CHAPTER FIVE

Jerusalem: A City Not Yet Divided

INTRODUCTION

Until 1948 Jerusalem was not a divided city; only with the 1949 cease-fire accords, which ended the War of Independence, was the city divided between the Kingdom of Jordan and the newly established State of Israel. When Kahn lived in Jerusalem during the 1930s, the city was the center of the Mandate Government.

ALL DAY HE GRINDS HIS COFFEE [LOCAL COLOR]

Zif Zif, pp. 30–31

> *Smells on David Street in Jerusalem are as mixed up as the people, the animals, the stalls and the sounds. There are odors emanating from sizzling kebab [meat cooked over flames], damp sheep entrails, nargilehs [hookahs], and the very pink roses being arranged into small bunches by a peasant woman on a step. And yet, at one particular spot, there is an odor that never fails to disentangle itself from the others with the distinction of time-honored aristocracy. It is the odor of coffee, rich and fresh and tempting. So follow it to its source and discover Ahmed Ali, the blind coffee grinder who, for thirty-years, has been discovered on and off by all habitués of the Old City.*

In his dim little hole-in-the-wall shop, Ahmed has managed to imprison much of the romance and poetry with which the East has endowed the

commonplace coffee bean. All of the odes and lyrics that Easterners from Sultan to bedouin have sung in praise of coffee seem to revive with poignancy in Ahmed's modest stronghold.

Ahmed Ali grinds coffee. As he grinds, his strong arms weave great circles with the wheel. His husky body bends forward, giving him the effect of a genie breathing a magical incantation over each grain of his precious mixture. His eyes are half-closed, his beard black and rather unkempt; his half-bared chest is hairy and expansive.

In the meager light one is transfixed, watching the flow of movement produced by this monarch of the coffee bean, whom the gods seem pleased to have made sightless so that they may shut out all else but the sound of his eternal grinding and the odor of his nectar.

Ahmed does not permit his spectators to stand long in admiring silence. He senses their presence above the thrum of the machinery and facetiously demands *baksheesh* (a donation) for his performance. Now the ice is broken. The fantastic figment is alive and relating the story of his life. Thirty years ago, when he was a boy, fourteen years old, he became blind. It was hard to find work in the village, so he came to the Old City to grind coffee.

He has been grinding ever since. Twelve hours every day, he is at his wheel. For this work he receives ten piasters a day. But he does not complain because somehow it is sufficient to maintain his family of five children.

The lights and shades and curious winding windings of the Old City, he has never seen. But he knows them. He boasts that you could not lose him in any part of the ancient labyrinth of narrow lanes. Indeed, he is as enamored with the life that flows through the Street of the Chain as the man who devours it with his eyes.

"Here come some soldiers," he says while the distant sound of the marching feet of a contingent coming to the mosque for the Nebi Musa festival [a seven-day-long religious festival celebrated annually by Palestinian Muslims] is still quite indistinguishable to the average ear.

Ahmed Ali is pleased when you want to buy a few piasters worth of his coffee. With the pride of a craftsman-artist he weighs it on his crude scale. "I have given you too much," he comments, preparing to return the extra measure to his stock. Then, with great abandon, he secures the bag with its extra portion and hands it to you remarking, "Yes, it is too much." But, *ma'alesh* (it doesn't matter).

THE INVASION OF THE "SUNDAE" [LOCAL COLOR]

Zif Zif, pp. 52–53
Earlier version in *The Palestine Post*, January 23, 1934

There are numerous treasures in the Jerusalem Young Men's Christian Association. Rows upon rows of fascinating scarabs, graceful urns of early Greek origin, priceless Hebraic seals, cases of intriguing clay relics of the stone and iron ages, rugs from Persia and a queen chandelier upon which cherubim become sportive under proper lighting effects.

One does not hear of the talented cherubim or of the scarabs until making a private exploration expedition. But the soda fountain! Its fame spread far and wide as one of the truly monumental spots in the Holy City.

At first one is only slightly stirred by the news that sodas and juices may be obtained in the YMCA, feeling a certain satisfaction in going native to the extent of reveling in gazoz [flavored soda water]. For a month—or perhaps two—the affinity survives and then, without preliminaries, something snaps within and it has gone. Alas, gazoz is no more than a ripple of a pebble in the sea. Now you too are yearning for the soda fountain.

The other day came the news that a fruit syrup manufacturing plant is to be established in Montefiore near Tel Aviv, operating according to "modern American methods."

This announcement, on the surface, means no more than further industrial development in Palestine. Yet, underneath, one senses an ominous rumbling. In the twinkling of an eye, the era of the chocolate soda, cherry sundae, banana split, orange frappe and coconut delight may be upon us. Palestine is liable to be submerged under a flood of marshmallowy, chocolate, whipped, creamy substances that are one of the backbones of life in America. The introduction of this era will bring considerations, philosophies, professions and institutions hitherto unknown in Palestine.

At the very outset it will give rise to a new school of literature. No self-respecting sundae is merely a sundae. It goes through life disguised as a "Manhattan Perfection," "Babe Ruth Balmy" or a "Roosevelt Rosy." Therefore, we may anticipate that some creative soul will go into exclusion to emerge with such touching catchwords as "Ein Harod Honey," "Rehovot Razzberry," "Levant Luscious," "Bethlehem Banana Dandy" and "Bialik Moonlight."

The advent of this era will bring into being a new race of men. After all, there is something frank, open and spontaneous about the personality

of a gazoz vendor. He seems to feel a refreshingly abandoned joy both in himself and in his product. At times tenseness creeps into his voice as he hawks his wares. Yet one does not feel that he lies awake at nights brooding over the pros and cons of *gazeuse* [carbonation].

The soda water dispenser will be a more imposing, less lovable, and more awe-inspiring character. He will stand behind huge cans of cherries, chopped nuts and shredded coconuts with gravity at once overwhelming. True, he will make quips over the counter with a certain light dash. But as he places the crimson cherry in its nest of snowy marshmallows and adds one almond at a twenty-five degree angle, you realize that this is no mediocrity—but an artist in his own right.

And what of the pharmacies in Palestine, those miraculous drug stores that usually sell drugs? Will the soda water era mean that they are to be corrupted by selling light lunches and everything else, from fountain pens and alarm clocks to children's rompers? Alas, the American pharmacist cannot find a bottle of liniment without first moving an automobile tire, four Kodaks [cameras] and a pair of skates.

A visitor in Tel Aviv was heard to sigh while looking into a cake shop, "When I was in Palestine four years ago, the people didn't know what pastry was." The introduction of pastry made little change in the general tenor of life in Palestine. But will the invasion of the sundae, with all its ramifications, be so subdued?

THE PASSING SHOW

Zif Zif, pp. 45–46
Earlier version in *The Palestine Post*, "The Passing Show, Jerusalem's Outdoor Scene," July 30, 1934
Unpublished manuscript from Bar-Adon's personal archive

A humorous description of Zion Street in Jerusalem (1934) as a circus, demonstrating the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city.

Forget your Piccadilly Circus—and Broadway and Forty Second Street—and Potsdam Platz—and come behind a large glass window fronting on Zion Circus in Jerusalem—your coffee will grow cold—and your cigarette go dead—while you watch the world and his wife pass by in four directions—the lazy gait of the East—the energetic stride of the West—all bound up in a symphony of movement—a sharp-eyed Arab vendor is displaying

a grass rug to a British policeman—the rug is embellished with a lion—is the policeman bargaining for it?—We hope not—it would be terrible to wake up in the middle of the night to see the beast all of a sudden—but the policeman is apparently only asking for a license—wise policeman—we are relieved—a shiny car pulls up in front of the cinema house—an Arab woman in a glorious red embroidered dress emerges—looking as though she should be drawing water in some village—but she is passing by Zion Circus instead—everybody passes by Zion Circus—plenty of sun helmets always reminding you of big game hunting in Africa—plenty of white suits—two Eskimo pie boys in a scrap—you expect to see the street deluged with Eskimos any minute—someone intervenes—the day and the Eskimo pies [chocolate-covered vanilla ice cream bars] are saved—two old Jews looking like a vaudeville conception of what old Jews should look like—they're laughing terribly hard—you wish part of the story would penetrate your window—suddenly lots of donkeys—about twenty in one party and they are actually galloping and the donkeyteers are sprinting after them—where can they be rushing to—a bus swerves round the corner—did it strike the last lagging donkey—no—two Germans—newspapers under arms—so engrossed—maybe one of them is telling the other that the whole business began when Hitler spilled a cup of coffee on Goebbels in a Berlin café—and the other man maybe answering that it didn't matter much because Goebbels' shirt was brown anyway—or maybe they're not saying that at all but they're so engrossed—a little Oriental boy who would look nice selling mishmish (apricots) is vending children's dresses instead—pink ones—they look enchanting from here—even the Yemenite with a suggestion of underwear peeking from one trouser looks enchanting—your garbage man lolling on the sidewalk looks enchanting—everybody—and everybody—and everything—passes by Zion Circus—and when you see it from behind a plate glass window—it looks enchanting.

MEN WITHOUT WOMEN

1934
Zif Zif, pp. 11–13
Unpublished manuscript from Bar-Adon's personal archive

Reflecting on Election Day for the municipality in Jerusalem in 1934, Bar-Adon concludes that in Jerusalem the vote is for men only.

One had to make herself immune to undisguised stares and titters if she was to invade the "no-woman's-land" of the polling districts when Jerusalem elected a mayor. Diogenes could not have found a true skirt no matter how bright his lamp, unless it was being worn by a fellah.

For a woman to invade the voting precincts was as deceitful as handing a boy an empty bag marked "licorice drops." Before the war had even stopped, the windows were bombarded with circulars of every color, extolling the sterling qualities of the respective candidates. Imagine the disappointment for the ward heelers when what emerged from the mass of paper was only a woman.

And a woman at a Jerusalem election is about as useful as ice skates at the Dead Sea. One boy in the Orthodox Jewish district of Mea She'arim, who had either a sense of humor, a sense of irony or was so excited that he had no sense at all, pulled my sleeve and implored that I "vote for Perlman."

It was amusing—after having felt like an important cog in the Ship of State when you cast your vote for President Roosevelt—to discover that in Jerusalem at election time you are as important as a crumb (and a crumb should be swept away, as soon as possible). Indeed the sight of one of the frailer sex walking into the midst of the voting arena caused as much ado as a man walking into a beauty parlor when the clientele is crowned with curlers. Any attempt to gain entry into the sanctum sanctorum where the votes were actually being cast was met with a near-panic or stern refusal.

At the Old City Station I did enter the polling room. But the wheels of progress immediately stopped; clerks were unable to continue with their work and inquiries of "What do you want?" came from all direction in the three official tongues. Alarm seemed to spread as though no one was quite sure whether this insidious female was going to try to slip a vote into the box for the most handsome candidate—or to appropriate the entire box—(which was decorated with ribbon) for her boudoir table. Or perhaps she was one of these tourists who were bent on capturing the whole room as a souvenir of election day in Jerusalem.

The police at St. George's School, the Arab district, presented this stir with a cold, "entry forbidden."

By peeping through the window, one could see finely attired sheikhs looking like a page from Arabian Nights. One might surmise they were discussing moonlight and white steeds—but of course the conversation centered on the two mayoral candidates Ragheb Bey Nashashili and Dr. Khalidi. In other sections of the city there were the pious Jews looking like a

vignette from the Old Bible. One might surmise they were discussing prophecy—but of course their conversation centered around Mr. Perlman and Mr. Ende [mayoral candidates].

The polling station at the railway station was least picturesque—but most reminiscent of election time in England or America. Young effendis in European clothes stood with their heads together making predictions as to the outcome and driving back and forth in open roadsters.

One felt, however, that more color could have been added to the scene if a woman ran out between washing the baby and cleaning up the lunch dishes to dry her hands on her apron and mark a cross after the name of her favorite. In any other civilized country the women are the part of the election—they challenge the challengers so well. The politicians even send automobiles to bring women from the cradle to the polls. But in Jerusalem, voting is a man's prerogative and he guards it jealously.

THREE GLASSES OF TEA [LOCAL COLOR]

Zif Zif, pp. 14–15

Moshe—the Moshe of the Café Vienna in Jerusalem—was busy as usual Monday morning dispensing magazines, drinks, and casual conversations. Between times he puzzled over a newspaper. He had already read the Hebrew accounts of Shmaryahu Levin's [1867–1935; Zionist leader and author] death the day before. But the English version was difficult. He picked his way through it word by word.

Moshe is not sentimental. Like all waiters who remain in one place watching a parade of people drifting in and drifting out again, Moshe had absorbed the philosophy of the rightness of people drifting in and drifting out again, in the broader sense. And like so many of us, Moshe expressed his mystification over the slim thread between life and death with the phrase "And only the day before the Festival of the First Fruits, I brought Dr. Levin a set of chessmen."

It seems that Dr. Levin's never-failing greeting when he entered the café (which was a daily occurrence except when he was confined to his bed) was, "Shalom. Nu? Yesh mishahu?" (Hello. Well? Anyone here?). Then it was Moshe's special tafkid (duty) to unearth a chess opponent. Sometimes it was easy. Sometimes no one was available, in which case even

Dr. Levin would settle down to read a newspaper, after having given Moshe instructions to find a partner, "even if you have to get someone from the street."

Moshe took the matter of finding a chess partner most seriously. Sometimes he would be forced to take Dr. Levin's command almost literally and would bring him a stranger. Moshe would make the necessary introductions. So pleased was Dr. Levin with Moshe's success in securing a partner that he would pay scant attention to the introduction formalities so long as the partner knew the difference between a castle and a knight.

Of late Moshe had been concerned with Dr. Levin's failing health and felt it part of his tafkid to take precautions that the chess games were not too trying. He would take it on himself to ask the partner of the day to allow Dr. Levin to win a game or two, in case he was not up to his usual form.

Moshe remembers the Yiddish stories of Shmaryahu Levin, and he remembers too that all chess opponents who played a poor game brought down on their heads the taunt of *shuster* (shoemaker).

Moshe's other important tafkid concerned tea. He remembers that Dr. Levin seldom drank anything else but tea—Russian tea.

"He could drink much tea," Moshe will tell you, "As soon as he sat down, I brought him a glass of tea without waiting to be asked. Then, when his glass was empty, I brought him a second glass, without waiting to be asked. But for the third glass—here Moshe raises his had to emphasize the climax—ah, for the third glass, I always had to wait until he asked."

ARTICLE

Probably written 1936
An article from Bar-Adon's personal archive, without a title

On the basis of her experience as a journalist in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Kahn ironically interviews herself on differences between being a journalist in the United States and in Palestine.

From America to Jaffa Road is a long journey. How does being a journalist in Palestine compare to being a journalist in America?

How does it compare? Well, you lose any superiority complex that you might have had. Most Americans adore publicity. Perhaps this is because the country and the people are so delightfully young. They have no secrets—they enjoy telling all. So, of course, the newspaper reporter is a very popular fellow. He walks through open doors and everyone is glad to see him.

And here?

The country is older and perhaps the people are wiser. At all events, I've never had any flags unfurled when I came in quest of information. I interviewed a few presidents of the United States with no difficulties. But in Palestine I've waited around two days to talk to a farmer who was too busy repairing a chicken coop to receive me. You see, the people here aren't what Americans call "publicity conscious." If you tell a falafel vendor that you want to write about him, he grabs his falafel and runs for his life. In America you walk around with your press card pinned to your lapel. But here it's more comfortable to sneak around disguised as an olive tree.

That must be annoying.

It is, but you get used to it. In the beginning I longed more than once for America, where a murder story is sure to receive three or four columns of space. It seems strange to write a few lines to the effect that some fellah had murdered his wife, grandmother, two children and a camel. Surely, the public would want to know the life story of the fellah and his grandmother and his camel.

But you found that the public wasn't interested?

Not at all. The completion of a new road leading to somewhere or a political opinion of so-and-so is worth more space than the finest murder that was ever perpetrated.

So, the people here are political minded. And what are the other difficulties?

Language—language—and again language. You know that Americans are the most monolingual people in the world. For most of us, mastering another language is a life's work. Here it's difficult to get any information about the weather in the Old City unless you know a bit of Armenian, at least a few words of Amharic, and a smattering of Persian. I remember that when I arrived in Palestine, I was sent to get some information from an Arab butcher concerning a crisis in the meat market. I couldn't understand him so he drew a sketch which I took back to the office. But since nobody could tell if he had drawn a sheep

or a cow, we didn't know whether the supply of beef or mutton would be stopped on the morrow.

Yes, I suppose language is a journalist's first tool.

More or less. But you learn to speak any language by proper motions and a smile. I remember that the late Mayor Dizengoff [first Mayor of Tel Aviv; died in 1936], who spoke many languages fluently, was amazed to find that I spoke only English and remarked with horror, "Did it ever occur to you that if you didn't know English, you'd be dumb?"

Yes, that's a very upsetting thought. But one can go far in Palestine with English.

You flatter me. Here in Palestine, I have learned that I don't even speak English. Just American. Many times people shake their heads ruefully and say, "I studies English, but I don't seem to understand American! By the way, do you understand me?"

Almost.

According to the popular song, you say tomato and I say tomato, so let's call the whole thing off.

Oh, not yet. You seem to enjoy being a journalist in Palestine. So tell me some of the things that compensate you for the falafel men who evade you?

Well, the size of the country. It's as small and convenient as a pocket comb. If you hear about a story on the farthest frontier, you can be on the scene within a few hours. You can get anywhere in the country and home again between breakfast and dinner—with your story safely up your sleeve or under your hat. Surely, this is a paradise for journalists who have a reputation for wanting to be everywhere.

Yes, it must be easy to keep in the swim of things when the sea is so tiny. But how can you find enough to write about in such a small country. Don't you feel sometimes that you've just about reached the end?

To the contrary. It always seems as though you haven't begun. There is such a diversified wealth of people, creeds, beliefs and experiments. Then too, the country is closer to the city than elsewhere. In America, the rural correspondents handle the cows and the chickens and the beehives. But here, Kiriat Anavim [first kibbutz established in the Judean Hills—1920] is just a step from Jerusalem, and the farms of Judea aren't very many steps from Kiriat Anavim, so you have to be a dilettante farmer.

Then there is no dearth of news?

Never. You just open your inkpot and the stories flow in. Or, to be more exact, you uncover your typewriter and the stories hop onto the keys. Of course, I'd rather—

Now, you say rather and I say rather—so we'd better call the whole thing off, especially as the time is up.