PM

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Egypt's Misery a Contrast to Rebirth in Palestine

Reverse Situation Would Ruin Jews' Case

I. F. Stone resumes today his series on Palestine and the Near East which was delayed by his illness.

PM Exclusive

WASHINGTON, Dec. 21. — Flying southeast across the blue Mediterranean from Athens to Cairo, my first glimpse of Egypt was the Delta, a green and fruitful land, stretching from horizon to horizon. Far below, on the muddy branches of the Nile, I could see tiny white moths of sailboats. The villages and towns are many, and uniformly adobe-colored, except that each has its white mosque with graceful minaret.

This is Egypt, mother of civilization, tutor of the Greeks, already ancient when, in the Twelfth Dynasty, Joseph's brethren came out of famine stricken Canaan to buy its ever plentiful corn.

It is hard to imagine any country so completely and intensely cultivated. The sun flashes back from the irrigation ditches and from flooded fields. But one does not fly very long before the desert begins to intrude. An arm of yellow sand appears amid the green then another and another, and soon the whole horizon toward Arabia and the East is sand and then the whole horizon toward Libya and the West is sand.

Citadel Dominates City

Only the serpent of the Nile remains brown and green. The Pyramids, vast even from the sky, and the Sphinx, hardly distinguishable from the sand, loom up ahead as the plane begins to circle and lose altitude for the landing outside Cairo, a huge city, dominated by its high citadel around which cluster a half-dozen famous Mosques.

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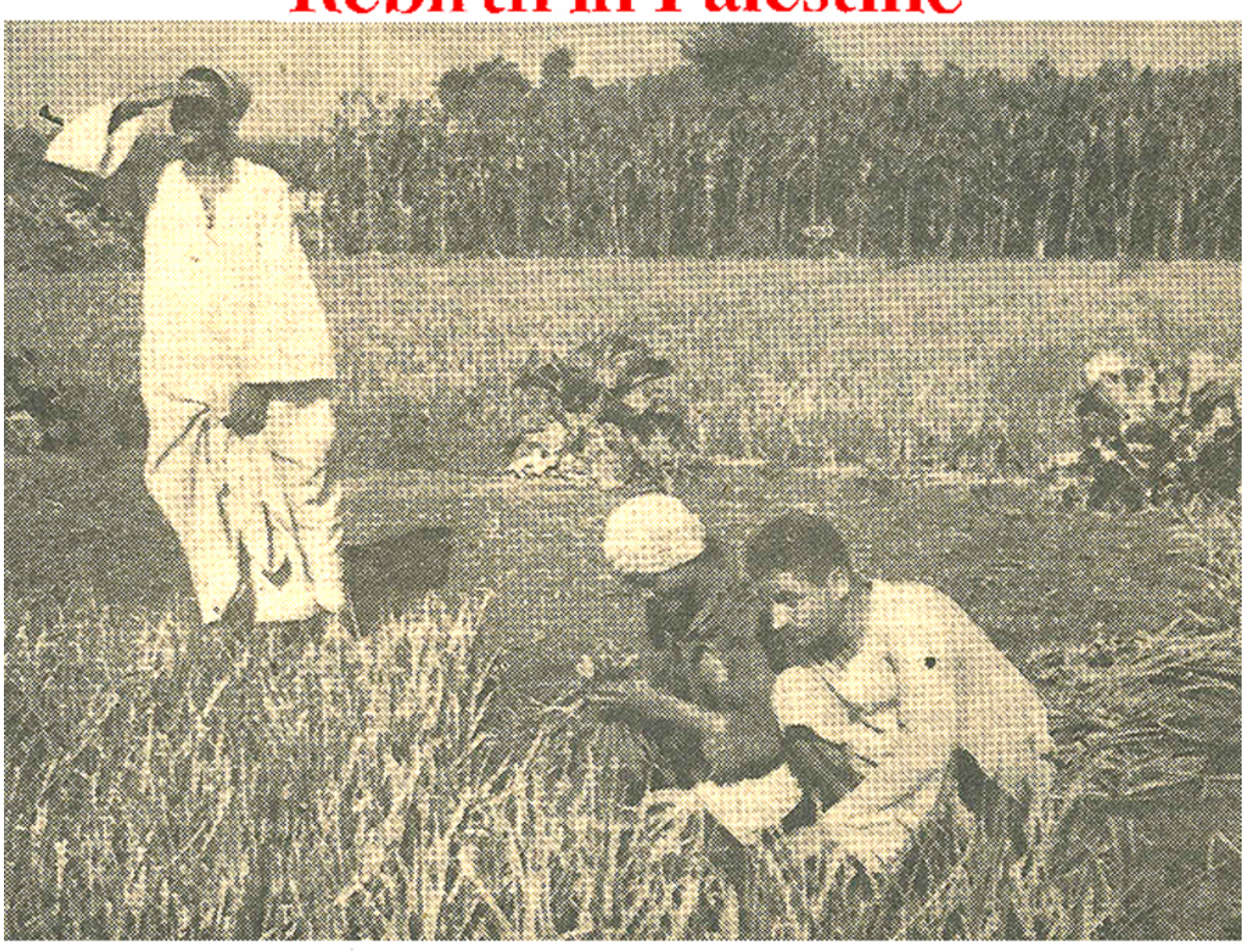
Rebirth in Palestine



These Egyptian *fellahin* are picking onions for the markets of Cairo.

This is the East, the East which stretches from Suez to Singapore, and it is not a very romantic place. One's first impressions in Cairo are, I imagine, one's first impressions in any of the great Oriental cities, from Baghdad to Bombay: a little magnificence amid much filth, some few evidences of great wealth amid sheer omnipresent beggary; luxurious carriages and limousines in streets dominated by walking evidence of disease, squalor and misery beyond imagination; a few cosmopolitan hotels, outside which swarm beggars, guides, procurers and bootblacks as pertinacious as they are impoverished, shrewd-eyed and many-tongued.

Pashas and Masses

"Meestair, you wanna buy feelthy peecture? You wanna see hoochy-kooch?"

Handsome, coal-black, lordly looking Sudanese serve Turkish coffee on the veranda of Shepheard's to portly pashas in well-cut European clothes and red *tarboosh*. British officers with swagger sticks, their knees showing between their socks and tropical shorts, walk in for tea, desert sheikhs, in *kaffiyehs* and flowing robes, with jewelled daggers and (incongruously) brief cases, emerge from big hired cars at the door, the Arab League is in session. In the streets outside, the costume of the masses seems to be a dirty old-fashioned three-button nightshirt, ankle-length.

In the streets, rickety trolleys clang by, packed as a rush-hour subway in New York, men and boys hanging on from the outside and black-veiled women looking out the windows from within. In the winding narrow stinking streets of the ancient quarter, the Muski, one occasionally encounters a camel, that silliest and most supercilious of all beasts. There are evidences everywhere of American influence and American products in the shops

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and in the street signs. A huge banner in English and Arabic, illustrated with the kind of luscious Oriental females only Hollywood produces, announces coming soon, Abbott & Costello, *Lost in a Harem.*

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It was fortunate that I had to stop in Cairo on my way to the Holy Land and fortunate that I had to remain there five days before I could get a plane for Palestine. One understands Palestine and the Palestine problem better after seeing Egypt. Egypt provides Middle Eastern perspective on what is essentially a Middle Eastern problem. It gives one a standard by which to judge the condition of the Arab in Palestine. It furnishes one with a glimpse of Arab nationalism in action at the present stage of Arab development. It enables one better to grasp the inevitable tactics and strategy of British imperialism in the Arab countries. And it provides a sobering view of what minority status means in an Arab country.

I had the good fortune in Cairo to break away from the magic circle that tends to enclose the foreign visitor and the foreign correspondent and shut him off from the life of the country, the circle bounded by Shepheard's and the Continental and the night clubs and by the British and American embassies and information offices. It is hard to penetrate into private homes in any strange country; I had the privilege of being a guest in three different homes in Cairo, two Moslem, one Christian. I visited a village. I spoke with many Egyptians of the upper classes, including a senator and a royal councillor, and with several in lower walks of life.

Disliked Egypt

There are British and American officials who like Egypt; in Egypt the well-to-do foreigner and the rich can live the life of a potentate. I must confess, with all due respect to the many good Egyptians with whom I spoke, that I hated Egypt. The exploitation of man by man in Egypt is monstrous, and with no real parallel in the West. In the West, we speak of capitalist exploitation, but the capitalist builds, constructs, produces; he adds to the country's wealth; he gives a visible return for what he takes. In Egypt, the *fellah* (peasant) lives on the Nile; the pasha lives on the fellah.

The *fellah* is the same submissive human he was in the days when

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his ancestors and counterparts built the pyramids. From the treatment he receives, it is hard to tell whether he ranks a little above or a little below the omnipresent donkey. The pasha, the *effendi*, the landowner, the ruling class, has little, if any, constructive capacity. For them, to rule is to plunder; politics is intrigue; to hold office is a chance to line one's pockets.

Life Is Short

In Egypt, about 1 per cent of the people own about three-fourths of the arable land. About three-fourths of the *fellahin* in the delta and upper Egypt suffer from *bilharzia*, a debilitating disease caused by a worm which attacks the urinary system and the intestines. More than half the *fellahin* also suffer from hookworm. The life span of the Egyptian *fellah* is 28 years, lower even than that of the Indian peasant.

Of 4000 villages, 14 now have health centers. Of the 14, five have doctors. I was taken to see one of these "show villages" not far from the pyramids. There as in the old quarter of Cairo one can see an unforgettable sight, flies feasting on the pus-encrusted eyelids of little children. I was impressed by the good people of the village and by the pride of those who worked in the health center and, above all, by the young coptic Christian doctor in charge.

From the doctor and his wife, who is also a doctor, I learned a little of the difficulties which beset those who are working at the Augean task of cleaning up Egypt and raising the health levels of its people. I heard of the efforts of the Muslim Brothers, a fanatical organization, to stir up the people of the village against the doctor because he is a Christian and of the troubles of the Copts in Egypt. This ancient Christian minority is in much the same position in Egypt that the Jews are in many Christian countries.

"When a man goes for a job," one of my Coptic friends told me, "they ask his name. If it's Mustapha (a Moslem name) he gets the job. If it's George (a Christian name) he doesn't."

British Pro-Moslem

One feels in Egypt, as one does in the Lebanon, that the British are supporting the Moslems against the Christians. At a lunch with British officials in Cairo on my way back, I mentioned the Muslim Brothers

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and the plight of the Copts. The reaction of my host to the first was to praise the "restraint" these fanatics had shown and the mention of the Copts evoked an explanation which was almost a defense of Egyptian Moslem antagonism to these Egyptian Christians.

There is a curious bond between the English and the Egyptian upper classes. The masses, to the extent that they are politically minded at all, are anti-British. The basic issues of Egyptian politics revolve around demands that the British withdraw their occupying forces and allow the union of the Sudan with Egypt. The upper classes would like the British out so they could have the exploitation of Egypt to themselves. But the pashas are afraid of the people.

"Just as in India, the British support the princes against the people," said one Egyptian radical, "so here they support the pashas against the people."

The basic economic problem of Egypt is landlessness and there is the fear that an insurgent Egyptian nationalism might get out of hand and lead to radical land reform. And in the last analysis the imperialist and the upper-class nationalist have a common interest and are apt to join hands. Nowhere is this common interest more evident than in the current effort to divert popular agitation from genuine Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian questions to anti-Zionism.

Contrast in Palestine

To go from Egypt to Palestine is to see with one's own eyes that the coming of the Jews has not hurt the Arabs. I saw the markets in the all-Arab towns of Beer-sheba, Gaza and Jenin, and in the Arab section of the old city of Jerusalem. The cleanliness of the stalls and the food displays contrasts sharply with the markets one sees in Egypt. And the Palestinian Arab himself, his appearance, his bearing, his clothes, are refreshingly different from the dirty and diseased creature one sees everywhere in the streets of Cairo and as one goes through the villages.

If conditions were reversed, if the Arab of Palestine were wretched and the Arab of Egypt healthy and relatively prosperous, the case against a Jewish homeland in Palestine would be irrefutable. No progressive Jew or gentile, could support further Jewish immigration to the Holy Land. But as it is, the evidence of one's own

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eyes, the statistics, and the findings of authoritative investigations like the British Royal Commission of 1937, all tell a different story. It is in Palestine, where the Jews are building a national home, that the Arab enjoys higher standards of living and of health than anywhere in the Middle East.

The British Royal Commission investigation of 1937, in drawing a picture of Palestine as it existed at the end of the first world war, pictured a country not so very different from Egypt as it is today. Arab society in Palestine was still "quasi-feudal." At the top was "a small aristocracy of landowners" which was wealthy and well educated. At the bottom "the great majority of the Arab population were peasantry or *fellaheen*, some of them owners of their little plots of land, but mostly tenants or cultivators on the estates of the *effendi* who in many cases were 'absentee landlords.'"

"The outstanding characteristic of the peasant class," the Royal Commission found, "was its poverty. For this there were several reasons—the poorness of the soil, especially in the stony hills where most of their villages were situated, and the lack of water; the heavy load of debt which robbed most of them of their earnings and deprived them of the capital required for the better irrigation of their land or the improvement of its crops; the lack of knowledge of intensive methods of cultivation; the cramping effect of the antiquated land system and the general insecurity of tenure; the limited markets for country produce and the badness of the means of access to towns."

And what has been the effect of the new people, new capital and new ideas brought in by the building of a Jewish national home?

"In Arab as in Jewish Palestine," the Royal Commission reported, "the most striking fact is the growth of population."

The Arab population of Palestine has risen from 600,000 to 1,200,000. Better roads, wider markets for produce, economic expansion has benefited the Arabs. The Royal Commission found that the large import of Jewish capital had "a general fructifying effect on the economic life of the whole country" and that "the expansion of Arab industry and citriculture has been largely financed by the capital thus obtained."

The Royal Commission found that "Jewish example" had done

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much to improve Arab cultivation, that Jewish development had increased Arab employment opportunities in the urban areas and that Jewish reclamation and anti-malaria work had "benefited all Arabs in the neighborhood."

"Institutions founded with Jewish funds primarily to serve the national home," the Royal Commission reported, "have also served the Arab population. Hadassah, for example, treats Arab patients, notably at the tuberculosis hospital at Safad and the Radiology Institute at Jerusalem, admits Arab countryfolk to the clinics of its rural sick benefit fund, and does much infant welfare work for Arab mothers."

Perhaps most striking of all was the Royal Commission's finding that Arab population showed the largest percentage of increase in areas of Jewish development. The Commission reported 186 per cent increase in Arab population in Haifa, a 62 per cent increase in Jaffa and a 37 per cent increase in Jerusalem "while in purely Arab towns such as Nablus and Hebron it was only 7, and at Gaza there was a decrease of 2 per cent."

I spoke frankly of what I had seen in Egypt and of my impressions in Palestine to a reverend Haj I visited in an Arab village in the Emek.

"Thirty years ago, before the Jews came," the Haj informed me, "you would have seen villages in Palestine much like those of Egypt."

NEXT: Solutions for Palestine.

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