and literary enterprises like the Société des Etudes Juives established in 1879, built orphanages, homes for the needy, Ecoles de Travail; provided a 'useful' education for young Jewish ladies — the whole portfolio in fact of classic Jewish philanthropy. And at the centre of all this activity was the handsome synagogue in the rue de la Victoire, opened in 1875 and raised by an issue of bonds launched by the Consistoire de Paris in which the Rothschilds had donated a substantial, if not preponderant, portion. With Zadoc Kahn as its Rabbi and after 1890 with him as Grand Rabbin of France, it was the central habitat of the Jewish grandes: where their children married, their families repaired on High Holydays and where the communal and kinship ties were most in evidence.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 86

Edmond de Rothschild did not exactly plunge headlong into the Palestinian venture as the result of the two quite separate, though equally urgent, appeals. Even though he gave Feinberg the impression that, were further assistance needed at Rishon it would not be withheld, his commitment, at least until Dugourd's report had been received, was more in the nature of a preliminary reconnaissance than a fully fledged enterprise. It was, he told Samuel Hirsch, to be a concours partiel provided in order to make a Jewish pied-à-terre in Palestine more secure.¹¹³ His own part in the matter was to be scrupulously anonymous and the sums provided to be used strictly for housing and irrigation. Edmond, it was apparent, was not yet in the business of redeeming the Promised Land; rather he was putting the site under inspection and testing the quality of the labour.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 169

A primary managerial problem was to identify the point at which necessary investment became a perennial subsidy which, so far from assisting the productive efficiency of the farm acted as a disincentive to resourcefulness; in other words the point at which use became waste. The relationship of input to output was further complicated by the intrinsic importance of so many non-economic independent variables. Edmond was not, after all, in the business of patronizing a company of Levantine white planters so much as founding a new, specifically Jewish society. Hence a number of economically gratuitous expenses — the wages of a Hebrew teacher or the cost of constructing a synagogue — were indispensable items on his cultural inventory. Since his overriding aim was to lay the foundations for a permanent settlement the ostensible commitment to profit and loss accountability was unconvincing, not least to those recurring on the debit side of the ledger. Even if particular colonies or enterprises showed consistent losses over a period of years and required further liberal transfusions of capital to allow them to continue at all Edmond shrank from drawing the most austere conclusion. But though foreclosure was ruled out there remained an unresolved tension between the claims of social consolidation and the operational costs of the effort. So long as the Baron was personally in charge, however, money was the subject, not the master, of Jewish colonization. The way in which levels of support were geared to social expectations rather than commercial results tended to disguise the real economic cost of sustaining the larger colonies. Nowhere was this more graphically illustrated than in what, by 1900, had come to be considered the 'leading sector' of Jewish farming in Palestine: viticulture. To be sure, those responsible for its progress over fifteen years had cause for satisfaction with their accomplishments. By the turn of the century nearly 25,000 dunams had been planted out with vines, over 200,000 vines since 1894 after the phylloxera aphid, making a belated entry into the Levant, had laid waste a major part of the original stock. Rishon Le Zion and Zikhron Ya'akov, with cellars of several thousand hectolitres' storage capacity, had both become major producing centres and had become prosperous on the proceeds of the industry. In 1896, with direct help from Edmond, Elyahu Lewin-Epstein, the founder of Rehovot, established the marketing organization, Carmel, thus securing the export monopoly for sales to Russia and Poland. Despite stiff competition from Bessarabian and other Caucasian wines, Carmel had made promising inroads into the Jewish market in the Pale. Further outlets were created in Germany, Britain and Egypt, though an attempt to find a clientele among the immigrant communities of the United States proved premature.²⁰⁷ For all the fluctuations of the market the future seemed promising for the expansion of the Palestinian wine industry. There were, however, those who had their doubts. In 1899 Adolphe Starkmeth, the engineer and acting administrator at Zikhron, compiled an exhaustive report which amounted to an indictment of the way in which the colony had been managed and expressed the gravest reservations about its future prospects.²⁰⁸ The whole of the wine industry, he claimed, was so heavily subsidized that its true economic performance was disguised. However

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 171

unpalatable Starkmeth's conclusions, it was indisputable that the industry had evolved in sharp divergence from Edmond's original plans and at a cost which even he found unnerving. The 1880s were a period when oriental and North African — like American — viticulture was taking full advantage of the prostration of the French industry before the double scourge of phylloxera and mildew.²⁰⁹ By 1890 Turkey was exporting nearly 750,000 hectolitres (around 15 m. gallons) a year and the French government importing from Algeria approximately 1.5 m. hectolitres, both to strengthen the light Languedoc growths and to make up the deficiency in quantity.²¹⁰ There had been vines in Syria and Palestine since Biblical times of course, but the first modern growths were put down in Ksara in the Lebanon in 1857 by some enterprising Fathers of the Society of Jesus. Dugourd had enthused in his original report of December 1882 about the potential of Palestinian grapes, and between 1884 and 1886 around Rishon there had been a great deal of uprooting of the ancient indigenous vines and replanting with some of the hardier north African varieties, such as Bourdalou and Braquet, along with the sweet Spanish Alicante and a few of the more resistant American vines. But it was only in 1888, when Ermens first accompanied Scheid to Rishon and Zikhron, that the possibility of producing wine in commercial quantities was seriously pursued.

Pagina 194

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 194

Moreover, since the emergence of political Zionism in 1896-7 as a major force, he had been beleaguered from another direction. Having persevered manfully in the face of either stony apathy or bemused scepticism from his family and the Paris Jewish élite in general, he found himself publicly upbraided by Herzl and the Zionist leadership for doing good by stealth. In the parlance of their Congresses, the 'Rothschild administration' had become a byword for everything that was held to be morally insidious and politically craven in the Jewish resettlement of Palestine. At best it was an 'irrelevance' to the majestic vista of the coming Judenstaat, at worst an impediment to its realization. At the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897 a modest and rather ceremonial motion, essentially a gesture of courtesy rather than an unrestrained panegyric, was proposed thanking Baron Edmond for his munificence in the work of colonization. Herzl had it struck from the agenda. Rothschild himself had spoken of the 'cankers' disfiguring the growth of the settlements. In so embattled an atmosphere it was scarcely surprising that he looked to others to help him in the work of weeding them out.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 196

The agitation became so alarming that in February 1901 the Odessa Committee decided to send a special delegation consisting of farmers, workers and representatives of the Palestinian wine industry to see Edmond in Paris and try to prevail on him to revise the JCA policy. It had originally been hoped that it might be led by Herzl himself and his principal lieutenant Max Nordau, but predictably enough the Leader ruled out anything resembling supplication. The delegation was impressive enough even without him, including the Russian engineer Menahem Ussishkin, who was not altogether unsympathetic to the practical work of colonization, and Ahad Ha'am who was, Serge (Yehiel) Tchlenow, Wolf Gluskin and Menashe Meirowitz of the Rishon cave, and other important figures from the colonies, David Shub of Rosh Pinna, Moshe Smilansky of Rehovot and Moshe Karmiel from Zikhron. The advance publicity in the Jewish press made known the burden of the colonists' grievances. In effect they attacked many of the evils which Starkmeth and Meyerson had pointed out two years before: expensive agricultural extravagances, too little land for arable farming, a top-heavy administration, excessive reliance on Arab labour and a cumbersome dependence on Paris for decision-making. They were, they said, starved of responsibility and asked if more control of their own affairs might not be devolved to colonists' elected committees. Edmond, of course, had not agreed to receive them in order to hear a lecture on how to run his settlements. As usual he did most of the talking while the delegates stood, rather crestfallen and cap in hand, with only Ahad Ha'am, by his

Pagina 197

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 197

own account, grinding his teeth in mute chagrin. The Baron began by expressing surprise that since they had the time and money to come to Paris — and not for the first time — they should feel anything was wrong with their affairs. If he had consented to see them at all it was only because he had something to say to them.²⁴² Then followed a fusillade of reprimands and criticisms. 'I am the Yishuv,' he announced baldly, and no one had any right either to interfere in his affairs or to express an opinion on his actions. All that they had done up till then:

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 210

The gap was too wide, though, to bridge short of a lightning conversion by Edmond. Instead Leven advised Herzl merely to use his influence at the Porte to advance the cause of colonization. If, after some time, that was going well the Baron would think again. But Herzl was not intending to put himself on probation. Rothschild became his *bête noire* for the rest of his life. He believed that the Baron and JCA were bending over backwards to put obstacles in the way of any arrangement with Abdul Hamid. During his journey to Palestine in 1898 to meet the Kaiser he took undisguised satisfaction from the ‘dumbfounded’ reaction of the administrators at Mikve Israel when the mounted Emperor, riding past the farm, struck up a casual conversation.²⁵⁶ He was unimpressed with Rishon Le Zion: ‘for a poor village this is a prosperous place. But if one has imagined it as more than a poor settlement one is disappointed. Thick dust on the roads, a bit of greenery... Fear of Monsieur le Baron hovers over everything.’ After being shown the cellars ‘with elaborate ceremony’ he observed:

Pagina 226

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 226

Paradoxically, the socialist-populist notion of rights conferred by labour was not so far from the official JCA axiom of converting, after a period of probationary labour, the share-cropping tenancy into long-term lease. Of course the JCA (as PICA afterwards) was adamant about retaining absolute property rights in its own name where it had not actually sold off its title deeds. In times when pressure of immigrants on available land was severe — as in the 1930s and 40s — PICA’s (undisputed) right to decide which land should or should not be leased was criticized for being exercised with an alleged unconcern for the ‘populist’ view. But for the time being the interests of the newer settlers, or the children of the older generation, and those of the JCA converged. This was especially the case in Galilee, where the immediate objective was to get as much land as possible under cultivated occupation so as to avoid any possibility of confiscation. With the phasing out of Edmond’s massive plantations in the Upper Galilean settlements, especially at Rosh Pinna and Yesud HaMa’ala, and with the addition of land at Metulla and Mishmar Hayarden, more space became available for the classic cereal farming — *grande culture* — favoured by Kalvarisky and the JCA managers.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 277

In any event, the contribution made by members of the French and English families towards extracting official expressions of approval for the establishment of a Jewish 'homeland' in Palestine, went well beyond lip-service or mere standing in as token figure-heads for the 'real' Zionists. In many cases they were the real Zionists. A number of them stood at the centre of a network of influence and association extending at one pole from the most ardent of the Manchester Zionists like Harry Sacher and Israel Sieff, to discreet and grave personages in the Cabinet secretariat or the junior offices of the War and Foreign ministries at the other: men such as Leo Amery, Theo Russell and Robert Cecil.³³⁹ As ever, much of the momentum for the bifurcated strategy of persuasion undertaken by the Rothschilds — inwards at the Jewish community and outwards at politicians and statesmen — came from Baron Edmond in Paris. Throughout the war Weizmann paid regular visits to him at the house in the rue Faubourg St Honoré and to his villa at Boulogne-sur-Seine. Afterwards, in *Trial and Error*, Weizmann paid unstinting tribute to the consistency and fortitude of his commitment: The

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 278

At his first visit after the outbreak of the war, on 28 December 1914, Weizmann was taken aback to discover just how far along the road to expressly political Zionism Edmond had advanced. From a benevolent onlooker he seemed to have become an active accomplice. 'The Baron was magnificent,' he wrote to his wife, 'he is ready to go the whole hog. We talked for five hours, in two sessions. He wants a State, nothing less.'³⁴¹ Weizmann may well have been carried away by his delighted enthusiasm, for little that Edmond was to say subsequently corroborated that assumption, at least not in the short term. But it was certainly true that he was prepared to lend his support to the lobbying of strategically placed public men in both France and Britain, provided that it was done discreetly and with the minimum of publicity. He agreed with Weizmann, in 1914, that there was no point in the Zionists attempting to collaborate with the liberal-assimilationist anti-Zionist faction of the Jewish élite, and even revived the old Herzlian idea of a chartered company through which to co-ordinate the financing and economic developments of Jewish Palestine.³⁴² How was it that, by December 1914, Edmond was apparently prepared to countenance and even advocate notions which, when they had been presented fifteen years earlier by Theodor Herzl, had been so scathingly dismissed? First, as the experience of the Palestine trip earlier that year and the collaboration with Weizmann over the Institute/University showed, the Baron had mellowed a good deal in his basic attitude towards the Zionist enterprise. Privately he confessed that he felt he had misjudged figures such as Nordau and even Ahad Ha'am — though the memory of Herzl himself still rankled.³⁴³ Secondly, and more important, his insistence on the subordination of political to tangible economic goals had been based on the endurance of Ottoman power. So long as Turkey remained master of the Levant he believed it utopian to indulge in grandiose plans for the implantation of a Jewish political entity. However moth-eaten the condition of the Empire, its evident hostility towards anything so ambitious as an attempt to constitute a separate Jewish nationality could only, he believed, prejudice the chances of quiet immigration and settlement. With Turkey's slightly belated entry into the conflict as an ally of the Central Powers, however, that premise was abruptly swept aside. As shrewdly as Weizmann or Herbert Samuel, Edmond could see that the partition of the Empire was likely to be on any war-aims agenda, and that it would be folly for the Jews not to exploit such an eventuality. The timing, he conceded, was not ideal. 'The whole thing has come to us five or ten years too soon,' Weizmann reported him saying:

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 287

Leading the regiment of Rothschild ladies, after Mrs James, was Mrs Charles — née Roszika Wertheimstein — who, despite what Weizmann described as the ‘melancholy’ disposition of her husband, proved herself to be a forthright and articulate advocate.³⁶¹ The Marchioness of Crewe, whose husband had been Secretary of State for India before Edwin Montagu and was latterly Lord President of the Council, was another willing convert following exposure to Weizmann’s magnetic personality and his exposition of the miseries of Jewish persecution. She was born Margaret Primrose, the daughter of Lord Rosebery and his wife Hannah, the only child of Baron Mayer de Rothschild, and was thus perfectly placed for contacts in both the Liberal and Anglo-Jewish élites. Weizmann came to regard what he called her ‘salon’ in Curzon Street as a hunting ground for new allies, and in April 1916 Vera Weizmann wrote to Mrs James of her satisfaction at one such gathering on overhearing Robert Cecil, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, remark to Lady Crewe that ‘We are all in this house Weizmannites’.³⁶² Others marshalled into the Zionist lobby, if not as outright supporters at least as tacit sympathizers, included Leo Amery, in 1917 Secretary to Lord Derby, the Minister of War, and Theo Russell, Diplomatic Secretary to Grey. Through the Rothschild connection — and despite the recalcitrant opposition of the Mrs Leopold-Edwin Montagu-Claude Montefiore axis — a clutch of politicians of junior ministerial rank, all strategically placed in offices which could directly affect government thinking on the Near East strategy, were canvassed for the Zionists. It was an extraordinary concurrence of chance and determination, but one which in the end paid handsome dividends.

Pagina 300

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 300

On his trip to the United States Balfour was reported as announcing, ‘I am a Zionist.’ It was a testimony to the advocacy of men like Weizmann, Samuel and James that governments now seemed to be queuing up to offer their endorsements. In May Sokolow succeeded in extracting from the Italians official approval of the Palestine enterprise and on the 28th of that month Weizmann felt sufficiently confident to publish in The Times an unequivocal statement of Jewish national aspirations in that country. James had even gone so far — though with not entirely happy results — as to commission from Ernle Richards, the Professor of International Law at Oxford, a draft constitution for British Palestine.³⁸¹ An important final piece in the jigsaw was slotted in during the first week of June when Sokolow received from Cambon, an official at the French Foreign Office, a document which looked forward to: the renaissance of the Jewish nation in the land from which the people of Israel were exiled so many centuries ago...

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 301

As Isaiah Friedman rightly notes, this legitimization of the premise of Jewish nationalism not only anticipated the Balfour Declaration but actually went farther than the British document in attaching the Zionist cause to the war aims of the Allies. It seems most unlikely that Edmond had had any hand in bringing about such a favourable and unexpected development. At that time, while approving of the London démarches, he was mostly concerned to head off, by diplomatic finesse, any possible adverse reaction from the anti-Zionists on the Alliance.³⁸³ But one may be sure that in approving what one might call the 'Cambon declaration' the French government meant not to underwrite in any way the possibility of British unilateral action in Palestine, but on the contrary to preclude it.

Pagina 303

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 303

Deeds rather than words — a suitable Rothschild motto — prompted James to arrange his secondment to the second battalion of the 39th Fusiliers which was recruited in Britain and sent to join Allenby's forces in Palestine. So his second tour of duty in the war fulfilled the offer made to Weizmann in 1914 to go out to Palestine and do whatever might be asked to promote the Jewish cause.³⁸⁶ It was all a far cry from Louis-le-Grand, Trinity, the rue Laffitte and Royal Ascot.

Pagina 380

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 380

If the conduct of some British officials at the time of the riots put great strain on whatever 'special relationship' there might have been between PICA and the British, the findings of the Shaw Commission into the disturbances and the publication of the White Paper sundered it completely.⁵⁰³ As Honorary President of the Jewish Agency (a global body which included non-Zionist as well as Zionist opinion, founded in 1929), Edmond had urged Weizmann to resign his Presidency of the Zionist executive in the hope of so drastic a response forestalling its appearance. Weizmann in fact resigned after the document appeared and, despite the predictable attempts of Franck and Wormser to dissuade him Edmond published in *The Times* an open letter to Weizmann expressing the 'state of shock' in which the 'Jews of the whole world' had been plunged, and his own grief at the violation of what had been held to be sacred pledges. James, who had been elected Liberal MP for the Isle of Ely the previous year was similarly moved to make one of his comparatively rare parliamentary speeches, denouncing the White Paper, and was instrumental in establishing the Palestine Parliamentary Group to try to counteract the influence of the Balfour Declaration backsliders.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 381

For the Rothschilds, as for Chaim Weizmann, the White Paper of 1930 — even though it was repudiated by Ramsay MacDonald in February 1931⁵⁰⁴ — marked the beginning of the end of the hopes they had nursed since 1917 for a peaceful but steady progression towards an independent National Home. The ‘gradualist’ or ‘practical Zionist’ approach advocated by the Weizmann-Sokolow leadership which had put economic and cultural consolidation before assertive political nationalism, had been based on the premise that, whatever the problems, the British Government would not actively impede progress towards the goal of a Jewish nation however long it might take to realize. In 1921, prior to the official statement of how the Declaration was to be interpreted under the Mandate, Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, following a conference at Cairo to deliberate on British Middle East interests, travelled to Palestine to consult with Samuel, Zionist and Arab leaders and the Emir Abdullah who had been elevated to the newly created Kingdom of Trans-Jordan. In his entourage were James and Dorothy de Rothschild, with whom he visited first Tel Aviv and then the vineyards and plantations of Rishon Le Zion. At the settlement he was given the usual ceremonial treatment with a mounted guard of honour, tables dressed with palms and laden with oranges and grapes. The mandatory inspection of the colony’s blooming youth together with the equally obligatory speech from Meirowitz were duly followed by a forte Churchillian performance in which he specifically promised that ‘no obstacle will be put in your path; no individual would prevent you from accomplishing your work which contributes not only to your well-being but that of the other inhabitants of the country... Every time in the temple you invoke the blessings of God on my King and Government I also offer you my own blessing.’⁵⁰⁵

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 383

For all these flowery celebrations there were those who saw in the subsequent White Paper the seeds of betrayals to come. Weizmann, who very reluctantly recommended co-operation with the British on the basis of the document, himself believed that nothing, other than ‘lip service’, was left of the Balfour Declaration. This was perhaps over-pessimistic. Churchill had in fact reiterated the Government’s determination to fulfil the terms of the Declaration — that is to create a ‘centre in which Jewish people as a whole may take on grounds of race and religion, an interest and pride’ and to do so through immigration and settlement. But at the same time he repeated that this could only be done in so far as economic conditions would permit no infringement on land or employment of the indigenous population (a condition the Zionists willingly allowed) and that, in no circumstances, was it to be the imposition of a Jewish nationality on the Arab majority.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 397

The image of lordly dash and hauteur was not without some substance. In 1922 James and Dorothy had inherited the stupendous, seventy-room Waddesdon Manor, built on a Buckinghamshire hill by Baron Ferdinand — a transplanted Viennese Rothschild — in the style of a Loire château in the 1870s. Simply maintaining Waddesdon and its peerless collection of eighteenth-century furniture and objets d'art in good order would have been a colossal undertaking.⁵²⁰ But James managed this as well as indulging at the same time his special passions for Liberal politics and horse-racing. In 1929 he became MP for the Isle of Ely. He followed the increasingly forlorn trail of Samuel's 'pure' Liberals in the House of Commons, reduced after 1935 to a mere handful, and spoke, whenever necessary to defend Liberal policies and the interests of Palestinian and world Jewry.⁵²¹

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 402

Relative to the dramatic growth of the rest of Palestine however, the Rothschild establishment was marking time. In 1900 its settlements covered 145,000 dunams or 67% of all Jewish land in Palestine; in 1914 the figures were, respectively, 235,000 and 56% and by 1930 around 400,000 and 34%.⁵²⁶ In 1914 there had been 45 Jewish settlements of various types of which JCA (CP) accounted for 24; by 1931 the balance was 30 out of 124. Immediately after the war Edmond had clinched some important deals with Elias Sursuq and a number of other Beiruti absentee landowners, mostly for properties in Lower Galilee and the upper Jordan basin. But the major regions of acquisition by the Zionist agencies — the valleys of Jezreel and Beisan (Beit Shean) — were not areas where PICA had a strong interest.⁵²⁷ Moreover, by the 1930s the flow of capital through the Jewish National and the Zionist Foundation Funds was on a scale which began to overtake anything the PICA could possibly match. Between 1921 and 1937 the two principal Zionist agencies brought in nearly £P11 m. whereas the PICA investment in public works — industrial enterprises, land settlements and subsidies — probably amounted to about a third of that figure.⁵²⁸ This growing imbalance was reflected in other figures. Of the seventy-two new settlements founded between 1932 and 1939 PICA was responsible for just eight.⁵²⁹ In other sectors, too, PICA influence remained relatively self-contained within the parameters of economic development compared to the infiltration of the labour Zionist ethic into virtually every key institution of the Yishuv. The workers' unions which had such weak bargaining power before the war were now a paramount force as the unified Histadrut and in 1930 founded a political wing, the Mapai.⁵³⁰ The co-operatives like Tnuva and Hamashbir which acted as wholesalers for the farms' produce were likewise dominated by the labour organizations. Health and educational facilities were also run collaboratively and acknowledging this fact in the 1920s — in spite of his concern for the preservation of traditional Judaic instruction in school curricula — Edmond had handed over PICA responsibility for the running of those institutions to the general supervision of the Vaad Ha Le'umi (the Jewish National Representative Council). The only major challenge to the predominance of the labour organizations came from the militant right-wing Revisionists led by Jabotinsky. But while he sympathized with their antipathy to monopoly socialism, Edmond found their flirtation with militarism, their mystique of violence and ethnic messianism, Jabotinsky's demagoguery, and his part in the overthrow of Weizmann at the 1930 Zionist Congress, deeply distasteful.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 415

moreover, an additional consideration. After the Peel Commission reported in 1937 that the 'irrepressible conflict... between two national communities' could be solved only in the context of a partition,⁵⁵⁰ it was felt imperative by the Zionists to stake out as strongly as possible claims in Galilee, Beisan and other areas of relatively sparse Jewish population. No inch of land which, for want of occupancy, could revert to Arab tenure or be considered 'vacant' should be overlooked. A mythology became established, fostered especially by the Zionist press, that PICA sat tight on vast assets of land which it refused to relinquish for settlement, partly because of apprehension about the political complexion of the settlers and partly because, instead of providing no-deposit long-lease agreements like the Jewish National Fund, it insisted on selling its property for a remunerative return.⁵⁵¹ Much of this was pure fiction. James himself had on many occasions gone on record as being against the restraint of new settlement and was a prime mover in the establishment, not only of Ashdot Ya'aqov in 1933 but the 'Massada' group near Yavniel which became the kibbutz Mishmar Hashlosha. Of the 65,000 cultivable dunams acquired by PICA since 1914 45,000 had been leased out by 1940.⁵⁵² Fully aware that it was time that all the land-holding agencies fell into line over the forms of settlement, the Gottlieb-Wolfson regime was prepared to abandon Edmond's original preoccupation with loosely associated communities of small freeholders and lease out property to collectives or co-operatives on the easiest terms, provided it was satisfied with their credentials for making the farm(s) viable. There were other impediments in the way of simply handing over tracts of land on demand as the newspapers Davar and Ha'aretz suggested PICA should. If the experience of the 1920s and 1930s had taught anything it was that, however commendable in themselves, no amount of dedication, fortitude, industry and idealism would enhance the chances of agricultural success. By this time the pioneer spirit had become a euphemism for technology and the best pioneer a combine harvester. What was really needed for a settlement to make a go of mixed farming was soil amelioration and analysis in advance, deep ploughing, intensive irrigation, modern livestock accommodation to ensure against disease and ample veterinary facilities in the case of failure, chemical fertilizers — even pesticides. All these had to be incorporated within the original settlement budget and the enormous extra costs naturally demanded very careful scrutiny before irreversible commitments were entered into which could end up wasting time, land and money.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 422

reclaimed from the Atlit and Kabbara swamps. They also emulated the Galilean group in putting up improvised but semi-permanent buildings and barricading themselves in from eviction, justifying the action as necessary defence against Arab raids and 'incursions'. The situation on the coast was made even more sensitive by virtue of the fact that the fishing boats were being used to help the illicit nocturnal landings of prohibited immigrants.⁵⁵⁹ While that action compounded the illegality of their conduct it was out of the question for PICA to collaborate in the enforcement of a policy which, like any other Zionists, it considered an unmitigated evil. Acting very much in the spirit of his father, James had spoken eloquently in the House of Commons condemning the 1939 White Paper as not only a capitulation to Arab terror but a systematic deprivation of European Jewry of its last and only refuge.⁵⁶⁰ Not all these wrangles arose from a clash of ethos and ideology.

Pagina 423

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 423

The casus belli was water. Early on the growers had complained that they were being overcharged for their water allotments given that local commercial rates were said to range between £P6 and £P10 per dunam.⁵⁶¹ Those complaints grew more vociferous as it became plain that PICA had grossly underestimated the irrigation needs of the groves and overestimated the capacity of its well. Instead of three to eight days' adequate saturation irrigation, watering took in the region of three to four weeks, and that meant a chaotic competition between the growers for timetabling their share of the water. Faced with this growing disorder PICA made some effort to find new wells but in the end decided to hand over the whole responsibility for irrigation to negotiation between its satellite, the Samaritan Water Company and a co-operative it urged the growers to form. The trouble arose from the differential in the price to be charged by the Company and the sums already paid, usually as debts, by the growers to PICA. The real cost, the growers insisted, would in fact be much lower than the sums they had incurred were it not for the Water Company having to incorporate in its price the amortization of its new wells, pipes, pumps and working overheads. They therefore argued that since PICA had been contractually obliged to supply 'adequate irrigation' (and much, of course turned on the interpretation of adequate) 'at a fair price', and since their own indebtedness resulted from its failure to honour that clause, the least it could do was to pay that part of the new price represented by installation and capital equipment costs. The growers themselves would then be liable only for running costs. To do otherwise was to penalize them for PICA's blunder and its misrepresentation of a situation which, if accurately explored would never have attracted their investment.⁵⁶² To gauge the true difference between the new balance and the sums they had already been charged they asked for independent arbitration.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 435

In his testimony to the Round Table Conference of 1939, which merely confirmed that the Mandate having failed, the Peel-Woodhead partition was going to fail too, the representative of the Mufti even intimated that unspecified numbers of Jews already in Palestine would have to be removed.⁵⁸⁰ All this took place against the grotesque scenario of the Powers at Evian in 1938 pretending concern for the fate of Jewish refugees and then piously washing their hands of any responsibility for it,⁵⁸¹ while the condition of European Jews became progressively more desperate. The final ignominy took place in May with the publication of a White Paper limiting Jewish immigration to 75,000 (to include 25,000 refugees, mostly the aged and children) and then ceasing entirely unless Arab assent were obtained. In a characteristic fulmination Churchill called it 'an act of repudiation' and 'another Munich'. Others in the House of Commons like Leo Amery and Herbert Morrison exposed it as a gesture of pathetic appeasement which, as usual, capitulated to the stronger party and then attempted to pretend that what it had done was just as well as expedient.⁵⁸²

Pagina 436

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 436

'The White Paper,' James stated in the House, 'proposes in so many words that Great Britain shall wash its hands of its obligations. It is stated that it will take ten years to do this — ten years to clear out of Palestine. Who asked the Government to do this? The Mufti and the people who have created the trouble, disorder and deaths that have taken place.' He wanted, still wanted, a Jewish Home as a dominion, even a full colony rather than anything like the moral abnegation contained in the Paper implemented. (Even in 1955 he hoped that Israel could be part of the British Commonwealth.)⁵⁸⁴ The truth of the matter was as stark as it was simple. 'For the majority of Jews who go to Palestine it is a question of migration or of physical extinction; for the Arabs it is a question of addition to their present vast territories.' In a gesture which tells us more about James than about the Chamberlains, he appealed to the Prime Minister to honour the memory of his father who, in 1903, had taken the first steps to try to associate the British Empire with the creation of a Jewish homeland at El Arish.⁵⁸⁵

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 438

Nothing became the PICA so well as the manner of its ending. It ensured for the history of the Rothschild enterprise in Palestine a kind of symmetry: its consummation, like its inception, resulting from an act of imposing moral grandeur. If it had taken considerable breadth of vision to impel Edmond to bother at all with the handful of querulous Russian and Rumanian Jews scrabbling around their dried-up wells to extract some sort of peasant subsistence, it took a different, but no less remarkable imaginative bravura to hand over, 75 years later, to the Israeli national institutions, its remaining 150,000 dunams, the factories and utilities that had stemmed from the original commitment. That the 1957 'bequest' was crowned with the outright gift of some £1.2 m. for the building of a new Knesset (parliament) was an appropriate symbol of both Rothschilds' concern that the Jewish State should remain within the traditions of western political society. Both acts went against the historical grain. Edmond's decision in 1882-3, and the tenacity he showed in the trying years that followed, had belied the facile assumption that all Rothschilds were so eager to shake the dust of the Frankfort Judengasse off their feet that they would stand aloof from any ethnic entanglement that could compromise their position as the leaders of a new élite. Likewise James's testament, for a while at any rate, disposed of the stock caricature of PICA as an obsessively formal and alien body, prone to corporate self-perpetuation and devoting disproportionate energy to legalistic nit-picking at the expense of the higher values embodied in the establishment of the Jewish nation state.

Pagina 444

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 444

The War of Independence was the real trial by fire for the PICA settlements, especially those in the Galilee, but well before the summer of 1948, during the last wretched death throes of the British Mandate, violence and disorder throughout the country had escalated to almost unendurable levels. James de Rothschild, who had briefly been a junior minister in Churchill's 1945 caretaker administration but who had lost his seat in the General Election, watched with consternation as the White Paper policy was reintroduced by Attlee's government and as Bevin repudiated the Anglo-American Committee recommendations to transfer immediately 100,000 refugees from the DP camps to Palestine.⁵⁹⁶ Among the 2700 members of the Jewish Agency arrested at the end of 1946 after the 'night of the bridges' when military and civilian installations had been blown up by the Hagana, were many of James's own friends and acquaintances like Moshe Shertok. But he shared Gottlieb's and Wolfson's revulsion for the terrorist atrocities of the Irgun and the Stern Gang — reinforced doubtless by the blowing up of the King David Hotel with the loss of 100 Arab, Jewish and British lives. The King David had not only been the HQ of the British military and civil administration in Jerusalem; it had also been part-owned by PICA. Its destruction was a suitable epitaph for the long-cherished hopes of a Jewish dominion within the British Commonwealth.

Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 479

The legacy presented to the Jewish people by Edmond de Rothschild was handsome beyond measure. Though, over three-quarters of a century, his work had been threatened with setbacks and disasters, with wars, diseases and famines, finally it had yielded a prolific bounty. Fertile farms, gushing wells, plantations, factories, cities — the cornucopia of a living, organic Jewish society where once there had been sandy, fetid waste and the timeless confrontation of merchant and schnorrer. It is tempting — and most narrators have duly succumbed — to classify this phenomenon as another chapter in the epic of Jewish national resurgence. That would be neither wholly false nor wholly true. For the colour, confusion and complexity of its extravagant adventure, like the personality of its patron, spills out from any category the historian might choose to impose. Any category, that is, but one. For when Chaim Kalvarisky — like Edmond another sublime original — was engaged in arguing with Baron Edmond the pros and cons of retaining Talmudic instruction in the Palestine schools in 1925 his appeal for a secular, free-thinking curriculum met with the following, conclusive, retort. ‘Monsieur Kalvarisky, I know you well and I have known your ideas for a long time now. The difference between you and me is that you, Monsieur, are a national Jew and I, I am a Jewish Jew.’⁶³⁷
