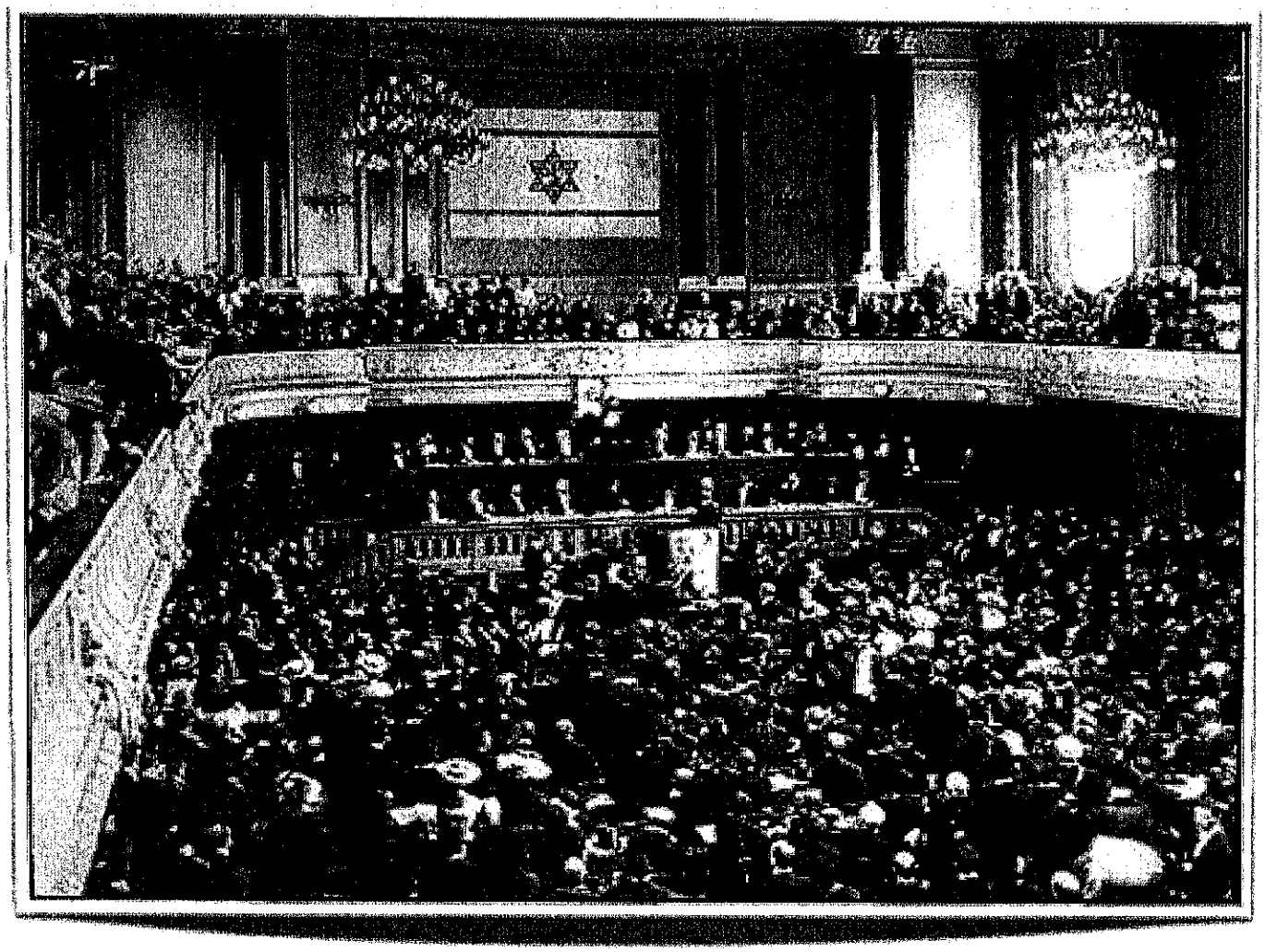
Theodore Herzl and Chaim Weizmann

Great Jewish Rivalries



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canal in such a fashion as not to damage the locks. Other Jews worked in the match factory and the sawmills.

Jewish Pinsk was divided into two communities, Pinsk proper and Karlin, each with its own set of synagogues, Rabbis, hospitals and schools. Karlin, where I lived, was considered, as they say in America, the right side of the tracks. It was here that I grew from boyhood into early manhood, here that I had my social and intellectual contacts, and here that I was inducted into the Zionist movement. Pinsk, then, set the double pattern of my life; it gave me my first bent toward science, and it provided me with my first experiences in Zionism.

These two areas of my life were sharply separated. Zionism was never tolerated as a political movement by the czarist regime, and practical Zionist work, primitive enough in those days, was carried on under the guise of philanthropy. In 1884, about a year before I came to Pinsk, there had taken place the famous Kattowitz Conference of the *Choveve Zion*—the Lovers of Zion—the first gathering of its kind. It marked, historically, the conscious, organized beginning of Zionism, and it followed closely the onset of the era of repression. Pinsk became one of the centers of the *Chibath Zion*. Rabbi David Friedman—who was known, according to the Jewish fashion, by the affectionate diminutive of Reb Dovidl, also as Reb Dovidl Karliner, from the name of his community—was a member of the Presidium of the Kattowitz Conference, and therefore the titular head of the movement in Pinsk. This Reb Dovidl was a remarkable figure, combining the highest traditions of old-world Jewish saintliness and scholarship with a feeling for the spirit of the times. He was a tiny, shriveled-up wisp of a man, with a wonderful, transfigured face. He fasted every Monday and Thursday, and was considered even among pietists as exceptionally scrupulous in his observance of all the minutiae of the Jewish ritual. He had a little synagogue attached to his house, and it was there that I attended services. The brother-in-law of Reb Dovidl was Reb Yechiel Pinnes (a name connected with Pina and Pinsk), one of the earliest settlers in Palestine hailing from our parts; he preceded, if I am not mistaken, the group of the *Bilus*, as they were called, who went out from Russia as the first modern colonizers in 1882. Several branches of the family also settled in America, and scores of their descendants are scattered throughout the United States. The name has been Americanized into Pines.

For a community of its size Pinsk contributed an unusually large number of workers and pioneers in Zionism. There was Judah Berges, who married into a Pinsk family, a distinguished *Maskil*, a follower of the *Haskallah*, or new Enlightenment) and a man with a genuine gift of leadership. There was Aaron Eisenberg who went out to Palestine when I was still in Pinsk. His departure was a tremendous event and Pinsk gave him a great send-off. It was with a sense of awe that we

assembled that evening and gazed with our own eyes on a man who was actually going to Palestine. He promised to write us, and tell us what the land looked like; and afterward we waited eagerly for every scrap of news about his movements and his adventures. Eisenberg settled in Rehovoth, became one of its most useful and most prosperous colonists, and contributed greatly to the development of the region. Forty years later I bought the land for our house in Rehovoth from the children of Aaron Eisenberg. George Halpern, who many years later became the manager of the Jewish Colonial Trust, likewise came from Pinsk, so did Isaac Naiditch, one of the founders—in 1920—of the *Keren Hayesod*, the Palestine Foundation Fund, an important instrument in the building of Jewish Palestine. The Shertoks, too, came from Pinsk; Moshe Shertok of the younger generation of that family, brought up in Palestine, is a leading figure in the political life of modern Palestine. During my boyhood years in Pinsk, Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, the great folk orator, taught at a local Hebrew school. He was one of the most beloved and most influential of the *magidim*, or popular preachers. He settled afterward in America, and was as beloved among the Yiddish-speaking masses there as he had been in Russia. He died a few years ago, an octogenarian, one of the last remaining links with the heroic early days of Zionism. These are names familiar perhaps only to Zionists; but they were the names of men who had a vision of redemption nearly sixty years ago, who transmuted the dream into tangible reality and who, in the face of infinite discouragement on the part of practical people, sowed the seeds of that considerable achievement which is Jewish Palestine today.

We must not think of Zionism in Pinsk fifty odd years ago, long before the coming of Theodor Herzl, in terms of the modern movement. Organized activity in the present-day sense simply did not exist. A youth organization was undreamed of. There were casual meetings of the older people, at which the youngsters sneaked in, to sit in a corner. On rare occasions when a circular was sent out, we were permitted to address the envelopes. Our financial resources were comically primitive; we dealt in rubles and kopecks. One of the main sources of income was the collection made on the Feast of Purim. Youngsters were enlisted to distribute leaflets and circulars from house to house, and modest contributions would be made by most of the householders. Not all, by any means. Not the very rich ones, for instance, like the Lurias, the great clan of industrialists with branches in Warsaw, Libau and Danzig, who owned the match factory in Pinsk. For already, in those early days, the classic divisions in Zionism, which have endured till very recent days, manifested themselves. The Jewish magnates were, with very few exceptions, bitterly anti-Zionist. Our supporters were the middle class and the poor. An opposition—in the shape of a labor movement—did not

fundamental change took place; my political outlook, my Zionist ideology, my scientific bent, my life's purposes, had crystallized.

Of my fellow-students who afterward became my fellow-workers in Zionism I shall have much to say, in this and in succeeding chapters; for some of them became intimate and cherished friends; and the *Jüdisch-Russisch Verein* could, without derogating from the role played by similar student bodies in other Western universities, claim to have been the cradle of the modern Zionist movement. But I must speak first of a great man who was then living in Berlin, one whose influence on us, on Russian Jewry, and on the Zionist movement, was incalculable. Him, too, I was able to call, in later years, friend and comrade, though he was more—he was adviser and teacher, too; and I shall have much to say about him in later chapters of this narrative.

Asher Ginsburg, best, indeed almost exclusively known under his pen name of Achad Ha-am—"One of the People"—was the foremost thinker and Hebrew stylist of his generation. I was a boy of seventeen, a high-school student in Pinsk, when he first sprang into prominence with his article—a classic of Zionist history and literature—"Truth from Palestine." He was a keen and merciless critic from the beginning, a man of unshakable intellectual integrity; but his criticisms sprang from a strongly affirmative outlook. For him Zionism was the Jewish renaissance in a spiritual-national sense. Its colonizational work, its political program had meaning only as an organic part of the re-education of the Jewish people. A façade of physical achievement meant little to him; he measured both the organization in the exile and the colonies in Palestine by their effect on Jewry. His first concern was with quality. When he organized his society, the *Bnai Moshe*—the training school of many of the Russian Zionist leaders—he put the emphasis on perfection. The membership was never more than one hundred, but every member was tested by high standards of intelligence and devotion. As a writer, Achad Ha-am never put forth less than his best; he was precise and penetrating in his thoughts; he was sparing and exact in his style, which became a model for a whole school. As an editor he was not less exacting of his contributors. He criticized the early work of the *Chibath Zion* because it had placed the chief emphasis on the physical redemption of the Jewish people; he criticized the practical work of Baron Edmond de Rothschild because the latter, in coming to the rescue of the tottering colonies in Palestine, was animated—so it was thought, but somewhat mistakenly, as I shall show later—only by a spirit of old-fashioned philanthropy, which was less concerned with the remaking of the colonists than with immediate economic results; he criticized Herzl because he did not find in the new Zionist movement the proper attention to the inner rehabilitation of Jewry which had to precede, or at least accompany, the external solution of its problems.

It is not easy to convey to this generation of Jewry in the West the effect which Achad Ha-am produced on us. One might have thought that such an attitude of caution, of restraint, of seeming pessimism, would all but destroy a movement which had only just begun to take shape. It was not the case, simply because Achad Ha-am was far from being a negative spirit. Though essentially a philosopher and not a man of action, he joined the executive of the *Choveve Zion* Federation, the Odessa Committee as it was called, which supervised such practical work as was being done in Palestine. His criticisms were likewise exhortations. In his analysis of the spiritual slavery of "emancipated" Western Jews he was forthright to the point of cruelty, and his arguments hurt all the more because they were unanswerable. The appearance of one of Achad Ha-am's articles was always an event of prime importance. We read him, and read him again, and discussed him endlessly. He was, I might say, what Gandhi has been to many Indians, what Mazzini was to Young Italy a century ago.

We youngsters in Berlin did not see much of him. At rare intervals we would drop in on him at his modest little home. But his presence in our midst was a constant inspiration and influence.

We held our regular Saturday night meetings at a café, and mostly it was the one attached to a certain Jewish hotel—the Hotel Zentrum on the Alexanderplatz, because there, during lean periods, we could get beer and sausages on credit. I think with something like a shudder of the amount of talking we did. We never dispersed before the small hours of the morning. We talked of everything, of history, wars, revolutions, the rebuilding of society. But chiefly we talked of the Jewish problem and of Palestine. We sang, we celebrated such Jewish festivals as we did not go home for, we debated with the assimilationists, and we made vast plans for the redemption of our people. It was all very youthful and naive and jolly and exciting; but it was not without a deeper meaning.

At first I was greatly overawed by my fellow-students, among whom I was the youngest. Fresh from little Pinsk, with its petty Zionist collections and small-town discussions, I was staggered by the sweep of vision which Motzkin and Syrkin and the others displayed. There was also a personal detail which oppressed me at the beginning. I was only a student of chemistry; they were students of philosophy, history, economics, law and other "higher" things. I was immensely attracted to them as persons and as Zionists; but gradually I began to feel that in their personal preparations for life they were as vague as in their Zionist plans. I had brought with me out of Russia a dread of the "eternal student" type, the impractical idealist without roots in the worldly struggle, a figure only too familiar in the Jewish world of forty and fifty years ago. I refused to neglect the lecture hall and the laboratory, to

reactionary. They were not, either, the *Shtadlonim*, the notables, with their vested interests, their lickspittle attitude toward the Russian Government, their vanity and their ancient prestige. Nor were they like the German assimilating Jews, bourgeois, or Philistine. For these last strove, in their assimilationist philosophy, to approximate to the type of the German *Spiessbürger*, the comfortable merchant, the *Geheimrat*, the professor, the sated, respectable classes. Most of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, and above all the students, assimilated toward the spirit of a Tolstoi or Korolenko, toward the creative and revolutionary classes. It was, I think, a tragically erroneous assimilation even so, but it was not base or repulsive. In Germany we were losing, through assimilation, the least attractive Jewish groups. The opposite was the case in Russia.

For me, then, it was a time of three-fold growth. I was pursuing my scientific studies systematically, and to that extent resisting the pressure of bohemianism in my surroundings. At the same time, within the Russian Jewish Society, I was working out, in discussion and debate, my political philosophy, and beginning to shed the vague and sentimental Zionism of my boyhood. Thirdly, I was learning, one might say from the ground up, the technique of propaganda and the approach to the masses. I was also weaving the web of my life's personal relationships.

CHAPTER 4

The Coming of Herzl

"The Jewish State"—Herzl's True Historic Role—His Personality—The First Zionist Congress Called—Max Nordau —Zionists and Revolutionaries at Berne University—Lenin, Plekhanov, Trotsky—Revolution against the Revolutionaries —Russian Student Zionists and Herzl—Herzl's Diplomacy —The Democratic Fraction—Western Zionism and Russian Zionism.

I WAS in my second year in Berlin when, in 1896, Theodor Herzl published his tract, now a classic of Zionism, *Der Judenstaat—The Jewish State*. It was an utterance which came like a bolt from the blue. We had never heard the name Herzl before; or perhaps it had come to our attention, only to be lost among those of other journalists and *feuilletonists*. Fundamentally, *The Jewish State* contained not a single new idea for us; that which so startled the Jewish bourgeoisie, and called down the resentment and derision of the Western Rabbis, had long been the substance of our Zionist tradition. We observed, too, that this man Herzl made no allusion in his little book to his predecessors in the field, to Moses Hess and Leon Pinsker and Nathan Birnbaum—the last a Viennese like Herzl, and the creator of the very word by which the movement is known: Zionism. Apparently Herzl did not know of the existence of the *Chibath Zion*; he did not mention Palestine; he ignored the Hebrew language.

Yet the effect produced by *The Jewish State* was profound. Not the ideas, but the personality which stood behind them appealed to us. Here was daring, clarity and energy. The very fact that this Westerner came to us unencumbered by our own preconceptions had its appeal. We of the Russian group in Berlin were not alone in our response. The Zionist student group of Vienna, *Kadimah*, was perhaps more deeply impressed than we. There were also, as I have said, strong Zionist groups at the universities of Montpellier and Paris and elsewhere. It was from these sources that Herzl drew much of his early support.

We were right in our instinctive appreciation that what had emerged from the *Judenstaat* was less a concept than a historic personality. The

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Judenstaat by itself would have been nothing more than a nine days' wonder. If Herzl had contented himself with the mere publication of the booklet—as he originally intended to do, before it became clear to him that he was no longer his own master, but the servant of the idea—his name would be remembered today as one of the oddities of Jewish history. What has given greatness to his name is Herzl's role as a man of action, as the founder of the Zionist Congress, and as an example of daring and devotion.

I first saw Herzl at the second Congress, in Basle, in the summer of 1898, and though he was impressive, I cannot pretend that I was swept off my feet. There was a great genuineness about him, and a touch of pathos. It seemed to me almost from the beginning that he was undertaking a task of tremendous magnitude without adequate preparation. He had great gifts and he had connections. But these did not suffice. As I learned to know him better at succeeding Congresses, my respect for him was confirmed and deepened. As a personality he was both powerful and naive. He was powerful in the belief that he had been called by destiny to this piece of work. He was naive, as we already suspected from *Der Judenstaat*, and as we definitely learned from our contact with his work, in his schematic approach to Zionism.

His Zionism began as a sort of philanthropy, superior of course to the philanthropy of Baron de Hirsch, but philanthropy nevertheless. As he saw it, or seemed to see it, there were rich Jews and there were poor Jews. The rich Jews, who wanted to help the poor Jews, had considerable influence in the councils of the nations. And then there was the Sultan of Turkey, who always wanted money, and who was in possession of Palestine. What was more logical then, than to get the rich Jews to give the Sultan money to allow the poor Jews to go to Palestine?

There were, again, two steps in the process. First, the rich Jews had to be persuaded to open their purses; second, the Great Powers had to be persuaded to put some pressure on Turkey and to act as the guarantors in the transaction. In this connection, the two leading Powers were Germany and England; Herzl began by putting the emphasis on Germany and the Kaiser; afterward he shifted it to England. The whole of the Zionist Organization was merely an understructure for Herzl, whereby he would exert pressure on the rich Jews, and obtain the authority for his *démarches* among the Powers.

Young as I was, and totally inexperienced in worldly matters, I considered the entire approach *simpliste* and doomed to failure. To begin with, I had no faith at all in the rich Jews whom Herzl was courting. Even Baron Edmond de Rothschild, who had done considerable semi-philanthropic work in Palestine—he did a great deal more than that, later, when he achieved a deeper understanding of Zionism—regarded Herzl as a naive person, who was completely overshooting the mark.

To me Zionism was something organic, which had to grow like a plant, had to be watched, watered and nursed, if it was to reach maturity. I did not believe that things could be done in a hurry. The Russian Zionists had as their slogan a saying of the Jewish sages: "That which the intelligence cannot do, time [that is, work, application, worry] will do." There was no lack of Zionist sentiment in the Russian-Jewish masses; what they lacked was will, direction, organization, the feeling of realities. Herzl was an organizer; he was also an inspiring personality; but he was not of the people, and did not grasp the nature of the forces which it harbored.

He had excessive respect for the Jewish clergy, born not of intimacy but of distance. He saw something rather occult and mysterious in the Rabbis, while he knew them and evaluated them as individuals, good, bad or indifferent. His leaning toward clericalism distressed us, so did the touch of Byzantinism in his manner. Almost from the outset a kind of court sprang up about him, of worshipers who pretended to guard him from too close contact with the mob. I am compelled to say that certain elements in his bearing invited such an attitude.

I remember (to run a little ahead of my story) a characteristic incident at one of the early Congresses. The committee which I liked most to serve on, and of which I was occasionally the chairman, was the *Permanenz-Ausschuss*, a combination resolutions, steering and nominating committee. On the occasion to which I refer, Herzl had intimated to us that he wanted us to nominate, as one of the Vice-Presidents of the Congress, Sir Francis Montefiore, of England, the nephew of the great Sir Moses Montefiore, who was a legendary name in Jewry because of his early interest in Palestine and his services to the Jewish people at large. We did not want Sir Francis as a Vice-President of the Congress. He was a very nice old English gentleman, but rather footling. He spoke, in and out of season, and in a sepulchral voice, of *"mein seliger Oheim"*—"my sainted uncle." He always wore white gloves at the Congresses—this in the heat of the Swiss summer—because he had to shake so many hands. Sir Francis was quite a decorative figure, and he was invariably called on to greet the Congress. We did not mind him as a showpiece, but we were rather fed up with his sainted uncle, and we wanted that particular Vice-Presidency to go to some real personality, like Ussishkin or Tschlenow. When Herzl pressed his point on me I said, "But Dr. Herzl, that man's a fool." To which Herzl replied, with immense solemnity: *"Er öffnet mir königliche Pforten"*—"he opens the portals of royalty to me." I could not help grinning at this stately remark, and Herzl turned white. He was full of Western dignity which did not sit well with our Russian-Jewish realism; and without wanting to, we could not help irritating him. We were genuinely sorry, but it was an unavoidable clash of temperaments.

Most profound in its effect on the movement was Herzl's creation of

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the Zionist Congress. Having failed with the Jewish notables and philanthropists, he turned to the Jewish masses. He made contact with the leaders of the *Chibath Zion*. David Wolffsohn, who was to be his successor, came to him. The call for the first demonstration went out in 1897. It was not to be another Kattowitz Conference, a semifurtive, internal Jewish affair. It was to be a public declaration, an address to the world, a manifesto of flesh and blood, the Jewish people itself reasserting its existence and confronting humanity with its historic demands.

That was how we felt about it, and that was what suddenly jolted us out of our old routine, and out of our daydreams. We resolved, in the spring of 1897, to devote the summer vacation to the propagation of the idea of the Congress. I myself was busy for months in the dim marshlands, persuading the communities to elect their delegates; I also received a mandate to the Congress from the community of Pinsk, a mandate which, I remember with warm gratitude, was renewed for every Zionist Congress that followed; other Zionists of Pinsk had to stand for election; about mine there was never any doubt. Three men who were particularly active among the Russian communities were Ossip Buchmiller, Boris Katzman and Moshe Margulis Kalvarisky. All three were taking the agricultural course at Montpellier, and all three settled in Palestine later. For them, and for many others, the Congress was a far greater inspiration than the contents of the *Judenstaat*; and the truth is that Herzl's contribution to Zionism, apart from his personal example, was that of form. Conviction, devotion, persistence, tradition—all these things we had in ample measure. But we had no experience in parliamentary organization and action. It was here that Herzl shone, both by natural aptitude and by years of training as the correspondent of the *Neue Freie Presse* in the Chamber of Deputies in Paris.

Max Nordau, the famous author of *Degeneration* and *The Conventional Lies of Civilization*, was the other outstanding leader of early Western Zionism. Him I also saw for the first time at the second Congress, in 1898. The passionate devotion of selflessness which commanded respect in Herzl was lacking in Nordau, whom we found artificial, as well as inclined to arrogance. Nordau was, of course, a famous European figure; but what mattered to us was that he was an ardent Zionist only during the sessions of the Congresses. During the other three hundred and fifty odd days of the year we heard only occasionally of him within the movement; for then he attended to his business, which was that of writer. He was not prepared, like Herzl and many others, to sacrifice his career for Zionism. Of Nordau's ability there was no doubt. His address at the first Congress was powerful, and made a deep impression. For the first time the Jewish problem was presented

forcefully before a European forum. True, it was not done in our fashion; Nordau's concept of anti-Semitism was different from ours. But it was a bugle call sounded all over the world, and the world took note. Then came Nordau's main address at the second Congress, and it was a repetition, with variations, of the first. So it went on, from Congress to Congress, and the thesis lost its originality. It is true that Nordau's occasional polemics with assimilated Jews had considerable value for us; but the fact remained that he did not pull his weight in the movement. For the movement was not, strictly speaking, his business. He was a *Heldentenor*, a prima donna, a great speaker in the classical style; spadework was not in his line.

The cleavage between East and West, between organic and schematic Zionism, was clarified in Nordau's development as a Zionist. In later years, after the First World War, he became the father of what is known as the Max Nordau Plan, if plan it can be called, which proposed the transfer of a million Jews to Palestine in one year, and the solution of the Jewish problem within a space of ten years. How this was to be done, and whether the Jews were prepared for such an immense dislocation, and whether Palestine could take them—all these questions were ignored. It was assumed that even if, of the million suddenly transplanted Jews, two or three hundred thousand perished, the remaining seven or eight hundred thousand would "somehow" be established. One hardly knows how to characterize the whole proposal, which was taken seriously by a number of Jews, and which afterward became part of the credo of the Revisionist Zionists.

I could not get away from the impression that Nordau's attitude toward the "East-European" Jews was a patronizing one. His tone was supercilious. His talk sparkled with epigrams, but it betrayed no depth of feeling and perception. His Zionism was facile. There was latent in it from the beginning the irresponsibility of the Nordau Plan. It was easy for Nordau to believe in the possibility of a tremendous and miraculous leap forward in Zionist work; for me there was never a royal road, a shortcut—I shall have occasion to refer again and again, throughout this narrative, to my struggle against this false concept. Moreover, I held that Zionist progress could be directed only through Palestine, through tedious labor, every step won by sweat and blood. Nordau thought the movement could be directed from Paris—with speeches.

Nordau was no more successful than Herzl in winning over the notables and great philanthropists. While I was still teaching at Geneva —I am again anticipating—a deputation of Russian Zionists was organized to call on Baron Edmond de Rothschild, to discuss with him the need for a reform in the administration of his colonies. Achad Ha-am, Ussishkin, Tschlenow, Kohan-Bernstein (the last was a Herzlian Zionist) made up the deputation. In Paris they co-opted Nordau as

Of our battle against the dissolution of young Jewry in the Russian Revolution I shall speak again; but enough has been told here to indicate one set of reasons for the opposition to Herzl which took shape in the Democratic Fraction at the early Zionist Congresses. We were not revolutionaries; but it would have been even more inaccurate to call us reactionaries. We were a struggling group of young academicians, without power, and without outside support; but we had a definite outlook. We did not like the note of elegance and pseudo-worldliness which characterized official Zionism, the dress suits and frock coats and fashionable dresses. On me the formalism of the Zionist Congresses made a painful impression, especially after one of my periodic visits to the wretched and oppressed Russian Jewish masses. Actually it was all very modest, but to us it smacked of artificiality, extravagance and the *haut monde*; it did not bespeak for us the democracy, simplicity and earnestness of the movement; and we were uncomfortable.

Had we been other than we were, we could not have appealed to the student youth, which was later to constitute the leadership of the Zionist movement. Herzl had no access to it; he did not speak its language, just as, both figuratively and literally, he did not speak the language of the Russian Jewish masses. If the Zionist movement became a factor in the great student colonies of the West, if it ceased to be a romantic "sport" and compelled the serious attention of its opponents, it was because the young protagonists of the idea had found their way to the hearts of the Russian Jewish student youth.

There were other, related reasons for our opposition. Herzl's pursuit of great men, of princes and rulers, who were to "give" us Palestine, was the pursuit of a mirage. It was accompanied, most unfortunately, but perhaps inevitably, by a shift of the leadership to the right. Herzl played to the rich and powerful, to Jewish bankers and financiers, to the Grand Duke of Baden, to Kaiser Wilhelm II and to the Sultan of Turkey; later to the British Foreign Secretary. We, on the other hand, had little faith in the benevolence of the mighty. It was inevitable that the leadership should feel uneasy about the Democratic Fraction, and about the left-wing section of the movement, the *Poale Zion*, which formed parallel with the right wing, the *Mizrachi*, or orthodox group. Official Zionism, as represented by the thoroughly respectable leadership, might have won the tolerance of the Russian authorities. Not so the young men, with their definitely leftist leanings. We began to represent a "danger" to the movement. We were the "subversives."

A third set of reasons came into play. Herzl, as we have seen, relied on diplomatic activity to get Palestine for the Jews. At the first Congresses, Herzl's political statements, though always vague, did have a certain freshening and exhilarating effect. It seemed to us for a time that we had been romantics and dreamers, but that our visions had been

little ones. Herzl spoke in large terms, of international recognition, of a charter for Palestine, of a vast mass migration. But the effect wore off as the years passed and nothing remained but the phrases. Herzl had seen the Sultan. He had seen the Kaiser. He had seen the British Foreign Secretary. He was about to see this or that important man. And the practical effect was nothing. We could not help becoming skeptical about these nebulous negotiations.

Side by side with the revolt of the Democratic Fraction there was a more general revolt on the part of the Russian Zionists against the Western conception of Zionism, which we felt to be lacking in Jewishness, in warmth and in understanding of the Jewish masses. Herzl did not know Russian Jewry; neither did the Westerners who joined him—Max Nordau, Alexander Marmorek, the distinguished physician, Leopold Greenberg, the editor of the *London Jewish Chronicle*, and others. Herzl was quick to learn—not so the others. They did not believe that Russian Jewry was capable of furnishing leaders to the movement. Herzl, however, wrote, immediately after the first Congress:

> And then . . . there rose before our eyes a Russian Jewry the strength of which we had not even suspected. Seventy of our delegates came from Russia, and it was patent to all of us that they represented the views and sentiments of the five million Jews of that country. And what a humiliation for us, who had taken our superiority for granted! All these professors, doctors, lawyers, industrialists, engineers and merchants stand on an educational level which is certainly no lower than ours. Nearly all of them are masters of two or three languages, and that they are men of ability in their particular lines is proved by the simple fact that they have succeeded in a land where success is peculiarly difficult for the Jews.

But Herzl discovered more. Of the Russian Jews, he said:

> They possess that inner unity which has disappeared from among the westerners. They are steeped in Jewish national sentiment, though without betraying any national narrowness and intolerance. They are not tortured by the idea of assimilation, their essential being is simple and unshattered. They do not assimilate into other nations, but they exert themselves to learn the best that there is in other peoples. In this wise they manage to remain erect and genuine. And yet they are ghetto Jews! The only ghetto Jews of our time! Looking on them, we understood where our forefathers got the strength to endure through the bitterest times.

Yet, with all this intuitive perception, this generosity of understanding, Herzl could not remake his own approach to Zionism. How much less possible was this for the smaller men who surrounded him! The Zionism of the Westerners was to us a mechanical and so to speak sociological concept, based on an abstract idea, without roots in the

traditions and emotions of the Jewish people. Excluded as we were from the leadership of the movement, we were expected to regard ourselves merely as its beneficiaries, and not, as we felt ourselves to be, the true source of its strength. We, the unhappy Jews of Russia, were to be sent to Palestine, by them, the emancipated Westerners. And if Palestine was not available, well—some other territory would have to be found.

We were vindicated in our attitude toward the Western leaders when, at a crucial moment in Zionist history—following the Kishinev pogrom—Herzl attempted to substitute Uganda for Palestine, as a temporary palliative measure, he urged, failing to perceive that, with all their sufferings, the Jews of Russia were incapable of transferring their dreams and longings from the land of their forefathers to any other territory. It was thus made manifest that Palestine had, in fact, never been "available" to the Western leadership. It had been a mirage, and when the mirage faded, Uganda—which as a matter of fact was even more of a mirage—was proposed in its place. The fact that the heart of Jewry was fixed, by every bond of affection and tradition, on Palestine, seemed beyond the understanding of the Westerners. The enormous *practical* significance of this fixation, its unique and quite irreplaceable power to awaken the energies of the Jewish people, escaped them.

We liked and admired Herzl, and knew that he was a force in Israel. But we opposed him within the movement because we felt that the Jewish masses needed something more than high diplomatic representatives, that it was not good enough to have two or three men traveling about interviewing the great of the world on our behalf. We were the spokesmen of the Russian-Jewish masses who sought in Zionism self-expression and not merely rescue. We must follow the example of the *Bilu* though on a far larger scale; this alone would encourage our youth, would release the forces latent in our people, would create real values. To Herzl all this was rather alien at first. But now that I have come to know and understand the Viennese milieu in which he grew up—so remote from all the troubles and vicissitudes of our life—and especially when I compare him with other Jewish Viennese intellectuals, of his time or a little later (Schnitzler, Von Hofmannsthal, Stefan Zweig—all men of talent), I am amazed at Herzl's greatness, at the profundity of his intuition, which enabled him to understand as much of our world as he did. He was the first—without a rival—among the Western leaders, but even he could not break the mold of his life. Within the limitations of that mold, and with his magnificent gifts and his complete devotion, he rendered incalculable service to the cause. He remains the classical figure in Zionism.

CHAPTER 5

Geneva Years

I Graduate, Begin to Teach, and Sell My First Patent—Tug of War between Chemistry and Zionism—Crisis in East-European Jewry and in Zionism—The Fourth Zionist Congress—Zionist Figures—Menachem Mendel Ussishkin—Yechiel Tschlenow—Leo Motzkin—Shmarya Levin—Vladimir Jabotinsky—Martin Buber—Berthold Feivel—Ansky—Zvi Aberson, the Luftmensch*—The Spiritual Dilemma of the Zionist Youth—The Birth of the Idea of the Hebrew University—I Meet My Future Wife—Vera Chatzman and Her Circle—A Glimpse into the Future.*

THE deep division of my life, or perhaps I should say its organic duality, manifested itself completely in the four years I spent in Geneva. Already in Berlin I had been aware of the double pull, toward science on the one hand, toward a public life in the Zionist movement on the other. There I had maintained the balance between the two forces; I still maintained it in Freiburg, while I was taking my doctorate. In Geneva the balance was disturbed, my scientific work suffered. Later on I emphasized my chemistry again, for a short period; and then again, in much later years, I abandoned it wholly for long periods.

My doctorate thesis was based on the dyestuff researches I had started in Berlin, and on the discovery which I had tried unsuccessfully to sell in Moscow. I managed to obtain with my doctorate the coveted top rating of *summa cum laude*, and the autumn following my graduation I was appointed *Privat Dozent* in chemistry at the University of Geneva. The nearest equivalent to this post in an English university is that of assistant reader; in an American it is, I think, that of lecturer. There is one important difference. The *Privat Dozent* received no fixed salary. He was paid by the pupil, at about fifty marks per term. The average enrollment gave the *Privat Dozent* something less than a very modest livelihood. But of course the title carried with it a certain distinction. It was the beginning of an academic career. It afforded opportunity for study and research. The next step was an assistant professorship, and after that came a full professorship. So, with all its poor pay, the post of *Privat Dozent* was much coveted.

European Zionism represented a passive nationalism, consciously or unconsciously influenced by assimilation, springing from a Judaism chiefly religious but not rooted in Jewish knowledge and folk experience. Meanwhile the continuous demand for practical work in Palestine was being ignored.

But Herzl, whatever he may have felt regarding the justice of our observations, was increasingly the prisoner of his line of action. He was driven to intensify and to emphasize his diplomatic activity. The calamities of Russian Jewry overwhelmed him; he foresaw the new tides of immigration which Kishinev and its aftermath would set in motion, and he redoubled his efforts for "the quick solution." As the summer approached we heard vague rumors of political negotiations with England; but we did not learn of their character until the Congress met. Meanwhile another facet of Herzl's far-flung activities was made public. Herzl had managed to arrange an interview, in St. Petersburg, with Von Plehve, the man whose hands were stained with the blood of thousands of Jewish victims! And in the early part of August, shortly before the opening of the Congress, Herzl actually came to Russia to be received by the butcher of Kishinev.

There was a passionate division of opinion on this step. There were some who believed that the Jewish leader could not pick and choose his contacts, but had to negotiate even with a murderer if some practical good would come of it. Others could not tolerate the thought of this final humiliation. But there were still others—I was among them—who believed that the step was not only humiliating, but utterly pointless. Von Plehve, who had passed a series of decrees, shortly after the Kishinev pogrom, designed to render impossible any sort of Zionist activity, would not make any promises worth the recording; if he did, he would not keep them. It turned out that Herzl not only hoped to influence Von Plehve to suppress the activities of the Black Hundreds (it was an utterly fantastic hope since anti-Semitism was a necessary instrument of policy to Von Plehve, to Pobiedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod, and to the whole czarist clique) he even dreamed of enlisting Russian aid in persuading Abdul Hamid, the feeble ruler of Turkey, to open the gates of Palestine to us. Unreality could go no further; anti-Semites are incapable of aiding in the creation of a Jewish homeland; their attitude forbids them to do anything which might really help the Jewish people. Pogroms, yes; repressions, yes; emigration, yes; but nothing that might be conducive to the freedom of the Jews.

Such was the fathomless despair of masses of Russian Jews that Herzl's progress through the Jewish communities took on an almost Messianic aspect. In Vilna, especially, there was a tremendous outpouring of the Jewish population, and a great surge of blind hope, baseless, elemental, instinctive and hysterical, attended his arrival. Nothing came,

naturally, of Herzl's "cordial" conversations with Von Plehve, nothing, that is, except disillusionment and deeper despair, and a deeper division between the Zionists and the revolutionaries, for the latter were particularly furious at this concession to reaction. Herzl records his talks with Von Plehve in his memoirs. Many generalities were uttered, Von Plehve reiterated the stock accusation that the Jews were all revolutionaries, and made some vague promises which he had no intention of keeping. In exchange for these, Herzl, in an address to the Jewish leaders of St. Petersburg, warned the Zionists against harboring radical elements in their midst! The memorandum which I had sent him had produced no results.

Worse was to follow at the Sixth Congress. It opened under the shadow of the Kishinev pogrom and Herzl's visit to Von Plehve; it closed with the Uganda episode.

The flurry of rumors regarding Herzl's negotiations with the British Government was put to rest only when the facts were submitted to the Congress. Before making these facts public, Herzl had already consulted the Actions Committee—the cabinet—of the Congress, and had discovered that he would encounter strong opposition. How strong he was yet to learn. There was, among many of the Russian delegates, a deep resentment against Herzl in connection with his visit to Von Plehve. They could not speak out—though Nachman Syrkin did express bitter disapproval on the floor of the Congress—because they knew that even in Basle they were being watched by the Russian secret police, and that they would be held accountable, when they returned to Russia, for every incautious word. This repressed resentment was fortified when, having set the stage with his customary skill, Herzl read forth the famous letter from the British Government, signed by Lord Lansdowne, offering the Jews an autonomous territory in Uganda, in that part of it which is now British East Africa.

I remember one deeply significant detail of the stage setting. It had always been the custom to hang on the wall, immediately behind the President's chair, a map of Palestine. This had been replaced by a rough map of the Uganda protectorate, and the symbolic action got us on the quick, and filled us with foreboding. Herzl opened his address with a vivid picture of the situation of the Jews, which we, the Russian Jews, knew only too well. He deduced from it only one thing: the urgent necessity of bringing immediate, large-scale relief by emigration to the stricken people. Emergency measures were needed. He did not relinquish the idea of Palestine as the Jewish homeland. On the contrary, he intimated that Von Plehve's promises to bring Russian pressure to bear on Turkey had improved our prospects in Palestine. But as far as the immediate problem was concerned, something new, something of great significance, had developed. The British Government had made us the

offer of a territory in British East Africa. Admittedly British East Africa was not Zion, and never would be. It was only an auxiliary activity—but on a national or state foundation.

It was an extraordinary speech, carefully prepared—too carefully in fact, for its cautious, balanced paragraphs betrayed the essential contradictions of the situation. Herzl had already encountered deep opposition in the closed session of the Actions Committee. But he had obtained a majority, and had enforced the unit rule, so that he could present the British offer in the name of the Actions Committee. Knowing, then, that he would encounter similar opposition on the floor of Congress, he did not submit the proposition that the British offer be accepted; he cushioned the proposal by suggesting that the Congress send a commission of investigation to the territory in question, to report on its suitability.

The effect on the Congress was a curious one. The delegates were electrified by the news. This was the first time in the exilic history of Jewry that a great government had officially negotiated with the elected representatives of the Jewish people. The identity, the legal personality of the Jewish people, had been re-established. So much, then, had been achieved by our movement; and it meant much. But as soon as the substance of the offer, and Herzl's manner of announcing it, sank home, a spirit of disquiet, dejection and anxiety spread through the Congress. It was clear that Herzl's faith in Von Plehve's support of our hopes in Palestine was more or less put on. And again, it was all very well to talk of Uganda as an auxiliary and a temporary measure, but the deflection of our energies to a purely relief effort would mean, whatever Herzl's intentions were, the practical dismantling of the Zionist Organization in so far as it had to do with Zion.

How was it that Herzl could contemplate such a shift of objective? It was the logical consequence of his conception of Zionism and of the role which the movement had to play in the life of the Jews. To him, and to many with him—perhaps the majority of the representatives of the Jews assembled in Basle—Zionism meant an *immediate* solution of the problems besetting their sorely tried people. If it was not that, it was nothing at all. The conception was at once crude, naive and generous. There is no *immediate* solution of great historic problems. There is only movement in the direction of the solution. Herzl, the leader, had set out with the contrary belief; and he met with disappointment. The *Judennot* —the Jewish need—was increasing hourly. Herzl had been in Russia and had cast a shuddering glance at the Pale and its miseries. Everywhere he had been received by a desperate people as its redeemer; it was his duty now to redeem. If Palestine was not, at the moment, feasible, he could not wait, for the flood of anti-Semitism was rising minute by minute and—to use his own words—"the lower strata of the Jewish

edifice were already inundated." If anything were to happen, then, there might not be enough Jews left to build Palestine; hence the offer of the British Government was providential; it had come just in the nick of time—a very present help in time of trouble. It would be cruel, heartless, un-Jewish and un-Zionistic, to throw away a chance which might never again occur in the history of the Jewish people.

Herzl's statement to the Congress was cautious, dignified and guarded; off stage, in the lobbies of the Congress, he was less diplomatic, more human, more vehement. He, and those under his influence, little thought that what he was offering to Jews and Zionists was a snare and a delusion: there was no territorial project, however magnificent it might appear at first blush, which could possibly, within a short space of time, have relieved the tension and appreciably mitigated the disasters which had come upon us with the force of an avalanche. Jewish emigration from Russia, which before Kishinev had been rising steadily, reached the figure of one hundred thousand per annum after Kishinev. Those who spoke calmly of deflecting the stream of immigration to Uganda did not stop to reflect that Uganda was a country of which only one thing was known, namely, that it was a desolate wilderness populated by savage tribes; neither its nature, its climate, its agricultural nor its other possibilities corresponded—at the optimistic best—to the need of the hour. It is hard to tell to what extent Herzl was completely taken in by the Uganda proposal. In his tortuous diplomatic calculations, he was also thinking of Uganda as a pawn. He wanted the Congress to accept Uganda in order to frighten the Sultan into action, as if to say: "If you won't give us Palestine, we'll drop you completely and go to British East Africa."

In any case, the proposal before the Congress was only that of an investigation committee. But no one was mistaken as to the symbolic significance of that proposal. A deep, painful and passionate division manifested itself on the floor of the Congress. When the first session was suspended, and the delegates scattered in the lobbies, or hastened to their caucuses, a young woman ran up on the platform, and with a vehement gesture tore down the map of Uganda which had been suspended there in place of the usual map of Zion.

I proceeded to the caucus of the Russian delegation, the largest at the Congress, for the discussion of our stand on the Uganda proposal. Ussishkin, the leader of the Russian Zionists—who was of course bitterly anti-Ugandist—was not at the Congress. He was in Palestine. The other Russian leaders, Kohan-Bernstein, Shmarya Levin, Victor Jacobson, were as implacably anti-Ugandist. The Polish delegates (they were a subgroup of the Russian delegation) were divided. Sokolow—characteristically—would not commit himself. My father, who was a fellow-delegate with me from Pinsk, was of the Russian minority which was

pro-Uganda—so was my brother Shmuel—and for the only time in our lives there was a coolness between us. I should mention that among the Russian Zionists there was a certain type of respectable middle-class householder which had always been skeptical of the feasibility of the rebuilding of Palestine. There were practical men, merchants, men of affairs, who argued that Herzl's efforts for Palestine had reached an impasse. "What's the good of pursuing a phantom?" they said. And then again: "What have we to lose by accepting Uganda?" Or else it was: "The British are a great people. It is a great government which makes the offer. We must not offend a great government by refusing."

All of these arguments, it seemed to me, were informed by a curious inferiority complex. In the session of the Russian delegation, I made a violent speech against the Uganda project, and swung to our side many of the hesitant. In the confusion of the offer, which Herzl had flung so dramatically at the Congress, many of the delegates had lost their bearings. I myself, I admitted, had for a moment looked upon the incident as a party maneuver but it had become clear to me that it was much more fundamental. It was an attempt to give a totally new character to the Zionist movement. The very fact, I said, that the *Mizrachi*—the religious Zionists—were mostly for Uganda, and the Democratic Fraction mostly against it, revealed the nature of the move.

"The influence of Herzl on the people is very great," I said. "Even the opponents of Uganda cannot get away from it, and they cannot make up their minds to state openly that this is a departure from the Basle program. Herzl, who found the *Chibath Zion* movement already in existence, made a pact with it. But as time passed, and the idea of Palestine did not succeed, he regretted the pact. He reckoned only with external conditions, whereas the forces on which we base ourselves lie deep in the psychology of our people and in its living impulses. We knew that Palestine could not be obtained in short order, and that is why we do not despair if this or that particular attempt fails." And I closed my speech with these words: "If the British Government and people are what I think they are, they will make us a better offer." This last sentence became a sort of slogan for the anti-Ugandists at the Congress.

The debate on the Uganda proposal had opened at the first session of the Plenum with a speech in the affirmative by Max Nordau. It was not a convincing speech, for Nordau himself was not thoroughly convinced, and had yielded only to pressure. It was then that he coined the famous phrase *Nachtasyl*—night shelter; Uganda was to be colonized, nationally, as a sort of halfway station to Palestine. As the debate unfolded, the first flush of excitement over the recognition of the Zionist Organization by a great government died away. The feeling against the proposal began to crystallize.

The debate was resumed after the separate sessions of the caucuses,

and was closed by a second address from Nordau. The Congress was in a high state of tension. Family bonds and lifelong friendships were shattered. The vote on the resolution was by roll call. Every delegate had to say "Yes" or "No." The replies fell, in a deathly silence, like hammer blows. We felt that the destiny of the Zionist movement was being decided. Two hundred and ninety-five delegates voted "Yes," one hundred and seventy-five "No." About a hundred abstained. I remember vividly Herzl calling Sokolow's name. "Herr Sokolow." No answer. "Herr Sokolow!" No answer. And a third time, "Herr Sokolow!" With the same result. To indicate the excitement under which all of us labored, I record a minor incident which took place afterward, in the train which was taking a group of us from Basle toward Russia. Tschlenow turned to Sokolow and said:

"If I, or Weizmann here, had abstained from voting, it would have mattered little; but how could you, the editor of the most important Hebrew paper in Eastern Europe, to which thousands of readers look for guidance, abstain? You must have an opinion one way or the other on a fundamental question like this!"

To which Sokolow replied, with unwonted heat:

"I could write you a dozen articles on this issue, and you would not find out whether I am pro or con. . . . And here you dare to ask me to my face for a definite reply. That's more than I can stand!"

Now the extraordinary feature of the vote was that the great majority of the negatives came from the Russian delegation! The delegates from Kishinev were against the Uganda offer! It was absolutely beyond the understanding of the Westerners. I recall how, after the vote, Herzl came up to a group of delegates in the lobby, and in the course of a brief interchange of views exclaimed, apropos of the recalcitrant Russians: "These people have a rope around their necks, and still they refuse!"

A young lady, the one who had torn down the map of Uganda from the wall behind the dais, happened to be standing by. She exclaimed, vehemently: *"Monsieur le President, vous êtes un traitre!"* Herzl turned on his heel.

Technically, Herzl had a majority for the Uganda proposal, but it was quite clear that acceptance of the British offer would be futile. The vote had been too close. Besides, the people *for* whom British East Africa was to be accepted, the suffering, oppressed Russians, did not want it. They would not relinquish Zion.

When the result of the roll call was announced in the Plenum the Russian members of the Actions Committee who had been against the proposal at the closed session compelled Herzl to exonerate them from responsibility for the unit vote. They then left the dais and marched out from the hall, followed by the great majority of the Russian delegates. It was an unforgettable scene. Tschlenow, Kornberg and others of the