

Jabotinsky...The Man and the Vision

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Foreword

Seven decades have passed since the death of Ze'ev Jabotinsky. In that time great and terrible events have transpired to reshape Jewish life and thought: A third of our people perished in the camps and crematoria of Eastern and Central Europe; a Jewish state was reborn and has fought seven wars for its continued existence, and an ingathering into Israel of the exiles began that has already reclaimed more than two million Jews, including nearly one million from the former Soviet Union, once thought to be beyond the reach of Zion.

Amidst such events, most figures of the distant Jewish past would rate at best a sentimental footnote. Jabotinsky is an exception. Like Theodor Herzl before him, he was a man not merely of his own time but for all time. He defined Jewish statehood at a period when the very term "Jewish State" was considered a provocation. He established a doctrine of Jewish self-defense when the idea of a Jew defending himself was still regarded as ludicrous or dangerous. He was the "old" Jew – a throwback to the Maccabees and Bar Kochba – who heralded the coming of the "new" Jew, fiercely proud of his ancient culture, free of the dark fears and inferiorities of the ghetto, fully capable of meeting the non-Jew on equal terms.

Having been born in the future, the future has finally caught up with Jabotinsky. He was better understood in his own day by the youth than by his contemporaries, and at its zenith, there were close to 80,000 young people around the world gathered under the banner of "Betar," the passionately Zionist youth movement he created and headed. Not since Biblical times has any Jewish leader had so massive a personal following.

One has the feeling that Jabotinsky would again be better understood by the national Zionist youth of this day than by their fathers and uncles, a youth angered and sickened by the spectacle of incremental appeasement masquerading as "moderation," longing for a clear, courageous unequivocal stand on matters critical to Jewish national existence. Jabotinsky was a man who had no fear of saying *no* and meaning it, surely a man for this day when every *no* and every *yes* has been prostituted by a *but*. The question "What would Jabotinsky have done?" is heard more and more frequently from a generation awed by the incomparable leadership he provided while he lived. His writings and speeches on virtually every subject of national concern have weathered time and circumstance. If they do not provide sure solutions to our present dilemma, they at least point us in the right direction.

It is time to reopen the book on Jabotinsky. It's astonishing that it should ever have been closed. His neglect is an appalling comment on Jewish values and sense of history. With Herzl, he stands as one of two seminal figures of modern Zionism, the greatest purely Jewish intellectual of the 20th Century, the ideological bedrock upon which Israel's ruling political party rests, the creator of the World War I "Jewish Legion, Betar and "Haganah," the Israel Defense Force. Yet millions of Jewish children – and their parents – are barely familiar with his name. It would be comparable to an Englishman not knowing who Winston Churchill was.

In reintroducing a new generation to Ze'ev Jabotinsky, it is hoped that readers will be drawn toward a more intensive exploration of this remarkable visionary and his writings. An excellent way to pursue that quest is with a reading of *Lone Wolf*, the brilliant two-volume biography by his last secretary, historian Shmuel Katz (available through afsi@rcn.com). Jabotinsky was conspicuously free of Messianic pretensions. Yet, history has shown repeatedly over the years since his passing that the circumference of his personal vision was wide enough to encompass us all. He knew us well. Our need to know *him* at this critical juncture in Jewish history couldn't be more compelling.

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The Prophet Ascendant

The last and bloodiest battle of the 1973 Yom Kippur War was the battle for the recapture of Mount Hermon, the 9,000-foot snow capped range that stands astride Israel, Syria and Lebanon, dominating the Golan Heights and the Huleh Valley below. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli forces under General David Elazar took the Syrian-held southeast corner of the Hermon, ending a 19-year reign of terror during which the mountain was used by the Damascus regime as a sanctuary from which to launch shot and shell at Jewish farms and villages in the valley.

For six frustrating years, Syria's gunners and sharpshooters were cut off from their favorite targets. Then in October 1973, the prize they most dearly coveted fell back into their hands. In the surprise and confusion that attended the combined Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel, a heavily armed Syrian force succeeded in encircling a tiny Israeli garrison manning the eastern heights and the Hermon shoulder was recaptured.

With a cease-fire-in-place looming as inevitable by late October, it became imperative that Israel retake the Hermon, no matter the cost. The task fell to the Golani Brigade, the Israeli Army's most decorated infantry unit and, in no small measure, to one of its young officers, a 22 year-old lieutenant named Yigal Passow. Yigal was a member of Betar, the youth arm of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Zionist Revisionist Movement. His father, Yehoshua, had been a "Betari" in Izmir, Turkey during the Second World War, a member of "Irgun Zvai Leumi" (IZL), the underground resistance organization created in Palestine by disciples of Jabotinsky, and a participant in IZL's daring 1947 raid on British CID headquarters in Jaffa. During Israel's 1948-49 War of Independence, the elder Passow had fought with the Givati Brigade, which played a decisive role in halting the Egyptian advance into Palestine. He was severely wounded at the Battle of Ashdod.

There was a certain historic inevitability in the fact that the spearhead assignment in the fight for the reconquest of the Hermon had fallen to a Betari, son of a Betari. More than 50 years earlier, confined by the British to a prison cell in Acre for the "crime" of organizing Jewish self-defense forces against Arab rioters, Jabotinsky had written in a poem entitled *Shir Asirei Akko* ("Song of the Prisoners of Acre"), *Lanu, lanu yihyeh keter ha-Hermon, keter ha-Hermon* ("To us, to us will belong the crown of the Hermon, the crown of the Hermon."). It was a prophecy. With that sixth sense that never ceased to amaze his followers or confound his foes, he was telling us as early as 1920 that not only was there to be a Jewish state in our lifetime, but that the Hermon was to be its pinnacle. And why the Hermon? Because Jabotinsky, that most practical of Zionist visionaries, understood even then that if there could be no state, which by definition did not include the Galilee and the Golan, then that state would also have to include the Hermon, for whoever controlled the Hermon would control the Galilee and the Golan.

Yodefet Masada Betar... So go the closing words of the Betar anthem. Jabotinsky founded Betar in 1924. They called it his "Benjamin," the child closest to his heart. And when that heart gave out in the dark summer of 1940, worn down in the years-long effort to arouse European Jewry to the mortal danger that was now upon it, it was at a Betar training camp in upstate New York.

Yodefet Masada Betar... To die or to conquer the mountain. Thirty three years later it was given to a disciple of Jabotinsky, son of a disciple of Jabotinsky, the task of fulfilling that promise.

The retaking of Mount Hermon by the Golani Brigade in October 1973 has passed into legend. Yard by yard, centimeter by centimeter, in a series of three attacks over terrain that recalled the World War II allied battle for Monte Cassino, the men of Golani drove out the elite Syrian units dug into the Hermon shoulder and recaptured the summit. The toll was the most fearful of the Yom Kippur War.

Lt. Yigal Passow was killed leading his men on the final assault. His spirit, however, is not silent. An anonymous rifleman, a member of his company, has left us with an account of Yigal's instructions before that conclusive battle. Through his words, we are drawn back across nearly a century to that prison cell in Acre in 1920 and the realization that Ze'ev Jabotinsky, writing of the "crown of the Hermon," had created a vision that would fire a generation of heroes 33 years after his death. Listen to the young rifleman speak:

"For us, Yigal said, the Hermon was like the Western Wall. We wanted to get to the top and we weren't prepared to give it up. I would rather have died there and not come down. Not only myself – everyone went with this decision. He instilled it into us from the beginning –that we would not come down until we saw the flag of Golani flying from the top. He said the Hermon was the eyes of the nation..."

Lanu, lanu yihyeh keter ha-Hermon, keter ha-Hermon.

The Early Years

Who was this Jabotinsky who could so inspire a generation that had never known him, whose words could ring across decades as clear and relevant as though they were uttered yesterday?

David Raziell, the third commander of IZL, with whom Jabotinsky quarreled over resistance policy toward the blatantly pro-Arab British Mandatory in Palestine, saw him as a 20th Century Moses, “a wanderer, persecuted and oppressed...teacher of a rebellious people...an exemplary leader of the generation of the wilderness...the last generation of slaves and the first generation of free men.”

The novelist and historian Arthur Koestler, who had once seen him hold an open air audience of several thousand spellbound for five hours, found in Jabotinsky the epitome of the 19th Century liberal, “a successor to Garibaldi and Mazzini...that missing link in the abrupt transition of European Jewry from the Tsarist ghetto to the advanced social experiment in Palestine.”

South Africa’s soldier-statesman Jan Christian Smuts saw another Jabotinsky...”the brave and successful officer and leader” who had made such a “notable contribution to the Allied cause” in the First World War. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George saw in him the “nerve” of the forces of World Jewry in the fight for statehood that lay ahead. His lifelong friend, Col. J.H. Patterson, commander of Jabotinsky’s “Zion Mule Corps” at Gallipoli in World War I, found in their literary and oratorical gifts striking parallels between the Zionist leader and Winston Churchill.

Jabotinsky was all those things...but also something more, something still being defined in Jewish life six-plus decades after the resurrection of the Jewish State: He was a totally undefensive, totally free Jew. From his earliest days in Odessa, Russia, where he was born in 1880 to a middle class merchant family, through the stormy years of his career as a journalist, essayist, poet, novelist, playwright, orator, translator, publicist and statesman, he was singularly free of what he called “that old Jewish disease – impressionism.” In a December 25th, 1924 editorial in *Rassviet*, the Russian-language Zionist journal he edited from Paris, Jabotinsky defined the opposite of impressionism, its antidote, as “a sense of reality and a feeling for proportion...Not to be put out by last week’s events ...not to give way to outbursts of optimism because of one good harvest or to panic after a failure.”

If there was one attribute above all others which informed Jabotinsky’s thinking it was that “sense of reality.” Combating with equal vigor both the “fog of pessimism” and the “fog of optimism,” he refused to delude himself, his followers or his opponents as to where he stood on any issue. He hated euphemisms, mealy-mouthed words and phrases designed to blunt the edges of truth so as to make it more palatable for the faint of heart. As early as 1925, on the eve of the foundation conference of his new “Zionist Revisionist Movement,” Jabotinsky declared in an article in *Rassviet*, “It is time to proclaim loud and clear that the aim of Zionism is the establishment of a Jewish State.”

To appreciate the dimensions of this “heresy,” it must be borne in mind that even Jabotinsky’s closest collaborators in 1925, men of the stature of Meir Grossman, editor of

the *London Jewish Tribune*, shrank from the term “Jewish State.” It was treated like a high explosive that might go off at the slightest jolt, gutting the Zionist relationship with the British Mandatory power in Palestine, inciting the Arabs to riot and murder and as one contemporary Revisionist put it, “frightening away even our friends.” Yielding grudgingly to the entreaties of his supporters, Jabotinsky temporarily adopted the more conciliatory “self-governing commonwealth under the auspices of an established Jewish majority” to express his nationalistic aspirations.

But the euphemism rubbed and five years later at the 17th Zionist Congress, when the critical moment arrived for Jewish nationalism to declare itself or abandon its aims, he threw it aside and boldly defined Zionism as “a Jewish State with a Jewish majority on both sides of the Jordan.” “What is the Jewish National Home?” he had asked rhetorically a year earlier at the 16th Zionist Congress. “It is a national state, a state with a predominant Jewish majority, where the will of the Jewish People will determine the forms and ways of collective life. What is Palestine? It is an area whose essential geographic character is that the Jordan River flows not along the border but down the middle of the country.”

And the opposition -- the “practical” Zionists who ruled the Zionist Organization and the Zionist Executive? They hadn’t yet even admitted a euphemism for Jewish Statehood into their thinking. To Dr. Chaim Weizmann, head of the Jewish Actions Committee, the man destined to become Israel’s first president, the idea of Jewish statehood, even as late as August 1930, was still an “academic question” unworthy of serious discussion. “Palestine could become a Jewish State,” he declared airily, “if it were an uninhabited country. But it is not an uninhabited country.”

In contrast to this, Jabotinsky’s propensity for telling it like it is, runs through his life like a main thread. He had dreams but no illusions and no use for facades. And one of the issues on which that absence of illusion shone through with uncompromising clarity was the Arab issue. “Palestine,” he told an audience in Tel Aviv in December 1929 on the eve of his second banishment from Palestine, “is the meeting of two cultures which have no common spiritual aspirations. A genuine rapprochement between them is an organic and historic impossibility.” This was barely four months after the brutal Arab massacre of 133 unarmed Jews in Hebron, Jerusalem and Safed – Jews, Jabotinsky hastened to remind his audience, who spoke the language of the Arabs, were attuned to their customs and were completely aloof from the Zionist ideal.

In an age of incipient appeasement, when words were used to conceal rather than elucidate intentions, this kind of blunt honesty inevitably contributed to the mythical image of Jabotinsky as an “extremist,” one tenaciously propagated by his political opponents in Palestine and the ruling councils of the Zionist Organization. Jabotinsky, in fact, was always a conciliator -- when conciliation did not involve a violation of principle. Above all, he was a realist. “I don’t believe in a policy of aggression, which I am always being accused of,” he declared to the 15th Zionist Congress in 1928, mindful of the deplorable weakness of the disarmed Jewish “Yishuv” in Palestine. “Such a policy can be entertained only if one has material power. Since our strength is of a moral nature, there can naturally be no question of an aggressive policy.”

But conciliation did not mean appeasement, nor did realism mean pacifism – not in Jabotinsky’s lexicon. In words and deeds, he was a fighter from the outset. The outbreak

of the infamous “Easter Pogrom” in the Ukrainian city of Kishinev in 1903 and the threat of a pogrom in his native Odessa finds him organizing the first Jewish self-defense units in the history of Tsarist Russia. They are to serve as a model for his creation of the Haganah in Palestine 17 years later. To this period belong Jabotinsky’s masterful translation into Russian of Chaim Nachman Bialik’s *Masa Nemirov* and his first encounter with Zionism.

His Jewish defense activities, his translations and his “feuilleton” essays for the Odessa daily *Oddeskiya Novosti* earn the young Jabotinsky a ticket to the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland in 1903, where he hears Herzl speak for the first and only time. It is enough. Though he votes against the Zionist patriarch’s proposal to accept Britain’s offer of a Jewish National Home in Uganda (the “Uganda Project”), he casts his lot unalterably with “Herzlian Zionism,” and its insistence on a political base for mass Jewish settlement of Palestine, in preference to the so-called “practical” Zionism, with its emphasis on non-political Jewish colonization, which became ascendant after Herzl’s death in 1904.

The gap separating the two Zionist philosophies is never to be completely bridged and Jabotinsky, with his aversion to papering over ideological differences and his keen sense of the possible, understood this better than anyone. “We are we,” he informs his followers, euphoric over the prospect of an alliance with the middle-of-the-road “General Zionists” in the wake of the 15th Congress, “a particular psychological breed in Zionism. For us there is no rapprochement – only conquest or defeat. And our defeat would be tantamount to the end of Zionism.”

From 1903 until the outbreak of the First World War, except for a year (1909-1910) as head of a Zionist Organization mission in Turkey and a five-month stay in Palestine, Jabotinsky produces a series of plays, articles, poetry, translations and speeches that are destined to make his name a household word, not only among Russian Jews, but among the Russian intelligentsia. He travels incessantly across that vast, inhospitable land -- “the years of my wanderings,” he was to call them -- establishing Zionist centers, stiffening the Jewish sense of national identity, combating the assimilationism of the Marxists and the quasi-nationalism of the Bund.

Two of his verse plays, *Krov* (“Blood”) and *Ladno* (“All Right”), are staged by the Odessa Municipal Theatre. A third, *Chuzhbina* (“On Foreign Soil”), a satire on Jewish life in Russia, is suppressed by the Tsarist government. In 1910, Jabotinsky makes literary history with a Russian translation of Bialik’s *Songs and Poems* that becomes a runaway best seller (seven printings in two years). His translation of Bialik’s *The City of Slaughter* is considered so masterful in concept, so linguistically beautiful that it becomes a Russian classic in its own right. Also in 1910, he produces the first Hebrew translation of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Raven* and in that same year, delivers his first public address in Hebrew. It marks the start of a campaign for the use of Hebrew as the language of instruction in all Jewish schools in Russia. This “Hebraization of the Diaspora,” as Jabotinsky labels it, brings him into conflict not only with the assimilationists and the “Yiddishists,” but also with many of his own Russian Zionists who oppose the idea as too radical.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Jabotinsky leaves Russia for a tour of Western Europe as a correspondent for the Moscow daily *Russkiya Vedomosti*. In Turkey’s alliance with Germany he sees an end to the Ottoman Empire and he urges the

Zionist movement to drop its neutrality and join hands with the Allies as the swiftest route to the attainment of its political objectives. His advice is received coolly, but Jabotinsky persists. In Alexandria, he meets the one-armed Jewish soldier-pioneer Joseph Trumpeldor and the idea for the formation of a “Jewish Legion” to fight with the Allies for the liberation of Palestine from Turkish rule takes root. Its first sapling is the “Zion Mule Corps.” Commanded by Patterson, with Trumpeldor as deputy commander, it has the misfortune to be thrust into Winston Churchill’s disastrous 1915 Gallipoli campaign in Turkey.

Jabotinsky is neither discouraged nor dissuaded by the Mule Corps’ bad luck. He goes to Rome, Paris and London to do battle for a full fledged Jewish Legion. For almost three years he gets nowhere, partly because of the official Zionist leadership’s insistence on neutrality. Then in 1917 a break comes. Dr. Weizmann, head of the Zionist Executive, lends a discreet hand in London to Jabotinsky’s efforts and the doors in Whitehall begin to swing open. The British Government gives its assent to the formation of the “38th Battalion of Royal Fusiliers” and it is joined in short order by the 39th Battalion from America and the 40th from Palestine. The three are subsequently merged to form the “First Judean Regiment,” with the Menorah as its insignia.

Creator of the first organized Jewish fighting force in 1,800 years, Jabotinsky enlists in the 38th as a private, is later promoted to lieutenant and distinguishes himself in battle as commander of the first company to cross the Jordan in pursuit of the Turkish Army.

The Legion, indeed the whole concept of “Legionism” and Jewish self-defense, became inseparably identified with Jabotinsky. It made him world famous, led to his first exile from Palestine and ultimately, was one of the factors that set him and his followers apart from the rest of the Zionist movement. “Half of the Balfour Declaration belongs to the Legion,” he avers in his 1928 volume *The Story of the Jewish Legion*. It is no overstatement. The Legion arrived at a time when the Zionist movement was broken and paralyzed and in Jabotinsky’s words, “completely outside the narrow horizons of a warring world with its warring governments. Only one manifestation of the Zionist will was able to break through on this horizon.” he wrote, “to show that Zionism was alive and prepared for sacrifices, to compel ministers, ambassadors and most important of all, journalists, to treat the striving of the Jewish People for its country as a matter of urgent reality, as something which could not be postponed, which had to be given an immediate yes or no – and that was the Legion movement.”.

But the “yes” the Legion had been so grudgingly accorded after so much effort by Jabotinsky, was cynically turned into a “no” by the new Mandatory Authority in Palestine. The anti-Jewish bias of the British military command was scandalously evident even while the war was on. Jerusalem was declared “out-of-bounds” for the Legionnaires and Col. Patterson, their commander, reported that they were so often molested by the British Military Police, they were forced to take off their insignias in order to move in peace outside camp limits.

Still, as long as the Legion maintained its visibility in the immediate post-war months, peace reigned in Palestine. The pro-Arab British military administration, however, would not have it that way. No sooner had the 1918 armistice been signed, than a tug of war began between the British, pressuring for a swift demobilization of Jewish troops, and Jabotinsky, urging them to stay on and enlist in the standing army of occupation. He

correctly saw the Legion as Palestinian Jewry's only insurance against Arab harassment. He himself volunteered for additional service, but was forcibly demobilized in August 1919. By the Spring of 1920, the British had virtually gotten their way. A bare 400 men remained of the 5,000 that had constituted the First Judean Regiment and once represented a quarter of all the infantry in the Holy Land.

With even this remnant confined to barracks, the thing Jabotinsky feared most, occurred. During Passover of 1920, Arab mobs shrieking *Al Daula Maana* – “the government is with us!” – ran wild through the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, murdering, raping and looting. Jabotinsky, anticipating trouble months before, had organized two companies of Haganah self-defense forces and had had them trained secretly by demobilized Legionnaires. With these, he marched to the Jaffa and Damascus Gates of the Old City in a show of force that put the marauders to flight. The British police, immobile to this point in the face of the Arab out rages, suddenly swung into action -- not in defense of the Jews, but to arrest Jabotinsky and 19 of his men. Charged with unlawful possession of firearms, they were hauled before a military tribunal, where Jabotinsky created a sensation by forcing the tribunal to conduct its proceedings in Hebrew. He was convicted and sentenced to 15 years of penal servitude, his 19 companions to three years each.

Jabotinsky and his Haganah troops were dispatched to Acre prison, but their case became an immediate cause celebre. The Palestinian Jewish community – the Yishuv – declared a general strike and Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook granted a special dispensation for the signing of a petition on the Sabbath by thousands of Jews declaring themselves “at one with Jabotinsky.” Some 380 members of his Haganah units who had not been arrested, penned their own petition, claiming equal guilt with their commander and demanding to be put on trial. Meanwhile, the sentences imposed on Jabotinsky and his comrades were being denounced in the British and American press and in the House of Commons.

Amidst all this turmoil, Jabotinsky maintained a glacial silence. Predicting to his men that “we shall not stay here 15 weeks, much less 15 years,” he employed his time at Acre in writing poetry, catching up on his extensive correspondence and bolstering the morale of his troops. On May 1, 1920, a military board of review reduced his sentence to one year without hard labor, that of his comrades to six months. But the firestorm of Jewish indignation refused to abate and in response to it, Palestine's Jewish High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, announced an amnesty in July 1920 for all those, Jew and Arab, imprisoned in connection with the Passover riots. Exactly 14 weeks after he entered Acre prison, Jabotinsky walked out a free man.

Mere freedom, however, did not suffice for him.. He demanded vindication. Eight months later, he got it. In March 1921, after listening to Jabotinsky's defense of his actions, the Crown Council in London ordered the Commander-in Chief of British Middle East Forces in Egypt to nullify the proceedings and sentences of the Jerusalem military tribunal. The slate was wiped clean.

Living With the Establishment

Jabotinsky arrived in London in February 1921 as an internationally acclaimed hero, his popularity at a peak attained by no Jew since Herzl. There were those among his friends and followers who felt he should use that adulation as a lever to break the power of the official Zionist leadership, a leadership that both he and they had condemned for its silence in the face of the Mandatory administration's failure to protect Palestinian Jewry. Instead, Jabotinsky decides on the opposite course – an attempt to capture the official Zionist fortress “from within.” He joins the *Keren ha-Yessod* as director of its press and propaganda department and together with two associates, George Lichtheim and Joseph Cowens, becomes a member of the Weizmann-ruled Zionist Executive.

The assault on the fortress lasts two years. In that period, Jabotinsky acts the exemplary establishmentarian. Despite an intense disinclination toward fund-raising, he goes to America and puts in seven arduous months of work on behalf of *Keren ha-Yessod*. At the sacrifice of his fundamental instincts, he loyally shares responsibility with the rest of the Zionist Executive for acceptance of the 1922 Churchill “White Paper” with its restrictive interpretation of Jewish immigration rights in Palestine. But the larger objectives Jabotinsky hopes to gain from this trade-off go unrealized. His dream of a “Great Zionist Cabinet,” combining a broad representation of Herzlian and “practical” Zionists with Jewish intellectuals, never gets off the ground. His pressure on the Zionist Executive to demand the removal of anti-Zionist officials in Palestine is stubbornly resisted. Meanwhile, the safety of Palestine Jewry grows daily more precarious and Zionist political work grinds to a virtual halt.

By November 1922, Jabotinsky has become thoroughly disillusioned. He sends the Zionist Executive a terse memo demanding, in effect, a showdown with the British over their violation of a Mandate that required their facilitation of “close” Jewish settlement in all parts of Palestine. Characteristically, he wants to know where he stands, even if that means a negative reply from Whitehall. “If the Mandate has no function but bluff,” he declares, “it is no use keeping up appearances for another couple of months. Our movement can only thrive in an atmosphere of clarity. It was the policy of drift and bluff that brought us to the present situation. This policy – to avoid straight talk with the government for fear they may have up their sleeve a ready and unpleasant reply, and at the same time, to tell the Jewish public that everything is in perfect order – this policy can no more be countenanced.”

It is a theme that is to echo through Jabotinsky's pronouncements about the British for the next 18 years. The caricature of the man that has been passed down to us is that of an anti-British firebrand. In fact, from a philosophical perspective, he was probably the most pro-British of all the Zionist leaders. He had a profound respect for British civilization, fairness and good sense. “The Supreme Court of Appeal against everything being done in Palestine,” he once observed, “remains British public opinion.” Even in the midst of the intense anti-British feeling aroused by the Arab riots in Hebron and Jerusalem in 1929, Jabotinsky continued to push for a “last experiment” in the form of a determined political offensive to get London to alter its policies in Palestine.

He was to change his attitude toward Britain later (then reverse it again on the eve of World War II with an offer to put a Jewish Army at King George's disposal), but in the

early 1920s Jabotinsky felt the Jewish plight in Palestine was less the fault of Whitehall than the Zionist Executive's refusal to deal in straight talk. "Being repeatedly told that everything is all right in Palestine," he submitted to the Second Revisionist World Conference in 1927, "British public opinion naturally believes that the Jews are satisfied and that the people they have to reckon with are the discontented Arabs."

This policy of not rocking the boat was the main oar of Zionist Executive thinking in 1923 and it was in no mood to contend with an iconoclastic Jabotinsky. The dissenter was told to either get his thinking in line with everybody else's on the Executive or disembark. On January 18, 1923, Jabotinsky resigned and became a private citizen again. The campaign to capture the fortress had failed.

The Revisionist Challenge

Jabotinsky was prepared in January 1923 to disconnect himself from further active participation in Zionist affairs. “A load has fallen from my shoulders,” he wrote his mother and sister in Palestine. “I am genuinely happy ... no responsibilities and no more need to lie. I shall be able to devote myself to my own affairs and start getting rich ...”

Indeed, for almost two years Jabotinsky’s contribution to the Zionist cause was confined to his articles in *Rassviet*, then being published in Berlin, where he was residing. “My job is to tell the truth as I see it,” he informed his colleagues on the paper. “I don’t intend to move a finger to ‘sell’ it...If somebody wants to ‘buy’ and spread my ideas, he is free to do so. But without me. I am no more in this trade...”

It was, in ways literary, a most productive period. Though he never got “rich,” the two years between his resignation from the Zionist Executive and the foundation conference of the World Revisionist Union saw Jabotinsky reach the summit of his literary powers. In 1924, he sealed his reputation as the greatest contemporary contributor to Hebrew language and letters with the publication of his masterful translation of the 10 cantos of Dante’s *Inferno*. That same year he published *Targumin*, a highly acclaimed Hebrew translation of English, French and Italian poetry based on the Sephardi pronunciation. In 1925, he brought out the first Hebrew atlas, in collaboration with Shmuel Perlman, one-time editor of the Hebrew daily *Ha’aretz*, and a pocket edition of his own short stories translated from Russian into English. He was already at work on his first novel, *Samson the Nazerite*, a literary milestone that was to appear in 1926.

Jabotinsky might have been content to remain a writer and occasional commentator on Zionist affairs, but neither history nor his own restless intellect would allow it. It was a challenge flung at him by a group of young “Hasmoneans” in Riga, Latvia that finally brought him out of “retirement.” He had addressed the group on the subject of Zionist activism one afternoon in November 1923 while on a fund raising lecture tour of the Baltics for the financially distressed *Rassviet*. The following day, the fired-up youngsters cornered him. “And what now?” they demanded, according to Jabotinsky’s published version of the encounter. “You have no right to preach such views and stir up young people if you don’t intend to call them to action. You either keep quiet or organize a party.” Jabotinsky, who always had a troublesome habit of practicing what he preached, was given no alternative. Before he left Riga, he and the young Hasmoneans made a mutual promise to roll up their sleeves and “straighten out the Zionist movement.”

It was more than a casual challenge that restirred Jabotinsky’s juices. It was belief. In a letter to supporter Eliyahu Ben Horin in February 1924, he related that in Latvia and Lithuania “I saw a young generation worth believing in. I will try to organize them for the cause, if I have enough strength to do so.”

The “League for the Revision of Zionist Policies, Provisional Bureau,” as the new movement was first called, set up its initial headquarters in Berlin in December 1923. Its platform, enunciated in a series of articles in *Rassviet*, included five major planks: A return to the Herzlian concept of a Jewish State with a strong political base; mass colonization of Palestine to achieve a Jewish majority; the restoration of the Legion; a

national loan to replace the charity funds, and a sustained political effort to alter British policy in Palestine.

The response from Jabotinsky's older friends was lukewarm. British novelist and Herzl confidante Israel Zangwill wrote him from London that "political Zionism is dead and even you will be unable to revive it." Meir Grossman was formally willing but unenthusiastic. The reaction of the Zionist youth groups, on the other hand, was electric, and by September of 1924, following a second lecture tour to finance the revival of *Rassviet*, which had temporarily folded, Jabotinsky had 50 youth groups supporting him from Canada to Harbin, China. He had, meanwhile, moved himself, wife Ania and son Eri from Berlin to Paris for purely economic reasons. *Rassviet* resumed publication in Paris on December 25, 1924 and exactly four months later, on April 25, 1925, the first conference of the "League of Zionist Revisionists" convened at the Café de Pantheon in Paris' Latin Quarter.

What was this "Revisionism" and how did it differ from the "official" Zionism of the day? Jabotinsky, in a philosophical aside to an American reporter in 1935, paraphrased the French historian de Tocqueville, calling Revisionism one of those "providential movements which are characterized by the fact that they always gain, no matter whether by victory or defeat." But the distinction between Revisionism and "official" Zionism was most sharply drawn by him in his testimony before the Shaw Commission in London inquiring into the causes of the 1929 Arab riots in Palestine:

"When we started our movement in 1925," he told the Commission, "the official point of view, as expressed by Dr. Weizmann and his associates was this: The business of Zionism can be completed and achieved simply by the process of the Jews pouring money and energy into Palestine; and it ought not to matter at all what the attitude of the Mandatory was, provided that the government was a decent human administration. We demanded the revision of this point of view, saying that large scale colonization cannot be conducted independently of a government, that it is a government enterprise by its nature and can only be completed if the government supports it by legislation and administrative action."

It was the position Jabotinsky enunciated at the 14th Zionist Congress in Vienna in 1925 as head of the new Revisionist list and it got a thunderous response. "If not my program what have you to offer?" he boldly inquired of the ruling Zionist body in a speech that defined the Revisionist stand on Jewish colonization, Jewish autonomy, and the reestablishment of the Legion. Jabotinsky's closest confidante and first biographer Joseph Schechtman called it "by far, the best of all his addresses to the Congress, both in content and delivery." Abraham Goldberg, a leading American Jewish journalist and Zionist of the day found it totally refreshing: "When one hears him after the other speakers, one has the feeling of emerging from mossy, thick-grown woods into green, sunlit fields offering far horizons...He speaks like the child of a people living normally. So will speak some of the Jews of tomorrow. Jabotinsky presages the tomorrow..."

For his own part, Jabotinsky was reluctant to go to the Congress. It meant rejoining the Zionist Organization and "for the sake of a speech," binding Revisionist freedom to its discipline. He finally relented in order to keep peace within his Revisionist Central

Committee, but it was the beginning of a conflict between his principles and his role as party unifier that was eight years later to split the Revisionist movement wide open.

Two Journeys

With Revisionism firmly launched in Europe, Jabotinsky embarked for the United States early in 1926 in search of political and financial support. "America is a university and a laboratory," he wrote, "and I want to learn." One of the things he learned in the half year he spent in the U.S. was that a philosophical gulf wider than the Atlantic still separated American and European Jews.

He found America the hardest field to conquer for Revisionism because, as he put it, "Revisionism is a concept that takes Zionism and Palestine in 'dead earnest'... It rejects all kinds of toy-Zionism or solace-Zionism, like spiritual centers, seats of Hebrew culture and other forms of sop for renouncing the one and only concrete *tachlis*: the Jewish State...American Jewry...has no idea of the intensity of the Eastern Jew's distress and can, therefore, not easily absorb the intensity of our Zionist urge. When a Lemberg Jew hears of the miracles of the Palestine boom, he asks: 'And what about me?' When it is an American Jew, he exclaims: 'Hooray!' This makes all the difference."

Lecturing under the auspices of impresario Sol Hurok, Jabotinsky stumped the East Coast, Midwest and Canada, demanding more land in Palestine for Jewish settlement, certificates for 50,000 immigrants a year and an end to the Zionist Organization's attempts to pack the Jewish Agency for Palestine's ranks with 50 percent non-elected, non-Zionists – the "Gviocracy," he dubbed them, in a play on the Hebrew term for "fat cats." He met with generally favorable audiences, but his only real conquest for Revisionism was the 5,000-member Order of the Sons of Zion, a constituent body of the Zionist Organization of America. It proved a valuable one, however. Two years later, when Jabotinsky settled in Palestine, it was as Jerusalem director of the Sons of Zion-owned Judea Insurance Company.

In contrast to his rather subdued American reception, Jabotinsky's arrival in Palestine in October 1926, after a five-year absence, created a sensation. Riding with him from Jaffa into Tel Aviv, the Palestine correspondent of the Warsaw newspaper *Haint* heard the roar of "Long Live Jabotinsky!" rising from the streets while a blizzard of flowers and blue and white banners descended on his motorcade. At Beit Am, 10,000 people jammed through the doors to hear him speak. Another 6,000 rallied to his lecture at the Maccabee Sports Grounds and hundreds were turned away from his talk at the Revisionist Club.

His motorcade into Jerusalem, the city he had risen to defend, attracted such a multitude the police were forced to halt all traffic. Thousands poured into Jaffa Road, spontaneously breaking into *Hatikvah*. Even Haifa, that bastion of Labor socialism, found the excitement of Jabotinsky's presence irresistible. His appearances there drew large crowds.

Jabotinsky's speeches covered a number of the planks in the Revisionist program, including the need to reestablish an independent Jewish Legion to preserve peace and order, particularly in view of the Mandatory's formation of an "Arab Legion" in Transjordan. He also stressed the importance of developing Jewish industry, trade and artisanship, intensive agriculture and improved distribution of Palestinian products in the Diaspora.

It was his emphasis on the needs of the private economic sector, articulated the following year in an article entitled *Basta*, which called down on Jabotinsky's head the wrath of Palestine's leftist political parties and their economic blunderbuss, the powerful *Histadrut* Labor Federation. He was labeled the "enemy of labor," a slur that was to dog him for the rest of his life. In fact, Jabotinsky was a *friend* of labor. What he deplored was class warfare. In *Basta* he simply exposed what should have been obvious to all -- a total disequilibrium among the various social elements in Palestine and the socialists' transformation of the *Histadrut* from a labor union into an instrument of the class struggle in which "every Jewish worker should consider himself an enemy of the Jewish capitalist, even though the latter utilizes his capital to build another factory or to purchase a plantation and employ in his concerns Jewish labor exclusively."

For this bit of good sense and his insistence that arbitration take the place of the strike during the development period in Palestine, Jabotinsky was pilloried as the "doorkeeper of the bourgeoisie," a rather futile term, he averred, in a society like Palestine Jewry, where "the wage earners are the sons of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie are their fathers and older bothers."

But there was a deeper issue involved here than class conflict. Jabotinsky saw in the Left's manipulation of the *Histadrut*, its blatant politicization of what should have been a professional labor union open to all, an attempt to force a marriage between Zionism, an ideology inherent in Judaism, and socialism, one completely alien to it. He called it "shatnez," borrowing from the Bible's prohibition of combining wool and linen in the same garment. "Put two idols in a temple," he said, "and it is inevitable that the 'second one' will emerge the victor." The "second one," in this case, was socialism and the petty economic privileges the Left had managed to acquire in Palestine over the years. To preserve them, Jabotinsky saw the "first idol," Herzlian Zionism, being sacrificed. As had Herzl's colleague and World Zionist Organization co-founder Max Nordau before him, he sensed that the future was being given away for the present.

Jabotinsky would not allow Revisionism to have that "cannon ball chained to our ankles." It was one of the reasons that with few exceptions, the Revisionist Movement owned no settlements or other economic enterprises in Palestine. The price of remaining true to this vision was high. As Zionism's material "have nots," the Revisionists more than once found their political future critically affected by this decision.

Palestine

“Jabotinsky never lived in the regular time of day,” a political adversary reflected, years after his death. “He had his own time. When we Zionists saw the clock at six, he saw it at twelve.”

Schechtman thought the six-hour time difference might have corresponded to the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust, but the disparity could also have been applied to other events that marked and marred the Jewish landscape from the late 1920s to the coming of the Second World War. Jabotinsky’s clock was always set six hours ahead. While the rest of the Zionist movement wrestled for partisan political gain, he pleaded for Jewish unity and a Jewish State as the one hope for Jewish survival in a world growing increasingly intolerant of the Jew.

Years before Winston Churchill was to preside over it, Jabotinsky foresaw the dissolution of the British Empire and the all-out confrontation between the Jews and the Arabs to fill the vacuum that would be left in Palestine. As early as April 1933, a month after Hitler’s ascension to power, he declared that the Third Reich, left unchallenged, would bring catastrophe to European Jewry, and for the next seven years, obsessed with evacuation schemes, he drove himself relentlessly across Eastern Europe, importuning complacent, often hostile Jewish communities to flee while there was still time. Finally, he predicted almost to the month, the reestablishment of the Jewish State.

The period of great events began with Jabotinsky’s abbreviated sojourn in Palestine. He came to the Holy Land in October 1928 in fulfillment of a promise of aliyah he had made to himself more than a year earlier. For the first time since quitting the Zionist Executive, his financial affairs were in order. He had a firm commitment with the New York Yiddish-language daily *Morgen Journal* and the Warsaw *Haint* for the regular publication of his articles, *Rassviet* was doing reasonably well and the “Order of the Sons of Zion,” the renegade ZOA splinter he had won over in his 1926 trip to America, wanted him to head up their Jerusalem-based “Judea Insurance Company.” as vice president, treasurer and managing director. The salary was \$500 a month and the post left him free to pursue his political and journalistic career outside of office hours. He accepted the offer.

Why he accepted, is still a puzzle to some. One thing is certain: Jabotinsky did not leave a comfortable flat in Paris to take up solitary residence in a room at 46 Rehov ha’Anglim (“Street of the English”) for pecuniary reasons. Nor was his Zionism of the “romantic” variety. He could say, along with Nordau, another non-romantic Zionist, that “our belief in Palestine is not a blind half mystical sentiment, but the result of a dispassionate study of the entire essence of our history and our movement.” In truth, Jabotinsky could have made his point just as effectively from the Rue Blanche. Yet there he was in Jerusalem, a city that by his own description at the time, was “a miserable provincial town, without cultural life, without inner cohesion.”

Jabotinsky provided the answer to the puzzle himself. Actually, he provided two answers. The first was that he saw in Palestine the future homeland of his people, the only homeland it would ever have. The second was a more personal answer. It had to do with his sense of belonging. All his life Jabotinsky had been a wanderer. Until his death, he

was stateless, a traveler on a League of Nations passport, a man of *all* countries, belonging to *no* country. In Palestine, he saw the only chance he would ever have to end that stateless existence. “Reb Yid,” he wrote to himself, “you are now home. Here at last, you are going to build a house of your own and your years of wandering are over.”

It was not to be the case, and it marks what may have been Jabotinsky’s greatest personal tragedy. But the brief period he spent in Palestine was illuminating, nonetheless, for it helped broaden and crystallize his thinking about the Yishuv and its relationship with the Diaspora for years afterward.

His arrival in Palestine in the fall of 1928 coincided with a period of mounting Arab-Jewish tension in and around Jerusalem and rampant pro-Arab sentiment on the part of the Mandatory overlords. The awful riots of 1929 were only months away. Jabotinsky saw the Zionists as “defending the last ditch” and he wanted meaningful political action. To the proposal of the *Va’ad Leumi* (“Jewish National Governing Council” in Palestine) that an “ad hoc” delegation be dispatched abroad to present Palestinian Jewry’s grievances against the British Mandatory Authority, he replied: “What is needed is a permanent body which should strive to influence the entire decisive international political factor.” He wanted that body to function alongside the Zionist Executive in London as a kind of “Jewish Dominion” in formation. “If you say ‘a,’ he declared, “then you have to say ‘z’.” But this was a *Va’ad Leumi* that was not prepared to say a *or z*. “They have lost the quality of being offended; they are resigned to everything,” he concluded. In the end, they did nothing.

The Palestine sojourn also provided him with the only opportunity in his life to have his own Hebrew paper. *Doar Hayom* had always been friendly to the Revisionist cause, but it was a tepid, inoffensive little daily in a field dominated by the powerful *Ha’aretz* and the *Histadrut*-backed *Davar*. Then, in December 1928, Jabotinsky took over as editor. Overnight, *Doar Hayom* became the “fighting paper of those who believe.” Restrained in language but uncompromising in its convictions, its new tone was set by Jabotinsky in the powerful *Ani Ma’amin* (“I believe”) he penned for the first issue under his stewardship. It encapsulated the “a-to-z” of his own faith in the Zionist ideal and the emergence of the Jewish State. *Doar Hayom* doubled its circulation in a few weeks.

Jabotinsky took his duties on behalf of the Judea Insurance Co. just as seriously. The idea of Jewish insurance premiums forming the basis of a capital investment pool for the development of the Yishuv was an old Herzlian dream that in his view, needed dusting off. He saw in it a chance for foreclosing a financial relationship between the Jewish settlement enterprise in Palestine and the Diaspora “based on charity.” In a letter to the American Zionist, Judge Julian Mack, he called for “the gradual elimination of the dole system called *Keren ha-Yessod*...to be replaced by a scheme that would make commercial credit accessible.” To Jabotinsky, economic self-reliance for the Yishuv was a three-step process: Diaspora Jewry would keep a portion of its savings in Palestine, Palestine Jewry would use the capital to enlarge its productive capacity and Diaspora Jewry would buy the products that resulted from this expansion.

By early 1929, however, the shadows were lengthening across Jabotinsky’s stay in Palestine. As he shuttled from Jerusalem to Vienna to preside over the Third Revisionist World Conference, then to Zurich to head the Revisionist Union’s delegation to the 16th Zionist Congress, murderous Arab rioters ran amok in Hebron, Jerusalem and Safed.

Instead of the praise they should have received in defending the Jews, Jabotinsky's young *Betarim* were singled out by the British for allegedly inciting the riots. He was back in Palestine in the fall, then departed the country, never to return (though he had no inkling this would be the case) on December 25, 1929, two days after delivering a devastating critique of the Zionist Executive for its inaction in the face of the outrages. Before an audience of 6,000 in Tel Aviv, he called for the Executive's resignation and warned against further concessions to the Arabs that were leading nowhere.

Following his departure for a speaking tour of South Africa, Jabotinsky's associates in Palestine were informally "advised" that the Mandatory would not favor his return. His speeches and articles, its representatives charged, were an incitement to the Arabs and a threat to the "peace." Palestine High Commissioner Herbert Samuel, an ally of Chaim Weizmann's before collaborating with then-Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill on a 1922 "White Paper" which essentially cancelled Britain's obligation to help create a "National Jewish Home" in Palestine, made Jabotinsky's exile official. Though he had been a permanent resident of the country since October 1928, the Mandatory refused to honor the reentry visa issued to him on his departure for South Africa. The Arab nationalists, in league with the anti-Zionist clique in the House of Commons, were thus placated. Jabotinsky was once again a man without a country.

The Split

Jabotinsky was reunited with his family in Paris in the Spring of 1930, following the South African speaking tour. But all was not well with the Revisionist Union. Large cracks had begun to appear in its façade. The Palestine experience had left him more convinced than ever that the future of his movement lay in complete independence from “official” Zionism rather than as an opposition body within the Zionist Organization.

The Revisionist Union’s London Executive, led by Meir Grossman and German-born Zionist publicist Richard Lichtheim and supported by the brilliant Viennese journalist Robert Stricker, still clung to the dream of conquering the Zionist establishment. They were now in charge of the Revisionist World Headquarters, which had been shifted to London from Paris when Jabotinsky took up residence in Jerusalem. At the opposite extreme, the “maximalists,” represented by the Central Committee of the Revisionist Party in Palestine, clamored for the Revisionist break with the Zionist Organization Jabotinsky now favored.

To keep peace within the ranks, Jabotinsky agreed to lead the Revisionists to the 17th Zionist Congress in 1931, but only on condition that they consider a secession from the Zionist Organization should the Congress fail to adopt a resolution proclaiming a Jewish majority in Palestine as the aim of Zionism. His demand for an open endorsement of the Jewish majority theme was neither intended to annoy the British nor incite the Arabs. It was rather, in Jabotinsky’s view, a categorical prerequisite to any legal claim the Jews might have on future immigration rights in Palestine.

“My friends and my opponents,” he declared in his address to the Congress, “keep looking in vain for a passage in the Mandate which specifically mentions our right to large scale and rapid immigration. The only basis for our rights to demand mass immigration is that the expression ‘National Home’ means Jewish *majority*. I would advise you not to renounce that basis, for the enemies of Zionism assert that a minority could also create a National Home and that a small immigration would suffice for it. If you want a legal basis for large scale immigration, you must insist on this interpretation.”

The Congress awaited a reply to this thrust from Dr. Weizmann, President of the Zionist Executive. It came a day later in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “I have no understanding and no sympathy for a Jewish majority in Palestine,” Weizmann declared. The statement sent tremors through the Congress. Its Political Committee reacted with a resolution that amounted to a no-confidence vote, and its acceptance by a majority of the Congress, including the Laborites, would have precluded any chance of Weizmann continuing as Zionist Organization president.

Under normal parliamentary procedure, the mantle of leadership should then have fallen to the opposition – Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Union. Weizmann, himself a fervent believer in parliamentary democracy, was convinced Jabotinsky would succeed him. Nor was he dismayed at the prospect. “I believe you are now the only one in the Zionist movement qualified to become president of the Zionist Organization,” he told his old adversary.

Jabotinsky had no such illusions about the democratic instincts of the Congress. It chose instead, Nachum Sokolov, a Laborite in good standing. What disturbed him far more, was the refusal of the Congress to put the Revisionist resolution on a Jewish majority in Palestine to a vote. When an attempt by Grossman to bring it to the floor was shouted down, Jabotinsky tore his delegate card to shreds. "This is not a Zionist Congress anymore," he declared, and walked out, not to return.

Jabotinsky did not attempt to "collect" on the secession pledge. He knew such a move would tear Revisionism apart. Instead, a compromise was struck at a meeting of the Revisionist Executive in Calais, France in September 1931. It asserted that any Revisionist was free to belong or not belong to the Zionist Organization, provided he subjected himself to the primacy of World Revisionist Union discipline. In the event of a conflict, Revisionist doctrine would prevail.

It was precisely on this question of "primacy" that the Revisionist Executive finally foundered. The Zionist Executive precipitated the break with a statement in December 1931 declaring that no member of the Zionist Organization could accept "a discipline which may conflict with and take precedence over allegiance to the ZO." In other words, Revisionists would have to choose between allegiance to their party and its ideology and membership in the ZO. They could no longer maintain both.

To Jabotinsky, the choice was evident. "An end must be made to all this," he wrote a friend the following year. Influencing Zionist Organization policy might be a legitimate Revisionist objective, but not at the expense of Revisionist independence.

The London Executive saw things in a different light. The Revisionists, it submitted, could continue to go their independent way without an open clash with "official" Zionism. Jabotinsky's insistence on a reaffirmation of Revisionist "primacy" was nothing but a provocation aimed at forcing a secession from the Zionist Organization. An attempt to heal the rift at a Revisionist World Party Council in Kattowitz, Poland in March 1933 proved unsuccessful. The Grossman group was spoiling for a fight, convinced they could beat Jabotinsky in a showdown with the party's rank-and-file. On March 23, 1933, he gave them the opportunity to prove it, throwing down the gauntlet in a statement from Lodz, which read in part: "I, the President of the World Union of Zionist Revisionists, declare that as from today, I am personally assuming the actual direction of the Union and all matters of the world movement. The activities of the existing central institutions are thereby being suspended. I shall publish an appeal to the widest possible circle of the Revisionist and Betar movements not to participate in the 18th Zionist Congress.". The statement included an announcement of the establishment in Warsaw of a "Provisional Secretariat" to replace the London World Executive, with Schechtman and Betar head Aaron Propes among its members.

Jabotinsky's move was denounced by the London group as a "putsch" and an "adventure," but the Revisionist rank-and-file had the last word. In a plebiscite held on April 16, 1933, an overwhelming 93.8 percent of the membership voted to vest all of the executive functions of the Revisionist movement in Jabotinsky's hands. Gallant in victory, he strove mightily to keep the defeated Londoners and Stricker in the party, even to the extent of rescinding his ban on Revisionist participation in the 18th Zionist Congress. But the split was now irreparable. Led by Grossman, the dissidents

reconstituted themselves as the “Jewish State Party,” a Revisionist offshoot that maintained unswerving allegiance to Zionist Organization discipline.

The Stavsky Affair

In the midst of this Revisionist upheaval, the “National Socialists,” led by a hate-crazed demagogue, clawed their way to power in Germany and the “Stavsky Affair” struck like a thunderclap across the face of World Jewry.

The Stavsky Affair began with the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff, head of the Jewish Agency’s political department, by two Arabs while strolling with his wife along a beach near Tel Aviv on the night of June 16, 1933. Despite the voluntary confessions of the two Arabs, Abdul Majid and Issael Abrass, British police arrested Dr. Abba Achimeir, editor of the Revisionist weekly *Hazit Haam* and Avraham Stavsky, a young Betari recently arrived from Poland. Three days later, 29 more Revisionists were rounded up, including one Zvi Rosenblatt. Arlosoroff’s wife identified Stavsky and Rosenblatt as the killers and Achimeir was accused of masterminding the crime, allegedly in retaliation against the Jewish Agency for its softness in dealing with the Arabs and the British. Majid and Abrass were quietly induced to withdraw their confessions.

The arrests and charges against Stavsky, Rosenblatt and Achimeir unleashed a carefully orchestrated campaign of anti-Revisionist, anti-Betar agitation, demonstrations and outright violence in Palestine and around the world. Led by the socialists, but by no means confined to them, the self-appointed judges issued a manifesto in Tel Aviv declaring “the moral responsibility for this brutal assassination falls upon the entire Revisionist movement which has produced such a murder...Let our motto be: ‘Expel the Revisionist gangs from Jewish life!’”

Jabotinsky, the real target of their wrath, struck back hard. Labeling the anti-Stavsky frenzy a ‘new Beilisade’ – a reference to the infamous 1911 Tsarist blood libel against the Jew, Mendel Beilis – he released a statement from Poland reminding the accusers that there were two rules sacred to civilized humanity: “A man claiming his innocence is considered innocent until a court has pronounced him guilty; and secondly, even the proven guilt of an individual should never be construed as the guilt of the community to which he belongs. Both these rules should be specially sacred to Jews, doubly so the second one, the violation of which has always been a poisonous weapon in the hands of anti-Semitism.”

Days later in a celebrated article in *Moment* entitled “Cool and Steadfast,” Jabotinsky called on the Revisionist movement not to waver in its principles by “one iota” in the face of the attacks against it. “We shall not give one inch in our war against class hatred and class domination,” he wrote. “The instigators will not succeed; their attempt to exploit the blood that has been split will not help them either.”

”It was in this anti-Revisionist lynch atmosphere that the 18th Zionist Congress convened in Prague in August 1933. As late as July of that year, Jabotinsky was writing of a “Congress of Hope” that would focus on such burning issues as the Nazi menace in Germany, the legalization of Jewish self-defense in Palestine and the “Jewish State-Jewish Majority” theme. Instead, the 18th became a “kangaroo court” in which the entire Revisionist movement was tried, convicted and condemned along with Stavsky, Rosenblatt and Achimeir for the Arlosoroff murder. Breaking a time-honored tradition, the Revisionists were barred from representation on the Congress’ Presidium, an action

so flagrantly undemocratic that it resulted in Jabotinsky's refusal to be the main speaker of the party's 46-member delegation. When Schechtman rose to speak in his stead, the entire socialist bloc walked out.

It was not the personal venom directed against himself and his colleagues that disturbed Jabotinsky so much as the failure of the Congress to deal with the developments that were threatening Jewish life from Berlin to Warsaw to Tel Aviv. His resolution calling for a worldwide boycott of Germany was not even put to a vote by a Zionist Congress that had ruled out any discussion of the German question. He charged that the Nazi threat had been reduced to "small change" – a three million mark transfer deal with Hitler to allow German Jews to liberate their money in the form of goods and a request for a few more Palestine immigration certificates from the British – rather than used "for placing the Jewish problem in its wider perspective before the world and demanding that it should be solved by giving Jews a place in the sun."

Reflecting on this "Congress of Hope," the last he and his party were to attend, Jabotinsky wrote: "It humiliated our nation before the arrogance of the Third Reich; it broke the united front of the boycott movement; it failed to unmask the anti-Zionist essence of the Mandatory policy which hides under a cloak of verbal benevolence. Worst of all," he concluded, "it committed what I do not hesitate to call a crime by intervening in a matter *sub judice*, and pushing to the gallows three young Jews who claim to be innocent and whom I firmly believe to be innocent."

Stavsky, Rosenblatt and Achimeir were ultimately cleared of all complicity in the Arlosoroff murder after a year-long worldwide defense effort organized by Jabotinsky and his friends in the House of Commons and the British press. But the failure of the 18th Zionist Congress, particularly in respect to the Nazi question, and the scars it left on the Jewish body politic, have remained to haunt Jewish life to this day. An attempt to restore Zionist peace through a series of London meetings in the fall of 1934 between Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion was less noteworthy for its futility than for the light it shed on the visceral difference between Jabotinsky and most of his contemporaries in the Labor Camp. Ben-Gurion was both fascinated and repelled by him. "There was in him complete internal spiritual freedom," Israel's first prime minister told Schechtman during a conversation in 1945 at his Negev retreat in Sde Boker. "He had nothing of the 'Galut Jew' and was never embarrassed in the presence of a Gentile."

Years earlier, Weizmann had referred to Jabotinsky as "utterly un-Jewish in manner, approach and deportment." Jabotinsky never denied it. *Moreno verabenu ha-Goy* ("Our teacher and our mentor the Gentile"), he had declared in 1927 at the Second Revisionist World Conference. This fundamental difference between the two camps of Zionism was compounded of geography and tradition. Like Herzl and Nordau before him, Jabotinsky came from outside the "mainstream" of Jewish life. He was an intellectual, a cosmopolitan, a man of the city. The jargon-bound East European "shtetl," that had produced Weizmann and Ben-Gurion and most of the rest of Zionist officialdom, was alien to him. He never understood its deep sense of inferiority toward the Gentile. It was no wonder that he appeared so "un-Jewish" to his Zionist contemporaries.

In the most universal sense, however, he was more "Jewish" than any of them, precisely because he was not frozen in any time period. He was the Jew of the past and the future. His old friend, the Biblical scholar Dr. Mordechai Solieli, with whom he shared a place

on the Zionist Executive in the early 1920s, probably said it best. "Jabotinsky," he submitted, "was the first citizen of the Jewish State long before its emergence. He felt and acted like one, with the calm assurance of a man who had already obtained his citizenship papers. What was still missing were only the external attributes of statehood, but these, he was confident, our generation will fight out."

The failure of the Ben-Gurion talks severed the last ties between the Revisionist Union and the Zionist Organization. The time has come for a "clean-cut *basta*," as Jabotinskyphrased it, a "New Zionist Organization," broadly representative of the masses, totally devoted to the principles of a Jewish State on both sides of the Jordan River and social justice without class war within Palestine Jewry. To those in his movement who still argued for a sentimental link to Herzl's old Zionist Organization, he responded bluntly: "There ain't no such animal. I don't understand that lingo. I am deaf on that ear."

A Revisionist plebiscite calling for the creation of the New Zionist Organization was overwhelmingly approved 167,000 to 3,000 in June 1935, and in September of that year, 278 delegates from 32 countries assembled in Vienna for the NZO's Foundation Conference. Jabotinsky's 10 year-old dream of independence was realized at last.

The Frozen Stampede

But overshadowing all dreams and victories, great and small, was the growing power of the Third Reich. What alarmed Jabotinsky was not Germany's anti-Semitism per se – the Jews, after all were no strangers to that phenomenon – but the *kind* of anti-Semitism it projected. Here was the “anti-Semitism of Men,” as he termed it, a subjective revulsion against the Jew, powerful and permanent enough to become anything from a hobby to a religion. Unlike the “anti-Semitism of Things,” the more common ostracism Jews experienced in Poland and other countries, the German strain carried pandemic contagion. It could spill over and infect an entire continent.

He was particularly concerned with its impact on central and Eastern Europe, that “zone of incurable anti-Semitism,” as he described it to the Shaw Commission in 1930. He portrayed the four million Jews living in that zone as caught in a “frozen stampede.” Desperately in need of outlets for mass emigration, they could find none. “Imagine that a fire breaks out in a crowded movie house,” he told audiences. “People begin a frantic stampede to get out, but the doors and windows are hermetically sealed.”

For the last seven years of his life, Jabotinsky was obsessed with the mechanics of Jewish evacuation. At his insistence, the Foundation Conference of the New Zionist Organization authorized the preparation of a 10-year plan for evacuating 1.5 million European Jews and their resettlement in Palestine. In Poland, the main target of his efforts, home to 3.5 million Jews, he was pilloried by some for “breaking Jewish national discipline and jeopardizing Jewish civic equality” with this “evacuation talk.” Ironically, the Polish Government was quite sympathetic to his Palestine resettlement plan. The British, however, were unmoved.

Finally, there was no recourse for Polish Jewry other than to run. And in a hauntingly prophetic address in Warsaw on the 9th of Av, August 1938, Jabotinsky implored them to do exactly that:

“It is now three years,” he declared, “that I am calling on you, Polish Jewry, who are the crown of world Jewry. I continue to warn you incessantly that a catastrophe is coming closer. I became gray and old in these years. My heart bleeds that you dear brothers and sisters do not see the volcano which will soon begin to spit its all-consuming lava. I realize you do not see this because you are immersed in your daily worries. Today, however, I demand from you trust. You were convinced that my prognoses have proven to be right. If you think otherwise, then drive me out of your midst. However, if you do believe me, then listen to me in this 12th hour. In the name of God! Let any one of you save himself as long as there is still time. And of time, there is very little...And what else would I like to say to you on this day of Tisha b'Av? Whoever of you that will escape from the catastrophe, he or she will live to see the exalted moment of a great Jewish wedding – the rebirth and rise of a Jewish State. I don't know if I will be privileged to see it. My son will! I believe in this as I am sure that tomorrow

morning the sun will rise...”

It was Jabotinsky’s last Tisha b’Av message to his largest and most beloved constituency. In a short while, both he and they would be gone.

The Last Years

If Jabotinsky's evacuation plan was still-born, the other great projects of his closing years – the fight against a suffocating 1937 British partition plan for Palestine; the organization and implementation of “illegal” Jewish immigration to Palestine under “Aliyah Bet,” and the mobilization of Jewish armed resistance to Arab aggression and its British enablers.-- all succeeded admirably. His final endeavor, the recruitment of a Jewish Army, a reincarnated “Legion,” to fight alongside the World War II allies might have achieved equal success had he lived long enough to see it through.

Of the 1937 British Royal Commission's partition plan, it may be said that Jabotinsky, almost alone among Jewish leaders in opposing it, played a key role in its rejection by the League of Nations. The man who in principle always opposed the “half a loaf” concept in Jewish affairs, could never bring himself to accept “crumbs” when it came to a Jewish State. The partition plan put forward by the “Peel Commission,” as it came to be known, with little more than Tel Aviv and environs designated for Jewish statehood, could not be described other than as crumbs.

Jabotinsky compared the scheme to “the Latin verb *aio*, a grammatical monstrosity meaning ‘I say.’ It is present, it is imperfect and it has no future.” Warned that his fight against Peel might imperil Jewish unity, he retorted: “God's name is not unity. God's name is truth.” Yet for all its monstrous inequities, the 1937 plan had one virtue in Jabotinsky's eyes: It put flesh, however meager, on the concept of a Jewish State.

“Aliyah Bet” (“Second Aliyah”) or “Aliyah Af-Ahl-Pi” (“Aliyah Against All Odds”), as it was sometimes called, was an exercise in Revisionist “adventurism” that saved the lives of more than 100,000 European Jews between 1936 and 1940. It was Jabotinsky himself who first posed the idea of an “illegal” immigration to Palestine carried out by Jewish youth in a 1932 article entitled *On Adventurism*. “Where is it written that one may enter a country only with a visa?” he asked. “If I were young, I would laugh at their visas and their restrictions. Impossible? Tell that to your grandmother, not to me, I would say. If I were young, I would launch a new phrase in propaganda betokened to a new symbol – a whistle, an ordinary tin whistle...And the slogan for this propaganda campaign would be: ‘Whistle at their laws and restrictions.’”

Within four years that “tin whistle” was being heard across Europe as Jewish “illegals” from half a dozen countries, their transports organized by hand-picked Betar units, were loaded aboard boats for Palestine. At the other end of the line, members of Irgun waited on the beaches to insure their safe arrival. Jabotinsky's own son Eri was in charge of the Aliyah Bet operation in Rumania.

By the end of 1938, thousands of such “illegals” a month were being spirited into Palestine through the Aliyah Bet pipeline. “The noblest of all the sports in the world,” Jabotinsky called it. “The Jewish national sport,” he wrote, “is helping to break through the barrier that stands in the way of millions of hungry souls; it is helping to win a country for a homeless rabble and to make the rabble a nation.”

Nothing less than the Second World War proved big enough to stop Aliyah Bet, but those whom it did save had Jabotinsky to thank for it. “I think all the illegal immigrants in

Palestine owe him their lives and present liberties,” his old British friend Col. Josiah Wedgwood observed at a memorial meeting for the Revisionist leader. “Others would not have dared had he not led the way.”

Jabotinsky did not lead the way in the formation of the underground Irgun Zvai Leumi fighting force in Palestine. But while it developed without his involvement, it was a flowering of the seed of Jewish self-defense he implanted, first with the Jewish Legion, then with the Haganah – both of them his creations. IZL was formed in 1931 as a split-off from Haganah, which had fallen under leftist influence. Originally called “Haganah Bet,” the new entity included a broad coalition of non-socialist youth, most of them *Betarim* and young Revisionists. Jabotinsky only became formally linked with it in 1936, when a renewal of Arab rioting against Jews in Palestine caused him to cast aside long held reservations about underground-type resistance activity. His altered perspective on the issue was reflected in a famous article entitled in Yiddish “*Oifn Pripechek*” (“On the Hearth”) in which he declared: “Young men, learn to shoot!” It was to be the slogan of a new era among Jewish youth. in Palestine. “Learn to Shoot!” became their “Eleventh Commandment.”

In 1936, Jabotinsky was named Supreme Commander of Irgun, with sole authority to appoint the organization’s Palestine commander. On matters of Irgun policy, Jabotinsky’s word was to be final. Day-to-day operations and the appointment and promotion of officers were to be in the hands of the Palestine commander.

The Supreme Command of IZL was probably the most difficult and soul-searching assignment Jabotinsky ever undertook. There were jealousies between Betar and Irgun that only he, as head of both organizations, could resolve. “Fairness,” in some of these cases might have tested the wisdom of two Solomons. There were, additionally, questions he wrestled with concerning armed retaliation against Arab attack that could, and occasionally did result in death and injury to Arab non-combatants There was also the fear that the sword might become a way of life for the young Irgunists – the first, rather than the last resort, for solving problems.

Jabotinsky, it must be recalled, was essentially a 19th Century “liberal,” a humanistic, intellectual term of reference that was to be subsequently hijacked by the Left and distorted beyond all recognition. Though prepared to take up arms, as he did in World War I with the Zion Mule Corps and the Jewish Legion, he set great store by reason, most particularly, political reason. “*Breshis bara Elokim et ha-Politica*” (“In the Beginning God created the political world”) was his famous paraphrase of the opening lines of the Book of Genesis. Though his son Eri was a member of IZL’s High Command and had been sentenced to a term in Acre prison by the British for his part in a retaliatory operation in Jerusalem, it was not until Britain’s issuance of the infamous “MacDonald White Paper” in May 1939, padlocking the gates to further Jewish entry into Palestine, that Jabotinsky swung completely around to the Irgun point of view.

The underground organization joined Betar as one of Jabotinsky’s “children” in that same month at a mass meeting in Warsaw. “When the Irgun grows,” he told the crowd, “your hope also grows...The Irgun is your salvation. Its existence is your promise. It is the strongest form of protest. With their sacrifice, they awaken the conscience of the entire youth of Eretz Yisrael. The Irgun must grow, reinforced by whole battalions of young Jews from the Diaspora, thus establishing a powerful Jewish Army.” Eight years earlier,

in 1931, Jabotinsky had prophesied: "There will come a time when we shall have to tell England to go from Palestine. She must know it, sooner or later." In 1948, IZL delivered the eviction notice and a Jewish State was reborn.

Betar

“Jabotinsky has created a youth movement,” the American Zionist Jacob de Haas wrote U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis in the fall of 1935 after a visit to Poland. “Its code is *noblesse oblige* and it is ready to go to the stake.”

If Jabotinsky could have added one word to de Haas’s near perfect description of “Brit Trumpeldor,” the full name of the global Jewish youth organization he created partly in tribute to his fallen compatriot in arms, Joseph Trumpeldor, it would have been “hadar,” an explicitly Hebrew conception of *noblesse oblige* that he strove to infuse into every member of that remarkable youth movement. The essence of hadar defies precise translation. Literally, the word means “shine” or “glow,” but as Jabotinsky portrayed hadar, it implied a certain “knightliness” in conduct, manner and life-style, a combination of “outward beauty, respect, self-esteem, politeness, faithfulness. Hadar,” he further explained, “consist of a thousand trifles which collectively form everyday life.”

In crafting Betar from a handful of Jewish high school students in Riga, Latvia in 1924, Jabotinsky imbued the “everyday lives” of hundreds of thousands of Jewish children from the ghettos of Eastern Europe with a spirit of *malchut Yisrael* – the “Jewish nobility” their people had not known for 1,800 years. “Our lives are dull and our hearts are empty,” one of these youngsters declared, greeting Jabotinsky at a youth rally in 1926, “for there is no God in our midst. Give us a God, sir, worthy of dedication and sacrifice and you will see that we can do it.”

Jabotinsky gave them no personal God – he recoiled against idolization and the cult of personality. What he did give them was a sense of being part not only of the future – the coming Jewish State – but of the past: the majesty of King David, the Maccabees, the Prophets and Bar Kochba, from whom they were descended. He also gave them something else, a belief. Its name was “monism” and it stated simply that in the temple of Jewry there could be room for only one “ism,” Zionism, unrivaled and untainted by any other “ism,” no matter how vaunted. “One sun in the sky and one faith in the heart and no other,” he commanded them, quoting from the revered Bialik. There was to be no trace of “shatnez” in their ideological garments. It was with that singular devotion to an ideal Jabotinsky so vividly allegorized in his novel, *Samson the Nazerite*, that Betar brought a discipline and a military preparedness into the life of the Yishuv in Palestine which laid the groundwork for Jewish resistance and the sense of mission that has sustained the armed forces of Israel through seven wars.

Jabotinsky chose Betar as the name for his Revisionist youth movement and he chose it most deliberately. It has a double meaning. In addition to its aforementioned reference to Brit Trumpeldor, Betar was also the last stronghold of Jewish resistance against the Romans during the Bar Kochba revolt. With the name Betar, Jabotinsky indelibly linked the last site of ancient Hebrew courage and martyrdom with Zionism’s first contemporary Hebrew hero-martyr, the man with whom he had conceived the Jewish Legion. Trumpeldor was killed along with six comrades in 1920 defending Tel Hai, their Galileean settlement, against an Arab attack, but his concept of *chalutziot*, “pioneering youth,” became embodied in Betar’s *Plugot ha-Gius* -- “Mobilization Corps” -- in which every new Betar recruit in Palestine was required to spend two years giving

whatever service the Yishuv might need of him. This spirit of service became the engine that powered Betar.

The history of Betar and the life of Jabotinsky intertwine almost mystically through the tumultuous 1920s and 30s. Wherever Jabotinsky is, there is Betar. Wherever and whenever he needs support, Betar is there to provide it. In Tel Aviv in October 1928, they defend him with their bodies as he walks calmly through a gauntlet of leftist hooligans incited to fever pitch by his public address at a review of Betar detachments from all parts of Palestine. "If they throw stones at you," he instructs them, "don't pay any attention. If they insult you, don't answer. But should anybody try to bar your way, do whatever your commander orders." Nobody tried to bar their way.

Five years later in Kattowitz, Poland, when Jabotinsky decides to take personal command of the Revisionist Union in order to enforce the primacy of Revisionist policy and principle over the "diktat" of the Zionist Organization, it is Betar that rallies to his side. With its support as spearhead, he prevails over the opposition of his Revisionist Executive in London. In the late 1930s, it is Betar's *Plugat ha-Kotel* ("Western Wall battalion") that answers Jabotinsky's call for volunteers to protect Jews praying at that hallowed site from Arab molestation. And in 1938, when he gives the signal for the acceleration of Aliyah Bet's "illegal" transports of European Jews to Palestine in response to the MacDonald White Paper meant to shut them out, it is to Betar that he delegates the responsibility for organizing the transports and seeing the immigrants safely to their ports of embarkation.

The relationship is by no means one-sided. If they are all for him, he is all for them. On one occasion, Jabotinsky refers to Betar as "the roots from which the entire tree receives its nourishment." More than once are those roots imperiled and only his personal intervention saves them from being torn up. The history of Betar in Palestine is a history of calumny, slander, beatings and vilification. Betar is blamed by the Left for everything from precipitating the bloody Arab riots of 1929 to the 1933 Arlosoroff murder. While there is not a scintilla of evidence linking Betar to either event, it takes all of the power and prestige at Jabotinsky's command to keep his precious youth movement from being sucked under in a whirlpool of mindless hatred, most of it aimed at him.

He also finds himself defending Betar's flag in less dramatic ways. When the prospect of peace with the Laborites arises in 1934 in a series of London meetings with Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky insists on the restoration of Palestine immigration certificates to his Betarim as one of the planks in the peace agreement. The socialists, who controlled the issuance of the certificates, withheld them from Betar for obvious political reasons. Many believe it was this plank that caused the *Histadrut* to vote down the agreement. They also concede that Jabotinsky would not have made the deal on any other terms.

He confided in Betar as in no other individual or group. It was the confidence of a father in a son. When he contemplates reentering Palestine in 1935 in defiance of Britain's refusal to grant him a visa, Jabotinsky first discloses his plan to the head of the Palestine Betar. And in 1937, when informed by a Palestinian Betar delegation in Alexandria that the organization was prepared to rise in revolt against the British Royal Commission's crippling partition scheme for Palestine, even if that meant another "Masada," he replies: "If you ask me to give the order to revolt, I shall do so, but only if I'm together with you.

For that, you will have to land me at Machanaim so that we can fight together, go together to prison, and if need be, die together...”

A lesser man might have been tempted to use this unique personal following, this youth army that by 1938 totaled 78,000 members in 26 countries, as a political power base. Indeed, there were “maximalists” in both Betar and the Revisionist movement, impatient with the democratic give-and-take and occasional hair pulling within the party, who wanted Jabotinsky to head up a dictatorial Revisionist regime. Jabotinsky would have no truck with it. The question of dictatorship, he declared “is a dead duck, simply because there is no dictator in evidence. The candidate whom the advocates of this idea had in mind explained to them that this role is beyond his strength and not to his taste...”

The maximalists had underestimated their own movement. They didn’t need a dictator. Jabotinsky had given them something far worthier: a living example of all their hopes and dreams for the “new” Jew rising from the ashes of nearly two millennia of degradation and persecution. He was their “Rosh Betar,” the only one ever accorded the title. They, in turn, gave him the belief that a new Jewish generation had at last come into being, a generation, as de Haas observed, “that is bleeding itself white for Jewish causes.” For this generation, Jabotinsky was ready to endure anything – vilification, slander, personal attack and all the disappointments that a man born ahead of his time must suffer.

When the end came for Jabotinsky, it was fittingly in the role of “Rosh Betar.” Col. Patterson, recalling that tragic day in the summer of 1940 wrote:

“...Jabotinsky’s last walk on earth was between the lines of young Betarim who awaited his arrival in Camp Betar in Hunter, NewYork. They stood in military formation for his inspection. Although suffering from acute pain, Jabotinsky carried out the inspection and went straight to his room and died...I was not with him during the last hours of his life, but when I heard of it, I could not help saying to myself that if Jabotinsky were to choose the setting for his death, it would have been something after this manner...”

Jabotinsky’s will instructed that he be buried where he fell, with his remains to be removed to the Land of Israel *only* by order of a sovereign Jewish government. For 24 years, he remained interred in a plot of the Nordau Circle at the New Montefiore Cemetery in Pine Lawn, NewYork. In 1964, at the order of then-Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, his remains and those of his wife were transferred from Pine Lawn and reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. The prophet of Zion had come home at last.

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