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**"The Misunderstanding of Musa Alami's Palestine", a Clipping from
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Books:

The Misunderstanding of Musa Alami's Palestine

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The former Jordan Minister of Defence, Governor of Jerusalem and ambassador in London assesses the role of Musa Alami and questions some of the judgements passed by Sir Geoffrey Furlonge and other British Arabists on the Palestinian Arab abilities and their prospects as a nation.

PALESTINE IS MY COUNTRY, the story of Musa Alami by Geoffrey Furlonge, 242 pp., index (John Murray) 42s.

Palestine is my Country is not primarily a book on the Palestine conflict; and yet, by telling the story of Musa el Alami, the distinguished Palestinian Arab leader, it succeeds, I think, in providing a deeper insight into the complexities and incompatibilities of that conflict than most other books on the subject.

Thus from the outset, the juxtaposition of Basle, set against the background of industrially developed and colonially competing Europe where, in 1897, the First Annual Zionist Congress gave birth to modern political Zionism, with deeply traditionalist Jerusalem, lying on the periphery of an ailing Ottoman Empire where, in the same year, Musa el Alami was also born, provides a theme of sharp contrast and sustained interest that run, like a thread, through the entire fabric of the story, giving it cohesion and an unfortunate rationale.

The technological gap that, despite the justice of the Arab cause, made its initial defeat inevitable, has of course been much narrowed since. However, the depressing impact of the 1967 war impels a pervasive feeling of uneasiness that the bearded and no doubt benign dignitaries of Musa's childhood days playing at leap-frog—while like bearded, more purposive counterparts were laying the scientific foundations of the future Jewish State—should in fact be a reminder that our present day handling of the Zionist menace, demonstrably inadequate as it has proved to be, may not

also appear to future Arab generations as having been wastefully irrelevant.

The book, the author says, is Musa el Alami's own story, as told by himself. However, the author is not a mere Boswell: Sir Geoffrey Furlonge is a distinguished observer of the political scene whose special knowledge of the area covered by his subject enables him, while "editing", to "pad" the narrative with much useful background information and personal comment. He displays a sympathy with the Arab cause that is only equalled by an evident impatience with Arab shortcomings.

Though somewhat belatedly, it is nevertheless gratifying to learn for the first time about Sir Edward Grey's handwritten cable on the basis of which the territorial delimitation of independent Arab territory had been promised to Hussein. It included Palestine. What does strike one as curious, however, is that Churchill, in giving his own interpretation of the Hussein-MacMahon correspondence in 1922, should have overlooked this important document and so set the pattern for a long line of British policy statements that violated the simplest facts of geography; statements whose patent insincerity was finally exposed by J. M. N. Jeffries and George Antonius and is now candidly conceded by the present author.

In seeking some moral justification for this lapse, the author advances the theory that it is inconceivable



MUSA EL ALAMI:
Constructive and humane

that the then British Foreign Secretary should not have intended to include some reservations about the Palestine Holy Places, and the fact that he did not, must therefore have been due to an oversight. It is a fair sized oversight.

Naturally, in a book like the one under review, which is part narrative and part comment, it is important clearly to distinguish the areas covered by each in order to avoid misunderstanding about which part is attributable to what source. Some reflections on the Palestinian social and political scenes are cases in point.

Now we all know that Musa el Alami is not a politician: essentially, he is a gifted, highly trained technocrat whose dedicated integrity and sense of moral purpose are only matched by his deep humanity and unswerving instinct for justice. To him, therefore, politics was an unavoidable evil which he undertook with reluctance, regarded with distaste and channelled, to the extent that he could, through some well chosen, well defined and humane, inspired objectives. In describing them, he was anxious to stress their human motivation, rooted in his Arab traditions and family associations.

To interpret his concern for refugees, therefore, as a manifestation of the "Grand Seigneur-protégé" relationship extended, as the scene shifted, from private estates to national politics would only, I think, embarrass Musa. It also involves a basic mis-

understanding of Arab society which, as the book itself says, is both humane and egalitarian. It is finally to fall into the snare of Zionist propaganda which divides this society into heartless overlords (Musa, an exception, notwithstanding), and hapless serfs; a snare from which some Arabs themselves have not been entirely immune, as the extreme radicalism of the younger generation of Arab intellectuals and politicians demonstrates.

Only recently one of these prominent leaders made a violent speech attacking his own distinguished family, back to the umpteenth generation, in an effort to emphasize his proletarian fervour. And while Arab society is far from perfect, and the family of that particular leader, like all others, has its fair share of blacksheep and benefactors this, I think, is a grotesque example of the deep turmoil which besets the Arab world and which is compounded by its political frustrations and the merciless buffeting of ideas that are theoretically attractive but are basically unrelated to indigenous conditions.

Another point which the book brings out but which it does not, I think, sufficiently relate to later developments is that Musa must have led a lonely life as a child. His father's house, always open to guests and friends alike, in the true Arab tradition, could not have provided him with many companions of his own age. As the only son of that house, he must have developed from an early age a keen sense of his duties and responsibilities as host, which he no doubt discharged with typical ability

and charm, but which must have forced upon him the need to create an inner tower within himself, in which he held his only real communion—with himself. This sense of aloofness could not have been much alleviated by his years at Trinity Hall, and must have reflected itself upon his relations with his Palestinian Arab political colleagues in later life. And truth to tell, they were a "bickering" lot, in the manner of all politicians, Arabs not excluded, and Musa hated "bickering". However, I doubt that he would agree that they were also "nonentities". Unsuccessful, yes, and success is one of the normal yardsticks for measuring "stature"; but it would be a harsh interpretation of history, he would feel, to maintain that it is synonymous with it.

And this brings me to my final point. There is a breed of Englishman with whom the Palestinian Arab is not as popular as his noble and nomadic cousin across the Jordan river. Perhaps this is a sentimental hangover from T. E. Lawrence; but it may also be due to a troubled conscience. With the exception of Palestine, which consistently bedevilled Anglo-Arab relations, the British may claim that they came out of their commitments to Hussein honourably. They do not like to be reminded of the exception, and the troublesome Palestinians refuse to be ignored, and never fail to do just that. They must therefore be discredited. Thus if a Palestinian Arab so much as opens his mouth, he is too articulate, and is therefore unworthy of trust; while if he keeps it shut, he is too dumb, poor fellow, and deserves

sympathy. In other words, he cannot win.

I find traces of this attitude in the book when it describes the Palestinian Arabs as being "unwarlike". Let me be clear on this: I do not consider that to be "warlike" is necessarily always a credit. The hordes of Atilla and Hulaku were also "warlike"; who more so? However, to be "unwarlike" in the defence of home and heritage is a slight which I do not accept. As a generalisation it is not true, and in its particular application to the Palestinian Arab past it is not justified.

It is quite true that the Palestinian Arab, being rooted in the soil, is, happily, better equipped to handle a ploughshare than a sword. He evaded conscription under the Ottomans for many reasons, mostly sensible; but when he fought, whether in the Balkans or the Yemen (or even in Palestine against Ibrahim Pasha) he did so with outstanding courage and distinction. And in the 1936-39 Arab Rebellion, a handful of Palestinian Arab guerilla fighters engaged and were able to hold down a hundred thousand seasoned British troops. It does little credit to their memory to say that those who fought them so well, so long, and against such odds, were an "unwarlike" lot.

The book ends, as it begins, on a poignant note of expectancy and foreboding. Musa is cut off from his children's farm at Jericho by the 1967 war. His great experiment in education, agriculture and social service is jeopardized by the continuous exchange of fire across the Jordan. The arid implications of such a nightmare being allowed to be the closing chapter of a lifetime of struggle are too terrible to contemplate. Though old and failing in health Musa, being who he is and, more important, what he is, namely, a refugee like other refugees, he will not accept a purposeless life in exile.

In the meantime, twenty years of debilitating humiliation have not broken the spirit of the inmates of refugee camps. The closing chapter must therefore record the story of their redemption. The big question is whether it will come about through a just solution of their problem, or through test by fedayin fire. It must be the one or the other, and it is my sincerest wish that reason and justice, rather than fire and violence, will have the last word.



JUSTICE MINISTER SHAFIRO WITH ANWAR NUSEIBEH:
A lack of understanding