

Lion, Bear and the Serpent

By Rabbi Michael Aaronsohn

Once again—in the twentieth century—the Land of Canaan has become an arena of bloodshed and slaughter. Violence, wasting and destruction are heard again in the Holy Land.

It is an old, old story only slightly modernized by radio and bombing plane. The wonder of it all is that so wee a parcel of land should arouse so vast a curiosity and alarm. How, for example, can the tragedy of Palestine be compared in magnitude with that of Spain or China?

Palestine's woes are neither novel nor extraordinary. That area comprising ten thousand square miles of land, which is not rich in minerals or other natural resources, is suffering from a chronic disease of world-wide character. Anyone who sincerely seeks enlightenment on the dismal situation should not limit his investigation to specifically Arabic or Jewish historians and publicists. For a well-rounded and amazingly applicable analysis of the Palestine malady, one should read Henry George's work on the land question in Ireland, published in 1881.

Then, in 1881—as now—Ireland (Eire) presented a diseased condition prevalent in every part of the civilized world. Then—as today—in Ireland, the bete-noire was the British Empire. Then, in 1881—as now—in Ireland, the real spring from which all the evils flowed was the hoary institution of land monopoly. Today (in 1933), in Ireland, 1.4 per cent of the population own all the land, about 20,000,000 acres; while 5,000,000 Irish are landless.

Line by line the same may be said of Palestine today. Several years before his assassination, Arlosoroff wrote: "At the top of this small, but commanding minority of the Arabic population in Palestine, is the landlord class, the effendi, the owners of large estates. These are often absentee landlords living in the cities of Palestine or abroad. They derive their income from the rent of their lands, an income usually

sufficient to enable them to live in grand style, to entertain lavishly, to cultivate the social elegances, and hence to be extremely popular in aristocratic social circles. It is estimated that this class owns about 80 per cent of the land in Galilee, about 50 per cent in southern Palestine, and about 85 per cent in Transjordanian." Another reliable report states that 4,702,000 dunam of land in Palestine are held in large estates.

There is one factor which makes the situation of the Jews in Palestine today more heart-sickening than the woes of the Irish in the nineteenth century. It is the appalling conspiracy of at least two nations to harass the Jews everywhere, even in the Holy Land. It is this which distinguishes the calamity of the children of Israel from that of all other peoples. Yet when we turn to the history of Israel, we come upon many experiences of similar extent and intensity of suffering. The pattern of these experiences is so well defined that it takes on the character of prophecy as well as of geometric regularity. Consider, for example, what the prophet Amos said at a time when the social and economic conditions in Palestine closely paralleled the story written in our generation: "As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him."

When this parable is unfolded in language familiar to Georgists, we learn that wherever the Israelite turned he found himself face to face with a monstrous adversary—the land monopolist. Most staggering is it indeed today when the "lover of Zion" discovers the serpent—within his own house, within the land of promise, the land of hope, the long-

prayed for haven of rest and spiritual salvation. Today the lion is the land monopolist in Europe, or even America; the bear is the effendi; the serpent, the Jewish land speculator himself. In September, 1934, Rabbi Silver of Cleveland wrote: "The story of Palestinian speculation in real estate and orange groves is a faithful replica in miniature of the disastrous Florida boom in 1925. The rapid urban development of Palestine which has been stimulated by the stupendous immigration into the country in the last few years is destroying the Jewish character of many of the farming settlements which were built at so much cost of labor and substance. . . . What, therefore, appears to some as the mounting sap of wholesome growth may, in reality, prove to be deadly, creeping dry rot. . . ."

The bear and the serpent might have been mastered by the flaming spirit of the Jewish pioneers. Palestine might have been reconstructed according to the patterns laid down by the framers of the American Zionist Organization's program, which embodied the highest and noblest ideals of social justice along lines of sound political economy. But Palestine could not escape the fatal consequences of concentrated land speculation within an area of ten thousand square miles. The irrepressible explosion—"the day of judgment"—might have been postponed had the same series of events taken place in Uganda or Australia. But in Palestine the poverty of the fellahin was so deep and broad that there was but one avenue of release open to them, outside of slow starvation—revolt, revolt against their oppressors. And as is the way of such phenomena the fellahin were turned aside in their wrath from their real enemies. National and religious prejudices were cunningly employed by the effendis to save themselves from the hands of the fellahin. And the Jews, who for the most part regarded themselves not only as the friends, but as the benefactors of the down-trodden fellahin, became the victims.



True, the enterprise, the industry, and the large capital investments of the Jews have greatly increased the aggregate wealth of Palestine. But as Henry George taught and the universal experience of mankind confirms this principle of law, "material progress does not merely fail to relieve poverty; actually it produces it." True, no Arab peasant in Palestine has been illegitimately dispossessed of his land. Yet the phenomenal increase in the value of land in Palestine accomplished the same baneful result. Speculative land values accompanied by an increase in the cost of living, together with a reduction in the earnings of the Arab peasant,—these factors made it impossible for the fellah to retain possession of his land and to maintain himself even at a bare subsistence level. Hence, from the perspective of his mud-sills, the fellah could associate his impoverishment only with the ceaseless influx of Jewish immigrants.

Naturally, the highminded Zionist is shocked. He thinks the Arab peasant is ungrateful. He imagines his Arab neighbor has been solely swayed by German and Italian intrigues. Rapprochement with the fellahin is accepted by all Jews—except the fascist Revisionists—as the paramount objective. But there can be no permanent peace between Arab and Jew in Palestine until the ideals set forth in the 1918 platform of the American Zionist Organization become the law of the land—and not merely of that portion of Palestine held by the Jewish National Fund. There must be one and the same law for the Arab and for the Jew. The jealousy and fears that now array Jew against Arab and Arab against Jew will give way to a true fraternity when land monopoly in all its ramifications is eradicated from the Holy Land.

How is this to be accomplished? How are the three monsters, the serpent, the bear and the lion to be conquered? Most assuredly not by a campaign of vilification against the British Empire, nor by savage conflicts with the Arab nationalists. An appeal must be made to the hundreds of millions of Christians and the millions of Moslems as well as to the several million Jews in every

part of the world to free the Holy Land of the curse of land monopoly by the abolition of the system of private ownership and the establishment of common ownership through the medium known as the "Single Tax" program of Henry George.

Thus Palestine should become, neither the homeland of the Jews nor an Arab province, but the common heritage of all the population; and the wealth created by Arabs and Jews in Palestine should be THEIR common wealth. In November, 1929, Rabbi Judah Magnus of Jerusalem made this statement: "Palestine should not be a place of political 'domination' at all on anyone's part. It is of much more importance to mankind than that. It does not 'belong' to Jew, Christian or Moslem, but to all of them together, to humanity."

One of the outstanding leaders who appeared before the British Royal Commission less than two years ago was David Ben Gurion. "The Bible," he testified, "is the 'Mandate' upon which the Jewish people rest their claim to Palestine."

Two dominant thoughts may be discerned in the Old Testament regarding the fate or destiny of Palestine. The first is that dealing with the "everlasting covenant" made between God and the children of Israel, wherein Palestine is designated the perpetual heritage of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The second great thought is that Palestine has been selected as the spiritual center of the world. This latter idea is most vividly set forth in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "All nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

To fulfill her traditional destiny,

Palestine must become the spiritual Switzerland of the world. As soon as Peace has spread her beneficent wings over Palestine, prosperity will come to every village and town; quietness and security will reign in all her borders as in Switzerland today. Yet the analogy is not complete in this respect only. For, just as little Switzerland is renowned throughout the civilized world for her physical beauty and political harmony, Palestine will draw to her ports hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists year by year. They will come with reverent curiosity and glowing eagerness to see with their own eyes the rivers, the hills, the mountains, the woods, the cities, the villages and the shrines of this, the most publicized, the most venerated country on all the earth.

Let then the true-hearted Zionist and the equally high-minded Arab point the accusing finger at the land speculator, who is making merchandise of the sacred, good earth of Palestine, and say: "Thou art the man! Thou art the cause of all our misery, our want, our brutishness." Let the earnest Arab and the earnest Jew in Palestine appeal to Christian, Moslem and Jew everywhere. Let them appeal to their conscience, their intelligence, their imagination—to their sense of justice. Above all, let them appeal to the deepest and most powerful emotion, that of religious faith in the "Word of the Lord." Let all the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan go to the world with such a plea, and all the mighty forces of progress, benevolence and righteousness will array themselves against the lion, the bear and the serpent to fight under the banners of Amos, Isaiah, and Henry George—in the name of Truth and Brotherhood, and for the glory of God.

