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## Much Ado about Little: Ahad Ha'am's "Truth from Eretz Yisrael," Zionism, and the Arabs

THE 1891 ARTICLE "*EMET M'ERETZ YISRAEL*" [Truth from Eretz Israel] by Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginzberg, 1856–1927) is one of early Zionism's most-cited references. It is regarded as a milestone in Zionist thought and in Ahad Ha'am's own role in the movement, and even, more notably, as the first serious analysis of "the Arab issue," which was eventually to dominate the history of Zionism and of the state of Israel. Remarkably, it appears that no full English translation has previously been published.

What follows is a complete and original translation of "Truth from Eretz Israel" as published in Ahad Ha'am's collected writings.<sup>1</sup> "Truth" originally appeared as a series of articles in the Hebrew daily newspaper *Hamelitz* (St. Petersburg), 13–24 Sivan, 5651 (19–30 June 1891), following Ahad Ha'am's first visit to Eretz Israel,<sup>2</sup> 26 February–17 May 1891.

This was very early in Ahad Ha'am's career as one of Zionism's most influential thinkers. His first important publication, the article "This Is Not the Way," had appeared only two years earlier in the same newspaper, and established him as a severe critic of the prevailing mode of settlement during the first decade of Zionist (or proto-Zionist) activity.<sup>3</sup> In his view, the "Return to Zion" that began in 1882 was premature, disorganized, and inadequately conceived. His report of his 1891 trip belongs, first and foremost, to the general thrust of the critique first laid out two years earlier. Above all, in his view, the movement needed unity, better organization, better leadership, better preparation (both morally and materially), and the application of intelligence in both senses of the word; what he found in the ancestral land was a movement that, having developed from numerous centers at the grass roots level, consequently lacked any central direction: "a convulsion of withered limbs."

Despite his previous criticism, Ahad Ha'am professed, in a letter sent soon after arriving in Jaffa, that "I live in the hope that . . . I will find an answer to all my doubts."<sup>4</sup> In fact, 1891 was considered a moment of renewed hopes for settlement of Eretz Israel; the Ottoman Empire had relaxed its entry restrictions just as new pressures in Russia had created masses of potential new immigrants, and a wave of newcomers had already begun. But given Ahad Ha'am's predilections, and the perhaps inevitable chaos accompanying any sudden mass movement of people, his hopes of finding matters to his liking were doomed to disappointment. His trip there was itself the result of allegations of mismanagement in the Jaffa office of *Hovevei Zion*,<sup>5</sup> which put him right in the middle of some of the uglier squabbles.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, he was appalled by the vicious infighting among the Zionists themselves, the proliferation of profiteers both Jewish and non-Jewish, the skyrocketing price of land, various agricultural fiascoes, and, above all, by the inability of the new settlers to free themselves from dependence on outside charity (principally the support of Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris). "I was not able," he reports, "to locate a single person living from the fruit of his land alone."

This damning reality was juxtaposed in his mind with the scandalous activities of "charlatans" promoting the holy land as "a new California" with an easy life. What resulted was "a motley mixture of gold-diggers and indigent exiles" who were an easy target for Ahad Ha'am's scathing sarcasm. Describing one "Hebrew middleman" who declared that unsuccessful settlers can "go to hell," and another who bragged of tricking a settlement society out of a tract of land, he noted that "even the most sublime idea can be emptied of any integrity when molested by such hands." As an intellectual whose world view nevertheless put a premium on practicality, Ahad Ha'am was at his most effective in puncturing the balloons of the various get-rich-quick schemes that he encountered, whether the much-heralded wine industry ("where will all this flow of wine back up?") or the short-lived cultivation of silkworms: "I will not be at all surprised if I soon hear in the papers the glad tidings that in some city [a silkworm cultivation] society has been born—*mazaltov*, Bless the Lord, and may it prosper—and then not many days will pass before the one society will sire another ten societies in its own image, and instead of vines and wine we will hear, all day, old wives' tales about mulberries and silk . . ."

"I know full well," Ahad Ha'am admitted in passing, "that my words here will infuriate many against me." They certainly did. *Hamelitz* printed numerous attacks on his article, some from close associates in the move-

ment (including Menachem Ussishkin, who had accompanied Ahad Ha'am on his trip). The controversy did abate after a while, only to be stoked again by a similar series of articles following Ahad Ha'am's second trip to "the colonies" in 1893.<sup>7</sup> The result of the first article, however, was to isolate Ahad Ha'am within the movement at a time when he was emerging as, potentially, its natural leader; the cost of "Truth" may have been the loss of any chance to implement his own ideas from a pinnacle of power.<sup>8</sup>

Ahad Ha'am's own solution to the problems he outlined in "Truth from Eretz Israel" was to turn to Jews in Western nations to provide the leadership, organizational skills, and wherewithal lacking in Eastern European Jewry. The immediate impact of this proposal was slight; however, within a few years the idea was realized, with a vengeance, in the emergence of Theodor Herzl and the founding of the World Zionist Organization. Needless to say this was not what Ahad Ha'am had in mind, and by this time he had formulated his conception of a "spiritual center," for qualified immigrants after extensive preparation, as an alternative to political Zionism in the Herzlian mode. The publication of "Truth from Eretz Israel" was thus also an important landmark in the evolution of Ahad Ha'am's simultaneous position both as Zionism's most prominent ideologue and its most important internal critic.<sup>9</sup>

Most references to the article today, however, do not relate either to its importance to Zionist ideology or to Ahad Ha'am's own thinking and career. Its most frequently quoted passages are those dealing with the Arab issue. In large part, this is because it stands as the first, and for some time as the only, serious commentary with at least a glimmer of recognition that relations with the Arab population would be one of Zionism's most severe tests. Those who dealt with the problem after Ahad Ha'am, such as Ussishkin, Leon Motzkin, Ber Borochov, and Herzl himself (in his utopian novel *Altneuland* [Old-New Land], published in 1902), tended to minimize it as a long-term threat and to express confidence that economic prosperity brought by Zionism, together with fair treatment of Arabs *as individuals*, would eliminate the problem by integrating the Arab populace into a modern democratic (and Jewish) society.<sup>10</sup> A full-scale debate based on growing realization that the Arab issue would not be solved simply by the success of Zionism itself, but required a long-term strategy recognizing a conflict of interests, began only with the publication of Yitzhak Epstein's article "The Hidden Question" in 1907<sup>11</sup> (by this time, unmistakable evidence of rising Arab nationalism was at hand). In this context, Ahad Ha'am's warning in 1891 appears as evidence that, while Zionists of the first *aliyah*

(the first wave of settlement, 1882–1905) may not have focused on the issue, they were at least aware of it. On the other hand, the article's stern condemnation of the settler's mistreatment of Arabs is often cited as confirmation and admonition by anti-Zionist writers and publicists.

In view of its landmark status on both sides, therefore, it is startling to discover that, apart from a few incidental references, only two paragraphs in "Truth from Eretz Israel" actually address the issue of relations with the non-Jewish population there. The truth about "Truth" is that the Arab issue was not a major concern. Nor was it a major focus of those who attacked the article; in his response to his critics, Ahad Ha'am does not mention the Arabs.<sup>12</sup> Nor did he again mention the issue in his second "Truth from Eretz Israel," which followed his second trip there in 1893.<sup>13</sup> Nor did he return to the subject in any depth, except as part of a scathing review of Herzl's *Altneuland*,<sup>14</sup> until after another trip in 1911, when the impact of Arab nationalism was evident to all.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, in 1891 Ahad Ha'am did see beyond what others saw. He saw the Arabs not simply as passive objects of manipulation by others, but as actors with their own desires and aims ("From abroad we are accustomed to believing that the Arabs are all desert savages, like donkeys, who neither see nor understand what goes on around them. But this is a big mistake."). He recognized a collective dimension to Arab identity; their hostility to foreign intrusion was not simply a matter of local or isolated frictions, but was potentially part of a general pattern of resistance that Zionism would one day face ("If the time comes when the life of our people in Eretz Israel develops to the point of encroaching upon the native population, they will not easily yield their place."). He also never claimed that Eretz Israel was "an abandoned land" [*eretz azuva*], a phrase that occurs with regularity elsewhere in Zionist writings of the period, sometimes even from those living in the clearly non-abandoned land.

In fact, Ahad Ha'am's perceptions were, in some respects, well ahead of the perceptions and attitudes of the early settlers who were actually in contact with the Arab population. Diaries and letters of first *aliyah* pioneers pay surprisingly little attention to the population among whom they lived, and when Arabs appear in these pages it is usually as a nuisance.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the history of early settlements shows that all of them existed in a state of friction, if not conflict, with their Arab neighbors. The standard interpretation was that such frictions were "normal" and did not have a larger political importance, being similar to conflicts among the Arabs themselves. This was, apparently, a matter of no small ideological significance to the first

settlers; to admit that they found themselves among a hostile population that harassed them on an ethnic, religious, or political basis would be to admit that Zionism in Eretz Israel had merely duplicated the basic problem of the Diaspora. To this the settlers countered with a standard narrative that appears again and again in the new colonies: the Arabs harassed us, we fought back bravely and successfully, and now they respect us and leave us in peace. That Arab hostility in fact grew over time was thus conveniently swept under the rug, despite an occasional observer—such as Ahad Ha'am—with a compulsion to peek under carpets.

In other respects, however, Ahad Ha'am's response to the presence of Arabs in Eretz Israel did not depart significantly from the received wisdom. As the in-house monitor of the movement, he naturally targeted the empty optimism and fantasies that characterized much of early Zionism, and took upon himself the role of forcing attention to the unpleasant realities and imponderable problems that others tried to ignore. In his list of obstacles and hardships that were being ignored, the Arabs are simply another item to be ticked off, and not the main one at that. The Arabs come after the problem of land scarcity and before the problem of the Turkish government. They were an active rather than a passive force, but still basically an obstacle to be overcome rather than an opposed party that Zionism had to either accommodate, or else mobilize to defeat by force.

In other words, for Ahad Ha'am, the Arabs, while possessing a collective interest that others did not see, still did not constitute a *political* problem. Political issues were to be dealt with on the level of the Ottoman government (where Ahad Ha'am, like others, grossly underestimated the extreme improbability of the Turkish government, already under siege from Europe for centuries, voluntarily introducing into its territories another assertive minority tied to the West). This is hardly a surprise; for decades to come, the Zionist movement would try to settle political issues with outside forces—the Hashemite dynasty, mandatory Britain—rather than deal with the Arab community in Eretz Israel/Palestine as a political entity. It is true, as numerous analysts have pointed out, that Arab nationalism had not yet made its appearance. But this does not mean that Arabs in the area of Zionist settlement were incapable of perceiving a collective interest in blocking foreign—especially European—intrusions; that is to say, of having political instincts and aspirations. To ignore this is not only to overlook the historical evidence of hostility to alien penetration into their midst,<sup>17</sup> but also to overlook the basic us-them dimension of human relations.

Ahad Ha'am saw the immediate problem simply in terms of behaving decently and humanely toward the local population. In this he was more

willing than many others to recognize the continuity in Jewish history and to link the issue to the traditional Jewish concern over stirring up hostility in a host population: “There is certainly one thing we could have learned from our *past and present* history: how careful we must be not to arouse the anger of other people against ourselves by reprehensible conduct [emphasis in original].” But this was not a matter of coming to some kind of mutual adjustment; it was rather part of the overall strategy for reducing obstacles to the desired end. Ahad Ha’am recognized that this would not make the problem go away, and that, over time, Zionist success would provoke hatred, but he declared that “this is nothing,” because, in the end, the Arabs would simply be overwhelmed: “By that time our brothers would be able to secure their position in Eretz Israel by their large number, their extensive and rich holdings, their unity and their exemplary way of life.”

Finally, it should also be noted that Ahad Ha’am’s attitudes toward the Arabs as a backward non-European people did not set him apart from the early Zionist settlers in an age when the superiority of European culture and institutions was taken as a given. In the first paragraph of “Truth from Eretz Israel” he already mentions in passing the “indolence” of the Arabs; later he notes that they “do not like to exert themselves.” He assumed, no less than Herzl or other Zionist leaders, that the introduction of European methods and mores into a benighted area of the world was one of Zionism’s positive historical functions, even if he was not so naïve as to think it would eliminate resentment over the intrusion.

Ahad Ha’am thus subscribed in the end to the basic assumption about “the Arab problem” that differentiated this earlier period from the later era that began, roughly, with the second *aliyah* (1905–1914) and the 1908 Young Turks’ revolt (which brought Arab nationalism to the fore). Stated baldly, this assumption was: no solution is needed apart from success in the Zionist enterprise itself. This being the case, there was no need to analyze the issue apart from the established Zionist program, nor to offer specific proposals or compromises of one kind or another directed toward dealing with the roots of Arab hostility, nor (if compromise is impossible) to mobilize as required for a decision by force of arms. Thus, while his talent for puncturing balloons led to recognition of a larger problem than others saw, even Ahad Ha’am did not see its real dimensions. His essay is, in essence, the exception that proves the rule.

Ahad Ha'am  
Translated by Alan Dowty

## Truth From Eretz Israel

**A**FTER MANY YEARS SPENT CONTEMPLATING and imagining the land of our fathers and the rebirth of our people in it, I have now finally been privileged to see with my own eyes the subject of my dreams, this land of wonders which captivates the hearts of multitudes from all peoples and all lands. I spent about three months there. I saw its ruins, the remnant of its life in the *past*. I observed its miserable condition in the *present*, but I paid particular attention to its *future*, and, everywhere I went, one question was always in the forefront: in the end, what is our hope here? Is the Land of Israel ready to return to life, and are the children of Israel capable of reviving it? Regarding the *land* I had no trouble finding an answer: one has only to traverse it for a few days, to see its hills and valleys, its fields and vineyards that bear their fruit despite the indolence of the Arabs, in order to realize that its vitality has not waned, and that now, as in the past, it has the capacity to give life and happiness to great numbers of its children who return to it wholeheartedly and work it with eager hands. But, on the other hand, it was not so easy to find an answer to the question of the *people* Israel, to pass judgment on the forces at work, to learn from the deeds about the doers and how far they are capable of bringing us to the end we seek.

Now I have left the land of my dreams; I left with broken heart and downcast spirit. My imagination is no longer free to soar aloft as in the past; the land, with those therein and every reality there, is no longer a pleasant dream but rather tangible *truth*, clearly and intricately distinguished from familiar visions, good and bad, that I can no longer ignore. Of this *truth* I want to reveal here a small part—the ugliest part. I do not want to be “a lyre for the songs of Zion,”<sup>18</sup> to fire the imagination and emotions of readers with pleasant pictures—such lyres we already have in abundance, putting us to sleep with pretty tunes. My wish, to the contrary, is to arouse my fellow lovers of Zion from their sweet slumber and to bring before them, as an *eyewitness*, the defective side of the movement’s course so that they themselves can judge whether our present activities are suitable to our desired



*goal* and whether we might not have reason for concern about the future, despite the lovely visions we encounter here and there. Even one error sometimes destroyeth much good;<sup>19</sup> how much more so, repeated fundamental errors.

To Eretz Israel or to America? This question, which in its time gave birth to an entire polemical literature, has stirred almost no one in recent years. This is because the better people in both camps have, over time, had to make certain admissions. Those singing the praises of Eretz Israel admitted to their opponents that it could not, at present, absorb the mass of people moving from their countries of birth, especially merchants and craftsmen looking for an *immediate* source of sustenance who do not have the energy to prepare everything required for working the land and waiting for the fruit of their labor. And the other camp was also compelled to admit that America could not gather together in one place a huge mass of the children of Israel and establish them on the soil for the purpose of founding a *Hebrew center*. The true answer, therefore, is: to America *and* to Eretz Israel. The economic side of the Jewish question needs to be answered in America, while the idealistic side—the need to create a fixed center for ourselves by settling a large mass of our brethren in one place on the basis of working the land, so that both Israel and its enemies will know that there is one place under the heavens, even if it is too small for all the nation, where a Jew can raise his head like any other person, earning his bread from the land, by the sweat of his brow, and creating his own national spirit—if this need has any hope of being fulfilled, it is only in Eretz Israel.

And if so, if settlement of Eretz Israel is not an answer to the question “what will we eat?” for each and every person, but instead to the question of the life of the whole community, then it follows that those going to America do so by their own decision and on their own responsibility, while the settlement of Eretz Israel is a matter for the people as a whole. Every step needs to be measured and carried out with sober and considered judgment, under the direction of the nation’s statesmen and leaders, in order that all actions be directed to one end and that individuals do not, in their private actions, upset the apple-cart. But in order to appreciate even more the absolute need for unified and orderly action, we need to examine the current situation in Eretz Israel in relation to our own goal and to the stumbling-blocks in our path.

From abroad, we are accustomed to believe that Eretz Israel is presently almost totally desolate, an uncultivated desert, and that anyone wishing to buy land there can come and buy all he wants. But in truth it is not so. In the entire land, it is hard to find tillable land that is not already tilled; only

sandy fields or stony hills, suitable at best for planting trees or vines and, even that, after considerable work and expense in clearing and preparing them—only these remain unworked, because the Arabs do not like to exert themselves today for a distant future. And thus it is not possible to find good land for sale every day. Not the peasants alone, but the owners of large properties as well, do not easily part with good land that has no drawbacks. Many of our people who came to buy land have been in Eretz Israel for months, and have toured its length and width, without finding what they seek.

From abroad we are accustomed to believing that the Arabs are all desert savages, like donkeys, who neither see nor understand what goes on around them. But this is a big mistake. The Arab, like all children of Shem, has a sharp intellect and is very cunning. The cities of Syria and Eretz Israel are full of Arab merchants who also know how to exploit the public and to proceed furtively with all those with whom they deal, exactly as in Europe. The Arabs, and especially those in the cities, understand our deeds and our desires in Eretz Israel, but they keep quiet and pretend not to understand, since they do not see our present activities as a threat to their future. Therefore they try to exploit us as well, to extract some benefit from the new visitors as long as they can. Yet they mock us in their hearts. The farmers are happy to have a new Hebrew colony founded in their midst since they receive a good wage for their labor and get wealthier from year to year, as experience shows; and the owners of large properties are also happy with us, since we pay them a huge price—more than they dreamed possible—for stony and sandy land. However, if the time comes when the life of our people in Eretz Israel develops to the point of encroaching upon the native population, they will not easily yield their place. . .

From abroad, we are accustomed to believing that the Turkish government is so feeble and so disordered that it will pay no attention to what happens in Eretz Israel, and that, thanks to its love of lucre, we can have our way there, and even more so if we have the protection of the European representatives. But in this we are also grievously mistaken. “*Baksheesh*” is indeed a potent force in Turkey that even state officials do not resist. But at the same time, we must realize that the top ministers are also patriots and great devotees to their own religion and government, and, in questions that involve the honor of either of these, they do their duty faithfully and no amount of money will change that; and in such cases, the intervention of consuls will sometimes cause more harm than good, as I have it from reliable sources.

In addition, we must remember that traces of modern culture have already appeared here and there in Eretz Israel. The Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad will soon be completed, and there is a report that a government permit has already been issued for a more substantial line from Haifa to Damascus. The blasts of the locomotive's whistle will undoubtedly bring great changes to the land and its inhabitants, and our work will be even harder than before. . . . And when we add to this the general obstacles, material and moral, that any mass immigration of people coming to settle in a new country encounter in their path—and even more when their intent is to change their entire way of life, to transform themselves from merchants into workers of the soil—then, if we truly and seriously seek to achieve our end in the land of our fathers, we will no longer be able to conceal from ourselves the fact that we are setting forth in a massive war and that such a war requires extensive preparations: it requires clear and detailed knowledge of the condition and features of the battlefield, it requires overall planning to delineate in advance all future actions, and it requires good weapons—not sword and spear, but a mighty will and total unity—and above all it requires skilled leaders, suitably trained, who will go before the populace, who will bring together and organize all the activities in accord with the requisites of the goal, and no one will defy them. Only under these conditions can we hope that, despite all the obstacles, the doable will be done and we will be well able to overcome,<sup>20</sup> because nothing can stand against the will and unity of an entire people.

The basic principle upon which all rests is thus not the *quantity* of our actions, but their *quality*, and from this viewpoint we must survey the current state of our affairs in Eretz Israel if we are not to deceive ourselves and those who believe in us.

From abroad, we rejoice to see that the idea of settling in Eretz Israel is taking hold of our people. This joy is justified only under two conditions. First, only if people know the true state of affairs, if all those seeking to immigrate to Eretz Israel know in advance the stumbling-blocks they will encounter on their way and the hard work required beforehand—that it is not a matter of money and wealth, but of bread to eat—and for all that they still long to come, then we could be certain that they have truly and sincerely resolved in their hearts to assume the burden of labor, and we could hope that most of them would also be prepared to accept and carry out what they have taken on. Second, only if everything were ready for such a movement, if we already had at hand all the information necessary for such a massive project, if we had people who would stand at its head and bring all the

disparate materials together into one unified whole, and who could go before the nation to show it the correct path in all actions and to protect it from evil, from a corrupting Satan, and from perilous paramours . . .

But one has only to spend a short time in Eretz Israel, observing with open eyes all that is happening, in order to realize that both of these conditions are totally lacking.

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In every people and in every language, the scribes and preachers who stir up a new movement are people of stature who know that to every purpose there is a season and a measure, and who understand how and what to articulate in order to keep the people on the correct course. Among us, as well, there would certainly be such scribes and preachers who knew how to measure their steps and weigh their words—if the “movement” were truly honest and inclusive. But now, when in truth we have nothing but the convulsion of withered limbs, each one by itself, the men of letters also do “each one that which is right in his own eyes”<sup>21</sup> without paying much attention to the results of their words. In their excessive enthusiasm, they imagine they are serving the cause of settling Eretz Israel by fabricating rosy pictures. They feel that the great multitude is not moved by love of Zion, and the plain truth will not suffice to captivate its heart, and thus they allow themselves to lie “in the name of God,” to praise and exalt Eretz Israel and its fruits in gross exaggeration, to publish abroad various letters “from there” written by youths or visionaries, or also—dare I say it—by charlatans who overstate the case *deliberately and purposefully*. As though it were not enough that the land of our fathers, like all lands, provides bread for its tillers, it must also “bring forth cakes and fine woolen garments”<sup>22</sup> without undue exertion. Through such means, they have indeed succeeded in kindling love in many hearts, but not love of Zion and Israel, nor even love of physical labor and farming, but rather love of the new “business” with the fruit of the vine, which, according to its owners, gives them a better income than usury and interest. Many shopkeepers, middlemen and such people concluded, thanks to these glad tidings, that this “great idea” was better than their current pursuits in providing a large profit for minimal effort. And thus our holy land became a new *California*, catching the eyes of those looking for an easy life and of “fortune hunters” of various sorts.

From this source came forth all the “precise accounts” by which societies for the planting of vineyards were founded and are founded every day. Who among those known as “*Hovevei Zion*” does not know by heart the economics of the vineyards and the great wealth earned by their owners? Who does not know that such and such vines cost their owners such and

such, that each vine will yield such and such grapes, from which will be made an exceptionally good wine that will be sold throughout the world at a steep price, and that the return from all this is such and such percent (a respectable number)? People who have never in their lives seen even an image of vines sit down and preach with the pretense of experts about the vineyards and the wine, keeping exact accounts and promising great returns, and the entire people hears and rejoices and applauds and sees in this “the footprints of the Messiah.” And indeed there are Messianic footprints here, though in a different sense . . .

I know full well that my words here will infuriate many against me, but I consider it a sacred task to publish the truth: up to this very day we have no experience on which we can rely that can tell us what to expect from the new vineyards in Eretz Israel. All the colonies, old and new, are blindly following the agricultural experts sent by the Benefactor.<sup>23</sup> If *Rishon Lezion* begins planting “Bardello” grapes, henceforth the entire nation plants “Bardello,” and if the planters in *Rishon* go back to “Malbec” grapes, it comes to pass that the entire nation again gropes in the darkest corners for “Malbec”—without noticing that all of these French guests are only experiments on the sacred soil and that the result is yet uncertain. Moreover: despite the promises of the French specialists and despite the lies spread in the journals, *the wine did not turn out well in Rishon Lezion last year and could not be sold in Europe*. To be sure it is possible, as the experts say, that this was due to various circumstantial causes and that we should not yet despair; but for all that, *so far there isn't a glimmer of anything beyond high hopes*—hopes that cannot remain in suspense forever. That is to say, it is possible that the new wine will not bring a good price in distant markets after costs of transport and custom duties, and then it will be sold in limited quantities, domestically and in the region, and if our brothers plant tens of thousands of vines at once, then where will all this flow of wine back up and what will be its price? If wealthy investors living abroad put only a part of their money in vineyards in Eretz Israel, and do not get fifty percent back, by their way of thinking it is not a tragedy. But those of modest means or the poor who have put all their money into working a small vineyard and have waited with bated breath for the jubilant day when every man shall sit under his vine and celebrate to the tune of the jangling silver that his wine will bring—if *they* have miscalculated, and the income of the vineyard is not even enough on which to live, then what will be with them and with the settling of Eretz Israel?

This view of the current planting of vineyards, and the danger posed to settlement built on such a foundation, is not mine alone, but is shared by

most of those who know Eretz Israel. The more sensitive add that it is a bad moral commentary on our people if it aspires to make its land into liquor, to convert the holy earth into a vast field of intoxication—and perhaps such an “idealistic” claim also has a grain of truth. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that, if the movement sets out from a pure source and relies on credible information, then it would never take this form. All those who want to get rich and do not want to work would then seek their fortunes elsewhere, and only those of Israel who cherish the land and its cultivation for itself, and not for the sake of huge earnings, will come: people who are truly and simply fed up with a life of degradation and meaninglessness and will go to the land of their fathers in firm determination to leave behind their disreputable traits, the consequences of commerce, and to devote themselves with a whole heart to physical labor with spiritual repose. Such people would not put themselves at risk by entrusting their destiny, and that of Eretz Israel, to a conjecture that is not yet sufficiently examined, but would rather choose to buy cultivable fields and bring forth *bread from the earth* by the sweat of their brow, while at the same time they could plant vineyards in their spare time, gradually, without outside labor or huge costs. If in the course of time the wine proved very profitable, so much the better, and if not, they could make do with less and eat their bread with contentment. This is not the case at present, when most of those coming to Eretz Israel do so on the basis of calculations that guarantee them great profit for little work (or for simply supervising the work of others), and only on this basis have they been so gracious as to settle themselves in the land of their fathers. Now, it is self-evident, they are “on no account” about to engage in simple tilling of the soil, which yields so little. And thus, in all the settlement activities, there appears a kind of stock-exchange speculation, under the banner: Get Rich or Die!

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Though the people Israel can be “a wise and intelligent people”<sup>24</sup> when it chooses to be—it cannot be denied—one talent has stuck to it more than to any other people and nullifies its wisdom, and this is the talent for imitation. Speak to the children of Israel from the crack of dawn, speak of the necessity and benefit of some matter, prove all this with manifest signs and wonders—all in vain! Only one in a city will hear your voice; the great mass will not bestir themselves. However, let anyone actually arise and act, even if improperly and on the wrong basis, and he at once has numerous pupils who follow his lead and blindly imitate his actions. This inferior trait might actually bring great benefit, if our work were truly inclusive, and if it had

distinguished and intelligent men at its head. In that case, the first steps would be taken properly, and the people would imitate them and take many more like them. But in the current state of affairs, with no system and no order and no unity in any of our actions, where every intellectual (and, often, true lunatic) sees himself as a miniature Messiah and jumps in front to redeem Israel—now it is impossible to overstate the damage this trait causes. Let anyone found a society in his city, even on the shakiest foundation and with accounts in total disarray, and many others follow in his path; and societies like this, with almost no variation, will shortly be founded in a number of other cities, without any investigation or concern about whether there is substance in the matter, without seeking the wisdom of experience, and without taking into account that not everything that is possible in one place can be done everywhere, and that not everything that works for a select group of true “*Hovevei Zion*,” similar in their ideas and attributes, also works for any riffraff on the street.

Recently in the Benefactor’s colonies, attention has been directed toward cultivation of the silkworm. Experiments are being carried out in *Rishon Lezion* and in *Zichron Ya’akov*, and there is hope. But the experiments have not yet concluded, and the overseer (as he told me himself) did not know the exact results—and already there are in Eretz Israel enthusiastic accountants who prepared their own *private* prospectus and founded a new society for mulberry tree farming and silk products! The aforementioned overseer, who saw the prospectus, was astonished by it. But, despite his warning, I will not be at all surprised if I soon hear in the papers the glad tidings that in some city such a society has been born—*mazaltov*, Bless the Lord, and may it prosper—and then not many days will pass before the one society will sire another ten societies in its own image, and instead of vines and wine we will hear, all day, old wives’ tales about mulberries and silk . . .

“And so what?” the heads of the societies habitually respond. After all, our rules forbid members from settling in Eretz Israel for some years, before everything is ready. And by then, if it turns out that our calculations are mistaken, we won’t allow poorer members to immigrate. And finally, through such actions a large area of land will pass from the hands of the Arabs to those of Jews.

But this argument has many flaws. First, the poor who mortgage their households in order to join a society (it has happened) will not be able so easily to put aside the pleasant dream that had for so long enchanted them. And even if the founders shout loudly, after the fact, that they erred in their calculation and that the poor will not find immigration to their advantage,

their shouts will not avail them, just as presently the warnings of the Odessa committee are of no avail, and Eretz Israel will be enriched with *thousands* of new paupers living on support or expiring from hunger. Second, there is ample proof that, despite the cited rule, a great part of the members will settle in Eretz Israel before the set hour, since the present economic situation abroad deprives many of their livelihood every day. These people, whose condition forces them into exile, will not go looking for a temporary respite somewhere else pending permission to settle in Eretz Israel when they have a stake in a given society. While I was in Eretz Israel, in fact, letters arrived from society members asking for some pretext to violate the cited rule. Third, even the moneyed members of such societies will not all bring a blessing to Eretz Israel by settling there, because the founders of the societies, as is well-known, are not too particular about their members' moral qualities or their capacity for physical labor, so long as they are fully paid up. And in such a delicate and complicated matter, it is impossible to foresee all the embarrassment that such disreputable people will bring with them, even if they start with a full belly.

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But in addition to all this, the one positive thing in all these activities—the purchase of land—came out on the short end during this period because of disunity and disorder. Whoever has not seen how land is now bought and sold in Eretz Israel has never seen vile and vicious competition. All that goes on among the small shopkeepers and middlemen of the “Pale”<sup>25</sup> is justice and virtue compared to what goes on currently in Eretz Israel. When I arrived three months ago, there were only two companies of speculators (who buy land in order to sell it piecemeal), and already then we could see that speculation would become an obstacle to settlement. And behold it has come to pass! In only a short time, the speculators have been fruitful and multiplied at a frightening pace, and when I left Eretz Israel, I left behind *six* such companies, and undoubtedly they will continue to multiply, apart from the large camp of petty middlemen and agents, among them tailors and cobblers, who left their trade for this “commerce,” and various swindlers among the *new immigrants*, some of whom, to their shame, bought land also for themselves and style themselves as “future colonists.” All of them strive together and provoke each other and try to harm their fellow man at each step. And what methods they use! Any abomination, trick, or deceit is ritually pure in their eyes; by bribery they intercept letters and telegrams, they employ spies who slink around stealthily in order to uncover their rivals' activities and the dispositions of the buyers—and, all the



while, profiteering wildly on the land while making Arab landowners wiser about what is going on. . . . When I arrived in Eretz Israel, some of our notable brethren there complained to me that one large parcel, with more than one hundred thousand dunams of good cultivable land, was for sale, but that the seller had decreed his price as twenty francs per dunam, and that it was “*unthinkable* to pay such an *appalling price*, because other sellers would hear and we would be buying trouble in the future.” Three months have not yet passed, and one of the speculators bought the land at the “appalling” price, twenty francs per dunam, and even before he had confirmation of purchase others came along with an offer of *twenty-seven* francs. And when the owner saw this, he decided not to sell the property for the time being, hoping that the buyers’ frenzy would go on growing by leaps and bounds. Another incident involved one of the emissaries of the societies, who had been trying for more than half a year to find a plot for purchase, and had several times concluded a deal; but, each time, speculators entered the picture and pushed up the price with their many wiles.

As I was leaving the country, he again bought a property at an inflated price, some twenty-three francs per dunam. He almost believed that he had finally achieved his goal, and suddenly the owner reneged because there were other buyers willing to double the price! Yet it is understood that, so far, no one has actually been crazy enough to pay almost fifty francs for a dunam, and that the intent of the bidders was thus simply to disrupt.

We now hear of such incidents in Eretz Israel every day; they have already become routine and no longer excite any surprise. Even the *non-Jewish* natives of Eretz Israel have begun to involve themselves with our “great idea”; even among them have arisen “benefactors” occupied with the settlement of Eretz Israel . . . and why not? Why should they lag behind the Hebrew speculators, who also see in the whole affair nothing more than a way of creating wealth from the blood of their brothers? I might find some comfort if I had not heard one of them say outright: “I am only a merchant and have nothing to do with the destination of my merchandise or the destiny of its buyers. If they do not succeed in their enterprise, they will go back where they came from or they will *go to hell*; what does it matter to me?” And I saw for myself a letter from one of the Hebrew middlemen in which he arrogantly brags to one of his associates about how he managed to mislead the emissary of one of the societies who trusted him, and instead of helping him purchase a tract they had their eyes on, he put obstacles in their path, and they never knew, “and the tract will come into our possession, and God willing we will make a great profit.”

And in the hands of such people the fate of the *yishuv*<sup>26</sup> is now entrusted! Even the most sublime idea can be emptied of any integrity when molested by such hands.

Obviously, all of this is the result of the “societal proliferation” and the isolated and separate actions of the various societies, something that would not be possible at all in one inclusive undertaking proceeding from a single center and organized properly. Without the proliferation of buyers, individuals, and emissaries of societies, each looking out only for himself and his society, the middlemen would not also be proliferating in such swarms. And about this we can rightly say that the fault lies only with our own confused and disordered actions: “an open door invites the thief.”

It is now a common sight in Jaffa to see pairs of people walking around conspiratorially, each one glancing fearfully and suspiciously on all sides, lest, God forbid, someone hear what is passing between them. Occasionally some of them will suddenly disappear and not be seen around the city for some time, and then everyone knows that they have secretly gone somewhere to see the “merchandise”; and afterwards they return and others disappear, all of this in great stealth, because each fears someone else will beat him to it. These people are the “buyers.” Some of them are “individuals” who want to buy land only for themselves, and some of them are “delegates,” emissaries of the various societies: “*Hovevei Zion*” emissaries from one city, “*Dorshei Zion*”<sup>27</sup> emissaries from another, and so forth, always in the name of “Zion”; and for all that, instead of helping each other and consulting together to work one work, with one purpose, as one man with one heart, each goes his separate way—and not only the individuals, but also the delegates, behave toward each other as if they were there to deprive each other of their livelihood, to open new stores next to each other. These Lovers and Seekers, the envoys of our House of Israel, have completely forgotten the *spirit* that gathered them hither; they have forgotten that, apart from the particular desires of one society or another, there is a common purpose shared by all, without which all their deeds are without form and void, and before which there is absolutely no distinction between members of one society and those of another, so long as they are conscientious and prepared to work the sacred soil and to serve as the foundation for the construction of the House of Israel. Were it not for this disregard, were it not for each society caring only for its own welfare and its own benefit and not adhering to the needs of all, then our brethren, who are so skilled in commercial and competitive arts, would instinctively understand that multiplying the number of those who come to buy land brings us only great loss, and they would seek a means of establishing in Eretz Israel a single

center to which all would turn *from afar*, and all the honorable delegates would be so good as to stay at home, and no outsider would know the number of buyers or the amount of land they need.

And when we picture in our minds these buyers on one side, the scribblers lying in wait for news on another, and the unadorned “idealists” who roam the streets of Jaffa with nothing to do, on yet a third side—then we can gain some sense of the tumult and turmoil and clamor and clatter that, at present, attend all happenings in Eretz Israel. People immediately blow the trumpet and shout for joy, verbally and in print, over any few cubits they have acquired or simply hope to acquire; in Jaffa the whole city is abuzz over any incident great or small, and all of them, aliens and citizens, from the delegate to the least of the workers, old or young, know all about the turn of events and take it upon themselves to pronounce an opinion and to debate it endlessly in the markets and the streets. Short-sighted correspondents trail all those who come to Eretz Israel, reporting their every move, so that they can proclaim the good news that these and these have arrived and those and those will arrive, that this one has bought and that one is buying and the other is thinking of buying and so on, lacking the sense or intelligence to see the distressing consequences that result.

Needless to say, in this instance, as in all the news from Eretz Israel, much is fabrication and fantasy (as happened recently with one of the emissaries who had been three months in the country, without managing to buy any land, and suddenly it was heralded in the newspaper that he had already founded a colony and with God’s help had worked wonders and was also at peace with his Arab neighbors). But the publication of the truth also inflicts great damage: on one side, the property owners hear (and sometimes our own people also tell them) that the Jews are coming en masse to buy land, and accordingly the price rises daily; on another side, we attract the attention of the government and the inhabitants, and all this before we have actually done anything, as though we were deliberately trying to bring the Evil Eye on ourselves. . . . And from a third side, and this may be the worst, our people in the Diaspora hear that great numbers of our people are immigrating to Eretz Israel, and given our gift for imitation many who are unsuitable, and whose arrival will be a disaster to Eretz Israel and to themselves and will add chaos to confusion there, are also stirred to follow suit.

In such a situation, we should not be at all surprised if it soon becomes impossible to find land to buy in Eretz Israel and *if the Turkish government does not again begin putting obstacles in our path*, and if the ugly realities do not excite revulsion among our better people and instead of “the great movement” we get a terrible reaction . . .

On the shore of Lake Kinneret,<sup>28</sup> there is a small German colony<sup>29</sup> where my colleagues and I stopped to rest on our way from Rosh Pina to Tiberias. When I spoke with the manager, I heard that, not long ago, the Franciscans had bought an extensive tract of land stretching from the colony to the Jordan River. This spot is midway between Tiberias and Safed and close to our northern colonies; it is a spot that our people pass through again and again looking for land to buy, and for all that not one of us knew anything about its purchase. I recalled our own practices, and I say in my heart: blessed be the “nation”<sup>30</sup> that says little and does much<sup>31</sup> and whose deeds are all acts of wisdom and order.

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And as witness to the lack of wisdom and order in all our deeds, here is one more spectacle, one that brings a blush of shame to my face every time I speak of it. After a decade’s work and the composition of thousands of articles and the travels of numerous learned wayfarers, we are still ignoramuses in all the questions related to settling the land, even in the basic matters where knowledge is essential. There is hardly any question on the work of field or vineyard in which you do not hear different and contradictory answers. For example, we ask the colonists: how many vines should be planted on a dunam of land? And you hear various responses beginning from 400 on down to 225. And the same thing with other questions. And likewise regarding the sowing of crops and the planting of various fruit trees, where everything is done according to rumor, mouth to mouth, and sometimes a single case, some stray word from the mouth of one of the “experts,” becomes the foundation upon which all proceed to build, each following the other and also proclaiming to anyone who asks that it is an established truth borne out by experience. Is it good to leave the land fallow every few years? There are those who say it is good and proper, and others who say it does harm. How many measures will average land produce in an average year?<sup>32</sup> The Arabs produce (according to rumor!) five-fold or six-fold. But there is no evidence for this—say others—because Arabs work inefficiently and their tools are ineffective, and they would produce much more if they farmed with European tools. Others claim, to the contrary, that local conditions are wrong for a European plow. Now everyone in Eretz Israel knows that many of the Germans, and also the rich Arabs, use European tools, and thus it would be simple to collect statistical information from different sources and to get a clear answer based on experience. And yet—no one knows. Have you, the reader, ever heard that almost all the houses in Eretz Israel are damp in rainy season and unhealthy, especially to those with respiratory ailments? You have never heard, even though you

assiduously read all the news from there. But it is true. Moreover, according to expert builders with whom I spoke, this defect could be easily remedied by various means in the construction of the houses. Yet no one takes the trouble to investigate the matter. Also in regard to court cases over land purchases, where the need for information is felt on every side, we still grope like blind people in a fog, and we still do not have even one *reliable* person who can at least read Arabic fluently. And our Jewish brethren buy land for thousands and tens of thousands, without being able to check *clearly* whether the purchase deeds or building permits are properly written, and for this they are compelled to rely on rumors floating in the breeze.

And if this is the story in working the land, an issue that engages everyone, how much more is it the case in commerce and industry, in which we have no reliable knowledge, and in which all of the advice and admonition, verbal and written, is nothing but conjecture. During my sojourn in Eretz Israel I received many letters full of questions on these matters. I confess, without shame, that, due to lack of knowledge, I responded to no one. The “Executive Committee” in Jaffa also receives such letters daily and it, also, leaves most of them unanswered, if I am not mistaken, for the same reason. These naïve inquirers, seeing the great expertise in all things displayed by men of letters in Eretz Israel, apparently believe that one has only to come to Eretz Israel and all the information will be amassed and laid before them, and it never occurs to them that all the “expertise” is plucked from thin air, and, that in truth, no one knows a thing.

But before we become too astonished about the absence of knowledge in matters where we still lack experience, but which we could master from various sources, we should be yet more astonished that our people have not been able or willing to benefit from the experience we already have.

Some ten colonies have now been in existence for several years and not one of them can yet exist without support. The good news published in the journals, that in one of the colonies many stopped receiving aid this year, is a lie. In all my endeavor and entreaty, *I was not able to locate a single person living from the fruit of his land alone*. And why? In fact, is it in vain that the plower will plow and the sower will sow there, and his labor will yield nothing? God forbid! In Eretz Israel, as in all lands, he that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread,<sup>33</sup> and even in this year, though it was not a productive one, the traveler sees along the roads flourishing fields and grain-covered valleys. The Arabs sow and reap, the Germans sow and reap, only on us alone has the wrath gone forth.<sup>34</sup> But why?

The correct answer, to which all the more perceptive in Eretz Israel

agree, is: because the first colonists indeed brought with them a great idealism, and some of them a little or a lot of money, but they all lack the aptitudes and abilities needed for working the land, and are not capable of being simple farmers, of laboring, they and their households, a hard labor, and making do at the same time with the least possible. Not only the intellectuals, but also the ordinary folk among them are not overly fond of the work in the field that brings forth bread, and thus most of them in the end became simply vine growers, and we see them now sitting and waiting for their future profits, and because of future bounty they forget the present; they pay little attention to the garden behind their house, they do not raise livestock or poultry as they should, the Arabs bring them butter, eggs, and vegetables, and they buy everything at full price, and do not even always do the labor in their own vineyards themselves. To be sure there are exceptions, but these are all poor people with insufficient land.

From this experience, it was surely possible to derive a clear answer to the question heard every day: who will come to settle in Eretz Israel as *a worker of the land*? Those who bring all the necessary wherewithal, both *material and moral*. The latter—to wit: a love of labor, patience, courage, etc.—in abundance, to equip them to endure and survive for some time in order to achieve their goal; the former—to the minimal degree necessary, considering how many are in the household and how many are working—to keep them from fantasizing about wealth and indulgence. And instead of this answer, we still hear today debates and inquiries about *how much* is needed, as though the only question were: *how much* does someone have to have *in his pocket* before he is qualified to be one of the first farmers in the land of our fathers. Some say five thousand rubles, and others progressively less down to two thousand, while all of them fail to note that many came with more than this and have not yet managed to live off their land. This is because there is, for the most part, a reverse relationship between the necessary material and moral means to work the land: everything that increases a person's wealth decreases his inclination and capacity to live the simple life of physical labor. And even though many swear to themselves that they are ready to sacrifice all their being and their happiness on its altar, the love of Zion is not powerful enough to uproot the predilections and passions they brought with them from exile.

In recent years, a new immigrants' party has been born: the "Workers' Party," made up of people who have come to Eretz Israel to work for others as day laborers. With the encouragement of the "Executive Committee," they find work in one of the new colonies. They receive a good wage by local standards (1-1/2 francs per day), which enables them also to put something

aside, and the administrators, who are honest men and true Lovers of Zion, treat them with kindness and mercy and try to better their condition as much as possible. Any worker of another nation in this situation would find no cause to complain overmuch about his fate, but not so the Hebrew worker in Eretz Israel. I specify “Eretz Israel,” because from America we hear glad tidings also from the Hebrew workers: this one and that one found themselves work that furnishes a minimal living, yet they rejoice and advise their relatives to come too so that they too will find such joy there. But not so in Eretz Israel. Here those who look for bread and find it in exchange for their labor also think of themselves as sacrificing for the general welfare, and therefore feel justified in demanding recompense for this from the Jewish people. Many of them, with the passage of time, will despair of such work, which brings neither riches nor respect to its practitioners, and they will conclude that there is no future “higher purpose” in it, and they will become incensed with the community for which they are toiling, and the ungrateful community will neither pay them what they deserve nor buy them fields and vineyards, etc. Claims of this kind were published recently in one of the Jerusalem papers, and I heard from trusted colleagues in Eretz Israel, who know the workers very well, that this is not an isolated opinion but echoes the voices of many workers.

From this experience as well, we do not learn what we could learn, and there are those in Eretz Israel who are trying to increase the number of Jewish workers *artificially*, not from *natives of Eretz Israel*—which would be good and beneficial—but from abroad, in such a way that, in time, we may see a sight never seen before: the question of labor and capital before capital has managed to enjoy any return from labor.

But not this alone; in all things it is our custom to learn nothing from the past for the future. There is certainly one thing we could have learned from our *past and present* history: how careful we must be not to arouse the anger of other people against ourselves by reprehensible conduct. How much more, then, should we be careful, in our conduct toward a foreign people among whom we live once again, to walk together in love and respect, and needless to say in justice and righteousness. And what do our brethren in Eretz Israel do? Quite the opposite! They were slaves in their land of exile, and they suddenly find themselves with unlimited freedom, the kind of wild freedom to be found only in a country like Turkey. This sudden change has engendered in them an impulse to despotism, as always happens when “a slave becomes a king,”<sup>35</sup> and behold they walk with the Arabs in hostility and cruelty, unjustly encroaching on them, shamefully beating them for no good reason, and even bragging about what they do,

and there is no one to stand in the breach and call a halt to this dangerous and despicable impulse. To be sure our people are correct in saying that the Arab respects only those who demonstrate strength and courage, but this is relevant only when he feels that his rival is acting justly; it is not the case if there is reason to think his rival's actions are oppressive and unjust. Then, even if he restrains himself and remains silent forever, the rage will remain in his heart and he is unrivaled in "taking vengeance and bearing a grudge."<sup>36</sup>

What more can I add? Will I tell my readers about the disreputable attributes that prevail among those coming from exile, about gratuitous hatred, discord, vain squabbles over a place in the synagogue, etc.? But in what I have already said there is enough, it seems to me, to prove to ourselves that "This Is Not the Way"<sup>37</sup> to accomplishment of the goal, and that, if we continue in this way, spending our days and energies in separate and conflicting actions without the necessary preparations, without first-rate organization, without decent leaders, without system and order, then we might indeed manage finally to place in Eretz Israel a few thousand vintners and plowmen, who in time will earn their bread easily or with difficulty, by divine or human agency; but the *principal goal* we will almost certainly never achieve; and instead of finding a complete and lasting answer to *the Jewish question*, we will only add *the question of the Jews* where it did not previously exist—in the land of our fathers . . .

So what do we do? To whom do we speak, to whom do we turn, who will go before us and who will hear our voice?

Israel's deliverance will not come from the favors of *individual* "benefactors," even though their righteousness is like the great mountains.<sup>38</sup> This, experience has already shown. We can also expect little from our brothers in Eastern Europe. Their material, moral, and political condition will not enable them to do great deeds, much less to take the lead. After all, they are the ones who are now the doers, and what they are doing and how—we have already seen. There is, to be sure, the "Executive Committee" in Jaffa, which in truth does much good and brings order *to the best of its ability*, but "its ability" is very limited, for various internal and external reasons, whose source is also in the character and condition of these, our people, from whose midst it arose . . .

What remains therefore is to turn to our brothers in the West, especially in England, who have lately been very active on the issue of settlement in Eretz Israel. If there are really among these activists, as reported in the press, some outstanding figures who are natives of Eretz Israel, then they might yet be able to make the crooked straight and put the whole issue into proper perspective. These people, who are accustomed to an ordered life



and who know what modernity is, and who also have the necessary means, should found a large national company for the settlement of Eretz Israel. First they need to send there a commission of various experts, who will traverse the width and length of the land for a year or two and conduct experiments and collect accurate information on all the subjects relevant to settling and working the land. And after that it would try to buy any estate up for sale, doing this wisely and knowledgeably, with great caution and without hue and cry. The company would divide all its lands into two parts: land mostly for crop cultivation with a little plantation agriculture, and land entirely for plantation agriculture. On the former, colonies would be established at once, divided into plots sufficient to maintain one person and his household. The company would calculate the cost of each plot *with house, cowshed, and all the livestock and necessary tools*, all of this not extravagantly but on a *minimal* basis only, and then these plots with their improvements would be sold to those *without means* who are fit, according to their aptitudes and abilities, to be farmers in Eretz Israel. They would also receive reductions in their payments, as the company deems fit, simply for fulfilling the conditions put before them in advance regarding their way of life and their work. The company itself would work the land in the second category, employing Hebrew workers who have been tested and found worthy, and when each vineyard or orchard has been developed and is ready for sale, it would be sold to a member of the company, and the workers who worked it faithfully during these years would be settled on land in the first category, given a “plot” and all that goes with it, on condition that they live by recognized rules, and they would pay their debt little by little over a number of years.

In such a way we could acquire considerable land at an inexpensive price and without bringing on the Evil Eye; competition and speculation would be banished, because all those supporting various societies that promise them a vineyard in due time would prefer to participate in such a company and to buy a vineyard from it, also in due time, and thus there would no longer be a “buyer” for lands outside the company. Those who want to settle in Eretz Israel immediately as workers of the land would also find everything ready for them, and if they are truly capable of it, they will achieve their desire without huge expenses, and the destitute workers would also know that there is hope of recompense if they work conscientiously. And consequently, after ten or twenty years, we would find in Eretz Israel not a motley mixture of gold-diggers and indigent *exiles* who are good for nothing, but rather healthy, good, and honest people who love their work and live from the labor of their hands in peace and good order. People such

as these would not stir up hatred from the country's populace at the first opportunity, as they would not provoke them and would not encroach upon them, and even if, in the course of time, jealousy might cause hatred, this is nothing. Because by that time our brothers would be able to secure their position in Eretz Israel by their large number, their extensive and rich holdings, their unity, and their exemplary way of life.

Obviously all that is said here is very general, in order to depict the *spirit* of such a company. And if it were in fact to be founded, it would find people more prominent and more qualified than myself to draw up its specific regulations.

However, let us not forget that, in the current state of affairs, the company's burden will be very heavy in the beginning. We will not easily stem the chaotic flood of immigration to Eretz Israel, after the public has already grown used to seeking refuge there; the speculators will also not easily yield their places and go away peacefully; nor will those in Eretz Israel who try to befuddle the masses with grand "proposals" and moneymaking societies cease at once; likewise Israel's scribes will not suddenly acquire the wisdom to stop bombarding the world about every trivial event that has transpired in Eretz Israel. There is indeed one place in Eretz Israel that is yet untouched, and that is the plain across the Jordan. There, far from the clatter and confusion, the company could quietly begin its operations, and perhaps from there also work a little or a lot on the developing situation in western Eretz Israel. But, to our misfortune, the speculators have already begun casting their eyes over this area, and many of the newcomers are now already thinking of settling there. "Transjordan" now trips off every tongue in Jaffa, and already, as usual, there are also correspondents in the papers raising their voices and calling in everyone's ears: "Transjordan!" And accordingly, it may not take long before we see there as well all the fantasies we have become accustomed to in Judea and Galilee, and the company of which I have spoken, if my dream is not simply idle chatter, will be compelled to begin its activities amidst all the clamor and commotion, and will have a massive war on its hands from within and from without—a war requiring many forces, much patience, and great intelligence.

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Filled with despondent thoughts after touring the country and seeing what I saw in Jaffa and the colonies, I arrived in Jerusalem on the eve of Passover in order to pour out my complaint and my anger before "the trees and the stones," the remnants of our ancient glories. I went first, of course, to "the *kotel*."<sup>39</sup> There I found many of our Jerusalem brethren standing and praying loudly. Their haggard faces, their outlandish gestures, and their bizarre

clothes—all this befits the sight of the terrible wall. And I stand and look at them and at the wall, and one thought fills all the chambers of my heart: these stones are witness to the destruction of our land, and these men—to the destruction of our people. Which of these two destructions was worse? For which do we shed more tears? Let the *land* be destroyed, and yet the people remains full of life and force—Zerubabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah will arise and the people behind them and they will return and rebuild it. But if the *people* be destroyed, who shall arise and from whence shall come its help?

And if the spirit of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi had come to me at that moment, and I had been able like him to mourn “the destruction of the daughter of my people,”<sup>40</sup> my lament would not begin with “Zion,” but rather—“Israel.”<sup>41</sup>

**21 Iyyar, 5651 (May 29, 1891) on board ship from Jaffa to Odessa**

## NOTES

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1. *Kol kitvei Ahad Ha'am* [Collected Writings of Ahad Ha'am] (Tel-Aviv, 1947), 23–30. The title of the article is a Biblical allusion to Psalms 85:12: “Emet m'ereetz titsmah” [Truth will spring forth from the earth] [Hebrew].

2. Literally “the land of Israel,” and the equivalent in Hebrew of “Palestine” as a geographic term; Ahad Ha'am does not use the term “Palestine” in the article.

3. “Lo ze haderech,” *Hamelitz*, 12 Adar II, 5649 (15 March 1889), reprinted in *Kol kitvei Ahad Ha'am*, 11–14.

4. Letter to Y. H. Rawnitsky, 5 Adar II, 5651 (15 March 1891), in Arye Simon (ed), *Igrot Ahad Ha'am* [Letters of Ahad Ha'am] (Tel-Aviv, 1956) 5 [Hebrew].

5. “Lovers of Zion”; the loosely coordinated settlement groups that appeared in Jewish communities in Tsarist Russia and elsewhere from the early 1880s.

6. Ahad Ha'am's followers dominated the “Executive Committee” in Jaffa; his consequent fear of being blamed for a collapse of settlement efforts may have helped impel him to a more severe critique of the overall situation. See Yosef Goldstein, “L'toldot masa'o barishon shel Ahad Ha'am: emet m'ereetz Yisrael?” [On the History of Ahad Ha'am's First Trip: Truth from Eretz Israel?], *Cathedra*, No. 46 (December, 1987) 91–108.

7. Titled by the author as “Truth from Eretz Israel, Part Two,” *Hamelitz*, 3–5 Elul, 5653 (15–17 August 1893), reprinted in *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha'am*, 30–4 [Hebrew].

8. This point is made persuasively in the masterful biography by Steven J.

Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley, CA, 1993) 63–5. For background on Ahad Ha'am, see also Jacques Kornberg (ed), *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am* (Albany, NY, 1983).

9. See Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 324.
10. See the account in Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882–1948: A Study of Ideology* (Oxford, 1987) 26–45.
11. “She’ela ne’elama,” *Hashiloah*, 17 (1907) 193–206 [Hebrew].
12. Published as “Bilbul de’ot” [Confused Ideas], *Hamelitz*, 14 Av, 565I (18 August 1891), reprinted in *Kol kitvei Ahad Ha'am*, 35–7.
13. See footnote 7.
14. *Hashiloah*, 8, No. 60 (December, 1902) 566–78, reprinted in *Kol kitvei Ahad Ha'am*, 313–20.
15. See Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 200–01, 246–7.
16. This is the focus on my current research, based on primary documents of the first *aliyah*.
17. See Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley, CA, 1976) 32–57.
18. From a celebrated twelfth-century poem of Yehuda Halevi; see the final sentence of the article, including footnote 42.
19. Ecclesiastes 9:18: “But one sinner destroyeth much good.”
20. Numbers 13:30.
21. Judges 21:25.
22. Talmud, Shabat, 30: “Eretz Israel shall bring forth cakes and fine woolen garments.”
23. Baron Edmond de Rothschild, the “well-known benefactor” from the Paris branch of the Rothschild family, whose supposedly anonymous support of early settlements was an open secret.
24. Deuteronomy 4:6: “Surely this great nation is a wise and intelligent people.”
25. The “Pale of Settlement,” the area of Tsarist Russia where historically Jewish residence was permitted.
26. Literally “the settlement,” meaning the Jewish community in Eretz Israel.
27. “Seekers of Zion,” settler groups similar to *Hovevei Zion*.
28. The Sea of Galilee.
29. The German settlement at Tabgha, as identified in Ahad Ha'am's diary entries for the trip.
30. In Hebrew, *goy*, with the double meaning of non-Jew.
31. Talmud, Avot, 1:15: “Shammai used to say: make thy [study of] Torah [a matter of] regularity; say little, but do much.
32. “Measures,” in Hebrew *she'arim*, from Genesis 26:12: “Then Isaac sowed the land, and received in the same year a hundred-fold (*me'ah she'arim*).”
33. Proverbs 12:11.
34. Numbers 17:11.
35. Proverbs 30:22.

36. Leviticus 19:18.

37. The title of Ahad Ha'am's first publication, in 1889, which established him as the leading critic of settlement methods and activities of proto-Zionist groups in Palestine (see footnote 3 above).

38. Psalms 36:7.

39. The Western Wall, a surviving part of the enclosure wall of the Second Temple and traditional site of Jewish prayer.

40. Lamentations 2:11: "Mine eyes do fill with tears . . . for the destruction of the daughter of my people."

41. A reference to Halevi's poem that begins: "Zion: wilt thou not ask of the peace of thy captives?"