



25. PROPHET OF DOOM: E. T. RICHMOND, F.R.I.B.A., PALESTINE 1920-1924

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I HAVE recently discovered some records of the period my father spent as a member of Sir Herbert Samuel's Civil Administration in Palestine. This replaced the Military Administration, known as Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (South), which had run the country since Allenby's conquest of Southern Palestine and his occupation of Jerusalem in December 1917. The Civil Administration was established in July 1920, and at Samuel's invitation, my father, E. T. Richmond, joined it early in November.

This was not the first time E.T.R. had seen Palestine. He was an architect who had spent many years in Egypt before the first World War. He went there in 1895, as a young man of 21, to help in preparing the illustrations for a book about the Temple of Amenhetep III, published in 1898 by Somers Clarke and J. J. Tylor. Somers Clarke was an old friend of ETR's father, Sir William Richmond, R.A. About the turn of the century ETR was appointed Assistant Architect to the *Comité pour la Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, and in this capacity he worked under Herz Bey in the restoration of many of the famous mosques of Cairo and other buildings of the Islamic period. Later on he worked successively for the British Army of Occupation, building barracks and houses for the troops, and for the Ministry of Public Works, where he eventually became Director of the Department of Towns and Public Buildings. He left Egypt in 1911 to set up an architectural practice in England.

While in Egypt he had made friends with Ronald Storrs, then Oriental Secretary at the British Residency, and at the end of the War, Storrs, now Military Governor of Jerusalem, recommended him to General Allenby as a suitable person to undertake an examination of the structural condition of the Muslim shrines in the Ḥaram ash-Sharif. He thus came to Jerusalem in the spring of 1918 as a Temporary Major in the Military Administration. He spent about a year on his work in the Ḥaram. Some of its results were subsequently published in a sumptuous volume entitled *The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. A Description of its Structure and Decoration*.

The course of his work in the Ḥaram naturally brought ETR into contact with Muslim dignitaries, including the then Mufti of Jerusalem, Muḥammad Kāmil al-Ḥusaini. He had learnt Arabic in Egypt and this

helped him to make many friends among the leading Arab families of Palestine, Muslim and Christian. It was presumably for this reason that Sir Herbert Samuel thought he could provide a useful link between his administration and the Arab population. By the time he arrived in November 1920 such a link was becoming more and more necessary. Palestinian distrust of British intentions had been growing steadily even before the arrival of the Zionist Commission in April 1918. The Military Administration had been at pains to explain to the population that nothing was settled and that it was working in accordance with the Hague Convention of 1909 which forbids an occupying power to change the status of occupied territory in advance of a peace settlement. However, the Commission was bent on creating *fait accomplis* with considerable support from London. February and March 1920 had seen a series of anti-Zionist demonstrations, and the first serious anti-Jewish riots in Jerusalem had greeted the division of the Fertile Crescent into British and French Mandates at San Remo in April.

When ETR arrived in November, the future of the country was still fluid. The Mandate had been given to the British Government only six months earlier. It was still in draft form and nearly two years were to pass before it would be ratified by the League of Nations. The Balfour Declaration had, of course, been made three years before, but it was merely a declaration of intent about a country which had not then been completely occupied by British Forces. None could know in 1920 that—as historians have since made clear—its authors really intended to change the demographic composition of Palestine so that its 90% Arab majority would gradually dwindle into minority status. ETR and many other Englishmen firmly believed that the responsibility for securing the cooperation of the native population in the Zionist programme must lie on the Zionist leadership. It did not occur to him, or to the many who thought like him, that it could be the intention of the British Government to use its administration in Palestine to secure Arab acquiescence in that programme by force if need be. It seemed to them that this would be an unwarrantable extension of the meaning of Balfour's promise to 'facilitate the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'. They could not believe that the British Government which had claimed to be liberating the Arabs from 'Turkish misrule' really intended to give the Palestinians a smaller say in their own affairs than they had enjoyed under the Turks. They were confident that the Declaration must be intended to mean at least as much as it said about safeguarding the rights of the non-Jewish majority.

ETR's complete emancipation from these illusions took some three and a half years. It began as soon as he discovered that the Chief Secretary, his immediate superior, Wyndam Deedes, was a committed believer in

Zionism as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies; that Norman Bentwich, the Legal Secretary, was both Jewish and Zionist; that both men believed in the closest possible cooperation with the Zionist Commission, and that both distrusted the Arab population and regarded its nationalist leadership as the Administration's enemy. In these circumstances ETR's time in Palestine inevitably became a continuous battle with his colleagues, a battle which he was destined to lose.

Unfortunately very few of ETR's letters of his first eight months in the Palestine Administration have survived. The period was important because it included the visit in March 1921 of the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill. ETR was present on Samuel's behalf at an interview in Jerusalem between Churchill and the Amir Abdullah, at which Hubert Young interpreted, and he remembered the resentment of many of the Arabs who saw the Colonial Secretary, at the contemptuous bad manners with which he treated them. By the middle of 1921 ETR's views on the way the National Home policy was being carried out were already formed. He recorded them frankly in a letter to his brother (Later Admiral Sir H. W. Richmond, and Master of Downing College, Cambridge):

'Our record in this country is not a bright one. It may be summed up shortly as follows: we were welcomed by an exceptionally friendly people, because of ancient good relations between the Arab world and England. But we adopted a Zionist policy, and allowed immigration of Jews on a scale for which labour conditions offered no justification—on providing work for these hordes and on accommodating them we spent from local revenues. . . . All this disturbed the Arab mind, both Moslem and Christian. We put many Jews and Zionists into high places. The immigration Department is a Jewish department. The Legal Secretary is a Jew and a Zionist. The High Commissioner is both. The people begin to regard the Government as Jewish camouflaged as English. They will not accept Jewish rule. We denied them all the representative institutions which they enjoyed under the Turks. We allowed them no authoritative voice in their own affairs. Hence we turned friendliness into distrust. . . . The country is in a state of ferment. Explosions are apt to occur where the irritant is most in evidence. The port of Jaffa is a landing place for Jews and in Jaffa¹ an explosion took place which very nearly spread to the whole country. . . . Unless the delegation² in England succeeds in gaining sympathy at home and representative institutions for Palestine, there will be another more serious outbreak or a refusal to cooperate with Government and a decision to cease paying taxes. . . . It is a platitude that Governments cannot be based on force alone. By giving representative government to Palestine and by returning as far as possible to the very reasonable form of it that the country had under the Turks we could satisfy Arabs and moderate Jews. Such a policy leaves no place for a Zionist Commission.'

When this was written the ratification of the Mandate was still more than a year away. Hopes that its draft terms could still be altered to

¹ The Jaffa riots of May 1921 in which about 100 people lost their lives.

² The first Palestinian Arab Delegation to the British Government.

provide scope for the political aspirations of the overwhelming Arab majority were still not unrealistic. These hopes were carried to London in July 1921 by the first Palestinian Arab Delegation. This delegation was commissioned by the Palestinian Arab Congress, the Fourth in a series which had started in February 1919. It was led by Mūsa Kāzīm Pasha al-Ḥusaini, who had been Mayor of Jerusalem but resigned when required by the Administration to use Hebrew as well as Arabic in his official correspondence. (He was actually dismissed! Ed.)

The British Administration was meanwhile involved in elaborating a constitution for Palestine. This was a normal function of a Mandatory power, but one which presented obvious difficulties in the case of Palestine, because of the implications of the Balfour Declaration, and the fact that any self governing institutions ran the risk of being used by the Arab majority to cripple the immigration policy on which Zionism pinned its hopes. ETR submitted his views on this question in a long memorandum to the High Commissioner in September 1921:

‘ . . . The Constitution will show how far, in the opinion of those responsible for drafting it, Zionism is compatible with the maintenance of the political, civil and religious rights of the existing population, and how far these rights must, in the supposed interests of Zionism be curtailed or infringed upon.

If the Constitution, as finally passed, contains clear evidence that connotes infringement of these rights in the supposed interests of Zionism, it may be taken as axiomatic that Zionism will be resisted by the Arab population; and that the population instead of cooperating will be antagonized. It may further be taken as axiomatic that, if the Arab population is antagonized, either the Constitution will have to be altered or force will have to be used against the population. . . . The people of this country ask for the Political as well as their Civil and Religious rights. If the Constitution does not grant them these in a measure accepted as reasonable, they will assume that any restrictions that may have been made, are made in the interests of Zionism. They will not be persuaded that the restrictions are due to the benevolent wisdom of the Mandatory power; or, in other words, to the desire of that power to assume, in the interests of the people themselves, responsibilities which, at a later stage of political evolution, could be safely entrusted to the people themselves, but which, at the present moment, must, in their own interests, be withheld from them. That argument will carry no weight and no conviction. The people of Palestine, with the example before them of what has been done in Syria and Mesopotamia, will merely regard it as a verbal subterfuge, as a specious and insincere protestation concealing an intention to delay the granting of full political rights to the people of Palestine until that people are for the most part composed of Jews. They will reject any Constitution giving colour to such views. They will oppose its operation; and their opposition will be directed not only against the Jews but also against the Mandatory power.

There are two alternatives before us. Either to base our policy on force or on faith (if we have it) in the rightness of our cause. If we impose a Constitution which implies distrust and denies real political power to the population, we shall have to use force and we shall have to put our trust, not primarily in moral influences, but

in chariots and horses. If, on the other hand, we grant reasonably full political powers we shall be in a position to use whatever there may be in us or in the Jews of intellectual or moral superiority to forward the cause of Zionism on peaceful lines. Are we to use force or are we, by means of reason and example, to induce conviction and collaboration? That is the question we have to answer now, before the constitution is finally drafted and approved.'

After another four or five pages of argumentation against 'a Constitution which implies distrust and denies real political power to the population', ETR sets out his own ideas for a Legislative Assembly which would be elected on a proportional basis, by elections conducted under the still legal Turkish system, and would contain no official and no nominated members. All laws passed by it would require approval by a two thirds majority of a High Council, composed of 12 Muslims, 2 Christians and 2 Jews (according to their respective ratio of the total population), half nominated and half elected. The High Commissioner would preside over the Council and would have the power of veto.

(2)

Although 1922 was a difficult year for Zionism, it was not a correspondingly good one for the Palestinian Arabs. The British Government, prompted by Samuel and Deedes, refused to recognize their Delegation as having any representative character, and the exchanges of views with the Colonial Office which took place in the autumn of 1921 were futile. In spite of this the Delegation remained in England until June 1922 when it was recalled to Palestine after Churchill's policy declaration was approved by Parliament. This declaration denied that it was His Majesty's Government's intention to turn the whole of Palestine into a National Home for the Jews, or to bring about the 'disappearance or the subordination of the Arab population, language or culture', but its concessions to the Arabs were only verbal.

Its substance was the proposal to set up a Legislative Council whose composition clearly implied that 'distrust and denial of real political power to the population' which ETR had feared. Under the Churchill White Paper the Council was to have 12 elected and 10 official members. The High Commissioner would preside, and since two of the elected members would be Jews, he would be assured of a built in majority in any issue where the interests of Zionism and those of the Arab majority seemed to conflict.

The White Paper was accepted, rather grudgingly, by the Zionist Organization and rejected by the Arab Delegation. In July the Draft Mandate, with all its Zionist clauses unaltered, was ratified by the League

of Nations. All that was gained by the Arabs was that the Mandatory was empowered to exclude Trans-Jordan from the operation of the Zionist clauses.

ETR's activities as a Political Officer in the Secretariat during 1922 were recorded in reports on the work done by the Political Office during Calendar year 1922: 'The Office collected and submitted to the High Commissioner information on the political, economic and other questions, in particular all correspondence and interviews concerning the Palestine Arab Executive Committee and the Supreme Muslim Council. Among the subjects covered were submissions on the inconsistencies between the Mandate and the White Paper; the under-representation of the Muslims in the Legislative Assembly; and the political consequences of a general belief that the Administration was not giving due consideration to the rights of Arab cultivators of land included in the area covered by the concession to the Jewish Colonization Association in the Athlit-Caesarea district.

The Political Office also opposed many suggestions and tendencies, objectionable and abnormal in a British Administration, which were never-the-less unfortunate expressions of the policy of the Administration:

- (1) that the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress should be treated without enquiry as an illegal body and that the Administration should force a rupture with this Executive;
- (2) that the Administration should countenance and support an attempt to undermine the Supreme Muslim Council with a view to replacing its President and members by others, 'loyal' to the British policy in Palestine;
- (3) that Arab Nationalism is not as legitimate a political creed as Jewish Nationalism and that adherents of the former should be treated by the Police and by the Administration as potential criminals while adherents of the latter should be regarded as law-abiding citizens;
- (4) that the Arab people of this ancient country should have meted out to them the treatment of violence and unreason supposed by some to be proper for a 'backward' race;
- (5) that firing upon Arab demonstrating crowds is only a necessary incident (rather than a symptom of failure) in the process of ruling the country;
- (6) that the 'National Muslim Society', composed of paid agents of the Zionists, should receive countenance and encouragement from the Government on the grounds that it was loyal to the policy of the Government.
- (7) that Jews who possess fire-arms illegally should be negotiated with while Arabs should be arrested and prosecuted for the same offence;¹

¹ This is a reference to a conversation between ETR and Deedes in March 1922 (recorded elsewhere in ETR's papers). It took place after Deedes had turned down a police recommendation that the Haganah should be raided for arms. In the course of this conversation ETR 'told Deedes that we ought

to disarm the Haganah and break up their organization as illegal. He replied that he preferred to trust to the good sense of their leaders and their confidence in him'. At that time Ben Zvi, later President of Israel, was the head of the Haganah, which had been founded a year or so earlier.

- (8) that the press should be subsidized with a view to manufacturing a sham statement of public opinion;
- (9) that officers of the Administration should take part in politics and play the part of Zionist propaganda agents;
- (10) that the representative of any group of individuals who allege that their rights are infringed should be arbitrarily ignored on no other grounds than that his intervention is embarrassing to the Administration.¹

Offering opposition to these and other similar tendencies has occupied a not inconsiderable proportion of the time and energies of the Political Office. Describing the effects of putting the above points in writing on his colleagues and superiors, ETR wrote a letter to his brother:

'... a silence, so thick that it could be felt, descended and lasted for more than ten days. Then Samuel spoke to me, rather hesitatingly, about it. He said that it was not quite what was wanted ... the Colonial Office would be very surprised to read it. What they needed was no more than a colourless statement, not of my work but of the chief political events of the year. ... Deedes was completely silent about it, but it will do him good to have read it. Also it was no bad thing for Samuel to have a full statement of the numerous follies I have fought. Deedes goes in a month's time—a very good riddance. He is a fanatical little missionary with his Old Testament and other Hebraic furniture.'²

By early 1923 it must have been apparent to ETR that his days in the Palestine Administration must be numbered and that the battle to change His Majesty's Government's Zionist policy was almost lost. But Arab hopes had been revived by the fall of Lloyd George's Coalition in October 1922 and were kept alive by the success of the Arab Executive's campaign for a boycott of the elections for the Legislative Council. The new British Government took some time to make up its mind before deciding to continue the policy of its predecessor. It became clear that it would do so in February 1923. In the same month the elections in Palestine were rendered negatory by large scale abstentions of the Arab population.

ETR's views were such as to preclude his remaining in the Administration once all hope of changing or moderating the Zionist policy had been lost. The Colonial Office was torn between its desire to get rid of him as an irritant, and its exaggerated belief that his presence in the Administration helped to keep the Arab population less militant than would have been the case without him. Its officials seem to have decided to try a little irritation on their own account. At the end of July 1923 he wrote to his brother:

¹ The reference may be to Wadi' Bustāni, a graduate of the Syrian Protestant College (the American University of Beirut) who defended the rights of Arab cultivators in the Athlit-Caesarea district and later in Beisan, or to Jubrān Quzma,

member of the Palestine Arab Congress, who performed the same function.

² Deedes was replaced as Chief Secretary by Brigadier-General Gilbert Clayton (later Sir Gilbert Clayton and High Commissioner in Iraq).

'My future is a little uncertain. . . . I know from a conversation Ronald Storrs had at the Colonial Office about me that they want to get rid of me. They call me an "*imperium in imperio*". They don't like such "*imperia*", though as Ronald Storrs pointed out to them, they already have one in the Zionist Commission.'

ETR went on leave in September 1923. He returned in December and on 17 January he wrote to my mother:

'Yesterday I told Samuel I should leave Palestine in the beginning of April. I have pondered long and deeply before deciding this . . . I move in a Jewish Administration which regards me with disfavour, and only keeps me because it is afraid to get rid of me—the Colonial Office is confessedly hostile to me—no proposal ever made by me of a positive constructive character has been accepted—by staying on I am betraying the people of the country into a wholly false belief that the Administration contains an element of *effective* sympathy. To these disadvantages must be added exile and separation from wife and family and my home. In a word Palestine is gaining nothing and I am losing much.

When Samuel heard I was going, he was, Clayton told me, very perturbed. He sent for me and said he had changed his views about me and was now convinced that my presence in Palestine was essential, that my influence with the Arabs was invaluable; that there was work for me in negotiating the Abdullah treaty, also in the mosques repairs and in serving as a channel of communication between the population and the Government. He begged me to reconsider my resignation and to stay on at least for a year or if that was not possible for six months. I told him my reasons for resigning, adding that I would consider what he had said and would let him have an answer after the visit to Amman.¹ I have no intention of changing my decision, but it seemed polite to treat his appeal as worthy of consideration. I told Ronald Storrs of my decision. His comment was characteristic: "When will you go?" I answered: "Beginning of April." He replied: "I wish it were later and after Nebi Musa."²

He too has the idea that I keep the peace.'

ETR left the Secretariat and the country in April 1924. In 1927, when Lord Plumer was High Commissioner, he was invited and accepted to return to Palestine as Director of Antiquities, a strictly non-political appointment. From the Palestine Antiquities Museum he was able, for the next ten years, to witness at close quarters the unfolding of the tragedy he had prophesied and striven to avert from the people of Palestine.

John Richmond

¹ This was the visit paid by Samuel and his Chief Secretary, and others including ETR, to King Husain of the Hijaz, then visiting his son, the Amir Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, at the end of January 1924.

² Nebi Musa was a Muslim celebration which

brought many Muslims to Jerusalem to start the annual religious visit to a site near the Dead Sea associated with the Prophet Moses. It normally coincided with the Greek Easter which brought Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem and thus increased the danger of political or communal disorder.