Menorah made of gold in accordance with instructions laid down by God in Exodus 25: 31–40. Cast by Moorish workmen in Avaro, Spain, about 1240 C.E., during the period when Judaism was still permitted in that kingdom. Deposited at Makor June 21, 1559, after sunset.

It was an age of expansion. Constantinople, under Ottoman rule since 1453, was offering Europe such riches drawn from India and China as to make the dreams of Marco Polo seem unimaginative. Columbus had presented the world with a new hemisphere to balance the old, and daring Portuguese navigators were proving that cargo ships could reach the wealth of Asia by doubling the tip of
Africa. Spain was amazing Europe with the wealth of Aztec and Inca, and all the world’s horizons were being expanded so that the center of power was no longer the Mediterranean; for on the Atlantic hitherto unimportant nations suddenly found themselves possessed of empires so enormous as to be indescribable. Even a trivial kingdom like England, beset on three borders by hostile Scots, Welsh and Irish, could visualize acquiring territory a thousand times larger than itself, while the Dutch were about to prove that they could establish commercial stations wherever their daring captains located safe anchorage and fresh water.

It was an age of intellectual discovery. From the cellars of forgotten monasteries, from the long-unused libraries of princes, and most often from Arabic scholars who had preserved the wisdom of the west, the books of Aristotle and Thales, of Plato and Euclid were rescued from the past to astonish men and enlarge their concepts. Dante and Boccaccio reminded a forgetful world of Virgil and Ovid, while the glories of Sophocles and Seneca awakened new appreciations of the drama. And not only was the intelligence of the past being discovered; each ship returning from Java or Peru brought with it, packed among the spice and silver, fresh discoveries of the mind, and thus the way was prepared for that succession of world-changers who followed Gutenberg, Copernicus and Galileo.

It was an age of religious explosion. For centuries Christian Europe had been united into one all-embracing Church, devout, competent and far-seeing. Recently Christians had been inspired by two victories: the expulsion of Islam from Spain and the first conversions of the Aztecs; now there was reason to hope that millions in Asia and Africa would join the Church, since missionaries of great dedication were on their way to these areas. For a brief moment it was logical to believe that the known world might soon unite under the leadership of Rome. And then Martin Luther strode with rude and giant steps across the boundaries of Europe, awakening men like Calvin and Knox who would destroy old associations and establish new.

It was an age of political invention. City states gave way to national units and barons surrendered to kings who found their support in the new middle class. Secular governments displaced religious as leaders began to study Machiavelli instead of Thomas Aquinas. The barbarians from the north were finally brought under control and Europe, having expelled the Muslim Arabs from Spain, now girded to fight back the Muslim Turks as they threatened the approaches to Vienna.

It was an age of growing freedom. Men who rebelled against the confinement of Europe were now free to try America and Asia. Any who had chafed under papal rule were welcome to adopt Lutheranism, and peasants who had silently borne the tyranny of landlords were now free to attempt a revolt. Law courts were strengthened and in the realm of writing and art men could break away from medieval restriction to follow Petrarch or Michelangelo. Each year brought new horizons, for this was the age of freedom.

But not for Jews. In 1492, after more than seven hundred years of faithful service to Spain, the Jews were expelled from that state. They fled to Portugal, where they were scourged, forcibly baptized and later exiled. In Italy and Germany they were forced into inhuman quarters where they wore inhuman costumes. At almost rhythmic intervals they were charged with murdering Gentile children for
blood to be used at Passover. They were accused of poisoning wells, of spreading cholera, of knowing how to infect rats with the plague to decimate Christian communities; and they were particularly accused of posing as Catholics, accepting the holy wafer of communion and hiding it slyly under their tongues until they could produce it for blasphemous black masses. In an age of growing freedom they were constantly restricted as to where they could move, what they could wear and especially what occupations they could engage in.

In this golden age of discovery the Jews discovered only the rope and the fagot. Each time a Jew was accused of having murdered a Christian child—and never once was the charge substantiated—some Jewish community would be wiped out in one ghastly slaughter. Each time a crime occurred near a Jewish quarter, that district would be stormed by indignant Christians and its inhabitants burned alive. And throughout the Christian world, come Holy Week, the friars would preach such sermons against the Jews that the enraged churchgoers would storm from their cathedrals to kill and maim any Jews they met, thus hoping to honor Him who had been crucified on Good Friday and risen in resurrection on Easter.

Why did not the Christians, since they held supreme power, simply annihilate the Jews once and for all? They were restrained because Christian theologians had deduced from passages in the New Testament the ambivalent theory that Jesus Christ would not return to earth bringing with Him the heavenly kingdom until all Jews were converted to Christianity, but at the same time 144,000 unconverted Jews were needed to be on hand to recognize Him and bear witness to His arrival. On this ambivalent theory two courses of action had been built: Jews must be converted; and those necessary few who refused must be kept in such obvious misery that all who looked could see what happened to people who denied Jesus Christ. So the Jewish districts multiplied, the harsh laws increased, and each year the Jews suffered unbelievable repressions, It was as if the Church kept them alive to remember the coming of the Messiah, the way a man keeps an aching tooth in his head to remind him of mortality.

In only two ways did Jews share in the expanding spirit of the age: they were still encouraged to serve as moneylenders, which enabled them to keep alive; and in 1520 in Venice a printer struck off a complete printed copy of the Talmud. So bitter had been the Christian hatred of this Jewish masterwork, so often had it been burned by the authorities in Italy, Spain, France and Germany, that when it was finally put into type only one manuscript copy was known to exist. It was by a miracle that this summary of Jewish knowledge was saved... and the Venetian printer who thus rescued the law of Judaism was a Christian.

But in those dark days, when the Jews of Europe sighed at the stake and smothered in their districts without any moral protest from the Christian world, one gleam of hope began to shine from a most unlikely quarter: the inconspicuous hillside town of Safed in Galilee.

Rabbi Zaki the Shoemaker was a fat Jew, and this was his undoing. In the Italian seaport of Podi, where he had taken residence after his marriage
in 1521, the coming of spring brought moments of anguish to Jewish men who were overweight, because starting in March they could feel the eyes of their Christian neighbors probing their rolls of fat and calculating whether Zaki was fatter than Jacopo or Jacopo slightly fatter than Salman; and each man and his family began to worry. Nevertheless, the calculations continued, and as the twenty-first of March approached, the apprehension of the fat Jews became very real indeed, and each family asked in secret, “Will our father be chosen this year?”

Rachel, Rabbi Zaki’s wife, really had no cause for uncertainty, because Zaki was so gross that he was automatically selected, year after year. It was only a question of which five additional Jews would be chosen as his teammates, so that Rachel, freed from the calculations that tormented the other wives, could spend her whole energy castigating her unfortunate husband.

“Why are you so fat?” she plagued him throughout the year. “Moses isn’t fat. Is Meir fat like you?” She had lived with Rabbi Zaki for twenty years and had come, not without cause, to the conclusion that he was a poor specimen of manhood. He did not provide well for his family. He never charged enough for his shoemaking, allowing clever Italians to outwit him. And it was obvious now that he was not going to become a famous rabbi leading his congregation to fame. He was merely a fat man who most of the year seemed pathetic, and in March positively degraded.

The Jews of Podi were a close community, for during the expulsion of 1492 they had fled in a body from Spain to Portugal and then—after the shocking mass baptism ordered by the Portuguese government—from Lisbon to Italy. In the strictest sense Rabbi Zaki, his sharp-tongued wife, Rachel, and all the Jews of Podi were Christians, for they had been forcibly baptized—some bleeding from the mouth, some screaming—in Portugal; but a series of considerate Popes had decreed that the Christian Church could not accept the fruits of such baptism and that the Jews of Podi were therefore free to revert to their original religion, which was after all an offshoot of the Holy Bible. The generous Duke of Podi had welcomed them as industrious merchants who brought much income to his territories and had even encouraged them to have their own synagogue, so that gradually the persecution of Spain and Portugal was forgotten in the kindlier atmosphere of Italy.

One of the leading merchants of Podi was Avramo the redhead, Rabbi Zaki’s father-in-law, and as the Jews of the port looked at their pathetic little rabbi they often wondered how he had been able to catch the merchant’s daughter. Rachel had hoped for a better marriage than hers had turned out to be, for, as she frequently reminded both her father and her husband, “I knew even before we were married that Zaki would amount to nothing.” But her father had argued, “I think Zaki will become a fine rabbi, and you should be honored that he takes you as his wife.”

But Rachel was not honored. As a child in Portugal she had known Zaki as the fat one whom the others teased, and as an adolescent girl she had watched him grow even fatter, so that none of her friends looked on him with longing. Left alone, he had read Talmud and apprenticed himself to an Italian shoemaker, who had warned his parents, “You’re wasting your money. Zaki has such fat fingers he’ll not be able to hold the nails.” Still the amiable fellow had managed somehow to become both a rabbi and a shoemaker.
The Jews of Podi were never able to understand why a man like Avramo had agreed to give his daughter to such a clod, and when in later years Rachel herself raised the question, he explained, “When I looked at Zaki’s fat face and rolling eyes I knew that he was a good man, and good men make good husbands.”

The wedding had gone forward, and Rachel found herself tied to a man of no distinction who each March brought upon himself and his family an almost unbearable disgrace. “Why do you eat so much?” she screamed at him with increasing desperation as the years passed. “Does Meir eat like a pig, day after day? Tell me that.”

Zaki could only reply, “God must have wanted me to be fat.” He was an amiable hulk, a man who loved his shrewish wife, adored his three daughters and found joy in eating with his family and fulfillment in serving as a rabbi. Since he was a short man, enormously round, none need envy him and all could find amusement in him. What they saw was a kind of gelatinous good will, an oleaginous buffoon of the spirit. He did not consciously make himself ridiculous, but since he knew that he was so, he did not fight against his nature.

“God wanted someone He could laugh with in the afternoon,” he told his wife one day.

“He got someone the whole town laughs at each spring,” she stormed.

“I didn’t make myself fat,” he said weakly.

“You did, too!” she cried. “For years you’ve been eating like a pig.”

“Rachel,” he pleaded. “Not that word.”

“I withdraw the pig,” she snapped.

“But you are fat,” his unlovely daughter Sarah complained.

“I am the rabbi,” he said quietly. “Even if I were as thin as Meir, the Christians would still choose me.”

The idea—a new one that Rabbi Zaki had developed subconsciously at that moment—hit his wife with some force and she stopped feeling sorry for herself. She looked at her grotesque husband and for a fleeting second half understood the point he was making, but even as he spoke he had fish sauce on his jowls and his logic was destroyed.

“Go ahead!” she lamented. “Eat and grow fat and make us ashamed of you.” The girls wept.

In humiliation Zaki listened to the grieving, then said, “They will choose me again, and again you will stand in the sun and watch me, and there is no escape. But they choose me because I am the rabbi, and I think it is better that I am fat and that they laugh at me because of my fatness and not because I am the rabbi. Would you have it otherwise?”

Of course they chose him. For several hundred years the dukes of Podi had provided sport for the community by assembling, at the spring equinox, a carnival of mountebanks, jugglers, fools and dancers. There was gaiety for one day, even if it fell in the midst of Lent, and in recent years the climax was reached by the race between the fat Jews and their next-street neighbors, the town prostitutes. For this race, which had grown famous in eastern Italy, the six fattest Jewish men were chosen, stripped down to a pair of thin underpants and driven barefoot to the starting line, where they took their places among the frowzy, boisterous whores.

The excitement of the race, which drew thousands of people from towns as far
distant as Ancona, arose not only from the joy of seeing the fat Jews puffing nearly naked through the streets while the populace threw things at them—not hurtful things like rocks, for that was forbidden, but harmless items such as eggs and chicken feathers smeared with honey—but also from the fact that the little pants which the fat Jews had to wear were so constructed that along the route there was always a chance for the Christian women to get a fleeting glance at what the mysterious rite of circumcision did to a man.

To the Jews, nakedness in any form was humiliation, but to run in the Podi pants, with the penis popping in and out, was abhorrent. Not only Rachel, but the other wives as well, and Jewish men who did not run, wept for Israel.

In 1541 the twenty-first of March was a hot, bright day, and during the morning hours the mountebanks and jugglers did good business. Members of the ducal family moved austerely through the crowd, nodding somberly as townspeople assured them, “This year it’s to be a fine race.” In the mid-afternoon there were games of football and the offering of free drinks, ending with a horse race through the streets and across the public square. It was a day of relaxed festivity, much relished in the midst of Lent.

But it was the late-afternoon spectacle that the people wanted, and toward five o’clock the town constable aroused cheers by bringing from the jail six notorious prostitutes, assuring them that any who finished within the first three places would have the remainder of their jail sentences remitted. “But to win,” he warned them with broad winks, “you must pull and trip the fat Jews or they will finish ahead of you.” The six bawds said they understood.

The crowd cheered the girls and began betting on them, but everyone waited for the real contestants; and at five, when the first sunset of spring began to throw gold on the cross of the cathedral, the duke ordered a bugler to sound the trumpet. Now the crowd roared and formed a path which led to a roped-off section of the piazza. A hush fell over the rabble as the Duke of Podi signaled to the cathedral, out of which issued a stunning procession of clergy dressed in the vestments of the Christian Church. Impressive both in detail and mass the body of clerics moved in regal fashion across the piazza, taking its position beside the improvised ducal throne. Again the trumpeter blew, and again the crowd cheered, for from a narrow lane leading to the Jewish quarter came a motley crowd led by six men in long brown robes, each marked by a bright yellow star.

In the lead was Rabbi Zaki, ridiculously fat, a man not over five feet three inches tall and weighing at least two hundred and twenty pounds. His bare feet padded across the stones and his dunce’s cap, tall and red, bobbed in the late sunlight. The mere sight of him caused the mob to shout with joy. Behind the racers, each sick with apprehension, even though the brown cloaks still covered them, came the entire population of the ghetto, for each Jew unless he were near death and excused by a Dominican friar was required to witness the humiliation of his people.

The contestants were led to where the six prostitutes waited, and one of the girls elicited shrieks of approval when she pulled Rabbi Zaki’s robe apart, peeked at his trousers and screamed, “I saw it.” She made an indecent gesture to the crowd. Rachel and her three daughters, who had been herded into the front ranks of the Jewry, kept their eyes on the ground, but a barefooted friar in charge of the Jews
shouted that they must look up. The girls did so in time to see their ridiculous father stripped of his robe, so that he stood almost naked in the fading sunlight while the crowd shrieked with delight.

The duke himself addressed the contestants: “This is to be a fair race, three times around the piazza, down the Corso and back to the cathedral. Any girl who finishes in the first three will have her sentence excused.” At this the crowd cheered. “But if any Jew finishes in the first three he is granted privileges for one year. Race well. Ignore the crowd. And I shall wait for you at the finish.” He bowed handsomely to the racers, signaled the trumpeter and retired.

At a sign from the Dominican, prostitutes and Jews started running, and a gasp of joy rose from the crowd when one of the fat Jews fell right at the start. “Clumsy! Idiot!” they screamed, pelting him with vegetables. He stumbled to his feet and tried to overtake the others. With outrageous irrelevancy Rachel thought: Thank God it wasn’t Zaki.

Three times around the piazza the racers went, with prostitutes screaming and the six fat Jews silent. The audience, having cheered the start, was quiet now, waiting for something memorable, the Christian women watching dry-lipped as the inadequate pants flapped open and shut. Then it happened. Rabbi Zaki was in second place when one of the whores leaped forward, clutched at his pants and pulled them down about his knees. His fat legs, completely incapable of stopping, tangled themselves in the cloth and he went tumbling across the stones, skinning his knees and exposing his nakedness.

“Whoever that girl is,” the duke cried, “set her free, whether she wins or not.” The crowd, staring minutely at every motion of the fat rabbi in recovering his pants, cheered and whistled. Zaki, hurt and far behind the others, tried to withdraw, but the Dominican poked him and informed him that he, like all the others, must finish the course.

Down the Corso, Zaki went, then back toward the cathedral; but as the runners re-entered the square the same girl pulled down the pants of another of the Jews, and the race ended in an obscene scramble, with firecrackers exploding, music playing and the crowd screaming its approval. Minutes after the others had finished Rabbi Zaki waddled up to the cathedral door.

Along with the five other racers he was handed his brown robe and red dunce’s cap. Dressed thus, he was shepherded into the cathedral, where the Jews of the community were assembled on wooden benches set off from the rest of the church by rope, and while the citizens of the town and many from outlying villages—for their small locales provided no such spectacles—cramped in to stare at the Jews and surround them with hostility, the prelates of the Church assembled and took their places on a wooden platform. The duke and his escorts went to other specially erected seats and all listened as a haggard friar began a conciliatory sermon intended to show the Jews the glories of a gentle and forgiving Christianity.

“You swine, you pigs, you filth of the gutters,” he shouted at them, “you abominations, you unspeakable dogs of the outhouse, why do you persist in your contumacy? With your hooked noses you smell out the filth of the world and are content to lie in darkness and wallow in your own defecation. Your women are all whores. Your men are circumcised criminals. Your daughters are the bawds of the
nation. You are the Anti-Christ and your sons shall perish in eternal hellfire. Why are you so obdurate?” For twenty minutes the friar, whose job it was to convert the Jews to a higher form of religion, hurled at them thunderbolts of scorn and poured over them the vials of his abuse. No crime was too contemptible for them to have committed, no malpractice too abominable for them to wallow in. It was a sermon that was being preached throughout the Christian world in those years and it was based upon a perverse logic, for with each fresh insult the Jews, roped together in their special area, knew that what the fiery man said was preposterous, and they concluded that if his Church were as ignorant of Judaism as he was, there was truly no sense in listening to its plea for conversion. If the Jews of Europe had had even the slightest inclination toward apostasy, their obligatory attendance at the yearly conversion sermon would have hardened their hearts against it.

Now the friar came to the second part of his plea: “You argue in the filth of your despair that God is one, whereas we know that He is three. How can you be so blind? So stupid? So contumacious? Why do you persist in holding to your Old Book when we have proved that it is faulty? Why do you refuse to accept the glorious New Book, which clearly contains the truth? God is three and all the world proclaims this fact. Can you not see that your Old Book was given you only temporarily so that the way might be prepared for the true words of the New? Why do you cling to your error? Why?”

And every Jew sitting by sufferance in the cathedral that day knew that he persisted in his error, his oftentimes fatal error, because he had been taught from the days of Abraham and Moses and Elijah that God is one, indivisible, alone and unknowable.

From the pulpit the friar now launched into the final portion of his sermon, using at last the soft voice of reason: “Come, Jews, who were once Christians, come back to the true Church while there remains a chance. Forswear your error. Surrender your blindness. Come back with singing hearts to that seamless robe where you will find peace and gentleness and love.” He paused. From inside the roped-off section faces of stone stared back. The friar, seeing the obdurate Jews and sensing their unwillingness even to listen, decided to remind them of the special condition in which they lived. “You are not ordinary Jews, men and women of Podi,” he began quietly, “you are people upon whom the baptism of Christ once rested. You are people who have gone astray, and unless you return quickly to the fold events of a terrible nature are bound to overtake you.” His voice rose to a dreadful, premonitory wail: “For if you do not return to the Church you will be dragged into the cellars to taste the rope, the fagot and the choking water. Your bodies will be broken and your hearts torn with anguish. The peace that I offer you this day will no longer be available, and you will march across the piazza not in the spirit of friendly sport as you did this day, but bearing a fiery brand which will be used to light the fires which will consume you. Fiends, idiots, sons of hell—repite now. Join the true Church now. Abjure the blasphemies of Moses and the old ways. Now, now!” He ended in a paroxysm of religious fervor, and Rabbi Zaki, who knew something of these matters, was terrified.

That night, after Rachel had belabored him again for being so fat and for having allowed the whore to tear down his pants in the race, Zaki started to speak seriously of his fear, but at this point his daughters took up the complaint and
insisted that by next spring he lose his weight and not humiliate them. The sorely
tried man was tempted to bang the table and cry, “We are not talking about
humiliation! We are talking about our lives.” Instead, he waited for his womenfolk
to complete their condemnation, which he knew they had a right to deliver—for
they were wounded in spirit—and when they were done he said quietly, “The friar
meant what he said. We shall be allowed a few more years. Then the burnings will
begin.”

“Zaki!” his wife snapped. “Are you an idiot?”

“I am saying what I know to be true. We must leave Italy this week.”

“What do you mean, burning?” his wife heckled. “Because you are so fat that
you fell down? Because the friar made his usual ugly speech? You grow suddenly
afraid?”

“I am desperately afraid,” Zaki acknowledged. “That angry man meant what he
said.”

“Where would we go?” Rachel demanded. “Tell me, where?”

Zaki lowered his voice, looked about the room and said, “Salonica. There is a
letter from a German Jew who fled to Salonica, and he says that the Grand Turk
...”

“To Salonica!” his wife repeated. She began laughing hysterically and pointing at
her daughters. “Do you think I want them to marry Turks?”

Zaki waited for his wife’s contempt to die down, then said quietly, “Rachel, we
are in trouble. I think we should sail for Salonica immediately.”

This was too much for Rachel. She rose from her chair, stormed about her
husband’s mean shop and cried, “Has not the Pope himself assured us that we
can live peaceably in Italy for as long as we wish? Are you a coward that you doubt
his promise?”

“This Pope promised. The next Pope can revoke,” Zaki argued carefully.

“But he gave the promise because he knew that we were baptized forcibly. We
were never true Christians, and like the good man he is he has allowed us to be
Jews again. I do not wish to go to Salonica. I refuse.”

“Rachel,” the fat rabbi pleaded, “you asked me if I was a coward? Yes, I am. I
listened to that man today and he was on fire. He sounded like the priests of Spain
and Portugal. He will not rest until Jews like you and me are burned. Rachel,
listen!”

But Rachel would not listen, and she refused to permit her daughters to listen,
either. Tormented by that day’s confusions the rabbi’s family went to bed, but he
did not, and in the morning, after prayers, he went to the ducal palace, where he
waited for five hours until the duke allowed him to enter. “I want permission to
take a boat to Salonica,” Zaki said.

“What!” the duke exploded. “You want to leave?”

“Yes,” Zaki replied.

“But why?”

“I am afraid.”

“Of what? Zaki,” the duke laughed thinly, “you mustn’t worry about the fun
yesterday. We meant no harm. As for the girl who tore down your pants, the jailer
put her up to it. Women are curious about these things, you know.” He chuckled
at the harmless teasing. “Zaki, we meant no offense. There’s nothing for you to be
afraid of.”
“But I am afraid.”
“All right! Next year you won’t have to race.”
“It’s the sermon I’m afraid of.”
“That?” the duke laughed. “We have to do that. Once a year. Pay no attention to him. I rule this city.”
“Excellency, the friar meant what he said.”
“That fool? That clerk? He can do nothing, believe me.”
“Excellency, I am terribly afraid. Let me take my family to the Grand Turk.”
“No, by God! Not to that infidel.”
“Please. Evil days are coming here, of that I am sure.”
The duke found this statement offensive, for Pope Clement himself had promised that Jews baptized under force would be forever under the protection of the papacy and were free to practice their religion as they wished. It was expected that future Popes would repeat this promise. Therefore, when Rabbi Zaki expressed his wish to leave Italy, heading for the realms of the Turk, his plea could be considered only as an insult to the Church. “You cannot go,” the duke said, and the interview was ended.
At home the women deduced where the rabbi had been and they chided him for his faint-heartedness. Other Jews were summoned to ridicule him, and all pointed out that whereas the fears he expressed might have been logical in Spain or Portugal, where there was an Inquisition determined to uncover Jews masquerading as Christians, there was no logical ground for fear in Podi. “This is Italy!” they pointed out, taking refuge in the constant rationalization of the Jew: “It won’t happen here. The people are too civilized.”
Rabbi Zaki for once in his life could not be swayed by either his friends or his family. He had a clear vision of what must inevitably happen in Italy, either with the arrival of a new Pope or with a change in the prosperity of the peninsula. “I am afraid,” he repeated stubbornly. “I saw the faces of the people yesterday. There was hatred in the cathedral.”
“He’s been making the same speech every year,” a cautious merchant repeated. “We’d feel the way you do, Rabbi, if we’d raced half-naked with the women laughing at us.”
“But you didn’t have to race, did you?” Rachel stormed. “Because you’re not fat like a pig.”
Zaki was stunned that his wife should have used this word again and in front of his congregation. With a pleading voice he whispered, “That is not a word to use against a rabbi.”
“But you do eat like a pig!” she cried, and he looked at the floor. It was a mark of the little rabbi that even in his humiliation he never once thought of leaving Podi without his nagging wife, even though he could easily have done so; two men from the city had fled to Amsterdam without their families, but he could not understand their behavior. He knew there was going to be terror in Italy and he could not abandon his stubborn wife and his unlovely daughters to face it, obstinate though they were.
“I am taking my family to Salonica,” he said quietly, “and if you men are wise, you’ll do the same.”
His wife was so irritated that she refused to discuss the matter, and the meeting broke up with a sense of frustration and fear. But in the morning Rabbi Zaki was back arguing with the duke, and after apologizing for any possible insult to the Duke, to the Pope or to the Church he again asked permission to emigrate.

“Give me one reason,” thundered the duke.

Zaki, during the night, had pondered half a dozen good reasons, but on the spur of the moment dismissed them all and said, “Because I have three daughters, Excellency, and like a good father I wish to marry them to Jewish men, whom I can find in Salonica.”

The duke considered this unexpected reasoning and began to laugh. “You have to find three husbands, Zaki?”

The rabbi said “Yes,” and sensing that he had enlisted the interest of the duke, added, “It’s not easy, Excellency. To find one good husband these days is not easy.”

“And you think that in Salonica…”

“Yes.”

The duke called in his younger brother, for whom he had obtained the appointment as Archbishop of Podi, and when that amiable prelate heard of Rabbi Zaki’s request to leave the city he did his best to quieten the Jew’s fears. “The duke commands here,” the archbishop reasoned, “and you should know that he will tolerate no act against his Jews.”

“I need you for my commerce,” the duke said.

“But I heard the friar say we were to be burned,” Zaki said. “I believe him.”

“That one?” the archbishop asked, laughing like a man recalling a pleasant day in the field. “You certainly know that my brother and I found his silly sermon as repugnant as you did, Zaki. Consider it only as a part of the Easter celebration and pay no more attention.”

“I cannot put it out of my mind. I am afraid.”

The tall archbishop summoned Zaki to the window and pointed toward the center of the piazza, where from a granite plinth rose a statue of the Duke of Podi astride a white stallion. The sculptor had caught the condottiere, sword in hand, at the moment of his conquest of Podi, and his manly bearing lent dignity and courage to the city he ruled. “Do you suppose a warrior like the duke would ever permit a preaching friar or even a Pope to determine his behavior?” The churchman laughed at the absurdity, but when Zaki repeated that he wanted to go, the archbishop shrugged his shoulders. “In Podi we hold no man against his will,” he said compassionately. “But regulations covering departures are administered by the friars,” and he sent for the very man who had preached the Lenten sermon.

The Dominican bowed to the duke, acknowledged the archbishop and looked with disgust at the Jew who defiled the ducal rooms. “He should not be allowed to leave,” the friar warned. “He was baptized a Christian and it’s abhorrent that he should join the Turk.”

“He’s determined,” the archbishop said, whereupon the Dominican asked for pen and paper and began listing the restrictions under which Zaki might depart: “He may take with him no papers proving that Christians owe him debts. Nor any books written or printed, no money minted in this state, no lists of names which
might help the Turk, nor any instruments for the Christian sacraments. And at
the pier, in view of all, he must kneel and kiss the New Testament, acknowledging
its divine inspiration.”

When the terms of departure were agreed upon, the Duke of Podi signed the
paper and in later years this fact would be remembered against him. The
archbishop signed, too, and this was also recorded. Finally the Dominican thrust
the document at the Jew, warning him, “If one item is transgressed, you may not
depart.”

But Zaki had his permission, and in a kind of mysterious terror he fled the
room where he had always been treated so justly by the duke and his brother, for
he sensed the deepening of a tragedy whose outlines he only vaguely understood;
but as he crossed the piazza on his way to talk with a ship captain about passage,
he stopped at the marble statue of the condottiere and muttered a prayer, “May
God, Who allowed you to conquer this city, allow you to keep it.”

Then, as he neared home, he began to sweat, for although he had convinced the
duke, the archbishop, the friar and the ship captain, he still had to convince his
wife, and this would prove most difficult of all. But on one point he felt not the
slightest uncertainty: even though he knew that tragedy was about to engulf Podi,
if his wife and daughters refused to flee with him he would have to remain with
them. “Rachel is sometimes a trial,” he muttered to himself, “but no man can
desert his wife. Besides, she’s given me three lovely daughters.” For her sake he
prayed that he could persuade her to leave the city.

When he reached his shoemaker’s shop he tried to put on a look of firmness
and he must have succeeded, for Rachel saw that a decision of moment was about
to be announced.

“I’ve been to the duke’s,” he began.

“Yes?”

“And he has agreed to let us go.”

“Where?”

“I’ve also been to see the captain and he has agreed…”

“Where?”

“There’s no turning back, Rachel,” the fat rabbi pleaded. “Evil days are ahead in
this city…”

“Where?” she screamed. “Salonica?”

“Yes,” he said bravely, raising his arms to fend off the attack that must take
place.

To his surprise Rachel sat down. She breathed heavily, made no other sound
and hid her face in her hands. After a while she gave a low sob and summoned her
daughters from the other room. “We’re going to Salonica,” she announced softly,
like the whisper of a volcano afraid to explode. The oldest girl, Sarah, gasped and
her mother leaped from the chair. “Yes!” she shouted. “Your father’s taking us to
Salonica!” The youngest child began to cry and Rachel slapped her. “We’re going to
Salonica,” she shouted in a hysterical giggle. “You’re all going to marry Turks.” She
collapsed in the chair; even the older girls began crying, whereupon she stormed
about the room, shouting, “We’re going to Salonica, oh, my God!” Then she
slapped each of the girls harshly and announced calmly, “We shall do as your
father says. No one in this room will ever again argue about his decision.”
She kept her word. With demonic frenzy she applied herself to packing the family goods, but as she tied each parcel the Dominican friar would come to inspect it, reminding her that many of the things she wanted to take belonged, by agreement, to the Church. Once Zaki was afraid that Rachel would fly at the Dominican, but she patiently surrendered even the toys of her children. When the friar had completed his third scrutiny Rachel declared war, muttering, “Very well.” Digging up a secret hoard of forbidden gold pieces she sewed them adroitly into unlikely places, so that when the rabbi’s family was given its final searching she succeeded in smuggling so many coins that she could support the family for some years in its flight.

The Jews of Podi came to the pier to bid their frightened rabbi farewell, and to him they seemed like a necklace of beautiful pearls strung along the dock, causing tears to well up in his eyes as he listened to their farewells; fortunately he could not hear their whispers: “Look at our crazy rabbi. Lost his head because a whore pulled down his pants.” And then, like the shadow of death crossing the waves, a darkness came over Zaki’s vision and he saw his beloved congregation as it was to be. There stood fat Jacopo, who had been in the race, and he would be burned alive in 1556. Beside him stood thin Meir, a cherished friend who would be burned alive in 1555. There were the sisters Ruth and Zipporah; the elder would be burned alive in 1555, but the younger would die in prison almost torn apart by torture. There was also the gentle Josiah, who would die at the stake in 1556, but because he was dim-witted he would escape death by flame, because at the end he would say uncomprehendingly, “Of course I accept conversion,” and the executioner would mercifully strangle him before the fires began.

The cloud passed, and the doomed Jews stepped aside as the smiling Duke of Podi came onto the dock, crying, “Good-bye, Zaki. No one in Podi had bitterness against you. You’re being very stupid.” And one day this generous-hearted man would be humbled and hounded from his dominion because of the assistance he would give his Jews in their time of trial.

It would not be proper to claim that on this day in 1541 Zaki foresaw these precise events in the darkened faces of his friends, but he knew with a certainty that similar things were bound to happen. To no one could he confide, not even to his bewildered, faithful wife, the reasons for his insight: “If men repeat often enough their hatreds the evil comes to pass.” He looked at his dear friends, his lovely companions doomed in their goodness, and he wept.

His wife, ashamed of his latest display of cowardice, refused to weep. But as the ship started to move she cried hysterically, “We are going to Salonica.” During the first days of the tedious voyage she and her daughters kept to themselves, but when Muslim pirates threatened the ship she began to wail, “Is this what you are taking us to Salonica for?” And she made so much commotion that the captain bellowed “Rabbi, shut that woman up or I’ll let the pirates catch us.” Zaki went to his wife and pleaded, “Rachel, if we have escaped Italy, God will not abandon us to slavery now.” His wife looked at him with blank amazement and forgot the pirates: her husband was still talking gibberish, and she was so appalled to have married such a fool that she kept her mouth shut.

The pirates were outdistanced, but the ship was forced to land in northern Africa, where shoemakers were not needed and hwe Rachel and the girls had to
work. And after many years they came to Safed.

2

On a cold, wintry morning in 1540 the citizens of Avaro in central Spain found on their doorsteps a printed broadsheet commanining them to report to the Holy Inquisition anyone who had publicly accepted baptism as a Christian and had then secretly continued to practise as a Jew. To aid informers in spying out this crime, a series of ingenious tests was provided:

Put before your neighbor morsels of food such as pork, rabbit and congers eels, and if he refuse to eat, he is a Jew.

Watch with great care everything your neighbor does on Friday. Does he put on fresh linen? Does he light candles at least an hour before honest men do? Does his wife cean the house that day? If you catch him doing these things, you have a Jew.

Go to your roof on Friday two hours before sundown and watch all the chimneys of the city. Any that stops smoking suddenly as the sun sets betrays a Jew. Run and catch his name.

When you visit your neighbor's home spy out to see if he washes his hands more than most. When his wife kneads bread does she throw a small bit into the fire? If you detect any of these matters, report your neighbor at once, for he is a Jew.

In church does your neighbor, while professing to be a true man, rock his head back and forth and bend occasionally at the waist? Does he recite the psalms like an honest man, then refuse at the end to repeat the Gloria Patri? Does he attend with special reverence whenever testimony from the Old Testament is mentioned? Does his tongue seem to gag in his mouth when he is called upon to recite the phrase. „Father, Son, and Holy Ghost“? If he does any of these things, you have caught a Jew.

At Holy Communion watch your neighbor with redoubled vigilance. Does he swallow the wafer with fortright honesty like a true Christian, or does he try to hide it in his mouth for deliverance later to Satan? Or does he linger with it on his lips, then swallow it swiftly when he catches you looking at him? If he does either of these tricks, remember his name.

Be vigilant ever. If you are present whenyour nieghbor dies, see if at his last breath he turns his face to the wall. When a son is born to your neighbor see if his wife delay for forty days before returning to normal life. Watch if the new child is called secretly by a name from the Old Testament. Try diligently to see if his son is circumcised. And inspect all that your neighbor does, because you may succeed in routing out a Jew, and if you triumph over this devil, great grace is yours.
A few days later the distinguished advisor to King Charles of Austria and Spain, Counselor Diego Ximeno, whose ancestors had for eleven hundred years lived in Spain as Jews, and for the last century as converts to Christianity, happened to choke as he was eating a piece of pork. Inadvertently he allowed the pork to fall to the floor, where, seeing it ruined, he absent-mindedly ground it into the dust with his heel. A jealous neighbor detected him doing these things and next day satisfied himself beyond question that Diego Ximeno was a secret Jew because he spotted the robust, handsome counselor washing his hands three times in the course of one day, whereas a believing man would not have done so.

Accordingly, this trusted friend went quietly to the office of the Inquisition and reported: “I have strong reason to suspect that Diego Ximeno is a Jew.” The Dominican in charge of recording accusations raised his eyebrows, for although in recent years some rather prominent citizens of Avaro had been caught in the nets of the Inquisition, no one of Diego Ximeno’s importance had yet been apprehended, and to catch a man of his dignity would bring the local office into national prominence. Senior officials of the Inquisition were therefore summoned and the informant was questioned avidly. “For some time,” he told them, “I have suspected Diego of being a secret Jew, but not until the paper arrived telling me what specifically to look for did I know how to trap him.”

The committee itself had a much longer list of ways to catch a Jew than the one which it had sponsored in print, and one by one these questions were put to the excited witness and he was led to review his years of friendship with the counselor, until all reached the conclusion that Diego Ximeno at one time or other had been guilty of almost every act that betrayed a secret Jew. It was safe for the informer to make his nebulous accusations, for under the codex of inquisitorial procedure he would never face the man he was condemning, nor would Ximeno ever be told who had informed against him or what had been the charge. At the end of several hours the priests conducting the interrogation thanked the neighbor, and when he was gone, concluded, “At last we have caught a truly great one. Honor is ours.”

That afternoon uniformed guards of the Inquisition marched to Ximeno’s office and without advising him of any particulars arrested him and hauled him away to a cramped, dirty subterranean cell, where he was kept in absolute silence for four months. The inquisitors knew that they must prepare their case against such a man with care, for even though he had had Jewish ancestors a hundred years ago he also had great influence with the court, and his arrest had already caused many horsemen to ride between Avaro and Vienna. Finally the Inquisition was ready to interrogate the prisoner, which it did with secrecy and solemnity, but since Ximeno was not told what the specific charges against him were, he confessed to nothing. On the second day no progress was made, nor on the third, so on the fourth the court convinced itself that in Diego Ximeno they had a secret Jew who was going to prove exceedingly difficult.

Accordingly, he was returned to solitary confinement, where he languished for the rest of 1540 and all of 1541, during which time he was required to pay substantial sums for his keep and for the marshaling of further evidence against
him. Regardless of the eventual outcome of his trial he was being financially ruined, and he knew it.

The Avaro chapter of the Inquisition could afford to move so deliberately because of the significance of the work in which it was engaged. Before it became powerful in Spain the Inquisition had been in existence as a necessary arm of the Church, for some six or seven centuries, during which it had served to protect Christianity from numerous heresies. For the first half-thousand years of its operation it had been a generally benign office, but with the ascendancy of Tomás de Torquemada as Inquisitor-General of Spain and his elevation of the Inquisition to a position independent of both Pope and emperor, the policing powers of the body had degenerated into a kind of panic and terror: in a period of seventeen years, some 120,000 of Spain’s inquisitive intellectuals were killed. And then, with Torquemada dead and the Faith apparently secure against false movements, a time was reached when the terror could be relaxed, but at this moment Martin Luther in Germany launched the most dangerous heresy of all, so that even a fool could see that the true Christian Church was imperiled by Protestantism. What was almost as disturbing, certain Christians like Erasmus of Rotterdam were writing books that cunningly mocked the Church, and as if this danger were not enough, Jewish families who had some centuries before accepted baptism into Christianity were discovered to be secretly adhering to old Judaic rites. Thus the Church was beset from without and from within, and only the Inquisition, superior even to the Pope, could hope to root out the heresies, burn the incriminating books and track down the Lutherans and the secret Jews.

The official figures for the Inquisition of Avaro illustrate the Church’s response to the peril it faced. In the two centuries before the arrival of Torquemada, Avaro beheaded only four persons, and these were grievous enemies of the Church who refused to recant gross sin. But from 1481 to 1498, under the whip of Torquemada, the Avaro judges executed eleven thousand heretics. In the quiet period that followed, the number dropped to less than twenty a year, but in 1517, with the appearance of Luther as a mortal threat and with the influx of works by Erasmus, the number of executions rose sharply.

It is significant that in this period of sixty years, from 1481 to 1541, not a single professed Jew was executed by the Avaro Inquisition. If any man, upon arrest, could say boldly, “I am a Jew and have always been known as one,” he was banished from the realm, but he was not burned. The Spanish Church had to despise him and send him on those mournful wanderings which the New Testament had predicted, but it never touched him. At the same time, however, the Avaro Inquisition had rooted out some eight thousand people whose families had once been Jews but who had converted to Christianity, accepting baptism and full membership in the Church while secretly continuing to practice Jewish rites. And of these eight thousand faithless ones more than six thousand had been burned alive. There was the girl Maria del Iglesia, whose family had been Christian for three centuries, who fell in love with the young man Raimundo Calamano and in a moment of courtship confidence confessed to him that she and her family observed Passover: he ran straight to the Inquisition, and three days before she was to marry, troops broke into the Del Iglesia home to find forty-one Jews eating matzoth, and all were burned alive. There was the renowned scholar Tomás de
Salamanca, who taught the youth of Avaro, and one day his nine-year-old son burst into the street, shouting, “My father whipped me. He fasts on Yom Kippur.” So after investigations extending over a period of seven years, sixty-three close associates of Tomás had to be burned alive. What was especially frightening was the fact that among the confessed Jews were seventeen nuns who had held Jewish rituals in their convent, thirty monks, seven priests and two bishops. The Church was being dangerously corrupted from within, and only the most painstaking investigation could protect it. For that reason the case against Diego Ximeno, counselor to the king, moved slowly.

At the beginning of the third year Ximeno was again summoned before the tribunal, which now had in its possession a voluminous file of material linking him to Judaism. Informants as far away as the Italian city of Podi and the German city of Gretz had made depositions damaging to him, and the judges were completely satisfied that they had a secret Jew. Now the problem was to force him to confess and to incriminate others in Avaro who might have masked their evil practices as successfully as he had done. Over a period of four days he was interrogated in minute detail, and when he proved obdurate the tribunal had no alternative; they had to commit him to the torture.

He was dragged immediately to the subterranean vault long used for the purpose of extracting confessions, but he was not, as some might suspect, thrown into the hands of brutal men free to abuse him at will. He was delivered to a skilled and patient priest who had been conducting such interrogations for many years and who was assisted constantly by a knowing doctor who had learned from experience what torment the human body could absorb without expiring. There were few deaths from torture in the dungeon of Avaro.

On the other hand, the ordinary workmen who administered the three tortures which were allowed had become callous experts who had acquired a score of tricks guaranteed to break down the resolve of any secret Jews, so at the moment when Diego Ximeno was thrust into the dungeon these men already knew that he was someone special sent to test their skill. If they extracted a confession, they would be rewarded; if they failed, they would be rebuked. It was therefore a poignant moment when the handsome man of fifty, stalwart even after two years of imprisonment, stumbled into the torture chamber, gained his footing and stood in quiet defiance before the interrogating priest.

“Do you confess, Diego Ximeno?” the priest asked. The prisoner looked at the Dominican with contempt, whereupon the priest, who had often seen that particular look at the beginning of his interrogations, but never at the end, said to the doctor, “The prisoner refuses to speak. Is he qualified for the question?” The doctor studied Ximeno and thought: He’s arrogant and he’s in strong health. This one may take a long time.

The doctor nodded to the scribe sitting at the feet of the priest. It was this man’s job to record confessions and to confirm in writing that humanitarian safeguards were observed in the torture room. “Write down,” the priest directed, “that the prisoner was found qualified for the question.”

With this the Dominican signaled to the workmen, who with lightning force grabbed Ximeno, pinioned his arms and stripped him naked before he knew what was happening. With equal speed they lashed his hands behind his back, fastened
twenty-pound weights to each ankle, and by means of a heavy rope attached to his wrists hauled him some forty feet into the air. From below, the foreman of the workmen shouted, “You’ll talk, Counselor.” They left him suspended for nearly an hour, while his arms, wrenched upward from behind, slowly pulled his shoulders from their sockets.

The ache throughout his body had become almost more than he could bear, and the Dominican, seeing his anguish and sensing that he might be ready to speak, came below him and called, “Diego Ximeno, do you now confess?”

Still uninformed as to the specific charges against him, Ximeno bore his pain in silence.

“Diego Ximeno,” the priest pleaded, “if you are in pain now, believe me it is only a beginning. Please confess or we must apply the question.” The prisoner made no response, so the priest returned to his small dais, instructing his scribe to record the fact that the prisoner had been offered mercy.

Suddenly, with terrifying shouts, the workmen dashed at the rope which suspended Ximeno and by means of prearranged holds allowed it to slip so that the prisoner dropped thirty feet, ending with a shattering halt which tore each of his major joints apart with maximum pain. His wrists, elbows and shoulders were mutilated, while the weights on his legs, magnified many times by the precipitous fall and the sudden stop, pulled apart his ankles, his knees and his hips.

Before Ximeno could identify his new pains the workmen pulled him back to the ceiling to initiate one of the worst features of the torture. At times they would shout and drop the rope. At other times they would shout and not drop it. Again, without warning, they would drop it only a few inches. At other times there would be the sickening fall almost to the floor and the hideous wrenching.

Ximeno was now beyond pain, and when the Dominican again begged him to confess the stalwart prisoner refused even to listen, so the rope was let go and he was dropped in a heap, quickly lifted onto a table and subjected to an entirely different kind of torment; for if the hanging and falling had constituted gross pain, which men like Ximeno could school themselves to resist, what was now at hand was psychological torture that few could withstand.

The table upon which he was laid had a small log across the middle, so that his back was severely strained and his stomach drawn flat in a position which of itself induced strangling. Then a funnel was placed in his mouth and his nose was closed. Huge draughts of water were poured into the funnel from an earthenware jar, and as his taut lungs gasped for air he alternately strangled, choked and gulped the water. It was an agonizing, shattering torture.

Before the second jar was poured, the priest returned and begged the prisoner to recant. “The tortures will cease,” the Dominican assured him, but apparently Ximeno was prepared to die and said nothing. The priest departed and the scrivener recorded the fact that the merciful offer had been made.

“This time you’ll speak,” the workmen promised. One leaned hard upon Ximeno’s distended stomach as it arched over the log, and the sudden movement of water throughout his internals almost killed him. Another placed in his mouth a cloth which long experience had proved to be of exactly the right mesh, and through this the water was now poured. Gulping, fighting for air, Ximeno sucked the cloth into his throat, where it embedded itself as the water trickled slowly
through. It seemed that he must surely strangle, but at the end of the long agony the workmen suddenly jerked the cloth from his throat, tearing away the membranes and bringing blood.

“Now speak,” the workmen whispered, and when he refused, the bloody cloth was again inserted in his mouth. Six jugs of water, six strangling, terrifying, mortal jugs, were poured into him while strong hands pressed on his stomach, so that his lungs, his bowels and his heart seemed to explode.

He did not talk. So he was hauled at last to the final torture, where, spread in complete agony on the cold stones, his joints inflamed and his throat torn, he was given a few minutes of respite, during which he heard the priest begging him yet once more to avoid the worst agony which was now at hand. He remained silent, whereupon the soles of his feet were smeared with a mixture of pepper, oil, menthol and clove, and when the unguent was well into his pores fagots from an open fire were brought and passed back and forth across his feet, raising horrible blisters and sending throughout his body pain of an absolute magnitude. He fainted.

He awakened some time later in his cell. His mattress had been removed and he was lying naked on the stones, his heap of clothes beside him. He was unable to move either his arms or legs. His feet ached beyond human endurance, and his mouth had already become so scarred that each breath was agony. For four dreadful days he lay there hoping to die, and on the fifth, when his blisters were at their worst, his joints inflamed and his throat a mass of sores, he was dragged back to the vault, where the priest said, “Diego Ximeno, we have proof beyond question that you are a Jew. Please, for God’s mercy, confess and let us end this business.” Ximeno said nothing.

The Dominican honestly wanted to save the accused from further pain, so he pointed to the door of the torture chamber and said, “Diego, believe me, of a hundred misguided people we have to bring down here, we set at least ninety free. To resume their normal lives. To rejoin the Church as corrected Christians.” He waited but Ximeno said nothing. “It’s true, we punish them here, but when they confess they go free with nothing worse than an unhappy memory. Diego, if you tell us now the names of the other Jews, you will go free, like the ninety, with nothing worse than a few scars on your ankles. Please, please speak.” But Ximeno said nothing.

This time the workmen used different tactics. Pulling him to the ceiling they eschewed tricks and set about dropping and raising him as rapidly as possible, until it seemed that his heart must be torn out of his body. Then, after a few minutes, they lugged him like an inanimate object to the water table, pressed him down upon the log until his back nearly cracked and proceeded immediately with the cloth and six jugs of water. Later, at the fire, they went right to work and burned him so horribly that again he fainted. With disgust they dragged him, unconscious, back to his cell and heaved him through the air, smashing him against the wall.

“Let’s hope we killed him,” they muttered, for his obstinacy was a reflection upon them. They had proof that he was a secret Jew, and his refusal to confess was preposterous.

Of his tortures on the third day he remembered nothing, but they were in no
way different, for the Inquisition did not permit its workmen to cut a man's flesh, to blind him or to meddle with his private parts, and if a prisoner remained silent in the face of rope, water and fire, as Ximeno had done, it was permissible nearly to kill him with these means but it was not permissible to do more. At the end of the third incredible session the doctor stood over the inanimate hulk by the fire and said, "This one can stand no more."

The Dominican looked at the distorted, blistered body and cried, "Why don't they confess and save themselves this agony?"

The doctor asked, "Do you suppose this one really is a Jew, Father?"

"At first I was sure," the Dominican replied. "But after this..." He turned away.

Toward the end of 1542, when Ximeno had been nearly three years in solitary confinement, for which his estate still had to pay rent week after week, the sad-eyed Dominican came at last to see him: "Diego, tomorrow your day of judgment is at hand. You are to be burned at the stake."

The prisoner still made no response, and the priest begged, "Diego, please, for the mercy of God, confess, so that when you reach the stake the executioner will be permitted to strangle you before the fire begins."

Again there was no comment, and the distraught priest cried, "Diego! Do not force us to do this horrible thing. Your soul is already in the hands of God. At least allow your body to go in peace."

But the resolute prisoner said nothing, and the priest departed.

At four on Sunday morning two young Dominicans entered the cell bearing a sackcloth uniform into which Diego Ximeno was forced to climb. Over it the priests threw a long yellow robe on which had been painted little red devils throwing into the fires of hell heretics and secret Jews. Finally they jammed on the prisoner's head a tall conical hat, yellow and adorned with swirling flames. "You must follow us, Counselor," said the two young friars of Avaro, who in happier days had often sought his assistance, which he had freely granted.

At the door of the prison Ximeno was handed a lighted taper, which signified that he was to be burned, and he came at last to the barefoot procession itself: sixty-three who had confessed minor crimes against the Church, like reading Erasmus, and who would escape death to live the rest of their lives in dismal isolation—pauperized, forbidden employment, anathematized; nineteen who had confessed major crimes, like naming their sons Moses or refusing to eat congers eels, and these would be burned, but at the last moment they would be strangled so as to escape the fire; and six like Diego Ximeno, who had refused to confess either to Judaism or Lutheranism, and they would be burned alive without strangling.

It was a long procession, headed by the dignitaries of the Church; and a longer day, marked by sermons, pleas and accusations. More than forty thousand persons packed the plaza to hear the solemn proceedings, for the day had been widely advertised throughout the region and all who attended were granted special dispensation, for that day they would see where the path of heresy led.

Late in the afternoon the inquisitors came finally to the cases of those to be burned, and justification for this act was cited from the specific words of Jesus Christ Himself as reported in the holy gospel of St. John: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast
them into the fire, and they are burned.” But once the verdicts of death had been read, the Church dignitaries solemnly washed their hands of the matter and left the scene, while the prisoners were turned over to the secular arm of the state with the plea that they be treated kindly and that no blood be spilled.

The secular arm then marched the condemned to an entirely different part of the city, where stakes had been set into the ground and fagots piled high, and as the prisoners marched, the populace screamed at them, threw things, cursed and reviled them. Those prisoners suspected of being Jews went through a particular Gehenna, for they were tormented with special taunts: they had known God and had turned their backs on Him; they had crucified Jesus; they were worse than the swine they refused to eat. And with each step that the suspected Jew took, two friars clung to him, crying, “Jew, confess that your religion is false. Confess that God is three and not one.” And to many Jews on the death march this vilification of their religion was worse than the taunts of the crowd. At the burning place the citizens watched with horrified fascination as Diego Ximeno, silent and austere, climbed unaided onto the pile, ignoring the pleas of his accompanying friars that he save himself from the final agony. Below him secretaries waited with pen and book, ready to write down whatever he might scream in his torment. This had become a matter of some importance, for there were many in the town who were beginning to believe that Ximeno was not a Jew, and such a belief might become embarrassing if it led to local sanctification. But as the flames leaped at his throat Ximeno summoned forth the same iron control that he had shown in the torture room, and he died confessing nothing, so that at the moment of his death the people who had known him well began to whisper, “He was not a Jew. He was a saint,” and the first steps of his canonization began, much to the disgust of the Inquisition, which had intended something quite different.

Of all the watchers who saw the burning of Diego Ximeno, none witnessed it with greater apprehension than Dr. Abulafia, a distinguished medical man whose Jewish ancestors had become Christians in 1391 and who, as a good Christian himself, had risen to a place of prominence in the city. He was married to a Christian lady of impeccable lineage. He ate pork, was not circumcised, nor were his sons, and he had never been suspected by anyone, not even during the worst rigors of the Inquisition, of being a Jew. Upon the distribution in 1540 of the list of signs whereby secret Jews could be trapped, some of his acquaintances had jokingly reviewed the items with him, saying, “At least nobody can accuse you of being a Jew, Abulafia,” and not even his friends had considered reporting him to the inquisitors. He was a flawless man.

With horror he had stood in the public plaza to hear the formal charges against his old patient, Diego Ximeno, and during the procession to the burning grounds he had twice stationed himself in positions where the condemned man would have to pass close to him; but Ximeno, in a kind of mortal trance, had stared straight ahead, refusing to see the doctor. When Ximeno climbed to the stake Dr. Abulafia positioned himself with the secretaries waiting to catch any words the doomed man might utter, but again nothing happened. Yet at the last moment, when Ximeno’s hair was ablaze and his skin had begun to char, he did cast one final, lingering glance at Dr. Abulafia, and their eyes met through flame.

When the fires burned down and there were left only iron chains soiled with
greasy soot, Dr. Abulafia walked dumbly homeward, and it was now he who was in a trance. At home Doña Maria asked, “Why are you so pale?” and he replied, “I’ve just seen Diego burned,” and his wife replied, “He must have been guilty. These are not things for us to worry about.”

Abulafia was unable to eat supper, nor did he wish to play with his two sons. He went to his study to examine patients, but he became dizzy and thought he would faint. By exercising will power he succeeded in maintaining control, saying to himself: If I faint now it might be fatal. Who knows which of these patients was sent to spy on me this night? So he worked on.

Dr. Abulafia was a tall man with dark, sympathetic eyes. Handsome and much respected by the people of Avaro, he had a gentle manner with the sick which enabled him to earn more money than most of the doctors in town. He was a skilled surgeon, enjoying a favorable reputation in cities as far distant as Toledo, where he had once treated Emperor Charles. He sprang from a family whose contributions to Spain dated back to the year 400 C.E., and he should have felt secure this ghostly night, when the smoldering fires of the burning still hovered above the city, but he did not. The execution of Diego Ximeno haunted him, so at the earliest chance he closed his office. Avoiding his family he went to a small inner room containing no books, no papers, no pictures. The walls were white, the table and chair rudely made, and he sat staring straight ahead and thinking. He was afraid to write anything down, which he desperately wanted to do, for his wife or some spy might find his writing and give it to the Inquisition. He was afraid to mumble the words his brain formed lest someone be listening and overhear un-Spanish syllables. He was not free to recite any litany, nor to consult books, nor to read manuals, nor to do anything other than sit.

He stared at the wall for nearly an hour, trying to cleanse his mind of the terrible things it had seen that day, but flame and the penetrating eyes of Diego Ximeno haunted him; when he tried to concentrate he saw only the eyes of the counselor, but finally the dreadful visions faded and letters of the Hebrew alphabet began to form in space before the whiteness of the wall, and they began to move hither and about, forming in alternation consoling or condemning patterns. Still he stared, as the letters took meaningful patterns recalling concepts which he had suppressed for many months; then they assumed the form of symbols which evoked other meaningful concepts, and still he sat, motionless, wanting to write down the letters with pen and paper but terrified of doing so; and after a long interval of watching, the Hebrew letters turned to fire and marched purposefully across the wall, and he began to breathe in short gasps. His stomach contracted and these preliminary letters started to fade from sight until the wall was lonely and bare.

Then, from an immeasurable distance behind the wall, came four letters of extraordinary force, too powerful to be looked at directly. He dropped his eyes. The letters came through the wall and across the room right to his forehead; and now without using his eyes he could see them in all their terrible majesty, and they were broken, YH on one side and WH on the other, and try as he might he could not bring them together to form the unspoken, the unspeakable Name; and slowly the letters receded until they stood again upon the wall, and now he could look upon them with his eyes, and they stood accusingly there, YH to one side and WH
to the other, and he had not the power to fuse them into one word. For the word he sought was the sacred Name of God Himself, and this Name Abulafia could not speak; for he felt himself to be a man of sin: he could have joined Ximeno at the stake but through cowardice had not done so. After a long while he stopped looking at the accusing letters and found himself muttering an ancient Hebrew prayer, and it was for the salvation of Diego Ximeno’s soul; for Dr. Abulafia knew with certainty that the counselor had been a secret Jew and that the Inquisition was therefore justified, according to its rules, in burning him alive.

On the day in 1540 when he heard that Ximeno had first been arrested, Dr. Abulafia had said to himself, trembling in this white room, “Diego will confess, and he will tell them that I, too, am a Jew.” Then his agony of cowardice began. With unmanly apprehension he watched the prison where Ximeno was kept, expecting each day to be called before the Inquisition with word that the counselor had incriminated him. The three years that Ximeno had lain in silence were to the doctor an eternity, for he could visualize the tortures that his friend was suffering. In recent years several patients, having been set free after preliminary questioning in the torture chamber, had come to Dr. Abulafia with distended joints or horrible scars on their feet and they had wanted to tell him how they had acquired these marks, but he had refused to listen. “The sacred Inquisition does its duty and does it justly,” he told them, for he could never be sure which were spies saved from their own burning in order to trap him.

In the refuge of this silent room he had prayed: “God of Moses our Teacher, save Diego.” And when weeks passed and the Inquisition did not come to arrest him, he said to himself: Maybe Ximeno is not going to confess, and he grew ashamed at having entertained such self-seeking thoughts. A few days ago the broadsheet had come fluttering through the streets, announcing that the next burning of heretics would be headed by Counselor Ximeno, and Dr. Abulafia had suffered fresh moral confusion until at last he had been driven in a kind of self-sacrificing mania to station himself along the path of Ximeno’s march to the fagots, willing to step forward and identify himself if the doomed man gave the signal; but with a fortitude Abulafia considered impossible, Ximeno had marched in silence, protecting the names of others that he alone knew to be secret Jews. Yet as he passed, Abulafia saw something that he would never forget. Ximeno’s face was a mask which revealed nothing, but his bare feet were marked by gaping scars which could have come only from burns. And at the end there had been the last fraternal glance.

Now on the night of death Dr. Abulafia sat again in the white room and asked himself: How many other secret Jews in this city did Ximeno protect through his courage? And when he contemplated the fortitude of the martyred man he had to cry aloud, whether spies heard him or not, “Praise God for those who have the strength to die for the sanctification of the Name.” And he continued with a soaring, poetic invocation to the good Jew who had that day allowed himself to be burned alive rather than escape his agony by incriminating others who would be hounded to death after he was gone.

Dr. Abulafia had met Ximeno twenty years ago, in the winter of 1522. It was an accident, an accident of words: at a formal dinner celebrating the patron saint of Avaro he had asked innocently, “What is this Kabbala the Jewish people speak...
of?” And after a series of cautious probings the counselor had revealed himself as a master of the Kabbala, that esoteric body of mysticism that had grown up in Germany and Spain as a pathway to the understanding of the Hebrew God. Ximeno had given Dr. Abulafia a manuscript of the Zohar, the arcane book of Kabbalism, believed to have been composed centuries before by a mystical Jew in Granada, and had initiated him into its mysteries. Abulafia had found much to his liking, for while he had never been able honestly to accept the Christian principle that God was of one substance and three manifestations, he found the austere monotheism of Hebraic teaching equally difficult. There was in life, and his Spanish nature sensed it, an additional spirit of flight, the wild movement of the human soul seeking some kind of further identification with God; and only in the Zohar did Abulafia find a solution that satisfied him.

Between the immensity of God and the insignificance of man the Zohar postulated ten spheres of divine manifestation, each of which man can approach or even encompass: the supreme crown of God, the wisdom of God, the intelligence, the love, the power, the compassion, the everlastingness, the majesty, the root foundation and the kingdom of God. These ten spheres, through which God emerges from his unknowable state, can be represented in the form of a tree, but it is known that the sap of this tree, the vitalizing power, is and must be the ultimate spirit of God.

It was through the exploration and contemplation of these spheres that Ximeno and Abulafia reached the mystical point at which sometimes, after having manipulated the letters of the Hebrew alphabet for hours, they would come close to the ultimate secret of God Himself. Then the four separate letters of the mystical tetragrammaton, YHWH, would appear on the paper before them, properly fused into the Name, and they would become aware of the actual presence of God Himself.

But when the searching fingers of the Inquisition began to clutch at one secret Jew after another, Ximeno had warned, “Companion, we had better burn our books,” and with moral confusion they had burned their copy of the Torah, even though it was a holy book for the Christians, too, and their tracts from the Talmud, but when it came time to burn the Zohar, Abulafia had promised, “I will burn it tonight,” and without telling Ximeno he had secreted it in a wall of his cellar, for the book which had illuminated his soul he could not burn. Later Ximeno had cautioned, “We must no longer write Hebrew letters. A child might find an un-burned scrap or your wife might see scratches on the desk.” And they had formed the habit of sitting together in absolute silence, two secret Jews, each contemplating the mystery of God in his own way.

It was surprising, Abulafia thought, that the Inquisition had not identified him as one of Ximeno’s friends, but he remembered that Diego had wisely refused ever to meet Abulafia socially; he had come always as a patient, claiming a persistent nasal condition. “I will not tell even you who the other Jews are,” he had once said, “for the day may come when we shall be called upon to resist harsh tortures and we must not know who our neighbors are lest we prove not strong.”

Now, in the white room, Dr. Abulafia tried to reconstruct what he knew of Ximeno’s habits: He came frequently to visit me, and I was a Jew. He also visited the shop of Luis Moro. Could it be that... He slammed his hand across his lips to
stop even the speculation, because if he were called to the torture he must not even have suspicions to give the judges. He would strike the name Luis Moro from his memory forever and if...

“Oh, God! Oh, God!” he cried aloud. Then he quieted himself and wondered: How did Diego have the courage to keep my name from his lips? Abulafia wanted to utter lamentations in the streets for Ximeno, to pray for this great soul whose life had expired in flame, but he was afraid. Silently he wept, not even allowing the tears to form in his eyes lest his wife come suddenly upon him.

Choking on his grief and sense of sin Dr. Abulafia reached a decision: I will flee Spain. I can no longer endure this horror. He hoped to find some quiet spot where he could study the Zohar in peace, seeking to find some way whereby the ten spheres of Godhood might lead ordinary men to an awareness of Him. But where could a Jew find freedom? And how could he escape Spain to get there? To Abulafia’s rapidly moving mind came the memory of a letter he had once seen from a German Jew who claimed that in the empire of the Grand Turk, Jews could live without persecution, and he began constructing an involved plan for reaching Constantinople.

It was amateurish and almost impossible of execution, but he was in such a state of panic that he could be excused for his grotesqueries. First of all he would abandon his wife and children, and this was a grave decision of itself, for Maria Abulafia was a beautiful, compassionate wife whom he had loved deeply and his two sons were sturdy, laughing boys; but he reasoned: Even if they wanted to be Jews I couldn’t get them out of the country. And if they preferred to remain Catholic how could I trust them to keep my secret? He decided to tell them nothing, unable to realize that his own flight must surely bring them before the Inquisition as his suspected accomplices.

Next he took another equally foolish step. He slipped down into the cellar, moved aside two stones and took out Diego Ximeno’s manuscript of the Zohar and a small seven-branched candelabrum, an heirloom menorah which Ximeno had given him on the day in 1522 when they had mutually confessed to being secret Jews. To try to smuggle these two items out of Spain, especially through the port of Seville, was madness, for detection would mean certain death, but he would not leave without them.

In the morning he kissed Maria and the boys good-bye, informing them that he had been called to Seville on medical matters, and at an inn along the way he coldly forged documents directing him to proceed to Egypt on behalf of the Crown to investigate medicines developed by the notable Spanish doctor, Maimonides, who had served the Fatimid Caliph in Cairo. A more clever man would have produced a document so perfect that it must look suspicious; Abulafia’s was so patently absurd, with the royal seal—transferred from another order—upside down, that it passed as honest.

In Seville he was nearly trapped three times: once at the inn where a suspicious clerk wanted to inspect his luggage and actually had the Zohar in his hands; once when he presented his forged sailing orders at the citadel; and finally when the Dominicans interrogated him, as they did all passengers, for final clearance. “Wasn’t this Maimonides a Jew?” they asked.

“Yes,” Abulafia replied, clenching his whole body to keep from trembling.
“Hundreds of years ago. But he is treasured as a Spaniard.”

“Why does the king want you to study Jewish medicine?”

“You know what they say about Maimonides. If the moon had consulted him, it wouldn’t have spots on its face.”

The Dominicans laughed. “Have you any Jewish blood?” they asked.

“None.”

“What are you carrying?”

“Medical books.” And thus he fled Spain.

As soon as his ship touched Tunis, Dr. Abulafia went ashore to find a butcher shop, where he slashed his outer garments and smeared them with blood. He paid a Muslim to carry the evidence back to the captain with word that the Spanish doctor had been stabbed by robbers and that his body lay somewhere at the bottom of the bay. He then carried his precious luggage to a small inn and waited nervously until he saw his ship sail back to Spain. His childish plot had worked.

He summoned the innkeeper and asked to borrow a pair of scissors and a candle, after which he locked the door to his room and broke the candle into seven parts. Placing them in Diego Ximeno’s menorah he lit them, prayed in Hebrew and symbolically washed the water of baptism from his head. Then with trembling hands he took the rusty scissors and started to circumcise himself. The first cuts were so unexpectedly painful, the rush of blood so sudden, that he came near to fainting. But he strengthened himself, whispering, “Fool! Think of Ximeno’s feet,” and with a fortitude that had not previously been tested, he proceeded with his commitment. In exultation he threw open his window, crying in a loud voice the sanctified prayer of Judaism, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Passers-by looked up at him as if he were a Jewish muezzin calling them to his mosque, and he shouted, “Ximeno, I am a Jew! I am a Jew!”

And after many years he came to Safed, bearing a book.

3

The third Jew who made the long pilgrimage to Safed came not from raw fear, like Rabbi Zaki, nor from a love of Kabbalism, like Dr. Abulafia; he came impelled by a force greater than either of those: the moral outrage of a man disgusted by his society.

In 1523 Germany represented an anomaly among the nations: Spain, Portugal, France and England, as rising national states, had expelled their Jews; but Germany, not to be united for several centuries, found no way to act as a unit and so began to accumulate those historic hatreds that were to erupt so savagely in later periods. For example, Cologne had expelled its Jews in 1426 but Frankfort had not. Augsburg, Nuremberg and Ulm had banished their Jews long ago, but the Rhineland city of Gretz, secure within its wall, still preserved a Judenstrasse where Jews were permitted to exist; and no resident of that quarter was more respected than Rabbi Eliezer bar Zadok, a descendant of the great family Hagarzi ha-Ashkenaz, whose ancestors had come from Babylonia as groats makers about a thousand years before. In 1523 Rabbi Eliezer was a tall, scholarly man who surprised strangers with his boyish jokes and love of good beer. At his wedding to
the prettiest Jewess in Gretz, Leah the weaver’s daughter, he astounded the Judenstrasse by dancing all night, drinking beer with any who would join him and then in the cold dawn leading a group of scholarly Jews to the synagogue, where he lectured on the Talmud till nightfall, never mispronouncing a word. Friends asked, “But what of the bride?” and he replied with an extraordinary smile, “Leah and I are married for eternity. One night spent dancing with friends, one day spent honoring the Talmud we shall never miss.”

He was the acknowledged leader of the Jewish community, the judge of the Judenstrasse. More than any other Jew in Gretz he was free to move about, and although he was forced to observe all normal laws governing Jewish quarters, he alone managed to accept them with a certain dignity. For example, although he was a tall man he was forced by law to wear a Jew-hat almost three feet high, conical in shape, red in color and with a brim twisted to form devil’s horns, so that when he moved about the city he could be identified as a Jew. He was also required to wear a coarse woolen coat “which must reach to within two inches of the earth,” and this gave him the figure of a witch and was an invitation for the rabble to chase him through the alleys; but Eliezer wore his coat with such dignity that on him it became a kind of uniform, honored by the man who wore it. In the middle of the coat’s back, like a target, was sewed a bright yellow ring signifying—as if additional signs were needed—that the wearer was a Jew, and the same ring, smaller in diameter, was repeated in front over the heart. It was this loathsome stigma that invited the Gentile community to despise even a dignified Jew like Rabbi Eliezer, for wherever he walked the yellow badge proclaimed, “Here comes a Jew!” The circle was interpreted by some to represent a coin, ridiculing the only profession allowed the Jews; but most knew it to be a reminder of the holy wafer used in communion, which Jews were accused of stealing to profane in their obscene rites. It was this symbol, more than any other infliction, which kept the Jew apart from honest people; and if boys threw stones at Jews, it was partly because the slowly moving circles made irresistible targets.

There were other irritations. Eliezer, as a rabbi, would normally have grown a long beard, but since beards were a sign of German respectability, he must keep his short. He was not allowed to walk near the cathedral, to be on the streets during Holy Week, to converse aloud where others could hear him during church services, or halt at any time to speak with children lest he lure them into apostasy. Worst of all, he was required both by law and by custom to live within the Judenstrasse, which in Gretz was a concentrated horror. In the twelfth century two rows of large houses had been erected for Christians, and because enmity had developed between the owners, a space was left between the rows, and here brawls used to occur. The authorities were forced to build two walls sealing the houses off from each other, thus creating an empty space, forty-four feet wide, into which had been squeezed two rows of Jew houses along an alley six feet across. On the street level the houses seemed almost to touch; but as more and more Jews were crowded into the area, each narrow house had to be built higher and higher until finally only a small section of sky was visible: the Judenstrasse was permanently in shadow, its rooms gasping for air and its inhabitants crowded beyond belief.

One end of the street was blocked by a house which rose five stories, cutting off the sun, while the other was guarded by a stout iron gate, above which rose
another house, so precious was the space. Thus the narrow area was closed at all points, and at dusk each day the iron gate clanged shut to be locked by a Christian guard whose salary the Jews were forced to pay. Inside the gate, where each Jew must see it daily, rose an obelisk commemorating a crime supposed to have been committed by the Jews of Trent some years before. Each of the four sides contained bas-reliefs showing details of how a saintly child had been tortured to death by hideous Jews in long cloaks, while above ran the legend: “Sacred to the memory of the Christian boy, Simon of Trent, whose body was used as a blood sacrifice by the Jews of that city in the year 1475, for which unnatural crime all the Jews of Trent were burned to death.” It was a solemn reminder of the volcanic passions that might erupt at any moment against Jews, made more poignant by the fact that sometime after the mass burning, it was proved beyond question that Simon had not been touched by the Jews, and that the whole affair must be excused as another unfortunate mistake.

In each narrow room of the Judenstrasse lived an average of six persons, so that the number of Jews in the city was not insignificant, but they were not allowed to work in the Christian areas of the city, nor to join any of the guilds where men worked as artisans, nor to buy or sell merchandise of any kind except amongst themselves, nor to engage in any kind of enterprise except moneylending, which the Church still forbade to Christians; and it was not unusual to see the Christian dignitaries of Gretz come furtively to the Judenstrasse money shops, seeking loans, and then some months later to lead the rabble in to kill the moneylenders, burn the account books, and thus erase all debts.

Apologists for the system pointed out: “Having the Jews assembled in one place affords them protection in case of trouble,” and perfectly sincere Christians who had never seen the incredible conditions believed this. They also argued: “Jews like to live in a Judenstrasse. They thrive on it, don’t they?” This reasoning was, in a perverse way, proved true by the Jews themselves, for when they found their families crowded into loathsome quarters, they adhered even more stringently to their strict sanitary laws, and at the same time Jewish medicine, which Christians ambivalently scorned and sought, protected them from many of the plagues which swept the free population. The Talmud itself had said: “No Jew may live in a city that lacks a good physician.”

In the middle of the Judenstrasse stood one narrow room, musty and cramped, the center of Rabbi Eliezer’s joy. It was his synagogue, and few houses of God have ever been so mean as this ugly little hovel in which the Jews of Gretz were forced to worship; it had no benches, no windows, no shelves for manuscripts. Jews who wished to pray sat on the floor, or, when the room was crowded, stood. There was a raised desk from which on Shabbat the rabbi’s uncle, Isaac Gottes Mann, read the Torah, and there was one small shred of adornment: in front of the cupboard where the scroll of Torah was kept, hung an embroidered cloth. And that was about all, except that in one corner, for use on weekdays, there stood a patched and rickety table more than a hundred years old, plus one chair and a candelabrum; it was here, day after day through the long years, that Rabbi Eliezer studied Talmud, endeavoring to identify the legal and moral bases of his faith. Among the Jews of Germany it was recognized that if he were permitted long life he must surely become one of Judaism’s luminaries.
In another corner of the synagogue was an area in which Rabbi Eliezer conducted school for the young boys of the Judenstrasse, and all under his care learned to read, for repeatedly he told parents, “Teach your son to read and you give him four arms.” To Eliezer it was offensive to use the synagogue in this way, for boyish recitations interrupted the reading of older scholars, but in all the Judenstrasse not one additional corner could be found.

It was not by preference that the Jews of Gretz occupied so mean a synagogue; under existing law they were allowed no better: “The Judenstrasse may contain a synagogue providing it be not large, nor so high as the cathedral, nor adorned in any way. Once built, it may never be changed in any detail, no matter how slight, without approval of the bishop.” The Jews did not like to see their learned rabbi studying at his rickety table, and some years ago had built him a better, but the guard at the iron gate had gotten wind of their move and had alerted the officials, who had confiscated the new table, fined the Jews and ordered the old one returned.

It was curious, Rabbi Eliezer reflected, that these degrading restrictions had originated not with civil legislators but with the Church. As he explained to his congregation: “The same religion which seeks to win us to its bosom through conversion also forces this Judenstrasse upon us to prove how merciful it is.”

Actually, in Gretz there was little attempt at conversion, for no Jew would leave the guidance of Rabbi Eliezer and no Christian would welcome him if he did. Centuries before, Gunter the Crusader, in his rough German manner, had summed up the local attitude about conversion: “A converted Jew is like chicken manure, hot when it leaves the bird but cold when it hits the ground.”

Furthermore, at this particular time in Gretz there was little reason for Jews to envy Christians, for the latter religion was shattered by contention. Though in 1517 the Jews had watched with indifference as Martin Luther, a monk who spoke Hebrew, launched his first shafts against the parent Church, now in 1523 a surge of hope sped through the Judenstrasse when Isaac Gottes Mann brought home a copy of Martin Luther’s first public statement regarding Jews.

“It’s unbelievable!” he cried as Jews assembled in the alley.

“What does he say?”

“He calls it Jesus Was Born a Jew. And I could not believe my eyes when I read it.” Carefully he recited the singing words:

“Our fools and jackasses, these priests, bishops, sophists and monks have treated the Jews in such a fashion that if a man wanted to become a true Christian he might better become a Jew. Were I a Jew and saw what blockheads and windbags rule and guide Christendom, I would rather become a sow than a Christian. For they have treated the Jews more like dogs than men. Yet the Jews are kith and kin and brothers-in-blood of our Saviour. If we are going to boast about the virtues of race, Christ belongs more to them than to us. To no other people has God shown such favor in entrusting them with His Holy Word.”

Isaac looked up, and the hope that he saw in the eager faces infected him and he cried, “May God give Luther victory! If he wins he will abolish the Judenstrasse,
because listen to what he says next: 'My advice, therefore, is to deal decently with this people. So long as we resort to violence and lies and slander, and so long as we forbid them to work and trade and mingle at our side, thereby forcing them into usury, how can we expect to win them or better them? If we wish to help them we must employ not Papist law but Christian love. We must give them a friendly hand, letting them work and thrive in our midst, in order that they may have reason and occasion to become of us and with us.'"

The compassionate words caught the imagination of the Jews, and one summed it all up: “He will let us work.”

But at this moment Rabbi Eliezer came through the iron gate, and seeing the crowd of people, joined them to hear the last words of the monk’s message. In him, too, a surge of hope rose, but being a cautious man he asked to see the pamphlet, and as he studied it in silence and tried to formulate a guess as to what had been in Luther’s mind as he wrote, he came to the sobering conclusion that the Jews would be wise not to pin their hopes too strongly to the Lutheran banner, and he said so.

“What do you mean?” Gottes Mann asked. “He says right here that Jews are to be treated like human beings.”

“Yes, he does,” Eliezer agreed.

“Then I think we should support him,” Isaac said, and his suggestion gained some support.

“False,” Eliezer objected.

“How can you say that?” his uncle asked. He was the principal moneylender and a man of prudence.

“We know the Church,” Eliezer replied. “And how it treats Jews. But we don’t know this monk, Martin Luther.”

“Read his words, Rabbi!” one of the men pleaded.

“I have,” the tall man replied, “and I know what Martin Luther means now, when he wants to use us against his own Church. But what will be his position if he wins? Will he not insist that we convert to his religion?”

At first Eliezer’s argument made no sense. As one Jew argued, “After this long night of oppression Martin Luther comes along and says, ‘In your treatment of Jews you are more like animals than Christians.’ I say, Trust Luther and hope for his triumph.”

“No,” Eliezer warned flatly, “there will be no support for Luther from the Jews of this city. We must not create a new opponent to supplant the old.”

He asked to borrow the pamphlet, and as he walked to the two tiny rooms in which he lived, airless and cramped, with his wife, his baby, his mother-in-law and two aunts, he felt certain that his decision was correct; but when he had gone over the pamphlet word by word he called his wife, and since she could not read, he read the words to her and watched as she sat with her hands clasping her knees, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; and at the end of the reading he asked, “What do you think of the message?”

“He says a lot that I like to hear,” she replied.

“But what does he mean?”

“I suppose that he has two things in mind. To use us now and to convert us later.”
“Exactly,” Eliezer cried. He had been married to Leah for two years, and his joy had not diminished. She was as perceptive as she was beautiful, and as affectionate with the people of the Judenstrasse as she was with her own son. She wore her hair parted in the middle and drawn down over her ears, so that her clear, bright face was framed in black. She had lived most of her life inside the locked gate of the quarter, for her father had wisely anticipated trouble if so lovely a Jewess were allowed to be seen by the young men of the city; and after her marriage to the rabbi, Eliezer had also asked her to stay close to home for the same reason. There had been many incidents in which attractive Jewish girls were raped or killed, and the authorities could find no way to punish the malefactors, principally because judges were reluctant to interpret rough play with Jewish girls as in any way criminal.

So for the next ten years Leah, the young rebbetzin of Eliezer bar Zadok, knew only the Judenstrasse, and here she shed a kind of radiance which made the narrow street livable. She was not a midwife, but most pregnant women wanted her to be with them during the toils of childbirth, and she had helped many. She was gifted with the needle, and in the semi-darkness of the Judenstrasse homes she taught young girls how to care for their fathers’ clothes. Best of all she had a vivid imagination and loved to tell old stories about the heroes of Judaism, and mothers of the narrow street grew to expect their children to be at Rabbi Eliezer’s, listening to the rebbetzin as she embroidered fabulous backgrounds to stories which in the Bible required only a few sentences.

“Now you must not think that Jael was any ordinary wife,” Eliezer heard her saying one day as more than a dozen children listened. “Oh no! She was tall and she had red hair, and when she was no older than you she went into the Sinai Desert and tamed a lion, for she was never afraid. She knew how to weave and had many dresses of red and gold and blue, and she found colored stones to make for herself a necklace. Believe me, when Jael was married to Heber it was one of the biggest weddings you’ve ever seen. People came from villages far distant. They rode on horses and on camels, and Jael’s younger sister—she was about your age—came riding on the tame lion, and some of the guests had to walk for three days to get to the wedding.”

“Were they allowed to leave the Judenstrasse?” a boy asked.

“Moishe!” she cried. “In those days we had no locked streets or iron gates. Don’t you know how we lived then? We had beautiful villages under the open sky, and palm trees bending with dates, and men like your father had horses on which they rode for miles along green fields. Maybe your father, Rachab, would have tended bees, and wherever he went on his white mule there were flowers, and in the woods there were lions for brave men to hunt, and at the edge of the desert there were camels which you could ride—if you were clever enough to catch them. And everywhere there was beauty. The lakes... the lakes were so big you could not possibly walk around them, and a man named Nethaneeel had a boat on one of the lakes, and after the wedding he took all the children on the lake for a boat ride.”

Rabbi Eliezer studied quietly in a corner of the room, and after a while one of the older girls who wore pigtailed asked, “But why did Jael take a hammer and drive a nail into Captain Sisera’s head?” The rabbi leaned forward to catch his wife’s explanation, for the Talmud taught that Jael, in order to trick her enemy,
engaged with him in seven acts of sexual intercourse, after which she drove a nail through his skull.

“If I explained to you now, Miriam, you could not possibly understand. So believe me when I say that Jael was one of the gentlest women of the Jews. Tell me, Miriam, do you think that a woman who could tame a lion would be other than gentle?”

“What does a camel look like?” one of the little boys asked.

“You've never seen a camel?” Leah cried. “It’s got fur like a lion and a tail like a tiger and four fast feet like a horse, and big teeth that tear down the tops of trees, and it sleeps in a little ball, like a kitten. You should have seen Jael and her husband Heber and their children when they rode on camels through the flowers. They would wave to people on the lake, and in the evening they would have dances in great open spaces under the stars. Did you really think that in the old days we proud Jews lived in narrow alleys like this?”

Frequently Rabbi Eliezer felt tempted to halt his wife’s storytelling, for later the children would have to unlearn most of what she told them, but he never spoke to her about it. For later when the children grew up and married and went to live in the corner of some crowded room, to have their own children who would know only the Judenstrasse, it was desirable that they had at one time known of open spaces and self-respect; and the errors did no harm, for later they would remember only that Jael was a heroic woman who had killed a man in order to save Israel.

But the day came when even Eliezer realized that he must put a stop to his rebbezin’s wild storytelling, for as he sat on his bed one morning, apparently reading, he heard Leah telling the wide-eyed children, “The ark Moses found in the desert was as long as this house and twice as big, all covered with gold like Gottes Mann’s cane, and in it he put the tables of the law and carried them for forty years across the desert. The desert?” She paused. “It’s as big as all the land from here to the city wall, flat and with lovely grass growing out of the sand, and flowers as far as you can see. And each night it grows a loaf with dark crust beside each flower, and in this way God kept his Jews alive for forty years.”

“What happened to the ark?” a boy asked, imagining himself on the flowering desert.

“It was lost,” the rebbezin said, smoothing her hair back from her forehead, “and we were all sorry. We wept. We tore our clothes. And then one day King David found it, tucked away in a small village, and he was so happy that he began to dance and to sing and to drink great mugs of beer. And he danced all night. And as he danced what do you suppose he did?”

“Kissed the girls?” Miriam in pigtails asked.

“Yes. He did that too. But he also composed more than a hundred psalms of joy.” It was at this point that Rabbi Eliezer felt obligated to halt his wife, but for some reason he did not do so, and Miriam asked, “Is it true, Rebbetzin, what my mother says? That on your wedding night your husband danced all night?”

“Oh yes!” the rebbezin said. “When we Jews lived freely, under the open sky, with the flowers of the desert about us, we danced all the time. It’s only here that we've forgotten, Miriam, and when the rabbi danced at our wedding he was restoring the days of King David.”
And Rabbi Eliezer looked above the heads of the little children and saw his wife looking at him with love, and he said unexpectedly, “Children, you must go home now,” and when they had left he sent his son from the crowded room too, and he embraced Leah as if it were the first time he had been alone with her. “You are my lovely psalmist,” he whispered. “In your distorted and contrary way you bring me truth.” He kissed her ardently and felt her cool hair tumbling about his face, and from the crowded alley they could hear the cries of children.

In late 1533, as a result of this tender interruption, it came Leah’s turn to summon the midwife, and a girl was born named Elisheba, and now with two children of her own Leah was hardly ever seen without a cluster of young ones about her heels, and almost every day she had to tell them another story from the Hebrew past: of Samson and the far fields he had owned, where a man could ride in any direction for days without coming to the boundaries; and of Miriam, the great dancer, who had an orchestra of maybe seventy musicians and not less than sixteen different costumes; and finally of a shepherd boy named Samuel, who used to wander along paths that took him through fields and into forests and along lakes and across a land that was memorable. Whenever Leah told her stories children were able to visualize their Promised Land.

These were the happiest years that the Judenstrasse of Gretz ever knew, and none of the inhabitants had greater cause for joy than Rabbi Eliezer and his wife. His congregation was attentive to his leadership, and conflict within the quarter was scarcely known. His family constituted an almost ideal Jewish home, except that now four additional people from another family were cramped into the back room. He had no space to study, but he could always retreat to the synagogue and the rickety table with its candle and Talmud.

But in 1542 Isaac the moneylender came forth with a proposal: “I have made profits and would like to contribute a new synagogue to the Judenstrasse, one of which we could be proud.”

Rabbi Eliezer rebuked him: “The city law says we must live with the synagogue we have.”

“The new one could have benches,” Isaac argued, “and a study place for you. It would be a credit to the Lord.”

Eliezer argued against the proposal, telling the would-be donor to give his funds to the poor, but Isaac pointed out that in the present period of religious uncertainty the town burghers might be more lenient. So against his better judgment Eliezer went before them and announced, “The Jews of Gretz request permission to build a cleaner synagogue.”

He got his answer quickly: “It would be an insult to the city, and would constitute a challenge to the supremacy of the cathedral. Since the Jews must already have the money in hand to commit this sacrilege, we hereby fine the Judenstrasse a sum equal to the cost of building a new synagogue.”

Rabbi Eliezer had to protest the unfairness of this fine, and the city elders turned their wrath on him: “And for his contumacy, the rabbi of the Judenstrasse is to be tried for opposing the operation of holy law, because the Bible says that Christians were abused in the synagogue, hence it must be an abomination of wickedness.”

A court was convened and Eliezer was summoned to trial, but Church officials
protested that no Jew could properly swear to tell the truth, especially not on the Bible, which they denied, so an ancient Germanic custom was invoked, and into the court was hauled the bloody hide of a freshly killed pig. The rabbi was required to cast off his shoes and stockings and to stand barefooted in the pig’s bloody skin and repeat, “May the skin of this pig envelop me if I lie, may its meat choke my mother, may the head of the pig be transformed into the head of my daughter and may the swinish blood be smeared upon the foreheads of my children for three generations if I do not tell the truth.”

Rabbi Eliezer, who had taught himself to read seven languages, stepped like a criminal onto the pigskin and swore. The officials then required him to repeat after them the routine confession: “I am a filthy Jew whose people crucified the true Christ. I am a wanderer who has no home save where the benevolence of the Church provides one. I am evil and corrupt and an abomination to all men. I poison wells, spread the plague and kill Christian children for their blood. My women are whores and my fate is everlasting hell, for I am the enemy of the Church and of all good Christians.”

Next Rabbi Eliezer publicly admitted that this description accurately characterized him, after which he was required to attest, on the blood of the pig in whose skin he stood, that he came before the court not as a rabbi, the leader of a congregation, for to admit the presence of such leadership might be interpreted as acknowledging the lawful presence of Jews, but as a man alone, asking for an intemperate request. He was forced to kneel down, placing both hands in the pig’s blood, and he did so.

Not only was the denial of a new synagogue confirmed, but the synagogue already standing in the Judenstrasse was ordered to be torn down, since it was a source of evil and an offense to Christ. And as penance for his personal effrontery Rabbi Eliezer would be required next Shabbat to kiss the hind end of the Sow of Gretz in front of the assembled citizenry.

Defiled and torn in spirit the rabbi returned to the Judenstrasse and informed his Jews that they were about to lose their synagogue. In the narrow alley he announced, “It is a judgment upon us because of our arrogance. When will we learn, O Israel, that we serve the Lord not in buildings but in our hearts? The sin is upon us, not upon them who destroy the building. The lamentations are ours, for we caused them with our vanity. When the building is torn down we shall all watch, and we shall wear mourning, for the sin is upon us.”

He went to the ritual bath to cleanse himself of the defilement he had suffered in the Christian court, but as he lay in the consoling waters he heard children shouting, “Here come the men with the axes!” He reached the street in time to see a score of workmen start their demolition of the synagogue. With crowbars they ripped down the door and with fire borrowed from the kitchen of a Jewish home they started a conflagration into which they threw the door, Eliezer’s old table and the rickety chair. The raised desk from which the Torah was read they pitched into the flames and then Eliezer watched with dismay as they tore down the embroidered covering of the cupboard and tossed it irreverently onto the fire; it was as if they had thrown a woman there, for the fragile cloth was beautiful, and a man tried to rescue it but was driven back.

Then Eliezer’s dismay became unbelieving tragedy when the workmen ripped
down the cupboard and shook it to dislodge the parchment scroll of Torah. As the holy book rolled in the dust, the destroyers kicked it toward the flames. Deftly one of the men caught the scroll with his toe and lofted it in a graceful arc so that it fell into the fire, where flames quickly reached for the sheepskin and consumed it.

From the Jews came a long wail: “God of Moses, take back your Torah!” And they began to rend their garments as if death had visited that place, and Rabbi Eliezer, tearing his long-coat, prayed aloud, reciting from the Psalms of David: “Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.” Thus in their moment of humiliation he tried to console his people, but in the midst of his prayer his voice dried up, not from fear and not because of the flame, but because from the synagogue the workmen had brought the precious scrolls of the Talmud, and these rare books they now threw into the laughing fire.

A young boy whom Eliezer had been teaching the Talmud saw the precious works strike the flame, and he was so desirous of knowing the secrets of these books that he broke away from his mother and tried to rescue them. He rummaged among the brands, clutching futilely at the parchments, and the Christians, seeing that he could accomplish nothing, indulged him; but at last the flames drove him back and he stood beside the rabbi, not yet aware that his hands were badly charred. “Be not thou far from me, O Lord,” Eliezer prayed. “O my strength, haste thee to help me.” And the men with the axes worked on.

When the fires were burned down, when the charred hands of the would-be scholar were bound, Rabbi Eliezer stood looking at the gutted synagogue, recalling those wintry nights when candles had lighted the faces of old men studying the Talmud and those bright, hopeful Shabbat mornings when frightened boys of thirteen had stood before their elders to announce in piping voices, “Today I am a man.” Where now would the old men read, where now would the young proclaim? He looked with affection at the roof, to which each year for many centuries the storks had come in spring from the Holy Land, to the gaping door at which travelers had always found a welcome, and at the hollow interior, where generations of Jews had learned the principles by which men can live together in harmony. This synagogue had been a force for great good in Gretz, and in destroying it the Christians had weakened themselves.

With these gloomy thoughts Rabbi Eliezer went slowly home like a man walking knee-deep in ashes, and there he found his wife sitting calmly among the children, sharing with them the only lasting reality the Jews had ever known: “In those days we owned a city on a hill to which men of every kingdom were welcomed in friendship. Jerusalem it was called, and inside its walls King Solomon built not a small synagogue but a temple standing upon an open space so great you could not walk around it. Not two of you together, Moishe starting at one end and Rachel at the other, could have run around that field in a whole day. There were trees with birds in them, and camels watering themselves beside the cool streams. It was a temple so beautiful that King Hiram of Tyre sent down a shipload of two hundred people to inspect it and tell him if it was as beautiful as the temples of Tyre; and two of his men cried, ‘Put out my eyes so that I need not tell the king that I have seen this perfect thing.’ and two other men said, ‘Let us stay in the land of the Jews, for we would be afraid to tell our king how great their temple is,’ and two
other men, very important men in the city of Tyre, said, ‘Give us brooms that we
may stay here the rest of our lives and sweep this temple, it is so beautiful.’ And in
that way King Hiram lost six good men.”

“Were there stables for the horses?” a boy asked.

“Not in the temple itself,” Leah explained, “but along the edges of the fields
nearby there were many stables filled with swift horses, and boys and girls like
you used to mount the horses and ride swiftly... Oh, you rode so swiftly over the
meadows and down the roads and when you came to a brook you would lean
forward like this and spur your horse and ... Oh!” Leah threw her hands in the air.
“You and the horse flew over the brook and you landed safely on the other side
and you rode on and on in the free air and after a long while you stopped and
turned your horses around—and what do you suppose you saw?”

“The temple?” a boy asked.

“Yes,” she said.

Rabbi Eliezer sat on a chair in the corner and buried his face. Leah, seeing him,
thought that he might be weeping and she asked the children to go out and play,
but Christian horses had been led into the narrow street to cart away the
remnants of the synagogue, so she hid the noisy children in another home, that
they might not witness the desecration, and then rejoined her husband.

He was not weeping. Rabbi Eliezer was not the kind of man to weep, but he did
sometimes feel upon his shoulders a force greater than he could struggle with, and
now he felt it, and seeing him thus his wife burst into tears. “Our lovely, lovely
synagogue,” she cried. It had been a travesty of a place of worship, an obscene
hovel, really, but it had been too large for the Gentiles to tolerate, and now it was
gone. “O God of Israel, what did we do wrong?” she wept.

Coldly, because he did not dare set loose his thoughts, the rabbi said, “On
Shabbat they are repeating the obscenity of kissing the Sow’s rump.”

“You?” she asked in an ashen voice.

“Yes.”

“No!” she screamed, and flung herself on the floor, clutching at his knees. “No!
No!”

He smoothed her hair and began to laugh. “Yes, your husband. On Shabbat at
noon. And you and all the Jews of Gretz will be there to watch. For me it will not
be a humiliation, but for the men who have ordered it, yes.”

She looked up at her husband and he was strangely composed. She rose from
the floor and sat beside him, asking, “What shall we do about the synagogue?”

“We will make this room our synagogue,” he explained, and he sent her into the
street to ask the Jews to join him in prayer; and when the men were jammed in he
recited from memory one of the great passages of the Torah, for in the community
there was no longer a copy: “This is the promise of Moses our Teacher: ‘If from
thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him
with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these
things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy
God and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) he
will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy
fathers which he sware unto them.”

On Shabbat, when they should have been in synagogue, the Jews in their tall
red hats, long cloaks and yellow circles were marched through the iron gate of the Judenstrasse and up to the front of the cathedral, where they faced two of the most artistic stone statues in Europe, the *Triumph of Church over Synagogue*. To the left of the entrance stood the Church Triumphant, a graceful woman of exquisite features standing at rest and bearing in her right hand a stave adorned by banners, and in her left a cross topped by a crown of thorns. The excellence of the carving was demonstrated in her face, but the spirit of the Church as it showed in her eyes and firm chin was not peaceful, but condemnatory; not marked by conciliatory grace, but harsh and unforgiving.

The coldness of the statue was understandable, for it looked across the great entrance of the cathedral to a similar statue representing the Synagogue Defeated, and this woman was not beautiful. Her eyes were blindfolded and her mournful, humiliated head was bowed. In her right arm she carried a broken spear with no triumphal banners, and in her left a most curious object. It was the two-part stone tablet of Moses on which God had given him the law, but in this case the stones were broken, and the entire figure of the synagogue was one of desolation. Rabbi Eliezer, as always, studied only the broken tablets of Moses and wondered: What theology could construct a theory that a new Church could be built upon the destruction of all which had made that Church morally strong? Do they think they rescind the law of Moses by shattering his tablets?

His tormentors that day had little thought for the law of Moses, nor for anything else except the hearty horseplay of the Middle Ages, preserved in Germany long after it had vanished elsewhere; for after a perfunctory sermon which reminded the Jews of the merciful quality of the Church, they were herded to the northern side of the cathedral, where a robust statue more famous than either that of the Church or of the Synagogue at the entrance had been set into the wall. It was the notorious Sow of Gretz, and now as the populace saw the Jews herded before it, shouts of joy and festivity filled the old city.

The Sow of Gretz was a huge recumbent stone pig of evil visage lying on her side with some two dozen teats exposed. At half the stations little stone devils with amusing tails and saucy horns fed, while at the remaining teats Jews in disgraceful caricature feasted, the intended concept being that from the poisonous sow of Judaism all Jews sucked in contamination from the day of birth. If the carving had ended there it could have been accepted as rather vigorous religious homily, suited to the rougher tastes of an earlier day; but on the right-hand side of the statue the argument became more vicious. Here a devil lifted the tail of the sow to show to a Jewish rabbi the origin of the Talmud, for from the anus of the beast could be seen projecting the edge of the Jewish book, while the bowels ejected a heavy stream of defecation which struck the stone rabbi in the face. Throughout the centuries it had become customary for the Christian children of Gretz to paint the lines of defecation yellow and to continue the coloring across the face of the rabbi.

“For his arrogance the rabbi will now kiss the hind end of the Sow,” an official announced, and Eliezer was led to the rear of the statue and forced to bow down. But as he did so his revulsion was so great that he jerked backward and his tall hat fell off, and there was a scream of protest from the populace. “Hat, hat!” they shouted, and he was directed to replace it, but as he returned to the Sow the hat
again fell off, so an official produced a string with which he tied the hat to Eliezer's ears. The crowd cheered.

Now the rabbi prepared to kiss the Sow's rump, and as he bent down he found that pranksters had smeared the statue with real excrement, and those in the crowd who knew what had been done giggled with knowing delight; but he kissed the Sow and then instinctively wiped his lips. The crowd protested, and officials decreed that he must perform his obeisance again without wiping his lips, and he complied.

That night he assembled in his home-synagogue some of the leaders of the Jewish community and read them a letter which had circulated secretly in Germany for some years. It had been written by a Jew from Gretz who had escaped the Judenstrasse and made his way to Turkey:

In the realm of the Grand Turk even the poorest Jew can live like a human being. Constantinople lacks nothing, and is one of the finest cities in the world. I dress as I please and wear no special mark. My children do the same and are not beaten on the streets. We have built a fine synagogue, and one of our men is counselor to the sultan. Any man who can work is welcomed by the Turk.

“I think we should go,” Rabbi Eliezer said.
“You're agitated by the dirty business of the Sow,” Isaac Gottes Mann argued. “They didn't humiliate you, Eliezer.”
“I cannot even remember that I kissed the Sow,” Eliezer honestly replied. “But I do remember the looks of hatred on the German faces. It is for their sakes that we should leave.”
“Why do you worry about the Germans?”
“If we cause such hatred in Catholic hearts, then we should go,” Eliezer replied simply.
“Those people today?” Isaac countered. “If they didn’t hate us they’d find somebody else.”
“I no longer want to be the cause of Christians’ committing sin,” Eliezer said, and his wife noticed that in three sentences he had moved the argument upward from German to Catholic to Christian; and when the men argued further, he said firmly, “I will not live with my brother if I cause him to outrage God.” Leah thought: This great, good man, constantly he lifts matters up to where they truly rest.

There was a change in the discussion when Isaac, still hopeful that the Jew would find an honorable place in Germany, argued, “The dominance of the Church over us is limited, Eliezer. Before long Gretz may be a Lutheran city,” and spurred by these words the Jews in the crowded synagogue reopened the speculation begun twenty years earlier at the publication of Luther's conciliatory letter on the Jews: Was there a possibility that a new kind of Christianity might replace the old?
“We must pray for the triumph of Luther,” one of the hopeful Jews reasoned. “In all parts of Germany he is humiliating the Church, and with his victory our freedom will come.”
A matter of real hope had been raised, a breath of fresh air sweeping down the centuries of persecution and entering even the crushed houses of the Gretz Judenstrasse. No Jew dared openly say that he prayed for the downfall of his ancient oppressor, for the Church had proved remorseless in its punishment of renegades, but it was agreed against Rabbi Eliezer’s advice to wait a little longer; and that night when the congregation had departed, even Leah whispered, “We should not go to Turkey, husband. Our children are happy here and we have a good life.” But Eliezer knew that she was not right. No life that involved the hatreds he had seen that day, even though no man had been killed or no house burned, could possibly be termed good.

“Leah,” he said sharply, “it’s proper for you to create the dreams of children and to tell them of open fields, but don’t tell your husband that this rotten life is good.” He pointed at the bedroom in which he stood. “A synagogue of half a room, in which the rabbi sleeps.”

Leah replied, “I am hoping that some day things may be better.”

“The Jews of Germany always hope,” he said harshly, kicking his bed into position.

Leah took him by the hands and asked, “Eliezer, tell me the truth. Why are you determined to leave?”

He thought for a moment, then said, “Because to live as we do in the Judenstrasse is a moral outrage.”

The simple truth stunned Leah and she said quietly, “I shall go with you.”

Cryptically Eliezer added, “We may have to leave very soon. The books of the Jews are being burned, and unless my work is done quickly they may perish.”

Then in 1543 even optimistic Jews like Isaac Gottes Mann learned what the future was to be, for Martin Luther, their one-time champion against the Church, turned on them with a fury that only a sage like Rabbi Eliezer could have predicted. Having tried vainly to convert the stiff-necked Jews to Lutheranism, and having found them as obdurate against Protestants as they had been against Catholics, Luther surrendered all hope for them and lashed out in rantings that came close to monomania or downright idiocy. “Well-poisoners, ritual murderers, spreaders of the plague, practicers of black magic” were some of the milder forms he flung at them. Jewish bankers, he said, stole the life-blood of the community while Jewish doctors poisoned Gentile patients. Synagogues must be destroyed, the Torah burned wherever it could be found, homes torn down brick by brick and Jews sent into the fields to live like Gypsies. “I would threaten to rip their tongues from their throats,” said the prince of Protestantism, “if they do not accept the proof that God is three and not one,” and he urged all God-fearing men to hound the Jews like wild beasts from the land.

It was a shattering blow, the final closing of the door, for these charges would reverberate along the Rhine for centuries, finding voice at last in strange and hideous quarters. So that night Rabbi Eliezer announced to his family, “Tomorrow we start for Turkey.”

“Do you know where it is?” the rebbetzin asked.

“We shall go up the Rhine,” he replied, “cross over into Hungary, and go down the Danube to the capital of the Grand Turk.” And only his wife could visualize the terror and loneliness encompassed in those words.
But Eliezer could not leave Gretz without discharging a final obligation to his community, and to that end he assembled the leaders in his narrow room, saying, “I think you ought to leave Germany now. Those who cannot risk the long journey to Constantinople should move on to Poland, where there is freedom.”

This suggestion was greeted with protest, so he added, “I know how deeply you love Germany and how you hope one day to find peace here. Isaac Gottes Mann has consented to become the leader of those who stay behind, and under him may you find the peace you seek.”

“Reconsider!” Gottes Mann begged his nephew. “This madness will pass and we Jews will know centuries of wonderful accomplishment in this beautiful land, for we are Germans.”

“I feel myself charged with saving the soul of Judaism,” Rabbi Eliezer said, and next morning he was off. But as he led his family for the last time through the iron gate his rebbetzin looked back with longing at the little children who were weeping to see her go, and she uttered the lament of all Jewish mothers who left the ghettos which they had tried to make endurable; “Our little street, what a kingdom of love it was.”

When the family of Bar Zadok approached the border of Germany they were overtaken by a gang of men on horseback who noticed the beauty of the two women, Leah and Elisheba, then nearing eleven, and they began to molest them, so that the rabbi and his son had to defend their womenfolk against the horsemen, who shouted, “Let’s have fun with the Jewesses!” A heavy fight ensued, with the men lashing out at the four Jews and finally knocking Leah to the ground.

When Eliezer saw his wife fall he leaped at one of the assailants, caught him by the leg and tried to pull him from his mount; but the others rode back furiously and their horses trampled the fallen Leah so badly that she died. With anguish greater even than he had ever known, Rabbi Eliezer buried his wife and led his children toward Hungary.

In that country the rabbi’s son fell ill, and there was no money to buy his cure, and he, too, died. But after a long time the tall scholar and his daughter Elisheba came to Safed.

The Tell

“Jesus Christ!” Cullinane cried, bursting from sleep and finding himself bolt upright in bed at three in the morning. He was covered with sweat, and the vision he had been having of the two trees remained as clear as the stars shining through his tent.

The first tree he had seen as Major Cullinane, flying his bomber into the Atsugi air base in Japan at the end of World War II. One March morning at an inn where he had taken a charming Japanese girl he had lain in his bed after a session of exquisite love-making and had idly spotted a cherry tree which an early warm breeze had teased into sending forth the first flowers of spring. It had been a different kind of tree from those he had known in America: a huge, gnarled trunk
several feet across and apparently dead, except that from it sprang one splendid branch which was vitally alive and about to be covered with flowers.

"Why don't they cut the old tree down?" he had asked the girl.

"Cut?" she had echoed in disbelief. "I bring you here... the best tree in Japan... very famous." And with gestures she had explained that the Japanese prize such a tree above all others, for it reminds the viewer that it is ancient and near death, but that one powerful strain of life still pulsates through the bark; and as he had lain there, enjoying the girl and the quiet inn and the old tree, he had caught something of the spirit of Japan and its strange values.

"In America," he had said, "any self-respecting farmer would cut down an old crock like that. But I see what you mean."

Later the same girl had taken him to the bonsai mart in Tokyo, where he had seen dwarf trees, sixteen inches tall and two hundred years old; and his pleasure in their beauty had been so evident that she had taken him to her uncle’s, and for the first time he had become aware that she was not a prostitute but a sensitive girl with a college education, caught up in the aftermath of an imperial war. And she had shown him her uncle’s bonsai, famous in Japan—a dwarf cherry tree more than three hundred years old, with a trunk even more dilapidated than the one at the inn. It was almost hollow, black and lifeless, with numerous holes worn through it where branches had once grown; and again one single bright limb flourished, covered with blossoms.

"It’s a miracle," the old man had said, "the foundation and the flower."

The second tree he had found at Makor, that very old olive, a gaunt, dismembered relic whose trunk existed only as a dead cavity surrounded by fragments of life, but like the cherry in Japan this patriarchal thing—perhaps two thousand years old—sent forth from its always-dying body persistent branches of great beauty, and they bore fruit. On first seeing this miraculous olive he had not remembered the cherry in Japan, but one day in August while sitting beneath its branches and trying to evoke the Makor of Emperor Vespasian, he happened to look at the tree in a new way, and he had snapped his fingers, crying, “It’s just like that cherry tree Tomiko showed me in Japan.” He had remembered the girl’s name, and the inn, and her uncle’s bonsai.

Now, in the dark tent at Makor, he remained sitting in bed and saw the two ancient trees before his eyes, plus a conceptual vision as clear as the diagram in a book. He thought: I was raised to believe that the Old Testament was dead, and that whatever it contained worth saving had been transplanted into the New. In the same way I was taught that Judaism was dead, except for a few obstinate Jews, and that true religion had been handed on to the Christian church, which had produced a flowering.

He shook his head, as if he had been knocked dizzy, but the two trees remained before him, and they represented the modified view of religion which he had been developing without having consciously verbalized it: We have the great, primitive trunk of Judaism and we also have the branch-tip flowering of Christianity, and I intuitively thought that the first was dead and that all life had passed into the second. I never really considered whether the Christian church had direct roots into the soil or not. If anyone had told me that the flowering branch had no roots except those which extended through the forbidding old trunk of Judaism, I’d not
have known what he was saying. But now I see.

He was fascinated by the persistence of his vision and was amused when he reconstructed how the trees had come to him. He had gone to sleep thinking of Vered Bar-El in Chicago and this had led to an erotic dream about Tomiko, probably the most exciting girl he had ever known—or it may have been that he was younger then—and she had passed naked into the old trunk of the cherry tree, and it in turn had become the olive tree under which Jesus could have sat; and in this way he had come to the question of God. It sneaks up on you in the damnedest places, he mused, and the trees slowly vanished, but their enigma remained.

Freed of the vision he tried to sleep but found this impossible, and in the dark hours before birds sang he thought of the work he was doing. Until Makor he had never seriously considered the merits of Judaism. He had not understood how anyone could find in the stalwart obstinacy of the Jews a way of life, nor had he approved the awkward procedure of the synagogue with its lack of harmony and appeal to the senses. It seemed to Cullinane—and in this he was without rancor or blind adherence to his own faith—that the Christian church had brought to the religious experience an extraordinary beauty and a personal involvement that far exceeded what he had found in Judaism. It was like comparing, he thought, a beautiful singing young woman filled with life to an old woman...

He choked. There, by God, it was! The stony, unyielding religion he had been unable to understand deserved all the unfavorable descriptions he had given it; but it was also like the old woman, knowledgeable, patient, immortal and close to God. He closed his eyes and saw again the olive tree of Makor: so terribly powerful, so close to the soil, and old, old, old, with holes through it and emptiness and a forbidding sense of time. Yet it was alive.

Remaining in a sitting position he took a hard look at himself and asked: After this digging in the heart of religion, what do I honestly think of Judaism? And because he was a bookish man his conclusions centered on three books: Judaism was an unresilient, gnarled body of primordial belief founded on the Torah; plus a Talmudic ritual equally unyielding but very efficient in providing man with specific guidance; and the Zohar. This trio of books, Torah, Talmud, Zohar, had produced a unified religion with tremendous powers for survival; in fact, the religion seemed to have a built-in determination to survive, for throughout history, whenever its contemporary form had seemed doomed, some new primitive force had evolved which had given the religion another thrust forward. Even the dates of these thrusts were significant, Cullinane thought. By the year 1100 B.C.E. the characteristics of Old Testament Judaism had been fairly well evolved, and to a surprising degree it had existed unchanged for about thirteen hundred years, when in the years following the final destruction of the Jewish state, say, around 200 C.E., the Talmud began to take shape. The period of Talmudic domination had lasted for another thirteen hundred years until around 1500 C.E., when the Kabbala of Spain was transported to the heights of Safed, where it suddenly exploded in a mystical radiance which spread throughout the Jewish world with enough vitality to keep the spirit of Judaism alive for another thirteen hundred years, say, until the year 2800 C.E. What the Jews will come up with then, Cullinane mused, is no concern of mine.
Again he lay down and tried to sleep, but he could not, so he asked himself: If I had to characterize Judaism in simple terms for someone who knew nothing about it, what words would I use? And almost against his willing it to be so, the symbolism of the olive tree returned and he replied: Ancient, gnarled, unresilient, a powerful religion which takes man back to his fundamental nature and experience. He laughed. In two thousand six hundred years Judaism had been able to accept only two changes, the Talmud and the Kabbala, whereas Christianity, with masterful resiliency, had spun off a dozen staggering modifications whenever the spirit of the times demanded: trinitarianism, transubstantiation, the infallibility of the Pope, the near-deification of Mary. There lay the difference between the two religions; there lay the explanation of why Christianity had conquered the world while Judaism remained the intransigent, primordial religion of the few.

“Hey, Eliav!” he called. “You still asleep?” There was no reply, proving that Eliav was still sleeping and would no doubt wish to remain so, but in spite of this Cullinane crossed over to Eliav’s bed and shook him.

“You asleep?”

“No, I’m awake.”

“I can’t sleep. I’ve been hammering at some ideas and I’d like to try them out on you.”

“Shoot.” Eliav sat up and grabbed his knees to his chest, while the Irishman sat on the foot of his bed. Only moonlight illuminated the tent, and the men spoke in low voices so as not to disturb Tabari.

“I’ve been perplexed…” He hesitated, as if in embarrassment. “By a matter of religion.”

“Why not? We’ve been digging in it for long enough.”

“And I wondered what a believing Jew…”

“Don’t look at me. I’m no orthodox rabbi, spending his time in the synagogue.”

“I’m no priest, spending his time at mass.”

“You mean,” Eliav suggested, “that we’re both illiterates?”

“Exactly, except that it’s people like us who keep the thing moving.”

“Agreed.”

“So let me ask it again. What does an average, non-orthodox Jew like you think of the parallel development of Judaism and Christianity?”

Eliav let go his knees and leaned backward on his pillow, thought for some time, then drew himself forward and said, “I’ve always thought that classical Judaism was about ready for a new infusion sometime around the year 100 C.E. The old patterns were ready to be enlarged. For proof, look at the concepts we get from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Or the development of the Talmud. So I’ve never resented the eruption of Christianity. The world was ready for it.”

“Why?”

“Possibly because Judaism was a hard, tough old religion that didn’t give the individual enough free play. It could never have appealed to the world at large. The bright, quixotic religion of Christianity was ideally suited for such a proselytizing need.”

“Is brightness the difference between the two?” Cullinane pressed.

“Partly. Because, you see, when Judaism did reform by means of the Talmud it
went backward toward its own nature. It became harder and more irresponsible to modern change, whereas the Christian church moved forward psychologically, and in a time of wild change an organism that is retracting has less chance than one which is expanding.”

“Seems to me it was unfortunate for Judaism that in the years of decision you had the inward-looking rabbis, whereas we Christians had outward-looking church fathers.”

“Right there you beg the question,” Eliav said slowly. “You say you were lucky that in the critical years between 100 and 800 CE. Christianity went forward, and we were unlucky that during the same years Judaism went backward. Don’t you see that the real question is forward to what, backward to what?”

Cullinane reflected for a moment and said, “By God, I do! That’s what’s been bugging me without my knowing it, because I hadn’t even formulated the question.”

“My thought is that in those critical years Judaism went back to the basic religious precepts by which men can live together in a society, whereas Christianity rushed forward to a magnificent personal religion which never in ten thousand years will teach men how to live together. You Christians will have beauty, passionate intercourse with God, magnificent buildings, frenzied worship and exaltation of the spirit. But you will never have that close organization of society, family life and the little community that is possible under Judaism.

Cullinane, let me ask you this: Could a group of rabbis, founding their decisions on Torah and Talmud, possibly have come up with an invention like the Inquisition—an essentially anti-social concept?”

Now it was Cullinane who rocked back and forth, and after a while he confessed, “I’m afraid that in those days we did treat you rather badly.”

Eliav groaned. “Why do Christians always use that marvelous euphemism, ‘treated rather badly’? John, your Inquisition burned to death more than thirty thousand of our best Jews. I read the other day that a leading German had confessed that his nation had ‘treated the Jew rather badly.’ He had fallen back upon this inoffensive term to cover the destruction of a people. Judaism would simply not permit its rabbis to come up with solutions like that. Judaism can be understood, it seems to me, only if it is seen as a fundamental philosophy directed to the greatest of all problems: how can men live together in an organized society?”

“I would have thought,” Cullinane suggested, “that the real religious problem is always ‘How can man come to know God?’”

“There’s the difference between us,” Eliav said. “There’s the difference between Old Testament and New. The Christian discovers the spirit of God, and the reality is so blinding that you go right out, build a cathedral and kill a million people. The Jew avoids this intimacy and lives year after year in his ghetto, in a grubby little synagogue, working out the principles whereby men can live together.”

“About the euphemism, treated rather badly. What does a Jew like you feel about that... now?”

Again Eliav relaxed his hold on his knees and fell back into the darkness. “I think it was very good for the world,” he said slowly, “that Martin Luther came along.”

“What do you mean?” Cullinane asked.
“I mean that up to then you Catholics had really treated us Jews, as you say, rather badly. If one made a simple list of all that your church did to mine it would quite destroy any moral justification for Catholicism to continue, and if a man like me felt that what your people had done to us was an essential characteristic of Catholicism, then I don’t see how we could co-exist. But fortunately for world history, Martin Luther came along to prove that Protestants could behave with equal savagery. After all, it wasn’t misguided Catholics in Germany in 1939 who fired up the furnaces. It was good, sober Protestants. It wasn’t Catholic political leaders who shrugged off the whole affair. It was Protestant prime ministers and presidents. So a man like me reasons, ‘What happened in Spain was no part of Catholicism. And what happened in Germany wasn’t Protestantism. Each was merely an expression of its times, a manifestation of the deadly sickness of Christianity.’ Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes,” Eliav said. “The tremendously personal religion that evolved around the figure of Christ was all that He and Paul had envisaged. It was brilliant, penetrating and a path to personal salvation. It was able to construct soaring cathedrals and even more vaulted processes of thought. But it was totally incapable of teaching men to live together.”

There was a stirring in the other bed and Tabari came over to Eliav’s cot. “Don’t believe a word of what he’s saying,” the Arab said. “The only reason the Jews haven’t behaved like the Christians is that for the last two thousand years they haven’t had anyone they can kick around. That’s primarily because whenever they form a kingdom it quickly comes apart at the seams. How long did the empire of Saul and David last? A little over one hundred years. In an area as small as Palestine they broke up into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern. John, you’ve heard what they say about Jews? Two Jews get together, they build three synagogues. ‘You go to yours, I’ll go to mine, and we’ll both boycott that son of a bitch on the hill.’”

Eliav laughed. “You may have something there, Jemail. Historically, we’ve found it just about as difficult to get together as you Arabs have.”

“But as I listened to you two fellows argue I thought: Why should I lie here silent, when I have the solution?” Cullinane asked.

“Simple. Judaism had its day, and if the Jews had been smart, when Christianity came along they’d have joined up. Christianity has had its day, and if you were intelligent you’d both join the newest religion. Islam!” He bowed low and said, “Soon all Africa will be Islamic. And all Black America. I see India giving up Hinduism while Burma and Thailand surrender Buddhism, Gentlemen, I represent the religion of the future. I offer you salvation.”

The easy nonsense of his statement pleased the men and they began to laugh, while from the other tent the photographer called, “Coffee,” and a day began, little different from the fifteen million days which had dawned over Makor since the first organized community had been established in its cave.
In the early years of the 1500s Safed was an undistinguished village of one thousand people who lived in a collection of mud-walled houses perched along narrow alleys that climbed up and down the southwestern flank of a hill in the Galilee. At the crest of this hill, wasting in sunlight and inhabited only by eagles and crawling things, stood the gaunt remains of a Crusader fort, its once-soaring turrets fallen and its walls collapsed.

Winds from the north had deposited upon the humbled fortress a freight of blowing silt in which trees had taken root, so that the once-proud castle was now merely a mound of earth with only here and there a rock projecting, sometimes with a bit of carving, to indicate how majestic that hilltop had once been. Of the thousand residents some two hundred were Jews, a few were Christians and the rest were Muslim, with only one or two men who remembered hearing from their grandparents that their hill had once been a bastion of the Crusaders.

The town, which nestled on the hillside well below the ruins, contained two mosques, a synagogue, a small church, some dark covered souks and a nest of small Jewish shops. The Turkish governor, ruling on edict from Constantinople, maintained peace among the various communities and allowed qadis to judge the Muslims, rabbis to rule the Jews and priests to govern the Christians. Once each year a small caravan straggled in from Damascus, bringing a few bales of shoddy goods in sad memory of the silks and spices of former times, and Turkey collected few taxes, for there was no substantial trade. In fact, if one had looked dispassionately at Safed in those early years he would surely have predicted, “This little village will continue sleeping forever. The only good thing here is the mountain air.”

Then in 1525 several events, apparently unrelated, conspired to change the history of Safed, transforming it for some ninety years into one of the most significant communities in the world: a manufacturing city of sixty thousand, a trading center known through Europe and the spiritual capital of the Jewish people. The drowsy little town was about to enter an age of gold so luminous that its memory would be cherished by nations then not even in existence. The revolution was achieved by three unlikely conspirators: the camel, the spinning wheel and the book.

The miracle of Safed began with the camel. As the wealth and power of the Turkish empire grew, with Constantinople replacing Genoa and Venice in control of merchandise passing from Asia to Europe, the new prosperity affected centers like the manufacturing city of Damascus and the ruined port of Akka. Since the highway between these two communities had always passed through Safed, the latter town became a post from which to protect caravans and a stopping point for merchants. Each body of travelers left behind in Safed some of its wealth and occasionally a few of its personnel, for the enchanting location of the town, perpetually cool with snow in winter, appealed to men tired of the desert. Most who reached Safed by this means were Arabs, and they occupied the southern and eastern sections of town, building new mosques and additional lines of covered souks.

But without the spinning wheel the camels could have accomplished little, and it reached Safed in an ironic way. When Jews were expelled from Spain and later
from Portugal, many of the best and most courageous were drawn not to new refuges like Amsterdam but back to Eretz Israel, the land of their longing. Disembarking at Akka they were told by sailors in the one inn still existing along the waterfront, “Jerusalem is a hovel and Tubariyeh is no more. The real Holy Land exists only in Safed.” By foot and by donkey these strong-minded Jews made the overland trip to Safed, where they began to swell the western quarter of the town, building small stone houses on the beautiful slopes which overlooked both a wadi and a mountain. Seldom have the victims of a religious persecution found a refuge so gentle as did those Jews of Avaro and other Spanish cities who escaped to Safed.

They brought with them the spinning wheel, which they had used in Spain to spin merino wool, and with it they initiated in their new home what was to become the foremost weaving center in Asia. Huge caravans began to assemble in the ruins of Akka, waiting for ships bringing the raw wool of Spain and France, and in Safed the Jews produced from this wool an excellent cloth, dyeing it by ancient processes and shipping it back through Akka to the markets of Europe. Unexpectedly the income of Safed rose from ten thousand florins a year to two hundred thousand and then to six hundred thousand, and its Jewish population from two hundred Jews to well over twenty thousand. It had become what the sailors of Akka had said, “The leading town in Palestine.”

But caravans of camels have come to many towns, and riches have multiplied for a while, leaving no world-memories. And the same would have happened in Safed had not the Jews who carried the spinning wheel also brought a book, one of the most extraordinary in history, and it was the impact of this book that spread the name of Safed to the remotest Jewish community in the world, luring to the hillside center scholars from a dozen nations as different as Egypt and Poland, England and Persia.

But again, many towns have received books and done little with them. It was the glory of Safed that it received in addition to its book three rabbis prepared to give that book significance: Rabbi Zaki from Italy, Rabbi Eliezer of Germany, and the charismatic Rabbi Abulafia from Spain.

The first of the three rabbis to reach Safed was Zaki the Shoemaker, who, after seven years of painful struggle through Africa and the shores of Greece, landed with his wife and three daughters at the ruined, rock-strewn port of Akka. A caravan set forth intended for Damascus, and camped the first night at the uninhabited mound of Makor, from which the ancestors of Zaki had fled more than a thousand years before; but the houses his people had lived in lay beneath a Crusader fort, and it lay beneath a heap of sand and flowers.

On the next day, at about four in the afternoon, the caravan reached the pass separating the plains from the hills of Safed, and for the first time Zaki and his family saw the lovely town that was to be their home. On the summit a few great blocks of stone from the Crusaders’ fort reflected back the bright sunlight, while below them, spreading out across steep slopes, flowed a collection of little houses, like petals falling from a flower.

Zaki, his heart bursting with the wonder of what he saw, uttered those singing words which God had used in urging Lot forward: “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou
be consumed.” He had been in the plains and now the mountain beckoned.

“It looks as if it would be cold,” Rachel warned.

“In Salonica they assured us,” he reminded her. “Life is good here.”

“It looks as if the people would fall out of their houses and roll down the mountainside,” she complained.

“It only looks that way,” he said convincingly.

The road entering Safed led to a public square which spread out from the foot of the ruined castle, and this area served as the commercial center of the town. Here the camels were unloaded and their cargoes sorted for delivery to merchants. Turkish officials clustered about the muleteers, asking of news from Akka, and Rabbi Zaki was left alone, staring down at the heart of Safed; and whispering a prayer for his deliverance he looked beyond the limits of the town and saw between the hills to the south the sunset-colored waters of the Sea of Galilee.

His arm was grabbed by a strong hand, and he heard a rough, peremptory voice asking, “Are you intended for Safed?” He turned to find himself facing a burly, good-looking man with a stout black beard and workman’s clothes.

“I am sent here by Rabbi Jemuel of Constantinople,” Zaki replied.

“Blessed be his memory,” came the brusque reply. “That your family?”

“My wife Rachel and my daughters.”

“You’ll need a big house,” the Safed man said. “Right now we have none.”

“I told you not to come to Safed,” Rachel began to lament. “We were happy in Salonica.”

“But until we find one,” the bearded man added, ignoring the complaints, “you shall live with me. All the newcomers do at first. My name is Yom Tov ben Gaddiel.” And he led the family—they had scarcely any luggage—down a steep path and through alleys only a few feet wide until Rachel was dizzy, and she reminded Zaki: “I told you people would fall off this hillside.”

They came to a square, not a European plaza but a halting place on the hillside, perhaps twenty feet across, and here the little group rested, hemmed in by houses, and Rabbi Zaki was able to study Safed: a warm, tightly knit town where Jews were at ease. They then proceeded down the hill until they reached Yom Tov’s home, and from his door they could see the western hills and the pass they had negotiated, and extensive fields reaching to the horizon. Zaki covered his face and thought: It’s this we’ve been searching for; but his wife thought of Podi and Salonica and Izmir and all the other good places they had known, and she was disconsolate.

Next day, when the Jews of Safed learned that a rabbi from Italy was among them, they crowded Yom Tov’s house to question him, and many wanted to know why a Jew who had lived in Podi would have left such a well-regarded haven—and Rachel echoed the question: “Yes, why?” Zaki explained what his fears had been and told of how for seven years he had longed to get to Safed. He said that the fame of the hilltop town had spread throughout Jewr y and that he had wished to make himself a part of the brotherhood.

His simple explanation was received in silence, as if the men of Safed knew that they did not merit such praise, and in the long moment of hesitation Zaki had a chance to inspect the faces about him: they were bearded faces, marked by deep-set eyes which seemed to express the quiet exaltation of the town. The men wore
oriental-style gowns and some wore turbans as well; and there was a stateliness about them, as if they had spent many years learning to control both their emotions and their fugitive thoughts. They were men, Zaki thought, with an intellectual power far surpassing his own, and he wondered if he could hold a place amongst them.

This fear was increased when Yom Tov said, “Shall we explore the alleys?” And leaving the women behind, Zaki set out to see his new home. First he was led back to the square at which the family had stopped the evening before, and from there he moved along a narrow lane to the south, where to his surprise he was brought to a yeshiva where a man in his late fifties was expounding the Talmud to a class of nearly a hundred devotees. It was the great rabbi of Safed, Joseph Caro, who spoke in a cold, deliberate manner, interpreting the law of Judaism. Never before in his life had Zaki seen so big a yeshiva, nor had he been aware that so many Jews were interested in philosophical discussion.

Yom Tov then led him down to a lower level and back to the west, where in a large house he was introduced to an even more persuasive teacher, the learned Moses of Cordova, the man of Safed who knew most about the mysteries of the Kabbala, and he, too, had a student body of nearly a hundred, listening to intricate speculations which Zaki knew he would not be able to comprehend.

Yom Tov then led his fat guest to another level of the town, where he found in close proximity four different synagogues, each with its teacher and sixty or seventy scholars. “It’s a town of wisdom!” he cried in the Ladino which he had picked up in Izmir and which served as a lingua franca in all except the German quarters of Safed.

“It’s also a town of work,” Yom Tov reminded him, leading the way to a large building through which a mountain stream tumbled, causing devices of various kinds to operate, and here Zaki became aware that his guide was both a respected rabbi, Yom Tov ben Gaddiel, and the leading cloth manufacturer of Safed. His plant employed three hundred men who were engaged in combing, fulling, washing and dyeing processes.

“In Safed we say, ‘Without work there is no Torah,’” the rabbi explained. He spoke of one famous rabbi who kept a shop, of another who was a barber. “I’ll find jobs for your women.”

“Doing what?” Zaki asked, for in the factory he saw only men.

Yom Tov led him back to the center of town, where they stopped at several homes, and in each, women were spinning wool imported from Turkey or weaving it into the stout cloth which accounted for Safed’s fame throughout the Mediterranean. Yom Tov explained that he owned the mill, another dyeing establishment at the edge of town and the warehouses.

“You must be very rich,” Zaki observed without envy.

“No,” the local rabbi corrected. “The money we make on cloth goes into the yeshivas and the synagogues.” Zaki stared at the black-bearded man in laborer’s clothes and said nothing, for the words he had just heard were difficult to believe.

When they returned to Yom Tov’s home Zaki was perspiring, and Rachel observed, “At last! You’ll climb up and down these hills so much you’ll lose some of that fat.” And she proceeded to describe in much detail how embarrassed she had been when her husband had lost his pants in the spring races at Podi, but
none of the listeners felt embarrassment, because most of them, during their lives among the Christians, had suffered equal indignities.

“I shall give you four spinning wheels,” Rabbi Yom Tov explained to the women of Zaki’s family.

“What for?” Rachel asked suspiciously.

“To work,” Yom Tov answered sharply, and before Rachel could reply that she had not come to Safed to learn spinning, he added, “Here we all work. I’ll find you a house where the women can spin in the back and the rabbi can be a shoemaker in front.” And such a house was found.

As the family settled into its new life Rabbi Zaki confided to no one the principal reason for his joy in having reached Safed, but to himself he often thought: It’s wonderful! So many young men here without wives. If I don’t get the girls their husbands here, where in the world could I?

So wherever he went, whenever men gathered together to talk religion, Rabbi Zaki could be depended upon to cite either the Torah or the Talmud regarding the desirability of marriage. “As the Talmud says,” he used to quote in his shoemaker’s shop, “The unmarried person lives without joy, without blessing and without good. He cannot be called a man in the full sense of the term.” And always in the course of talking with his customers he would remind them of the pregnant words of Genesis: “male and female created he them.”

It would have been difficult to find a poorer propagandist for marriage than Rabbi Zaki; Safed required very little time to classify him as uxorious and his wife as a shrew. As for the three girls whom the fat rabbi offered as God’s blessing to unmarried men, they were ill-tempered, petulant and bad-complexioned. It seemed unlikely that the older girl, Sarah, would ever marry, for she had a sharp tongue and a drawn face, while the two younger girls, Athaliah and Tamar, though prettier in feature were equally acid in nature.

And then one day a muleteer from Damascus, a stolid Jewish lad who had never read the Talmud or heard of the yeshivas of Safed, climbed down the many levels of the town to sit with Zaki at the shoemaker’s bench: “On the trip from Akka I watched your daughter, Rabbi.”

“You did?” The fat shoemaker leaped. “Which one?”

“Athaliah. She has a better manner than the others.”

“She’s a wonderful girl!” Zaki cried impulsively. “Oh, this girl she can cook… she can weave.” He became so excited that his words stumbled over themselves, for his daughters were getting old and this was the first time that anyone had even obliquely discussed marriage... He stopped cold, “You do want to marry her, don’t you?” he asked bluntly.

“Yes,” the muleteer mumbled. “I’ve told my mother.”

“Oh, Rachel!” the fat rabbi cried. And he summoned his family; and when the girls were lined up he announced, “This fine young man from Damascus... What’s your name?” He choked, grew red in the face and grasped Athaliah by the hand, delivering her to her suitor.

As soon as it was decently possible the muleteer led his bride away to Damascus, and that night Rabbi Zaki initiated the tradition that was to make him beloved in Safed and renowned throughout the Jewish world. He went to bed at dusk, for it was written in the Talmud that men should not be abroad after dark,
but he could not sleep, for he was possessed by a great happiness at having found a husband for one of his girls; and when he thought of the way doomed Jews were living that night in Podi and Portugal and Spain, he felt driven to rise from his bed and dress and go out into the narrow streets of the town, and to walk up and down, crying, “Men of Safed! How can you sleep in your tranquillity when Jews throughout the world are unhappy and miserable? Do you appreciate the magnitude of your blessing? Jews of Safed, you happy, happy Jews, let us rise now and go to the house of God and give thanks.” And he routed out the scholars and the leaders and the men who would always know more than he and drove them to the synagogue, and there, in the light of a few candles, he recited the triumphant passages of Deuteronomy, and in his simple way brought many of the citizens of Safed closer to God than did all the Talmudic scholars and all the Kabbalists.

Two or three nights each month this sensation of absolute happiness would overcome Zaki, and he would roar through the narrow streets, summoning the Jews of Safed to praise their God for His bounty; and whereas it had been obvious to the scholars that Zaki of Italy would not attain a place of eminence in their schools—not even as a student, for he could not understand what men like the legalist Caro or the mystic Cordovero were talking about—he could, by the sheer simplicity of his faith, become one of the memorable rabbis of Safed. Although he left no writings, he so impressed his humanity upon the town that he modified subsequent religious behavior.

The keynote of his teaching, repeated again and again in his midnight discourses, was charity. “Gold does not grow out of the land,” he taught. “It is found in man’s labor. And those who profit from the gold must give a fair share back to the poor.” He used simple explanations, saying, “The mills of Rabbi Yom Tov could not run for a day if God stopped the mountain streams that feed them. If we live on God’s charity, should we not share what God gives us?” He argued that a man should distribute at least twenty per cent of his income to the needy, saying, “And if he gives less than one part in ten he may not call himself a Jew.” Again and again he pleaded with his listeners to be generous, and the joke was circulated through Safed: “Rabbi Zaki wants more than anything else in the world to give things away... especially his daughters.”

Outside the synagogue Rabbi Zaki was even more effective, for from his workbench he reviewed the homely precepts of the Jewish sages: “The great Akiba tells us: ‘Whosoever neglects the duty of visiting the sick is guilty of shedding blood.' Have you been to see Rabbi Paltiel’s wife since she fell sick? Go now, and you can have your shoes when you return.” His round face and luxuriant beard became a trademark of humanity throughout the Jewish section of Safed, and he was the favorite Jew of the Arab quarter, too, for he offered his Muslim friends no religious argument, only laughter and mended shoes.

The young men of the town, watching his jovial passage, argued, “If his daughter, Tamar has lived with him so long, she can’t be as bad as she looks,” and one day a man came to the shop and said, tentatively, “Rabbi Zaki, I’ve been thinking that I might like to marry your daughter.”

“Sarah?” he cried. “She’s a fine girl.”

“I meant Tamar.”
“She’s a fine girl, too!” the shoemaker said enthusiastically, but after the marriage was celebrated he asked his son-in-law, “About Sarah. Do you happen to know any other men...”

“No,” the groom replied firmly, but that night Zaki again coursed through the alleys, calling for the Jews to celebrate the paradise they knew in Safed, so that the more cynical observed, “Watch! When he finally gets rid of that oldest daughter we’ll have midnight services for a month.” But Safed enjoyed the exuberance of their fat rabbi, for everyone acknowledged—even the great scholars—that from time to time someone ought to call the attention of the people to the everyday joys and triumphs of a decent life. “And there is no greater triumph imaginable,” dour Joseph Caro opined, “than finding a husband for a daughter like Tamar.”

If charity was the pragmatic heart of Rabbi Zaki’s preaching, the philosophical core was found in a passage of Maimonides which he revived for Safed: “Everyone throughout the year must regard himself as if he were half innocent and half guilty. And he should regard the whole of mankind in the same way. If then he commits one more sin, he weighs down the scale of guilt against himself and against the whole world. And he himself causes the destruction of all. But if he fulfills one commandment, he turns the scale of merit in his favor and perhaps he saves the entire world. He by himself has power to bring salvation and deliverance to all the men of the world.” He frequently recited this passage, adding, “And every man in Safed tonight, Arab and Jew alike, has this divine opportunity. The charity you do tomorrow, you, Muhammad Iqbal, may save the world.”

The gentle teaching of the little rabbi was the more impressive in that his personal life was such a shambles. In retrospect Rachel had grown positively fond of Salonica, the largest Jewish city in the world thanks to the Spanish expulsion, though when she had first landed there from Africa she had assured her daughters that it was a stinking place where the Turkish governors were despicable, the Greek citizens inhospitable and the Jews irreligious. In Safed the same people who listened with deepening respect as their humble rabbi talked of the good life, heard that same man’s wife berate him as a fool; but the one did not seem to affect the other.

Rachel’s ill temper was understandable. She had convinced herself that if the family had remained in Salonica, Zaki would by now have found a husband for Sarah, but when the rabbi looked at that unfortunate girl, now twenty-five and with a worsening complexion and disposition, he wondered. He sympathized with Sarah. With her two younger sisters married she was bound to be miserable, but she made herself so disagreeable that Zaki had pretty well stopped offering her to the young men who came to his shop.

Then one day in 1547 he came puffing home with the titillating news that a new rabbi had come to Safed. “A tall man, very handsome. His name is Abulafia and he has been wandering through Africa and Egypt. He has no wife.”

Rachel jumped. “Speak to him right away, Zaki! It’s your fault your daughter has no husband.”

Zaki agreed to this remarkable thesis. These days he agreed to almost everything, so Rachel continued, “It’s a father’s duty to find men for his daughters, and it reflects sorely on you, Zaki, that your oldest daughter is unmarried. Look at her—a splendid woman.”
Zaki looked at her and thought: I could name six things that girl could do which would help her more than any of my efforts. Nevertheless, he looked forward to an intimate talk with the newcomer, for no rabbi should be without a wife.

Dr. Abulafia created excitement in more than the Zaki family. His years of wandering had made him thinner; his beard was gray; he wore a turban; and his constant search for the mysterious meanings of man’s relationship to God had caused his features to assume a remote beauty that was disturbing to men and women alike. There was a sensuousness about him, manifest in all he did, a mixture of Spanish grace and Hebrew insight; and before he had been in Safed a month it was clear that the Kabbalist group had found a new teacher and possibly their leader.

To the public and to the large number of students who crowded to hear him lecture on the essence of God, Abulafia was impressive, for he taught that even the humblest Jew, by strict concentration and a longing for the infinity of God, could lift himself to levels of comprehension much higher and more complex than those which now engaged him; but it was with the select group of experts who met with him each dawn that Abulafia was radically effective, for to these trained philosophers the Spanish doctor expounded the inner mysteries of the Kabbala itself.

Abulafia’s introductory beliefs, which he expressed in words of almost flowing purity, were twofold: “To live in harmony with himself a man must labor to unite the knots which bind his soul, and this is a personal matter between man and himself; then he must seek through contemplation an understanding of the Name of God, which is the timeless relationship between man and God.”

Abulafia’s teaching on the apprehension of God was easy to understand: “You must sit in a quiet room with a sheet of clean white paper and a brush, and you must begin to write at random the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which is the language in which God wrote the Torah; and without associating these flowing, moving letters with specific words, you must permit them to come and go of their own will, nor must your mind direct your arm to direct your fingers to direct the brush to form this letter or that or to put it either here or there. And after several hours of this march of letters, if your concentration is of sufficient intensity, the pen will fall away and the paper will move from you, and you will be in the presence of endless thought in which the letters move of themselves, free and in space, and after a while your whole body will be seized by a trembling and your breath will come in short gasps and perhaps not at all, and there will be a bursting of your chest and you will feel that you are about to die—and then an enormous peace will come, for your soul will have untied the knots that bind it and the veil will have passed from your eyes; and after some time in this state of light you will see new letters of a radiance unknown before, and from them will appear the ineffable four, and you will see them, not on the paper nor on the wall nor in the room, but in the endless fathoms of your soul, the sacred Name of God, Y H W H.”

That was the primary level of Abulafia’s teaching, available to any scholar who took the trouble to study one of the handwritten copies of the Zohar circulating in Safed. This was a book as mystical as its teachings, for great contention had arisen as to its authorship. Perhaps because of local pride, the men of Safed
believed that it had been written by the immortal Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, who for thirteen years in the second century had hidden from the Roman soldiers of Emperor Hadrian. He had lived in a cave in the nearby village of Peqiin, where Elijah had visited him, bearing the secrets of the Kabbala, which Yohai had written down in the Zohar, the Splendor.

But as Abulafia knew, the book, which consisted of a commentary on the Torah, had been composed around 1280 by an adventurous Spaniard who had written it in ancient Aramaic to lend it credence: it was a mélange of mystical formulae, probably gathered from many original sources, plus a compelling explanation of the way a poetic mind can sometimes hypnotize itself into an apprehension of the reality of God. In secrecy, in well-thumbed copies which passed at night, the Zohar had traveled from Granada in Spain to all parts of Europe, treasured as much by mystical Christians as by Jews.

It was in the mountain village of Safed, however, that its power was to be most clearly demonstrated, for here had gathered, almost by accident, the half-dozen men who were to give the book its philosophical vitality, after which it would enjoy long life in Germany, Poland and Russia, forming the basis of a radical new interpretation of Judaism. It was a book which influenced all who touched it, and Dr. Abulafia, as the leader of the Safed group, expounded its first levels in lucid and seductive prose, but when he progressed to the second and third levels he became incoherent so far as logical exposition was concerned, but burning in his brilliance of metaphor and suggestion. Once, when a flood of incomprehensible words had tumbled from him like a stream issuing from the hills of Safed, he apologized, “To utter one word from the world of ultimate mystery is to break down the keystone of an arch so that no one knows from which side the next stone will fall.” He was asked by his pupils to put his words down in an orderly system, but he countered, “Where would a man start in a field that has no beginning, no end and no definition? But if you listen to me long enough you will gain a sense of what I am trying to say, and that is all that I know myself.” At other times he spoke with a clarity that was almost agonizing, and with an insight gained partly through rejection and personal tragedy, partly through an all-absorbing contemplation of God: “If seventy of us in this room study the Torah we find that it has seventy different faces to present to us, for each of us will see his own creation of beauty shining through the words of God. But I say to you that the Torah has not one face, nor seventy faces, but six hundred thousand faces, one for every Jew who was present when God gave Moses our Teacher the law; and if the cords that bind your soul are untied, you are free to find your own Torah among the six hundred thousand.”

In the group of listeners influenced by Dr. Abulafia’s teaching was Rabbi Zaki, but he was affected in a different way. When the more abstruse explanations were reached he was apt to fall asleep, and occasionally he snored, for Kabbalistic flights of thought were quite beyond him; and one morning when the students were inclined to laugh at the dozing shoemaker, Rabbi Abulafia rebuked them, saying, “I think our sleeping fat man describes better than my words what I am trying to say. Rabbi Zaki has seen not the face of the Torah but through to the heart of the Torah itself, and there he found the one commandment of God upon which Torah and Talmud and Judaism rest: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as
thyself.’ I happen to know that Rabbi Zaki spent last night sitting with the sick wife of Rabbi Paltiel and he requires to sleep, and there is no man in this room worthy to waken him.”

The reason why Rabbi Zaki loved to attend Abulafia’s lectures, which he rarely understood, was that he could sit in the synagogue and think: A fine rabbi like Abulafia ought to have a wife. I can imagine no woman in Safed, nor in Salonica either, who would make him a better wife than my Sarah.

So one day in 1549, after the Spanish doctor had finished a soaring exhortation, Zaki waited for the scholars to ask their last questions. Then, alone with Abulafia, he asked bluntly, “Doctor, why don’t you take my daughter Sarah as your wife?”

Dr. Abulafia sat down. “Sarah?” he asked. “Do I know Sarah?”

“You must have seen her. She appears often with my wife.”

“Oh, Sarah! Yes.” There was silence.

“The Talmud tells us that a rabbi must have a wife, and I assure you that Sarah is as fine a girl as her mother.”

“I’m sure she is,” the Spaniard said.

“And even if you cannot accept my daughter, Dr. Abulafia, you must find a wife somewhere, for many of us feel that your influence in Safed would be greater if…”

“If I were married?”

“Yes. For a rabbi it’s practically an obligation.”

The handsome Spaniard sat looking at his hands for some minutes, then said quietly, “For your daughter I would be an old man. After all, I’m fifty-seven, till a hundred and twenty.” This was the Jewish way of stating an age, derived from the promise of God as given in the Torah: “Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”

“I assure you Sarah would not worry about that.”

Again there was a protracted silence which neither man knew how to break, but some heavy burden was on Abulafia’s heart, and when he looked at the simple, round face of his friend he was inspired to speak with this man as he had never spoken to another, and he suggested, “Shall we climb the hill to the old fort?” And the two bearded rabbis walked slowly through the narrow streets of Safed, those winding, wonderful streets that never ran in one direction more than a hundred feet, and after considerable climbing past seven synagogues they came to the broken rocks of the fort, and there Abulafia pointed to the distant hills and to the Sea of Galilee.

“This is paradise, Zaki, and I agree with you that any man who lives here should have a wife.”

“Doctor, believe me! Sarah would make you a perfect wife. She’s neat, and her mother has taught her how to cook.”

“But in Spain…” Abulafia halted, afraid to conjure up revolting memories, except that the reassuring presence of Rabbi Zaki encouraged him to do so. Laughing nervously he said, “Zaki, you want to get rid of a daughter who clutters your house. And that’s a big problem. But I must get rid of the devil who rides my soul, and that’s impossible.”

The little rabbi looked at the Kabbalist in amazement. “But it’s you who tells us each morning that we must untie the cords that bind our souls.”

“I do,” Abulafia said. “And I cannot unbind my own.”
The two rabbis looked at the sweeping beauty of upper Galilee; in the days when it was wooded, say, when the great rabbis of the third and fourth centuries were meeting in Tverya to compile the Talmud, it must have been even more inspiring. And Abulafia whispered, “In Spain I was married. To a Christian woman whom I adored. We were marvelously happy, but I was afraid to tell her I was a secret Jew. We had two sons. They didn’t know I was a Jew either. When the worst of the persecutions struck...” He hesitated. He rose and walked about for some time, looking down at Tubariyeh, where the soul of Judaism had been saved by a group of dedicated rabbis much like the ones who had now gathered in Safed on a somewhat similar mission. He wondered if any of those great old men like Rabbi Asher the Groats Maker had been burdened with a sin as terrible as his. Then he looked down, and Rabbi Zaki was waiting.

“The best friend I had in the world,” Abulafia continued, “better even than my wife, was a secret Jew named Diego Ximeno. He introduced me to the Kabbala, and anything I’ve been able to accomplish...” He thought of Ximeno looking at him through the flames. “The Inquisition trapped him. Through what trick, I don’t know. They tore his joints apart, ripped out the lining of his throat, burned holes in his feet. And on the day they dragged him through the streets to the place where he was burned alive, he passed as close to me as...” His ancient sense of sin choked him.

“Burned?” Zaki asked. “Alive?”

“Yes. Well, that night I decided to flee Spain, because Diego Ximeno had shamed me with a courage I could never have. He was as close to me as you are, in his mortal moment, and he looked at me but refused to betray me. So I forged papers...”

Abulafia’s students, who envied his gray-haired grandeur and his mastery of language, would have been surprised could they have heard him in these next moments: he was a man at the apex of his power, unable either to form words or look at a friend. He sat with his head between his hands, mumbling, “In my ignorance... well, I wanted to spare my wife... it never occurred to me...” Syllables came, but no sense; then: “I reached Tunis... circumcised myself with a pair of old scissors... shouted from the window, ‘I’m a Jew! I’m a Jew!’”

For a moment Abulafia collapsed completely. Then he re-established control and forced himself to say, “Years later a Spaniard coming through Alexandria fell sick and they brought him to me. He said, ‘Abulafia? Wasn’t there a renegade Jew from Avaro named Abulafia?’ And although I was safe I began to tremble. ‘This Abulafia ran off and left his wife and children to the Inquisition.’ I clutched the man’s arm to keep from fainting and he guessed who I was. Sick though he was he fled from me in horror. I ran after him, grabbed him and threw him to the street. A crowd gathered and he fought me off. He pointed at me...”

Remembering that day in Egypt the tall rabbi broke into uncontrollable tears, and until fat Rabbi Zaki comforted him, could not speak: “My wife was burned alive. My eldest son was burned alive. My youngest son died in the torture. They did not even know the name of Jew.”

Like the sick man in Alexandria, Rabbi Zaki drew away. In Salonica he had met many Jews from Spain and Portugal who had undergone the tortures of the Inquisition and he was no longer affected by the horror of any narration; but he
had never met a man, no matter how degraded, who had saved his own neck at
the expense of his wife and children; indeed, he could not imagine, judging from
his own experience in leaving Podi, how any man could abandon his family. But in
spite of his automatic disgust he did not feel qualified to pass judgment on a man
like Abulafia, who had done so, and he refused to make any moral comment. He
was therefore unprepared for the tall rabbi’s next question: “Zaki, am I entitled to
marry your daughter?”

To his own astonishment Zaki heard himself say, “No.”

That day they said no more. But when Zaki reached home and saw his unlovely
daughter Sarah, he experienced pangs of remorse. My God! he cried to himself. I
had a chance to catch her a husband and I said no! He was thrown into a world of
self-recrimination and remorse. As a rabbi he could not escape taking a harsh
view of Dr. Abulafia’s behavior: to desert a wife and children and to be the cause of
their being tortured to death; it was a graver sin than he had ever heard of, more
serious perhaps than apostasy, for this was an abdication of all human principles.
Yet the more he brooded upon the matter the more confused he became.

His perplexity was heightened when Dr. Abulafia came to his home and in an
act of moral despair asked Rachel and Zaki, “May I have your daughter Sarah in
marriage?”

“Yes!” shouted Rachel.

“It is for him to say,” Abulafia replied, pointing to Zaki.

“He says yes!” Rachel cried joyously.

“No,” Zaki said.

“Study your heart,” Abulafia pleaded and left. As he climbed sorrowfully up the
narrow street he could hear Rachel screaming at her husband.

For three days the shoemaker’s shop was a scene of hell. Sarah, who from the
first had been bedazzled by the gracious rabbi from Spain, wept until her pasty
face was an ugly red. She accused her father of destroying her life. Rachel was
more to the point: “He’s insane. We should hire an Arab to stab him.”

Zaki bowed his head before the storm he had aroused, but the moral problem
facing him he did not avoid. Abulafia, by his abandonment of his Christian wife,
had put himself outside the sphere of love, and even though rabbis were supposed
to marry, the handsome Spaniard had been well advised not to do so; Zaki was
sorry he had raised the question that day, and he was even sorrier that he had
involved his daughter.

It was Zaki’s habit, when faced by such conflict, to consult the sage whose
writings he had found most helpful when guidance was required; so he went to the
synagogue and took down his favorite book, turning its pages idly until he came
upon the sentence in which Maimonides discussed the passage from the Talmud
which summed up his philosophy: “The Torah speaks in the language of living
men.” The law was given to men, not men to the law. In the abstract Abulafia’s
behavior made him unfit to enter into a second marriage, but this was no longer a
case of abstracts. Human beings were involved—a lonely rabbi who was doing
God’s work, an unmarried woman—and common sense cried, “Let them marry.”

Still unconvinced that he was doing right Zaki puffed up the hill to Abulafia’s
medical office, stood in the doorway and announced in a halting voice, “The
wedding can proceed.” He turned, went down the hill and told his daughter,
“Rabbi Abulafia will marry you.”

On the day of the wedding the Jews of Safed joked, “Since Zaki got rid of that one, he’ll have us rejoicing in the synagogue all night,” and after the wedding feast they went home to wait for the sound of their fat rabbi running through the alleys to summon them. But nothing happened. Midnight passed and one o’clock, and finally some men came to the shoemaker’s shop and called to him, “Rabbi Zaki! Are we not going to celebrate tonight?” And he would give no answer, so the men went back and reported, “The fat old fellow was in a corner praying. And he wouldn’t look up.” So others came and cried, “Rabbi Zaki, please call us to the synagogue!” But in this marriage he found no joy and could not respond, so a third time they called, “If we summon the crowd, will you also come?” And he was about to refuse even this when Rachel came from the kitchen. It had not occurred to her before that the people of Safed actually loved her ridiculous husband, and to hear them begging him to join them gave her a new view on their marriage: in his fumbling way Zaki had found good husbands for each of his daughters, and tonight she had to admit that the girls had not been prizes. His accomplishment was not a mean one, and she looked at him with respect. Awkwardly she placed her hand upon his shoulder and said, “They want to celebrate, husband. And I want to celebrate, too.”

“You can’t go in the streets,” he said solicitously. “I’ve poured myself a glass of wine in the kitchen.” Zaki could say nothing, so she tugged at his arm. “They’re calling for you,” she said and opened the door. This invitation he could not refuse, and when he came sore-hearted to the synagogue he saw a gaunt, bearded stranger standing at the wall next to a beautiful girl, and it was Rabbi Eliezer from Gretz, newly arrived with his daughter Elisheba.

The appearance of the German rabbi, last of the three whose work in Safed would modify subsequent Judaism, had a sobering effect upon the city. He was neither a simple good man like Zaki, nor a mercurial mystic like Abulafia. Nor was he any longer a handsome young rabbi who loved dancing and good German beer, for seven years of exile had aged him noticeably. He was now an austere man burned out by the fires of persecution and personal misery. All that remained was a vision crystal-clear as to how the Jews of the world could be salvaged from the chaos which must overtake them in the years ahead, and it was his undeviating dedication to this one concept that would make him immortal.

In Safed he did not teach, nor did he build his own synagogue, as did many of the other leading rabbis. When wealthy Rabbi Yom Tov offered to erect one for him he refused. Instead, he gathered all the books available in the Galilee and applied himself to them, day after day, year after year. Anyone who wished could consult with him, and as the years passed, practically the whole of Safed did so, even the Arabs, for he was acknowledged the leading legalist of the Galilee. The Kabbala he refused to investigate, saying, “That is Dr. Abulafia’s field. He has the mystic vision and I do not.” Nor did he concern himself with the daily ministry of a man like Rabbi Zaki, of whom he said, “He is the greatest of the rabbis, and I hope that in the future every community finds one like him. But I must tend my books.”

Eliezer’s self-appointed task was the codification of Jewish law: he would put down in simple terms those things a Jew must do in order to remain a Jew. The
Torah contained 613 laws, the Talmud scores of thousands, and the decisions of later rabbis like Maimonides and Rashi hundreds of thousands. On any given topic, say, marriage, no Jew could any longer know what the law was and this confusion Rabbi Eliezer proposed to remedy. Furthermore, in his travels through Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey he had seen many communities where knowledge of even the Torah law was dying out and where the Talmud was not known, let alone Maimonides. The legal structure of Judaism was vanishing, and if this continued, the Jewish people must perish. For all such Jews, Eliezer would provide one massive book containing a summary of all law. His ambition was to save Judaism, no less.

He had started his work in Constantinople in 1546, but that city was not conducive to systematic thought; the Jews had few books and the Turkish government put men of obvious talent like Eliezer under considerable pressure to accept administrative posts. Three times the gaunt rabbi had been invited to become a counselor at court, and doubtless his talents would have insured him advancement, but he felt called to serve in a different capacity. “In Safed,” his friends had told him, “you’ll find both books and a spirit of scholarship.” And they had collected a purse of gold which would last him for many years, and promised him more if he needed it, so that he was free to concentrate his whole energy on the question: “What must a Jew do to remain a Jew?”

On the question of marriage alone he had already filled two notebooks, and his researches had reminded him that each man must have a wife, so in Constantinople he had married a Jewish widow who found her fulfillment in looking after his books and his attractive daughter. He was now codifying the laws of inheritance, adoption and divorce, and this would require another two books. After that would come land tenure, the clean and the unclean, business practice and each intimate detail of human life. For every conceivable human action there could be found a law, and the Jew must know what that law was.

In later years certain liberal philosophers of Judaism would deplore the fact that the iron-willed German ever reached Safed, for after he completed his codification the Jews of the world were hemmed in by a body of law so specific and rigid that any normal growth seemed impossible; harsh critiques were written of Eliezer bar Zadok’s deadening influence on Jewish thought, but in the end even his censurers had to acknowledge that only his iron will had brought order into chaos; if it was true that he had forged chains of bondage, it was also true that he had built those sturdy bridges on which Jews marched from past to present and on into the future. It was not forgotten that the first problem to which Eliezer bar Zadok addressed himself was one of the most permanent in world history: “How can a man and woman live together in harmony?” And his second problem had been: “What are the duties and privileges of children?” If Jewish family life grew constantly stronger while that of its surrounding neighbors weakened, it was because Eliezer the German Jew had spelled out the most intimate laws regarding these matters: “There is no aspect of sexual relationship between husband and wife that may not be discussed, but we have found that there are four things which a man ought not ask his wife to do, and there are three which no wife must ask of her husband.” And in simple language he stated what those seven restrictions were. He also gave the most succinct reason for abandoning plural
marriage: “Torah and Talmud agree that a man may have more than one wife, but the law says that if a man does have three wives, each has a right to sleep with him one night in turn, and if he begins to show favoritism either sexually or emotionally to one at the expense of the other two, the latter have a right to complain that they are being neglected, and if he cannot serve each properly and in her regular turn, which few men can do, then let him have one wife only.”

The world knows about this golden period of Safed, when Zaki taught love and Abulafia mysticism and Bar Zadok the law, because of an accidental traveler. In 1549 a Spanish Jew who had fled to Portugal and then to Amsterdam foresaw the Spanish-Dutch war that was about to sear his new homeland, and he concluded that this was as good a time as any to visit Eretz Israel, so after two years of dangerous travel he reached Jerusalem, where all men spoke of Safed as the jewel of Israel, and in the winter of 1551 he came north to Tubariyeh and then over the hill to Safed. Dom Miguel of Amsterdam was a perceptive traveler, one much concerned with Judaism, and the comments in his journal, while sometimes naïve, were always enlightening:

From afar I had heard that the great rabbis of Safed earn their living by doing each in his own way manual labor, but I was not prepared to find that Abulafia the Mystic holds daily doctor’s hours or that Zaki the Good mends shoes. One saintly man from Portugal, much respected by his fellows, cleans chimneys, and the poet who wrote Lecha Dodi, which all in these parts sing, makes his living selling fodder to the caravans bringing wool from Akka.

And wives work too. At home they are expected to clean, sew, cook and care for their children. But many go to the factory of Rabbi Yom Tov ben Gaddiel ha-Ashkenaz, where they spin and weave. Others work in the fields of farmers, but all who work expect to be paid in Turkish coins which, to my disgust, proclaim Allah, the God of Moses, is God.

If I were asked to name the glory of Safed it would be the children. Those who recall the pale-faced youth of the Jewish quarters in Europe would be surprised to see the children of Safed, During the recent snowstorm I saw them rolling in the drifts with ruddy cheeks and now that summer has come I watch them playing games with Arab children and their faces are brown. They’re noisy. They sing songs brought here from all parts of Europe, but at ten or eleven the girls become proper household helpers and boys begin their study of the Talmud. I would that the Jews of Germany and Portugal might produce such children.

The daily life of Safed, I am happy to report, is governed by the commandment which Moses our Teacher gave us after he had delivered the tablets of the Ten Commandments: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” These warnings were observed by all Jews in Safed, for the Torah was constantly in the heart of the great rabbis
like Zaki and Abulafia. I found that it also governed the behavior of businessmen like Rabbi Yom Tov. Even children were taught the laws, for the words of God were discussed in each home I visited. If I met Rabbi Zaki walking through the streets, he was reciting the Torah. The first thing we did each morning and the last each night was to pray, and I wish the Jews of Amsterdam did the same. I am pleased also to report that when a man prays he binds the leather phylacteries, one about his left arm, the other to his forehead. And each Jewish home I saw in Safed bore on its right-hand doorpost a small metal container in which rested the great law of the Jews: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” It was a most sweet and pleasant experience to be living within the law, and to be reminded of it at all times, both in the going out and at the coming in.

Like most strangers who visit Safed, when I walked into town cold and dirty from my travel, I was taken at once to the shoemaker shop of Rabbi Zaki, for he used to have three daughters, but all are married, and he finds pleasure in entertaining strangers. His good wife Rachel complains at times, but Zaki takes no notice of this nor do his guests. Sharing a home with this simple man is like living with the sages in the old times, and the seven days of his week are a string of amulets, each with its peculiar significance.

Half an hour before dawn each day throughout the year, a messenger from the synagogue comes tapping down the alleyways and at our door calls softly, “Rise, Rabbi, and greet the dawn.” Zaki dresses, brings a candle for me, and leaves his house in darkness to join with other men who head for the synagogue, where candles have been lighted and where in brief joyous ceremonies, joyous that is, except on Sunday, the new day is hailed. “O God!” Rabbi Zaki cries at these dawn services. “We men of Safed dedicate ourselves to Thee.”

Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Rabbi Zaki sets aside for hard work, applying himself to the making of shoes. But on Mondays and Thursdays he looks forward to additional religious services. He is so faithful in fasting on these days, touching neither water nor food till sundown, that I wonder at his fatness. Sometimes he spends the better part of Thursday at the synagogue, either reading or leading his Jews in prayer. In Safed, as in all Jewry, Monday is also the market day, observed since the time of Ezra, and Zaki enjoys moving along the stalls and greeting his friends.

But for Rabbi Zaki, Friday is the memorable day, complex and encrusted with those hidden meanings we Jews love. It is, in many ways, the best day of the week, not even excepting Shabbat with its special responsibilities. On Friday, Rabbi Zaki lies awake in the darkness, listening for the running feet and the knocking at his door, and he says to himself, “What joy! Another Friday.” He comes to my room and kisses me, crying so that his breath makes the candles flicker, “Rejoice, Dom Miguel! It’s Friday.” Then he takes me to the synagogue, where he sings in a loud voice, after which he stands at the door and breathes deeply, saying to himself, “Same sun. Same breeze. But somehow this day is different.” He spends his morning winding up his week’s business, and tries always to attend one of the yeshivot, where by tradition
each Friday the great teachers sum up the principal truth of the week’s
discussion or expound the basic tenets of Judaism.

In this report I have spoken much of Rabbi Zaki, and perhaps you would
rather hear about Dr. Abulafia or Bar Zadok, but when I tell you what Zaki
does at Friday noon, before he lunches, you will understand. He leaves the
synagogue where the great ones are expounding and he goes to his
shoemaker shop, where he studies the box in which he keeps the money
earned by mending shoes. “This week, Dom Miguel,” he tells me, “we can
spare a little more,” and he takes from the box almost half of what he has
earned. Hiding the coins in his long-coat he starts walking through the
narrow streets, and wherever he finds a poor man, or a widow who has not
with what to make Shabbat, he pauses and asks how this person is and as he
talks he quietly places a few coins in some inconspicuous place. But when
the meeting ends he always says, “Shmuel, you are a man who bears
misfortune with dignity. You must know God better than I do. Give me on this
happy Friday your blessing,” and he makes the man feel that it is he who is
doing the rabbi a favor. And thus he disposes of his wealth.

His charity completed, Rabbi Zaki goes home, where Rachel has been
cleaning her house and doing much cooking, with all her pots bubbling at
once. Carefully Zaki lays out fresh clothes, from stockings to robes, then
walks to the ritual baths, where he cleanses himself for the moments that lie
ahead. His lunch on Friday is always frugal and he grows impatient for the
hours to pass, but by mid-afternoon a kind of benediction settles over him,
and over the town itself, and he takes down his handsome prayer shawl,
white with black stripes and knotted fringe, and he leaves his home and
begins to walk sedately toward the edge of town, then out toward open fields,
saying to me, “Keep up, Dom Miguel. You are going to meet your Bride.” As he
moves through the narrow alleys, men join up with us until he leads as many
as sixty or seventy into the countryside—a fat, round little man with a black
beard, whose neighbors trust him. We are not in the fields long before we see
Dr. Abulafia coming, tall and princely, his graying beard long and his manner
of walking courtly. He is always attended by students of the Kabbala. Then
Rabbi Yom Tov, dressed in expensive robes and with an air of command,
comes marching toward us with his business assistants; and finally through
the fields comes a man alone, Rabbi Eliezer bar Zadok ha-Ashkenaz, his eyes
wearyied from reading. Four times since I came to Safed I have been told that
in Germany, Rabbi Eliezer was a man who could dance all night and drink
endless amounts of German beer, but if that was ever the case, sorrow has
changed him much in the intervening years.

In the shadow of the mountains we sit upon the ground and speak of holy
things. We sing hymns composed by poets of the town and study the flowers
of the meadow, but as the sun drifts toward the west Rabbi Zaki feels himself
gripped by an acute excitement, and he rises and returns to town, first in a
slow walk, finally in a donkey-like gallop, his gown flapping about his fat legs
as he calls behind, “Run faster, Dom Miguel! Your Bride is coming!” Through
the narrow alleys of Safed he hurries, up and down the hills, crying, “Queen
Shabbat is about to appear. Let us go forth in our finest clothes and in our
sweetest breath to greet the Queen!" He knocks on doors and cries at street corners, lest any miss the Queen. Then, in a kind of ecstasy, he waits as the other rabbis return from the fields singing songs of praise to the imminent moment of our joy. Each man proceeds to his own synagogue, the Sephardim like Zaki to one of the many Spanish congregations, the Ashkenazim like Eliezer to one of the two German synagogues, and men sit upon the floor, while women give praise in the balcony masked by gauze curtains, and after the evening prayers have been chanted, all join in the great Safed hymn that we would do well to sing in Amsterdam: “Come, my Beloved, let us meet the Bride. The presence of Shabbat let us receive.” And as the sun sinks, the day of the Lord begins in Safed, that mysterious day on which the communion between God and man is reaffirmed.

In a later passage that some Jews wished Dom Miguel had omitted, because of its frank discussion of sex in Safed, he wrote:

Shabbat in Safed is a day of extreme joy, and after the twilight service ends on Friday evening Rabbi Zaki invites some two dozen of his friends and all travelers from far places to his home, where the food prepared that morning by the rebbetzin is laid out and where wine from the Safed hills is poured. We sing old songs of Italy and Spain till nearly midnight and if a stranger gets drunk, more from the singing than the wine, Zaki does not rebuke him. One Friday during our singing he told me, “You will have to put them out, Dom Miguel, for I must go to bed. Since I was first married in Podi I have lain with my wife every Friday night, even aboard ship when we were both seasick, and she would take it unkindly if I missed now.”

On Shabbat itself three synagogue meetings are held: dawn, morning, afternoon. During this holy time all but religious life halts completely. Men are allowed to carry nothing, not even a string, lest inadvertently they work upon the Lord’s day. No food is cooked, no fire lighted, no lamp lit. Rabbi Zaki spends this day close to a window, even when in the synagogue, with his eyes fixed toward the lake below, for he tells me that when the Messiah arrives on earth he will make his appearance some Shabbat morning on those waters and then walk over the hills to Safed. “It would be a thing of error,” Rabbi Zaki says, “if we were not ready to greet him as he enters town.” It is a custom in Safed, and one I have grown to love, as Shabbat ends on Saturday at dusk—when a man can see three stars in one glance at the heavens—for the rabbis to gather as if to prolong the day, holding a feast, singing old songs and speaking of the goodness they have known. Rabbi Zaki prays almost till dawn, clutching, as it were, at the garments of the Bride as the day passes into history. How sweet Shabbat can be those last moments!

But I have never seen a more doleful day than Sunday in Safed. Now Rabbi Zaki awakes with the taste of ashes in his mouth. I hear him in his bed, fearful of the messenger’s footfall. Reluctantly he dresses and we go in silence to the cold synagogue, so different in spirit from what it had been only a few short hours before. This dawn Zaki looks at no one and he prays alone, as do the rest of us. And then, when the day has well broken and the sun is upon
us, the rabbis of Safed meet glumly on street corners and try to decide what went wrong last week. “If we had been truly God’s men throughout the entire week,” Rabbi Yom Tov complains, “the Messiah would surely have come. What did we do wrong?” And the rabbis discuss the errors of the past, the faults of Jews who keep barring the Messiah from his Holy Land. I have often heard Rabbi Zaki say, “Here in Safed we are so engaged in a struggle for our personal happiness that we forget our responsibility to the greater world.” And often he leaves these informal Sunday meetings to preach with new dedication his simple formula: “More charity. More love. More submission to God’s Torah.” And so, as each new week begins, the Jews of Safed again try to live such devout lives that through their example the Messiah will be lured down to earth, for as Rabbi Zaki never tires of reminding us, “It is written in the Talmud that if a single community repents, the world will be saved.” But it is my opinion that if the Messiah is ever brought down to earth it will be by the efforts of one man, and that man will be Rabbi Zaki the Shoemaker.

As for the worldly government of Safed, twenty-three thousand Jews, thirty thousand Arabs and I don’t know how many Christians are ruled by Turkish pashas sent down from Constantinople. The Turks collect taxes, set rules for the wool trade and provide soldiers now and then if bandits, called bedawi, move too close in their raids. The day-to-day life of Jews rests in the hands of their rabbis, while the Arabs are governed by their qadis, or judges, and the Christians by their priests. Since the arrival of Rabbi Zaki and Rabbi Eliezer there has been no death sentence and little divorce. I heard of some adultery but of not a single pauper who failed to receive charity. If the rabbis find time they teach the children to read, but here I do not find those systematic schools which were a credit to the Jews of Germany. Nor have I heard of any offenses against the civic peace. I was pleased to see that businessmen are not allowed extravagant profits, for during my visit Rabbi Zaki publicly rebuked Rabbi Yom Tov for not increasing the pay of his women workers when profits rose, and by public demand the wage was raised. I would that all Jews lived as just lives as I lived in Safed.

Curiously, now that I am removed from the city I recall only one sound as my lasting memory of that hillside paradise. It is the call of the muezzin from the Arab minarets which surround the Jewish quarters, and as I hear it echo I remember how easily Jew and Arab existed in this city and wonder at the bitterness with which the Portuguese insisted that they could not live with Jews, and at the ugliness in German towns, and especially at the hatred which Spaniards in Amsterdam feel toward their Jews. One man told me, “Arab and Jew share Safed in peace only because each is ruled with equal harshness by the Turk. If Arabs ruled they’d abuse the Jews, and if Jews ruled they’d be intolerable.” I hope the rabbis of Amsterdam will advise me on this matter.

Because our Jews in Europe are forced to lead far from perfect lives, I must not leave the impression that Safed is a paradise. If we must depend upon the purity of this city to lure the Messiah back to earth we may have to wait a long time. The men of Safed like women and they like wine. The latter they import in large tuns from Damascus, and the former they arrange for in a
most ingenious and satisfactory way. Along the line where the two communities meet, the Arabs keep a house where Jewish men pay to visit girls brought down from Damascus, while the Jews maintain a house in which Arabs come to visit Jewish girls from Akka and Nazareth. I myself visited the Arab house one night, and it was a credit to the city. The rabbis themselves were lusty men and I was told in secret that Dr. Abulafia, much tormented at home by a shrewish wife, kept a mistress near the yeshiva where Joseph Caro taught, and I shall never forget hearing Rabbi Zaki recount with pleasure the story of great Rabbi Akiba, who, lusting for knowledge, once followed his teacher into the privy itself, “and from what he saw him do there Akiba picked up three good habits which he used ever after.” And when I asked, “What were the tricks of hygiene that Akiba learned in the privy?” Rabbi Zaki told me bluntly, and we would not do poorly if we adopted them in Amsterdam. Many of the poems we sang in the synagogues told of passionate love, and the women of Safed like fine fabrics and get them. Jewelry we could buy from the Arabs, and any man was considered miserly who did not buy his wife some, so when I left the city I gave four presents, and they were better made and cheaper than any I could have bought in Antwerp.

Dom Miguel of Amsterdam concluded his remarks on Safed with a passage that would be quoted often in later centuries as a kind of ideal toward which Jews might aspire:

I have traveled across the hills to Peqiin, and am seated in the cave where Simeon ben Yohai wrote the Zohar while hiding from the Roman soldiers, and I think I now understand Safed. If in the future men tell you that we Jews were intended to be homeless, without a land of our own, or that we cannot govern ourselves or live side by side in peace with others, send such liars to Safed, for there you will see Jew and Arab living in peace. You will see Dr. Abulafia ha-Sephard existing easily with Rabbi Eliezer bar Zadok ha-Ashkenaz, and you will see a hillside living happily under the law of Moses, and getting rich while doing so. But most of all you will see a fat little rabbi from Italy puffing up and down the steep alleys, bringing love to all men. In Jerusalem they told me, “In Safed you will find the capital of Judaism.” I did not, for to me Jerusalem will always be the capital, but I did find Rabbi Zaki, and he is the heart of Judaism.

In only one respect did Dom Miguel fall into serious error regarding Safed: though the years were golden, the city was far from finding the secret to permanent civic harmony, for in early 1551 a severe contention broke out, and between the very rabbis whose harmony Dom Miguel had praised. Before long it involved the entire Jewish community and could in time have destroyed it had not prudent steps been taken to heal the breach. It began when a Jewish woman from Damascus wanted a divorce from a man who had lived briefly in Safed and whose family antecedents were uncertain. Rabbi Abulafia, still tormented by his own sin and unhappy in his marriage with Sarah—who grew more like her mother as the
years passed—was inclined to aid others who had fallen into domestic trouble. So even though the legal position of the claimant was unclear, he granted the divorce. Rabbi Eliezer, who was not involved in this case, noted with some apprehension that this was the fourth time that Dr. Abulafia had ignored a strict interpretation of the Mosaic law, and Eliezer felt that the spiritual foundations of Judaism were under attack. Accordingly, he retired to the library which the Jews of Constantinople still maintained for him with their contributions and composed a harsh letter, filled with legal citation and the kind of blunt Germanic sentences he used in his codification of the law. The essential paragraphs read:

Does Rabbi Abulafia think that he can issue such faulty divorces without censure? Does he plan to issue others in the future? If he does, we cannot see how the rabbis of Safed can any longer place credence in his decision in these or other areas. Surely a man who cannot understand the simple law of divorce can hardly be trusted to judge graver problems. By his arrogant and intemperate decisions Rabbi Abulafia raises in all minds three serious questions: “Does he know the law? Does he respect it? Will he in future observe it?”

These are matters which go far beyond Safed. We who have been allowed by God to see the sad state of Judaism throughout the world, know that Jews are in peril and can be saved only if they live according to the law. Any rabbi like Dr. Abulafia who abuses that law helps to destroy Judaism. In circulating this necessary but unpleasant letter we are not concerned with his faulty decision in the Damascus case. That was an error which can be forgiven. But we are concerned with the majesty of law as it operates to save Judaism. And we say to Dr. Abulafia, “If your arbitrary decision in this case becomes a precedent, the basis for Jewish family life will be destroyed.” We know he cannot intend this, so in charity we must conclude, Dr. Abulafia does not know the law. Surely he does not wish to lead the Jews of Safed into those twilight areas where each man is his own judge, where all are free to write the law according to their own desires, and where the hard, clear light of Torah and Talmud is obscured.

The letter, when it reached the alleys and synagogues, occasioned a fury of comment. It was the kind of document intended to make men take sides, and it succeeded. Rabbi Abulafia’s students were outraged and started drafting an answer which would show Rabbi Eliezer to be an idiot, but the doctor refused to be distracted by personal invective and halted his associates. He better than they understood the heart of Eliezer’s challenge, and he wished to place only the basic issue before the people. Therefore, in the weeks that followed Rabbi Eliezer’s distribution of the letter Abulafia worked quietly, saw his students each morning, prayed more than usual and spent his evenings discussing legal precedents with learned friends. Finally, when the tempers of his followers had cooled, he handed them a letter to circulate through the synagogues. It was a statesmanlike document, free of acrimony but filled with legal citation. Abulafia had dug out cases from six different countries supporting his decision in the Damascus divorce. He arranged his precedents so as to verify each procedure that Rabbi
Eliezer had questioned. He showed that the practical law of divorce, as it now operated in the Jewries of Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Egypt and Turkey, clearly supported his decision, so that any charge of arbitrariness or ignorance could not be sustained.

Yet even as he had compiled this part of the letter, he had confessed to himself that any scholar who analyzed his precedents would become aware that step by step, from Spain to Turkey, a chain of distinguished rabbis had been moving slowly and perhaps unconsciously away from a strict interpretation of Torah and Talmud. Encouraged by liberalists like Maimonides a group of rabbis had begun to evolve a tradition of their own, and Abulafia knew that it was at this revisionist tradition, and not at Abulafia himself, that Rabbi Eliezer had been striking in his letter. But this aspect of the controversy the Spaniard chose to avoid; his clear eye was focused on still another battleground existing between the two men, and it was to this fundamental topic that he addressed himself in the final pages of his letter:

I deny that the argument of the learned Rabbi Eliezer bar Zadok ha-Ashkenaz concerns me personally; indeed, I believe he has done Safed and Jews of the world a favor in raising the abstract points he has. Nor does the legalistic problem of adhering too much to Maimonides or too little to the Talmud involve me. Here again I believe that Rabbi Eliezer has performed a service in pointing out these divergencies. The real problem upon which we are engaged, and upon which I shall be happy to remain engaged, is this:

Can Judaism prevail if it is tied to a narrow interpretation of the law as conceived and administered by a body of older rabbis? Must we not in the years ahead revitalize our religion by infusing it with the day-to-day revelations experienced by common men? I believe in strict observance of the law, as I have shown in the preceding citations, and I would be shamed in my own eyes if I felt that I had strayed from one iota of that law as it has evolved in the lives of real men and great rabbis. I render no decision before I know what is being done in Paris, Frankfurt and Alexandria, for I am a servant of the law as it develops in the lives of men. But I also believe that Judaism, to prevail, must avoid becoming the preserve of a few men who, by their legalistic approach, stamp out the ordinary joy of life and its mystical appreciations.

With this courtly letter the battle was joined. It never became a personal brawl between Eliezer and Abulafia; the other rabbis and the good sense of the two participants prevented that. But it did become a fundamental confrontation between the two dynamic forces of Judaism in that age: Ashkenazi legality versus Sephardi mysticism; or, to put it another way, the conservative force of the rabbi versus the expanding social vision of the community; or, the great restraining tendency of Talmud versus the explosive liberation of Zohar. On these grounds the battle was fought.

The men around Dr. Abulafia—and they were the most persuasive in Safed—had a clear vision of what might happen to world Judaism if the rabbis prevailed. “It will become,” one of them predicted, “a religion much like the yolk of an egg.
The meat will all be there, clean and pure at the center, but it will be protected from common understanding by the crystallized white of the egg, legalism, and by the impenetrable shell, rabbinical force. All that can save us is the lifting of this vital yolk clean out of the shell and the sharing of it with average men.”

Abulafia himself did not reason in this manner. He said, “The mysteries of the Zohar are no more understandable by the common man than is the law of the Talmud. We shall always need rabbis, in the future more than in the past. But the exhilarating beauty that is found in the Zohar must be left free to illuminate the souls of all men, and if laws prevent this, then laws must be modified.”

Rabbi Eliezer, alone in his study, cut off from the popular rabbis by his austere nature and from the masses by his lack of a synagogue, talked mostly with his eighteen-year-old daughter Elisheba, who had her mother’s intelligence as well as her beauty. To the girl he said, “It isn’t a matter of Abulafia or me. Nor of law and mysticism. He is very right in his refusal to argue on either of those levels, but his experience has been only with Spain, where Jews lived wherever they wished and where persecution, when it did come, came to each man of himself. On the other hand, I know what happens in lands like Germany, where Jews are driven into narrow streets. And, Elisheba, most of the Jews in the world are going to live that way from now on. What can it mean to such people, freedom? We’re not concerned with the personal happiness of Uncle Gottes Mann, the honest businessman, may God preserve him wherever he is. We’re concerned with how four thousand Jews, living on top of one another, can exist. And they can exist and preserve their religion only through the most careful observance of the law.” One night he shouted in anguish, “They keep talking about Safed! I’m talking about the world. Without the law, what will bind the Jews together?”

As the argument grew keener, the rift down the middle of the community widened. The camel caravans kept hauling finished cloth to Akka and continued to bring raw wool back, so that everyone was making money, but Rabbi Zaki was worried. In his simple, clumsy way he saw more clearly than either of the main protagonists that this rupture must be healed, but neither man would make a conciliatory gesture. So he went at last and humbled himself before Rabbi Eliezer, but when the interview began he was distracted by the arrival of Elisheba, her hair drawn straight against her ears and tied at the back in a long pigtail; and like the fool his wife had claimed he was he forgot the main purpose of the meeting and said, “Rabbi Eliezer, you should be finding your daughter a husband.”

The rebuke was so honest, and so unexpected, that the austere German Jew began laughing. “You’re right,” he chuckled. “I’ve been diverted to less important things.”

“We all have been,” Zaki agreed. “The whole town’s been talking about Talmud and Zohar, Maimonides and Abulafia. Don’t you honestly think we ought to get back to work, all of us?”

“Do you understand what the argument’s about?” Eliezer asked.

“I try to. Dr. Abulafia is worried about the present. You’re worried about the future.”

Again Eliezer laughed and drew his daughter beside him. “You come awfully close to the truth,” he confessed. Then he grew grave. “But I can foresee a day not far off when the Jews of the world, distraught and each with his own vision of God,
will hear some crazy man shouting, ‘I am your Messiah! I have come to save you!’ And unless at that moment the God-struck Jew is standing firmly on the law and protected by it, he is going to dance in the air and cry, The Messiah is at the gates and I am saved from the Judenstrasse.”

“From what?” Zaki asked, and the German drew back as if the man he was talking to had not his alphabet, knew not the basic words he was speaking.

Then he said, “We Jews can be stupid people, Zaki. Only the law keeps us strong. We are a people of the Book and the day will come when only the Book will preserve us from ourselves.”

“I believe you, Rabbi Eliezer, and now can we have peace?”

“Yes. I have made my statement and I will keep silent.”

“I’ll go see my son-in-law,” Zaki said, and when he had left, Eliezer said to his daughter, “There goes a saintly rabbi. To Rabbi Zaki, Dr. Abulafia is not a man who has torn Safed apart and endangered Judaism. He is his son-in-law.”

At the home of the Kabbalist, Zaki was assured by Sarah that she “had told the rabbi a hundred times to stop writing letters.” Dr. Abulafia laughed uneasily, whereupon Rabbi Zaki suggested, “I think it’s time you leave the coolness of your library and come down the hill to my shoemaker shop.”

“Perhaps so,” Abulafia said, and he reached for his prayer shawl. As he left the house Sarah yelled at him, “And listen to what my father has to say,” and Rabbi Zaki thought: Now I’m a prophet!

He sent a boy to fetch Rabbi Eliezer, who came down the hill, and the three men sat in the shoemaker’s shop and discussed the altercation. Rabbi Zaki said, “I think we have all stated our positions clearly.”

Eliezer corrected him: “You haven’t said anything, Rabbi Zaki. What is your position?”

“That there are six hundred thousand faces to the Torah and that two of my dearest friends on earth, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Abulafia, have each seen one of the faces and from it gained great illumination.”

“We have been arguing about fundamental differences,” Abulafia protested.

“Is there anything more fundamental than the Torah?” Zaki asked.

“No,” Eliezer replied. “I shall write no more letters.”

“Nor I,” Abulafia promised.

Rabbi Zaki asked Rachel to bring some wine, and said, “You have each wondered if I understood the argument. I do. Abulafia is fighting for the right of the individual Jew to approach the Torah on his own level and to find joy therein, and to this I agree. Eliezer is fighting for the right of Jews as a group to exist, and of this I approve. The job of a poor rabbi like me is to see that each of these desirable goals has a chance of succeeding. But the word ‘Judenstrasse’ I do not understand, and I wish someone would explain it.”

“It’s a street, hideously narrow, where Jews in Germany are forced to live,” Eliezer explained. “And soon we shall all be living there.”

“When we do, may we have the courage of Diego Ximeno,” Dr. Abulafia prayed, and the feud ended.

It would be incorrect to claim that in this critical debate the town itself had remained neutral. Safed was a place of singular beauty; from the edge of the fort crumbling on the hill down to the open fields that lay beyond the synagogue,
sixteen narrow streets hung one below the other, connected by alleys which cut through at odd and inconsistent angles. In many places the streets were so narrow, scarcely three feet wide, that above them the houses joined and one walked as in a tunnel; there was an essential mystery about the place. Its location was such that frequently a cloud would drift into town and hang capriciously over some houses and not over others, and a neighbor could stand at his door and see the home of his friend mysteriously disappear—then reappear in sunlight as the cloud passed. The air of Safed was different, too—a clear, penetrating air that seemed to affect the lungs, causing one to breathe deeply with a kind of exhilaration—and through this clear air one could see unusual distances with almost ghostlike penetration. In short, Safed was a town which enhanced the mystical interpretation of life, and it is quite possible that had the Kabbalists chosen some other spot in Galilee, their success might have been limited.

It was Elisheba who first noticed this partiality of Safed. One day she said to her father, “The town fights against you.” He laughed grimly, but she added, “Here I could almost become a mystic. The alleys are just as narrow as the Judenstrasse we left in Gretz. Why, then, do they seem so lovely?”

“Because here there is no iron gate keeping you from the fields,” he replied matter-of-factly.

Elisheba was now twenty and resembled her mother more than ever; she was tall and had her father’s dignity of movement but her mother’s love of children and fantasy. She had become the object of speculation, and even Spanish-speaking Jews began attending the German synagogue to see if Elisheba was in attendance. Many young men thought of marriage with the rabbi’s daughter, and some came to Zaki’s shop to discuss the matter with him. “Ask her father,” the fat rabbi told them.

“I’m afraid of Rabbi Eliezer,” they explained.

“I’ll speak to him if your parents ask me,” Zaki said. But to one young man, shorter even than himself, Zaki said, “Forget Elisheba. She’s tall and you’re short, and men and women who marry should fit together in all ways.” He arranged a different marriage for this suitor, and later the man said that the fit was good.

Twice Rabbi Zaki went to Eliezer to speak on behalf of suitors, but the German Jew, reluctant to lose his memory of Leah, told him, “Elisheba can wait a little longer. Besides, I like to watch her as she brings the books.”

In the next years Rabbi Zaki was struck by two personal tragedies which diminished his ebullience; the only consolation he found was in the fact that the first took place before the second, sparing his wife additional sorrow. In early 1555 Rachel fell ill. Dr. Abulafia was called and could do nothing for his mother-in-law; and some men claimed, “She’s poisoning herself with her own bile.” For some time she had gone back to heckling her husband as to why he didn’t build a big synagogue of his own plus a yeshiva in which to teach.

“I have nothing to teach,” he replied.

“You would have if you weren’t so fat,” she said irrationally. In bitterness and unfulfillment she approached her death, for the three marriages of her daughters were not working out well, but on her last morning she whispered, “Husband, I’d like a little glass of wine,” and for a while as he sat by her bed she relaxed her animosity and said, “We should have stayed in Salonica. But I agree that Safed is...
better than running half-naked through the streets of Podi. It was better this
way... since you insisted on being so fat.” And with her death Zaki became lost in
tragedy and for half a year was little seen in Safed.

At the end of 1555 his mind was taken from his loss by the arrival of a refugee
from the Jewish community in Ancona, the Italian seaport north of Podi, and this
man convened a meeting in the largest synagogue to report on the disaster that
had befallen his city. “For long years,” he said, “we Jews who fled from Spain lived
happily in Ancona and even had grandchildren born on Italian soil. I had a
weaver’s shop.” He hesitated as if recalling some insupportable sorrow, then said
softly, “Of eighteen who lived on my street, only I escaped.”

“What happened?” Rabbi Zaki asked.

“Four Popes in a row had confirmed our right to live in Ancona, even though we
had been forcibly baptized when passing through Portugal. But this year came a
Pope who announced that the Church must now solve the Jewish problem once
and for all. We believe his nephew wrote out the new rules, but he issued them.”

“Are they much different from before?” Zaki asked.

The refugee turned to study the fat rabbi and said, “Aren’t you Zaki, who fled
Podi?”

“Yes.”

“The new rules are different. First, no city in the world may have more than one
synagogue, and if a city does, the others are to be torn down at once. Second,
every Jew in the world must wear a green hat. Men and women. Sleeping and
waking. Inspectors may break into the home at any moment to see that Jews are
wearing their green hats. Third, all Jews in a town must live on one street.”

“For years we did that in Germany,” Rabbi Eliezer said. His prophecy was
coming true.

“Fourth, no Jew may own property. If he now owns land he must sell it within
four months for whatever the Christians wish to offer. Fifth, no Jew may engage in
any kind of commerce, save the resale of old clothes.” He droned on through
additional proscriptions: no Christian may work for a Jew; no Jew may apply
medicine to a Christian; no Jew may work on a Christian holiday; nowhere at any
time, not even in synagogue, may any Jew be addressed with a title like Messer or
Rabbi or Master.

Rabbi Zaki, listening to the recital, tried to find what hope he could. “These are
simply the old laws made harsher,” he said.

“But now we have two new ones,” the man from Ancona said, “and it was from
these I fled. Thirteenth, all previous laws which granted Jews any kind of
protection are abolished, and the fathers of each town are invited to impose any
additional restrictions they desire. Fourteenth,” and his voice dropped to a
whisper, “if the Jew protests at any point he is to be punished physically, with
great severity.”

In the silence practical-minded Yom Tov ben Gaddiel asked, “But when the laws
were announced did anything happen?”

“No,” the Ancona man said, and throughout the synagogue the Safed rabbis
could be heard breathing with relief. “But on my last night in the city a Christian
who owed me much money came quietly to my house and said, ‘Simon ben Judah,
you’ve been a good friend. Here’s half the money I owe you. Flee the city this hour
because at dawn there will be many arrests.’ I asked, ‘What for?’ And he shrugged his shoulders: ‘After all, you are heretics.’ And as I hid on the hill behind Ancona I saw, toward four in the morning, torches moving out through all the streets where Jews lived.”

“So what happened?” Rabbi Yom Tov asked.

“I don’t know. I escaped to Podi.”

“Were Jews arrested there?” Zaki asked, his big face wet with perspiration.

“No. Your duke said that in Podi the new laws did not apply and in this defiance he was supported by his brother, the cardinal. Agitated messengers came from both Ancona and Rome to argue with the brothers, but they stood firm and allowed no arrests. Nevertheless, I grew frightened and took passage on a Turkish ship.”

“Tell me,” Zaki asked. “Jacopo ben Shlomo and his wife Sarah, were they well?”

“They were well,” the Ancona man reported. “They still have their red house by the fish market.”

That night Rabbi Zaki returned to his lonely shoemaker shop and prayed, but his lips moved heavily, for he could see his Jews of Podi standing on the wharf that day so long ago, with signs of fire on their foreheads. And then, in the summer of 1556, Safed received, along with a shipment of wool, another of the terrifying broadsheets which cities in Europe found morbid pleasure in circulating during the middle years of the century. The new printing press in Podi had produced this one, which, with harrowing woodblock prints providing details, told the world that in 1555 and 1556 the Holy Inquisition had saved Podi by burning alive twenty-nine Jews, and the name, the description, the heresy of each was reported in detail, with twenty-nine woodcuts showing how each Jew had reacted to the fire.

Fat Jacopo, who had run in the last race with Zaki, had died praying. Thin Nethaneel had begged for mercy. And Sarah, the wife of Jacopo, had died with her hair a living torch. In horror Rabbi Zaki read the predicted history of his congregation; it was as if the Inquisition had reached across the Mediterranean, calling him back to the punishment he had escaped by flight.

It was then that Rabbi Zaki, the amusing rotund man, fell into that sense of guilt which characterized his last years. The two blows coming together affected him profoundly, for he felt that if he had been a better husband Rachel might not have grown so bitter; and in fleeing Podi he had abandoned his congregation to the stake, just as surely as Dr. Abulafia had abandoned his family to its torture. For some months he was a man partly deranged by self-recrimination, and in neither Torah nor Talmud could he find consolation. He tried sharing his sorrow with Rabbi Eliezer, who had done the same in fleeing Gretz, but the austere German was so preoccupied with the law that he had no time to offer comfort, nor did the law itself, which stated what a man must do when mourning for the dead but not what to do when those dead were hung about his neck, burning in perpetual fire, so that the smoke blurred his vision. In his extremity he found aid in an unexpected quarter.

Dr. Abulafia came to him in the shoemaker shop and said, “Zaki, father-in-law and friend, the time has come in your perplexity for you to study the Kabbala,” and the devout Spaniard explained in simple terms certain concepts of the
mystical world that learned Jews had been perfecting in recent years. “The mystic perceives with his heart what his mind knows to be true... but cannot prove,” Abulafia began. “And we know that prior to creation God must have been immanent in all things. Without God there could be nothing. But if a merciful God is all things and is responsible for all things, how can we experience events like the burning of the Jews of Podi? Because just before God created the world, He voluntarily withdrew to make space for the physical world we see. But to remind us of His presence He left behind the ten vessels of which you have often heard me speak. And into these ten vessels He poured His divine light so that His presence might be amongst us. But after the first three vessels had caught their portion of the light and saved it for us, the lower seven were struck with such a flood of splendor that they could not retain it, and the vessels were shattered. Thus came confusion and tragedy into the world. Today you and I stand among the shattered vessels and the memory of our betrayals in Podi and Avaro. Sin is upon us and it becomes our responsibility, through dedication, prayer and extra-human effort, to reconstruct these shattered vessels, so that the light of God can exist in its intended receptacles. Zaki, you must co-operate with all men of goodness in their task of gathering together the shattered pieces and reconstructing the vessels.”

At last Rabbi Zaki understood what his handsome son-in-law had been teaching since his arrival in Safed. There was an evil in the world which God was powerless to combat without the help of men; a mystical partnership was being offered, stunning in concept and in its power to elicit the best in life. Like thousands of other Jews who in these years were piercing the mysteries of Zohar, Zaki discovered that he was not the kind of man to find spiritual solace through routine memorizing of Talmud or a sterile codification of law. He could find that mystical solace only through the Kabbala.

“What must I do to help rebuild the broken vessels?” Zaki asked in a spiritual daze.

“No man can tell you,” Abulafia replied. “Contemplate and pray, and He will warn you when He needs you.”

So Rabbi Zaki started to concentrate, but he found it difficult; usually he fell asleep. Nor was he the kind of man to whom God spoke, so he went back to the simple things he could do best: he prayed for the Jews of Podi, and then suddenly the world opened up for him in full mystical radiance. It began one day in November when the dignitaries of Safed came to him and blunt Rabbi Yom Tov said, “Zaki, it’s not proper for you to remain unmarried.” Zaki replied that he was then fifty-seven years old till a hundred and twenty and that his life with Rachel...

“That’s no excuse,” Yom Tov reasoned. “When God finished creating man, what was the first great commandment God gave him?”

Yom Tov waited, then recited in powerful voice, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply...”

At the first two meetings Zaki refused to heed his peers, but at the third meeting the force of God’s original commandment struck him when Yom Tov said, “For His first words to the human race God could have chosen any of His commandments, but He chose the simplest of all. A man must find a woman, they must enjoy themselves in each other, and they must multiply. God later said many other
things to his stiff-necked Jews, and we rebelled against Him at almost every point, but on this one principle there was agreement.”

Another rabbi said, “So, Zaki, you must find a wife.”

And the little plump man surrendered: “I will look among the widows of Safed.”

Then to his shop came Rabbi Eliezer, saying, “Zaki, my daughter Elisheba wants to marry with you.”

It was like a thunderbolt that struck but one house in a village, and that house was Zaki’s. “But I’m fifty-seven till a hundred and twenty and she’s twenty-three.”

“How do you know her age?”

“Because from the day she arrived in Safed I have followed her in all she’s done.”

“Then why are you surprised?” the German rabbi asked.

“But a dozen young men have sat in that chair and asked me, ‘Speak to Rabbi Eliezer that I may have his daughter.’ You know that yourself—I’ve been to see you several times.”

“And why do you suppose Elisheba has always asked me to say no?”

Rabbi Zaki wanted to believe what his ears were hearing, but he was afraid. Before him he saw not Rabbi Eliezer, but his own complaining daughter Sarah, who never bothered to mask her disenchantment with her courtly Spaniard, who seemed so attractive to the other women of Safed. Zaki guessed shrewdly that his daughter’s disappointment stemmed from the age-old problem which was discussed with disarming frankness in the Talmud: “The marital duty enjoined upon husbands by the Torah is as follows: every day for those that are unemployed, twice a week for laborers, once a week for donkey-drivers who lead caravans for short distances, once every thirty days for camel-drivers who lead caravans for longer distances, and once every six months for sailors, but disciples of the sages who study the Torah may stay away from their wives for thirty days.”

Rabbi Zaki thought: Dr. Abulafia is an elderly man, sixty-six till a hundred and twenty, and I am an old man, too, and if he has run into trouble, why may not the same happen to me?

With compelling simplicity the fat rabbi confessed, “Rabbi Eliezer, I’m afraid to marry your daughter.”

Compassionately the German replied, “I’m sure my daughter knows your fears, but she holds that in these matters God directs us. She’s willing to take the risk. She wants to marry you.”

Three times Rabbi Zaki started to speak, but no words came, so finally Eliezer said, “Little Zaki, you’re a saint. And women are more apt than men to recognize saints when they see them.” So the marriage was held in the German synagogue.

Then came the days of heaven on earth. Rabbi Zaki, who had pleaded with so many men to marry, discovered that he had not understood the meaning of the word, for those participations, which with complaining Rachel had been a duty, became with the tall, poetic Elisheba a joy beyond imagining. Being an uncomplicated man and one not committed, like Dr. Abulafia, to wrestling with spiritual problems, Rabbi Zaki encountered no difficulty in fulfilling or even exceeding his Talmudic quota; there was in fact only one problem: one Friday afternoon in the abounding joy of his new marriage he started to say that at last he understood the invocation of the Shabbat hymn, “Come, my Beloved, let us
meet the Bride,” but as soon as he had uttered the first words he dismissed them as blasphemous, for he knew that the Bride Shabbat was greater even than the Bride Elisheba, and in this radiant concept he found assurance. In the quickest possible time she was pregnant, announcing to Safed, “Rabbi Zaki and I are going to have two dozen children.” And as soon as her first son was born she became pregnant again, so that in three years she had three children. She laughed all the time, and when the young men of the town said, “We notice that Rabbi Zaki doesn’t call so many midnight meetings any more,” she shocked Safed by asking demurely, “Would you?”

What Zaki remembered most about his faultless wife, when he was absent from her, was a silly thing. On Fridays, as Shabbat approached, she took white paint and outlined all the cracks where stones joined in the floor of their home, and out into the street as well. It was a German habit and made the home look squared-off and neat, and one day as he recalled these lovely whitened squares with which his wife praised God—he saw them in his mind’s eye against the sky to the west—he first saw the figures 301. They came upon him as burning symbols, more real than the earth on which he walked, the flaming figures 301.

That night as he sat by candlelight, moving the Hebrew alphabet about his paper, hoping that he might convoke the mystical letters YHWH, a feat he had not yet accomplished, for his mind was not disciplined enough for that ultimate of mysteries, the ordinary letters suddenly began falling away and he saw at last only the two which designated the number 301. Again the letters stood forth in flame.

During the happiest period of his life, when Elisheba was walking proudly with her three children and when his own influence in Safed was at its height, the fat rabbi found the number 301 rushing out to confront him at unexpected places. On Friday afternoon he would go with the rabbis to the fields to sing of the coming Shabbat, and when he departed from them to announce Shabbat through the streets from one white wall after another, the burning figures 301 stood forth to terrify him. He could not escape them, and in the third month of this visitation a day came when, embracing his wife, he saw them emblazoned on her forehead and then on the heads of his children. It was a moment of terror.

For three days he spoke to no one, and on Friday he neither took a ritual bath nor went into the fields to welcome Shabbat. Instead, he crept quietly to the German synagogue, a man unable to acknowledge the divine summons which had come to him, and as the voices of singers rose about him, he could hear Elisheba chanting behind the curtain that separated the women:

“Come, my Beloved, let us meet the Bride.
The presence of Shabbat let us receive.”

And then on the embroidered curtain covering the Torah he saw the flaming figures 301.

Above the voices of the singers he cried, “Oh, God, what must I do to help?” And the figures burned in fire, as if they must consume the synagogue, and to the surprise of the worshipers he prostrated himself on the floor, crying, “God, have You called me at last?”

Rabbi Eliezer heard these words and interrupted his chant to run to the fallen
rabbī, and when he saw the ecstasy on the fat man’s face he sensed that some dreadful thing had come to pass through meddling with Kabbala, and he did an extraordinary thing. He slapped Zaki three times and cried, “It is not so!” But the fallen man ignored the blows and looked only at the cupboard of the Torah, where the mystical figures burned for some moments, not to disappear until Zaki cried in full submission, “I shall go.”

At the end of service he ignored Rabbi Eliezer and hurried home, where he said evening prayers with his wife and children, almost breaking down when he saw their four loved faces. He closed his doors to the habitual visitors who liked to sing with him on Shabbat evening and went instead to his room, where he prayed all night. In the morning he waited till Elisheba had fed the children, then said, “I must talk with you.”

Like an uncomplicated girl she smiled and said, “Speak.”

“Can we walk to the old fort?” he asked solemnly, and she, having feared this moment for some days, assented. Calling an old woman to mind her children she joined her husband and they climbed the narrow streets leading to the Crusaders’ fort, where they sat on old rocks and surveyed the marvelous landscape in which they lived.

Rabbi Zaki said, “It is a matter relating to the will of God.” His wife said, “I knew it must be.”

“I am not learned like your father, and I cannot pierce mysteries like Dr. Abulafia, but long ago, when I first read Talmud as a boy, I found the message which has guided my life. It was in the words of the great Akiba, who was also an uncomplicated man like me. Akiba said, ‘Everything in life is given against a pledge, and a net is cast over all the living; the shop is open, the shopkeeper extends credit, the ledger is open before you, the hand writes, and whoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow; but the collectors make their rounds continually and exact payment of every man, with his consent or without.’

There was silence. Elisheba had long known this greatest of passages from Akiba; she knew that all human beings lived under a net which bound them to certain limits of activity, and she knew also that the bill collectors circulated each day, lifting the payment of those who had borrowed against the future. These understandings were the basic morality of Judaism and she did not flinch from them. She wondered what was in her husband’s mind.

“For many months,” he said, “I have felt the number 301 summoning me, and recently it has appeared on your brow and on the brow of our children.” He trembled and drew back. “It’s there now, Elisheba.”

“What does it mean?” she asked softly.

“Fire,” he said.

For some moments she looked at the fat little saint with whom she had been allowed to live in such simple happiness, and slowly the meaning of his vision came to her and she rejected the great words of Akiba. “No!” she screamed in terrible anguish. “Zaki, no! No!”

“It means fire,” he repeated dully.

For some hours they sat peacefully among the Crusader ruins, an old man and a beautiful young wife, and finally each had to accept the fact that there was no escape, no alternative. Finally Elisheba, with an anguish greater than she had
imagined could exist, turned to her husband and said, “If you must, may God strengthen you for the sanctification of His Name.”

“I must,” he said, and like ghosts, treading on unreality, they went down the hill.

Elisheba took it upon herself to notify the other rabbis, and they came running through the streets to the shoemaker’s house. “Is Zaki dying?” the neighbors inquired, seeing the sudden convergence.

The little shoemaker, then sixty years old and with a white beard, sat sternly at his bench as the leaders of Safed gathered about him. He said, “All my life I have wondered why I was made so fat. To please Rachel I tried to eat less, but God kept me fat. It was for a purpose. So then when I march to the stake for the sanctification of His Name I shall make a blaze that will burn for a long time.”

And now the spiritual solidarity of Safed manifested itself. Rabbi Eliezer, torn from his legal studies, did not remind his colleagues that such egocentricity was the end product of Kabbalism, nor did he cry that seeking out martyrdom was arrogance and a matter not approved by law. He reasoned, “Zaki, my beloved son-in-law, has God directed you to do this thing, or is it merely your own vanity?”

And Dr. Abulafia, whose encouragements to Zaki to study the Kabbala could have been responsible for the fiery message, felt himself rebuked by Zaki’s determination to compensate for his abandonment of his congregation. “Zaki,” he asked, “is it a true vision you’ve had or something you imagined because you were with others who had honest insights?”

Patiently Rabbi Zaki put each of his friends at ease. “This happened to me long before I heard of Kabbala, for on the day I fled Podi, God showed me on the faces of the friends I was deserting the mark of fire. And it is a true vision, for in a dream a voice spoke to me and said, ‘Zaki, if you try to divide this number 301 by two or three or four or five or six, which are the ordinary days of the week, there is always one left over, which is you. But if you divide it by seven, which is the number of our Shabbat, there is no remainder, and you are one with God.’ In a whisper he added, “And if you sum the letters used in writing fire they come to 301.”

Among the Kabbalists there was serious discussion of these mystical facts, for obviously they portended something arcane, but the discussion was broken by blunt Rabbi Yom Tov, who reminded Zaki, “There is one supreme reason for not going. If your bones are buried here in Safed, on Judgment Day you will rise to greet the Messiah; but if they are buried overseas you will have to burrow underground like a mole to reach the Holy Land.” This was a belief held by many old Jews, and it was their dread of a long twisting journey in darkness which inspired them to return to the Holy Land to die.

Of equal weight was Rabbi Abulafia’s reminder: “You are not an ordinary Jew, Zaki, going to Rome on a mission to defend the Torah. Some have done so and escaped. But you are a Jew who was once baptized in the Christian Church, and like the Jews of Podi who were burned, you are in the eyes of that Church a heretic, and they believe they have a duty to burn you. If you go to Rome, you invite your own certain death.”

But what Rabbi Zaki said next was of greater weight: “We live within the net of God, and though I swam to the farthest end of the Mediterranean I could not
escape. Had I stayed with the Jews of Podi, I would have burned with them. They call me and God calls me.”

The discussion was broken by the arrival of Zaki’s two oldest daughters, Sarah and Tamar, who demanded to know What the meeting was about. When they were told that their father proposed going back to Rome to argue for Judaism and to offer himself for martyrdom, they began to protest bitterly. Like their mother they had been against his leaving Podi, Africa and Salonica, and they were now against his leaving Safed. “If Mother were alive…” they shouted harshly.

“She is not alive,” Elisheba interrupted. “But I am, and I say that if Rabbi Zaki is called by God to this terrible mission, he shall go with my blessing and the blessing of our children.”

“They’re not old enough to know anything,” the sisters whined.

“I know what they will believe on such matters,” Elisheba said, “because they are the children of a saint.”

“If our mother were here…” Sarah wailed.

“Order your wife out of here,” one of the rabbis told Abulafia, but he said resignedly, “She is his daughter. She is allowed to stay.” And the matter was put up to Zaki, who said, “You may stay, Sarah, but do not speak so loudly.”

The discussion went on and on, but nothing could shake Rabbi Zaki from his determination to go to Rome, and it was at last agreed that he should do so. He spent two weeks in finishing his affairs and selling his shoemaker shop to a young man he hoped would marry Elisheba when he was dead. He held long conversations with his children, trusting that they might remember something of the old, white-bearded man who had been their father.

From one synagogue to the other he went, praying with the people who had grown to love him, and on the last Friday he went to the fields with the rabbis and sang joyously at the approach of Shabbat, Then he left them and marched slowly through the streets, calling the Jews to their duty of greeting Queen Shabbat, and it was supposed that he would go to the German synagogue, which his wife attended; but he went instead to that of Rabbi Abulafia, a man who also carried a burden of sin, and the two old rabbis looked at each other across the heads of the congregation.

On Sunday he said farewell to his wife. No more would he embrace those lovely breasts or know her enchanting thighs. Her womb would grow no more with his seed and at night he would not feel her white leg creeping across his. The exact structure of her marvelous face framed in black hair would slowly recede from his memory, except that in the last moment, through the flames, he would see not YHWH, but Elisheba, the daughter of Eliezer bar Zadok.

Early Monday morning the people of Safed, led by their rabbis, walked into the countryside after Rabbi Zaki as he started on his pilgrimage. They gave him money and prayers. He kissed his wife and his children, then kissed his wife again, but the last citizen of Safed with whom he spoke was Dr. Abulafia, who came bearing a small parcel. “You know the sin under which I live,” the Spaniard said. “Help me. When I fled I brought with me this menorah. Take it back to the land of persecution. Someone may cherish it.”

Rabbi Zaki looked at the turbaned man and said with humility, “I judged you harshly. Now God forces me to behave in the same way. Forgive me.” But when he
camped that night at the mound of Makor he argued with himself: Taking Rabbi Abulafia’s menorah back to Europe is an act of arrogance, if not of idolatry. He therefore buried it deep in the earth, trusting that at some later date a Jew of the region would find it and consider it a miracle.

On the next morning he rose early and resumed his march toward Rome.

**LEVEL II**

**Twilight of an Empire**

*Illustration: Turkish gold coin*

Schematic sketch of a gold coin issued by the Fatimid Dynasty of Egypt. Original reads in part—Obverse: “In the name of God, this dinar was struck at Tiberias 395 A.H. (1004 CE.). Ali al-Mansur Abu Ali being Imam. Al-Hakim hi-Amr-Allah being Commander of the Faithful.” Reverse: “There is no God except Allah alone. He has no partner. [This phrase was included to irritate Christians.] Muhammad is the Apostle of God, sent with instructions to demonstrate the true faith in its entirety, even though the pagans hated this. Ali is the friend of Allah” It was this Caliph al-Hakim who ordered the destruction of the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1009, thus initiating the series of events that culminated in the Crusades. Deposited at Makor August 21, 1880 C.E., sometime after six o’clock in the afternoon.
It was hot in Tiberias, both within the city and without. A blazing sun beat down upon the molten surface of the lake and hammered at the barren hills like a great torch seeking to set the world afire. Inside the massive black walls of the town the heat was more than a man could bear, so that during the suffocating hours of midday few could be seen in the narrow alleys, down which ran open sewers throwing a hideous stench.

Tiberias was the earth’s lowest settlement, cowering more than six hundred and eighty feet below the level of the sea, and in this torrid summer of 1880 it was also one of the world’s most miserable communities, a somnolent, cramped and dirty little town overburdened with filth and fleas. In the remorseless sun it dozed as if ashamed to show its face to the world.

Legend of the countryside claimed that the king of insects held court in Tiberias and hither summoned his subjects each summer to devise new means of tormenting human beings, their shrewd inventions being first tried out on the citizens of this wretched town. Certainly something in the hot, low place was conducive to the breeding of insects, for each house was alive with fleas and scorpions and bedbugs.

For nearly a thousand years Tiberias had been the butt of jokes, because as early as 985 an Arab traveler, forced against his will to spend some time in the town, reported to his friends: “For two months in the year the citizens gorge
themselves upon the fruit of the jujube bush, which grows wild and costs them nothing. For two months they struggle with the numerous flies that are rife there. For two months they go about naked because of the fierce heat. For two months they play the flute, for they suck pieces of sugar cane which resemble flutes. For two months they wallow in mud, for the rains soak their streets, and for the last two months they dance in their beds because of the legions of fleas with which they are infested.” The people of Tiberias enjoyed a reputation no more favorable than that of their insects. A drowsy, undistinguished lot, they drifted through the years with no accomplishments, and a stranger, looking at their town in its present condition, could not have recognized the once-proud city of the Herods nor the center of learning from which the Talmud and the written Bible were given to the world. It would have been impossible to imagine that within these walls a Crusader court had once held sway, for now only a few Arabs huddled in their district, a few Jews in theirs, the Sephardim remaining strictly aloof from the Ashkenazim while a handful of Christians clung to the southern edge of the town, and on stifling days like this, when the thermometer on the kaimakam’s balcony stood at 124 degrees and when no breeze came from any quarter, the citizens of Tiberias lay panting in their beds, hoping that the night would bring relief.

In this flea-bitten town only one man was cool. In an underground room perched over a cellar which had been packed during the winter with ice lugged down from the mountains, a handsome, portly man in his early forties reclined in a bamboo chair, his fat feet higher than his belly and a wet towel about his head. He was naked except for a small breech-clout and he was drinking grape juice into which had been placed chips of ice from the cellar below.

Even so, this amiable man with the long mustaches was sweating, not because of the heat, but because of intricate and dangerous plans in which he was involved. Two different groups of plaintiffs had petitioned him for exactly contrary decisions regarding a matter of land: the white-robed qadi and the red-faced mufti had joined forces to plead for one solution, while Shmuel Hacohen, a sway-backed Jew from Russia, sought an opposing judgment. And Faraj ibn Ahmed Tabari, the kaimakam of Tubariyeh, as Tiberias was now called, had devised a trick whereby he could extort baksheesh from each side while appeasing neither, and such a solution appealed to his sense of administration.

Tabari lay back in his chair and imagined the plaintiffs as they would stand before him in a few hours. The red-faced mufti would bluster: “As religious leader of the Muslims I demand.” The white-robed little qadi, afraid of his judgeship, would wheedle: “Excellency, I do think you should.” And Hacohen, a man of incorruptible determination, would stand with his left foot awkwardly forward and plead: “A boatload of Jews has landed at Akka.” And each would have in his pockets, to bolster his petition, a handful of gold coins, dependable, negotiable English sovereigns. It was the kind of situation the kaimakam could appreciate.

But the real reason he sweated was not this exacting duplicity regarding land nor the oppressive heat of this unbearable day. Governor Tabari was nervous because he felt himself being edged closer to that moment when he must take a stand regarding the future of the empire, and this he was afraid to do. Before the recent war the sultan had arbitrarily offered a constitution and the hearts of young men like Tabari had surged with hope; but just as arbitrarily the sultan had
revoked the constitution and young men could see that despotism and tyranny
were to be indefinitely prolonged. This was a matter on which men of character
should take a stand, and Tabari, at forty-two, could logically place himself either
with the young idealists or with the established officials who were satisfied with no
change. Normally he would have procrastinated on a matter of such importance,
but his brother-in-law was on his way from Istanbul to urge that Tabari side with
the reformers who were planning a direct appeal for the restoration of law. Trying
to decide which way to jump in such circumstances was enough to make a man
sweat.

Kaimakam Tabari’s inability to make a decision should not be construed as
defectiveness in character; one of the few Arabs permitted to attain high position
within the Turkish administration, he had to be cautious where policy was
concerned. In fact, his presence in government had been a fortunate accident and
he would allow no mistakes to jeopardize it. Years ago, as a sharp-eyed Arab boy
growing up in Tubariyeh, he had captivated the interest of the then kaimakam, a
Turkish scholar of extraordinary quality who had invited young Faraj to play with
his son and daughter, and who, in watching the Arab boy at games, had developed
an insane passion for the youth.

Strange years had followed, in which Faraj traveled with the kaimakam from
Safad to Akka to Beirut, thus acquiring his insight into Turkish administration;
and then, as suddenly as the passion had arisen, it waned, and the kaimakam
allowed Faraj to marry his daughter and arranged for him to attend the school for
administrators in Istanbul. There Tabari had been a lone Arab in classes
dominated by Greeks, Bulgars and Persians, and had learned with what contempt
the Turkish rulers held all Arabs, those least and lowliest of the empire. He
dedicated himself to proving what an Arab could accomplish and he so impressed
his instructors that after graduation he was assigned to exploratory positions in
Salonica, Edirne and Baghdad. It was to that latter city, in 1876, when he was
thirty-eight and his strange father-in-law was dead, that his wife’s brother had
come with exciting news: “Faraj! You’re being sent to Mecca. And if you can
somehow get together baksheesh in the amount of six hundred Maria Theresas
you’ll be allowed to buy the kaimakam’s office in Tubariyeh.”

At that stage in his career, with three children, Tabari had been able to
accumulate through extortion, theft and bribery only two hundred Maria Theresas
toward the purchase of his next appointment, so the secret offer posed a difficult
problem, but his brother-in-law would accept no objections. “Get hold of the
kaimakam’s office, one way or another,” he counseled, “for then you’ll be able to
accomplish great things.” And for the first time Tabari listened to one of the young
idealists explain what the Turkish empire might become. “Faraj! When you’re back
in Tubariyeh you can open a school. Maybe a hospital. We have plans for a system
of military service which will also teach peasants to read and write.” They had
talked for many hours, at the end of which Tabari said, “I’ll find the money
somehow,” and they had shaken hands, not as conspirators but as two men, one a
Turk, one an Arab, who perceived the reforms that must overtake their tired old
empire.

What Tabari did not know as he traveled south to Mecca was that the sultan’s
men, seeking a new crop of officials who could be trusted to defend the old order,
had selected him for preferment and were sending him there to see if an Arab with no funds could be relied upon to protect himself in an emergency. They found out. Within a month Faraj Tabari had set in motion an intricate plan which would enable him to steal twice four hundred Maria Theresas in less than a year, and all from impoverished Arabs who could not protest. It would not be wholly accurate to describe his manipulations as stealing; in those somnolent years the Turkish empire operated on the principle that each government employee ought to be able to put aside each year, in one manner or another, four times his official salary: one to pay baksheesh on the job he already held, one to pay for the job he wanted next, one to help his superior pay for his job, and one to hold back for emergencies. Any Turkish official who did not know how to extort, lie, squeeze, blackmail and defraud without creating scandal was obviously unqualified to help run the empire, and Faraj Tabari was ready to prove himself one of the best officials sent to Arabia in recent years.

He started by going down from Mecca to Jidda, where Muslim pilgrims arrived for their journeys to the holy places of Islam, and within a few days he initiated a system whereby each pilgrim was milked of an additional tax. All ships putting in at Jidda harbor were required to pay unexpected port duties, and when they protested, unanticipated difficulties arose which could be solved only by the payment of more baksheesh. Next the energetic young Arab saw to it that all caravans putting in at Mecca were taxed on their oil and dates, and transfers of land were inexplicably held up until fees of an unspecified nature were paid.

What was exceptional about Tabari’s operation was that he accomplished it with ease and even urbanity. Each underling who collected baksheesh for him was allowed to keep a portion for himself, while those in superior positions found themselves receiving unexpected contributions. Maneuvering as if he had headed governments for years, Tabari won the respect of all, kept the friendship of most and certainly demonstrated that he was prepared for a command position within the empire.

When the six hundred Maria Theresas had been accumulated he took them to Istanbul, handing them to the official in charge of appointing kaimakams and then spending memorable weeks revisiting his school and forming those friendships which would control his destiny in the years ahead. His brother-in-law, who had insinuated himself into a good job, met him frequently at cafés along the Bosporus, with reports of progress among the younger men. “We have key positions in every department,” the enthusiastic reformer said. “When you get back to Tubariyeh there will be so much to do.”

During his first weeks in Istanbul, Tabari was almost convinced that the younger men would succeed in forcing the promulgation of a new constitution and he felt strongly drawn to them, but in the fourth week a cab called for him and he was driven out along the Bosporus to the splendid Dolma Bagcheh Palace for an audience with the sultan, and he found Abdul Hamid, destined to be the greatest ruler of modern Turkey, to be a shrewd, calculating man, cruel in decision and obviously determined that his empire should not again be molested by constitutional reform. Tabari was one of several newly appointed kaimakams whom the sultan was receiving that afternoon and at one point the group moved to a dark room of the palace, where Abdul Hamid said, “In the old days, if one of our
kaimakams betrayed his office, he was invited here for a consultation, and as he waited ...” Abdul Hamid giggled, and in the ensuing silence a huge black eunuch slipped into the darkened room and caught Tabari by the neck. The other governors gasped, and Tabari could feel the slave’s fingers tightening about his throat. Then the Negro dropped his hands and everyone laughed nervously. Abdul Hamid added, “Without a trace the faithless ones were strangled and pitched into the Bosporus. Of course, today we no longer use such punishments.”

And so, properly instructed on how to rule an empire, Faraj ibn Ahmed Tabari, the most successful man yet produced by the Family of Ur, returned to govern his home town of Tubariyeh. He allowed no strife, visited his outlying districts faithfully and paid regular baksheesh to the mutasarrif in Akka and to the wali in Beirut. Furthermore, as a result of insistent pressure on everyone who did business with him, he was able each month to put aside a sum of money toward the purchase of his next job, which ought to be of such importance that he could steal enough to retire on. When that time came he planned to return to Tubariyeh and buy a portion of the town for himself.

For he loved the grubby little settlement in which he had been reared. Even when serving in remote districts he had been able to recall the snow-capped mountain to the north, the lights of Safad nestling in the hills and the beauty of the lake. The quality of government he gave Tubariyeh was by no means inferior, if judged by the standards of the area, say, from India to Morocco, for he kept his people happy. He initiated no oppression and allowed each minority, like the Christian or the Jewish, to govern itself in matters concerning religion and family life. He supervised a rough justice and maintained civil peace in which the tedious years could pass with no disruptions and little change. Throughout the east thousands of people lived under conditions far worse than those provided by Governor Tabari, and if along the lake there were no schools, if women of all creeds lived like animals, it was simply that no alternatives had been suggested. During the two years he had sat in his office staring out at the barren hills of the Galilee, it had not once occurred to him that the reforms spoken of by the eager young men in Istanbul could be applied here if only he would spend a little energy upon them. When he saw the barren fields he did not understand that they could be otherwise or that they ever had been so. He lived beside a lake which contained some of the finest fish in Asia, a lake which had once fed multitudes even without the miracle of Jesus, yet he never thought it strange that contemporary Tubariyeh had no boat and no food from that plentiful reservoir that stood right at the edge of town. It did not occur to him that it might be a good idea to purchase a boat somewhere and bring it to the lake so that the citizens of Tubariyeh could again enjoy fish. The last vessel to sail that lake had rotted away four hundred years before, and where there had once been fleets of a hundred and two hundred craft there was now not even a rowboat. On the edge of plenty his people starved, and he could not visualize a solution.

“My job,” he once explained to the wali in Akka, “is to maintain order and to watch at night lest the Bedouins attack the walls.”

Kaimakam Tabari had one simple rule of administration, and it was understood by his subjects: In Tubariyeh positively everything was for sale. If an Arab youth was summoned to military service it was obvious that there was no possible
escape; but if his father paid the kaimakam enough, he could escape. Alien Jews were forbidden under the most severe penalties reaching almost to death from owning land in Arab areas; but if the Jew could get together enough baksheesh he could buy the land. When the qadi found a man guilty, it was arranged between the qadi and the kaimakam that the former would impose an excessive sentence; then the guilty man could appeal to the latter, and if he had enough money to pay the baksheesh he went free. For the issuance of the simplest government paper, an established scale of bribes was in force, and in either the civil court of the qadi or the religious court of the mufti any decision that was wanted could be had by paying the proper baksheesh to the kaimakam.

Of course, the income thus gained was by no means all his. He was generous in paying off his subordinates and in splitting fees with the qadi and the mufti. Furthermore, he had to send regular bribes to Akka and Beirut. As a result of this constant drain on the people of Tubariyeh, there was no money left for schools, or sewers, or water supply, or a jail in which a human being could survive. There were no hospitals, no adequate policing, no fire-fighting and no roads. There was the wall, and this kept out the Bedouins, and there was the smiling, amiable kaimakam who made things as easy as possible for his people.

For such a system of general bribery to work, there had to be relative honesty among the principals, but recently the kaimakam had found that the red-faced mufti was cheating on baksheesh and undermining him in Akka. Such behavior was not surprising, for Tabari’s brother-in-law had warned him that Arabs like the qadi and the mufti would be unhappy with a fellow Arab for kaimakam: “They’d prefer outsiders. A Bulgarian, for example. They would fear him and know where they stood.” As usual, the young man proved right, and as this hot day drew to a close Tabari resolved to settle matters with the mufti. He finished his grape juice, wiped his body for the last time and donned the Turkish uniform in which he conducted the business of government.

From behind a curtain on the second floor of his home he spied with fatherly interest upon the life that began to move once more through the alleys of his town. Muslim shopkeepers lounged at the doors of their shops. An old Jew passed through the market, seeking rags, while through the entrance of the synagogue other Jews passed to resume their study of Talmud. A Christian missionary, unable to convert either Muslim or Jew, walked in perplexity beside the lake, wondering what secret power Jesus and Paul had possessed that they could unlock hearts which were barred to him. Finally the kaimakam saw what he was looking for: from the door of the mufti’s house supped the little qadi, dressed in white and very nervous. Looking furtively in all directions the judge darted across the alley and started to walk in innocence toward the government buildings. After he was safely gone the portly mufti, dressed in black and with a red face on which his emotions could not be hidden, appeared from the same door and casually walked by different streets to the building where the meeting was to be held.

“They don’t want me to know they’ve been conspiring,” Tabari laughed. In a way he was pleased that they had been laying plans behind his back, and he was careful to give them time to reach his office, so that if necessary they could conspire further; for he judged that the more secure they felt, the better chance he had of squeezing from them a sizable chunk of baksheesh. This was contrary
reasoning, for usually one would expect only a man alone and in desperation to offer real baksheesh; but Turkish administrators had discovered that it was men who felt sure of themselves, men who had substantial funds at their disposal, who paid for what they wanted. Such men could not be bullied, but they could be tricked.

Kaimakam Tabari put out his Turkish cigarette, adjusted his tarboosh, went in to kiss his wife, to whom he owed so much, and started his walk to the office. Arabs and Jews alike drew back to pay him respect, and he moved slowly, majestically past the mosque, but at the caravanserai, which occupied a central area, he paused to inquire whether the messenger had arrived from Akka with the dispatches from the mutasarrif, and he was disappointed to find that no horseman had come.

“If one does,” Tabari directed, “speed him to me,” and with this he could no longer delay facing his visitors, so with feigned eagerness he burst into his office, hurried up to the two conspirators and embraced them warmly.

“Good friends, be comfortable on this hot day.” He arranged chairs for them and asked, “Now what’s your problem?”

The little judge gaped. “Excellency! For two years we’ve been discussing our problem.”

“Of course,” Tabari agreed amiably. “But have we any new solutions?”

“What word from Akka?” the mufti asked bluntly.

“None.”

“Then you will make the decision?”

“Of course.”

“And what have you decided?”

“I am inclined toward your point of view.”

The hopeful qadi assumed that this meant victory and was obsequious in his praise: “Excellency, we knew in our hearts that a man of your wisdom ...”

But the mufti, one of the ablest men in Tubariyeh, was better schooled in the tricks of Turkish administrators, and sought to pin Tabari down: “Can we rely upon your word?”

If the kaimakam was insulted by the mufti’s crudeness, he restrained himself by recalling his main objective: Today I want money from this man. Revenge can wait until tomorrow. He smiled blandly and said, “Of course you have my word.”

Again the qadi was delighted. “Then the Jew gets no land?” he asked.

“I didn’t exactly say that,” Tabari hedged.

“What did you say?” the mufti snapped.

Once more the governor stifled his anger. He thought: Sooner or later I must cut this man down. But not today. To the mufti he explained, “I said that I shared your opinions.”

“But what are you going to do about them?”

Tabari thought: Let the red-faced dog get madder. Then it will be easier to goad him for the money. He said easily, “What am I going to do? Exactly what you two gentlemen have recommended.”

The little qadi showed his relief that the uncertainty had been erased. “This is a memorable day, Excellency. Then the Jew gets no land?”

“Not under any possible circumstances,” the governor promised, and with a
gesture of transparent honesty he threw his hands on the table, palms up, as if to say: “There you have the whole matter before you,”

The qadi laughed nervously, as if a burden had been lifted from him, but the dour mufti realized that the squeeze was on. Whenever a Turkish official used that ominous phrase, “under no possible circumstances,” every wise man knew that the matter was at last up for hard discussion and that the verdict would go to the claimant who paid the largest bribe. The mufti thought: Look at that damned Arab, waiting for me to make an offer that would seal the bargain. Well, he can wait.

Kaimakam Tabari did wait. He saw that the stupid qadi had missed the point, but he knew that the mufti had understood what was expected and was remaining silent in order to humiliate his superior. But the mufti controlled the money that Tabari wanted, so it was the kaimakam who had to swallow his pride and say, “I’ve been thinking”; and when he used this universal phrase of Turkish corruption even the dim-witted qadi knew what was up.

“I’ve been thinking,” Tabari repeated, “that since the three of us have agreed that the Jew should have no land, I’d better inform the mutasarrif in Akka.” The mufti, a willful man but one eager to protect his Muslims, looked at the slippery kaimakam with contempt, so again Tabari was forced to spell out the negotiation: “But for me to go to Akka will require money.”

“How much?” the mufti asked scornfully.

“Thirty English pounds,” Tabari said unflinchingly. When he saw the qadi blanch he added suavely, “I say English pounds because I know you stole more than forty from the last group of pilgrims to Capernaum.”

As the mufti glared at the governor his red face became nearly purple. It was infuriating, the mufti thought, to be treated in this manner by an Arab playing the role of a Turk. Moreover, if he did give Tabari the thirty pounds, little of it would reach Akka, and this idea spurred a crafty thought: Why not give Tabari the thirty pounds, wait for him to steal half, then inform the mutasarrif in Akka that Tabari had stolen from him? By such a trick he might get rid of Tabari altogether, and that would be worth thirty pounds.

The qadi was not equal to such duplicity. The best he could do was sell legal decisions to the highest bidder and then split with the kaimakam, and the concept of springing a trap as far away as Akka was quite beyond him. But the moral problem in the case before him was not; and to everyone’s surprise he turned to Tabari: “Kaimakam Tabari, it seems clear that if you allow the Jew to buy land outside the wall he will bring in other Jews to work that land, and if they succeed, still other Jews will follow them, and soon we poor Muslims…” He waved his hand futilely, as if trying to stem the inevitable.

“Oh, I agree with you thoroughly,” Tabari cried enthusiastically. “That’s why I do hope you can find the money for Akka.”

“Will the mutasarrif be qualified to make the decision?” the mufti asked, lured against his will into discussing the case on its merits.

“Of course!” Tabari said in all seriousness, but even as he spoke he reflected: Two years ago the papers were started on their way from Tubariyeh to Akka to Beirut to Istanbul. The decision has surely been made by now, and somewhere along that chain a firman from the sultan is headed this way. Now the European
governments have been insisting upon more liberal land laws throughout the empire, and if the sultan grants privileges to Russians and Englishmen, he must do the same for the Jews. So if I want to get my baksheesh from the qadi and the mufti I’d better get it now, before they learn that the sultan’s decision has gone against them.

The mufti was speaking in a low growl: “Aren’t you afraid of having Jews buy land?”

“I am indeed,” the kaimakam replied with honest passion. “It would change everything. Open the gates for…” He didn’t know for what, but he suspected that the easy old days of accommodation and the quiet passage of years would vanish. He felt an honest sorrow, which he quickly suppressed, for time was passing and the firman might arrive at any moment without his having got the money.

“If we give you the thirty pounds?” the qadi asked plaintively.

“I’d work diligently to keep the Jews off the land.”

“And we could rely on this?” the qadi pleaded.

“You have my word of honor!” the kaimakam expostulated. “In fact, I’m riding to Akka tomorrow. I’ll hand the mutasarrif your money myself, and there’ll be no Jews in Tubariyeh.” To himself he reasoned: If the sultan’s decision is otherwise, I’ll insist I did my best to halt it.

This wily thought, as it came to him, must have betrayed its duplicity in some way, for the canny mufti, watching Tabari’s face, gasped to himself: That dirty swine! He already knows what the sultan decided and he’s trying to steal our money. Damn him! I’ll give him the money and strangle him with it. Tonight I’ll send a message to the mutasarrif telling him what’s happened. And before the week is passed, our friend Tabari will be in jail.

But now something of the mufti’s trickery betrayed itself to Tabari, who was well schooled in the basic rule of Turkish administration: When you have forced a man to pay a bribe, study him carefully to see how he plans to take his revenge. It became clear to Tabari that if his mufti paid the bribe he would do so in hatred and only because he saw some way of hurting the kaimakam. What could the mufti do to endanger me? Tabari asked himself. Only one thing. Pay the money to me, inform the mutasarrif that he’s done so, and count on me to keep the money for myself. Smiling genially at the red-faced religious leader, Tabari thought: You illegitimate pig. I’ll take your money and I’ll give every piaster to the mutasarrif, then tell him what a swine you really are. In two weeks you’ll be in Yemen.

Now the qadi and the mufti looked at each other in consultation, and the qadi delivered their decision: “We’ll give you the thirty pounds, Excellency.”

“To be used as you suggested,” the mufti growled. “For Akka.”

“Of course,” Governor Tabari cried pleasantly, and by great good fortune something inspired him to go to the two men and throw his arms about them, as if they were his friends, because at that moment an Egyptian servant appeared at the door behind them carrying a dispatch case; but because the governor gripped the two men tightly in an embrace, they could not turn to see the servant, and when they were able to do so he had disappeared on a signal from Tabari, taking whatever messages he had with him.

When the embrace ended Kaimakam Tabari cried to the servant, “Hassan, accompany the mufti to his home. He has a package for me.”
The Egyptian, his hands now empty, returned casually to the room. The mufti looked at him suspiciously and suggested, “I’ll bring the money over tomorrow.”

This called for Tabari to apply the second rule of Turkish administration: When a man agrees to a bribe don’t let him out of your sight till he delivers. He may reconsider. “You forget,” Tabari reminded the mufti, “I leave for Akka in the morning, and to be effective, your money should reach the mutasarrif promptly.”

The mufti bowed, extended his hand in friendship, then led the qadi from the room. As soon as they had parted from the governor the angry mufti drew the judge aside, so that the servant could not hear, and whispered, “Did you have the feeling that someone entered the room while the old bastard was embracing us?”

“I didn’t notice anything,” the bewildered qadi replied.

Suddenly the powerful mufti whipped about, caught the servant by the arm and demanded, “You just brought the kaimakam a dispatch from Akka, didn’t you?”

“No!” the startled Egyptian replied. In silence he accompanied the mufti to the latter’s home, where he checked and rechecked the thirty English pounds which the religious leader handed him.

At that moment Kaimakam Tabari was opening the dispatch case which the servant had been about to hand him a few minutes before. The routine papers Tabari laid aside, shuffling through the others until he found what he had suspected would be in the pouch. Hastily he took out the precious firman, inscribed in gold and sealed with red silk, and read:

The petition of the Jew Shmuel Hacohen of Tubariyeh to purchase land at the foot of Bahr Tubariyeh, said land now in possession of Emir Tewfik ibn Alafa, native of Damascus, is hereby granted. The further petition of Hacohen to purchase additional land giving direct access to the Bahr Tubariyeh and the River Jordan is hereby denied. Under no circumstances shall Jews be allowed to acquire land with water frontage.

As Kaimakam Tabari finished reading the firman he smiled, for it meant that the mufti’s bribe had been ineffectual even at the moment of being paid, and as an official of the Turkish empire he relished such sardonic contradictions. But now his servant entered with the thirty pounds and news that was less pleasing: outside in the waiting room stood the Jew, Shmuel Hacohen, eager to discuss with the kaimakam the land which he had for the past four years been trying vainly to purchase.

The Tell

It was singular, John Cullinane thought, that twice in modern history the Jews had been saved by the Turks. It had happened in the sixteenth century when Turkey had offered the outcasts such refuges as Salonica, Constantinople and Safed; and it had been repeated in the nineteenth century when pogroms ravaged Poland and Russia. Why had it been the Muslim Turks who had salvaged the Jews when Christian nations tried to exterminate the religion from which they themselves had sprung? One might reason that Islam had been tolerant because it valued Old Testament traditions more highly than Christians did, for Muhammad
had specifically directed tolerance toward Jews, while Christianity never did; but this was specious reasoning, and Cullinane dismissed it.

And why was it only the Jew whom the Turk tolerated? During the periods when the Turk was showing his greatest consideration to the Jew, he was at the same time persecuting the Druse and the Armenian, the Bulgarian and the Greek. The same kaimakam who on Monday aided the Jew, on Tuesday hung the Armenian, and on Wednesday shot the Greek.

It was necessary, Cullinane thought, to look outside the field of religion for an explanation, and when he did he found certain ideas which made sense. The Turk did not favor the Jew because he preferred him to the Christian; on the contrary, the Turk, like God, found the Jews to be a stiff-necked people, most difficult to manage. But the Jew stood alone and could be treated alone. He had no outside nation pressuring for intervention on behalf of his friends, so long as he behaved himself reasonably well he was welcomed in Turkey and treated generously. This was not so with the Christians or the Arabs. With the former there was the constant threat that they might summon to the Holy Land nations like France, England or Russia to protect them; while with the Arabs there was the insidious possibility that they would somehow unite to throw off Turkish rule. Consequently, neither Christians nor Arabs were ever allowed freedom to expand.

At first glance, Cullinane thought, the situation seemed contradictory. One would normally argue that since the Jew was friendless he could be persecuted with impunity, whereas the Christian, surrounded by friends, had better not be touched. The Turks had reasoned otherwise: they did not wish to persecute anyone for his religious beliefs, but they did wish to hold their shaky empire together and would tolerate no one who might in the future pose a threat to its continuance. Thus in Tubariyeh there was no possibility that the sickly ghetto students of the Talmud might one day coalesce into rebellion against the empire, whereas there was always the danger that the Arabs might do just that, so it was not illogical for a devout Muslim kaimakam to render decisions unfavorable to his mufti.

On the other hand, Cullinane learned that he must not interpret Muslim indifference to the Jews as constituting approval. The tragedy that was allowed to overtake Safad in 1834 was a classic example of Muslim administration, although in this instance it had been the invading Egyptians and not the Turks who were involved. On May 31, 1834, a sizable earthquake struck Safad, accompanied by much loss of property, and some weeks later word reached town that the Egyptian army was going to conscript Arab men. Superstitious Arabs concluded that some malign influence was working against them, and the Jews were blamed. The logical solution was to massacre them, which the Arabs started to do. For thirty-three unhampered days the Muslims were allowed to riot, destroying synagogues, killing rabbis and defacing over two hundred scrolls of the Torah, each worth more than a man’s home. The remnants of the great Jewish settlement were driven into the countryside, where for more than a month they lived on grass and slaughtered sheep, after which the government came back, caught the Arab ringleaders and hanged thirteen of them.

This was the way the Turks ruled: Start no pogroms yourself, but if the Arabs went to massacre the Jews, let them; then sweep in and execute the Arabs. Thus
each community lost its leaders and relative quiet was maintained. But certainly
in this cynical system the Turk treated the Jew no worse than he did the Muslim.

To Cullinane this impartiality was not surprising. He had found that most
people, in their study of history, evaluated religion as a rather more important
political force than it was. In the abstract one might expect Catholic France and
Catholic Spain to recognize common interests, but they rarely did. Once when
Cullinane was inspecting a dig in Persia he developed the attractive idea that the
Muslim religion would some day unify western Asia, but before he had time to
perfect his theory he found that Muslim Afghanistan was an ally of Hindu India,
but wanted to go to war with Muslim Pakistan, which was an ally of Buddhist
China. A little later Muslim Egypt tried to destroy Muslim Arabia. Even more
spectacular to anyone digging in Israel was the example of the Crusaders, who set
forth as a Christian army but who found their first enemies in Catholic Hungary,
in Orthodox Constantinople and among the Christian communities of Asia Minor.

Cullinane had learned not to expect Catholic Ireland and Catholic Spain to
share common views, and he doubted that Muslim Turkey and Muslim Syria ever
would, either. For religion was not a solid basis upon which to construct either a
nation or a congeries of nations, and he could foresee the distant time when Pan-
Arabism, not religion, would unite true Arab states like Syria, Iraq and Arabia,
while surrounding non-Arabic states would go their historic ways: to the west
Muslim Egypt would assume a position of leadership among the nations of Africa;
to the east Muslim Iran would concentrate on Asia; while to the north Muslim
Turkey would associate herself with the problems of Europe. Nationalism, not
religion, would decide, and he often caught himself wondering whether the new
state of Israel had been wise to commit herself so completely to one faith, no
matter how ancient and deeply rooted in the local soil that faith might be. He was
surprised at the power of religious parties in the government, at the religious
emphasis in schools and at the fact that Israel, like Turkey of old, had handed civil
problems like marriage and inheritance to religious courts composed of rabbis if
one were Jewish, priests if one were Catholic, or ministers if one happened to be
Protestant. As a good Christian he could not help concluding: This is where
Byzantium was sixteen centuries ago. Why would a new nation of its own free will
insist upon repeating such mistakes? He felt that one of these days he ought to
ask Eliav about these matters, for apparently Jews felt that their religion
contained special features which exempted it from errors which had overtaken
other faiths.

* * * * *

Shmuel Hacohen wanted land. He had to have land. More than any other man
in Palestine this sway-backed, hard-working Jew from Russia had to find land;
and as twilight ended on this hot summer day he became desperate, for the same
messenger who had brought the dispatches from Akka to Kaimakam Tabari had
brought word to Hacohen that the first shipload of Jews from Europe had landed
two days earlier at that port. Tomorrow they would begin marching to Tiberias,
and unless there was land awaiting them Hacohen would face disaster.

Four years ago, when he first came to Tiberias, he had thought that buying land
for a Jewish settlement would be a simple task, but months and years had slipped
by in tantalizing negotiation, in bribery and confusion, and Hacohen found himself in 1880 no nearer to having acquired his acres than he had been in 1876. For example, two full years had elapsed since his last petition had been forwarded to Istanbul. How could any government postpone making such a decision for two whole years?

At six o’clock on this very hot day Shmuel sat in his miserable room, wondering what to do. He lived in a hut that marked the border between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi sections, and not even in the worst of Russia had he known such a room, for in Russia one had at least a floor and—if he tried hard enough—a freedom from bedbugs; but here in the hopeless filth of Tiberias there was nothing except old men studying the Talmud, women living their pointless lives like animals, and children growing each year in ignorance. It was a hideous perversion of the way a Jew ought to live in his homeland, and Shmuel Hacohen was morally outraged.

He groaned in the heat. Obviously he must again implore the kaimakam to release the land needed by the incoming Jews, but as he visualized the kaimakam he shook his head: I can’t understand him at all. He recognized that Tabari was corrupt beyond any standard existing in Russia, and he knew that the kaimakam intended to squeeze out of the Jews every piaster possible. He was also aware that Tabari used the mutasarrif in Akka and the wali in Beirut as convenient excuses for extracting additional baksheesh, but what Hacohen could not understand was the man’s apparent lack of any moral base from which to operate.

Shmuel was willing to concede that Kaimakam Tabari was at heart a good man; otherwise he could have played Jew against Arab, and Christian against both, generating rifts within the community as Russian governors did, but this Tabari refused to do. He handled each religious group in his community in the same corrupt manner, thus preserving a kind of happy-go-lucky peace, and after Hacohen’s experiences in Russia he knew how to appreciate such peace. In his homeland Hacohen had learned to work with men who were mostly good or mostly bad, and with such men he knew where he stood. But with Kaimakam Tabari the problem was more complex, for the man could never bring himself to announce forthrightly what was to be done. Even when Hacohen bought him off with many pounds, things could not be considered settled, for the next man who brought the kaimakam a few more pounds could buy him back the other way. Trying to purchase land through such a man was frustrating to the point of despair, and Shmuel Hacohen had reached that point.

In his steaming, filthy room, not fit for sheep or goats, the wiry little Jew pulled on his western clothes, jammed his feet into hot leather shoes and prepared to wrestle yet again with the slippery, smiling kaimakam. But this day was going to be different. He was determined to get land. He would get the land he had paid for or …

He did not finish the sentence, because even in his state of anxiety he knew that he had no weapon with which to threaten the amiable official. A Jew could not protest to Akka or go to Beirut. He must deal only with Kaimakam Tabari. Nor could a Jew, like a Frenchman, appeal to his ambassador for aid—because the Jew had no ambassador. All Shmuel Hacohen could do was to pay more baksheesh to Tabari, and then more, and then still more.
Consequently, on this last desperate day Hacohen knelt in the dust at the head of his mattress and rummaged among some stones, from which he withdrew his final cache of funds. He had nearly a thousand English pounds, the last of his money from Russia, and this must close the deal. He brushed his trousers and started for the door, then stopped, considered for a long time, and returned reluctantly to the foot of his bed, where he dug into the earthen floor, coming up at last with a beautiful, shining gold coin. He studied it with love and regret, concluding that on this day of judgment even that coin was expendable.

He had found the ancient piece on one of his first scouting trips along the southern end of Bahr Tubariyeh where he had stopped to kick at the soil to see if it was promising. When he uncovered a dark, rich earth, capable of yielding fine crops if properly farmed, he took a stick and continued digging as if the land were already his, and in so doing turned up this antique coin covered with Arabic writing. It was waiting for me, he told himself.

It had been Shmuel’s intention to spend this lucky coin toward the purchase of his own home in the new settlement, and he had resisted all temptations to waste it otherwise, but now he was trapped. He must have land for his Jews, and if this gold coin could help him get it, the coin would have to be spent.

Into his right pants pocket he put what little Turkish money he had left. Into his coat he put the roll of English bills. And into his left pants pocket, where he could feel its reassuring weight against his leg, he placed the gold coin. Putting on his Turkish fez he brushed his suit again and prayed, “God of Moses, lead me out of this wilderness.”

Shmuel Hacohen had been born Shmuel Kagan in the little village of Vodzh along the western boundary of Russia. His father was a thin, pious man who collected rents for Russian landlords, and Shmuel’s first argument came when he was nine: his orthodox father had forced him to wear soft curls dangling down beside his ears, the Hasidic mark of piety as demanded by the Bible, but young Shmuel, a sickly and sway-backed child who walked with his left shoulder thrust forward, was learning that boys with curls were apt to be set upon by the Russians, so, borrowing his mother’s scissors, he had shorn himself. At the time his mother said nothing, but when Kagan senior returned from collecting rents she burst into tears and Shmuel’s father took him into a darkened room, where he recited the terrifying admonition of Moses our Teacher: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die.’ “His father had paused before adding, “You let your hair grow in curls.”

Shmuel Hacohen had been impressed by his father’s threat, and was for some weeks haunted by a vision of the punishment recommended by the Torah, but even this failed to make him pliable to his father’s ideas. He refused to wear the curls. The conflict became intensified when his parents wanted him to enter the yeshiva to prepare himself for a lifetime of study, since they recognized that he was an able
boy. Again Shmuel refused, for he had already decided to enter some kind of business.

“There’s no business nobler than studying Talmud,” Kagan said.

“It’s not for me.”

“Shmuel, listen. Each morning when I pass the synagogue I ask God to forgive me. That I’m collecting rents. For Gentiles. And not reading Talmud as I should.”

“Me, I want to work.”

The senior Kagan, knowing the disappointments that Jews faced in Russia, fearing the pogroms that were becoming frequent along the Polish border, said with certainty, “Son, you’re a weak boy with a swayed back. For a Jew like you there’s only one safe course. Study Talmud, Become a pious man. And trust in God.”

This reasoning the stubborn boy could not accept, so in their impasse father and son agreed to place their differences before the holy man of Vodzh and to abide by his decision. Accordingly, they left their home and walked along the muddy road until they reached the village pump, across from which stood a courtyard surrounded by a rambling wooden house. Hasidic Jews, with fur caps, long black gowns and side curls, clustered about the door, and through them Kagan led his son. Without knocking he entered the house, announcing, “Rebbe, we come seeking judgment.”

The saintly man before whom they stood scarcely seemed a religious leader. He was a tall, robust man in his forties, with a ruddy face, smiling eyes and a bushy black beard, a rabbi who loved dancing and the shout of folksongs; at weddings he would sometimes throw the bride on his massive shoulders and race about his courtyard, kicking his heels and bellowing marriage songs until his congregation cheered. If at midnight some wanted to halt the festivities, it was he who kept the musicians playing, and once when he was reprimanded for continuing a marriage celebration till dawn he said, “The Jews of Vodzh have neither carriages nor gold nor expensive wine. If we cannot be lavish with our dancing and our music, how can we celebrate?” And when his questioner remained quizzical, the big rebbe grabbed him and shook him, saying harshly, “Jacob! This bride has not the dishes to lay a table. All her life she will live in poverty, consoled only by the memory of this night when she was beautiful. For God’s sake, dance with her now, before the roosters make us finish.”

He was known simply as the Vodzher Rebbe, a Hasidic rabbi who alleviated the misery of his Jews by the joy of his religious experience. In Vodzh he maintained a court, which the rebbes of his family had conducted for three generations, a house in which transient Jews could find a place to sleep or local Jews a center for discussion. It was a holy place from which he dispensed justice among his people, who could not find it in the local courts. In all the villages of western Russia and eastern Poland the Vodzher Rebbe was recognized as one of the saints of Judaism, and often on Saturdays he would have at his table as many as fifty Jews from different communities who had come to hear wisdom from his lips, but what they usually heard was his lively voice singing old Jewish folksongs.

Across his left cheek he carried a scar which further detracted from an appearance of saintliness, but this was his badge of honor about which Hasidic Jews would speak for generations: “One Friday afternoon the woodcutter Pinhas
ran to the Vodzher Rebbe, saying, ‘Poor Mendel! He does not have with what to make Shabbat.’ That winter our rebbe had no money, for he had given it all away. But the idea of a pious Jew unable to celebrate the coming of Queen Shabbat was too painful to bear, so he put on his fur cap and marched to the great house of the nobleman, saying, ‘Sir, your poor Jews of Vodzh have no money to make Shabbat. What can you give me?’ The nobleman was insulted by this interruption and with his sword cut the rebbe across the face. Without flinching the rebbe said, That blow was for me. Now what have you for the needy Jews?’ And in this brave manner he got the kopecks so that Mendel could make Shabbat.”

Now, as the Kagans stood before him, this huge saintly man smiled at the close-cropped boy and asked, “Shmuel Kagan, what have you been up to?”

“My son refuses to wear his curls,” the father complained. “He will not enter the yeshiva.”

“He won’t?” the rebbe asked.

“I want to work,” Shmuel replied.

The big rebbe threw back his head and laughed. “How many fathers in Vodzh would be happy if their lazy sons once said, I want to work.” He reached out and grabbed Shmuel, saying, “Sit on my lap, son,” and with one enormous hand he clutched the frail boy to him, rumpling his short hair with the other. “I noticed that you were running through the village like a lamb newly shorn.” At this witticism the Hasidim in the room laughed, as courtiers should, but the rebbe ignored them, saying to the boy, “Your father is right, Shmuel. Israel can’t exist without a fresh supply of new scholars each year. My own son is at the yeshiva, and he makes me proud. Your father would be proud if you were studying Talmud.” He hugged the boy and asked, “What’s the matter? No mind for studies?”

“I want to work,” Shmuel repeated.

“And so you shall!” the rebbe cried joyously. “Kagan, Israel needs not only scholars but practical men as well. Shave your hair, Shmuel. Go to the Russian schools. Go on to Germany and attend university. Do the wonderful things that Jews are capable of. But never forget your God.” He rose, and keeping the boy in his arms, began to dance, jumping up and down in one place so that his beard brushed across Shmuel’s face, and the Hasidim began clapping their hands. One by one stately men with long beards and side curls joined the dance, and the rebbe’s court echoed with shouts of praise as the holy men danced.

“We are dancing for Shmuel Kagan!” the rebbe cried. “For he is the child of God and in the world he is to do great things.” Toward the end of the long dance, when all were chanting and beating their hands, the big rebbe kissed Shmuel on the cheek and whispered, “You are the child of God, the son of Abraham.”

The dancing ended, and with reverence the big man placed Shmuel beside his father, to whom he said, “The paths to God are manifold.” Then, as if he were experiencing a visit from God, he clutched the boy to him and burst into tears, great animal-sobs coming from his beard as he mourned, “You will do all these things, child, but in them you will not find happiness. Nor you,” and he pointed to one of the visiting Hasidim. “Nor you. Nor you.” He returned to his chair and sat trembling like a child, for he had been allowed a vision of the tragedy that faced his Jews.

So Shmuel Kagan, with his father’s consent, avoided the yeshiva and went
instead to the Russian school; he was a good student, but no small village like Vodzh could provide the funds to send a boy to university, so at the age of twenty he found a job as timber buyer for the government, and in this capacity traveled much of western Russia, a small Jew with an odd way of walking, who went from town to town, acquainting himself with the strange winds that were beginning to blow across that vast land. In Kiev he met young men who argued, “The only hope for the Jew is to join the socialist movement and build a new Russia in which he can find an honorable home.” In Berdichev he came upon a group who met in the home of a poet who insisted, “Jews will come into their own only when they return to Zion and build there a new state.” But at the end of each trip he returned to Vodzh, where he sat like a penitent in the court of the rebbe, listening as that bearded saint developed his view that the true salvation of the Jew could lie only in sanctity and the Talmud. To his surprise young Kagan found himself more attuned to the rebbe than to the voluble men in Kiev and Berdichev and he was always pleased when the spiritual leader ceased talking and began chanting some Hasidic song. Shmuel joined in, and the rebbe’s court would echo with their noisy voices: this was permanent, the joy that poor Jews could find in praising their God.

But at the rebbe’s court there was contradiction: although he himself relied solely upon the Talmud, he did not deny validity to men who thought they had found alternative routes for the Jews. One day in 1874, when Shmuel was twenty-eight, the rebbe surprised the young timber merchant by observing, “What the poet in Berdichev told you is correct. The day is coming when we Jews of Russia and Poland must combine with the Jews of Eretz Israel to build a new land for ourselves. We shall till the soil and work in cities like other men, and if I were younger I would elect this new life.”

That year Shmuel was further perplexed by the arrival in his father’s home of a bearded, unctuous middle-aged Jew named Lipschitz, who nodded to everyone, kept his mouth in a fixed smile and shook hands limply like a woman. He hiked from village to village through Russia, carrying with him a list of Jews who could be counted upon to give him lodging, and in Vodzh he had thrust himself upon the Kagans. “I am from Tiberias,” he announced. “Tiberias, in Eretz Israel, and I shall be living with you for a few days.” He made himself at home, ate voraciously, and visited all Jewish families, begging funds with which to support the Talmudic scholars of Tiberias.

Shmuel disliked Lipschitz and suspected that he was keeping much of the money for himself, but the man’s mention of Eretz Israel so close upon the rebbe’s comments excited Shmuel’s imagination, so that while the guest fed himself Shmuel asked many questions. Between mouthfuls the visitor explained how the holy town nestled beside the Sea of Galilee, how Arabs dominated the town, how the Turks governed, and how the Jews lived.

“What work do they do?” Shmuel asked.

Astonished, Lipschitz replied, “They study.”

“All of them?”

“Yes,” and he recited the Jewish legend which said that on the day when holy men no longer studied the Talmud in Safad and Tiberias, Judaism would perish. “You give your money in Vodzh so that the Messiah can be protected in Tiberias,”
he explained, but Shmuel thought that much of what he said was nonsense.

In succeeding months the young timber merchant spent many nights talking with his rebbe, who picked his way like an agile deer through the complexities Shmuel was encountering: “Joining a revolution I could not approve, for when the new Russia comes, you and I will still be Jews and our position will not have been improved. Emigrating to Eretz Israel might be right for you, with your energy, but it would be wrong for most of my court. Holding fast to ancient Jewish custom is still our salvation.” As the big man talked, Shmuel acquired his understanding of what Jewish rectitude meant. There was a right way to perform any act and a wrong way, and honest men clung to the former. Each aspect of business life had its moral tradition, which to ignore meant distress. Human relationships were governed by inherited law, which in the long run proved just. At times the rebbe experienced a mystical apprehension of the future, for in late 1874 he warned Shmuel, “One day our Jews in Poland and Russia will again face the days of Czmielnicki. I’m too old to escape. I’ll stay here and help my court survive whatever strikes. But others should ponder the future and act upon it.”

One warm spring evening in 1875 Shmuel discovered what his rebbe had meant, for in a nearby village a casual group of Russian peasants were sitting at an inn getting happily drunk after the day’s planting, and as the sun set, a sense of moroseness overcame one of the farmers and he observed, with no intention of harm, “Every kopeck I get falls into the hands of some Jew.”

“That’s right,” a second farmer said. “Either we give them to Kagan for rent or to Lieb for vodka.”

The farmers turned as a body to study their Jewish host, and Lieb, recognizing the look, began to put away the glassware. He signaled his son.

“Lieb,” the first farmer shouted, “what do you do with our money?”

“I run this place only for the landlord,” Lieb said apologetically, hiding his employer’s money.

“And Kagan?” the second farmer asked. “What does he do with our money?”

“Like me. Gives it to the landlord.”

The men had to admit that Lieb was right, and the second farmer said, “You Jews are as bad off as we are,” and Lieb breathed easier.

But then the first farmer said idly, as if reflecting upon some critical event in his life, “Jerusalem is lost.”

Like a spark this mournful observation lit up the eyes of the half-drunk peasants. A man who had not spoken repeated, “Jerusalem is lost.”

There was a long moment of hesitation, during which Lieb the innkeeper prayed while the sun went down. The farmers watched it go, waiting. The signal came from a youth, drunker than the others, who uttered the fatal word, that hateful word which once pronounced could never be recalled.

“Hep,” he said quietly, and Lieb turned white with fear.

“Hep,” the first farmer repeated as Lieb looked to see if he could reach the door.

“Hep!” the peasants began to chant, and villagers hearing the ominous word began boarding up their windows. Lieb, with panic on his face, shrank into a corner among the bottles.

“Hep!” the drinkers repeated, and of a sudden the young man leaped from his chair, flung himself upon the bar, sliding down to where he faced the innkeeper.
Grabbing a knife from a leg of meat he threw himself upon the white-faced Jew and cut his throat.

“Hep!” roared the growing crowd as it surged toward the Jewish section of the village, bellowing the ancient cry of the pogrom: “Hep!” Hierosolyma est perdita. And somehow the fact that Jerusalem was lost, a distant city which they did not know, became an excuse for murdering Jews. If any people in the world had a right to mourn the loss of that sacred city to Islam it was the Jews, but its surrender was used as a reason for exterminating them.

There were some in the crowd who recognized the irrelevancy of their cry and these substituted another of equal potency: “The Zhid crucified our Lord.” But whichever cry was used, it fed the wild spirit of the pogrom and all united in the culminating wail, “Kill the Zhid.”

The peasants, having destroyed the ghetto of their own village, stormed into the countryside, gathering strength from every farm until they reached Vodzh, where someone screamed, “Let’s get the rent collector!” They rushed to the Kagan home, shouting with approval as a swordsman tore off the head of Shmuel’s father with one blow. They cheered again when the same sword slashed open the belly of the old woman. With axes and hoes the Christians gained revenge for the loss of Jerusalem, hacking to pieces four bearded Hasidim who were trying to reach the rebbe’s court.

The mob then stormed into the court, where they found the big man dancing ecstatically with nine of his steadfast friends. For a moment the peasants hesitated, unprepared for this strange scene of men cleansing their minds for death. But then a young drunk sprang at the rebbe, screaming, “He crucified Jesus, didn’t he?” And so the Vodzher Rebbe was slain, and his beard set on fire, and his body dragged through the streets to a spot where more than sixty children, women and old men were being slaughtered and tossed through the air like sheaves of harvested wheat. Jerusalem was lost, Christ was dead, and somehow the shedding of this Jewish blood consoled the bereaved peasants in their drunken sorrow.

Shmuel Kagan returned to Vodzh in time to bury his parents and his rebbe. That night he determined to quit Russia, for he understood at last that what the rebbe had said was true: “When the new Russia comes, you and I will still be Jews and our position will not have been improved.” A vision of Tiberias, beside its lake, grew strong in his mind and he spent the following days consulting with Jews, numbed by the inexplicable ferocity of their neighbors, and he collected from them funds for the purchase of community farm land at Tiberias. Finally he approached the Vodzher Rebbe’s son, now graduated from the yeshiva, and asked him to lead the exile, but the religious young man refused to leave the village of his ancestors. “I shall stay here and be the rebbe. Last week my father told me that pretty soon you would be going.” So the new rebbe prayed with Kagan and at the end they repeated the litany of all Jews in the Diaspora, “To next year in Jerusalem.”

When Shmuel reached Akka in 1876 he did not, like many Jewish immigrants, fall upon the ground to kiss the soil in which he would be buried, for he saw Palestine not as the end of life but as a beginning, and in this spirit he performed an act even more symbolic than kissing the soil: he dropped his Russian name Kagan and assumed its Hebraic original, Hacohen, and as Shmuel Hacohen—
Samuel the Priest—he entered upon his new life.

His trip from Akka to Tiberias was an adventure in disillusionment, especially to one trained as a timber buyer, for both the Old Testament and the Talmud had taught him that Israel was a land heavy with trees: he found only bleakness. In the entire thirty miles from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Galilee, Shmuel Hacohen found only one small group of trees, the ancient olives at Makor, and he wondered who had destroyed the homeland of the Jews.

His apprehensions were increased when he reached the hillside where Rabbi Akiba lay buried, for from this eminence he looked down to see not the spacious marble-fronted Tiberias of the Romans nor the beautiful Tverya of the Talmud but mud-walled Tubariyeh of the Turks, a mean little town huddling within Crusader walls. What impressed him most, however, was the utter barrenness of the land; he could find no fields under cultivation, and he recalled the lush, dark loam of Russia. Doesn’t anybody down there farm? he asked himself, and when he descended to the town and entered the stone gates he found a desolation equal to the fields outside. It seemed to him that he was returning to the hatreds he had fled in Russia, for Turks ignored Arabs while Sephardi Jews did not speak with Ashkenazim. He tried to establish friendship with the latter group, many of whom were from Russia and Poland, but they rebuffed him as an intruder who might be trying to share in the charity they collected from Europe. When he explained that he did not want this charity, that he wanted to associate himself with those Jews who worked for a living, he found that what Lipschitz the collector had said in Vodzh was true: Jews in Tubariyeh did not work. To protect the sanctity of Jews in the rest of the world they spent their years reading Talmud, and had he tried to explain that he carried in his pocket funds for the purchase of farm land outside the walls, they would have considered him three times a liar: “No Jew has such money. Nor this one in particular. And if he had, to spend it on land outside the walls would be insane.”

On the afternoon of his arrival he started looking for tillable land, but none lay near the walls, so next morning he went to Capernaum, at the northern end of the lake, where he spotted extensive areas that would be acceptable, and all along the western shore of the lake he found other land that could be tilled. Back in his room, he dispatched an excited letter to Vodzh: “Here empty land is waiting which could be made as fine as any in Russia. I shall inform you as soon as I have completed my purchase.”

Two days later he hiked to the southern end of the lake, where the River Jordan begins its steep descent to the Dead Sea, and beside this bountiful river he found both the land he wanted and the ancient gold coin. After that first acquaintance he sought no other land; here the persecuted Jews of his village would build their farms and replant the vineyards that had lain vacant since the days of Rome. In his second letter to Vodzh he reported in Yiddish: “I have named our land Kfar Kerem, the village of the vineyards, and here we shall make wine, for did not Solomon himself sing, ‘Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear…’ Start packing now.”

Shmuel found his land in February, 1876, but when he tried to buy it he encountered such confusion that he quickly warned his villagers: “You’d better not
leave Vodzh until I find who owns our land.”

It took him eighteen months to discover this simple fact, and not until he had bribed three different officials was he allowed to know the owner’s address: “Emir Tewfik ibn Alafa, well known in Damascus,” but when he paid an Arab letter writer to send the emir a message, offering to pay a good fee for the idle land, he received a curt reply from a secretary: “Emir Tewfik has never seen this land, receives no rent from it, is not certain where it is located, and has no desire to sell.”

So in late 1877 Shmuel taught himself Arabic and walked to Damascus, where he tried for two months to see the landowner, but the emir refused to meet him. A tall dignitary in tarboosh and white robes explained, “Emir Tewfik ibn Alafa has never spoken to a Jew and has no intention of starting now.”

“But doesn’t he wish to make a profit on his land?”

“Emir Tewfik never buys or sells.”

“Doesn’t he care that the land is idle?”

“Emir Tewfik has thousands of acres of idle land. They are no concern of his.”

Shmuel was forced to leave Damascus without having seen the landlord and was about to decide that the enchanting fields could not be his, when on his way back to Tubariyeh he fell in with a delightful Arab, who advised, “Handle it through the kaimakam. For enough money he can do anything.”

“Even buy me the land?” Shmuel asked.

“Anything.”

So Hacohen spent the next three months learning Turkish, and in early 1878 presented himself at the kaimakam’s office, petitioning for an interview. To his surprise, the kaimakam, a tall, thin Turk in his seventies, admitted him and listened sympathetically to his problem. The situation was this: the kaimakam knew that in two months he was leaving Tubariyeh, but no one else did, least of all Shmuel Hacohen. So the governor teased the little Jew along, milked him of considerable baksheesh, and retired from active service without having written a single letter regarding the land purchase. When Hacohen discovered the duplicity he also found that the delightful Arab traveler who had suggested that he take his problem to the kaimakam was the latter’s cousin and had collected ten per cent of the baksheesh.

Shmuel’s disappointment was so great that he could not have continued in Tubariyeh, badgered by corrupt officials and outcast by the Jewish community, had he not in the spring of 1878 gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; and while it was true that sight of this noble city on the hill inspired him with Jewish longing, its great stone blocks in the temple wall reminding him of the Vodzher Rebbe, it was not this spiritual adventure which was to sustain him. In Jerusalem he encountered something more significant than racial memories: he met young Jews from Russia and Poland who were convinced that Jews had a chance of one day controlling their homeland; he met others who predicted that in years to come the Jews of Israel would speak not Yiddish but Hebrew, “as the prophets spoke to us three thousand years ago”; he met businessmen who had started factories and others who were erecting houses outside the wall; and one night which he would long remember he met six young Jews who had begun to build a Jewish village near Jaffa.

“The Gate of Hope, we’re calling it,” they announced. “It’s to be the first of
many.” One of the men turned to Shmuel. “You? From Tubariyeh? Are you starting any villages there?”

The men reminded him of the young Russians he had met in Kiev who were planning to rebuild that moribund nation, and of the poet in Berdichev who dreamed of a Jewish homeland; and as he discovered the vitality which these Jews had brought to Palestine he found new determination and replied, “When I get back to Tubariyeh I’m buying some land... Near the Sea of Galilee. We’re building a village there. Kfar Kerem.” And he returned to his hovel restored in his belief that he could do it.

In the summer of 1878 the new kaimakam, Faraj Tabari, took office, and when Shmuel reported his predecessor’s trickery in taking baksheesh for services never performed, the official laughed disarmingly and promised, “With me you’ll get the land,” and with these honeyed words Tabari had launched an agonizing period in Hacohen’s life. Postponements, lies, chicanery, these were the rule in Tubariyeh now, while in Russia the Jews of Vodzh, having concluded that Kagan had absconded with their funds, were making plans to arrive en masse in Akka. In frustration Hacohen went to the kaimakam and asked, “When can I get the land?” But Tabari merely stroked his mustache and said, “Mmmmmmmmmmm, on a matter as grave as this I’d better consult the mutasarrif in Akka,” and Shmuel understood that this would require more money. To approach the wali in Beirut would cost much more, while a letter to the sultan in Istanbul was prohibitive.

At the end of 1879, improbable as it seemed, Hacohen, this inconspicuous Jew from Vodzh, had seven different officials of the Turkish empire in his employ, one way or another, but the land was not yet his. By applying constant pressure and bribes whose number he had lost count of, Shmuel had advanced his case to a point where Emir Tewfik in Damascus was willing to sell the useless acres for the not exorbitant sum of nine hundred and eighty English pounds, but the baksheesh required to reach this agreement already totaled more than seventeen hundred pounds. And still the Turkish government would announce no decision.

Yet Hacohen did not lose faith in Kaimakam Tabari, for in a curious manner the thieving Arab had demonstrated an unquestioned friendship for the Russian Jew. One night, as Shmuel sat in his filthy room wondering whether or not to abandon Tubariyeh, he heard muffled footsteps on the cobblestones and intuitively checked to see that the places where he had hidden his money were secure. He had barely done so when his door burst open and eight Jews in fur caps, side curls and long coats rushed at him, pinioned his arms and dragged him off to a rabbinical court convened in the Ashkenazi section of town.

It was a gloomy, portentous scene, with three rabbis waiting to judge the prisoner. In Yiddish the charges against Hacohen were read: “He is not a part of our community. He does not observe our laws strictly nor does he study at the synagogue. He has been heard speaking against Lipschitz, who knew him as a suspicious one in Vodzh, and he disturbs the district with his folly about land purchases and Jews working as farmers.” As the preposterous phrases rolled forth Shmuel thought: The real charge they don’t make. That I endanger their way of life.

Then came the sentence, incredible for the year 1880, but made possible by the Turkish custom of allowing each religious community to govern itself: “Shmuel
Hacohen is to be fined to the amount of his possessions. He is to be stripped, stoned and banished from Tubariyeh, and may he leave Eretz Israel without further disturbing the ways of Judaism.” Before Shmuel could protest, the first provisions of the sentence were carried out.

Jewish men who had come to fear the little Russian who lived outside their narrow world laid hands on him and stripped away his clothing until he stood naked. Pockets in his torn garments were searched for money, which was handed to the court, after which he was hauled to a corner of the wall, where the general population began hurling rocks at him, not caring whether they blinded him or killed him, and he might have died except that one of the rabbinical judges interceded and the bleeding prisoner was dragged to the main gate of town and thrown outside the walls. The mob then proceeded to his hovel, where they started digging up the floor to find any gold he might have hidden.

It was at this point that Kaimakam Tabari interfered. His gendarmerie, hearing that a Jewish punishment was under way, had paid no attention, for this was a matter concerning one of the religious communities, and how they disciplined their people was not a governmental concern; but word of the unusually harsh sentence reached Tabari: “Did you say Hacohen? The Jew from Russia?” When he knew that it was the little land buyer who was being stoned he summoned his guard and went to the town gate, where torches showed the naked and bleeding Jew wandering vainly outside the walls.

“Take him home,” Tabari ordered. “You, you and you, give him your clothes.” When gendarmes reported that officers of the rabbinical court were wrecking Shmuel’s hut, Tabari hurried there and said to the mob, “Go home, all of you.”

As Shmuel regained his mournful room he saw with gratitude that the searchers had not reached the money intended for the purchase of his land. He fell on his mattress, too bewildered to cry. The sentence of the court had been so unexpected, the punishment so harsh, that he was content to have escaped with his life, and as for the kaimakam’s intervention, this Shmuel could not explain, but as he wiped his sores with a dirty cloth he asked himself: Did he keep me alive only so that he could rob me of what I have left? The thought was unworthy, for Shmuel could remember that as he had stood naked outside the walls the torches had shown him the kaimakam’s face, and it was that of a man who could not tolerate such punishments. If in the forthcoming months Tabari stole all of Hacohen’s savings, this would not alter the fact that tonight he had acted as one human being toward another. Why had he done so? Shmuel fell asleep before he found an answer, but Faraj Tabari, sitting alone in his room overlooking the mosque, asked himself the same question and replied: He was little and he had a swayed back, but he looked like my brother-in-law, so I had to save him. And for the first time the kaimakam expressed the hope that his brother-in-law might soon visit Tubariyeh to explain which of the new ideas could be put into practice here.

The next days Shmuel would not remember. In a daze of pain from the stoning by which Eretz Israel had rejected him, its mountains falling upon him in his nightmares, he lay upon his mattress while insects came to inspect his wounds. Each of the Jewish communities left him alone, the superstitious Sephardim viewing him as a curse and the vengeful Ashkenazim hoping that he would die. By
tradition Arabs did not come into the quarter where he lay, so his fever and nightmare were allowed to run their course and for two days of delirium Shmuel imagined that he was back in Vodzh, through whose cool lanes he went seeking timber.

When he recovered, unaided by anyone, he went into the alley to buy food, but the stares he met from the Jews were so hateful that he retreated to his hovel more wounded than he had been by the rocks. Was he wrong? Was it impossible to bring European Jews to this district and with them to build a new way of life, independent of charity? Weak though he was, he said to himself: It can be done! And he went back into the streets of Tubariyeh determined to resist his tormentors, but when he saw the bearded faces staring at him, waiting till they could catch him away from the kaimakam’s protection, he returned to his hovel and whispered, “God of Moses, I can accomplish nothing in this evil town.” And he prepared to flee.

From the earthen floor he dug up his money, and in the ill-fitting clothes which the kaimakam had forced his tormentors to give him he slipped out of town. Children saw him going and ran to tell their fathers, who left their studies to taunt the fugitive as he headed toward the north. At Safad he found conditions even more repellent than in Tubariyeh: old, suspicious Jews huddled over their Talmuds while young men took to robbery; the spiritual glory of the hilltop town was not even remembered. He left it behind and climbed over the hills that lay to the west, and what he found there saved him for the work he was destined to accomplish, for one evening as he wandered across a barren hillock, where he knew that trees must once have flourished, he came upon a little settlement that changed his perspective on what Jews could do in Israel.

It was Peqiin, at first sight merely another mountain village with narrow paths clustering about a central well and a synagogue hidden in a distant quarter, but when Shmuel came to know the place better he found it had distinguishing characteristics. For one thing, the Jews of Peqiin did not stay in their synagogue reading Talmud, for they were so remote from centers like Safad and Tubariyeh that no European charity reached them; they grew crops or they starved, and Shmuel found their fields in excellent condition. Nor did the Jews of Peqiin hide behind a wall, lest the Bedouins attack; they lived in the open and set men with rifles to guard the mountain passes. Four times in the 1870s Bedouins had thought to ravage the settlement and had retreated with their dead. The Jews here were a sturdy lot and for many weeks Hacohen found refuge with them, working in their fields and repairing the lacerations of his mind.

But the principal quality of the village he did not discover till late. It was a long evening in spring, when grape arbors were showing promise of a good crop, and as he sat gossiping in the village square he remarked, “Jacob, you’ve never told me where you came from.”

“From Peqiin,” the farmer said.

“I mean your parents. What part of Europe?”

“From Peqiin,” the man repeated.

“No. I mean Russia? Poland? Lithuania?”

“I’m from Peqiin. Aaron’s the same. And Absalom.”

A look of astonishment came over Hacohen’s face, for he had never met Jews
who were not from some place abroad. “Egypt or Spain?” he asked.

“We’re Jews,” Aaron said. “Our families never left this land.”

“But during the Diaspora?”

“The sons of Jacob went down into Egypt,” the Peqiin farmers explained, “but we didn’t. Nehemiah and Ezra lived in Babylonia, but not us.”

“Where did you go when the Romans drove us out?”

“We didn’t go.”

He could not believe that hidden in these hills the people of Peqiin had never fled: it was unreasonable, yet in persistent questioning he could find no Jew who remembered Russia, none who had returned with memories of Baghdad. These were Jews whose families had lived here for four thousand years, and the subservient habits of exile they had not acquired. One evening in July, when the men he was working with were at dinner, he walked upon the hills that had always known Jews, and as he did so the giant steps of the Vodzher Rebbe seemed to be striding along beside him: the huge and ghostly rebbe broke into a dance and once more gathered Shmuel to his arms. “You are the child of God, the son of Abraham,” the rebbe said. He kissed Hacohen the man as he had once kissed Kagan the boy, and cried to the hills, “You will gain your land, Shmuel, but in it you will find death.” With the rebbe’s words ringing in his ears, Hacohen went in and said good night to the Jews of Peqiin.

“I must go back to Tubariyeh,” he said.

“But why? If they stoned you?”

“You can buy land here, Shmuel.” They recognized him as a worker and wanted him to stay with them.

“My land is beside the lake,” he said, and when he reached Tubariyeh he found his hovel occupied by chickens. Chasing them away and turning his mattress over so that their manure would fall to earth, he dug a fresh hole at the head of the mattress and there he hid his English pounds, while at the foot he buried the gold coin. As soon as this was done he began applying pressure on the kaimakam, nor would he stop until he had bought his land where the River Jordan left the lake and vineyards could be planted.

It was with the memory of these lonely and frustrating years, plus the present knowledge that the Jews from Vodzh were already in Akka, that Shmuel began his march on this hot afternoon to face the kaimakam in a final effort to buy the land. As he walked through the streets where Jews ignored him, he was not an impressive figure. Even when wearing his tarboosh he was only five feet four inches tall, and his borrowed clothes hung awkwardly. His pants were too short and his shoes creaked from their country tramping. He was still a sway-back, so that his belly moved ahead of him down the alleys, and he walked with his left shoulder forward as if he were trying to edge his way through life. He smelled of the evil room in which he was forced to live and he had suffered so many disappointments that he was beginning to look like the furtive Jews who scuttled through back alleys in cities like Kiev and Gretz; but these appearances were only outward, for his mind had found a kind of peace: at Peqiin, Jews had proved they could live on the land and could make it prosper. Bedouin raiders could be kept off with guns, and he marched through Tubariyeh determined to come away from
this final meeting as the owner of land.

The kaimakam, who had hoped to postpone seeing Shmuel until he had perfected his plan for mulcting him of additional baksheesh, now that the firman had been promulgated, disarmed Hacohen by meeting him at the door of his office as if he were a friend and asking pleasantly, “Why do you come out on a day as hot as this?”

“Did the firman arrive from Istanbul?”

“Not yet, Shmuel,” Tabari lied. Then, seeing Hacohen’s shiver of despair, he added, “These things take time, Shmuel. There’s the mutasarrif in Akka, and the wali …”

“I know!” Hacohen snapped, almost losing his temper. “Excuse me, Excellency. I’ve had disturbing news from Akka.”

Kaimakam Tabari became suspicious, reasoning to himself: I know the Jews have arrived, but Hacohen doesn’t know I know. So why does he tell me something that makes his position weaker? He must be doing it for a reason. Probably plans to throw himself on my mercy. To Shmuel he said, “Now what could possibly happen in Akka that would be bad news? You know the mutasarrif’s on your side.”

“The Jews who are buying the land... they’ve landed.”

When Shmuel said this the kaimakam allowed his face to form a scowl. “They have? This is serious, Shmuel.” He waited to see what approach the Jew would take.

He had guessed right. Without replying Hacohen reached into his coat pocket and produced a roll of bills. Pushing them to Tabari he said, “Nine hundred and eighty pounds. For Emir Tewfik in Damascus.” The kaimakam did not touch the money, but watched carefully as his visitor continued to unload his right pants pocket. Out came a few paltry coins, some foreign bills, the kind of bribe a desperate man would offer for the recovery of a horse. Tabari waited.

“Excellency, this is every piaster I have in the world. Take it, but let me have the land.”

“This is a grave thing you suggest,” Tabari replied. “You want me to authorize the Jews to settle on the land before we hear from Istanbul. If I did that I could lose my job, my reputation.” He paused to let Shmuel study the matter, then added softly, “If we could wait a few months...”

Again Hacohen pushed the money at the kaimakam and said with passion, “If they come here and find they’ve been cheated, they’ll kill me.”

Kaimakam Tabari leaned back and laughed in a consoling manner. “Shmuel, Jews don’t kill other Jews! They might abuse you or ostracize you, but even that other night they didn’t kill you.” He felt sure that Hacohen controlled more money, somewhere, and he intended getting it. He stood up and moved a chair closer to his desk. “Sit down, Shmuel.”

This gesture astonished Hacohen. Never during his four years in Tubariyeh had he been allowed to sit in a kaimakam’s presence and he became doubly cautious. Tabari was saying, “I’ve been meaning to ask you for some time, Shmuel. What about the Bedouins? The raids? That is, supposing your people do get their land.”

The kaimakam caught himself. “I mean, supposing we can work something out.”

Hacohen tried not to betray his feelings. The firman from Istanbul had arrived!
He knew it from the way the kaimakam was acting. The Jews were going to get their land! He deduced what had happened. The messenger who had brought him news of the landings in Akka had at the same time brought Kaimakam Tabari the firman. Speaking very slowly, because he could not guess what Tabari would propose next, Shmuel said, “At Peqiin I discovered how to handle the Bedouins. First you offer to buy their friendship. And if you fail, you take a gun and fight.”

“Fight?” the amiable kaimakam laughed. “Shmuel, your bunch of pale scholars? Fight men of the desert?”

“There’s nothing else we can do, Excellency. In Europe, in Spain, we didn’t fight and we were burned alive. Here at Tubariyeh we’ll fight. But I don’t think we’ll have to.” He thought of the resolute farmers in Peqin; for three years there had been no attacks.

The kaimakam smiled indulgently and asked, “I suppose the newcomers are all Ashkenazim?” With his fingers he drew curls down his cheeks. “They don’t seem like fighters to me.”

“You’ve seen only one kind of Ashkenazi, Excellency.”

“I’d be pleased to meet some other kind,” the kaimakam joked. “The Ashkenazim we see here in Tubariyeh... Mean, little-minded. Now the Sephardim, on the other hand...”

Hacohen had no intention of allowing Tabari to sidetrack the main issue. Istanbul had granted the Jews their land and its transfer must not be delayed. He tried to bring the discussion back to that point, but Tabari rambled on: “I’ve always preferred the Sephardim.”

Hacohen thought: Regardless of what the kaimakam thinks he sees here in Tubariyeh, the future of the Jew lies with the Ashkenazim. It’ll be the hard, dedicated men with German educations and Russian determination who’ll determine the future. Let my friends in Akka get hold of their land, and we’ll see. To the kaimakam he said quietly, “The Sephardim are more pleasant to know.”

“Yes!” Tabari agreed. “In Tubariyeh every Jew I respect is a Sephardi.” He corrected himself. “Everyone but you, Shmuel.”

There followed an awkward silence, for obviously the kaimakam was leading to something, but what it was Hacohen could not guess. He waited, and Tabari added, “So what with the newcomers all being Ashkenazim, whom I don’t like anyway, why should I risk my position?”

“It’s all the money I have,” Hacohen insisted stubbornly.

Kaimakam Tabari looked hurt. “I didn’t want more money from you, Shmuel. It’s just that we have to have more funds from somewhere to buy the right judgment in Istanbul.”

It was a moment of hard decision. Shmuel could feel the gold coin pressing against his leg and he was tempted to bang it onto the table as a last wild gesture; but he had learned in these matters to trust his intuitive judgment, and this reassured him that the firman was already in Tubariyeh and that he need only be insistent. He therefore held back the coin and waited.

Finally Tabari spoke. “So what I thought was”—there was the horrible phrase again—“that if you could give me the names of the leaders of your group now in Akka, when I go there tomorrow I can see them and explain the gravity of the situation...”
From a cesspool of disgust Shmuel Hacohen looked at the kaimakam, and each man was aware of what the other was thinking. The Jew thought: He’ll go to the ship with an interpreter, some tough from the Akka waterfront, and they’ll confuse and bully the immigrants. The Jews will think he’s threatening their land and they’ll surrender every kopeck they have. The bastard. The bastard.

But Hacohen was wrong about what the kaimakam was thinking, for Tabari was saying to himself: This bewildered Jew. He thinks I’m doing this merely to tantalize him. Extortion. He doesn’t realize that right now I’m being the best friend he ever had. I’d better show him.

“You won’t give me the names?” he snapped.

“Find them yourself. Steal from the immigrants in your own way.”

“Stupid!” the kaimakam cried. With anger he took from his desk the firman and slammed it on the table. “Read that, you stubborn Jew.”

“I can speak Turkish. I can’t read it.”

“Do you trust me to read it?” Tabari read the first part and watched Hacohen’s face start to break with tears of joy. Then he read the harsh final proviso about keeping the Jews from water and he saw dismay take the place of joy.

“Without water the land is nothing!” Hacohen protested.

“Obviously. That’s why I must have extra money.”

Hacohen thought: It’s a lie. It’s a lie. He wants the money for himself. Then he heard the kaimakam saying easily, “The fact is, I suspect the sultan had nothing to do with that last clause. Some friend of mine tacked it on to help me out.”

“What do you mean?”

“So that I could do just what I’m doing now. Get a little more money for myself... and give him half.”

The duplicity of what Tabari was saying was too much for Hacohen to absorb. In Russia government officials were cruel. But a man grew to understand them. In Turkish lands ... His anxiety was too great and he started to laugh. The kaimakam joined him and explained jokingly, “So our position is this, Shmuel. I want you Jews to have your land, and the water too. I suppose the sultan feels the same way. But in view of that last clause I must interrogate Istanbul, and that takes ...”

“Money?”

“A lot of money. More than you have left. Now, may I have the names?”

Feeling morally depleted by developments two and three times more devious than he could follow, Shmuel Hacohen took the kaimakam’s pen and wrote down the names of the Vodzher Jews who could be depended upon to get the money together, if they had any. As he penned their names the faces of his friends came before him: Mendel of Berdichev, with beard and fur cap; Solomon of Vodzh, an outspoken man; Jozadak of the next village, a fighter and a man who hated rabbis. As he finished recalling the names he dropped his head on the desk and wept.

Kaimakam Tabari appreciated the anxiety under which Shmuel had been working and he left him alone for some moments. Then he reached out and touched Shmuel on the shoulder, asking, “What good would the land be without water?”

“I wasn’t weeping for them,” Shmuel replied. “I was thinking of those who are dead and will not see the land.”

Then began a curious negotiation, an exchange that neither Kaimakam Tabari
nor Shmuel Hacohen would ever forget. Tabari was convinced that the tough little Jew had more money somewhere, reserved for an emergency, and he suspected that after the land was secured he would not see Hacohen again; one of his most fruitful sources of baksheesh would thus dry up, and he hated to see anyone come into his office with money and escape. So on the spur of the moment, without really thinking, he did the thing that he would never afterward forget.

He said, "By the way, Shmuel, I have something in the other room you might like to see."

"What?"

"Come, look." And the portly governor threw open a door and led Hacohen to a shelf on which stood a row of twenty-two tall books bound in leather and stamped in gold. Hacohen recognized them as a fine Lithuanian printing of the Talmud, for he had seen such books in Berdichev while collecting money for the land purchase; and when Tabari handed him a volume to inspect he opened the pages reverently and before him stood the glorious, singing Hebrew that his father had wanted him to study.

"What I’d like to know," Tabari was saying, "is why this book has such an effect on Jews?"

Shmuel looked at the large pages—more than twenty inches tall and nearly fourteen wide. This was a book unlike those that a Muslim or a Christian would know, for each page was a separate work in itself, composed of six or eight distinct kinds of type, varying in size from very large to very small. The organization was unbelievable: in the center of the page would appear in bold type a short phrase, surrounded on all sides by blocks of different-sized type explaining and elaborating what the central phrase intended. Down margins would appear columns only three quarters of an inch wide, printed in minute letters. It was a jumble, a confusion, a thing of beauty, and no two pages were alike.

"What does it mean?" Tabari asked.

"Well, this bold sentence in the middle is an opinion handed down by the great Rabbi Akiba."

"Who was he?" Tabari asked.

"A rabbi. He’s buried here in Tubariyeh."

Tabari studied Akiba’s material, then pointed to one of the surrounding blocks of type. "What’s this one?"

"A judgment of Rabbi Meir, who came later. He’s also buried in Tubariyeh."

"And this big block over there?"

"Greatest of them all. Maimonides of Egypt." He studied the beautiful, complicated page and said, "Excellency, you’ve chosen a page most appropriate to Tubariyeh, for Maimonides is also buried here." Then, to his dismay, he realized that Kaimakam Tabari wasn’t taking his discourse on the Talmud seriously, had not even wanted to know what the great Jewish book was about. Tabari had much earthier ideas in mind and in pursuit of them he slammed the big book closed and stared directly at his little guest. "Shmuel, will you have a synagogue in your new settlement?"

"Yes."

"Well, wouldn’t a set of the Talmud like this... real leather. Wouldn’t that be a great thing to give the new synagogue?"
At first Hacohen thought that Tabari, in gratitude for the baksheesh he would extract from the Jews, was proposing to give the newcomers this expensive gift of books, and the little Jew almost made an ass of himself. He started to express his gratitude, then caught himself: My God! He expects me to buy them.

Tabari, quick to notice changes in the faces of people who came to consult him, caught the incipient smile and underwent the same degree of shock: My God! I do believe the little Jew thought I was giving him the books.

It was Tabari who spoke first. “So I thought that if you had—well—even a little extra money...”

The rest of the things Hacohen said that hot evening he could not later recall, for it was not he but some power greater that spoke through his voice. “Where did you get the Talmud?” he asked coldly.

“There was an old rabbi with some papers that had to be signed ... in Beirut.”

“Did he offer you that Talmud? For some papers?”

“They were exceedingly significant papers... involving his whole community.”

“But did he offer you his Talmud?” In some strange way it was now Shmuel Hacohen’s office. It was he who was posing the questions.

“Well... it wouldn’t be exact to say that he offered the books.”

“You asked him what he had of value?”

“I expected him to come with money... gold pieces. When he arrived with only books...”

“You took them?”

“It was a matter of vital significance,” Tabari insisted.

Shmuel could not speak. He opened one of the volumes and studied the title page: Wilno, 1732. He wondered what dreadful pressure had been put on the old rabbi to make him surrender these volumes. Jews had died for these books, had been burned at the stake, had seen their children and their sisters killed. What had the old man wanted for his people so desperately that he would divorce himself from his own conscience? To the kaimakam he said, quietly, “These are rare books, Excellency.”

“I thought they were.”

“And you’d like to convert them into cash?”

“Of course. I know you said you had no more gold. But a man always keeps a little back.”

Without argument Shmuel Hacohen took from his left pocket the precious coin. Ceremoniously he placed it on the table where the kaimakam could see it. “I don’t know what it’s worth, Excellency, but it’s yours. Maimonides has said, ‘If a man build a synagogue let him build it finer than the house in which he dwells.’ I shall live with rats and lice a little longer. But the synagogue...” He looked at Tabari as if to ask: What kind of man would steal the holy book of another, then try to sell it back for profit?

Shmuel started piling the massive volumes onto his arms, but Tabari, seeing the impracticability of this, summoned his Egyptian servant. Hacóhen pushed the man aside and at last balanced the twenty-two volumes on his forearms and left the room. The kaimakam hurried ahead to open his office door for the burdened man, and for a long moment the two stared at each other, the moral gap between them so tremendous that no comprehension could bridge it.
As he walked through the hot night Shmuel kept repeating the words of Moses his Teacher: “And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?”

The Tell

For Cullinane the problem of the Jews’ moral right to Israel was simple. It was a question of custodianship. When Herod was king, the Galilee held a population of more than half a million; in Byzantine times, more than a million. But at the end of Arab, Crusader and Turkish rule the same land supported less than sixty thousand, a visible loss of sixteen out of every seventeen persons. From what he could now see about him, Cullinane guessed that in another twenty years of restored Jewish control the rebuilt soil would again maintain its million people.

This was the staggering, incontrovertible fact: the other custodians had allowed the once sweet land to deteriorate, the wells to fall in and the forests to vanish; the Jews had brought the land back to productivity. He could not avoid wondering whether such creative use did not confer a moral right to possess the land, previous negligence having forfeited such right. The more Cullinane asked himself this question, the more he realized that he was basing an entire moral structure on land alone, and this was not logical.

Yet one by one he had to discard alternatives. Israel’s religious claim he dismissed without much consideration. Israelis, as Jews, had no more claim to a free Israel than Quebec’s misguided Frenchmen had a right to a separatist state merely because they happened to be Catholics. “One hell of a lot more goes into the making of a viable state,” Cullinane assured himself, “than religion,” and he said this even though he, as a Catholic, sympathized with his co-religionists in Canada who felt that they were being discriminated against. To establish a state wholly on religious foundations led to historical perplexities like Jinnah’s Pakistan or the problems involving northern Ireland. As an Irishman, Cullinane felt that his ancestral island had a right to be united, but surely not on religious considerations only.

Nor was Israel’s historic claim to the land impressive; to Cullinane it was irrelevant. Once a man started opening the historical-rights barrel of eels, no one could predict where the slippery evidence might run. The Sioux and Chippewa would reoccupy the United States, which might be an improvement but which might also entail difficulties; ninety-nine per cent of Englishmen would have to evacuate; and the composition of France would be completely changed, which might also be a turn for the better but which would probably create as many problems as it solved. History was neither logical nor moral, and whether one liked it or not the passage of years did establish a pragmatic sanction which only egomaniacs like Benito Mussolini or ghostly fools like the wandering dauphins of France tried to revoke.

One by one Cullinane could tick off the lines of reasoning which failed to impress him regarding the Jewish claim to Israel—language, race, hurts endured abroad, the authority of the Bible, the historical injustice of being the only
organized people without its own land—all of these made no substantial impression on Cullinane; but when he had dismissed them logically and in order, there remained one towering consideration, and as the first year’s dig approached an ending this problem of moral right returned to perplex him.

“What do you think?” he asked the men in the tent one night.

To his surprise, Tabari defended the Jews. “I place maximum importance on this matter of historical claims,” he said. “I believe that any organized people which has demonstrated a cohesiveness and common purpose has a right to its ancestral lands. So even though in this instance the Jews have recovered that land at my expense, they are nevertheless entitled to it. Perhaps they took too much too fast. Perhaps the present modus vivendi will require adjustment in minor points. But the Jews’ basic right to be where they are can’t be controverted.”

Dr. Eliav was, as always, careful and reflective. He lit his pipe, looked at the doors and said quietly, “Since no reporters are present I will confess that Jemail’s reasoning about adjusting the modus vivendi makes sense. Throughout history this bridge-land of Israel has been able to exist as a viable nation only when it maintained sensible economic relations with neighboring lands like Syria and Lebanon or neighboring empires like Egypt and Mesopotamia. We’d be idiots if we argued that some miracle in the twentieth century has changed that fundamental truth. So the present enmity between the nations of this area has got to be considered a temporary interruption of an historic process, and I have found that where temporary interruptions go against the grain of history they do not long endure. Now, how the necessary rapprochements are to be achieved I can’t say, but some weight must be given to the fact that we have made the land ours by demonstrating that we understand it and can make it productive. History usually takes such accomplishments into account, also.”

“But the real problem that worries Cullinane,” Jemail suggested, “is whether such custodianship does in theory as well as fact create ownership. Isn’t that your problem?”

“Precisely,” Cullinane agreed. “From what I said earlier, you know that I think it does. Superior husbandry gave the Anglo-Saxons custodianship of America. Superior English governance gave England temporary title to Ireland.”

“That word temporary frightens me,” Eliav interrupted. “You mean that we Jews shall be here for a decade, then…”

“Certainly more than a decade,” Jemail laughed. “After all, how long did the English hold Ireland?”

“Six or seven hundred years,” Cullinane replied. “That’s what I mean when I say temporary.”

“I breathe easier,” Eliav said. He noticed that Jemail was about to speak, but apparently reconsidered and sat with his hands in his lap.

“Can we agree on this?” Cullinane asked. “The custodianship of Arab and Turk was a disaster, at least so far as land surface was concerned.”

“No argument from this Arab,” Jemail agreed affably. “Some years ago an Englishman named Jarvis pointed out that for centuries the world has been misled by a phrase. We called the Bedouins ‘the sons of the desert,’ whereas they were really ‘the fathers of the desert.’”

“What did he mean?” Cullinane asked.
“Wherever the Bedouin took his camels and his goats he destroyed good land to create his own desert. After all, very few people in the course of world history have been able to build deserts out of such fruitful areas as the Nile, the Euphrates and the Galilee.” He laughed, then added, “It’s our special talent, but of course we have others. And persistence is one of them. You know the maxim we Arabs are taught. ‘A man who gains his revenge after forty years is acting in haste.’”

“The question as I see it,” Eliav suggested, puffing at his pipe, “is whether the world is entitled to prevent the Bedouin from doing what he damned well pleases with his land. Are we justified in insisting that any segment of creation—a human life, a river, a horse that might run well if trained, a corner of land—must be utilized to its top capacity? Perhaps, in God’s strange way, the Bedouin who created deserts was acting more in harmony with the divine plan for this area than was the Jew, who proved he could eradicate those deserts.”

“It’s just possible,” Tabari said, “that God, having seen what you Jews and we Arabs did with this land, and the strange fruit we grew here—Islam, Judaism, Christianity—cried, ‘Turn that cursed place back to the desert so that no more religions are raised up in My name.’ Perhaps the way of the Bedouin is the way of God.”

The men relaxed as the photographer appeared with a pot of coffee. “What’s the argument?” he asked as he spread the cups.

“I asked if Israel’s constructive custodianship of land conferred on her a moral right to ownership,” Cullinan explained.

“Sounds like the pragmatic sanction of the imperialists,” the Englishman said brightly. “What we were tossed out of India for.”

“You’re right,” Eliav said. “If you judge the Jew in Israel solely from the point of custodianship you come close to charging him with imperialism. So we’ve got to consider moral right, but having admitted this I want to ask one question. Is there any nation on earth that can come before the bar of justice claiming that it exemplifies moral right? On this spot the Canaanites drove out the original owners, and the Jews expelled the Canaanites and Egyptians and Persians and Babylonians, and God knows who else. You Arabs,” he said, pointing to Jemail, “came into the act very late. Very late indeed. You just barely got here ahead of the Crusaders and the Turks. So why suddenly should Israel, of all nations on earth, be summoned before the bar of international justice to explain its moral right? You know, when there was a town on this tell years ago a girl who married had to be sure that on the morning after the wedding her mother could parade through the town a bloodstained sheet, proving that her daughter had been a virgin. What kind of sheet do you propose that the Israeli government parade through the world? To Peru, for example, which disherited its Indians and accomplished nothing in doing so? To Australia, which conscientiously set out to kill off every Tasmanian and succeeded? To Portugal? To the United States with its Negro problem? Let us first see parading through the streets of Jerusalem the bloodstained sheet of Russia, proving that she was a virgin. Or the sheets of Germany and France.”

Eliav had spoken with rather more force than he had intended, and the Englishman said, “I always think that bedding is a great topic for coffee,” and Tabari suggested, “Why don’t you throw their own Book at them? ‘He that is
without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.”

Eliav laughed and said that he apologized, then in his slow manner concluded, “What I was leading up to was this. Israel’s ultimate justification must be moral, but not in the way that nations have used that word in the past. We will not appeal to history nor to custodianship of land nor to the persecutions we suffered abroad. We’ll stand before the world and say, ‘Here in a small land we have shown how people of many backgrounds can live together in harmony. With us, Arab and Druse, Muslim and Christian know social justice.’ John, you’re wrong when you justify everything by custodianship of land. Anyone can attain that with a police force and some agriculture specialists. But Israel’s custodianship of people, of human rights, is going to be spectacular.” He hesitated, then pointed at each of the men with his pipe. “That’s to be our moral justification.”

Tabari clapped him on the shoulder and said, “In a land noted for noble speeches, that hit a fairly high standard, Eliav. But I’m afraid you won’t have time to prove your point, because what I see happening is this. After some years we Arabs will unite, impossible as that now seems. With leadership from some unsuspected outside quarter like Persia or Morocco, or perhaps from central Asia, as in the past, the united Arabs will drive the Jews into the sea. Just as we did the Crusaders. Of course, the entire civilized world will be aghast at the slaughter, but it will do nothing to stop us. Absolutely nothing. Spain, once again a monarchy perhaps, will accept some of the refugees. Poland and Holland will take some, as before. But then in the United States horrible pogroms will begin. I can’t see the reasons too clearly now, but you’ll think up some. All the Jews in New York will be marched into a gigantic space ship and shot off into the air on a no-return rocket, and good Christians led by your President will applaud. From San Francisco, from Cleveland and especially Fort Worth, other rockets will shoot forth. And off in space these lonely ships will circle the earth, and light will reflect from them so that at night you’ll be able to see them pass the moon, and people will cry, ‘There go our Jews.’ And after many years the conscience of the world will be aroused, and citizens of great soul in Germany and Lithuania will make it possible for surviving Jews to come back once more to Palestine. And when they reach this spot and see how their irrigation plans have been allowed to lapse, and when they see how the Arabs permitted the schools and the vineyards to perish, they’ll say, ‘Things have sure gone to hell in our absence.’ And they’ll begin building all over again.”

Both Eliav and Cullinane started to comment on this summary, but neither could think of anything relevant to say.

* * * * *

For Kaimakam Tabari to travel from Tubariyeh to Akka in August his caravan had to depart at sunrise so that a safe halting point could be reached by noon, thus permitting the tents to be pitched before the worst heat of day. Consequently, at four in the morning a sizable entourage convened at the caravanserai, where horses and provisions were checked.

Along the edge of the lake moved flickering lights, soft in mystery, as people from various quarters of the town came to watch the caravan’s departure. Children from Arab and Jewish families ran through the narrow alleys, each group
keeping to itself, while mothers stood silent and their husbands asked knowing questions of the muleteers. The morning, already steaming and airless, was filled with the good smell of horses, and the gates of the town were being opened.

At this point the kaimakam appeared, a big, handsome man in flowing Arab garb, while from the government building near the fort came four armed soldiers to mount their horses and take their places along the caravan. A drum began to beat and cheers rose from the crowd as the expedition headed for the light-tipped hills to the west.

It was prudent, in 1880, to move within an armed body, for solitary travelers were apt to be murdered, and even groups of three or four if not accompanied by riflemen might be assaulted by Bedouins. Along the very road which Jesus had walked alone and in security the Turkish kaimakam scuttled like a frightened schoolgirl; for the route which had once contained inns and numerous cities now crossed only bleak and dangerous lands. What was worse, if the hills were safely passed, one entered upon extensive swamps, much larger than they used to be and ridden with malaria; two thousand years ago most of the area had been irrigated land producing the grape and olive which had made the Galilee rich.

Shortly after eleven that morning the armed caravan reached the barren knoll of Makor, the customary halting place, for from its height the guards could protect themselves from bandits, and on this high spot Kaimakam Tabari’s tent was pitched. By noon, when the sun was savage, he was asleep.

At six that afternoon he was awakened by loud laughter. Sticking his head out of the tent to see what was happening, he detected nothing, but since the laughter continued, he threw a robe about his shoulders and went onto the knoll. On the path below he saw a sight which would have made anyone laugh.

Coming down the road from Akka, traveling alone and on foot, was a frail man wearing an outrageous costume; and from time to time, from either joy or insanity, he stopped, executed a little dance and leaped high in the air, uttering all the while unintelligible words. Then adjusting his shoulder pack he would resume his journey.

“What is he?” Tabari asked. No one knew. “Go fetch him,” Tabari directed, and three riflemen ran down the knoll to confront the surprised stranger.

He must have suspected that the men intended to kill him, for with an ecstatic indifference he stood before them and bared his breast, waiting for the shots. Fear he did not display; some other emotion possessed him, and when the Arabs made it clear that they meant him no harm he danced again, then dutifully followed them up the hill.

The frail man stood before the kaimakam and waited, as people on the knoll chuckled, for he was an amazing sight, a consumptive Jew bent in the shoulder and bearded. Beside his ears dangled long curls, and over his body hung a black coat gathered at the waist. His pants were extraordinary and the kaimakam could recall none like them: they were made of a gray fabric containing a bold vertical stripe, and, hanging free like a boy’s, reached only to his calf. Below them were exposed white-ribbed stockings, which ended in shoes with silver buckles. The costume was completed by a large flat hat trimmed with brown fur, and since the man had obviously been walking in the heat of day, his face was lined with sweat and dirt; but more memorable than trousers or fur hat or dirty face were his
piercing blue eyes.

“Ask him who he is,” Tabari commanded.

Members of the caravan tried Turkish, Ladino and Arabic, with no results, but a horseman who knew Yiddish uncovered the fact that this was Mendel of Berdichev, come to settle on his new land.

Kaimakam Tabari recalled that this was one of the men identified by Shmuel Hacohen as a leader of the proposed colony, and it was from men like this that he was supposed to extort additional funds for the appeal on water rights. “Ask him what he’s doing on the road alone,” Tabari growled.

The interpreter could comprehend little of what the pilgrim replied, but he made an attempt to explain: “He could not wait for the others. He wanted to see the land.”

“How is he dancing?”

“For joy.”

“How does he know where he’s going?”

“He has a map.”

The kaimakam asked to see it, and from a Russian printing of the Torah, Mendel of Berdichev produced a map of Old Testament days, and it was about as good as any that the Turkish government had produced in recent years. At least the path from Akka to Galilee was indicated, and it was this path that the Jew was following.

It was obvious to Tabari that any attempt to mulct this demented man of baksheesh was hopeless, so he asked, “Doesn’t he know that he may be killed by bandits?”

The interpreter discussed this with the stranger, but the latter either did not understand or did not care. A positive radiance suffused him, and if death were to be his lot before he reached his land, there was nothing he could do to forestall it. “He says,” explained the interpreter, “that in the Russian troubles he nearly died, that in Danzig they stole his money, and that on the ship he came close to drowning, but he is now in Israel.”

The kaimakam and the immigrant stared at each other for a moment, the enchanted blue eyes of the Jew looking deep into the dark eyes of the Arab, and there was no understanding. Nor was there enmity. Grudgingly Tabari said, “Tell him he can sleep with us.” There was no point in sending him into the guns of the Bedouins.

But the Jew could not halt. He bowed to the kaimakam, to the horseman, to anyone in sight, then started dancing down the hill. “Give him some water,” Tabari directed, and when the man’s canteen was filled, he ran to the road, turned his face toward Galilee and leaped joyously like one demented, as if he felt coming through the soles of his feet the strange and lyric message of the land.

In the twilight he headed east, and as Tabari watched the disappearing figure, wondering what he signified, he had the strange feeling that this stranger from Berdichev had been looking at him with the same hard eyes that Shmuel Hacohen had used the night before. Haunted by these two pairs of eyes, Tabari began absent-mindedly toying with the gold coin that Hacohen had paid him for the Talmud; but he was not aware of doing so, for his attention was still focused on the dancing Jew.
Next morning, as Tabari approached Akka, he intended to proceed immediately to the immigrants to see how much baksheesh he could squeeze out of them for handling their water problem with Istanbul, but he found that the impact of the dancing Jew had driven aside such concerns and he had no wish to meet with the newcomers at this time. He therefore procrastinated, diverting himself with unimportant matters, but in the afternoon he forced himself to the ancient caravanserai of the Genoese, where the waiting Jews were encamped, and there he found Solomon and Jozadak to be more sensible negotiators than Mendel had been; but his heart was not in the business and he extorted only a tithe of what he would otherwise have managed. He was glad to leave the caravan, and made his way to the popular and spacious Turkish baths in the old building opposite the citadel; and there he found a pleasant surprise awaiting him. The large Negro attendant, naked except for a small towel, greeted him and said, “In the far room is someone you may wish to see.”

Tabari undressed hurriedly, eager to get the dust of the journey from his bones, and stepped into the small, well-remembered room where the stone seats were always clean and the steam abundant. At first he could not see who waited, then gradually through the steam and shadows he saw sitting on one of the benches the massive figure of the mutasarrif of Akka. The man was enormous, with a big, dark Turkish face and rolls of fat from chin to ankle; he seemed an enormous bullfrog waiting for a fly.

“Mutasarrif Hamid Pasha!” Tabari cried. “What an extreme pleasure of pleasures!” The fat man grunted, and Tabari continued. “I’ve come all the way from Tubariyeh to see only you, and here you are!”

“I was expecting you,” the fat man said, as if from the bottom of a well. He indicated that Tabari was to sit beside him, and since the mutasarrif of Akka was a pure Turk and Tabari only an Arab, the gesture was more than merely polite.

For the kaimakam the moment had extra meaning, for it was to this room of perpetual twilight, with its dark and mysterious shapes looming up through the steam, that the old-time kaimakam of Tubariyeh had brought him while he was still a young boy, and it was here that the infatuated Turk had barred the door and explained his passion for the young Arab. In later years, when the madness had passed and Tabari was the kaimakam’s son-in-law, they had again come to this same room, but in a different relationship.

How old Mutasarrif Hamid looks! Tabari thought. The bullfrog resembled Tabari’s father-in-law in the years before he died.

The big Negro brought in fresh water, throwing some on the walls to increase the steam. “Would you care for some grape juice?” the mutasarrif asked, and when Tabari assented, the Negro disappeared, returning shortly with cool glasses.

Tabari, as he drank the purple juice, reviewed the delicate problem before him: if he could depend upon the fact that the mufti of Tubariyeh had not informed Mutasarrif Hamid of the thirty English pounds, he, Tabari, could keep all thirty for himself. On the other hand, if he were sure that the mufti had betrayed him, he could make a gesture of offering Hamid all the money before the question was raised, thus gaining credit for himself. And, finally, if the mufti had been afraid to approach the mutasarrif himself, but had somehow conveyed the impression that an unknown amount of money had changed hands, Tabari could keep a good
share and give Hamid the rest.

But he must also remember that the mutasarrif controlled his chances for promotion, so it was necessary to retain not only his good will but also his active enthusiasm. What to do? It was precisely the problem that faced all officers of the Turkish empire: How honest should I be... this time?

He made up his mind. With a burst of frankness he told his host, “Excellency, I bring you good news. The mufti of Tubariyeh has given me thirty English pounds. For you. To enlist your aid in keeping the Jews out of Tubariyeh.”

“I know,” the fat old man mumbled.

Tabari was not fooled by this reply. There was a very good chance that the old man did not know and was claiming that he did only to keep Tabari honest in the future. In this tricky business a man could be certain of nothing.

The old bullfrog continued, with steam condensing on his face and dripping onto his paunch, “But as you well know, Faraj ibn Ahmed, the sultan has already decided to let the Jews have the land. So the mufti’s gift...” The two rulers had to laugh, and the old man raised his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

“I’m sorry for the mufti,” Tabari said cautiously.

“He’s a vicious man,” Hamid grumbled in the gloomy twilight, “and I took it as an affront when he came to warn me personally that he had paid you the money.”

“Did he do that?” Tabari asked in surprise.

The fat old bullfrog smiled to himself and thought: You know very well that he got to me with his story first. Else why should you have given me the full thirty pounds? But to Tabari he said, “Yes, he came running to me like a schoolboy...”

“How could he?” Tabari asked in real perplexity. “He paid me only two nights ago, and when I rode out of Tubariyeh I saw him in the crowd.”

“After you left he and the qadi came the back way by Safad. The mufti wants you out of Tubariyeh.”

The canniness of the red-faced mufti impressed Kaimakam Tabari. He was a redoubtable enemy and something had better be done about him, now: “Excellency, that mufti must be replaced.”

“I’ve already sent a letter to the wali in Beirut. But these things, as you know, Ibn Ahmed...”

“Cost money,” Tabari concluded. “I know, and with that in mind I’ve brought you a special gift, a gold coin issued eight hundred years ago. I found it in Tubariyeh.”

The old man’s eyes opened in greediness, then flashed a warm smile through the murky steam. “A generous gift, Ibn Ahmed. I don’t think the mufti will bother you in the future.”

The two officials relaxed in the pleasing heat and watched with casual interest as the Negro brought in wet towels to place about their heads. He also sloshed warm water onto their shoulders and rubbed their bodies with his powerful hands. When he was gone the old man observed, “In two years I shall retire.”

“So soon?” Tabari asked.

After a long silence the old mutasarrif grumbled out of the twilight, “I’m returning to a farm near Baghdad. A beautiful spot it is.”

“I liked Baghdad,” Tabari said. More silence followed, during which the young man tried to guess at what the older intended.
“It will be costly to man the farm... to do the things required.”

Oh, God! groaned Tabari to himself. The ancient thief wants more money. But this time he was wrong. The old man was reflecting on his long years as an official and for once required nothing but an attentive ear.

“I've been haunted the last few weeks, Ibn Ahmed, by memories of the places I served in. Baghdad was the best. Aleppo the most interesting, And Bulgaria was the worst. If I had my way I'd turn Bulgaria loose and tell them, ‘Rule this damned place yourselves. It's your punishment.’”

“I always understood that Greece was the worst,” Tabari suggested.

“Never served in Greece,” the old man said. “But three days ago when I watched the ship come into harbor with those Jews I had the strange feeling that they were going to prove more troublesome than Greeks or Bulgarians. Faraj ibn Ahmed, are we making a great mistake in allowing so many to enter the country?”

“The firman has been signed.”

“Sometimes the wrong firman is signed,” the old man said cryptically. Wringing out the towel he placed it over his huge, wet face.

Kaimakam Tabari recognized this statement as one made to trap him, but he did not know where the trap lay. Had the mutasarrif uttered his mildly disloyal statement as a means of luring him into anti-imperial sentiments? If so, it ought to be rebutted, for it was a reflection on the sultan. Or had the old man finally awakened to the dry-rot in the empire and did he honestly believe that changes were necessary? If so, Tabari ought to agree with him, for the mutasarrif had it in his power to determine what promotion Tabari would get next, and he would be capable of holding him back if disagreements arose.

It was essential that Tabari say something, and in trying to decide which way to jump he began to sweat with a copiousness not justified by the Steam. In Spite Of the moist room his throat went dry, and in panic he looked to see if the mutasarrif's countenance would betray any clue to the old man’s thinking, but the bullfrog remained passive, with the towel hiding his face as he had planned. Desperately Tabari racked his mind for guidance, but none came. In his heart he wanted to be a courageous man like Shmuel Hacohen, willing to challenge obstacles if necessary, but when he saw the great hulking mass of the mutasarrif he lost his courage. Almost certainly the old man was trying to trap him into radical disclosures, so Tabari clenched his hands and said, “I've found the sultan is usually right in the firmans he signs.”

Beneath his towel the mutasarrif wheezed approvingly. Uncovering his face he stared at Tabari with huge drooping eyes and said, “It’s good for an Arab to think that way. This morning the mufti tried to tell me that you had gone over to the reformists.”

“That swine!” Tabari was outraged by the treachery yet pleased that his assessment of the mufti had been correct.

“Normally I’d not have listened to him,” the flabby mutasarrif continued, “but two days ago your brother-in-law was hung in Beirut. Conspiracy.”

Tabari sagged as if the tense ropes in a torture chamber had been relaxed. The old bullfrog had nearly trapped him. Had he given the wrong answer, he might now be on his way to death, but it was not this escape that caused his body and his conscience to sag. He realized that in masking his slowly developing opinions
in order to protect a possible promotion he was surrendering them forever. Other men would lead the Turkish reformers, not he. Shmuel Hacohen would ride with the future, not he. Perhaps this was why he had saved the Jew that night, to serve this purpose. His limp hand reached for the towel and now it was he who covered his face, for at this moment he wished no one to see him.

“You were wise, Ibn Ahmed,” the old man said, “to resist your brother-in-law. Never again will the sultan allow any constitution foolishness. What we must do is permit no change and hope that things work out for the best.” At that moment his desk was heavy with petitions covering matters of health, schools, Catholic missionaries and an ingenious plan for clearing the harbor of silt, but during his remaining tenure none would be moved forward.

The old bullfrog shifted his enormous belly so that steam could work its way into a new set of folds, then, unexpectedly, grabbed the towel from Tabari’s face and stared at him, saying, “When I leave Akka you’re getting my job.”

Tabari sighed. Somehow the flavor had vanished from the promotion.

“Promise me one thing, Ibn Ahmed. Keep things as they are. We have a happy city here. Be sure that Christian pilgrims are allowed to visit their holy places without molestation and keep the Bedouins away from towns. But above all, when the wali comes down from Beirut be certain that things are in good shape. Spend money to fix them up, your own salary if necessary. Because in a place like Akka you can always get it back later, one way or another.”

The silent Negro slipped in to suggest that perhaps the two officials would like to move into another room for their massage, but the mutasarrif refused: “Let’s stay here a little longer, Ibn Ahmed.”

Later, as they were dressing, Tabari sought to deliver the gold coin, only to discover that he had lost it, and as he vainly searched his belongings he became aware that the fat old man was irritated and suspected him of some kind of double dealing. If this suspicion were allowed to persist, Mutasarrif Hamid might change his mind about the promotion, for the old bullfrog could be vengeful. So feigning generosity and love Tabari cried, “Excellency, I’ve lost your coin. But here are some funds I’ve collected for another purpose.” And he handed over the money which he had extorted that day from the incoming Jews.

As soon as he was free of the mutasarrif he dispatched two horsemen to Makor with instructions to search for the gold coin which he must have dropped there, but it was not found.

**LEVEL I**

**Rebbe Itzik and the Sabra**

Illustration:

Bullet from a British rifle
Bullet manufactured in New Haven, Connecticut, February, 1943 C.E., and intended for use in World War II. Fired from a rifle manufactured in Manchester, England, April, 1944 C.E., and also intended for use in World War II. Deposited at Makor sometime past midnight on the morning of Friday, May 14, 1948 C.E.

The three had this in common: that each loved the land passionately as a man loves a woman, joyously as a child loves the dawning of a day when there is to be a picnic on the land; the sabra loved Galilee as the soil from which her people had sprung through generations uncounted; the soldier loved Palestine as a refuge after years of fighting; and the little blue-eyed rebbe loved Israel as the land that God had chosen as a site for testimony. It was during the turbulent spring days of 1948 that their three loves came into contact.

To Isidore Gottesmann, the soldier, the instructions of Moses our Teacher were clear beyond necessity for debate: “When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies... the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house? ... let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle... And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard? ... let him also go and
return unto his house, lest he die in the battle...” Gottesmann especially liked another commandment: “When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war... but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.”

Thinking ruefully of his own situation, Gottesmann looked up from the almanac on which he was working and reflected: I have a new house. I’ve planted a vineyard. And I’ve a new wife. Moses Rabbenu must have had me in mind specifically, and I want to stay at home lest I die in battle.

Then he laughed nervously: And I’m particularly covered by this injunction. Here Moses surely had me in mind: “And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house...”

He leaned back from his desk, where he had been compiling data from the almanac, listened to the sounds coming from the kitchen as his wife prepared supper, and shook his head. He was a tall, thin, ascetic Jew with sunken cheeks and deep-set eyes peering out from beneath dark eyebrows. He did not seem an unusually sensitive man; he was rather more reserved and self-directed than most, and he had the habit of biting his cheek and drawing his lips back from even teeth. When he quoted the Torah he used Hebrew, but his personal reflections were in German, for that had been his native tongue. He also spoke an excellent English with only a slight German-Yiddish accent: And God knows that on that last command I qualify, because I’ve grown quite cowardly. “Fearful and fainthearted” describe me exactly.

He shook his head and called, in a heavily accented Hebrew, “Dinner about ready, Ilana?”

From the kitchen of the new white-walled house came a hearty, almost masculine cry: “Tend your figures. Leave the kitchen to me.”

Gottesmann returned to his almanac and completed his calculations, placing them meticulously within the columns he had ruled in his notebook: Tonight, April 12, 1948, sun sets at eight minutes past six. Tomorrow morning, April 13, 1948, sun rises at thirteen minutes after five. Now, if we allow an additional forty-five minutes of visibility both after sunset tonight and before sunrise tomorrow, we have left... He paused to do some subtracting, then noted the critical answer: We have about nine and one half hours of darkness in which to do whatever needs to be done. Carefully he put his pencil down and slumped over the almanac. He could guess what needed to be done and who would be ordered to do it.

It was some time before he raised his head, and then he did so wearily: Moses our Teacher could have summed it up in one simple command. “What man is sick of war? Let him return to his house.” He bit his cheek and muttered, “I’m fainthearted and fearful and can do no more.”

As a sensitive boy of eleven in Gretz he had watched the great madness of 1933 sweep the Rhine, and had understood when his father shipped him to Amsterdam in 1935. When the war started he had joined a hit-or-miss Jewish underground that operated along the German border rescuing refugees. English agents, penetrating into Holland, had stumbled upon the group and had provided a hard-core leadership, giving them the job of blowing up bridges. These English had quickly spotted Gottesmann’s ability and had pushed him through their
underground to Antwerp, from which he was ferried across to Folkestone and a
good English education. In 1942 he had joined the British army as a stores
corporal, handing out Lysol for latrines, but soon he was switched to a secret unit
headed for Syria to keep Damascus out of Vichy and German hands. Later, when
the fear of Rommel had evaporated, he fought in Italy; and there, meeting for the
first time members of the Jewish Brigade from Palestine, he acquired their vision
of a free Israel and volunteered to work in the smuggling of illegal immigrants. For
nine years, 1939 through 1947, he had been at war, and now he had had enough.
He was beginning to lose his nerve—if he had not already lost it—and he wanted
only the creative relaxation of tending his vineyards at Kfar Kerem.

He had first seen these lovely vineyards under unusual circumstances: one
winter’s day in 1944 when the German threat to Syria had dissolved, thanks to the
English victories in the desert and the Russian triumph at Stalingrad,
Gottesmann’s special unit was sent by truck from Damascus to Cairo, and since
the convoy had been directed to use back roads it came by way of Safad, where it
was halted in the mountain town by an unexpected snowstorm. The English
soldiers piled out to inspect the fairy-tale corridors, crying, “Look at that old fellow
from the ghetto.” But Gottesmann went by himself down the narrow alleys,
thinking: This is how the Judenstrasse of Gretz must have looked when Simon
Hagarzi lived there. And it was with keen pleasure that he stumbled upon the
small house marked by the reverent sign:

Here Labored the Great Rabbi
ELIEZER BAR ZADOK OF GRETZ
Who Codified the Law

Later, when he had climbed to the hilltop, the snow ceased and in the ensuing
sunlight he saw for the first time the majestic hills of Galilee; how extraordinary
they were that wintry morning, brown in their barrenness yet golden in the
unexpected sunlight and tipped on each rise with silver from the snow. The
convoluted hills twisted and turned in harmonious folds like the intricacies of
music, dropping at last to the lake itself, now crystal-blue in the distance. All his
life Gottesmann had known of Galilee, but he had not known that it was beautiful.

“Is this the land they spoke of?” he cried with soaring joy. “Is this what we Jews
used to own?”

As he looked at the goodness he saw that clouds had begun moving in from the
deserts east of the River Jordan, clouds superheated from their thirsty march
across waterless sands; and as they drifted across the mountains which protected
Galilee they struck the cold air of the snowstorm, so that above the lake they
leaped and spun in wild confusion, reaching far into the heavens and breaking
into violent patterns. And for a moment Gottesmann had the feeling that nature
was showing him a summary of the future with hordes from the desert striking at
the Jews of the Galilee, and the turbulence in his heart was reflected in the sky,
premonitory of the violence to come, yet consoling in the towering beauty and
promise of peace also to come. It was Galilee at its finest—that turbulent area in
which states and religions were born; and in a kind of exaltation he climbed into
his army truck and rumbled down the mountainside to Tiberias, where the
captain in charge suggested, “Let’s celebrate at the hot springs,” and they had
piled out to enjoy the old Roman baths at the southern end of town. Feeling
unnaturally clean and fresh-eyed, Gottesmann had left the baths to walk slowly
southward, coming finally to the end of the lake, where he discovered the rich
fields and the sleeping vineyards of Kfar Kerem. Some men were planting
grapevines, and he asked them in Yiddish, “Who owns this land?” They replied in
Hebrew, “The men of Kfar Kerem.”
“What men are they?”
“We’re the men,” the farmers had replied.
“Jews? Like you?” he had asked.
“Yes, Jews like you,” the men had joked in Yiddish, which they spoke poorly.
At that moment the idea struck him: After the war I’ll never go back to Gretz.
And England’s not my home. Carefully he asked the farmers, “What did you say
the name was?”
“Kfar Kerem. Village of the Vineyard,” one of the men translated.
“We’re the oldest Jewish settlement along the lane,” another said. “Built years
ago by a man named Hacohen,” and Gottesmann had remembered the names, the
fields, the vineyards.
When his convoy reached Jerusalem on its way to Cairo, Gottesmann
experienced for the first time the mystery of that city so pregnant with meaning for
a Jew—“To next year in Jerusalem” the prayer of his family had been—and while
the English troops explored the Arab bazaars which gave the city charm he went
with a few Jewish soldiers to the Hebrew University, on Mount Scopus, and there
as he looked across the hills at the wonder of his land he became aware of three
pretty Jewish girls who were speaking to the soldiers in Hebrew. He indicated that
he did not know the language, and the leader of the students said in imperfect
Yiddish, “We hope that when the war ends you’ll come back to help us capture our
homeland.”
She was a girl of seventeen, broad-shouldered, sun-tanned, with her heavy hair
cut short and her khaki dress even shorter. She was the tough, muscular girl of
the impending state of Israel, a true sabra—“flower of the cactus,” as those born in
Palestine were called, “prickly on the outside, sweet on the inside”—but there was
about her lovely face something that was unmistakably Russian. Her upper lip
was thin but her cheeks were full. Her cheekbones were high and her stubborn
chin was squared off, so that she did not look Jewish, and when she smiled her
teeth were unusually big and white. She was like no other Jewish girl he had ever
seen, strong and confident as she asked, “You will come back to help us?”
“To do what?”
She became solemn, most unlike a girl of seventeen who is flirting with strange
soldiers, and said, “There’s to be war. There’s to be much fighting and we shall
need your help.”
He remembered the turbulent clouds over Galilee and said, “You can’t fight all
these Arabs.”
“We don’t want to fight them,” she replied, “but they’ll insist. They’ll think they
can destroy us. But after we capture Jerusalem…”
“After you what?”
She looked at him with wide, lovely brown eyes. “We’ll capture Jerusalem,” she
said with assurance. “We’ll need help, of course.” And she grasped his hands eagerly, crying. “Soldier, please come back.” Ashamed of her outburst she stepped back, asking, after a while, “Where is your home, soldier?”

“Germany.”

“And your family?”

“I have none.”

She took his hands again and kissed them. “In Germany you have no home. In our free Israel you do.” He was startled, and in Hebrew she spoke words that he could not comprehend but whose passion he grasped: “Here is our home! Jerusalem shall be our capital, and if they mean to war with us, we shall show them war as they have never seen it before.”

Caught by the poetry of her words, he asked in Yiddish, “And where is your home?”

“In the greatest of all Jewish settlements,” she said quietly. “At the foot of the Sea of Galilee, where my grandfather proved that Jews...”

“Kfar Kerem?”

“You’ve heard of it?” she asked proudly.

He took her handsome square face in his two hands and kissed her. “Kfar Kerem will be my home,” he said in Yiddish, “and you will be my wife.”

Like lovers from the Crusades, speaking in Bordeaux on the afternoon when the knight must sail to the Holy Land to be absent for ten years, they spoke that afternoon of the historic days facing the Jews, and her soaring patriotism communicated to him the spirit of Kfar Kerem. “I train in the army, and we shall win from the English,” she predicted confidently, “and from the Arabs, too, if they insist. We’ll have a great city here in Jerusalem and our university...”

“You’ll never hold Jerusalem.”

“We will hold Jerusalem,” she said firmly, and she walked with him to the army trucks, where she gave him her address, although he did not need it: Ilana Hacohen, Kfar Kerem. But as the trucks drew away she cried suddenly with an impassioned voice, “Jewish soldiers! Please, please come back!”

Now, on April 12, 1948, as he sat in his new house among the olive trees, he listened to the untutored clatter of pots in the kitchen. It sounded as if a child were playing at a toy stove, and he thought fondly of Ilana, his reluctant housewife. The Galilee, remote from the centers of power, seemed to be falling apart and the Jews didn’t know what to do. There was idle talk about an attack on the town of Tiberias, held by the Arabs, but bolder spirits argued that the first assault should strike at Acre, also in Arab hands. And as for Safad, the situation there was worse than desperate; it was hopeless.

The situation was this. On November 29, 1947, the United Nations meeting at Lake Success in New York, had voted 33 to 13 to accept England’s decision to hand back the mandate given her by the old League of Nations, under which she had been responsible for the government of what came to be known as British Palestine. The problem of what to do now with this vital territory reverted to the United Nations, and the responsible committee had already decided that the land be divided into three parts: inland an Arab state containing mostly Arabs; along the Mediterranean a Jewish state containing mostly Jews; and in between, the internationalized city of Jerusalem to be snared by Muslims, Jews and Christians
alike, since that city was holy to all three religions.

On the morning following the announcement of this decision, the Arabs in Palestine had shown the world how they intended to comply by sweeping down upon an unarmed Jewish bus, killing five and wounding seven. Of course, this was not the first disturbance on either side, but it helped ignite an undeclared Arab-Jewish war, with each combatant fighting to gain territorial advantage against the day when division came into effect and an open war could start. During their final months of custodianship the English tried honestly to maintain some kind of peace, but as the bullets increased, as Arab village and Jewish market went up in smoke, the English made it clear that they were determined to leave. On May 15, 1948, they were quitting the land, and Arabs and Jews could partition it in warfare. As a result, in the difficult months at the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1948 the English were beset with irritating problems for which they blamed the Jews; the government in London tried to maintain a façade of impartiality, but their men on the job in Palestine found themselves increasingly partial to the Arabs, and it became obvious that all day-to-day decisions attendant upon withdrawal were going to favor the Arabs and impede the Jews.

This was only natural. The average Englishman had a personal affinity for Arabs and a distrust of Jews; but more important to the dispassionate Englishman was the fact that the Jews were pathetically outnumbered—600,000 Jews against 1,300,000 Arabs in undivided Palestine, plus 36,000,000 others determined to attack from Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Lebanon, all of whom had common boundaries with Palestine, and from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iraq, which did not. English politicians could be excused if they believed that within two weeks after May 15, 1948, the last Jew in Palestine would be pushed into the sea; it would be therefore unwise to aid these misguided people in prolonging their suicide. Wherever possible, existing fortifications, equipment and physical advantages were being handed over to the Arabs. By mid-April, 1948, the outlines of the transition were clear: The British would go; the Arabs would come; the fleets of the world would stand by in the eastern Mediterranean to rescue whatever Jews escaped the final massacres. Where the survivors were to find refuge, the U.N. would have to decide.

The raw figures facing Isidore Gottesmann were disheartening. In all of upper Galilee, which he and his group were supposed to hold, there were not more than five thousand Jews. Opposed to them were not less than a hundred thousand Arabs, with some two hundred thousand more available from the contiguous Arab countries to the north and east. For example, in the villages between Safad and Acre there were exactly thirty-four Jewish boys and girls with rifles. In Safad itself, where the first blow would probably be struck, an accurate census of Jews had been made: 1,214 Jews surrounded by an estimated 13,400 Arabs. Since Gottesmann had been trained in German gymnasia and English universities, he knew that one must not associate accurate figures and estimates; nevertheless, he had worked out the fanciful ratio of 11.1 Arabs to every Jew. It was an easy number to remember, 11.1. But even it was misleading in that it represented the Jewish strength as greater than it actually was, for the Arabs not only held every high and strategic point, so that their superior weapons could be aimed downward, point-blank at the Jewish quarter, but the 1,214 Jews who were in
Safad were composed largely of elderly religious people who either refused to defend themselves or were incapable of doing so. Many were convinced that God still intended to punish Jews for unknown sins and that this time He had chosen the Arabs to do His work, as in the recent past He had chosen the Germans, and before that the Cossacks under Czmielnicki and the Spaniards under the Inquisition. The Jews of Safad were doomed to die; the Torah said so. And they would sit in their synagogues and wait for the long knives as they had waited in the past.

Gottesmann looked at his gloomy figures: Of the 1,214 Jews in Safad, only 140 are armed, and only 260 in all are capable of fighting. The real proportion as between Jewish defenders and Arab attackers, augmented by reinforcements from without, must therefore be considered to be about forty to one. Yet the capture of Safad by Jewish forces was essential to the preservation of a Jewish state or to the winning of the war that would accompany its establishment. For Safad commanded the hills, and just as it had been vital to the Crusaders in 1100 CE. as a salient protecting Tiberias and the roads to Acre, and to the Mamelukes in 1291 C.E. as a point from which to control the rest of Galilee, so now in 1948 it was again a site overlooking the jugular vein of the area. Taking into consideration the overwhelming superiority of Arab numbers, the United Nations had logically awarded Safad to the forthcoming Arab state, but if it were allowed to remain in Arab hands the viability of any Jewish nation would vanish. As the days of the mandate drew to an end, Safad became the vital target for Jews in the area, and it was held by the Arabs, 11,1-to-1.

As he completed his notes he used the contemporary spelling, Safad, pronounced Sfat in one syllable to rhyme with spot. Like all the places of Galilee this fortress town had known many different names: it had originally been Sepph, then Sephet, then Safat; Crusaders had known it as Saphet, historians as Safed, the Arabs as Safad, map makers as Tsefat, and Hebrew nationalists as Zefat. In similar manner Acre had been Akka, Aecho, Ptolemais, St. Jean d'Acre of the Crusaders, and now purists were calling it Akko; but the most notable of the variations had occurred with the Sea of Galilee: at first it had been known as a sea called Chinnereth, from the resemblance of its shoreline to a harp, then Kinnereth, then Gennesaret, Galilee, Tverya, Tabariyyah, Tyberiadis to the Crusaders, and, to the Turks, Bahr Tubariyeh. For the English it became Lake Galilee and was to be Yam Kinneret, with the second word accented on the second syllable.

Isidore Gottesmann, satisfied that his figures on Safad were in final form, closed his folder and leaned back. He was sure that later on that evening, when Teddy Reich and his Palmach lieutenants came to review the situation, Teddy was bound to say, “We’ve got to capture Safad. Get going, Gottesmann.” The unhappy soldier smiled wryly: Everyone calls him Teddy but they call me Gottesmann. Because I look like a skinny Englishman. And because I like it that way.

He thought back upon the times when the calling of his name by some Englishman had been of critical significance: That night after we blew up the bridge inside the German border. The English major heading the underground had said in his crisp, unemotional manner, “Splendid show, Gottesmann. You’re for Antwerpen.” And that had been the difference between life and the extermination...
camp, for those who had not made it to Antwerp had been caught and killed. Or the night in the Belgian port when another English underground operative had called, “One more place in the lorry. Look lively, Gottesmann,” and this, too, had been the selection between living and dying, for on the following week this Antwerp ring had been penetrated by the Nazis. He also remembered the time when he had stood at attention in dirty civilian clothes as a professor announced to a motley crew, “And for the University of Norwich, Gottesmann. You did well in your papers, lad.” At graduation his German-Jewish name had been called crisply and he had moved into the British army, then into Syria and later into Italy—always at the command of British Gentiles who were generous in recognizing his merit and in granting him their approval.

But later the voices calling him had changed to Yiddish, the hard, tough voices of small, tough men: “Gottesmann, we’ve got to ship these refugees to Eretz Israel. Rent a boat at Taranto. I don’t know where you’ll get the money. Get it.” And the voice of Teddy Reich, who was even tougher and smaller than the others, all brain and sinew: “Gottesmann, you’ll take this dynamite to Tiberias and wait till the lorry...” Just before the suitcase exploded a British voice had cried with agonizing despair, “My God, Gottesmann! What have you done?”

It had been while hiding from the British after this dynamiting that he had been smuggled into Kfar Kerem, where he had made his way to the home of Netanel Hacohen. Tapping softly on the door he had aroused a tall, square-jawed Jew, who said gruffly, “If they’re chasing you, come in.”

“I met your daughter in Jerusalem.”

“She’s not here. But you must be Gottesmann and I suppose you blew up the lorry. Welcome, son.”

That night he had seen for the first time the haunting portrait of little Shmuel Hacohen, his left shoulder protruding as if he wanted to fight, his eyes flashing with notable vitality. “He was killed by Bedouins while fighting to protect this land,” Netanel explained. “When the first trouble started the others wanted to give up the vineyards and retreat to the walls of Tiberias, but Shmuel preached, ‘We’ll build walls greater than any Tiberias has seen. Out of our love for the land!’”

“Preached?” Gottesmann interrupted. “Was he a rabbi?”

Shmuel Hacohen’s son laughed. “Shmuel? A rabbi? When he died he was fed up with rabbis. There were no rabbis in this family. The Jewish state will be born when enough men like my father take enough guns and shoot down the bastards who are threatening us. When my father was fifty he organized his own little army to protect this settlement and he bought himself a donkey so that he could ride from one watch station to the next, firing his men up. The Bedouins announced to the whole countryside, ‘We’ll kill the little Jew on the donkey, and the others will run away.’ So they killed him. When we recovered his body it had nineteen bullet holes. But his faith had been so strong that no one dared run away, and after two or three battles the Bedouins left us in peace. Gottesmann, to hold this land we had to fight for it. If we want a state for the Jews we’ll have to fight for it. You did a fine thing when you blew up the lorry.”

“I asked about the rabbi business because I saw these volumes of the Talmud,” Gottesmann said.

“Those?” Netanel laughed. “Somebody sold them to my father and he kept them
for good luck. Shmuel Hacohen ... you could sell him anything. His preaching was 
simple, Gottesmann, and you remember it. No state is given on a silver plate. You 
buy with blood. Rabbis and governments and fine ideas will not win this land. 
Guns will. You get the guns, you'll get Israel.”

And then one day, as Gottesmann lay hiding, Netanel hurried into the room, 
explaining, “You've got to get out of here. My daughter’s coming home from 
university,” and Ilana appeared, somewhat thinner than when he had seen her in 
Jerusalem, lovelier when she smiled but more serious and totally dedicated to the 
ideal of a Jewish state. When she saw Gottesmann packing she said, “Don’t go,” 
and later, when he recalled that first meeting, he remembered principally the great 
tenseness of her mind and body. She stood forward against her toes, not back on 
her heels. Her chin was held forward too, like her stubborn grandfather’s in the 
picture, and her eyes, unlike those of girls Gottesmann had known in other 
countries, were marked by lines of concentration. Above all, he remembered her 
tough, rounded knees as they popped out from beneath her very short dress, and 
he recalled how delightful it had been, in his hiding, to touch those knees and to 
feel this vibrant girl, so eager for life and the day’s challenge, pressing against him. 

Now he laughed easily as he heard her banging about the kitchen in her last 
stages of preparing his evening meal. She was a dreadful cook, a typical Israeli she 
called herself, burning her thumbs and the meat, and she slapped food on the 
table as her ancestors must have slammed it on the wooden boards in their tents 
four thousand years ago in this very spot, when returning from their sheep in the 
wilderness. How excellent a human being she was, this Ilana, how strong in her 
resolves, and how desperately her husband wanted to stay away from the war that 
was engulfing him... how he longed to stay with his wife among the vineyards. 

Yet in his longing Gottesmann had to admit that not even under the humane 
law of Moses Rabbenu was he excused from this war, for although he did have a 
new house and a new vineyard, he did not actually have a wife. He and Ilana were 
not married. In the tempestuous fashion of the day she had simply moved in with 
him, announcing to the settlement, “Gottesmann and I shall live together.” He had 
expected some kind of protest from her father, but tough-minded Netanel had 
summoned two witnesses before whom the lovers recited the ancient formula: 
“Behold, thou art consecrated unto me according to the law of Israel,” after which 
Netanel boomed, “You’re married. Have lots of children.” Certain cautious 
nighbors had suggested that perhaps Gottesmann and his girl would like to have a 
rabbi from Tiberias authenticate the marriage, but Ilana had cried 
contemptuously, “We’re through with rabbis and all that Mickey Mouse crap.”

The phrase had struck Gottesmann as inappropriate to the discussion at hand 
and he had asked Ilana, “Where did you pick up the words ‘Mickey Mouse crap’?” 
and she had explained, “When you go to the movies and watch the cartoons the 
hero gets into all kinds of trouble, but at the end, when terrible things are bound 
to happen, Mickey Mouse swings in from nowhere and saves the world. 
Gottesmann, it doesn’t happen that way. And for sure it’s not going to happen that 
way in Israel”—Ilana always spoke as if her new homeland already existed—
“because nobody is going to come swinging in from anywhere, not God nor Moses 
nor some rabbi. So let them keep that Mickey Mouse crap to themselves. Fifteen 
thousand Arabs are going to come down out of those hills some day, and we’d
better be ready.” Her eyes flashed and she repeated, “We’d better be ready. Not Mickey Mouse. Not some rabbi wringing his hands and wailing, ‘Israel is lost. Israel is being punished.’” Recalling that outburst Gottesmann looked down at his folder and smiled.

Behind him the door banged open. There was a clatter of feet. A tray was banged onto the table and a chair was squealed backward over the stone floor. “Food!” a husky-harsh voice shouted, and supper was served at the Gottesmann home.

Ilana Hacohen was twenty-one, not tall, not plump. Her big white teeth sparkled as ever, and as usual she looked quizzical. She obviously loved the security and repose of living with a man and she took pride in her new home. With heavy yet loving hands she pushed the crockery about the table and splashed a generous helping of food onto her husband’s plate. It was meat and vegetables, cooked as if by accident, and it made him long even for the food of English restaurants. “Eat it all,” she said, “I’m saving some for Teddy Reich.” Then, on the impulse of the moment, she leaned across the table and kissed her tall, serious-browed husband.

“You worried about Safad?” she asked.

“For every Jew in Safad there are 11.1 Arabs,” he said glumly.

“If they’re the right Jews,” she reflected.

“And the Arabs hold all the favorable positions.”

“They always do,” she said.

“And in honest fighting strength they outnumber us forty to one.”

When Ilana chewed she kept the food in small portions in the right side of her mouth and moved her jaws only slightly, so that she seemed unusually reflective, with her thin upper lip drawn tight and the lines about her eyes contracted. She thought of the odds, forty to one, and of the position of Safad as she had known it, now so critical to the Jews. “It looks to me,” she said slowly, “as if Teddy Reich ought to move his Palmach in there tonight.”

Isidore Gottesmann visibly stiffened. He stopped chewing and looked down for a moment at the white boards of the table. Ilana regarded linen as ridiculous in time of war; she didn’t propose washing table covers when there was other work to do. When her husband did not speak she said quietly, “And if Teddy decides to send his men in, you and I are going too.”

“I guessed we would,” her husband said, and they continued eating.

Ilana Hacohen knew Safad well. Her grandfather had been killed by the Bedouins long before she was born, and she had never known him, but she remembered well the happy days when her father used to take her on horseback up the steep trail to Safad, from which they could see the Sea of Galilee and Tiberias. As they stood on the old Crusader ruins her father would explain how from this spot the Jews had looked down upon the great Roman city of Tiberias, when large fleets had stood out into the lake, and of how, in later days, a group of misguided bigots had assembled in Tiberias to write the Talmud, “thus binding the world in chains.” He said that some centuries later, around 900 CE., a much finer body of rabbis had also worked in Tiberias, “compiling the only honest text of the Bible, so that Tiberias is just as important for the Christians as it is for the Jews.” But it was his opinion that the only rabbi from these parts whom one could love was Rabbi Zaki the Martyr. “He was a great and honest man,” he said, “and all
could trust him.” Of contemporary rabbis, except for Rabbi Kook, he did not know many who could be so described. He told his daughter, “Always remember, in this country we have the best rabbis that money can buy.” They were a grubby, contemptible lot and old Shmuel Hacohen had decreed that none should be allowed in Kfar Kerem.

This did not mean that Ilana had grown up without religion. In her father’s house the reading of the Torah was exactly equivalent to the reading of Shakespeare in the home of an educated English family, or the reading of Goethe among Germans—except that because of its antiquity and historical power the Jews of the settlement felt that their great literary masterpiece was somewhat more effective than Shakespeare was for the English or Goethe for the Germans or Tolstoy for the Russians. Rarely a day passed in Ilana’s childhood when she did not hear some practical discussion of the Bible as the historical background of her people. She knew that Kfar Kerem stood where Canaanites had once ruled and that on their victorious return from Egypt the Jews had surged northward through the valleys to the west. She could imagine them still marching, just beyond the ridges back of Tiberias. To Ilana, God’s division of Canaan among the twelve tribes, which had taken place some three thousand years ago, was as real as the proposed United Nations division that would occur within a few weeks: Kfar Kerem stood at the junction of the portions given to Naphtali, Issachar and Manasseh, and it was from these lands that the citizens of Israel had been driven into captivity. Mount Tabor still stood as the perpetual beacon of the north, and the Sea of Galilee remained as Isaiah had described it. To the sabras of Ilana’s generation the Bible was real indeed. In her father’s vineyard she had found Jewish coins that had been issued by the Maccabees, and she could recall that day on which her father had taken her to see the recent excavations at Beth-shan, pointing toward familiar places on the Plain of Jezreel. “Why did he do it?” he had cried.

“Do what?” Ilana had asked.

“Keep his troops here at Gilboa while the enemy was camped over there at Shunem.” And he explained why the man had been a fool, a blunderer.

“Who was?” she asked again.

“King Saul,” her father replied. To the Jews of Kfar Kerem, Saul was a man of history, not a shadowy figure in a religious chronicle, and so with Gideon, David and Solomon.

Like most of her friends, whose parents were either non-religious or actively anti-religious, Ilana Hacohen bore a non-Biblical name. Hers meant tree and spoke of the ancient soil. Other girls bore evocative names like Aviva (spring), or Ayelet (fawn), or Talma (furrow). Young men were apt to be called Dov (bear), or Arieh (lion), or Dagan (cereal). Ilana was determined that when she and Gottesmann had children there would be no Sarahs or Rachels among them, no Abrahams or Mendels; she wanted no part of the old Biblical names nor of the Eastern European ones either. In fact, her only disappointment with her husband was that he kept his German name of Isidore, one relating in no way, she felt, to a modern Jewish state.

It would be difficult to say whether Ilana and her father were religious or not. On the one hand they loved the Bible as the literary textbook of their race. On the
other, they despised what the rabbis had made of it. “A prison!” Netanel Hacohen cried. “And the Talmudic rabbis who worked here at Tiberias were the worst of the lot, codifying into ugly little categories all things that God intended to be free.” He also looked unkindly at the work of the later rabbis who had lived in Safad: “In their exile in Spain and Germany they picked up many bigoted ideas and came back here to force them down our throats.” There were others in Kfar Kerem who were so disgusted with rabbinical Judaism that they went much further than Netanel Hacohen. These Jews were prepared to throw out God and Moses, too.

Ilana knew some of these latter thinkers and she found their reasoning persuasive. “We are Jews,” they argued, “and it is our job to reconquer Palestine. When we do we won’t require a lot of rabbis from Poland and Russia to tell us how to govern ourselves.” Women of this group were apt to be especially vehement in their denunciation, and it was from one of these, a girl at the university who had lived in America for some time, that Ilana picked up the phrase which seemed to her the best summary of the religious problem: “that Mickey Mouse crap.”

Among Ilana’s friends a curious cult had developed which could be explained only as a combination of deep love for the Bible and an equally deep distrust for institutionalized religion as they had seen it operating among the Jews of Galilee. Many girls flatly refused to get married in the old rabbinical patterns. “Me take a ritual bath?” Ilana had protested. “I’d sooner jump in cattle water ten days old than step naked into that Mickey Mouse crap.” Her girl friends sought out the men they wanted to live with and in swift progression became pregnant, fine mothers and good heads of their families. They also refused to wear make-up, that being the prerogative of purposeless women in decadent countries like France and Argentina. It became an act of faith not to shave under the arms, to avoid make-up, to wear very short skirts, to bob the hair and to take advanced training in the management of machine guns and field mortars—if any were made available by the men who needed them. These girls also spoke only Hebrew, fluently and with an earthy lilt. Yiddish they deplored as an echo of the eastern European ghettos, and Ladino was as bad. Those whose parents knew no Hebrew consented to talk with the old folks in whatever language was native, Russian with the Russian immigrants, Polish with the Polish newcomers, but Yiddish was frowned upon. “It’s a ridiculous mark of servitude,” Ilana protested, “and Gentiles are correct in laughing at it.”

They were a tough, wonderful, exciting group of young people, and if they had surrendered formal religion, they had found a substitute equally demanding: they were dedicated to the creation of a Jewish state that should be called Israel and that should be founded in social justice. There were no communists in Kfar Kerem, and there were actually those who preferred capitalism with its ever-present chance for a man to become rich, but most were like Ilana: “Our house is not really our house. It belongs to the settlement, and if we should move away the house will go to someone else just like us, which is only right. I work in the vineyard and I think of it as mine, but it really belongs to the settlement, too, and if I leave, other hands will tend the grapes. The important thing is that the land will continue.”

This was the real mystique of the group: the land will continue. “There were Jews on this land four thousand years ago,” Ilana often said, “and I am proud to
be a part of that chain. When I’m gone more Jews will live on our land, for another four thousand years. It’s the land that counts.”

She often recalled the teachings of her grandfather, which were kept alive in Kfar Kerem in a small book which was published after his death and in which he spoke of his great difficulty in acquiring land, and of its significance to the Jews who first realized that it belonged to them:

I met them as they came overland from Akka and the Arabs gathered at the gates of Tiberias to watch them struggle through, and everyone began to laugh, for they were thin and undernourished, and many of the men’s backs were bent from much study in the yeshivas of Berdichev. Not even the Jews of Tiberias thought that such people could live on the land, beset by drought in some years, floods in others, and Bedouins all the time, But I swore that the Jews of Kfar Kerem—as I had named the new settlement—would master the land. And to that purpose I drove them constantly to watch how the Arabs tilled the land, to remember what tricks the Russians had used on their fields; and weeks and months would go by without my ever hearing the word Talmud, but the word land was before us at every waking hour.

Ilana explained to her husband, “After it was evident that my grandfather was going to succeed, many religious Jews tried to join the settlement, but when they saw how determined Shmuel was to keep Kfar Kerem a farm and not a countryside synagogue, they left in disgust and went up to Safad. My grandfather never allowed a synagogue in Kfar Kerem nor any merchants, and this was the first new settlement to use Hebrew. Shmuel never mastered the language … he spoke it like a little boy, some of the old people told me. But before he died he was conducting the settlement meetings in Hebrew. My own father refused me permission to speak Yiddish, and I’m thankful now. Of course, I’ve picked up the usual number of words and I understand it, but I’d be ashamed to speak it.”

Land was the goal, the land of Canaan and Israel, the ancient fields awarded by God to Naphtali and Issachar and Manasseh. One day when Ilana was riding in an armed truck with her husband toward Acre she saw those once-great farm lands that had deteriorated into malaria-ridden swamps, and she broke into tears: “It’s a crime against the land. This is what happens when Eretz Israel falls into alien hands. We Jews have got to win back all this land, and in three years we’ll make it fertile again. We shall have to fight for it, foot by foot, but we shall win because I can’t believe that God intended…”

“You confuse me when you speak of God,” Gottesmann had interrupted.

“Well, yesterday you said some pretty forceful things against religion. Today you speak as if God were going to give you the swampland.”

“Don’t you believe that God has chosen us to tend this land?”

“No,” Gottesmann replied.

“I do,” she snapped, and her husband decided to drop the matter. Yet it was apparent to him that Ilana had come to identify God with the land, not differentiating between the two, and as the truck bounced along he thought: This must be the way people believed five thousand years ago when the long
progression to monotheism started. “God is the land, therefore we shall worship
this hill,” and almost at once they discovered that between God and His land there
had to be some agent of mediation, whereupon they invented priests and the
priests led to rabbis, and the rabbis led to all that Ilana hates.

Now, in his new home, waiting for Teddy Reich and the decisions about Safad,
Gottesmann acknowledged to Ilana that he had come partly around to her way of
thinking. As he ate the last of the meat—it was a matter of pride among the sabra
wives not to serve dessert—he confessed, “In the last few days I’ve decided that
you’re right. The land comes first, and after we get it we can worry about the other
problems.”

“You’re talking sense!” she cried excitedly, pushing the dishes aside. Propping
her elbows on the table she leaned forward and the lines of anxiety about her eyes
disappeared. “When we get hold of the land, Gottesmann...” Like many sabras she
always addressed her husband by his last name, but in her case this custom also
reflected her dislike for his first name.

“I have a feeling,” he continued, “that the next six weeks will decide whether we
get the land or not,”

“Whether!” she cried. “Gottesmann, we must get the land. Are you afraid we
won’t?”

“I’m a soldier,” he explained. “I know what it means... in a town like Safad... forty
on the other side to one on our side ...”

“But we must,” she said quietly. In great agitation she left the table and stalked
about the room, a husky girl, handsome in feature and explosive in her new-felt
power. She was not a tall girl, but she seemed to encompass in her tense body the
strength of the fields her grandfather had conquered and protected. “God of
Moses!” she whispered. “Let us recapture our land.”

Then Teddy Reich exploded into the new house, and all things changed. He was
a young, one-armed German Jew of twenty-four, without an ounce of fat or a
shred of illusion. He moved like a charged wire, sputtering and jerking as if
animated by some writhing inner force. He had keen, cold eyes, a spare chin and a
close-cropped head of black hair. He was only slightly taller than Ilana, which
made him much shorter than Gottesmann, and he possessed one of the most
daring minds in Galilee. He was accompanied by four men like himself, all tough
German Jews, and a fifth who seemed noticeably out of place. This young fighter
was actually rotund, had a soft round face, drooping shoulders and a perpetual
grin. He was Nissim Bagdadi, and his last name betrayed both his origin and the
fact that he alone, of all the eight in the room, was a Sephardi Jew.

“The word on Safad?” Reich demanded. Throwing himself urgently into a chair
he grabbed a pencil and listened.

“I was there two days ago,” Gottesmann began.

“Difficulty?”

“Shot at going in and out.”

“In the countryside?”

“No. In the town.”

“That’s to be expected,” Reich hurled back. Ilana gasped. Gottesmann had not
told her he had been fired at by the Arabs. He rarely spoke of his war experiences.
Reich noticed the gasp and looked at Ilana. “What’s the place look like?” he
snapped.

Gottesmann took one of Ilana’s steep-sided bowls and inverted it on the table. “Looks like this,” he explained in bad Hebrew. “This flat part on top, the Crusader ruins, held by Arabs. From here they dominate everything. Now imagine the sides divided into six segments—a pie. The Arabs hold five. We hold one ... this little one. At this upper corner of our segment there’s a rugged stone house which the British have turned over to the Arabs, and here there’s a police station which we’re afraid the British will give them, too.” Glumly the eight Jews studied the impossible situation: only one section held by their people, and it dominated by the Crusader ruins, by the stone house and by the police station.

Then Gottesmann placed a tall book in back of the bowl. Jamming his fist on top of the book he said, “And back here, commanding everything, is the big new fortress built by the British. The Arabs are already moving in.”

Impatiently Teddy Reich reached out with his one arm and swept everything aside. Book and bowl swept across the table, and the impregnable fortress, the stone house and the concrete police station were gone. “How many people are involved?” he barked.

“We have a definite count—1,214 Jews against about 13,400 Arabs. That’s 11.1 of the enemy to one of us.”

“Standard,” Reich grunted. “Will the Jews fight?”

“Two hundred and sixty might... if we can get them some guns.”

“How many have guns now?”

“One hundred and forty.”

“Better than I thought,” Reich cried. “Allon says Safad must be taken. We’ll move in that platoon hiding north of town.”

“Can a platoon do the trick?” Gottesmann asked.

“Simple,” Reich said, not looking up as he jotted notes. “Safad must be taken. To do it we can spare one platoon.” There was silence, then he added, “Gottesmann, if you left now, could you get to that platoon in the hills before dawn?”

“There’s no moon. If we push, we can make it.”

“Start now,” Reich directed as he continued his note-taking. “Tell them they must fight their way into Safad tomorrow night.”

“Very good,” was the reply, in German. If he had any emotional reaction to the difficult assignment he had just been handed, he showed nothing.

“You need any of my men?” Reich asked.

“I’ll take Ilana,” Gottesmann replied. Then he studied the four tough Ashkenaziim, but decided against them. “And for our guide, Bagdadi.”

No one in the room spoke. Ilana, standing near the table, made no move.

Teddy Reich looked up from his writing, turned to inspect Ilana and Bagdadi, then nodded, after which he rose, kicked open a door and went into the bedroom, where he threw himself on the unmade bed and said, “While you’re gone we’ll use this as headquarters.” Before Gottesmann and his wife were out of the house he was asleep.

It was customary for members of the Palmach to carry, when engaged in military operations, loads of at least forty kilos each, but in view of the unusual difficulty to be encountered on this trip to Safad, Gottesmann gave himself and
Bagdadi only thirty kilos each, sixty-six pounds, while Ilana volunteered to carry forty-four pounds. Normally a hike from Kfar Kerem to Safad could be handled with comfort by the well-trained Jews of the Palmach—an abbreviation for the Plugat Machatz, “striking force,” organized in 1941 to resist the threatened German invasion—for the roads were pleasant, the uphill climb invigorating and the distance only twenty-two miles; but tonight the three soldiers could not use the roads, for they were patrolled by armed Arabs who had killed several Jews attempting night missions. It was Gottesmann’s plan to start due west from Kfar Kerem, then to head north to the eastern flanks of the Horns of Hittim, cross the flat lands west of the lake and finally to penetrate the mountains on which Safad stood. It was an uphill trip of twenty-seven miles. The chances for success were not good, since four main roads had to be crossed. The countryside leading to them was rugged, and all had to be completed before four-thirty, when daylight would begin to break. If the travelers were caught in sunlight, the waiting Arabs could pick them off one by one, as they had the thirty-five Jews trapped in sunlight at Hebron.

But Gottesmann had picked Bagdadi as his third man for good reasons. The plump Iraqi was both skilled as a scout and valiant as a fighter. He knew the terrain well and had an animal sense of where an enemy might be attempting to spring a trap. Starting at a dogtrot, he quickly had his team heading away from the Sea of Galilee. Ilana, lugging a rifle and much ammunition, found no difficulty in keeping pace with the men, and whenever Gottesmann caught sight of her, head back, mouth tightly closed, he felt a rush of love for this exceptional girl who in normal times would have been at the university.

With deft maneuvers Bagdadi got his people across the first two roads leading into Tiberias from the west, then launched the hard climb up toward the Horns of Hittim, and as the sturdy trio reached the old Crusader battleground they could see below the sleeping city of Tiberias, which other Jews would try to capture within the next few days. When Gottesmann remarked on this, Ilana whispered, “May God give them victory,” but Gottesmann had already dismissed Tiberias and was thinking, as he ran, of the historic battle at Hittim which had determined so much history in this part of the world. It’s possible for a nation to make one wrong guess and lose its existence, he reflected. Is this attempt on Safad such a mistake? Bagdadi, apparently unbothered by history, pressed on, and the ancient battlefield was left behind as they headed north.

“Slow!” Bagdadi whispered, and the three Jews froze against the spring earth while a British scouting truck moved down the third of the main roads, its searchlight flashing aimlessly across the fields. Bagdadi kept everyone flat, and Gottesmann realized how much he appreciated the involuntary rest. When the light drifted harmlessly above them he noticed that Ilana had closed her eyes and was breathing deeply, but as soon as the truck passed, Bagdadi whispered, “We’re behind schedule,” and when they rose Gottesmann had to smile as his wife automatically brushed the sand from her khaki blouse and short khaki dress.

They now began a steady dogtrot along a fairly level course which carried them toward the hills but kept them well west of the main Tiberias-Safad road along the lake. These were the hours after midnight, and by pressing steadily Bagdadi recovered some of the time lost earlier, so that when they approached the stern
hills on which Safad perched they knew that they had at least a chance of getting to the Palmach village before the sun came up. But now the going became brutal, for Safad lay nearly thirty-five hundred feet higher than Kfar Kerem, and they had to make their way through rocky fields, tempting though the nearby roadway was, but no one protested, for all could feel the still-sleeping sun almost pushing on their backs. When it rose it must not catch them in some gully.

They were now in the heart of Arab country, with small villages on every side, and Bagdadi was proving his skill in leading his team as far as possible from likely Arab marksmen. He halted the march and whispered, “From here to the last road will be difficult. Crossing it will be worse. Then we have a very steep climb. If we run into Arabs, what?”

“No firing,” Gottesmann warned. “Absolutely no firing.” He gave this order more to Bagdadi than to Ilana, for he knew her to be extremely cool under such conditions.

“No firing,” Ilana repeated, knowing what worried her husband.

“No firing,” Bagdadi promised as he started toward the road with swift head-down strides. It was difficult and painful work.

They passed one Arab village, then another, hearing only the dogs barking at the night. They came in sight of the road but held back, for it looked unusually ominous, as if snipers might be waiting, and as the three huddled in the darkness they saw something that was both exhilarating and frustrating. Above them, so close that it looked as if it could almost be touched, lay Safad, the lights of its Arab quarter brilliant in the night air. Each Jew wanted more than anything else to climb directly to the inviting town, to the critical focus of their movement, but each knew that he must duck and dodge for several more hours, must cross the dangerous road and then work his way silently into the safe hills north of the town where the Palmach waited. It was as difficult as turning away from the gates of a brightly lit dance when one was young.

“We go!” Bagdadi whispered, and they cut quickly across the exposed road and disappeared into the brown hills on the northern side, where Bagdadi kept his team running up the steep incline that would lead them eventually to the hills behind Safad.

It was now three in the morning, the eighth hour of their march, and Ilana was nearing exhaustion, but she took a small drink from a canteen that Bagdadi carried and shifted her rifle ... “I’ll take it,” Gottesmann offered, but she grabbed it fiercely, bent forward and continued up the hill.

“Keep together,” Bagdadi warned. “Arab villages all around.” And for an hour, till his watch showed four, he maintained his killing pace. Even Gottesmann was finding it difficult to stay up with the astonishing Iraqi, but to fall behind would be fatal, and they pressed forward as behind them the first gray light of dawn began to break.

Now Bagdadi’s judgment became crucial. Somewhere ahead lay the village held by the Palmach, but in between stood others filled with waiting Arabs, and to pick an accurate track through the intervening land, to avoid alerting Arab sentries and at the same time to prevent Palmach scouts from firing random shots, required delicate skill. The Iraqi moved slowly, testing the route, until Gottesmann, whose nerves were almost out of control, snapped, “God, man! Move!”
Gently, as if he were rebuking a child, Bagdadi said, “This is the time when we dare not choose wrong,” and like a clever fox smelling out the terrain he picked the only path that would take them between the waiting villages.

But as they reached a spot in the center of the Arab holdings an ugly period came when the sun, weary of night, began reaching for the horizon. It was forty-two and twilight was about to begin. It was a moment of terror, for each of the three Jews could see the visible shape of the others... far too clearly. Ilana, wanting nothing more than to rest where she was, grew frightened as she saw her husband’s face looming out of the vanishing darkness: it was the face of a man who had driven himself to the edge of endurance, and he stopped running. He could go no more.

“We must go,” Bagdadi warned.

Gottesmann refused to move. He could drive his legs no farther, and he intended staying where he was, within the nest of Arab villages.

“We’ve only fifteen minutes!” Bagdadi pleaded.

Gottesmann could not respond. He saw a depression among some rocks and sat down, while the growing dawn formed a silhouette around him.

“Get him up,” Bagdadi pleaded with Ilana. Tired as she was she went to Gottesmann and pulled on his arm, with no success.

The leadership of the venture now rested solely in Bagdadi’s hands, and emotionally he was ill equipped to exercise it, for his life had been spent, it seemed, in following directions laid down by Ashkenazi Jews: as a boy of two, the son of a large Iraqi family living in Hebron, he had watched the unbridled massacres of 1929, when Arabs had swept over that town, slaughtering all Jews in an apocalyptic fury. In the room where he lay hidden under the bed seven of his family had had their throats cut and their bodies mutilated, and although he was mercifully spared from remembering precisely what had happened, he did vaguely recall pools of blood across which he had crawled when the screaming ceased and Ashkenazi Jews came to rescue him.

He had grown up an orphan in Tel Aviv, where the superiority of the Ashkenazim went unchallenged, and of the older boys who thrashed him on the city dumps, all had been from the superior group. When he applied for jobs he found that Ashkenazim had them, and the few vacancies in schools went to them, too. In the Palmach he had received orders only from Ashkenazi officers, but now, with death imminent, responsibility for one segment of Israel’s future had passed to him.

Realizing that Gottesmann was determined to commit suicide, Bagdadi pushed Ilana away and with two sharp blows struck the fallen German Jew across the face. “You’ll run!” he said. With one jerk of his powerful arm he dragged Gottesmann to his feet and gave him a shove that started him staggering zigzag across the final half-mile separating them from the Palmach village. Turning to Ilana he barked, “Follow me,” and he twisted his way through the last of the Arab territory.

Gottesmann’s irrational behavior had wasted precious minutes and now sunrise was upon them. A shot rang out from the hills, frightening Ilana but awakening her husband, and in the next minutes his clearing eyes began to see puffs of dust as bullets struck ahead of the running Jews, and he thought: Maybe they’ll keep
missing. He was not aware that it was his near-breakdown that had thrown his team into this predicament, and a bullet came close to his head, whining in protest as it missed, and ricocheted among the rocks. His lungs were heavy and his legs grew increasingly difficult to manage. He thought: This must be hell on Ilana. He looked ahead to where she was running and saw something which brought him fully back to reality. Ilana, determined to reach the village, was running as fast as she could, but in a straight line. A series of bullets was beginning to zero-in on her, and in a few more steps she was sure to be hit.

In this brief second of agony Gottesmann remembered a man named Pinsker in the German underground. Effective, cold, he had been a little man who expected to fight Nazis the rest of his life. “So when you’re running you will think yourself a rabbit,” he instructed all his men. “For the rest of your life you’re a rabbit and must run as if you knew that someone was looking down a rifle at you. You cannot imagine how a dodge to the left, a dodge to the right, will upset that man looking down the rifle. Gottesmann!” he had screamed. “You’re a rabbit.”

“Nieder!” Gottesmann himself now screamed, but to his horror Ilana kept running straight ahead. A bullet kicked dust at her left heel. He felt sick, then realized that he had intuitively used the German command nieder and not the English “take cover!” He panicked. What he wanted was the Hebrew artza! But before he could call again, Bagdadi looked back, instantly sized up the situation, and with a slight flicking of his hand indicated to Ilana what she must do. As soon as she saw his signal she threw herself flat, rolled over three times and resumed running on a new course. The next bullet struck where she would otherwise have been, and the three darting, dodging, twisting Jews escaped the Arabs and approached the village held by the Palmach.

Now it was Bagdadi’s turn to know anxiety, for in the uncertain light the chances were good that some Jewish soldier would begin firing at anything that was moving; so as he ran Bagdadi unfurled a small white flag containing a hand-stitched blue Star of David and began shouting at the top of his voice, “Palmach! Palmach!”

A quick-thinking sentry in the village sized up the situation and launched a barrage of fire at the Arabs along the ridges. The enemy was driven back and the three messengers from Kfar Kerem staggered the last hundred yards without any Arab bullets coming close to them.

When they approached the rude headquarters, gasping and pressing their ribs together, the sun was well up and they cast clear shadows on the earth. Gottesmann freed one hand and grasped Bagdadi by the Iraqi’s wet shoulder. “You know land,” he said, and before he had finished reporting to the local commander Ilana had found a place on the floor and had curled up like a little animal. After an hour’s talk he and Bagdadi lifted her, and without waking her carried her to a real bed. She slept all day.

At dusk on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 13, the Palmach men roused Ilana and her two well-rested companions. In the small village there was an air of commitment. Teddy Reich’s command to move forward, infiltrate Safad and take over the local defense forces had been so thoroughly discussed, and its difficulties so accurately assessed, that excitement and fear were pretty well spent. Now everyone knew that a platoon of thirty-three men and girls would creep through
the countryside at midnight, crawl on its belly for about three miles and try to sneak into the town through Arab patrols. If the maneuver degenerated into a pitched battle, the Palmach were to return fire but to keep moving forward.

The unit was led by Mem-Mem Bar-El, a sinewy young man who wore a beard and prided himself on his somewhat flashy appearance, his sabra birth and the fact that he spoke no language but Hebrew. He was blue-eyed and red-headed, with the controlled instincts of a true fighting man. His title, Mem-Mem, was derived from the Hebrew initials for platoon commander, and for this job he was nearly ideal. His judgments were swift and clearly communicated; in their execution he was usually in the lead. In normal times Bar-El might have been a lady-killer chewing a toothpick; now he was a battle-tested leader, twenty years old.

He was accompanied by a beautiful girl of seventeen, thin, with dark eyes and clear skin. In all respects she was small; her face and body seemed more a child’s than a young woman’s, and she came only to Ilana’s shoulder, but she piled her hair high on her head, like a Frenchwoman, hoping thereby to make herself look taller. She also wore a boxlike soldier’s cap which always seemed about to topple backward, for she kept its visor pointed skyward to steal additional height. She was unlike Ilana in that she dressed with the flair of a girl who enjoyed clothes, but she was obedient to the other rules of the sabra: no lipstick, no rouge, no shaving. She served as Palmach secretary and was known simply as Vered, the Hebrew word for rose. She had joined Bar-El’s unit in the simplest way: she appeared one morning, volunteering to serve in any capacity, and now she lived in whatever quarters the Mem-Mem could find for her. When questioned she insisted, “At the end of the war I shall attend university.” Bit by bit the men pieced together the fact that she had come from the family of some important doctor in Tel Aviv, but her parents did not know where she was and she intended not to tell them until victory had been won. Sometimes the men found her crying, and this embarrassed her, but the improbable thing was that delectable as she was, she had no boy friend and permitted none to touch her; Bar-El served merely as her watchdog. Gottesmann was surprised, therefore, when this frail child slammed shut the folding table-desk used by the Palmach as its headquarters, hefted it easily in her left hand, then reached with her right for a rifle and loaded on her back additional gear until she had the normal thirty-kilo marching load for girls. He felt an impulse to lean down and kiss her as he would a child, and say, “You can put the toys down, Vered,” but she let him know that she intended marching through the wadis to the relief of Safad.

The Jews ate a late meal, then closed down the village as if they had gone to bed normally. Some members who were not making the assault on Safad paced the outskirts on normal guard duty, stopping occasionally so that they could be seen by Arab patrols. A few dogs raced through the alleyways, barking sharply, and in all possible respects the village was kept ordinary; but shortly before midnight Mem-Mem Bar-El assembled his unit and with swift, quiet movements the twenty-six men and seven girls disappeared from the village and lost themselves in a deep wadi running north and south from Safad. No Arab had seen them.

Working silently the Palmach moved single file down the steep banks of the wadi, lugging one Sten gun, a Vickers machine gun stolen from the English, a
Mauser, a Garand, an armful of Czech rifles and revolvers from many sources. In the middle of the unit plodded a small donkey loaded with four Hotchkiss guns. Three of the younger boys were covered with web equipment stolen from a Scottish unit. Gottesmann, in charge of the rear, thought: I’d enjoy hearing what an English sergeant-major would say of this troop. Then he looked up to see the lofty lights of Safad as he had seen them the night before, and he realized that the unit was well below the elevation of its starting point and far below its objective. The rest of the operation would be uphill with eighty-eight pounds of equipment.

Now came the first danger. All the Jews were in the bottom of the gully, working their way cautiously southward toward the Jewish section of Safad, and if anything went wrong they would be trapped, with the enemy holding all the high positions. Furthermore, the bottom of the wadi was a natural pathway, so that any patrols that might be operating from the Arab part of Safad must surely intercept them. Yet Gottesmann approved the perilous disposition of the Jews. If they were going to penetrate Safad, they could do so only by this method. In the meantime, if one were religious, he could pray. None of the men Gottesmann knew was doing so, but each held his rifle at the ready.

Silently the Jews moved down the wadi. At one point Bar-El muttered to Gottesmann, “Now for the hellish part. Maximum stringing out.” If the Arabs were alerted, this would be the time for them to strike.

Bar-El jumped. Gottesmann felt his throat tighten in an involuntary spasm. A weird, terrifying cry sped through the wadi, echoing back and forth from one wall to the other. Ilana gasped and reached out to grab Gottesmann’s arm. The sound was sickening, fearful. Only Bagdadi was at ease. He chuckled: “Jackals. They smell the donkey.” Any Arabs who were listening found the sound familiar and in no way suspicious. Sweating, the Jews moved forward.

They were now ready for the quick move toward Safad, and it was necessary to consolidate the strung-out troops, so the Mem-Mem halted while the rear caught up. After consulting with his guides Bar-El whispered, “Cemetery.” The prior briefing had been so thorough that each segment of the platoon knew what to do.

In three units the Jews fanned through the old cemetery: one to the left past the tomb of Rabbi Abulafia, the greatest of the Kabbalists; one to the right past the tomb of Rabbi Eliezer of Gretz, who had codified the law; and another toward the honorary tomb of the greatly loved Rabbi Zaki the Martyr, who had died in Rome. Perhaps it was because these long-dead saints protected the Jews, perhaps it was because the Arabs could not believe that such an attempt could be made, but more likely it was because the Arabs had been lulled by the British announcement that they were withdrawing on April 16—the day after tomorrow—and taking all Jews with them... for one of these reasons Mem-Mem Bar-El was able to sift his men silently across the cemetery without detection.

Crash! A shot rang out from the Jewish sector. It came from the sturdy old synagogue of Rabbi Yom Tov ben Gaddiel. From the Arab quarter random replies were made, and Gottesmann thought: Damn, there’s going to be a real fusillade. The Palmach men, cursing, dropped. Bar-El dispatched two guides into the town to halt the Jewish firing.

Silence. The men and girls inched forward. They were almost safe... almost in Safad.
“Now!” Bar-El shouted, and the remaining thirty-one scrambled madly out of the cemetery and into the sanctuary of Safad.

As soon as the Jews hit the narrow alleys Vered’s high, girlish voice broke into song, wild, exulting:

“From Metulla to the Negev,
   From the desert to the sea,
Every youth is bearing arms,
Every boy should be on guard.”

Up and down the streets of the Jewish quarter the Palmach went, shouting its battle songs.
“Break into three groups!” Bar-El cried, and toward the edges of the Arab quarters the soldiers marched, singing the song of the Jewish fliers:

“Batsheva, Batsheva, the song is for you,
   From Dan to Beersheba we shall not forget.
   From the heights we will send you a song.
   Let us drink ‘L’hayim’ with the whole Palmach.”

“Start someone shouting that two thousand Palmach have arrived,” the Mem-Mem directed, and little Vered went running through the streets, her childish voice crying, “We’re saved! Two thousand brave men. Through the Arab lines.” Soon the citizens of Safad were repeating the cry, but Isidore Gottesmann was standing silent, his eyes and ears filled with love as Ilana Hacohen and Nissim Bagdadi directed a group of Palmach and Safad youngsters in a parade led by the donkey. Ilana sang the song which so hauntingly caught the spirit of the Jewish movement in which girls like Vered, no more than children, offered their lives for freedom:

“Danny-leh, Danny-leh,
   Eat your banana-leh.”

It was the pleading voice of the indulgent Jewish mother, coaxing her fat little boy to stuff himself one mite more. As she sang the nonsense words Ilana’s voice was like that... filled with love and the joy of having made it to Safad.

As dawn broke that Wednesday morning a surge of hope echoed through the narrow streets of Safad: “The soldiers have arrived!” And Jews who the previous afternoon had been choosing between massacre or exile were now free to weigh a third alternative, victory, and throughout the town men resolved to hold out a little longer. In all Safad there was rejoicing.

In all Safad, that is, except in the Ashkenazi synagogue controlled by Rebbe Itzik of Vodzh. In its narrow confines ten old men with long black cloaks and curls dangling beside their ears stood praying. The previous afternoon the British government had offered them safe-conduct to Acre, but they had determined not to leave Safad.

Their leader was a thin, small man, a Russian Jew who forty years before had brought his flock from Vodzh to Israel so that its members could die in the Holy
Land and, when the Messiah came, escape the dark and tedious underground burrowing from Russia. He had piercing blue eyes and bushy eyebrows, long white curls and beard. His flattened hat was trimmed with fur and his drooping cloak repeated in every detail the garment decided upon by Polish Jews three hundred years before. His hands were white and wrinkled, and when a young boy came bursting into the synagogue, shouting, “Rebbe! Rebbé! Jewish soldiers have arrived. A whole army,” the little man ignored the news, merely clasping his hands more tightly and bowing his head. His nine followers did likewise, their ankles and knees pressed closely together, as the Talmud directed. They prayed that the children of Israel might be patient when the Arabs fell upon them. They prayed that God would accept their souls when the long knives flashed. And they prayed that they might soon be one with Moses our Teacher, with great Akiba and with the gentle Rabbi Zaki, who had known the meaning of God.

After a moment the boy shrugged his shoulders and ran off to cry his good news elsewhere.

The Tell

Excavating was interrupted, insofar as Cullinane was involved, when a team of archaeologists from Columbia University dropped down from a dig they were conducting at the ruins of Antioch in southern Turkey to check the finds at Makor. At a luncheon meeting at the kibbutz the director of the Columbia team caused considerable pleasure by stating, “Word of what you’re doing down here has circulated through the profession. What with levels reaching all the way back from Crusader times to the beginnings of agriculture, you have a good chance to make this a classic dig.”

Cullinane nodded and said, “With two assistants like Eliav and Tabari we’re not going to lose much material that could be salvaged.”

“Are you an Arab, Mr. Tabari?” one of the Columbia men asked.

Cullinane deferred to his Arab assistant, and when Tabari merely smiled, he explained, “If you understand Arab names you’ll appreciate it when I tell you that Mr. Tabari’s real name is Jemail ibn Tewfik ibn Faraj Tabari. His family gave him those names to remind the world that he was not only the son of Sir Tewfik Tabari, the top leader of the Arab community during the English occupation, but also the grandson of the great Faraj Tabari, the governor of Akko. He was famous for having rebuilt much of that city.”

“Doesn’t Tabari come from the same root as Tiberias?” one of the Columbia men asked.

“In Turkish it’s the same word,” Jemail explained.

“But you decided to stay with Israel?” the New York professor continued.

“Yes,” Tabari said abruptly. He had no objection to discussing the matter of his allegiance, but he knew that to Cullinane and Eliav it was old hat, and he himself was bored with it.

The New Yorker studied the three archaeologists in charge of the Makor dig and changed the line of conversation completely: “Don’t you men find it... Well, with
fifty-five million Arabs or whatever it is breathing down your neck... Well, I've been reading the inflammatory pronouncements coming out of Cairo and Damascus and Baghdad. That they're going to drive you into the sea? Massacre every Jew. If they did this, wouldn't it go pretty hard on an Arab like you, Tabari?"

And suddenly Cullinane realized that this reasonably intelligent professor was aware that those who worked in Israel lived under the hammers of history, under the constant threat of annihilation, but he seemed not to be aware of the parallel fact that he in New York and his brother in Washington lived under precisely the same threat.

*     *     *     *     *

Next afternoon began the long debate that would determine the character of the state that was struggling to be born. It started because Ilana Hacohen and Isidore Gottesmann were assigned living quarters in a small house that stood next to the historic shoemaker shop that had once been used by Rabbi Zaki the Martyr. By the people of Safad this shop was regarded with affection, and by tradition it was reserved for the home of some rabbi. In 1948, when the Jewish-Arab conflict was drawing to its climax, it was occupied by the Rebbe of Vodzh.

The Yiddish word rebbe had originally signified an elementary-school teacher who taught religious classes in Hebrew in the villages of Poland and Russia; but later it had become a specialized word identifying those gifted rabbis who operated within the tradition of Rabbi Abulafia of Safad: the mystics, charismatic leaders and inspired tzaddikim of eastern European Hasidism, the unique rabbis who gathered about them devoted followings. Two men would speak: “My rebbe can uproot mountains with his interpretations.” “Yes, but my rebbe can cure all manner of sickness.” The Jews of Vodzh said, “Our rebbe understands the Talmud better than any other rebbe. He is the well that gives water without losing a drop.”

Even as a young man in Vodzh the rebbe had been recognized as one specially destined for a holy life, and word spread among the Jews of Russia and Poland that a worthy successor had finally been found to the great Rebbe of Vodzh, who had died a martyr in the pogroms of 1875. The young man's piercing blue eyes seemed to cut through to the essential moral problems that men faced, and he became widely known as Itzik, Little Yitzhak. At twenty-four Little Isaac felt no hesitation in condemning the richest Jew in Vodzh for a miserly act which contravened the teaching of the Talmud, and it had been his energy alone that had organized the mass exodus of his loyal followers to Safad. How difficult that had been, to bring those seventy people back to Eretz Israel, except that thirty years later most of the Jews who had not followed him from Vodzh were dead in the gas chambers of Oswiecim.

In Safad, Rebbe Itzik had established a new home for his followers. Along the narrow alleys his Jews had found abandoned houses which they rebuilt into clean homes. Living on alms from America they had acquired one of the ancient Ashkenazi synagogues, not the sturdy one of Rabbi Yom Tov Gaddiel's but an adequate refuge, and through the years they had prospered in their modest way. The Vodzher Jews they were called, and although some of the younger people had left for livelier towns, the rebbe's group still contained some sixty people determined to worship God according to the Torah as interpreted by their Vodzher
His theology was simple. He believed literally the great commandment of Moses our Teacher: “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you... Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” To Rebbe Itzik this commandment was lucid and all-embracing. It meant exactly what it said. A Jew should keep the law as handed to Moses by God. That law was found in the Torah, which contained 613 specific orders ranging from the first noble words at the beginning of Genesis, “Be fruitful, and multiply” to the last tragic commandment to Moses our Teacher as he lay dying in sight of the promised land: “Thou shalt not go over thither.” Encompassed between this nobility and tragedy lay all the law that man required, the lists in Leviticus, the repetitions in Numbers, the final summations in Deuteronomy. These laws Rebbe Itzik knew by heart and their words were sweet: “And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.” “If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.”

Upon these laws of the Torah a man must build the general pattern of his life. The ritual to accompany his birth was explained and the manner of his burial was laid out. His love for a woman was hedged with decent precautions, and his relations with his son, his business and his king were set forth; and Rebbe Itzik was satisfied that a Jew must live precisely within this body of law, and he had put together a congregation of sixty people prepared to do so.

The life that Rebbe Itzik had devised for them was somewhat different from that followed by the other Jews of Safad. In dress they were conspicuous; they looked like archaic ghosts in long black cloaks, flat fur-rimmed hats, shortened trousers and heavily ribbed stockings. They wore beards and black skullcaps and for some perverse reason preferred walking with the stoop that had characterized them when they were forced to live furtively in ghettos. Their daily life was much the same as that followed by Jews in Safad four hundred years before, with frequent synagogue attendance and strict devotion to complex dietary laws. And on Shabbat, starting on Friday afternoon, they stood especially apart from the rest of Safad, a little group of devout Jews living around Rabbi Zaki’s old shop.

No fire could be lit, no light used. No food was cooked, no vehicle moved. A man could walk only two thousand paces from his home and he could carry nothing; if he had a cold and needed a handkerchief he could tie it around his wrist and make believe it was a piece of clothing, but carry it he could not. On this day a man could not even carry his prayer shawl to the synagogue. The boy children of Rebbe Itzik’s group were especially differentiated from other young Jews by the long and often delicate curls dangling in front of their ears and by the four-cornered shawls which they dropped over their heads and wore under their shirts. The shawls bore fringes in accordance with God’s Torah: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments... that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.”

But powerful as he was in dictating the life of his community, Rebbe Itzik was
not arrogant; he never assumed that he was wise enough, by himself, to interpret God’s Torah, and it was his constant responsibility to study the Talmud, finding therein the guidance that had kept Jews together for more than fifteen hundred years. Each day of the year, excepting only the Ninth of Ab, when they mourned the loss of Jerusalem by staying up all night to read Lamentations, the male adults of the Vodzher group assembled at the synagogue to study Talmud, and since all lived on charity contributed from abroad, the men were free to sit in circles about their rebbe as he expounded passages from the massive volumes. One of the Vodzher Jews once wrote to Brooklyn: “If I have a dream of paradise, it’s to sit in the synagogue on a wintry night in Safad, when snow is on the ground, and the lamp is flickering, while our rebbe expounds Talmud.”

Rebbe Itzik knew the great book virtually by heart, and members of his congregation liked to boast: “Our Vodzher Rebbe can do this. You take a volume of the Talmud and pierce any six pages with a pin. Our rebbe can look at the first page, close his eyes and tell you what eleven additional words your pin has gone through.” The Talmud by which he lived provided answers to any conceivable problems, although sometimes, in the middle years of the twentieth century, one had to wrench meanings a little here and there to uncover a relevant legalism, but he was not averse to doing so, for he found the great compilation surprisingly contemporary: “Rabbi bar Mehasia said in the name of Rabbi Hama ben Goria who said in the name Rab: If all the seas were ink, and all the reeds were pens, and all the skies were parchment, and all the men could write, these would not suffice to write down all the red tape of this government.”

But the most remarkable characteristic which set Rebbe Itzik and his little group apart from the other Jews of Safad was their determination never to use Hebrew except as a holy language. From the Torah and Talmud they had derived the conviction that Hebrew would be used for common speech only after the arrival of the Messiah and that until such time it was reserved for religious purposes; and in furtherance of this belief Rebbe Itzik pointed out: “Observe that in the Talmud itself, only the Mishna, the law of God, is written in Hebrew. The Gemara, the explanation of ordinary rabbis, is inscribed in Aramaic. What the Talmud refused to do, we also shall refuse to do.”

Therefore, outside the synagogue, the Vodzher Jews spoke only Yiddish and they held it to be offensive when others spoke to them in Hebrew. Occasionally Rebbe Itzik had scolded people who addressed him in that language, and he went so far as to refuse his followers permission to ride on any train run by the English government, since the tickets were printed in Hebrew as well as in Arabic and English.

As long as Palestine remained in British hands the peculiarities of Rebbe Itzik’s group occasioned no difficulty. In Jerusalem, Jews of similar persuasion in obedience to the Talmud sometimes stoned ambulances that tried to move on Shabbat, but in the Vodzher part of Safad the streets were so narrow that no car could enter, and even that cause of irritation was avoided. But in 1948, with the likelihood of an eventual Jewish state, problems developed.

Rebbe Itzik viewed with apprehension the idea of such a state in Palestine, and to imagine one bearing the name of “Israel” was repugnant. He told his associates, “The idea’s an outrage. It must not be permitted.” He became so violent in his
rejection of statehood for the Jews that he threatened to become a nuisance, and when some young men of his congregation actually ran off to Kibbutz Makor to fight with the Palmach he deplored them as if they had converted to another religion. “There must be no Israel!” he protested.

To support these curious reactions Rebbe Itzik found authority in the Torah. Repeatedly God had condemned the children of Israel to exile among other nations: “And I will scatter you among the heathen... and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.” Jerusalem was to be occupied, which meant that the Arabs, in holding the Holy Land, were acting as God’s agents, and to oppose them was sacrilegious. Furthermore, the Holy Land would revert to the Jews only when the Messiah appeared; then Hebrew could be spoken generally, and for ordinary human beings like the Palmach to try to force the coming of the Messiah was presumptuous. There must be no state of Israel, no Hebrew, no resistance to the Arabs. There must be submission, prayer and resignation; and if Arabs chose to massacre, that also was God’s will.

Fortunately for Mem-Mem Bar-El and his Palmach, only a handful of Vodzher Jews held these extreme views, for even among the little rebbe’s immediate followers about half listened when other leaders like Rav Loewe and Rabbi Goldberg advised: “The Palmach serves as an instrument of God’s will. Co-operate in every way, for this time we shall fight the Arabs.” When Rebbe Itzik was advised of what the other rabbis had said he folded his hands and looked at the ground. “They do not understand God’s will,” he whispered sorrowfully.

The argument started toward noon on Thursday, April 15, when Ilana Hacohen, refreshed from hours of victorious love-making with her husband, came into the narrow street that ran past Rebbe Itzik’s home. As she left her new quarters, a rifle slung across her shoulder, she brushed back her bobbed hair, straightened her very short skirt, and happened to see the mezuzah nailed to the doorpost in conformance with the law of the Torah. Sensing the days of trial that lay ahead she reached up and touched it. As she did so, she happened to see in the street the tense little figure of Rebbe Itzik.

“For good luck!” she said in Hebrew. “We’re going to need it.”

To the little rebbe, everything this brazen girl had done was an outrage. She appeared like a wanton. She carried a rifle. Obviously she was fighting for a state of Israel. She had touched the mezuzah as if it had been an ordinary Christian idol. She had referred to it as a mere good-luck omen. And she had addressed him in Hebrew. With contempt he turned his back on her and walked away.

Ilana Hacohen, reared on the fighting principles of her grandfather and her anti-rabbinical father, reacted on impulse. To the astonishment of the benevolent dictator, she grabbed him by the shoulder and wheeled him around so abruptly that his hat fell off. “Don’t you rebuke me,” she warned.

Rebbe Itzik was not accustomed to opposition, and the unprecedented action of the sabra stunned him. He stooped, tried to recover his hat but awkwardly kicked it farther from him. As he rose he found his eyes opposite the brazen bare knees, then staring up at the girl’s tanned, insolent face. Irrelevantly he cried, in Yiddish, “You’re not even married to that man in there, are you?”

“If you speak to me,” Ilana snapped, “use the language of the land.”

The infuriated rebbe started to reprimand her and she started to answer back.
Her defiance attracted a group of the rebbe’s congregation, and an old man cried, “Whore! Don’t dare to address our rebbe.”

Ilana swung to face her accuser, and as she did so the butt of her rifle whipped close to the rebbe’s cheek, and he drew back. The newcomer thought his rebbe had been struck and he started to reach for Ilana. Deftly she grabbed her rifle with two hands and parried the clumsy effort.

The noise drew Gottesmann to the narrow street, and he quickly deduced what was happening. He knew Ilana’s feeling toward the ultra-orthodox, whom her grandfather and father had derided, and he could guess the rebbe’s reaction to her, a soldier of the emerging state. He caught his wife and pulled her back into the house. Then he took her place in the street and tried to mollify the outraged Jews.

Speaking Yiddish, which quietened things somewhat, he told the patriarch, “Rebbe, we’ve come to save your town—if we can.”

“Only God will determine whether Safad stands or falls,” the rebbe replied.

“That’s true,” Gottesmann agreed.

“But we’ll help Him along,” a young passing Palmach fighter cried in Hebrew.

Gottesmann, seeking to ease this new blow, assured the rebbe in Yiddish, “The important thing is, we must work together.”

The insulted rebbe retreated to the shoemaker’s house, where his loyal supporters consoled him. At the same time Gottesmann retired to the house next door, where he told Ilana, “We’re here for one job, Lan. Don’t be sidetracked.”

“We’re here for two jobs,” she corrected. “To win a nation and to see that it gets started right. You let that old fool ...”

“That’s not the word,” her husband protested. “Just stay away from him.”

“I will, if he stays away from me.”

But on the next day fresh trouble broke out. It was April 16, 1948, and the English were evacuating Safad. The captain in charge of trucks, a fed-up veteran from one of the mill towns in England who understood neither Arab nor Jew, marched wearily into the heart of the Jewish section, attended by four tough Tommies with submachine guns. He summoned Rebbe Itzik and some of the other elders, while Mem-Mem Bar-El remained hidden behind a wall as Gottesmann translated the English for him.

The British officer shouted, “Jews of Safad, in one hour we’re leaving. Your situation is hopeless. You’re a thousand. The Arabs waiting over there are fourteen thousand. Fresh troops moved down last night from Syria. If you stay, dreadful things are going to happen. We offer you—all of you—safe-conduct to Acre.” He waited.

Rebbe Itzik moved forward, “We’ve held a meeting,” he said, indicating the ten Jews of his congregation. “And we have decided that the Vodzher Jews will stay here.” The British officer groaned and wiped his forehead. Then Itzik added, “But the people of Rabbi Goldberg and Rav Loewe are free to leave with you.”

The Englishman turned to these two rabbis and said, “You’ve made the right choice.” He started shouting orders under which all the Jews could ride his trucks into Acre, and after his instructions had been repeated in both Hebrew and Yiddish a few old men and some mothers with babies began preparing themselves to move through the Arab lines to the trucks.
“All of you!” the officer bellowed. “Get going!” He started pushing the people toward the protected exit route but he was peremptorily halted by Mem-Mem Bar-El, who appeared dramatically with a rifle, backed up by ten Palmach men.

“No Jew will leave Safad,” he announced quietly in Hebrew. There was consternation. When the British officer heard Gottesmann’s translation he showed his incredulity. As for the would-be refugees, they took the command as a death sentence, while Rebbe Itzik held it to be insulting for a man with no authority—a stranger in Safad—to contradict the decision of the rabbis that the old and young could leave.

“No Jew leaves Safad,” Bar-El repeated.

“This is highly irregular,” the Briton fumed. “Who are you?”


“How’d you get in?” the Englishman asked.

“Right through your lines,” Gottesmann laughed.

“But, man! You’re overwhelmed.” The tired Englishman indicated the four compass points. “Surrounded. Outnumbered. Starving.”

“That’s right,” Gottesmann said. “All the Arabs have to do is come in a few steps and capture us.”

The officer shrugged his shoulders and pleaded, “At least let us take out the children.”

“You heard him,” Gottesmann said, indicating Bar-El.

The Englishman ignored the Mem-Mem and asked Gottesmann, “You educated in England?”

“Norwich.”

This seemed to make a difference to the Englishman, and he pleaded, “You know they intend to kill you all? They’ve told us so.”

“We’re not evacuating.”

“Let us take the cripples and sick.”

Mem-Mem Bar-El understood the plea and snapped, “We stay together. As we did at Massada... at Warsaw.”

The Englishman licked his dry lips and said, “I’ve been trying to prevent a massacre. Now it’s on your head.”

“It’s on all our heads,” Bar-El replied simply. “Your mother’s and my uncle’s. You English have done everything possible to destroy Palestine. When you leave... in a few minutes... you’ll turn all the installations over to the Arabs, won’t you? Arms, food, everything.”

“I’ve been ordered,” the Englishmen explained apologetically. “It’s been agreed that the Arabs should have this town.”

“And you worry about a massacre.” Bar-El spat contemptuously.

“In these matters we have to be impartial.”

“Goddamn your impartial soul,” Bar-El said hoarsely. Gottesmann refused to interpret this, but one Englishman who understood Hebrew started forward. A Palmach girl stopped him.

Gottesmann said, “You’re so dreadfully wrong about Safad. It will not fall.”

Bitterly the Mem-Mem added, “Turn the keys over to the Arabs and when you’re back home remember the name. Safad. Safad. Safad.” He spat on the ground and led his men away.
Gottesmann walked with the Englishman to the edge of the Jewish quarter. “I meant what I said,” he repeated. “We’re going to take this town.”

“May God bless you,” the Englishman replied. He could say no more, for now he must turn all fortified positions, the food supplies, the field glasses and the extra armament over to the Arabs. Nearly two thousand additional troops had moved down from Lebanon and Syria to be in on the kill. Six thousand well-armed Arabs were determined that not one Jew should escape.

Immediately after the parting two things happened. The tired Englishman said to one of his assistants, “It’s the first time I’ve ever seen Jews ready to fight back. They’ll last three days. Pray for the poor bastards.” And an Arab sniper, seeing Gottesmann neatly framed in an alley, fired at him, but the bullet missed and the final battle for Safad was engaged.

The Tell

In the dining hall one clear October morning Cullinane asked, “What did a Jew who had served with the English think of their behavior in 1948?”

It was an ugly question which most people avoided, for if the British had succeeded in their plan for turning Palestine over to the Arabs, Jews would have hated them forever; usually the topic was side-stepped. But Eliav had often considered it and had developed certain generalizations which he was willing to discuss.

“Normally,” he began, puffing at his after-breakfast pipe, “I don’t mention the matter, so I’m not sure my thoughts are consistent, but the English did represent a goodly portion of my life and I’d be stupid not to have acquired some ideas. Briefly, when the English picked me up I was a rough, uneducated tyke and they made a man of me. During their war against the Germans they treated me with dignity, and I grew almost to love them. During our war against them they behaved with notable crassness, and I had to fight them. Looking back on everything, I’m perplexed.”

“Let’s take your ideas one by one,” Tabari suggested. “First, they gave you manhood.”

Eliav nodded. “You could make it stronger. They gave me life. They rescued me from Europe. Educated me, gave me this Oxford accent which helps me so much in impressing American archaeologists. Imagine what you could do with it in Chicago, John!”

“I do very well with a fake Irish brogue, thank you,” Cullinane observed. “Remember, Chicago is an Irish Catholic city, not an English one. But tell me this, did the English ever admit you to full partnership?”

“I’ve thought about that. You know, some Jews have risen to positions of great power in England. Disraeli reached the top. Sir Herbert Samuel did pretty well. Leslie Hore-Belisha. It’s remarkable, really.”

“But did they accept you?” Tabari asked bluntly.

“For a few moments during the war, I thought so. But I was fooling myself.”

“Rather curious,” Tabari reflected, “because we Arabs who went to Oxford
always considered ourselves full-fledged English gentlemen. Still do.”

“You didn’t fight them later,” Eliav said.

“Correct. We fought on their side, so our feeling was strengthened. There was another curious factor…” He was about to offer an obiter dictum but apparently thought better of it and pointed to Eliav. “Your second point. That during the war they treated you well.”

“They did,” the Israeli said. “They taught me how to fight a guerilla war, how to organize a military unit… everything. In the War of Liberation I had to do some fairly ugly things against the English, but I always said, Tommy, old boy, you taught me how to do this.’ And I found that they had taught me right.”

“You’ve no bitterness?” Cullinane asked.

“None,” Eliav said. Then, after drawing on his pipe, he added, “And I suspect I speak for most Israelis.”

“Wait a minute!” Cullinane protested. “I’ve been reading some Israeli books and their scorn for the English pro-Arab policy … Why do you suppose a bunch of Jews blew up that lorry full of English soldiers at Tiberias?”

Eliav took a deep breath, studied his pipe which now rested between his palms, and said, “Let’s talk about that lorry. It was blown up, as you may recall, in retaliation for English blundering at Akko. I don’t believe you should leap to the conclusion that the lorry could have been destroyed only by Jews who hated Englishmen. The men who did the job may have respected England very much.”

There was a clatter of dishes as the kibbutzniks cleared away the tables, then Tabari resumed: “You said that during World War II you grew almost to love them. That’s a funny statement for a Jew.”

“I meant that after my escape from Germany… When I appreciated what horrible things were happening…” Eliav paused, then added matter-of-factly, “We were a large family. Few survived.”

Cullinane gripped his chair and thought: Sooner or later it smacks you in the face. I’ve known Eliav for all these months and now he tells me that he lost most of his family. In a restaurant you start to give a crude waitress hell. Then you see tattooed on her arm a Bergen-Belsen number. He bit his lip and said nothing.

Tabari, possibly because he had been educated in England, was not affected by Eliav’s last statement. “So everyone has a sorrowful story. What’s it got to do with the discussion?”

Eliav, like most Israelis, appreciated this impersonal reaction and said, “This. In the worst days of the war, when I was serving here in Palestine…”

Tabari interrupted. “You’re one of the few Jews I know who calls it ‘Palestine.’ I thought that was frowned upon.”

Eliav smiled. “When I’m speaking as a member of the British army I use their name. As an Israeli I’ll take it most unkindly if you call my homeland ‘Palestine.’ Well, anyway, when I served here and watched Rommel’s Afrika Corps coming at us through Egypt, and other Germans trying to reach us through Syria…” He stopped, puffed his pipe and said with great reserve, “If the British had not held desperately—you might also say heroically—six hundred thousand Jews would have been gassed to death in Palestine.” He relaxed and added lightly, “I rarely pray, and when I do I usually leave God and Moses out of it. But I have frequently asked blessings for Field Marshal Montgomery. I’m sure neither of you can
imagine how I feel about him.” He tapped his pipe and said, looking at the floor, “It was a very near thing, gentlemen.”

Cullinane asked, “Then you’re able to differentiate between Englishmen who fought with you and Englishmen who fought against you?”

“Of course. Because I must differentiate between my two selves. The Jew who learned all he knows from the English and the Jew who later fought them with all his dedication.”

“You’re able to keep your many selves straightened out?” Tabari asked sardonically.

“You go nuts if you don’t,” Eliav laughed. “How do you keep your various responsibilities as an Arab Israeli ...”

Cullinane interrupted. “It’s good hearing a Jew speak of these matters. As an Irishman I feel just about as you do. I must acknowledge that in the world at large the English have accomplished wonders, but in Ireland ...” He threw up his hands. “I’m sounding like an Irish politician in Chicago, but what I mean is, in Ireland they never had a clue. They operated from an entirely different intellectual base.”

“You’ve made my speech,” Eliav said, “and now let’s heckle Tabari.” He relit his pipe.

“One more thing,” Cullinane protested. “I know why they went wrong in Ireland, but why did they go wrong here?”

The Jew finished lighting his pipe and in the interval Tabari leaned forward as if he were going to speak. Eliav, noticing this, deferred, but Tabari bowed and said, “Hyde Park is yours.”

“To understand the English in Palestine,” Eliav reflected, “you’ve got to understand which Englishmen came here. Then you’ve got to study those Englishmen against the Arabs they met, and against the Jews.”

“Precisely,” Tabari said with malicious pleasure. “Point is, Cullinane, we saw two types of Englishmen in Palestine. The poor, uneducated second-raters who couldn’t be used at home and who weren’t good enough for important posts like India. Don’t forget, our little Falastin was truly a backward place of no importance, and we got the dregs.”

“True,” Eliav nodded. “The other group, of course, were absolutely top-drawer. Biblical experts, Arabic scholars, gentlemen of broad interests. Now how did these two different types of Englishmen react in Palestine?” He deferred to Tabari.

“On this I’m the expert,” Tabari joked, “because my family used to hold drills... I’m serious. My father would gather us together and coach us on how to treat the stupid Englishmen. I can still hear him lecturing: ‘Words are cheap, Jemail. Use the best ones you have. Effendi, honored sir, excellency, pasha.’ He advised us to call every army person colonel unless we recognized him as a general. I had an Oxford education, but I used to take real delight in calling some pipsqueak from Manchester effendi. I developed an exaggerated ritual of touching my forehead and chest as I bowed low and said, ‘Honored sir, I would be most humbly proud if you would so-and-so.’”

“What do you mean, so-and-so?”

“Well, I judged whether or not he knew Arabic, and if he didn’t, I ended my sentence, Kiss me bum, and the stupid fool would show his teeth and grin and give me anything I wanted. The Arab corruption of the average Englishman was
“And on the same day,” Eliav added, “this befuddled Englishman would meet a Jew from Tel Aviv who dressed like an Englishman, acted like an Englishman. Except that the Jew was apt to be better educated. Here there was no effendi nonsense, no floor-scraping. The Jew wanted to talk legal matters or Beethoven or the current scandal. And there was one additional thing the Englishman could not forgive. The Jew insisted upon being treated as an equal.”

Tabari laughed. “Under the circumstances, who can blame the lower-class Englishman for preferring the Arab?”

“With the upper-class Englishman the problem was different,” Eliav said. “They came with good degrees. Usually they spoke Arabic, but rarely Hebrew. And all had read the great romantic books which Englishmen insist upon writing about the Arabs. Doughty—you ever read any of his daydreams? T. E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell.”

Tabari said, “Yes, we Arabs have enjoyed about the best public-relations men in the world, all Englishmen. And tell him about the photographs.” The Arab fell into an exaggerated pose, right arm over chin, fingers extended poetically. With his left hand he threw a napkin over his head as a burnoose, and all in all looked rather dashing.

Eliav said, “The other day Jemail and I were reviewing some two dozen books on this area and in every one the English author was photographed in full Arab regalia. Robes, turban, flowing belt.” The men laughed, and Eliav concluded, “One of the worst intellectual tricks pulled on England was that photograph of T. E. Lawrence in Arab costume. Damned thing’s hypnotic.”

“Helped determine British policy in this area as much as oil,” Tabari suggested. “If the truth were known,” Eliav said, “I’d bet that even roly-poly Ernie Bevin had hidden somewhere a photograph of himself in Arab robes.”

“But can you imagine any self-respecting Englishman who’d want himself photographed as a Palestinian Jew?” Tabari held up his hands in disgust.

The archaeologists winced at the image as a kibbutznik slammed up, growling, “You gonna sit here all day?”

“We may,” Cullinane said drily.

He did not embarrass the kibbutznik, if that had been his hope. “Just wanted to know,” the boy said, sweeping away the dishes in a clatter.

“I’ll keep my cup, if you don’t mind,” Cullinane protested.

“No point,” the kibbutznik said. “Coffee’s all gone.” Cullinane drummed on the table to control his anger and the boy went off whistling.

“There was one additional factor,” Tabari began hesitantly. “It doesn’t appear in official reports, but in this part of the world it was rather potent.” He leaned back, then continued, “Many Englishmen who came here had enjoyed homosexual experiences. At school. In the army. And they were predisposed to look at the Arab of the desert, who had always been similarly inclined, with fascination if not actual desire. If one was a practicing homosexual, what could be more alluring, I ask you, than an affair with an Arab wearing a bedsheet? You and he on two camels riding to the oasis. A dust storm raging out of the desert and only two date palms to protect you. One for him, one for you. Blood loyalty and all that. Some very amusing things happened in this part of the world in those years, I can assure
“I wouldn’t have raised the subject,” Eliav said quietly, “but since Jemail has, I must say he’s not joking. Now suppose you were an avid homosexual, John…”

“We’ll suppose nothing of the sort,” Cullinane protested. “You forget it was Vered who interested me, not Jemail. Please to keep the names straight.”

“What I was saying,” Eliav continued, “was that if you were a young Englishman filled with romantic ideas and you stepped off the transport in Haifa, where would your sympathies…”

“Sympathies, hell!” Tabari protested. “Who would you want to go to bed with? Mustaffa ibn Ali from the Oasis of the Low-Slung Palms or Mendel Ginsberg who runs a clothing store on Herzl Street?”

Cullinane found the conversation preposterous, so he asked, “Considering the circumstances, you agree that the English did a reasonably decent job in Palestine?”

“Yes,” Eliav said.

“Speaking as an Arab,” Tabari added, “I think only the English could have handled things as well as they did.”

“Then you’ve no bitterness?” Cullinane asked the Jew.

“With history I never fight,” Eliav replied. “With the future, yes. And when I was fighting the English they represented the future. I had to oppose them.”

“Tell us the truth,” Tabari pleaded, as if he were a child. “Aren’t you generous in your present judgments because of the fact that when you served with the British army… wasn’t some officer… let’s say, a little extra nice to you? Come on, Eliav. We’ll understand.”

“Curious thing is,” Eliav replied, “they were all damned decent and I shall never forget it.”

* * * * *

Through the middle of Safad, running from the concrete police station down the hill to the cemetery containing the graves of the great rabbis—Eliezer, Abulafia, Zaki—stands a handsome flight of stairs built of finely dressed limestone. Its 261 steps, arranged in twenty-one separate flights, are wide and its whole appearance is one of solidity and permanence. These stairs will be long discussed in Israeli history, for they were built by the English for the express purpose of separating the Arab quarter from the Jewish, and there have been some to argue: “See! The English went out of their way to erect an official barrier between Arab and Jew. They made the division permanent, for by keeping the two groups apart they were able to play upon the fears of each, thus retaining for themselves the right to govern. The steps created new differences that would not otherwise have developed, and maintained old differences which would otherwise have dissolved. If you want a monument to English venality in Israel, look to the 261 steps of Safad.”

But it was also possible to argue: “We have historical records of Safad dating back to shortly after the time of Christ, and many different governmental systems have operated during that time, but so far as we can ascertain, there was always a quarter in which Jews lived by themselves and another in which non-Jews lived. There were synagogues and churches, then synagogues and mosques, and each
held to his own. All that the English did in building their flight of stairs was to acknowledge existing custom and to externalize in concrete form a tradition as old as the town itself. The handsome flights of stairs did not divide Safad. The divisions of Safad called forth the stairs. Perhaps the time may come when the stairs can be dismantled, but this could not have been done during the English occupation.”

And the impartial voice of history could have argued: “The truth lies somewhere in between. I can remember periods extending into centuries when Jew and Arab shared Safad in easy harmony. In the early days of Muhammad this was so. In the period of the Kabbalists there was no friction. And even in this century, prior to the great massacre of 1929, Jews felt free to live in the midst of the Arab quarter. On the other hand, I can recall periods of desolation. The Crusaders killed off every Jew in Safad. In 1834 there was a pitiful slaughtering, and I do not believe that Englishmen were governing in Saphet at that period. At this date who can remember exactly why the beautiful stairs were built? All I know is that from 1936 through 1948 the stairs kept two warring people apart; and at night, when the revolving searchlight on the police station flashed down the stairs, Jews and Arabs alike were afraid to cross over and molest the other.”

But on April 16, 1948, things changed swiftly, and as the English, in a stirring ceremony, handed the Arabs the keys to all the fortresses, all the high, protected points in town, and marched away with bagpipes playing, it became obvious that the war for Safad would begin at the stairs. If the Jews could hold there, they had a chance to hold the town.

Whiiiiiing! Zaaaaah! Across the fine gray stairs the Arab bullets began to whine. The withdrawing English had assured London that all Jews would be massacred within three days. The Arabs believed they could overrun the area in two. From all sides a constricting, dense, concentrated pressure began to strangle the Jewish quarter and during the first half-hour of fighting many Jewish families had evacuated the houses nearest the lovely stairs. Arab spotters cried, “They’re falling back.”

Zaaaaaaah! Unnnnnnh! The bullets splattered into the mud walls of the Jewish houses and after an hour of fighting no Jews could be seen on the other side of the flight. The Arab commander, knowing what a psychological shock the capture of a bridgehead across the stairs would be, gave the order to move out, and in company force the assault was launched. “Itbah il Yahoud—Slaughter the Jews!” cried the Syrians, the Iraqis and the Lebanese as they leaped across the open space.

In the next few minutes Jewish boys and girls seemed to appear from everywhere, for Mem-Mem Bar-El, anticipating this Arab move, had his people well stationed. Moving out from a deserted house Ilana Hacohen fired with deadly calm. Little Vered in her boxlike hat came darting in with her submachine gun spurting. Gottesmann and Bar-El loomed up from a pile of rubble, throwing grenades, while from a roof smiling Nissim Bagdadi fired with cruel effect. The astonished Arabs fell back. They tried to drag their wounded across the stairs, then abandoned them.

“Cease fire!” Bar-El shouted, and the Jews retired. Along the stairs there was no sound but the whimpering of a young Arab from Mosul. And in the Arab quarter
men were whispering, “Girls were fighting. With guns.” That night each side acknowledged that if there was going to be a massacre of Jews in Safad, it would not come easily, as in the past.

In the days that followed, Mem-Mem Bar-El issued orders which mobilized the Jewish population of Safad for the task of fortifying the outer rim. Trenches were to be dug connecting vantage points; houses had to be torn down to deny them to Arab snipers; roadblocks were required; and one hundred and seventy-three armed Jews dug in to hold off the assault of some six thousand Arab fighters. Every man and woman had a job to do, and Bar-El sustained in the town a kind of stubborn optimism.

But he failed to impress Rebbe Itzik, who refused to participate in the ungodly work. Each dawn he and his ten fur-hatted elders repaired to the Vodzher synagogue to contemplate the imminent destruction of Safad, and from a repetitious history they were able to select precedents for the manner in which a doomed body of Jews should behave in the last minutes before they perished. Judaism was the only religion with a specific prayer to be uttered “when the knife was at the throat, when the flames were at the feet,” and through the centuries this final reiteration of belief had been used “to lend sanctification to the Holy Name of God.” Peculiar grace had always been accorded those who died at alien hands while still proclaiming belief in the oneness of God, and Rebbe Itzik determined that when the Arabs finally overran the Vodzher Jews a new chapter would be added to the glorious record of Jewish martyrdom.

He was therefore disturbed on Monday morning when he found at his synagogue only seven Jews. “Where’s Schepsel and Avram?” he asked. He noticed that Shmuel was the other absentee. One of the old men said, “They’re breaking rocks,” and the little rebbe rushed out of the synagogue to locate his followers. He found them working under the direction of Mem-Mem Bar-El, breaking rocks taken from demolished houses. The resulting stones were to be jammed in between boards, thus providing bulwarks that would stop rifle bullets. Many cartloads of stones were needed to protect the Jewish houses facing the stairs, and the three Vodzher Jews were doing the job with sweat pouring from beneath their fur hats.

“Schepsel!” the rebbe cried. “Why aren’t you in synagogue?”

“I’m working to hold back the Arabs,” the old Jew replied, and no argument that Rebbe Itzik could advance sufficed. Three of his battalion were gone.

Later that morning he received an additional shock, for he found Ilana Hacohen, gun over shoulder, organizing the young girls of his congregation into a defense team, whose job it would be to carry stones to the old men and to provide meals for the Palmach.

“Come back, little Esther!” he called, but the girls had found a more inspiring leader, and the old man shuddered when Esther shouted to him, “Ilana says that when the next rifles come I can have one.” The girl, Avram Ginsberg’s daughter, was thirteen.

But when Ilana had her girls well organized she did an unexpected thing: she stopped by Rebbe Itzik’s home intending to explain what was being accomplished in defending Safad, for the Mem-Mem had growled, “See if you can win the old goat over.” When she pushed open the door to the shoemaker shop she was met
by the rebbe’s old wife, a Russian peasant woman who was cooking soup. Ilana tried to speak to her, but the rebbetzin knew only Russian and Yiddish, and Ilana refused to use the latter language. In a moment the rebbe appeared, surprised to find the armed sabra sitting in his home. The meeting was bizarre, for as an ultra-orthodox rebbe he deemed it improper either to touch or to look at a woman other than his wife, so that when they finally spoke it was as if each sat in a separate room.

“We drove away four Arab sorties last night,” said Ilana in Hebrew.

“It is the will of God that Israel should be punished for its sins,” he replied in Yiddish.

“But not by Arabs.”

“In the past God used Assyrians and Babylonians. Why not Arabs?”

“Because the Assyrians could defeat us. The Arabs can’t.”

“How dare you be so arrogant?”

“How dare you be so blind?”

On Wednesday, during the third day of their renewed discussion, Ilana had the distinct impression that in some contradictory way the little rebbe took pleasure in what she was doing, for apropos of nothing that had been said he cried, “The daughters of Israel are fair,” and to her surprise she replied, “We’re trying to build an Israel you will be proud of.” He looked at his folded hands and said, “Can you accomplish this if you are so arrogant? Why don’t you marry the tall Ashkenazi?” And her stubborn reply, in Hebrew, distressed the old man: “We are married.”

Nevertheless, the slight rapport increased when Ilana brought Vered with her, and the rebbe came upon them as they were eating the rebbetzin’s herbs and boiled water. “Of one thing I am proud,” the little man said.

“The barricades we’ve built?” Ilana asked.

“No,” Itzik replied. “The fact that in all Safad, when food is so scarce, no Jew operates a black market.”

“If he tried,” Vered said, “Mem-Mem would shoot him.”

“How old are you?” the rebbe asked, looking out of the corner of his eye at her almost childlike appearance.

“Seventeen,” Vered replied.

“Is your father religious?”

“Yes. He doesn’t know where I am.”

“His heart must ache,” the rebbe said, muttering a prayer over the two girls. Then the rapport was shattered. On the evening of April 23, the beginning of their second Shabbat in Safad, Mem-Mem Bar-El felt in his bones that the Arabs were due to attack, and he feared that the attempt would be made on Saturday, when it was logical to suppose that the Jews would be at worship, so on Friday afternoon he summoned all available hands to erect an additional barrier; and the Jews were silently moving boards and rocks when Rebbe Itzik loomed out of the growing darkness.

“What are you doing on Shabbat?” he demanded in Hebrew.

“Building a wall,” Bar-El replied.

“Stop!” the little man cried.

“Rebbe, go home to your prayers!” Bar-El pleaded. The outraged rebbe sought to prevent the men from continuing their work and it became apparent that his
protests might alert the Arabs, so the Mem-Mem clamped his hand over the little man’s mouth, swung him around and passed him along to Nissim Bagdadi. “Get him out of here,” Bar-El ordered.

The Iraqi Jew, weighing at least twice as much as the rebbe, easily carried him away from the urgent work and lugged him to the shoemaker shop, where he called for Ilana, telling her, “Keep him home. We’ve got to build a wall.” So Ilana went to the rebbe’s house and sat with him, grimly silent, until the emergency work was completed. Toward dawn the old man predicted in Yiddish, “God will curse that wall. God will curse any army that works on Shabbat.”

But the real crisis came with Passover, when Arab pressure was heavy and Mem-Mem insisted that two critical rows of houses be strengthened with bulwarks, even if other houses had to be torn down to provide the rocks. Work commenced on the eve of Passover, and Rebbe Itzik, hearing the hammers and the shovels, became frenzied. He ran among the bending workmen, the fringes of his shawl brushing across their eyes and reminding them of their own fathers at prayer on this holy day. He pleaded with them to desist from profaning the day, but they pointed out that Rabbi Goldberg and Rav Loewe, recognizing an hour of peril, had granted full permission to transgress either Passover or Shabbat. “So we’re working,” the men replied.

Now the decision of Rabbi Goldberg and Rav Loewe was one honored by nearly two thousand years of Jewish history, for the Greeks and the Romans, knowing of the Jews’ refusal to move on Shabbat, had always tried to select that day for their major offensives and by this tactic had won easy victories until the rabbis of Akiba’s time had pronounced the principle that when a man or a nation was in peril of its life any provision of the Torah might be put in abeyance, except those regarding murder, incest or apostasy. Mem-Mem Bar-El, relying upon that judicious precedent, had appealed to the rabbis for a declaration that the present siege was such a mortal moment and they had agreed. The soldiers could work. But to Rebbe Itzik the law was holier than the preservation of an unborn state which had no right to exist, and he stormed the streets calling down imprecations. “Get him out of here,” Bar-El pleaded, and again Ilana was given the job of keeping the old man at home; and in these moments of tension occurred a most regrettable incident, one that Ilana would often wish had been avoided.

She and Bagdadi led the rebbe home, fending off a few of his devoted followers who wanted to know, “What are you doing with our rebbe?” Bagdadi returned to the front, where the work continued. In the shoemaker’s room, where Rabbi Zaki the Martyr had offered his common sense to the people of Safad, Ilana sat with the blue-eyed Rebbe of Vodzh and balked almost all he tried to do.

“I should be at the synagogue,” he protested.

“You were at the synagogue,” she said, “and you left to make trouble. Sit down.”

“Do you think that God will bless a state that works on Passover?” he threatened.

“We’ll get the state, then we’ll worry about God and His Passover,” she replied.

The blasphemy was horrible. “Unless we go back to the old ways, any Israel you get will be ashes in the mouth.”

This kind of reasoning disgusted Ilana and she asked, contemptuously, “Rebbe Itzik, do you really believe that obsolete ideas generated in Poland three hundred
years ago represent the will of God?"

“What do you mean?” the old man sputtered.

“The uniform you wear. There was never anything like that in Israel. It’s straight out of the Polish ghetto.”

“The fringes...” the rebbe cried.

“That coat,” she interrupted with amused disgust. “That didn’t come from Israel and we don’t want it here. That fur hat. That blackness. That gloom. All from the ghetto.”

Rebbe Itzik stepped back, appalled. This brazen girl was challenging the symbols of his life, the honored traditions of ten generations of holy men in Vodzh. “This is the dress of God,” he began.

“Don’t tell me that!” she cried, cutting off his claim. “It’s a badge of shame forced upon us by Gentile overlords.” It was then that she lost her control for a moment, so appalled by what this frightened little man proposed doing to her impending land of Israel. Unfortunately, she chanced to look at the rebbetzin, standing by the fire—where Elisheba of Gretz had stood, caring for her three orphaned children who had later accomplished so much in Israel—and in a moment of fury Ilana brushed her hand across the old woman’s head, knocking her hair to the floor. The rebbetzin stood in shame, her bald-shaved head exposed in all its knobs and veins. Her wig lay on the stones.

“May God forgive you,” the rebbe whispered in a voice of anguish, terrified to think that any Jewish girl would do such a thing. He stooped, picked up the wig and returned it to his wife. The rebbetzin placed it clumsily on her bald head, then felt for the edges to adjust them to her temples. She looked pathetic and ridiculous and her husband gave the wig a small twist, setting it right.

“Get out of here,” he whispered hoarsely in Yiddish.

But Ilana, having done the thing, refused to move. “Where is such a custom in Talmud?” she cried. “In medieval Poland they used to shave the heads of brides so that Gentile noblemen wouldn’t demand to sleep with them on the wedding night. To make them ugly... repulsive to everyone but their husbands. So to this day you make your brides shave their heads to make them ugly—then you buy them wigs to make them beautiful. What kind of Mickey Mouse is this?”

“Get out of here,” the rebbe whispered again. “A Jewish girl who would insult an old woman. What kind of Israel are you building?” With unexpected force he pushed the Palmach girl, the bobbed-haired sabra, from his house.

Ilana stood in the dark street for some minutes and heard from nearby houses the sounds of Passover celebrations, conducted in this hour of travail. What had she done? She saw the baldheaded rebbetzin, with her wig in the dust. Suddenly she pressed her face into her hands and shivered, for she was spiritually alone.

She was standing thus when Gottesmann came back from the building for some food, and he pulled her hands down from her face and saw that she was crying. “What’s happened, Lan?” he asked.

“I struck...” She could not form the words, but her husband guessed that they had to do with the Vodzher Rebbe, so he kissed his wife and told her to stay where she was. Gently pushing open the door he entered to speak with the rebbe, and after a while came back, very soberly, saying nothing, to take Ilana’s hand.

“Where are we going?” she inquired.
“To apologize.”

“No!” she protested.

“You come here,” he whispered with fire in his voice. He dragged her back unwillingly and placed her before the old rebbetzin. “My wife wishes to apologize,” he said in Yiddish.

Silence. Twist of the arm. Silence. Another twist. Then in Hebrew, “I’m sorry...”

“In Yiddish,” Gottesmann whispered.

“I’m sorry,” his wife repeated in Hebrew. He twisted her arm again, hurtfully, and she said for the third time in Hebrew, “I’m sorry. In the street I cried for shame.” She pulled her arm away from her husband’s grip and covered her face.

Gottesmann, mortified by the scene, was about to take his wife from the room she had insulted when the old rebbetzin intervened, “Children, it’s Passover,” she said. “You shall greet Elijah here.” And she forced both Gottesmann and Ilana back into the center of the room to help her celebrate what she suspected would be her last Passover. “Find the leaven!” she whispered with the excitement of her youth, and Gottesmann felt a great lump rise in his throat as he realized that this old woman on this Passover of doom had secreted bits of leavened bread about her house, even though she could not possibly have known that she would have visitors. So, halfway between panic and fantasy, he poked into obvious places and cried, like a child years ago in Gretz, “Mother! I’ve found some leaven you overlooked,” and with embarrassment, as if she were a careless housewife, she burned it in the fire, as the Torah commanded.

Thus the house was purified. She brought her guests rickety chairs and served the pitiful shreds of food she had set aside for this holy feast: the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread, but no meat, for Safad was starving. She had, however, managed to find two beets, from which she had made one weak cupful of the traditional red soup symbolizing the Red Sea: in old Russia she had made bucketfuls for Passover. Then her husband tied his belt tightly, put on his sandals and took a stave, so as to be ready for immediate departure should the Lord command, and the four celebrants wrapped bits of unleavened bread in small parcels to be slung over their backs as if they, too, were fugitives fleeing Egypt. And finally the rebbe poured a little Safad wine into their glasses, after which he prayed, “Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive until this moment.”

To Gottesmann the moment was unbearably painful. The last Jewish feast he had attended in Gretz with his large and illustrious family had been the Passover of 1935. His Great-Uncle Mordecai had read kiddush that night and fifty-five glasses of wine had been poured, for Scholem the novelist, for Yitzhak the professor of chemistry, for Rachel who had pioneered social work in Hamburg, for five rabbis, two poets, three musicians and a handful of honest businessmen. It had been a Passover of singing and sorrow, for Gottesmann’s father had foreseen what must transpire and later that week had sent his son Isidore to Holland. Fifty-five glasses had been filled with wine that night as the great family sang, “One kid, one kid for two zuzim,” and of the fifty-five all but two were to die in the holocaust. “Who has enabled us to reach this moment,” the Vodzher Rebbe prayed, and Gottesmann felt that he could not accept this moment; he experienced a recurrence of the dizziness that had overtaken him that morning in the heart of
the Arab villages. Very carefully he placed both hands about his wineglass to control their shaking.

When the prayer ended the rebbetzin left the table and opened the door slightly, so that a stranger passing in the street might have access, while her husband poured a fifth glass of wine and placed it aside, should the stranger enter; and then began one of the profound, sweet moments of Jewish life, which that night saved Gottesmann’s sanity. At Passover, which is a joyous feast celebrating the deliverance of Jews from Egyptian bondage and their flight into freedom, it was customary for the youngest male child of the family to ask in a song-song voice four traditional questions whose answers would explain Passover, and having no male children the rebe and his wife and Gottesmann turned to Ilana, as their loved child, and she blushed.

At the agnostic settlement of Kfar Kerem the Jewish holidays had not been celebrated, for the hard-headed followers of Shmuel Hacohen had come to believe that much of Jewish religiosity was both archaic and an insult to reason; but if individual families wished to observe Passover, which did memorialize freedom, they could. Netanel Hacohen and his wife had never done so, but at the homes of friends Ilana had several times celebrated the noble holiday, so she—at least knew the rough outline of the ritual. Hesitantly she whispered the famous preliminary question: “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Then in a soft voice she asked the first question: “Why on other nights do we eat leaven, but tonight only unleavened?” The other three Jews chanted an answer and she stumbled her uncertain way through the second question: “Why on other nights do we eat all vegetables, but tonight only bitter herbs?” Again the listeners chanted the explanation and she started the third question.

She forgot what it was. Gottesmann blushed as if he were a nervous father whose child was being watched by hundreds. The rebe fidgeted. Finally the rebbetzin pointed openly to her hands, whose washing was the subject of the third question, but Ilana thought she was indicating a chair. “Oh, yes!” she cried brightly, like a happy child. “Why on other nights do some sit relaxed and some sit uneasily, while tonight all sit back in comfort?” It was the fourth question but no one corrected her, for a burst of gunfire came from the Arab quarter and Gottesmann leaped to his feet, grabbed his rifle and was gone through the open door.

Acting on reflex Ilana also jumped from the Passover feast and reached for her gun, but she was halted by the rebbetzin. “This is the night of Passover,” the old woman said, forcing Ilana back into her chair. Then she went to the door, and again cocked it open as her husband passed on to that portion of the feast at which he asked, “Why do we leave the door open? Why do we pour the extra glass of wine?” and Ilana was required to answer in the lovely fairy-tale nonsense of tradition that the door was left open for the Prophet Elijah to join this feast, and by tradition all turned to watch the half-opened door to see if just once Elijah might appear; but when Ilana looked she prayed that it might be not Elijah but Gottesmann. The firing grew heavier.

When the legendary songs were ended, with the rebe’s high voice singing of the joy the Hebrews had known when escaping to freedom, even though it was the freedom of the desert without water or food, the celebration reached that strange
and very Jewish moment when all present chanted what appeared to be only a nursery rhyme:

“One kid,  
one kid That father bought  
For two zuzim.”

With a joy unbroken by the hammering of Arab bullets the rebbe and his bewigged wife sang of “the angel that slew the butcher that killed the ox that drank the water that quenched the fire that burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat

That ate the kid  
That father bought  
For two zuzim.”

Neither Elijah nor Gottesmann came through the door that night, so the three waiting Jews sat at the table through the long hours and inaugurated that probing dialogue between the blue-eyed rebbe and the suntanned sabra which was to continue through the eight days of Passover and into the beginning of May, days when it seemed as if the compressing Arabs must crush the Jews at last, days during which only an extraordinary heroism kept the Jewish quarter of the old town viable. That the Jews of Safad resisted was a miracle, truly it could be called only that, for from all vantage points the Arabs poured down a steady rifle fire, picking off any Jew who moved unwarily. Yet somehow the stiff-necked Jews hung on, outnumbered, outgunned, outmaneuvered; and during this heroic defense of an area that could not possibly be held, but which all were determined to hold, Ilana and Rebbe Itzik talked.

REBBE in Yiddish: Do you really believe that against God’s expressed will you can establish a state of Israel in the Holy Land?

SABRA in Hebrew: Yes. Men like my husband …

REBBE in Yiddish: How do you dare to call him your husband? You’re not married.

SABRA in Hebrew: I call him my husband because my father summoned two neighbors, and in their presence announced, “My daughter is married. Have lots of children.” Isn’t that the way Jews were married on this land four thousand years ago? Were there rabbis then?

REBBE: Years pass and people grow wiser. Through many centuries the Jews found it best that their daughters marry in a certain way. Formally. With community sanction. You’re not strong enough to live by your own laws. But you will be strong if you follow our sacred traditions. If you marry your tall Ashkenazi legally. As wise persons do.

SABRA: You keep speaking of traditions. It’s I who am going back to the great traditions of this land. To the traditions of the patriarchs… Moses… Aaron… Jacob, men who lived in freedom. It’s you who want to ignore those traditions and substitute ugly little tricks picked up in Poland and Russia, where Jews lived like
pigs.

REBBE: YOU may not respect countries like Poland and Russia, but for two thousand years the Jews of the world have been forced to live in such countries. What happened to them there has determined their history, their character. Would you erase Maimonides, who lived in Egypt? And Baal Shem Tov, who lived in Poland? And the Vilna Gaon, who lived in Lithuania?

SABRA: Yes. We’re going to build a new state here, not a pale copy of something that was pitiful even when it existed in Poland and Lithuania. We want new laws, new customs, new everything. And we insist that this newness be based upon the Jews as they were in ancient times. On this land.

REBBE: But what existed then has meaning only in terms of what took place in the intervening years. Of all the Jews who have ever lived in the world, nine out of ten never saw Israel. Are you going to pick your tradition only from the one-tenth who happened to live here?

SABRA: Yes. If the nine-tenths got so badly off the track we’d better forget their errors.

REBBE: And you’re willing to throw over all the wisdom accumulated in the Talmud?

SABRA: Yes. You rabbis have made of the Talmud a prison of the spirit, and if we have to surrender what goodness there is in the Talmud to break out of that prison, we’ll do so. Then go back to pick up what’s good and necessary.

REBBE: Do you believe that one generation of Jews will have sufficient wisdom and moral insight to rebuild what it took our greatest minds, Akiba, Maimonides, two thousand years to construct?

SABRA: These are radical times. If we choose wisely we can rebuild.

REBBE: Don’t you respect the Talmud?

SABRA: NO. When my grandfather came to Tiberias nearly seventy years ago he was stripped naked and beaten by the Talmud scholars in that town. They said his idea to put Jews on the land was folly. When he brought over a settlement from Russia the Jews took one look at the land he had selected and they all wanted to run in behind the walls of Tiberias and study Talmud. They had escaped one Talmudic ghetto but sought refuge in another. Anything that does that to a people is wrong.

REBBE: Have you forgotten what Maimonides said about Jews as they built a nation? “Attach your nation to a true thing which shall not alter or be destroyed, and raise your voices in a faith that shall never fail. In this covenant stay, in this religion hold fast, in this your faith remain.” Is there a better counsel?

SABRA: No. But you have said that you’re against the state, so why worry about its form?

REBBE: I am always concerned about what Jews do.

SABRA: SO if we have a state, you want it to be as old-fashioned as possible?

REBBE: I want all Jews to live within the fence of the Talmud. Have you forgotten what the great Rabbi Akiba said? The fish were having a difficult time with the nets in the stream and the fox called, “Leave the dangerous water. Come up on land,” and the fish were about to do so when their leader asked, “If we are having a difficult time in the water, which is our element, how much more dangerous will be the land, where the fox waits to eat us?” If Jews have difficulty
within the Talmud, which is their element, how much worse will they be without it?

SABRA: My real complaint against the Talmud is my father’s… and my grandfather’s. That rabbis with narrow consciences interpret it. The Torah says simply, “The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work…” That’s straightforward. But the rabbis write whole books about what a man shall not do on Shabbat, and when Safad is about to fall to the Arabs you bring out those books to halt sensible work. If we win an Israel for you, do you expect to enforce each detail of those many books?

REBBE: Whether I leave Safad alive or not is God’s will. If we die, we shall die as we have died in the past. But if I am to be saved, I shall insist that Israel observe every law that God gave us.

SABRA: As interpreted by you?

REBBE: You frighten me when you rely so arrogantly upon your personal judgment as to what will be good for the state you plan.

SABRA: Not my judgment. The judgment of all who bring the state into being.

REBBE: Don’t you know what has happened to Jews when they relied upon their own illumination? When they by-passed the Talmud? Up this street used to live one of the most alluring Jews of history, Dr. Abulafia. Assisted by others of similar power he developed a mystical insight into the nature of God. An insight which he made available to every man. Each man his own rabbi. God talking personally to each man as he talked to Moses our Teacher. Perhaps new commandments to be delivered direct from God without the searching analysis and intervention of the rabbis.

SABRA: Would you as a rabbi veto what God himself has spoken?

REBBE: Of course. God tells us what is good for the world and the rabbis study his word to determine what is good for man.

SABRA: Then if our state has an elected parliament like England, or a congress like the United States, you would be willing for a group of rabbis to review their laws and say what should be obeyed and what should not?

REBBE: Of course. Someone must do it, and this is what rabbis are trained to do. Because in the days following Dr. Abulafia, when each man was his own rabbi, who came upon us offering his credentials and crying that he was the Messiah but Shabbetai Zevi? A Turkish Jew from Smyrna. Given to fits of exhilaration and depression. And his movement swept through the Jews of Europe, so that men in Vodzh were convinced that in 1665 the world would enter paradise in compensation for the Czmielnicki massacres of the decades before. Those were exciting days, wonderful for Jews … and then you know what happened? Shabbetai Zevi, the savior of the Jewish people, was captured in Constantinople and before even one torture was applied he converted to Islam. Our great savior had the courage of a mouse, and the damage he did to Jews of the world cannot be calculated.

SABRA: You believe the rabbis could have prevented the debacle?

REBBE: Only rabbis can keep Judaism pure. The rabbis of Jerusalem knew that Shabbetai was an impostor and said so. The rabbis where he first spread his poison gave the same warning. And a hundred years after Shabbetai Zevi vanished from history as a good Muslim, he was followed by another who was worse, Jacob
Frank. He, too, was the Messiah and he, too, was opposed by the rabbis. But he was persuasive and gained great power. He taught that to know goodness man must first know evil, and under his spell the poor men of Vodzh initiated abominations of the body, and all in the name of the Messiah. And when Judaism was well corrupted, what did Jacob Frank do?

SABRA: I don’t know of him. What did this one do?

REBBE: He said that the Talmud should be publicly burned, which it was. And then?

SABRA: What?

REBBE: He led his whole congregation to the Catholic cathedral, where they were baptized.

SABRA: He did?

REBBE: But even the Catholics found they didn’t want him. They discovered that when his Catholic Jews prayed to the Trinity they meant God, Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank, so they locked Frank up in a monastery. Why, even Safad has produced its own false Messiah. The legendary Joseph della Reine, who followed in the footsteps of Shabbetai Zevi in that he, too, converted to Islam. So you see, we Jews cannot be trusted if we stray too far from our rabbis.

SABRA: Then you see a people permanently bound by the old laws of the Polish ghetto?

REBBE: I see, when the Messiah comes, a Jewish state. In France or America agnostics are free to build any kind of state they wish. But a Jew who believes in the one God is not. It must be a Jewish state, and it must take into account the totality of Jewish law. And that law is what the rabbis say it is.

SABRA: Ours will be a Jewish state, but it will go back to the Jewish-ness of four thousand years ago, before your eastern European corruption.

REBBE: Jews are alive today to fight for your state only because the ghettos you despise kept them alive. And they were kept alive only by the force of rabbis administering the Talmud in every tiny community. You exist today because my grandfather existed in Vodzh and fought the Poles and the Russians and the Germans before them. Without him you would not be. And what sustained him? What sustained the Jews of Vodzh against oppressions that the mind of man prefers not to recall? An unalterable faith in the laws.

SABRA: If we are to keep ghetto Judaism alive, I would sooner see the Arabs win.

REBBE: There is no other that can be kept alive. For it is the inheritor. And Jews above all people exist on their inheritance.

SABRA: We’re making a new inheritance. In Vodzh your grandfather and his good Jews waited in the synagogue and bared their throats for the pogrom. And his grandfathers waited for Czmielnicki and his gang. No more, Rebbe. If the Arabs are to kill us in Safad, they shall have to kill every goddamned Jew, and before they get to you, they’ll have to shoot me down, because I’ll be killing them to the last minute with this rifle. We are the new Jews.

REBBE: Mein tochter, you do not make a new tradition by blaspheming. You girls, so proud of your rifles and your drills. Standing side by side with your men, where you should not be. This is no brave new tradition, but a very old one, and of it Moses himself said, “When men strive together one with another, and the wife of
the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that
smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets: Then
thou shalt cut off her hand."

SABRA: I have never heard a more preposterous straining of a text to prove a
point. If an Arab reach out his hand to strive with my husband, I shall shoot that
Arab between the eyes. I am a daughter of Deborah, and when we win Safad I
shall dance and sing as she did.

REBBE: I am distressed when you speak of power and force of arms. You forget
what Moses our Teacher said: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose
you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all
people.” It is our task to illuminate the rest of the world by our allegiance to the
one God.

SABRA: It’s our task right now to win a nation, and we’re going to do so.

REBBE: YOU speak with such contemporary arrogance that I have trouble in
reminding you that perhaps we rabbis are the ones who best understand the
world. My brother in Vodzh is more orthodox than I, more removed from life, as
you might say. May I read the response he wrote in 1945? It has done more to
save the lives of girls like you than anything you will ever do.

**Question:** Two fair Jewesses of Vodzh have come to me much distraught
because their husbands and their families refuse to accept them back into
the bosom of their homes, and the reason is that each girl has tattooed in
bold letters on her right forearm the words FIELD WHORE FOR THE
GERMAN ARMY. Their husbands argue, say the girls, that their marriage
bonds are dissolved because of the use to which the girls were put in the
slave camps. Their families argue that the girls should have died in their
shame, and an uncle says that they should have cut off their arms before
allowing Jews to see the uses to which they were put. What to do?

**Response:** The law on this matter is so clear that any man can understand
it. Any married woman who becomes a prostitute shall, like the wife of Hosea,
be put aside. The husbands are correct in thinking their marriages dissolved.
And the law says that any daughter who becomes a prostitute shall be taken
to the edge of the city by her own father and there stoned to death. The
families are therefore also correct in thinking that their daughters have
dissolved the family relationship, according to the law.

But that cannot be the end of the matter, for in the cases of these two
Jewish wives ordinary words do not apply. It is 1941 that we are talking
about, and we see four young Jewish brides brought before a tribunal of the
cruel ones. The judge says to the two who are not beautiful, “Go to the
boxcar,” and to the other two, who are, “Have your arms tattooed and go into
the whorehouse.” To defy either command means instant death. Had these
girls a choice? Does a Jewish girl of good family offer her arm to be tattooed
or her body to be abused? Was there one of us in this little town who did not
know the terror of the evil ones? How can we forget and today say that this
girl should have behaved so, and that this man’s wife should have done thus?

I therefore direct that these two women return to their husbands and to
their families, and that all receive them as thank offerings of the Lord, that we
have been spared. To my synagogue they shall come with honor, to my house with praise. We have all come back from the brink of the grave but few with so clear a mark of God's divine forgiveness as these girls wear. If any man in Vodzh shall speak against them, either husband or father, that man is forever excommunicated from the Jewry of this town and from any other town where this letter can reach.

Now, as to the uncle who advised the girls to cut off their arms, he is right in part and wrong in part. They must wear long sleeves to hide the awful thing that was done to them and they must take no pride in their humiliation. But on the other hand they must take no step to remove this contemptible sign, for God sends signs amongst us for a purpose, and all of us in Vodzh who have survived bear some sign, but none of us a sign so hellish; and when these women move among us they are a walking testimony to the fact that God punishes us Jews terribly, yet redeems us with His love.

The point is, that we must have in society someone who can speak on such matters, and he will have the authority to do so only if he speaks from the Book and only if the Book is old and sacred.

SABRA: Seems to me your brother took a long time to say a simple thing: “Take the girls back, you fools. They fought the war in their way, you in yours.”

REBBE: You miss the point. You could say it as simply as that, but the listener could believe you or not. When my brother said it the Jews of Vodzh had to listen and to obey. They required some higher authority, some moral authority if you wish, to remind them what the law was and then to say, “In this case it must not be obeyed.”

SABRA: What you say applies to the ghetto. But not to Israel.

REBBE: What I say applies to the human heart... to the continuity of Judaism.

SABRA: There’s a famous Jewish saying which I like better than your brother’s response, Rebbe Itzik. I think it applies to us in 1948. “In the palace of the king are many rooms and for each room there is a key, but the best key of all is an axe.” We’re in the age of the axe.

REBBE: In Jewish history each age is the age of the axe, but we seek something more permanent. I wonder if you consider what you may be doing to the man you call your husband? The Talmud has a proverb about the man who was studying Torah and came to a cool tree. In Hebrew ilana. And he cried, “How lovely is this tree,” and in pausing under it, in disrupting his study of the Torah, he had not only committed a great sin but had also put himself in danger of death itself.

SABRA: This, of course, I do not accept. Gottesmann and I will have children, and they will inherit a noble land, which we will rule together without rabbis.

REBBE: The rabbis you will have with you always, for your heart will call after them.

SABRA: Not this heart.

REBBE: Not until you come home with your arm tattooed... in Arabic.

On the morning of Thursday, May 6, the dialogue ended. The final partition of Palestine was only nine days distant and the Arabs besieging Safad received an order from the Grand Mufti’s high command in Jerusalem:
Safad must be immediately cleared of Jews and converted into our permanent headquarters for northern Galilee. Once we are secure there, we can move out to conquer all of northern Falastin.

So that afternoon the final push on the Jewish quarter began. Sniping was intensified and Jews began to die. House by house the Arabs tightened the noose, even crossing over the stairs to do so, and in the Vodzher synagogue men prayed.

**The Tell**

John Cullinane, as he retraced the ground that had been involved in the battle for Zefat, told Eliav and Tabari, “It was during the height of this battle that I just escaped making an ass of myself in Chicago. One of the newspapers discovered that I had worked in this area and knew a little Arabic. The editor asked me for an article about what was going to happen when the Arabs began throwing the Jews into the Mediterranean. I got out my maps, asked our reference library for the latest statistics, and wrote a fairly impressive article pointing out how the enormous Arab superiority in manpower, weapons, training and terrain meant that within three weeks of their initial push they would automatically succeed. I assured the paper and its readers that from my investigations on the spot—I threw in quotes from English experts and a lot of figures—thirty-seven million Arabs against six hundred thousand Jews: ‘Obviously, the war will be short, savage and for the Jews disastrous.’”

“Most experts agreed with you,” Eliav reflected sardonically.

“How was your Arab propaganda received in Chicago?” Tabari joked.

“Fortunately for me I had the good sense... Moses or Muhammad must have been watching over me. Anyway, on a hunch I took my article around to the chaps at the British consulate to check the figures, and the two top men said they couldn’t spot any errors, but when I got home I found that the chap they call the Cultural Attaché had been phoning frantically and insisted upon seeing me right away. He came over and with no formality blurted out, ‘My God, Cullinane, you haven’t submitted that article yet, have you?’ I said no, and he fell into a chair and asked for a drink. Thank God, old man. You’ve saved your neck.’ I asked him what he was talking about, and he said, ‘Well, the Jews are going to win and I don’t want you to look a bloody fool in public.’ I remember that I stopped pouring the drink and gasped, ‘What? Jews win?’ He looked at me with surprise and said, ‘Of course. Everyone knows that!’ I pointed out that his own superiors hadn’t known it, and he laughed, ‘They don’t know their bums from third base. They think that because some dotty English colonel has been teaching the Arabs how to ride camels that somehow an army has bloomed in the desert.’ He said a lot more, most of it profane, then told me something that helped make me a prophet in Chicago. He said, ‘Look at it this way, Cullinane. It’s positively impossible for the Arabs to move a motor cavalcade of petrol and ammo from Cairo to Gaza.’ I called up in my mind’s eye the map of the area... saw the roads and the various
conditions and corrected him. ‘You forget. There’s a good paved road now. They’re not driving over rocky wadis any longer.’ He banged his glass down and cried, ‘You miss the whole bloody point. So do the military blokes at the office. They see the figures on paper. Egyptians, eighty thousand armed troops. What the bloody hell good are they in Cairo if the fighting’s in Gaza? They see on paper, Egyptians, eight hundred heavy guns. What are they going to fire at from the pyramids? Take my convoy of essential military hardware. It’s moving up to the front under the command of two colonels. It forms up in Cairo one night, and before it leaves the city Colonel One sells to his cousin who’s operating in the Cairo black market all the spare tires. Every one. At the first inspection point Colonel Two allows his uncle to steal half the reserve supplies of gasoline. At the second inspection point Colonel One sells off two thirds of the ammo. At the first village a large operator in the black market, a nephew of Colonel Two, offers to buy half the trucks and pay in cash. And at the border the drivers of the remaining trucks decide to steal the machine guns and sell them to the Jews.’ I remember how he dropped his arms and made his fingers flutter like leaves falling from a tree in November. ‘So you see, Cullinane, it’s morally impossible for that convoy ever to leave Egypt.’ His argument was so seductive that I tore up my essay and we got stinking drunk together and collaborated on an analysis of the war that gained me some notoriety. In fact, Paul J. Zodman read it and he was so gratified to find someone who thought his Jews might win that later on he put up the money which is now paying my salary, and yours, and yours.”

The three men walked to the flight of stairs that had once separated the Arab and Jewish quarters, and to the left they could see the deserted mosque, so marvelously proportioned and with such pleasing juxtapositions of wall and dome and minaret; it was a minor work of art gracing the hill and lending character to the deserted Arab houses that clustered about its base; while to the right they could see the blunt, squat old synagogue of the Vodzer Rebbe. It lent neither the countryside nor its encroaching mud-walled houses any artistic dignity, but it did cry out the fact that to its doors had come, through the centuries, stubborn men who believed that there was a God who was one, and who in the affairs of men played a significant role, if the men would permit Him to do so.

Tabari sat on the stairs with his elbows on his knees and his chin propped on his knuckles. He said to Cullinane: “Have I ever told you about the defense of Acre? You know, as Sir Tewfik Tabari’s son I was handed the job of defending the old city, and I certainly had the men and the machines to do it. I was particularly pleased about the fact that in the caravanserai of the old Venetian fonduk we had ammunition enough to blow up all of Falastin. In particular, we had two million rounds of British ammunition. Two thousand ammo cases of a thousand rounds per case. And other goodies to match,”

“I fought at Acre,” Eliav said.

“What happened?” Cullinane asked.

“You ever read about the fall of Acre in 1291?” Tabari asked. “That time it was Mamelukes attacking and Christians defending. But the Christians were broken into about ten different autonomous groups: Venetians, Genoese, Templars, Hospitallers ... This time it was Jews attacking and Arabs defending, and we were broken into four thousand groups.”
“Four thousand?” Cullinane asked.

“Yes. I’m the only general in history to command four thousand one-man armies. We had Iraqi Arabs who had slipped in for the kill. We had Lebanese Arabs who had come down to open shops as soon as we had won. We had some Egyptians, some Jordanians, a lot of Syrians, a few Arabians. I had Falastinian Arabs from Jerusalem who wouldn’t speak to the Arabs from Haifa, and I must have had about three thousand valiant tigers whose sole ambition was to loot Jewish stores. They were willing for the other Arabs to fight the Jews, but their job was looting.”

“Was it that bad?” Cullinane asked.

“Worse. Because on the ground floor of the caravanserai there was a thin, ugly, mean-tempered Arab whose uncle knew the Grand Mufti, which gave him peculiar powers, even over me. He had the key to the ammunition depots in the Crusader vaults, and he refused to hand out a single cartridge unless his uncle said it was all right, and his uncle refused to act unless he felt that the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem would approve. He drove me mad. I’d plead for more ammunition… a raiding party… two hundred men. He’d refuse to issue it. One day I thought: I’ll shoot that ugly bastard and take his key; but he must have guessed what I was thinking, because he warned me: ‘Don’t think that you can get the ammo by shooting me. Because I keep the key hidden.’”

“What happened to him?”

“When the Jews approached the city as if they intended to fight, he jumped into a sailboat and fled to Beirut.”

“The key?”

“He took it with him.”

* * * * *

The Arab push on the afternoon of May 6 would have ended the Jews had it been followed that evening by a house-to-house mop-up, but for some reason which Gottesmann could not understand, at dusk the Arabs halted their advance, providing the Jews with time to regroup. But it was apparent that the defenders could not hold out much longer, for Mem-Mem Bar-El was exhausted and Gottesmann was near to falling apart. His nerve was quite gone, and Ilana wondered if he could last another day. Of the small command group only Nissim Bagdadi was in good shape, and he seemed to be living off his fat.

That night the Palmach held a gloomy meeting in Ilana’s house and the plans discussed were those of a prostrated remnant, courageous enough to go through the final motions but lacking the energy to devise any tactics other than wait and hold; and as they talked in the midnight hours they heard frightening sounds coming out of the wadi below the cemetery, and Gottesmann shivered. If the Arabs were launching then-final push, he’d have to go but...

Then voices were heard, as if the red-capped Iraqis and the white-robed Lions of Aleppo were cheering one another on for the kill, and petite Vered grabbed her submachine gun and pushed open the door. Through the starlit night the voices grew stronger. They came from people singing, men... women. Now even Gottesmann could hear the words, the defiant words in the night:
“From Metulla to the Negev,  
From the desert to the sea,  
Every boy is bearing arms,  
Every girl is standing guard.”

It was Vered who spoke first. “There must be hundreds.” She dashed from the room. Bagdadi followed her and Bar-El, finding a strength he thought had vanished.

“Come on, Gottesmann,” Ilana cried.

“All right.” She left him sitting there, staring at the open door, and hurried to overtake the excited Jews running down the narrow streets toward the cemetery, but at the corner of the Vodzher synagogue she stopped dead and stood alone in the night. “It’s a trap!” she said. “They’re Arabs, and when we’ve gone down to meet them the others will attack across the stairs.” On the spot she turned, lowered her rifle and sped alone to the vital sector, but when she got there, ready to fire, she found nothing; for any would-be invaders were paralyzed by the sounds rising from the wadi.

Two hundred Palmach troops arrived that critical night and leading them came Teddy Reich to add a new dimension to the Jewish effort. Wiry, alert and charged with that intense fire that came from knowing there was no alternative—“We capture Safad or we’re pushed step by step into the sea”—he characterized the impassioned Jewish command as it was to operate for the next eight months. Dressed in faded khakis, with hand grenades hanging from his webbed belt and a revolver convenient to his right hand, he somehow managed to handle with his one arm a small Shmeisser submachine gun. His left sleeve he kept neatly pinned at the shoulder. He was a short man and his tense body seemed to have been transmuted into rock, for when he assembled the local leaders it required only his appearance to reassure them. “We’ve come to do a job,” he said.

After brief introductions of his lieutenants—“Gabbai, Zuchanski, Geldzenberg, Peled, Mizrachi”—he marched out to a night reconnaissance of Safad.

“These are the stairs,” the Mem-Mem explained. “Up there the concrete police station.”

“How many Arabs inside?”

“About four hundred.”

“Machine guns?”

“At least thirty. Left by the English.”

He moved swiftly to the other end of the Jewish holdings and pointed to the ominous stone house, three stories high with a flat roof. “Defended the same way?” he asked.

“Yes,” Bar-El nodded.

He then returned to the middle of the line and stood for some time looking up at the menacing Crusader ruins dominating the entire town; then he climbed to the roof of a Jewish house to view the most forbidding of all the Arab installations, the great fortress on the mountain back of town, built solidly by the English and impregnable. It had thick walls, abundant food and a sure supply of water. Looming out of the night this fortress was foreboding in a special way. It seemed
so powerful, so unassailable by ordinary men. Gottesmann, trying to control his
nerves, thought he heard even Teddy Reich gasp when he saw the monstrous
thing.

If Reich did suffer shock at seeing the Arab positions, he hid the fact. “Back to
headquarters,” he snapped, and in the quiet hours of the night he held a
commanders’ meeting that none who attended would ever forget. Taking a steep-
sided bowl he inverted it on the wooden table and said, “Men, this is what we face.
The flat part is the Crusader hill. The flanks of the hill are divided into six parts.
The Arabs hold five of these parts. We hold one.” Gottesmann closed his eyes.
Somewhere he had heard those words before: “Stone house… cement police
station… Crusader ruins.” Once someone had shoved such a bowl across a table
and the sound echoed in his ears… echoed. He was about to shout something
when the incredible words of Teddy Reich struck him.

“So,” the one-armed German said, “that being the case, what we shall do, as
promptly as possible…” The wiry commander stopped, looked directly at each of
his lieutenants, focusing at last on Gottesmann, to whom he said, “We’ll move out
every man, every woman, and capture those three strongholds.”

“Capture?” Bar-El gasped.

“Yes. Up the hill. Across the Arab road. And we’ll smother each of the three
points.”

Even the men he had brought with him were astounded and for a moment no
one spoke. Then Bar-El pointed to the area above the bowl. “And what about the
fortress? Up there?”

Now it was Teddy Reich who had nothing to say. He took a deep breath, leaned
back, then came forward slowly and grasped Bar-El’s hand as it indicated the
massive fortress. “About this we shall think later.” He caught the looks of fear and
with a sudden leap grabbed Bar-El by the shirt. “We’ll leave it!” he stormed.
“Because I tell you that when the Arabs up there hear that we’ve taken the stone
house...” His fist crashed onto the table. “The concrete police station...” Another
crash. “…and the top of that bowl. Men,” he shouted, “it’s the Arabs up there who
will be worried. Not we Jews in Safad.”

He knew that it was essential to convince his handful of men that this quixotic
scheme of taking the fight to the Arabs could succeed, so before they could
discuss it among themselves he started working with dizzy speed. “You,
Zuchanski. You saw the stone house. How many men? You’ll have to take it floor
by floor. Lot of fighting... same as Haifa. How many?”

Zuchanski mumbled, “Well... with Gabbai and Peled...”

“They’re yours. How many?”

“Thirty.”

“Pick them out.” Zuchanski hesitated, and Reich snapped, “Pick them. Now!”
The detachment for the stone house was chosen.

“You, Bar-El. How many men to capture the Crusader ruins?”

“If I had Gottesmann, we could use forty-five... fifty. It’s spread out, you know.
Trenches.”

“Fifty men. You have them.” Then Reich looked at the remainder and said, “The
police station ... at the head of the stairs. That’s for me. And for Bagdadi. Can you
still dynamite a wall?”
“Yes,” replied the placid Iraqi.
Then Teddy Reich saw Vered and stopped the military planning. “Aren’t you Pincus Yevneski’s daughter?”
“Yes,” said Vered shyly.
“Why haven’t you written to your parents?”
“They’d make me come home.”
“Where are you staying?” Vered pointed at Bar-El, handsome and bleary-eyed, and Reich smiled at the dashing man.
“Wait a minute!” Bar-El protested.
“Oh, not sleeping!” Vered blurted out.
The men of the Palmach burst into nervous laughter, hilarious and bawdy. “Not sleeping!” some of them echoed, and they began poking their fingers into Bar-El’s cheeks.
“All right! All right!” he growled.
“Ilana,” Teddy commanded, “you see that Vered stays with you. Understand? Now as to the girls, they’re not to be in the attack positions, but they are to protect the flanks. I suppose you want to be with Gottesmann, Ilana?”
“Of course.”
Reich asked the others, who attached themselves to one unit or another. Finally he came to Vered Yevneski. “Where do you want to fight?” he asked.
“With Mem-Mem,” she said quietly.
Reich closed the meeting by saying that he wanted six young boys—under thirteen—right now. Ilana knew where she could fine some, and in a few minutes the six little boys, two with lovely curls dancing beside their ears, stood before the Palmach commander, who asked, “Which of you six is the bravest of all?” Each of the boys stepped forward. “Good. Now if you had a very difficult job to do, in two teams, who would you want for your partners?” The two boys with curls moved together. The four without curls made their group. “Good,” Reich continued. He reached forward and grabbed the fringes that peeped from beneath the shirt of one of the orthodox boys. “Your name is?”
“Yaacov,” the boy answered.
“Yaacov, I want you to take your friend and go as close to the Arab quarter as you dare. Geldzenberg and Peled here will stay in the shadows and protect you with their guns. And you’re to call out to some make-believe friend ... You’re to cry as loudly as you can, ‘The Palmach have brought a great cannon.’ If anyone should happen to ask about the cannon, you make up whatever answer you want. Understand?” The boys nodded, and Reich said, “Good. Now let’s all go in the street and let me hear how loud you can shout.”
The six boys went with Reich into the darkness, and Gottesmann could hear them crying, four in Hebrew, two in Yiddish, “The Palmach have brought a cannon,” and by the time the thin little voices had faded in the direction of the Arab quarter Gottesmann felt sure that the enemy must hear. But then he himself heard Teddy Reich whispering to Ilana, “You think Gottesmann can pull himself together for the attack?”
“I think he’ll make it,” she replied.
The secret weapon which the Palmach had lugged into Safad was the kind of implement that terrifies soldiers, especially those who must operate it. When
Bagdadi inspected it, and he knew more about explosives than any of the rest, he came back to tell Ilana and Vered, “It may not frighten the Arabs, but it scares hell out of me.” He took them to the housetop on which the home-welded device was installed: a triangular base about thirty inches wide at one end had supports rising from its point, and from them was slung an adjustable length of steel casing cast somewhere in Germany by one H. Besse. It bore the number 501 and was about five inches across and twenty-eight long, making a rude kind of mortar into which could be dropped a massive shell that looked like an oversize potato masher—big and blunt on the far end, trim and narrow in the handle—which fitted in the barrel of the mortar. “It’s these fins that make the noise,” Bagdadi explained, pointing to the four steel projections jutting out from the business end of the crude weapon. “When the shell flies through the air these whine as if they were alive. Sounds awful but doesn’t do much damage.”

“What’s it called?” Vered asked.

“Davidka,” Bagdadi explained. “Little David. It’s to help in our fight against Goliath.” He pointed toward the concrete police station, which in a few days he would have to assault.

That night the davidka was fired. As Bagdadi had foreseen, the cumbersome shell made a hideous noise as it flew through the air, and it must have frightened the Arabs, but it did no harm, for it failed to land on its nose, so its fuse did not explode. The Jew in charge therefore came up with an expedient that horrified Bagdadi: before the davidka was fired, a length of ordinary fuse was jammed into the nose and lit with a match. Then the firing charge was ignited and the burning potato masher was sent through the air. If it landed on its nose, it went off. If that missed, the burning fuse would explode it. The first two shots worked. What worried Bagdadi was this: “What happens if the firing charge backfires and leaves the potato masher in the barrel—with the fuse burning?” The Palmachnik in charge pointed to a girl. “If that happens, she runs out and jerks away the fuse. We hope she makes it in time.” The girl was about sixteen.

The futility of davidka became apparent when the Arabs wheeled into position some real artillery pieces and began pumping heavy shells into the crowded Jewish quarter. The results were sickening, for when the large English shells exploded they ripped mud-and-stone houses apart and crumbling was excessive. Some Jews were buried alive. Survivors ran into the street, abusing the Palmach and crying, “Until you came with your davidka the Arabs left us alone.”

Rebbe Itzik went through the narrow alleys, pointing out, “It is God’s judgment upon a willful people,” and as the Arab shelling increased, new gloom settled upon the Jewish district, whose residents could not know that soon Teddy Reich intended to rush out and silence the insolent artillery. At this critical moment support reached Reich from an unexpected quarter.

There was in Safad in those final days a Rabbi Gedalia, a sallow-faced, black-bearded man of forty, somewhat stoop-shouldered from much study of the Talmud. He was a withdrawn man and normally one would not expect him to be of much help in these critical hours, but after a searching review of the situation Rabbi Gedalia had reached the conclusion that the Jews had a chance to gain a state in Palestine but only if the holy city of Safad were kept in Jewish hands. He therefore gave the pious Jews of his synagogue directions quite contrary to what
Rebbe Itzik was saying: “Go out and help the fighters. Do anything they demand of you, for with God’s help they shall win.”

He himself moved among the Palmach, counseling Teddy Reich, Bar-El and the others: “You must not think of the odds against you as forty to one. Because most of the Arab soldiers are not fighting for a cause in which they believe. What do the Iraqis and Syrians really care for Safad? They’re good fighters and I’m sure they’re good men. But this holy place is not their home. It is ours.”

As Rabbi Gedalia talked, the tough young fighters gained strength from his quotations from the Torah, which they accepted as history if not as religion: “Moses our Teacher foresaw days when his Jews would have to storm up a hill to capture a town like Safad, and he said, ‘If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them: but shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt.’”

As time for the assault approached, he quoted God’s heartening promise to His people when they faced trials: “And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight.” As he spoke, this thin, sallow man of forty communicated to all his conviction that the Jews would win.

On the afternoon of May 9, when Arab artillery looked as if it must knock out all Jewish resistance in Safad, Teddy Reich convened his last meeting of the men who were to storm the Arab heights. He spoke confidently, reviewed tactics, and advised everyone to get some sleep. “Till eight o’clock,” he said quietly, after which he lay flat on the floor and slept.

At Ilana’s the old gang met for the last time: Bar-El, Bagdadi, Gottesmann and Vered Yevneski. Ilana slapped together some food and studied her husband apprehensively: “You seem tired, Gottesmann.”

“I am,” the veteran confessed. “I wish it were ended, the whole war.”

“Gottesmann!” Ilana laughed. “It won’t be over for years. After we take Safad we get right on a truck and move down to Jerusalem and from there we march to Gaza.” Her husband lowered his head.

Bagdadi chuckled when he thought how surprised the Arabs at the police station were going to be: “They must believe those concrete walls will protect them forever. Wait till the dynamite starts!”

“You think you can take it?” Gottesmann asked, looking up.

“Of course,” the Iraqi cried. “Don’t you think you can capture the ruins on top?”

“No,” Gottesmann said.

Bagdadi expressed no surprise at this assessment. Instead, he drew up a chair and placed his fat hands on the table. “To tell the truth, Gottesmann, I don’t have much hope, either. That is, not unless a miracle happens. But I’m sure one will.”

“What kind?” Gottesmann asked sullenly.

“Don’t mind him,” Ilana laughed from the kitchen of the old house. “Before a fight he’s always pessimistic. Remember how he was the day we bombed the lorry. I’ll bet you this, Bagdadi. He’ll capture the ruins before you take the police station.”

The five friends, the kind of young Jews upon whom the fate of Israel depended in those lonely days, ate a meager meal, then sat talking of the hours ahead. Ilana,
still perplexed by her dialogue with the rebbe, said, “I wonder what kind of Israel we’re building tonight?” And the Mem-Mem said in his pragmatic way, “Kill enough Arabs now and worry about the state later.” She looked to Gottesmann for help to combat this grievous error, but he was staring at his knuckles.

“The Israel I have in mind,” Bagdadi offered, “is one where the Jews of Iraq and Iran and Egypt would be welcome. To work with the better-educated Jews of Germany and Russia. Believe me, Gottesmann, you may not think so now, but this state really needs the Sephardim. To build bridges with the Arabs when the war’s over.”

Bar-El yawned and said, “We need you, Bagdadi, but we need sleep more,” and the three men found places to catch a little rest before launching their assault up the hill. When they were well asleep Vered asked softly, “Is it nice, Ilana, living with a man?”

The older girl looked down at her tall German husband, twitching nervously in his sleep, and replied, “If you’re lucky enough to catch one like Gottesmann…”

“What is there… I mean especially?”

Again Ilana studied her sleeping fighter. “I can’t say,” she replied.

Vered was silent for some minutes, then asked, “Is going to bed … I mean, is it so important?”

Ilana laughed. “How important do you think it is?” she asked.

Vered blushed and smoothed her hair. “I suppose it’s very important.”

“Ten times that much,” Ilana said quietly. “Maybe fifty times.”

“I’m ashamed I made such a fool of myself the other night … when Teddy Reich came.” Neither girl spoke, then Vered asked shyly, “If you were me, and if Mem-Mem…” She hesitated, and the girls looked down at the sleeping dandy. He was a most attractive young man. Ilana could think of nothing to say, so Vered observed, “The trouble is, after the war’s over I want to go to university.”

“I’m going back,” Ilana assured her.

“Even if you have children?” Vered asked.

“Especially if I have children.” She grew excited and moved her hands as her grandfather had done when explaining to others what Kfar Kerem would one day be. “We mustn’t have the women of Israel a dull lot.”

And when the hour came, and the fighters moved out toward their horrifying targets, from the house next door appeared Rebbe Itzik’s wife in her wig, calling, “Go on, children. God will lead you as He led us out of Egypt,” but the rebbe himself did not hear his wife’s blasphemous words, for he was in the Vodzher synagogue praying with two old men, the last of his congregation to support him in opposing the battle that was about to start.

At eight o’clock all units were in take-off position. The night was dark and Teddy Reich was hoping that a surprise rush might carry the Jews well into the front lines of the Arabs before the latter knew what was happening; but as he was about to give the signal to move out, an ominous thing occurred. A drop of rain fell. Then another. Rain in mid-May was impossible. It rarely happened, but here it came, drop by drop. Frantically the Jews looked at each other, trying to assess this unexpected development, then Rabbi Gedalia whispered to Teddy Reich and Bar-El the tremendous commandment of the Lord to His Jews: “Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your
fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them." Reich whistled and the attack moved forward.

To climb from the Jewish quarter to the police station was difficult even in times of peace—one had to twist and turn up narrow alleys before attaining the upper plateau—but to negotiate this dangerous terrain on a rainy night, with Arabs blazing away at point-blank range, called for true heroism, and Reich’s men displayed it. When necessary they fired with cold resolution, astounding the Arabs by pressing forward until, at nine o’clock, they reached the gray concrete walls of the police station itself. Bagdadi and his team of dynamiters brought their stuff into position against the stout walls, but when they ran back to protect themselves from the blast, nothing happened. The unexpected rain had put out the fuses.

“In again!” Bagdadi shouted, and he led his angry men back to the wall. Two were killed.

Once more the rain put out the fuses, and for the third time Bagdadi called, “Here we go!” His fat, clumsy courage was the inspiration his men needed, and this time Teddy Reich’s team held off the Arab fire, and Bagdadi lost no one. Nor did he manage to ignite the stubborn dynamite. The Iraqi thought of the number of times he had seen dynamite go off almost by itself, and it made him curse. Reich called his team back and tried to ignite the explosive by rifle fire, but nothing happened. From the Crusader ruins directly above the police station came many rounds of frenzied fire. “How does it sound up there?” Teddy shouted to no one in particular.

“Sounds like Ilana’s winning her bet,” Bagdadi replied. “What do you mean?”

“They’re going to take the top before we get the station,” Bagdadi growled. He was off for the fourth time to assault the wall, again without result. “Damn the rain!” he cried, as drops ran down his fat face like tears.

At four minutes after ten the team handling the davidka threw potato masher number one into the far end of the Crusader ruins, and the whine and subsequent explosion were horrendous to hear, for to insure firing, the Palmach were using eighteen pounds of black gunpowder where an ordinary gun would have used two. “You can smell the cordite down here,” Bagdadi said in disbelief.

At ten-twenty-five potato masher number two headed for the Kurdish quarter, with equal noise but with little effect, except that when it exploded it seemed to make the May rain turn into a real downpour. Reich called to Bagdadi, “Any use trying to explode our dynamite?”

“Let’s wait,” the Iraqi replied, and through the rainstorm the police station remained in Arab hands.

Then davidka launched shots three, four, five at the Arab souks, at the mayor’s house and at the ammo dump behind the girls’ school, and as the last explosion died away, Bagdadi screamed in unsoldierly fashion, “Teddy! Look!”

Through the gloom, down the side of the Crusader hill, came Isidore Gottesmann and Ilana Hacohen. They were running like children, and Ilana was shouting, “Teddy, we’ve taken the whole hill. It’s ours!”

For a moment Teddy Reich held his hands over his face, muddy rain running down his wrists. Then he kissed Ilana and asked, “The stone house?”

“Great difficulty.”
“Take it,” he said, and as the two ran off to that stubborn house, he said to Bagdadi, “Now we knock out this station.”

The dynamiters, exhilarated by the news from above, darted once more through Arab bullets, reached once more the face of the concrete stronghold, but try as they might, they accomplished nothing. It was frustrating, bitterly disappointing. From above they could hear the Palmach song of victory, yet if the police station were held by the Arabs all would be lost. The Arabs inside, knowing this, fired back with cruel effect and the Jews were driven off.

At about three that morning Ilana and Gottesmann returned to the plateau. “The stone house is ours!” they cried, and Teddy shouted, “Everyone here!” and with desperation the reinforced Jews rushed at the powerful concrete installation, again accomplishing nothing.

The rain halted, and Bagdadi promised, “Now we can explode the place,” but again the fuses failed to work and his valiant effort came to naught. Of his original team only he was left. He was crying.

It was now a few minutes after four and Teddy Reich was in despair. If dawn came, lighting the streets, the Arabs in the police station—not to mention those in the dread fortress on the high hill—could pick off the Jews with ease. “Everybody!” Reich begged. “Let’s get this cursed place.”

Isidore Gottesmann felt his nerves going, and Ilana knew that her husband could stand no more. Both wanted to retreat to the Jewish quarter, but neither would do so. “Once more,” she begged her tall German, and he who had led the fight both on top and at the stone house bit his cheeks and accompanied the next charge on the concrete walls. Nothing happened and Teddy led his men back.

It was now dawn and the Jews could expect from the Arab quarters a violent counterattack at any moment, but as Teddy stood disconsolately at the head of the stairs he began to laugh hysterically. Others ran to him, and they laughed too, like idiots, for halfway down the stairs, in the soft gray light of morning, an old Jewish woman with a shawl over her head was coming out of the Arab quarter, lugging a sewing machine.

“They’ve all gone,” she called hoarsely.

“They’ve what?” Teddy screamed.

“They are no more,” she cried, disappearing with her treasure.

Four Palmachniks leaped down the stairs, five, six steps at a time. With rifles ready they moved into the Arab quarter. Soon they fired, but in the air.

“See what’s happened!” Teddy shouted. There was no need. From the Crusader ruins Bar-El cried down, “They’ve fled from all positions,” and from the direction of the stone house other Jews came running with news that the Kurdish quarter, the sites on the hill, all were empty.

But the key position was not, and stubborn Arab shooting rang out from the police station, so that the Jews had to take cover down the stairs, and there Teddy Reich looked grimly at Bagdadi and asked, “Ready?” The plump Iraqi nodded, and with quick signals Reich sent many troops against the flanks of the building while he and Bagdadi ran zigzag to the front wall, where they tied down a massive charge of dynamite. Retiring to a corner of the building, where Arab bullets whined at them, they waited, and this time the fuse worked. There was a low, ugly, roaring explosion, after which Reich and Bagdadi darted boldly through the dust and into
the gaping hole. Jews were at last inside the concrete police station.

The fighting was brief and hideous. In one room a Jew and an Arab, having exhausted their weapons, scratched and bit each other until the Arab finally strangled his opponent, but Bagdadi came blazing in to spray the place. Then he and Reich, in a compelling partnership of German and Iraqi, went heavy-footed room by room, with one-armed Reich swinging his Shmeisser in deadly fashion, until at last Bagdadi stuck his head out the top window, bellowing, “It’s ours! All but the roof.” And in this manner the impregnable station fell.

Only then could the Palmach believe that Safad was theirs. Men came running in from all quarters of the town to report, “There is no enemy,” and Reich led his leaders on a quick tour of the place to find it mysteriously deserted except for a few old Arabs too weak to run away. From one of these he pieced together what had happened. The old man said, “My son Mahmoud read about it in the paper.”

“About what?” Teddy asked in Arabic.

“Hashiroma,” the old man said. He didn’t understand the word, but he explained, “When the atoomi bomb fell at Hashiroma the rains came.” He moved his hand through the air, simulating a bomb. He mimicked the whining of the davidka and mumbled, “Don’t let the rain touch you, young man. It can eat right through your body.”

The unbelievable had happened. The miracle that Nissim Bagdadi had hoped for had taken place. The Arabs of Safad, that powerful multitude, had heard the ugly whine of davidka, had listened to the unprecedented rain, and had recalled the Jewish children crying, “A new weapon…” In the darkness dilated eyes spread terror, whispers crashed louder than explosions, and finally some fool had cried, “Atoomi bomb!”

“Where’s your son?” Reich asked the old man in Arabic.

“He ran away.”

“He left you? Like that?”

“It was the atoomi,” the old man cackled. “Be careful of the rain.”

From the safe homes by the mosque of Jama el-Ahmar the Arabs had fled. In the hours before dawn they had abandoned the strong points at the ends of the Heart-Purifying Bridge, where no Jews fought. From solid entrenchments the red-capped soldiers of Iraq, the black-and-white-crowned Lions of Aleppo and the warriors of the Grand Mufti fled. Outnumbering their enemy by more than forty to one, the Arab forces had constructed their own panic, and had then obeyed it.

But Reich’s sense of victory was shattered when Vered Yevneski came crying, “Gottesmann’s gone out of his mind!” She said that at the edge of town he had found an abandoned English Land Rover and was now driving down the road to Damascus, pleading with the fleeing Arabs to come back to Safad. It was an act of lunacy and would surely get him killed.

Reich sent Bagdadi to investigate, and the Iraqi Jew, trailed by Ilana and Vered, ran out of town, where they finally overtook the English car, and just as Vered had reported, Gottesmann was driving slowly along the road, pleading with the fleeing Arabs to come back to their homes. “We need you,” he said over and over in Yiddish, but the frightened Arabs continued their flight.

Patiently Nissim turned the car around and drove the Jews back in triumph, but Gottesmann sat silent, for he knew that if the Arabs had left permanently, the
triumph was somehow tarnished.

In only one spot in all of Safad did the Arabs hold fast—in the great fortress on the mountain back of the town; and when Bagdadi and Gottesmann rejoined Teddy Reich they stared across the wadi at this ominous monster, and Reich could not repress a cry of triumph. “I told you!” he exulted. “Right now they’re the worried ones, not us,” but the Jewish lieutenants were also worried, for they knew that before long they would have to storm that final fortress, too.

At seven that morning Reich and his leaders met at the head of the stairs, and Bagdadi confessed to Ilana, “You won your bet. Gottesmann took the plateau before I entered the station.” Then he asked, “How’d it go up there?”

“You know Gottesmann,” she said with pride, “Start him down a trench...” Quietly she added, “He was responsible for the Arab collapse. Jumped into the middle of a headquarters area, blazing.”

At this moment one of the Arabs who had been left isolated on the roof of the police station drew a fine bead on Nissim Bagdadi, and the men about Reich heard a soft ping, following which Bagdadi slumped to the ground. Ilana quickly bent over him as Jewish marksmen shot down the Arab, but as she drew her hand away from the unconscious Iraqi Jew’s chest, Gottesmann saw the fatal blood and cried, “No! No!”

He fell on Bagdadi and began tearing away the fat soldier’s clothes, but the blood kept coming. “Nissim!” he cried in an agonizing wail. His hands were smeared with the blood and he shouted, “Nissim! We need you! The fortress...” He continued with incoherent phrases until Ilana persuaded two Palmach men to carry him home, where they placed him on a bed; then they returned to help celebrate the victory of 1,214 stubborn Jews over a final force of some 19,000 Arabs.

For three days Isidore Gottesmann lay in physical and moral stupor. His body was worn out and his mind no longer tried to bring into clear focus the death of Bagdadi, who had symbolized the common destiny of Sephardim and Ashkenazim; the tall German sought the escape of sleep. But on the morning of May 13 Teddy Reich burst into the house, his eyes dancing with joy, whispering, “Lan! We’ve got to waken Gottesmann. Such news!”

“Let him sleep,” Ilana replied, and little Teddy grasped her two hands in his one, danced giddily for a moment, then kissed her. She sat him in a chair.

“It’s unbelievable, and I wanted Gottesmann to know,” the wiry leader whispered. “The fortress...”

“What about it?” Ilana asked. Although she would not tell Teddy Reich so, she suspected that Gottesmann had fled reality because the prospect of assaulting that great stone monster was more than he could face up to.

“Remember how the fortress terrified us?” Teddy looked at the sleeping man. “Maybe that’s what’s driven him to sleep.” Suddenly, out of compassion which he could not normally express, the driving commander of the Palmach lowered his head and placed his one hand over his face. An ordinary man would have had tears in his eyes. Teddy Reich merely wanted to cover the uncontrollable twitching of his chin. Then came a whisper: “This morning two boys from a village in the hills went to the great fort... door was open ... nobody inside. They brought us secret papers... documents you wouldn’t believe. I went up there myself.” He
started to laugh. He rose and walked with explosive passion about the narrow room. Then with his solitary hand he produced from his map holder a sheaf of papers which he spread before Ilana. They were secret orders to Arab field officers directing them to evacuate from Palestine all Arab civilians: “Command them to create maximum confusion and disrupt normal services. Assure them that within seven days Arab armies will capture all Palestine and they can then return to claim not only their old property but any Jewish holdings they desire.”

Reich jammed the incriminating papers back into his pouch, muttering, “It wasn’t the atom bomb that drove them away. It was their own corrupt leadership.” And he stood, feet apart, facing Ilana and swore, “You and I and Gottesmann could have held that fort for thirty days. But at the first sign of attack, they ran away.” He burst into idiotic laughter, the only time Ilana had heard him do so, and with disgust he pointed at himself: “The great general! For three days I’ve been biting my fingernails over that goddamned fort, and it’s been standing empty. It was finally occupied by my heroic troops... two little boys.”

Possession of the fort brought Ilana a moment of elation, but it could not extend for long, for these were the culminating days when any local victory meant not termination but the beginning of some new responsibility, and Teddy came to the point of his visit: “They need us at Acre, Lan. We’re leaving after sunset.”

Ilana, anticipating what was to be said next, protested: “Why Acre?”

“Safad all over again,” Teddy explained, “A key point. Lots of Arabs. No Jews. We’ve got to take it quickly.”

“You ordering us to help?” Ilana asked.

“I must. Is Gottesmann equal to it?”

“He will be,” she said, and when Teddy left she wakened her husband and told him, “Tonight we go to Acre.” He said nothing, but he was able to dress, and it seemed to his wife that his long sleep had restored his self-control. His nerves, at least, were steadier.

That afternoon the lovers strolled through the town they had done so much to save. They climbed to the old Crusader ruins from which they could see the lake where they had first made love, and then walked down to the mosques which the Arabs had abandoned. The arts which the Muslims had used in decorating their holy places seemed finer than anything the Jews could show in their synagogues, and Gottesmann said, “We must preserve these buildings until the Arabs come back.” They sat for some time looking at the Galilee, and Ilana whispered, “I’ve only one regret, Gottesmann. I wish I were pregnant.” Her husband started to comment, but she said, “I’d like to leave Safad tonight thinking that while you and Reich were giving birth to a new state...” He tried to say that she and Vered were doing at least as much to win the new Israel, but he could not phrase his ideas, so finally they went back to the Jewish quarter to say good-bye to Rebbe Itzik, whom they had come to think of as their friend, “our difficult friend,” Ilana called him; but on the way they passed the plaza of the police station, and when Gottesmann saw this formidable building, when he recalled how Nissim Bagdadi had taken it by force of will alone, and when he stood at the spot where Bagdadi had fallen, he trembled and again lost coherence. Then, forming fists, he quieted himself and said, “We needed him so much,” and Ilana wondered if Reich would want Gottesmann at Acre; but after a while the storm subsided and they left the spot
which had affected him so harshly.

Rebbe Itzik bade the couple farewell. “Get married,” he said, still unwilling to look at Ilana directly.

Ilana answered, “On one thing you were wrong. We took Safad.”

The Vodzher Rebbe smiled. “God’s miracle did it. Well... miracle plus natural force.”

“You mean the rain?” Ilana asked.

“No,” the rebbe replied. “That God should come down to aid His Jews in the rainstorm was natural. The miracle was that so many Jews could fight together in a common cause.”

“We shall see you again,” Ilana said. “In Israel.”

“Then we shall begin the real battle,” the rebbe said. “For the soul of Israel.”

That night Teddy Reich and a group of tested fighters rode out of Safad in a truck to reinforce Jewish troops trying to capture the important Arab stronghold of Acre, and they drove without lights lest they arouse Arab patrols operating between Safad and the coast. All went well until the truck approached the old tell of Makor, which for millennia had guarded this road, and there some Arabs were engaged in an assault on the kibbutz and turned to fire upon the truck. A lively skirmish ensued, at the height of which Mem-Mem Bar-El cried, “They’re running. Knock them out.”

The Jews fanned out across the tell, each shooting at the retreating Arabs, when one of the enemy whipped about and fired rapidly. He hit Ilana Hacohen and she pitched head-first down the far slope of the mound. When Reich got to her she was dead, and he said, “Fetch Gottesmann,” and two fighters overtook the German Jew, who was climbing back up the mound, his self-control restored by the skirmish.

“Over here,” Bar-El’s voice called, and Gottesmann moved through the darkness to where his friends huddled over a fallen body.

“You capture an Arab?” he asked. And when he came to the spot the silent figures separated, allowing him to pass, and he saw that the dead fighter was Ilana Hacohen, her hands still gripping her English rifle.

A terrible cry rose from his throat, involuntarily, a long-drawn wail of anguish. He clutched his chest as if he were a madman and the accumulated passions of ten years broke over him. He rejected the self-discipline he had only just regained and threw himself on the ground beside the stalwart girl who now lay dead. He could not fully comprehend what had happened; the death of Ilana coming so soon after the death of Bagdadi was more than his distraught nervous system could tolerate: a man could bear ten years of war, absorbing one shock after another—family dead, underground partners betrayed, English companions shot by Germans, Jewish refugees drowned off Italy, smiling Bagdadi dead when needed most—a man could stand ten years of that, but not ten years and one day. His convulsive hands reached out to grasp Ilana, the perceptive, the lovable Ilana of Galilee, but all that his fingers could reach was the soil of the mound, the soil from which his ancient people had sprung; and as that earth sifted through his fingers, as he felt its cool impartial existence, he slowly gained strength, and a terrible fury—worse even than his initial wail of despair—possessed him, and he pushed himself up from the soil and turned his back on the dead. Shoving the
others aside, impelled by an agonizing vision of the future, tormented and glorious, like the apocalyptic visions that Gomer and the psalmist had known on this mound, he cried, “I’m no longer Isidore Gottesmann. I’m no longer a German Jew. I’ll be the tree that was cut down. My name is Ilan. I’ll be God’s Man. My name is Eliav, and I shall fight for this land…”

Mechanically he started down the steep side of the mound, firing his rifle idiotically, aimlessly, like some mechanized avenging angel gone berserk, and Teddy Reich said with cold calculation, “Let him go. At Acre we can use a hundred like him.”

And so the Jew Ilan Eliav left Makor, blazing in fury and setting his feet upon a trail that would lead not only to Acre, but beyond it to Jerusalem and to definitions he could not then have foreseen, blinded as he was by incoherent pain.

The Tell

Schematic diagram of Tell Makor from the south on the afternoon of Monday, November 30, 1964, at the conclusion of the first year’s dig. Horizontal scale accurate; vertical scale extended. Solid lines indicate certain sites which will be excavated during subsequent campaigns of 2965-1973 C.E. Observe that the actual distances between levels vary considerably. (For example, as can be seen in the chart on page 867, the distance between Levels XV and XIV is twenty feet, whereas the distance between Levels X and IX is only two feet.) Observe also that the monolith to El, perhaps the most significant of the remains buried in the tell, will be missed by the excavators.

With the approach of November and its threat of rain Cullinane could feel the work at the dig grinding to a halt. His own thoughts were in Chicago, where Vered Bar-El was delivering her series of unnecessary lectures on “The Candlestick of Death.” Paul Zodman airmailed batches of news clippings showing Vered posed with the fatal menorah, accompanied by captions which explained that six of the
king’s enemies had been slain and finally the king himself, because, in the timeless words of the Australian journalist, “he was his own worst enemy.” But when Cullinane read the articles he found that Vered had been honest enough to confess that the story was a fake.

Nevertheless, the clippings disturbed Cullinane because they reminded him of how much he loved this delightful woman: when she peered at him from behind the menorah she was positively enchanting and he longed for her return. I'll propose the minute she gets off the plane, he vowed, but his preoccupation with Vered was interrupted by a newspaper story which altered radically the course of the excavation, not only in 1964 but also for the years ahead.

ILAN ELIAV FOR CABINET POST
FOLLOWING KALINSKY RETIREMENT

J’lem Sources Insist Appointment
Certain If Religious Parties Agree

When Cullinane read the news his first reaction was: This is what’s been keeping Eliav and Vered apart. But what the relationship was he could not guess and before he could ask Tabari to untangle it, Schwartz from the kibbutz appeared to ask if Cullinane would see one of the women who worked in the dining hall. It was big Zipporah, and Cullinane guessed that she was seeking his help in finding a job somewhere, for she was Rumanian and as such was apt to be ambitious. He doubted that he could be of much help, but against his better judgment he allowed her to enter.

She was a handsome woman of thirty, strong and lively, and he recalled how vigorous she was in the kitchen, how rudely amiable in the serving. When she extended her large hand and smiled he knew he was lost. “What is it, Zipporah?” he asked.

The pleasant woman sat down, pointed to the headline about Eliav and burst into tears, not feminine tactical tears but great sobs of perplexity and grief. “Oh, damn,” he growled so loudly that she heard him.

“I’m sorry, Dr. Cullinane,” she sobbed. “I needing help.”

“I’m sure you do,” he replied banally and even with sarcasm. But as soon as he said the words he felt ashamed and took a quick look at her arms to see if they were tattooed with German slave numbers. They weren’t. It wasn’t going to be one of those cases, thank God! Relieved, he rose, walked to her side of the desk and offered her his handkerchief. “I’m sorry, Zipporah. Now, what can I do?”

She blew her nose and looked at the door. “Can I closing it?” she asked.

“Oh, of course.” He got to the door before her, then escorted her back to her seat.

“I’m sorry, Zipporah. Now, tell me what’s happened.”

Without speaking she took from her pocketbook the inevitable sheaf of worn papers that every Jew in Israel seemed to have. He groaned. It was to be one of those cases. An appeal to the American Embassy, no doubt. When she had her papers in a neat pile she asked quietly, “Is it true, Dr. Eliav going to cabinet?”

He pointed to the headline in the English-language paper. “I know nothing. But the story seems real.”
“What I wanting to know…” The Rumanian woman could not finish her sentence because tears, which she could not control, dripped off her nose and struck her papers.

Cullinane waited for some moments, wondering how Ilan Eliav’s putative promotion could cause such a flood of grief. Was the husky girl in love with him? Was she jealous of Vered Bar-El? It was too deep for him, so he shrugged his shoulders and waited.

After a while Zipporah blew her nose again and fought to regain control. “I so ashamed,” she apologized. “Usually not crying, but the world... I wanting help.”

“Now put your papers up here, take a drink of water ... You smoke?”

“Oh yes!” she cried with relief. After the first puffs she relaxed and asked formally, “Will you do me the honor to listening, Dr. Cullinane?”

“I sure will,” he assured her.

“Here is Zipporah Zederbaum, born Rumania thirty years ago. Married to Isaac Zederbaum nine years ago Tel Aviv. Widow. I working very hard…”

“I’ve seen that. I wish I could find a housekeeper like you in America.”

At this unfortunate word the stalwart girl’s composure left her, and she wept for some minutes. “I sorry,” she apologized. “My husband... I know you hearing many things like this too much ... but he no good. Really. Not give me one agorot to feeding myself. Ran away with Yemeni girl. Left her and going to America. Never send me no money and while he walking along a road”—she consulted her papers—“in Arizona. He killed by truck. So now my friend Yehiam Efrati... maybe you know him? He working in dairy.”

“I don’t know him, but he wants to marry you?”

“Yes,” she cried brightly, as if he had solved a puzzle. “It’s so hard, Dr. Cullinane. A widow my age. Not easy to finding a man who will to marry her. But he is good man.” She dropped her head and repeated quietly, “Yehiam, a very good man.”

“You’re lucky, Zipporah, to find a man like Yehiam,” Cullinane said enthusiastically. “Now, what can I do to help?”

“Would you speaking to Dr. Eliav for me? If he going onto the cabinet...”

“We’re not sure of that yet, but let’s suppose he does. What am I to do?”

“He must speaking with the rabbis,” she whispered. “They must changing what they say.”

“What have they said?” Cullinane asked, and the inevitable papers were pushed before him.

“This my birth paper. Good Jewish parents. This my wedding paper. Signed by rabbi. This is a photograph my husband’s death paper. Notary public American here, rabbi’s name here. And this Yehiam Efrati’s birth paper. Also good Jewish family.”

“Everything seems to be in order,” Cullinane said brightly, checking off the various documents.

“And this,” she said dully, “what the rabbis in Jerusalem saying.”

Cullinane took the document, obviously official, and read the pertinent parts:

In the case of Zipporah Zederbaum, widow, who wishes to marry with Yehiam Efrati, bachelor, the judges find that a brother of the deceased
husband of said Zipporah Zederbaum is still living in Rumania, and that this living brother, Levi Zederbaum, refuses to grant his brother's widow permission to remarry. On this point the law is clear, as stated in Deuteronomy Chapter 25: “If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband’s brother unto her ... And if the man like not to take his brother’s wife, then let his brother’s wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband’s brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband’s brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother’s wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother’s house.”

Long ago the rabbis determined that the widow of a dead man must not remarry until her dead husband’s brother give his consent, and it was further agreed that this consent must be given in writing, testified to by proper rabbinical authorities. In this case, all that Zipporah Zederbaum needs do is to obtain in writing the permission of her brother-in-law Levi Zederbaum in Rumania. She would then be free to remarry. But since her brother-in-law refuses to grant her this permission she is not legally free to remarry. And her petition to do so is denied.

Cullinane looked up from the amazing document. His first thought was: She’s playing a joke on me. A medieval joke. Then he saw that she wasn’t. “What does it mean?” he asked.

“As it says,” she replied. She was angry and there were to be no more tears. “In Israel a widow has to get written permission from her dead husband’s brother...”

“Yes.”

“But why?”

“Our law. Husband’s family still has interest in dead man’s wife.”

“Does that mean your brother-in-law in Rumania is offering to support you?”

“Support?” she echoed contemptuously. “No Zederbaum ever helping another.”

“Then why doesn’t he sign the release... let you get married?”

The sturdy young woman handed Cullinane a translation of a letter and sat back clothed in fury as he read it:

Brasov, Rumania
Sept. 3, 1964

To the Rabbis of Jerusalem,

I understand from the incredible document delivered to me yesterday that my sister-in-law, Zipporah Zederbaum, whose husband is dead, is not free to remarry unless I sign a paper indicating that I do not want to marry her and that she is free to marry someone else.
I also understand that if I were in Jerusalem my sister-in-law would have the obligation, when she heard that I did not want to marry her, to take off my shoe and spit in my face.

This is the twentieth century, and if I participated in any way in such medieval rites the authorities in Rumania would be justified in considering me a fool. I refuse to sign any such nonsense and I advise you to forget it too.

In disgust,

LEVI ZEDERBAUM

Cullinane folded the letter and thought: It's about what I'd have written. "What can you do now?" he asked Zipporah.

"Nothing," she said.

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"That's why I coming to see you," she explained. "After this letter, nothing to do."

"You mean you have to live the rest of your life unmarried...while a man is willing to marry you and support you."

"Yes," she said simply.

"It's inhuman."

"It's the law," she said, stuffing the papers back into her purse.

"Law, hell!" Cullinane snapped. "You wait here." He ran out to the dig, calling, "Eliav? Can you come in for a minute?" When Eliav approached, Cullinane asked, "What's this about a cabinet position?"

"These things come up from time to time."

"But this time it's serious?"

"Could be, but don't tell anyone I said so."

"Your first constituent is in my office. Woman by the name of Zipporah Zederbaum."

At the mention of the name Eliav stopped... cold... refused to move. "No, Cullinane. It would be most improper for me to see her. Not at this point."

"You won't talk to her?"

"Look! I know more about her problem than she does. I sympathize. But it would be highly improper for me to speak with her now when I may have to judge her case later."

"But goddamn it, Ilan. This girl..."

"John!" the Jew cried with great force. "You get in there and give her what consolation you can. And don't meddle in things that don't concern you."

"I'm sorry," Cullinane apologized. He watched as his friend stomped off; then he returned to the waiting woman. "I'll speak to Dr. Eliav later," he fumbled.

"He refused to seeing me, eh?" Zipporah asked.

"Yes, and I understand why."

"No one seeing me," she said. "Nothing I can do."

"There's no way for you to get married in Israel?"

"None. Here we are having only rabbi marriage, and if they refuse..."

"Somewhere I heard that if the rabbis refused, people fly to Cyprus."

"Who can flying to Cyprus? The money! And if we go Cyprus... our children bastards. When they growing up they not marry neither."
“I don’t believe it. You honestly mean that there’s no way you... Hell, you haven’t done anything wrong.”

“There is no way, Dr. Cullinane.”

“Then I’ll tell you what I’d do. I’d get my things together and I’d move in with Yehiam Efrati... now. And if you need help packing, I’ll come along.”

The powerful girl, so hard-working, so robustly attractive, obviously longed for a husband, but she was forced to say, “Unless we married right, what the purpose?”

At lunch Cullinane sought out Eliav, intending to raise hell, but whatever castigations he had in mind were quickly forestalled: “John, please don’t lecture me in this case. Because one of the reasons why I might be taken into the cabinet is to handle just such complexities.”

“Who said complexities? Inanities.”

“As you wish, but this is the law of Israel, and ninety-nine percent of our laws are humane.”

“But this poor girl... marriageable age...”

“I know.”

“Didn’t you sympathize with the brother-in-law’s letter?”

Ilan Eliav took a deep breath, then said slowly, “No, because I’m working to establish that Levi Zederbaum”—Cullinane was impressed by Eliav’s knowledge of the case—“wrote his letter in the way he did so the local Rumanian censors wouldn’t turn him over to the Russian authorities.”

“Suppose you do prove duress?”

“Zipporah can marry.”

“If you fail?”

“She can’t.”

“But, my God...”

“Shut up!” Eliav cried, and in distress he left the tell and stalked back to the dig, but apparently he was ashamed of his rudeness, for later he returned and said, “These are difficult days.” He thrust forward a sheaf of papers. “You think I’m indifferent to Zipporah’s case. Look at these.” And Cullinane studied the documents that Eliav would face if he took the cabinet position:

**Case One:** Trudl Ginzberg is a Gentile German woman from the city of Gretz, along the Rhine. Brought up a Lutheran, she fell in love with Hyman Ginzberg and against her family’s predictions of disaster married him. With the coming of the Nazis she suffered grievous persecution. Inspired by some inexplicable love of humanity she volunteered to sew the Star of David on her own clothes, fought to protect her children from Storm Troopers and was kicked in the right eye. Now partially blind. By heroic efforts she saved her children and for four years hid her husband in a cellar, providing him and her family with food by working in a factory kitchen. After the war, when she could no longer believe in God, she scraped together money which enabled her to bring Hyman Ginzberg and their three children to Israel, where the rabbis proclaimed, “Trudl Ginzberg is a Gentile. Worse, she is an atheist, and we cannot permit her conversion. Therefore, neither she nor her children can be Jews.” No effort on her part, neither her offer to convert nor her willingness to live according to Jewish law, has succeeded in changing the
rabbis’ minds. She is not a Jew and her children cannot be Jews, either. Can you propose a solution the rabbis would accept?

Case Two: The minute you see Esther Banarjee and Jaacov Jaacov you will know them to be Indian. They come from Cochin and have dark skin, limpid eyes and slim bodies. But they are also Jews. In the fifteenth century their ancestors fled from Spain to Portugal to Syria to Turkey and thence to the coast of India, where they intermarried with dark-skinned natives. In 1957 when Esther and Jaacov emigrated to Israel they were informed by the rabbis that because of some technical difficulty they could not be Jews. Their problem is this; they want to marry but since they are not Jews they cannot do so in Israel. If they were Christians, no trouble. They could marry in one of our Christian churches; but they are not Christians nor do they want to be so. They want to be Jews. In India their ancestors were Jews for more than four hundred years, sharing in the trials and triumphs of our people, but in Israel, because they are unable to provide written records reaching back four generations, they cannot be Jews. What to do?

Case Three: Leon Berkes is the son of an orthodox Jewish family in Brooklyn. He made a lot of money running a string of kosher hotels in the Catskills, and when the state of Israel was proclaimed, felt an inner compulsion to join us, but his business was prospering and required his supervision, so he lingered in America, secretly ashamed of himself and muttering to his friends, “If I had any guts I’d be over there helping the real Jews.” On his sixtieth birthday he abruptly turned his hotels over to his two sons-in-law, “fine Jewish boys,” he called them, and came to Israel to invest four million dollars in the Jewish state. Naturally he decided upon a hotel, in Akko, and as an observant Jew announced that it would be kosher. For nearly forty years he had been operating such places and he respected the ancient dietary laws of the Torah, but when he approached the Israeli rabbinate for a certificate he encountered many original problems. The Talmud stated that one could work on Shabbat only in case of dire need, which included the serving of food; but waiters were forbidden to write out meal checks, for that was not essential. Berkes complained, “It means more work, but if it’s the law, okay.” Then the rabbis warned, “All religious holidays to be strictly observed,” and Berkes assured them that in America he had done so. On holidays he did not allow his hotel band to play music, but the rabbis said, “We think it would be more respectful if you kept your band silent for nine days before the Ninth of Ab.”

Berkes said, “It’s terribly expensive, but if that’s Jewish, okay.” Then the rabbis pointed out that the Torah said explicitly, “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day,” and Berkes assured them that he never had a fire, but they explained that in recent years this passage had been construed to mean that no electrical switch, which might accidentally throw a spark, could be operated. They demanded that he stop all elevators throughout the hotel from Friday night through Saturday. He said, “People are going to grumble, but if it’s the law, okay.” But when the rabbis insisted
that the automatic doors leading from the dining room to the kitchen must also remain inoperative lest the mechanism accidentally produce a spark, Berkes said, “This is too much.” The rabbis warned, “If one door moves, we’ll take back your certificate.” So Berkes said, “You’re making it too complicated to be a Jew,” and returned to America. The question: Can we get this good man back to Israel?

“You’re taking everybody’s problems on your shoulders,” Cullinane said with respect.

“And the most complicated is my own.”

“What do you mean?”

“Remember the day we went to the Vodzher Rebbe’s... with Zodman?”

“Yes.”

“And the attendant asked Cohen or Levi? And we all answered ‘Israel’?”

“I still remember the Cohens putting the shawls over their heads.”

“And I said I’d explain later.”

“You did. Cohens are priests. Levis are temple attendants. Israels are the common herd.”

“Every Jew is automatically one of these three, tracing back in unbroken lines to the days of the Torah. All Jews named Cohen, Katz, Kaplan, Kaganovsky... you can guess the others... they’re all priests who even today enjoy certain privileges. Now your Levys, Levins, Lewisohns, Loewes and the rest... they’re all Levis, and they also have a few privileges.”

“But you poor Israels...” Cullinane began.

“I’m not an Israel,” Eliav said.

“At the Vodzher Rebbe’s you said you were.”

“I did, because I don’t take this Mickey Mouse...” He stopped. “That is, my wife... I never told you about Ilana, did I? She died over there.”

“She what?”

Eliav pressed the warm pipe against his chin and tried several times to speak. Finally in an offhand way he said, “I was married to a girl who could have served as the flag of Israel. She was Israel. She had a very special quality. She was shot. Right over there. Right... there.”

“I’ll be damned,” Cullinane said. He remembered that first night when he and Tabari had seen Eliav kneeling on the tell and he was now inclined to say nothing, but intuitively he knew that silence was not wanted. “So we’ve been digging ghosts?”

“That we have,” Eliav agreed. “And one of the ghosts has come home to roost... in a particularly mean way.”

“How?”

“I’m a Cohen... really. I come from a wonderful line of holy men in the city of Gretz, along the Rhine. One thing about a Cohen, he’s never permitted to marry a woman who’s been divorced...”

“How’s that?”

“Under Israeli law a Cohen is forbidden to marry a divorced woman. It just can’t be done.”

“But you and Vered are engaged.”
“That’s right. And if we want to get married we have to fly to Cyprus, get some
English clergyman to marry us according to his law, then fly back to Israel and
live in local sin.”

Cullinane started to laugh. “We’ve been trying to dig up ancient history and all
the time we’ve been living in it.”

“You’re wrong,” Eliav protested. “You’ve been digging in Judaism but you
haven’t tried to understand it. John, we’re a special people with special laws. Why
do you suppose I asked you to read Deuteronomy five times? Damn it, you stupid
Irishman! I’m not a Catholic. I’m not a Baptist. I’m a Jew, and I come from a most
ancient people with most ancient laws.”

“I’m beginning to realize that,” Cullinane apologized. “But this Cohen
business…”

“You saw Leviticus. The priests ‘shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane;
neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband…” There it is. And
there’s no way we can get married in Israel.”

“Wait a minute! Vered’s a widow.”

“More important, she’s a divorcee.”

“I don’t get it.”

“I knew her husband well. We fought together at many places… a handsome,
dashing young lady-killer. Vered was captivated by him and on the day we broke
the siege of Jerusalem she married him. But when peace came he couldn’t seem to
fit in. Never understood that things had changed, so they got divorced. Then, with
the Sinai campaign in 1956, came his second chance. You wouldn’t believe what
he accomplished with a column of armored cars, and I suppose God was gracious,
for he died in battle.” He paused to remember a gallant, undisciplined friend. “Bar-
El was one of the few heroes I’ve known. An authentic hero.”

“But if Vered’s a widow…”

“The critical thing is she was once divorced. If I intended staying on this dig,
that would be one thing. We’d fly to Cyprus, get married there, and if later on the
rabbis judged our kids to be bastards, when the time came for them to marry
they’d fly to Cyprus too. But I can’t join the cabinet and flout Jewish law.”

“You’d give up Vered for a cabinet job?” Cullinane asked in astonishment. And
the explosive form of his question satisfied Eliav that the romantic Irishman would
face any problems to marry her. His uncle, who was a Catholic priest, his father,
who still spouted nonsense, his sister, his friends could all go straight to hell if he
wanted to marry Mrs. Bar-El, which he did.

The honest shock of Cullinane’s reaction forced Eliav to reply carefully. He said,
“For an Irishman, with an Irishman’s secure history, the question is the way you
phrased it. But I’m a Jew, and my history is much different. We were two
thousand years without a country, John. I and a few… really, we were a handful…
my wife… Vered’s husband… and a marvelous Sephardi named Bagdadi, whom I
think of very much these days…” He stopped, and after a long moment said, “We
built a state to which the Jews of the world can repair for the next thousand years.
Today that state faces critical decisions concerning its basic structure, and Teddy
Reich’s convinced me that I’m needed…”

“Where?”

“In the most critical areas. The question you just asked would make sense if you
posed it to an Irishman. But the question to ask me as a Jew is this: Would you, in conformance to Jewish law, surrender Vered Bar-El to help preserve the concept of Israel?"

“Would you?”

Eliav evaded the question: “The night my wife was killed on this tell our detachment was on its way to Akko. Vered and her man took care of me, because I was pretty much out of my mind. We stormed into Akko, which Tabari held with his Arabs, and about thirty of us Jews went up against... well, God knows how many Arabs. And somehow I got far ahead of the line and I would surely have been killed, except that this little seventeen-year-old girl came blazing up with a submachine gun. She cleared the street and led me back as if I were her idiot child. I can feel her hand in mine now.”

“Why didn't you marry her?”

“She's a lot more primitive than you think. She was fascinated by the gallantry of Bar-El. When he was gone there was the Cohen business. Who wants to flee to Cyprus? And I was never the dashing buccaneer type.”

The two archaeologists stood silent for a moment, looking at the minarets of Akko, where Vered Bar-El had fought her way to save Eliav, and finally the Irishman said, “You've taught me a certain humility this afternoon. I withdraw my question.”

“Thanks.”

“But I pick up yours. Do you intend to marry Vered or to serve Israel?” There was no reply, and after a while Cullinane added, “Because I'm giving notice right now, Eliav. You marry that girl... before I leave for America... or I'm taking her with me. And so help me God, that's it.”

“Vered fought for this country,” Eliav said quietly. “She'd never leave Israel. She'd never marry a non-Jew,” and by their separate paths the two men left the tell.

Next morning the first of two disruptive visitors arrived, Professor Thomas Brooks, traveling through the Holy Land on one of his regular photographic trips, and since he was an influential board member at the Biblical Museum, Cullinane was obligated to care for him while he was in the Galilee. This was not an unpleasant task, for Professor Brooks was an amiable man, teacher of church history in a small Protestant college in Davenport, Iowa, who made additional income by lecturing through the west on “Old Testament Times” and “Scenes from the Life of Christ.” He illustrated his lectures with color slides, which, accompanied by his careful explanations, served better than motion pictures. He was a good scholar, tried to keep au courant with the latest archaeological research, and imparted to his audiences a vivid sense of that tiny area of the world from which the great religions had sprung. He was not allowed, of course, to lecture in Catholic churches, but he suspected that when his screenings were held in public halls rather than Protestant churches many Catholics attended, and he took pains to include in his slides scenes that would have special interest for them.

He was in his late fifties, a fleshy man to whom life had been good, and he traveled with his wife, some years younger than himself, who managed the
cameras and the checkbooks. They were a congenial pair, as beloved in the Holy Land as they were back home, and often they had helped rich widows write wills that bequeathed inheritances to the Biblical Museum for its excavations. They were honest people, the Brookses, and they believed in a simple, honest God; but as they finished their photographing tour in 1964 they were disturbed, and they conveyed their apprehension to Cullinane.

“John, I can’t approve what’s been going on here in Palestine,” Brooks said. As an older man, and as a member of the board that employed Cullinane, he always referred to the director as John, while as a fundamentalist he continued to refer to the new state of Israel as Palestine. “I don’t like it at all.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Who wants to see a great gaping ditch running smack down the middle of the Holy Land?”

“They’ve got to have water,” Cullinane said.

“Granted, but Grace and I reflected many times that all these factories... these macadamized roads. Really, they destroy the feeling we used to get from this land.”

“They do, John,” Mrs. Brooks agreed. “I remember when we first came here... the British administered it then, and it looked just as it must have in Bible times.”

“We took some of our greatest photographs in those happy days,” Brooks sighed. “I only wish Kodak had had a better color film in those years. The reds have faded from our best slides and we can’t use them any more.”

“But today,” Mrs. Brooks continued, “you can hardly take a photograph anywhere that tells an audience clearly that you’re in the Holy Land. Now it’s all towns and building developments.”

“I take it you’re rather strongly opposed to progress?” Cullinane suggested.

“Oh, there ought to be some progress in the world,” Brooks conceded, “but it does seem a shame to ruin a land that is so much beloved by people everywhere. I can remember when we first came here, you could find in almost any village a water well which looked exactly as it must have in the time of Christ. We got some of the most extraordinary pictures of women walking to the well with great earthenware jars on their heads. You could have sworn it was Miriam or Rachel. Now it’s nothing but deep artesian wells.”

“Your home’s in Davenport, isn’t it?” Cullinane asked, leaning back in his chair.

“When we can find some time for ourselves,” Mrs. Brooks said. “Mostly we travel.”

“Hasn’t Davenport changed pretty much... in the last thirty years?”

“Davenport’s different. It’s not a holy land to anyone. But Palestine... I hate to say this, John, since you’re working on this side, but Mrs. Brooks and I felt much more at home on the other side of the border. In Jordan. They’ve kept their land pretty much as it used to be. One gets a much better sense of the Holy Land in Muslim Jordan than he does over here in the Jewish sector.” Cullinane noticed that Brooks clung to the old English terminology: the Jewish sector.

“What we mean,” Mrs. Brooks explained, “is that in Jordan today you can still find hundreds of scenes with people in Biblical costume... little donkeys... heavenly-faced children playing by the open wells. You can point your camera almost anywhere and catch a Bible picture. It makes your heart feel warm.”

“You don’t get that feeling in Israel?” Cullinane asked.
His use of the current name for the new nation seemed to offend the Brookses, and the professor quickly re-established the accurate terminology. “This part of Palestine is frankly disappointing. I might almost say irritating. You go to a historic spot like Tiberias, hoping to find something that will evoke for people in Iowa the romantic quality of the place, and what do you find? Housing developments... bus stations... a tourist hotel... and on the very edge of that sacred lake, what? A kibbutz, if you like.

“And if you do try to take a photo that will catch the essence of the place, you don’t find people dressed as they are on the other side. Those wonderful garments that make you think of Jesus or the disciples. No, you find men and women dressed just as they would be in Davenport. Carrying plastic bags back from the supermarket. I saw not a thing in Tiberias that reminded me of the Bible.”

“There were a lot of Jews,” Cullinane said.

“I don’t think that’s funny, John,” Brooks said. He tried to avoid using the word Jew; he had been instructed that the people of that religion preferred to be called Hebrews.

“Aren’t you saying,” Cullinane asked, “that the Muslims on the other side look more like Biblical Jews than the living descendants of the Biblical people do?”

“I’m not saying that at all,” Brooks protested. “But when a land has a special meaning for so many, it ought to be kept...well...rural.”

Cullinane bit his lip and tried to keep from smiling. “A good deal of Christ’s ministry must have been spent in cities,” he pointed out. “Jerusalem, Jericho and Caesarea Philippi. And when you get to St. Paul, he seems to have spent most of his time arguing Christianity in the great cities like Corinth, Antioch and Caesarea.”

“That’s true,” Brooks said, “but I believe that most Americans like to think of Bible figures as living in the countryside. It seems to make them more...well...reverential.”

Cullinane thought that that might be one of the reasons why Christianity was having such a difficult time with some of its urban adherents, that they could not visualize Christ as inhabiting cities, where more and more of the population chose to live. He said, “When Jesus was in Jerusalem or Paul in Athens those cities must have been much like New York. I know that when we dig here at Makor we have to remind ourselves all the time that this was an urban settlement, while Akko down the road was always a fairly substantial city. And I’m not at all sure that Jesus went around, or Paul either, looking like a modern-day Arab.”

“I’m fairly well satisfied that they did,” Brooks said. Then, to ease the tension a bit, for he felt that Cullinane was being obstinate in not understanding his basic argument, he said, “The trip wasn’t a failure. Grace and I caught some wonderful shots at Jericho. What a marvelous spot. You could almost feel Old Testament people moving among those ancient ruins.”

“I suppose you got some Arabs to pose for you,” Cullinane said.

“Two handsome fellows. When they took their shoes off they looked just like prophets from the Old Testament.”

“I still wonder if Jeremiah dressed like an Arab.”

“Our audiences think he did,” Mrs. Brooks retorted. “Now, I’m sure you’re doing some excellent work here, John, but we couldn’t photograph it. Not for our
purposes. Because the young people I see out there look like ordinary Americans. It would kill the atmosphere.”

“I suppose in years to come,” Cullinane said, looking up at the ceiling, “you’ll take more and more of your photographs outside of Israel.”

“We’ll have to,” Professor Brooks said. “The Hebrews here simply don’t look right. And every new town or factory eliminates one more possible landscape. We’re forced to work in the other side.”

“But when Jordan succeeds in transforming itself into a modern nation, then what?”

“I’ve thought about that,” Brooks said. “As a matter of fact, right outside Jericho there’s some building going on that pretty much spoils that landscape. So next year we’re coming back with a great deal of film, and we’re going to shoot everything we can and keep it on file.”

“And after that?”

“We’ll probably find some backward area of Arabia,” Brooks suggested. “I think we’ll still be able to get some great shots of water wells and caravans down there.”

At the airport, when the Brookses were about to climb aboard the jet that would fly them home to Davenport in less than fourteen hours, Cullinane experienced an irrational urge that he knew at the time would get him into trouble. As his board member started toward the huge airplane, loaded down with cameras and color slides that would evoke the Holy Land for thousands, Cullinane asked, “Did you get a good shot of our airport?”

The humor of the question escaped the professor, who took it as a personal insult. He was about to say something but the sudden vision of a color slide of the large airport, with taxis delivering Jewish officials with briefcases and soldiers in Israeli uniform, overwhelmed him. He remembered when he had first seen the Holy Land, at the old port of Haifa, where his ship had docked and where a shrouded figure dressed much as Jesus must have dressed two thousand years before, had come ambling along the quay. In that pregnant moment Professor Brooks had sensed what his life mission was to be: to lecture throughout America with slides of the Holy Land showing people how the great religions had originated. And he was now convinced that this could not be done by showing slides of cities or modern developments. The Bible was something ancient. The men who composed it, or who participated in its adventures, were different, and he doubted that he would ever again bother to return to the Jewish portion of Palestine. This brash young digger, Cullinane, irritated him, too, and he thought: I’ll speak to the board about him when I get home. Is he really the man we want representing us in the Holy Land?

Cullinane, watching the bewildered man waddle onto the plane, thought: It would break his heart if he knew that when the disciples met in Tiberias, St. Peter probably said, “Look, James. We can’t possibly get to Jerusalem in three nights,” and James had probably replied, “We can if we scramble.” He thought of Makor, and reflected on how difficult it was to comprehend any past age: If a town of a thousand people exists for six thousand years, as Makor had, this means that nearly a quarter of a million different human beings must have lived inside our walls. How impossible it is to remember that they were ordinary people, who helped evolve and diffuse Judaism and Christianity and Islam. They didn’t go
through life posing in bedsheets, and many of their greatest decisions must have been made when they traveled to mighty cities like Antioch and Caesarea, or to significant ones like Jerusalem and Rome.

“God,” he cried, as he uttered the prayer of the archaeologist, “I wish I could see Makor for one day as it actually was.”

But the vast plane thundered in its chocks. Its jets reverberated. Men covered their ears and the great machine lumbered down the long runway, gaining speed until it rose from the Holy Land, turned gracefully toward the sea and headed for Davenport, Iowa.

As he drove back to the dig, brooding upon Professor Brooks’ image of religion, which would condemn an area and a people to ancient ways of life, he became aware that a car was following him and he looked back to see a red-painted jeep that was famous throughout the Holy Land. At the wheel, hunched up like a giant flying through space, sat a very tall blond man, hatless and wearing a dark brown sackcloth clerical habit. His hands grasped the steering wheel as if they were going to crush it and his jeep bounced along at a careless speed. Obviously it was headed for Makor, and Cullinane was pleased to see it coming. He sped ahead, parked his own jeep at the door and ran into the office, crying, “Father Vilspronck’s coming! Tell the architect to get the drawings ready.”

In a moment the door slammed open and the huge brown priest began greeting Eliav and Tabari in the comradeship established through years of working with them at one dig or another. He dropped into a chair, leaned across the desk and caught Cullinane’s two hands. “What contradictory things have you been digging out of my ground?” he demanded, and the question was not preposterous, for by dint of continued intellectual effort Father Vilspronck had made the Holy Land his own in a strange and meaningful way. Nineteen years before, as a young priest from Holland, to which he would return one day a cardinal, he had arrived in Palestine on the same boat that had brought Professor Brooks, and he had asked himself: Would it be possible to determine in a non-hysterical way what happened in the Holy Land during the first four hundred years of Christianity? He had started then to piece together all fragments of knowledge relating to the problem, and as the years progressed he became the world’s leading authority on this subject. During one period he had served as a parish priest in Germany, and this had kept him from his chosen work; other years he had spent in Rome close to the powerful cardinals, who had spotted him for preferment, and although he was able there to study the great Vatican documents on Christianity’s beginnings, he was unable to proceed with his digging. But always he had managed to find some wealthy Catholic layman who would provide him with the funds necessary to return to Palestine for his researches. Now he smiled at Cullinane, whom he had known years before in the Negev when they both had worked for Nelson Glueck, and he said in the manner of a bad little boy cajoling his father, “Well, John, you know what I want.”

“I have them coming,” Cullinane replied, and he asked Tabari to speed up the architect, but before the Arab could do so, the expert from Pennsylvania entered the office with rolls of drawing paper, which he spread upon the desk. They were, as Father Vilspronck had hoped, detailed drawings of the foundation lines uncovered at Level VII, where a Byzantine basilica had ridden over a Jewish
synagogue. Giving only a cursory glance at the former, Vilspronck carefully traced out the relationships of the synagogue stones. When he had done this he asked to see the lintel stone that had been found in the basilica wall, and for some minutes he studied the remarkable find in silence. Then he asked, “Where’d it stand in the wall?” Photographs were produced and the giant priest reconstructed what the men had seen that day. Finally he turned to the architect and asked, “Have you attempted any projections?”

The Pennsylvanian coughed and said, “After all, the length of wall we uncovered was only…”

“I know,” the priest interrupted. “But I take it you did make some guesses.”

And the architect flung out a large sheet of paper on which the two walls were shown as found, rock by rock, prolonged into full-scale guesses as to what their finished edifices must have been. If an observer had wanted to witness the true mystery of archaeology, the manner in which living men fight to penetrate the minds of men long dead, he should have seen that drawing of the Pennsylvania architect. As a basis for his deductions, the architect had merely twelve feet of basilica wall running from northwest to southeast; below that he had a right angle marking the earlier synagogue, and using only these slight clues he had drawn the completed buildings, and in doing so had come very close to what the future digs at Makor would uncover.

Father Vilspronck studied the synagogue and asked, “Why do you make it this size?”

The architect replied, “Judging from all the synagogues we’ve uncovered so far, our lintel stone is not large enough for a main entrance. So I must conclude that it rested over one of three small doors. That yields a façade like the one I’ve drawn. The thickness of the walls is exactly what we’ve found elsewhere. Working from these hints, I’ve spent a lot of time in the old synagogues at Baram, Kefar Nahum and Beit Alfa. This is about what we’re going to find.”

“I agree,” the priest said, twisting the paper so that he could study the synagogue from fresh angles. He was paying no attention to the later basilica, and Cullinane received the distinct impression that as a priest the big Dutchman was disappointed in what he was uncovering at Makor but as an archaeologist he was gratified. “Remarkable,” he said finally. “It bears out what we’ve found everywhere else.” He shrugged his shoulders, then asked abruptly, “You done any carbon dating?”

“No need to,” Cullinane said. “Our date of 351/2 CE. for the destruction is as good as if they’d left a signed copy of the orders. Our guess as to 330 for the original building of the synagogue…plus fifteen or minus fifty as you wish.”

“That’s what I thought,” Father Vilspronck said. Brushing away the architectural drawings he asked, “I suppose you’ve made a table of probable populations?”

“We have,” Cullinane answered guardedly.

“Care to let me take a look?”

“We’d rather not… at this point.”

“How about the synagogue level?”

Cullinane smiled. “I said we’d rather not, but you knew we would. Usual restrictions?” The priest agreed and Cullinane drew from a locked drawer a
document which in the army would have been classified *Top Secret*. He handed copies to each of the archaeologists and watched with amusement as Father Vilspronck darted his eyes directly down to Level VII, where he checked the population figures. As soon as he had completed this, the big man studied the other figures casually.

### PROVISIONAL ESTIMATES OF POPULATION

**AT SITE 17072584**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>HEIGHT OF POPULATION INSIDE WALL</th>
<th>MAKOR</th>
<th>POPULATION TOTAL OUTSIDE WALL</th>
<th>TOTAL MAKOR</th>
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“I notice that in 1560 C.E. you have the tell standing six feet higher than it does now?”

“Probably did,” Cullinane said. “Bedouins seem to have mined the place for cut stones in later years, and the height must have dropped considerably.”

The blond priest asked a few more irrelevant questions, then came back to Level VII. “Would you say that these figures for the Byzantine period are pretty accurate?”

“Just educated guesses,” Cullinane confessed. “But if the synagogue was that big, it had to serve about eight hundred fifty Jews. Of course we’re extrapolating from Kefar Nahum and Baram.”

The perplexed Dutchman placed the sheet of figures, which summarized so much learning, on the table and slapped it with his big hands. “At least you’re consistent!” he growled. “Every dig for the last thirty years has confirmed this story of Jewish persistence, and sooner or later we’ll have to adjust to it.”

Eliav lit his pipe and asked, “But you adjusted to it years ago. It’s your discovery.”

The priest laughed. “Half of me accepts. The other half doesn’t.”

“Is it so difficult?” Eliav asked.

Father Vilspronck returned the estimates to Cullinane, who collected the other copies and locked them in his desk. For any level the figures might be wrong by fifty per cent, but as the years passed and refinements were made, savants throughout the world would have to adjust their theories to these Makor facts, as the Dutch priest now prepared to do: “When I went to university the professors had an absolutely clear understanding of the Holy Land. A group of excellent
Hebrews lived here for some two thousand years. Their religion grew stagnant and Jesus Christ appeared, luring about half the Jews to Him. The others clung on desperately and in 70 C.E. rebelled against Rome, and Vespasian destroyed both them and their temple. In obedience to God’s command that they be a perpetual witness, they wandered homeless through the world while Christianity took over, and it was their punishment to wander until they finally converted to Christ. It was a neat, clean theory and that’s what the world believed. My first shock came when I found that in 135 C.E. the Jews, none of whom were supposed to be here, launched an even bigger revolt against Hadrian, and the recent discovery of letters actually written by Bar Kochba, who led the revolt, have had a startling effect on all of us. Once more we were told, ‘All Jews were driven out,’ but now we begin to excavate these synagogues of the fourth century and we find there were more Jews here than before. The synagogues were big, handsome buildings. Serving a very large population. Kefar Nahum, Baram, now Makor. All tell the same story. And three hundred years after that, when the Muslims come, we still find large Jewish populations. And four hundred years after that, when the Crusaders came, there were still Jews around.” He stopped and his face revealed his perplexity. “Something was going on here that the history books did not tell us.”

Father Vilspronck had begun his labors in the Holy Land intending to assemble the testimony that would reinforce Christianity, and it had become the major irony of his life that his work served primarily to tell the world more about Judaism; yet he persisted in his researches, for he knew instinctively that when the honest relationships were revealed, both Christianity and Judaism would be more meaningful and the ultimate conversion of the Jews closer at hand. He also knew something which he buried in his conscience, leaving it to others to develop: the arrival of Jesus Christ in the Galilee did not mysteriously signal the disappearance of competing religions; they survived with stubborn vigor, and if the testimony of the synagogues could be trusted, actually increased their power. It was not until the Greeks, doubling back with the great messages of St. Paul, reached the Holy Land that Christianity got much of a hearing in its place of birth. But that was for others to narrate.

The husky priest asked if he could visit the dig, but Cullinane soon discovered that Vilspronck had no real interest in the excavations; he had already visualized most of what had been done. His real desire was to talk with a fellow Catholic, and the two men sat on top of the mound looking toward the minarets of Akko while they discussed one of the prime intellectual mysteries of the world. “I don’t suppose you’ve found any clues that would relate to Flavius Josephus?” the Dutchman began.

“None. We know from the scars that there was a general destruction of Makor about 66 C.E. It’s probably safe to guess that it was burned by Vespasian.”

“Yet there’s that tantalizing passage in the commentary on Josephus: ‘Jewish tradition claims that Flavius Josephus escaped by night from Makor.’” He threw pebbles toward the ravine into which the great Jewish general had fled, abandoning the town to its destruction. “I’d give a lot if we could find some tangible proof that that rascal had been involved in a site which he had later refused to write about.” The Dutchman clenched his hands and studied the vacant trenches into which he could partially see. “Isn’t it logical to suppose that if Makor
were the first Jewish town that Vespasian reached, General Josephus would have been here to fight him? How did he escape by night, and why didn’t Josephus himself speak about it? I know why.” The priest rose and stalked about the tell, trying to visualize the town as it must have been two thousand years earlier. “Josephus refuses to mention Makor because here he behaved in some craven way. He writes at length about Jotapata, only a few miles south, because there he was heroic. I tell you, Cullinane, the man always picked and chose. Always!”

By this means Father Vilspronck hoped to explain away the mystery of Josephus. For a score of years this learned Jew had wandered back and forth across the land that Jesus had trod, and during the very years when the actuality of Jesus must have been greatest. In his books Josephus discusses all aspects of Jewish life, the good things and the bad, and he probes into relationships that were not known until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls; and what the archaeologists are uncovering supports the fundamental accuracy of this vivid reporter.

Yet never once does he mention Jesus Christ, the greatest Jew of his age, nor does he refer to Nazareth, although he writes extensively of cities not more than nine miles away. It is a nagging, gnawing fact that the most acute observer Palestine produced saw fit to ignore the major occurrence of his lifetime, the impact of Jesus Christ upon the world. An honest researcher like Father Vilspronck was therefore driven to ask, “Was that impact less than we have been led to believe?”

This question the priest was willing to ask, but he had an answer. “I think that Flavius Josephus consciously suppressed all mention of Jesus Christ and Nazareth, just as he suppressed facts about himself. We know he was a liar,” Vilspronck said. “Time and again we catch him in falsifications. If he says there were eighty thousand Romans, we find there were forty thousand. If he claims to have been a hero, we discover later that his behavior was despicable. In Josephus we have the case of a loyal Jew who convinced himself that Jesus never existed. He had probably seen the followers of our Lord face to face, yet he tried to erase Him from history,”

Silently the two men watched the sun sink behind the minarets of Akko, and a sense of the immensity of the problems they were discussing descended upon them. Finally Vilspronck said, “I used to hold Sigmund Freud in contempt. An enemy of my church. Now I find young priests reacting the same way to me. They feel I shouldn’t inquire into these matters. But when you start digging into a human soul, or a tell, or a historical concept, you quickly find yourself at levels of rawness you did not anticipate. But they confront you and you follow them to their conclusions.”

He rose to his full height, stalked over to Trench B and accidentally stood above the still-buried water shaft through which General Josephus had fled in the night. Turning to Cullinane he said, “The complexity of God is so profound and the mystery of Jesus so great that the addition of one more historical problem like the silence of Josephus must be a minor matter. If your faith is capable of encompassing Jesus it can certainly absorb historical contradictions.”

But he was about to be tested by an experience much more difficult to absorb than mere historical contradiction: he was to encounter an exceedingly difficult
theological problem. The confrontation happened by accident. He was parking his
ejep after having driven Cullinane from the administration building to the mess
hall when he said, “I’d better wash up. I seem to have picked up a lot of dirt on the
tell.”

Unluckily, as things turned out, his remark was heard by Schwartz, who said,
“Use my room,” and he led Vilspronck into the darkness.

They had been gone only a few moments when they returned angrily and it was
obvious that something serious had happened, for Vilspronck was flushed and
Schwartz belligerent. An awkward silence followed, broken by the Dutchman, who
said quietly, “I think I’ll skip supper tonight.” He stalked from the hall, wedged
himself into his jeep and with a flurry of dust turned it around in a tight circle, a
future cardinal who had been able to adjust to whatever new historical evidence
the tell was producing concerning Jews in ancient Palestine or Jesus in the Holy
Land, only to find himself unprepared to face the reality of either condition as
exemplified in a modern kibbutz. As the jeep sped away, Cullinane shouted, “What
happened?” and the big priest called back, “You’d better look at the signs in your
world.”

Perplexed by this reply Cullinane returned to the mess hall and asked for
Schwartz. When the secretary appeared, Cullinane asked, “What did you do to
Father Vilspronck?”

“He had a ticklish digestion. Found he wasn’t hungry.”

“What did he mean—the signs in my world?”

Schwartz hesitated, not because he was embarrassed by what had happened
but because he preferred not to involve Cullinane. Then, shrugging his shoulders,
he said, “Something he saw in my room.”

“Maybe I’d better see it too.”

“Why not?” Schwartz asked indifferently, and he led the way to a dormitory
building in which he had been allocated a one-room apartment. As an unmarried
member of the kibbutz he was entitled to no more, so that even if he served as
secretary for many years, he would still be allotted this one room. It was in no way
unusual—desk, chair, bed, water jug, and of course the three essentials: a large
bookcase jammed with publications, a record player with its stack of classical
records, and a colored reproduction of a painting by Marc Chagall—except that
across one wall hung a carefully lettered banner which read: We did so crucify
Him.

This was the banner of younger Jews who had survived Germany and Arab
invasion and who no longer cared what the rest of the world thought about them.
In early 1964 their motto had become notorious, in an underground sort of way,
for at that time Pope Paul VI’s visit to the Holy Land drew attention to the
possibility that the Catholic Church might issue a pronouncement absolving
present-day Jews of blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, and it was widely hoped
that this generous gesture would remove the stigma under which Jews had
suffered for nearly two thousand years. Some well-intentioned people actually
thought that such a statement would deprive anti-Semitism of its moral base and
would make it difficult for future hate-mongers to initiate pogroms. Throughout
Israel a surge of hope attended discussion of the matter and one hopeful group
had even written to the newspapers: “It will be a glorious day when the Christian...
Church finally exonerates us of our guilt.”

That letter was certainly not signed by Schwartz of Kibbutz Makor nor by any of his friends. They held the offer of absolution to be insulting to the Jewish people and the Pope’s visit to be an act of condescension. They drafted a different letter, which Israeli newspapers considered inflammatory and refused to publish: “It is preposterous for any Pope to come here distributing a forgiveness which is not his to dispense. For two thousand years we Jews have been abused by Christians and it is not their prerogative to forgive us. For them to do so is humiliating both to them and to us, for we are the ones who should forgive them.” As proof of their intention to remain stiff-necked, as God had commanded, Schwartz’s Jews flaunted their unyielding banner: We did so crucify Him.

“Take it down,” Cullinane said.

“Are you kidding?”

“Take it down!” the Irishman roared, unable to maintain his placid nature.

Schwartz laughed and this infuriated Cullinane, who grabbed at him as if to catch his mocking head and punch it, but Schwartz easily evaded him and the two stood facing each other. Cullinane controlled his anger and said, “Right now in Rome the bishops are meeting to correct an ancient wrong. All that you Jews hope for depends on men of good will like Father Vilspronck. And you insult him.” It was obvious that Cullinane was including himself among the men of good will who sought to improve and protect Jewish-Christian relations, and to him also the sign was offensive.

Schwartz ridiculed his well-meaning counselor and said, “Nobody takes that good-will crap seriously any more.”

Cullinane flushed and said grimly, “Then accept my ill will. Take down that sign.”

“Nobody in this room can make me.”

With a leap Cullinane reached the wall, thrusting his fingers behind the cloth and ripping it into two parts. Schwartz rushed up behind him, grabbed at his arms and wrestled with him. Finally Cullinane broke loose, but as he did so, Schwartz got his right arm free and with a wild swinging blow clipped Cullinane along the head and jaw.

The blow so astonished the men that they forgot the torn banner, dropped their arms and stared at each other. Schwartz was ashamed of what he had done and Cullinane was stunned both by the blow and by the furiousness of the struggle, yet he was unable to control his loathing for the sign, so while Schwartz watched he returned to the wall and tore the banner to pieces. “Neither of us can afford hatred,” he said.

Impassively Schwartz watched the destruction of his sign, then said coldly, “I don’t hate anyone. I don’t intend insolence to decent men like Vilspronck. It’s just that I no longer give one good goddamn what you think about Jews. Either of you. For nineteen centuries well-intentioned Jews like me tried to accommodate ourselves to what people like you wanted. And where did it get us? We were attentive to kings and Popes. And what did they do in return? Now we’ve won our own land and we’re going to keep it. And what you or Vilspronck or the Pope or General de Gaulle thinks about it is of no concern to me. Not one little bit.”

Responding automatically Cullinane shot out his right fist and caught Schwartz
on the point of the chin. Like an amazed oak that had paid no attention to the first chipping axe blows, the dark-skinned Jew tottered, then fell in a heap.

This was the first time Cullinane had ever knocked a man unconscious and he was appalled: “My God! I’ve killed him!” But to his relief Schwartz easily recovered, rose to one knee and rubbed his jaw.

“I suppose I deserved it,” he said. And as they walked back to the mess hall Cullinane lavished attention on him as if he were a sick child. Earnestly he said, “It does matter what we think...Vilspronck and men like me... because at the time of crisis we might be the ones who will rescue you.”

Schwartz paused to look at the eager Catholic and said, “For Jews it’s always the time of crisis. And no one ever rescues us.” But that night the two men ate together.

Next morning Vered flew in to Lod Airport on her return from Chicago. When she ran down the ramp like a bright little wren come back to resume control of the tree outside the kitchen, Cullinane thought: What an adorable person.

It had been his intention to ride back to Makor with Vered, so that he might propose again, but this was neatly forestalled by Eliav, who pulled her into his car and drove off, leaving Cullinane and Tabari to bother about the luggage. When Cullinane finally overtook them he and Tabari could see in the car ahead the pert figure of Vered speaking rapidly, interrupted now and then by some sharp rejoinder from Eliav, who kept pointing at her with his pipe stem, as if he were a college professor.

“You think this Cohen business will wreck the marriage?” Cullinane asked.

“Something’s wrecking it. And remember the particular job they’re offering him. He certainly couldn’t accept that job on Monday and marry a divorced woman on Tuesday.”

“What do you think of such rigmarole?”

“I take it seriously.”

“How can you?”

“By looking at history. For something like three hundred generations my family has lived in this area. And in that time we’ve seen a lot of people come and go. But the Jews hang on forever. Because they’ve had that tight body of God’s law binding them together. Today our boy Eliav, who was one of the heroes in the creation of this state, is trapped by the very law he helped preserve.”

“If he had any guts he’d get on the first plane to Cyprus and tell the government to go to hell.”

“John!” the Arab cried. “You’re talking like a liberal Catholic. If the Pope tried to hand you a deal like this Cohen-widow business, you’d ignore him and fly to Cyprus. As a Muslim so would I. But can’t you see the difference? Nobody on the outside is forcing Eliav to respect the ancient law. He did it to himself... by establishing Israel. I’m sure he didn’t intend to set up a state where such law would operate...but that’s what he’s done.” The two men relapsed into silence, which Tabari broke by predicting, “Within two weeks, John, you’re going to have a wife. That girl up there’s not going to marry Eliav.”

“You think not?” Cullinane asked hopefully.

“And then the real funny business begins. Out of sentiment you’ll probably want to marry Vered at the tell, with the kibbutzniks and old Yusuf as witnesses ...”
“That would be ending the dig with a bang. You in robes giving the bride away!”
“I’d do it, too,” Tabari laughed. “But haven’t you heard? In Israel such weddings are forbidden.”
“What do you mean? I’d get papers from the American Embassy.”
“Completely impossible. The rabbis say that in Israel no Jew can marry a Christian. Never. So when you propose to little Vered, get yourself two airplane tickets to Cyprus, because you’ll never get married here.”
“Outrageous!” Cullinane cried. “When the Catholic Church tries a trick like this in Spain, the New York Times has front-page articles about it. You mean that I…”
“I’m in the same boat,” Tabari protested. “As a Muslim I couldn’t marry Vered, either, though I’d like to. We’d have to fly to Cyprus. Matter of fact I did…when I married my wife. She’s a Christian Arab. And Christians and Muslims aren’t allowed to intermarry either.”
“From the way you talk, half the people in Israel who want to get married fly to Cyprus. I don’t believe the rabbis issued these rules at all. I think the airlines did.”
In the forward car the conversation was brisk, with Vered saying, “You needn’t be so superior. There were many things about America I liked.”
“Did you see any American Jews?” Eliav asked.
“Yes. And some impressed me very much.”
“Suchas?”
“Jews who run hospitals, and endow libraries, great art museums, universities. Of course, I also saw the fat, overdressed dowagers. Plenty of them. But somebody’s been giving us a very bum steer about the American Jew. He can be a most powerful person.”
“Would you want to live there?” Eliav asked.
“No. I want to live here…where I helped build a nation. And I want to live with you. And I want to get it all settled by the end of this week.”
“Teddy Reich’s meeting with the prime minister…”
“I don’t want Teddy Reich to be involved, or anyone else. Ilan, you’re to tell me now. Are we going to get married? When are we going to get married?”
“How can I decide until I hear what Teddy has to say?”
“I’ll help you,” Vered said primly, and she handed him a small slip of paper. “On Tuesday there’s an Air France plane to Cyprus. On Wednesday there’s Cyprus Airlines. On Thursday there’s B.E.A. And on Friday morning there’s El Al.”
“And on Saturday I suppose there’s something else.”
“There will be no Saturday… no Sunday… ever.” She folded her hands and kept her eyes straight ahead. When Eliav pointed at her with his pipe she was not looking.
“Is this an ultimatum?”
“The last plane that we will ever consider flies out of here Friday morning. If we aren’t on it…”
“There’s an easy test. It comes Friday morning.”
In silence Eliav drove toward Akko, then asked bluntly, “If I chucked the cabinet and took a teaching job … England… America… would you marry me?”
“Han,” she said softly, and her folded hands left her lap and clutched his forearm, “on the night Ilana died I should have taken over. When I went forward in
Akko to save you, it wasn’t because you were a valuable soldier. You were a man, a splendid man, whom even then I loved.” She began to cry, and whispered, “We should have married sixteen years ago, but then I didn’t understand. Now I do. Make up your mind, Ilan. I’m proposing to you. Marry me now.”

Eliav kept his hands on the steering wheel and his pipe clenched between his teeth. Staring at the minarets of Akko he turned the car eastward along the Damascus road, and the moment when he should have made his decision passed, and in various airports around the world the four planes that would fly that week to Cyprus tested their engines and were swept out by women wearing overalls. It was Monday.

When the archaeologists reached the dig the mood was autumnal: only Yusuf and his family of twelve worked at the job of closing down the installations and it was obvious that the old man was beginning to find himself isolated in Israel. Already his children were learning Hebrew and adopting kibbutz ways. His three wives were accommodating themselves to Israel, and the pregnant one was even going by herself to the Kupat Holim doctor to discover how to have a baby in a modern way. From their children the mothers were learning Hebrew, and the old patriarch was left alone, a man out of place in a world that he would never catch up with. His eleven underlings, once so subservient in Morocco, now assumed easy control of the family; no longer was he a man of authority, and as the years passed, the half-blind old man would grow in bitterness, while his new land stole from him his dignity, his language and his comprehension. On Tuesday the Air France plane took off for Cyprus and Morocco.

Ilan Eliav did not laugh at old Yusuf in his deepening solitude, for he felt himself to be in a comparable prison. Vered was proving unpredictably difficult; she still insisted upon an immediate answer. “The last plane leaves on Friday,” she warned. Wednesday came and Thursday, and B.E.A. made its flight. On Friday morning Cullinane, watching two people whom he cherished caught in such a vis, intruded against his own best interests; waiting till he found them together in the ceramics room, he joined them casually and said, “I’m not using a phrase when I say that what you two are doing to yourselves is breaking my heart. Eliav, if you decide to chuck the cabinet business, if you do fly to Cyprus, I will personally guarantee you work for ten years here at Makor and a teaching position in the Chicago area for the rest of your life. And I’m certain we can find Vered a job teaching archaeological ceramics. I make this offer because I don’t want you to reach decisions due to economic pressure.”

“I’ve been asked to teach at Oxford,” Eliav said dryly. “Knowing my background you must appreciate how enticing that would be.”

“I spoke only as a gesture of honor. I don’t want to marry Vered because you couldn’t...”

At this moment Vered was consulting her watch, and she seemed to be marking off the minutes one by one, until finally she rose and said quietly, “The last plane has gone.” Looking at Eliav she placed her hands in his and stood tiptoe to kiss him. “I wanted you so much,” she said haltingly.

She broke down and Eliav was unable to console her, so Cullinane, moving quietly, placed his arm about her shoulder and drew her away. “We’ll come back to Makor in the summers,” he said. “When he can, Eliav will leave Jerusalem and
She pushed him away and looked at him as if he were a stranger. “What are you saying, John? I warned you I’d marry only a Jew.” Then, seeing the shock on his face, she muttered, “Damn, damn,” and ran from the room.

The meaning of her behavior did not become clear until three o’clock that afternoon when Paul J. Zodman arrived unannounced in Israel, jumped into a car supplied by the U.J.A. and roared up to Makor. Bursting into an end-of-week staff meeting he said crisply, “I stayed out of this for a week. To give Dr. Eliav the time he needed to make up his mind. He hasn’t married Vered. Neither has Cullinane. So I’m going to. Sunday morning.”

It was Cullinane who said the asinine thing. He stared at Vered, who had regained her composure and was again a little Astarte, her eyes modestly downcast, and then he looked at Zodman, expensively dressed in blue sharkskin, freshly shaved, committed and eager. “But you already have a wife!”

“Had,” Zodman corrected.

“Oh, my God!” Cullinane cried. “Is that why you sent me the cable Come to Chicago? You knew I couldn’t leave and you gambled that Vered could...” He saw Zodman and Vered smile, and to his surprise he cried, “Zodman, you’re a plain son of a bitch!”

The merchant brushed this aside and said congenially, “Look, John! I came here two months ago an unmarried man. I saw two other unmarried men, you and Eliav, allowing an adorable widow... So I brought her to Chicago to see if she’d marry me.” There was silence, after which Zodman said quietly, “She said ‘No.’ Wouldn’t even let me romance her. Said she was engaged to Eliav, and that if he wouldn’t marry her because of the Cohen business, she might marry you, John, and to hell with being a Jew.”

The group gasped, even Vered. She looked appealingly at Zodman and reminded him, “You were not to speak of that.”

But Zodman continued, “Somewhere along the line all of you have loused things up, so on Sunday, Vered and I are getting married and flying back to Chicago.”

Cullinane looked at the various people and said plaintively, “This dig is going to end just like Macalister at Gezer. My executive goes into the government. My pottery expert flies to Chicago. Tabari, you and I are going to dig this tell all by ourselves.”

“We’ll find you somebody,” Zodman joked; but as Eliav had pointed out, it was never easy to be a Jew, and the Chicago millionaire was about to discover this in a most painful way. He proposed to drive Vered that night to Jerusalem to get a permit for their marriage, but Eliav reminded him that he couldn’t drive because it was Shabbat. “Who gives a damn about Shabbat?” Zodman snapped, and he roared his borrowed car southward across the Galilee.

In Jerusalem no one would speak to him on Shabbat and on Sunday he was advised by the rabbinical board, “Sorry, Mr. Zodman, but you can’t get married in Israel.”

Without raising his voice he asked, “And why not?”

“Because we have decided that no divorce granted by an ordinary American rabbi can be trusted.”

“Rabbi Hirsch Bromberg is scarcely average.” Zodman had been on the
committee that selected Bromberg.

“He’s not on the approved list,” a secretary reported.

Still keeping his voice low Zodman said, “I also have a perfectly good civil divorce from the state of Illinois.”

“Israel recognizes no civil divorce,” the rabbis replied.

“You mean to say that from this little room you’re going to judge all the Jews of the world?”

“In Israel it is our responsibility to say who can get married and who cannot,” the rabbis insisted.

In a very low voice Zodman asked, “And I can’t?”

“No.”

“I’m a large contributor to the Republican party,” Zodman said ominously. “I know Senator Dirksen and Paul Douglas.” His voice rose to a roar. “And I will not accept this insult.”

He stormed down to Tel Aviv to see the American ambassador—the state of Israel claimed Jerusalem as its capital and governed the country from there, but foreign powers, still holding that under the United Nations agreement all of Jerusalem was internationalized, insisted upon keeping their embassies in Tel Aviv and recognizing only it as the capital—but the legal aide to the ambassador assured him that the situation in Israel was precisely as the rabbis had explained it: there was no civil marriage; the local rabbis refused to recognize divorces issued by most American rabbis; and there was no conceivable way by which Zodman could marry Vered Bar-El. “Of course,” the young man suggested, “what many do is to fly to Cyprus. Such a wedding does leave the status of the children to be born of the marriage uncertain, insofar as Israel is concerned, but if you don’t plan to live in Israel...”


There it was agreed that Zodman and Vered must fly to Cyprus, as so many other Jewish couples were doing, and in the days required for Vered to clean up her work on the first year’s dig, the five leaders of the expedition had repeated opportunities for extended cross-questioning, during which Vered made her position clear: she was leaving Israel not because she liked large cars and air-conditioning, which her friends would charge, saying that she had sold out to the fleshpots of Egypt; not because she was afraid of the future, for she had given ample proof of her courage; not because her allegiance to a Jewish state had flagged, for she knew Israel to be the only tenable solution in a world where other sovereign states had been unable to protect the Jew or give him any honorable alternative to a homeland of his own; but rather because she felt that as a human being aged thirty-three she could no longer bear the burdens of a religion in the throes of becoming a state, with its military problems, social problems, economic problems and especially its complex religious problems. “I’ve done my part for Judaism,” she said without bravado. “I risked my life in more than a dozen battles, lost my husband, lost most of my friends, and I really do believe that I’m entitled to say, ’Rachel, from now on you be the Jewess. Little Vered is just too damned tired.’”

Her words had such a startling effect on Eliav that Cullinane thought the new
cabinet minister might strike her, but he clenched his hands and asked coldly, “How can you turn your back on all we fought for? Can’t you remember Safad?”

And Vered, speaking softly as one who has discovered her portion of truth, however meager, said, “Do I remember? Eliav, it seems to me we Jews spend our lives remembering, and I’ve suddenly discovered that I’m sick and tired of living in a land of remembrance. My year in Jerusalem begins with Rosh Hashana when I remember Abraham, four thousand years ago. Then comes Yom Kippur, and we remember everything. The Feast of the Booths and we remember the desert years. Like a great bronze bell tolling over the churches of Jerusalem, we tick off our days and remember our grief. Of course, there are a few happy days. Simhat Torah, Hanukkah, when we remember the victory of the Maccabees, Arbor Day for remembering trees. At Purim we remember Persia three thousand years ago and at Passover we remember Egypt even longer ago. Lag Ba Omer, Shavuot. And on the Ninth of Ab we mourn the loss of Jerusalem. When did we lose it? Two thousand years ago. We have special days to remember Herzl, students, socialists, the United Nations, the brave men who fell defending Jerusalem in 1948, and Independence Day. For years I dutifully remembered and thought it was natural to spend one’s life weeping over the dead past, uttering lamentations for things that happened so terribly long ago. It was a burden, but it was our special, inescapable Jewish burden and I accepted it.

“And then I went to Chicago. And I lugged that lousy Candlestick of Death up and down Illinois making speeches to Jewish women’s clubs, the kind Israelis like to joke about, and do you know what I discovered? That some of the finest people this world has produced are the Jewish women of Illinois. They live wonderful, satisfying lives without remembering Persia and Egypt and the Maccabees and the Sinai Desert and Jerusalem. They work for the local art museum and build new wings for the hospital and serve on the board of education and pay the deficit for the symphony orchestra and do all they can to make their world a better place to live in. Take away from Illinois what the Jewish women do, and that state would be a dump. And the only thing those women are required to remember is when to make the next payment on the television set. And you may be surprised to hear it, but I can hardly wait to become one of them.”

Eliav clenched his hands and pulled them against his stomach. In pain he asked, “For this emptiness you’d sacrifice Judaism? For the fleshpots of Egypt, stainless-steel version?”

“Stop it!” Vered cried, beating her palms against the table. “Stop throwing those old clichés at me. I raise a clear, well-defined issue and you mumble what sententious Jews have been mumbling since the time of Moses. The fleshpots of Egypt. I refuse to accept that any longer.” She waved her hands and placed them over her ears. “I refuse to spend the rest of my life remembering. I will not remember.”

Eliav, again in control of his bitterness, said quietly, “Your Gentile neighbors in Illinois will do your remembering for you,” and it was on this point that Eliav and Zodman initiated their acrimonious debate.

ISRAELI: Does Vered think that by going to America she escapes being a Jew?
AMERICAN: She certainly does.
ISRAELI: She escapes until that moment on her honeymoon when the hotel clerk says, “No Jews allowed.”

AMERICAN: We learn how to avoid such hotels.

ISRAELI: Or until the medical school tells her son, “Our Jewish quota is filled.”

AMERICAN: They don’t put it that way any more.

ISRAELI: Or until a new Senator McCarthy comes along. And fails in his economic promises. And has to use you Jews as his scapegoat.

AMERICAN: Now we have safeguards against that sort of thing.

ISRAELI: Or until some new international tragedy like Nazi Germany…

AMERICAN: The world will never again allow a thing like that to happen.

ISRAELI: It will happen before your first son is born. South Africa? Quebec?

AMERICAN: Something will be worked out, I’m sure.

ISRAELI: You sound just like my uncle in Gretz, 1933. And he was right. Something was indeed worked out. And they hung Adolf Eichmann for having worked it out.

AMERICAN: You can’t go on scaring the Jews of America, Eliav.

ISRAELI: I don’t do the scaring. History does.

AMERICAN: In America we have guarantees that protect us from history. Besides, you overlook one important fact. In America that natural hatred which exists in all people is directed not against the Jew but the Negro.

ISRAELI: If he perishes, you perish.

AMERICAN: You can’t apply European experience to America. It’s the greatest error I hear Israelis make, and you make it all the time. We Americans are different. Of my non-Jewish neighbors more than half have come from outside countries. We’re all minority groups.

ISRAELI: And they brought their anti-Jewish prejudice with them. You say you’re different, but it’s not because you’re an American. It’s because you’re a Jew, and America will never let you forget that difference. Neither you nor your children.

AMERICAN: Years go by without my experiencing a shred of anti-Semitism.

ISRAELI: You experience it every day, but have become hardened to it.

AMERICAN: Seems to me you’re angry with us American Jews for two reasons. We’ve built a new way of life that’s the best the Jew has ever known in this world. And we refuse to emigrate to Israel.

ISRAELI: Let’s take your reasons one at a time. As for your new way of life, it’s a false old dream in a golden ghetto. A religion that isn’t Judaism. A synagogue that’s a mere social center and a third generation that thinks it’s been accepted by the majority if it names its son Bryan. It’s a shallow, ugly, materialistic pattern of life, and it leads to one clear goal: assimilation. The rate of intermarriage among young Jews in America is over ten per cent and climbing toward twenty-five. A new way of life? No, an old delusion leading to oblivion, when there will be no more Jews.

AMERICAN: That doesn’t frighten me. If following Moses for four thousand years has got us where we are, a people totally apart, I think it’s time we tried the American pattern. I’ll be a good Jew. Vered will be. But if my son Bryan, as you call him, wants to lose himself in the main stream, I say let him do it.
ISRAELI: In that case Israel is really needed to preserve Judaism, and you’ve been very remiss about sending us immigration to help save the Jewish state.

AMERICAN: Our job is to stay in America and make it the safest home in the world for Jews. And then to share our goodness with our fellow Jews in Israel. And if I may be forgiven a personal reference, I have been careful to share that goodness and have advised my rich neighbors in Chicago to do the same.

ISRAELI: You’ve been generous with everything but human beings. Have you ever watched an immigrant ship arrive? Mostly uneducated people from Africa. People call them Arab-Jews. Strong-minded Ashkenazim fear that if such immigration dominates for the next hundred years, Israel can only become another Levantine state. A Middle East backward country in which a handful of European Jews ran things for a while before submerging their state in some kind of honorable alliance with Lebanon or Egypt. And so the vision of a Jewish homeland perishes once more. I’m not so pessimistic. I’m dedicating my life to the proposal that we can establish some kind of Jewish-Arab federation in this area, to the benefit of both. But to do this we must have more highly educated western Jews. And men like you accept no responsibility.

AMERICAN: Indeed I do! I send you every nickel the law allows.

ISRAELI: But people you won’t send? Yourself, for instance.

AMERICAN: Me? Live here?

ISRAELI: Yes. Instead of contributing manpower, you take away one of the most highly educated women we have. And next year you’ll take away half a dozen of our best-trained young Jews. As a matter of fact, you’d like to take me, wouldn’t you?

AMERICAN: Last time I said I’d be proud to have both you and Tabari.

ISRAELI: And you see nothing immoral in this? Using Israel as an intellectual quarry from which to dig the brains your system has failed to produce?

AMERICAN: I believe that a man of talent must go where he can make the best living. And when he’s done so, he must share his bounty with others. You can be sure that when Vered becomes an American we’ll send large sums of money each year to Israel.

ISRAELI: We… don’t… want… charity!

AMERICAN: You damned well ask for it hard enough. Every year the U.J.A. man perches on my desk. “We must do more for Israel! It’s a brave country, fighting our battle.”

ISRAELI: So you want to keep us a minor Montenegro? A little enclave that thrills the world because its fighters defend themselves against the Arab circle? So that Jews in America can feel pride? What would be the moral justification for such an Israel? But if we can become a beacon of pure, burning light, illuminating this entire area, forming an alliance with a prospering Arab world…making it a true fertile crescent…

AMERICAN: You sound like the U.J.A. man.

ISRAELI: There’s no other way to sound. And what I want Israel to become she cannot become if the Jews of America steal our talent and return only money.

AMERICAN: Where the hell would you be, Eliav, if we didn’t send the money? If there’s one thing you Israelis had better quit, it’s your flippancy charge that the Jews of America are interested only in material things. I drove to Jerusalem to see
the rabbis, God forbid, and I passed forests planted by Americans, hospitals paid for by Americans, university buildings bearing American names, rest homes paid for by Jews in Montana, kibbutz buildings paid for by Jews in Massachusetts, and, I might add, archaeological sites being excavated by Americans. If that’s materialism, you’d better hope your citizens develop some, because if you took away the gifts of our selfish, materialistic Americans this would be a shabby land.

ISRAELI: And if the gifts weren’t tax deductible, you wouldn’t send us a penny.

AMERICAN: But they are tax deductible because that’s the generous kind of country America is.

ISRAELI: Your money we appreciate. It’s your people we need.

AMERICAN: Men like me you won’t get. Life in America is too good. Besides, who would want to live in a land where rabbis have the power they have here?

ISRAELI: You better make up your mind. On your first visit you complained because our kibbutz had no synagogue. Now you complain because in marriage we follow Jewish law. What is it you American Jews expect of us?

AMERICAN: I expect Israel to preserve the old customs. I like it when your hotels are kosher. And no buses are allowed to run on Saturdays. It makes me feel like a Jew.

ISRAELI: And to keep that feeling alive—somewhere else in the world, not in America—you’re willing to send us ninety thousand dollars a year?

AMERICAN: How do you know what I send?

ISRAELI: It’s my business to know. For the money I’m grateful. For the men you don’t send, I hold you in contempt.

AMERICAN: Look here, Eliav!

ISRAELI: Contempt, I said. If you and Vered have a son, would you send him to Israel?

AMERICAN: Of course I would. I’d want him to work in a kibbutz some summer. For two weeks.

ISRAELI: You stupid…

AMERICAN: You don’t seem to understand the fundamental nature of American-Israel relations.

ISRAELI: Do you?

AMERICAN: A damned sight better than you seem to. Israel must exist. As the focus of our religion. The way the Vatican exists for Catholics. But good Catholics don’t emigrate to the Vatican. They stay in Boston, Massachusetts, and Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California, not to mention Sydney, Australia. And they work like hell and build good Catholic lives and send the money rolling back to Rome. You forget that we have more Jews in New York City than you do in all of Israel. If you take the whole United States, we have three times as many as you do. We’re the important part of the Jewish world. And our job is not to come here. Our job is to be the best damned Jews in the world, right in Chicago, and to support you with every expression of good will we can muster…with money, with tourists, with American votes at the United Nations, with arms if necessary. This country is our Vatican, and if I hadn’t seen the Vodzher Rebbe up there in the hills, I’d never give Israel another dime, because he’s what I expect of this country. Piety. Kosher restaurants. Men who keep the spirit of Judaism alive. Do I make myself clear?
ISRAELI: It would be a good day for Israel if you never returned and if you forgot us completely. Let us find our own level. Let us make peace with history and subside into a minor colony with an excellent university from which our best minds emigrate each year to Buenos Aires, Damascus, Chicago and other backward areas. Let the rabbis brood over the Torah and Talmud, but let Israel as a vital state perish, because as it is it imposes too terrible a burden. Vered can no longer sustain it in its present form, and you refuse to help. You want us to go back to the old days. When my wife’s grandfather reached Tiberias, out of a Jewish population of more than a thousand he found only two or three men at work. The rest waited for the dole from Europe, and when it came they prayed extra hard, insuring sanctity for the Jews who could not live in Israel. Are you proposing to re-establish that system?

AMERICAN: I’m proposing that Israel remain just as it is. That it be the spiritual center of Judaism. That I accept a responsibility for keeping it alive.

ISRAELI: For a man who’s made several million dollars, Zodman, you’re incredibly stupid. Don’t you see that for Israel to prosper is far more important to you and Vered, living in Chicago, than it is to Tabari and me, living here? That Israel protects you from the next Nazism? That Israel gives the Jew dignity you’ve never had before. How many Jewish taxi drivers in New York have said to me, as I rode to the United Nations, “You characters over there make me proud I’m a Jew.” You boast of your contributions. You know what I think? I think the state of Israel ought to tax men like you about forty cents on the dollar. To pay for the services we render you.

AMERICAN: How can you expect to hold the good will of a man like me if you talk like that?

ISRAELI: I don’t want your good will. I don’t want your condescension.

AMERICAN: What do you want?

ISRAELI: Immigration. Your help to stay alive.

AMERICAN: I’m an American and I owe Israel no allegiance. If you keep talking like this FU stop being a Jew.

ISRAELI: Ah, that’s not for you to decide. Cullinane can stop being an Irishman and no one cares. He can announce one morning, “I’m no longer a Catholic,” and it’s his decision. But if you shout for the next ten years, “I’m not a Jew,” it signifies nothing, for that’s a problem which your neighbor decides. Not you. No Jew can ever cease being a Jew.

AMERICAN: In America we’re writing new rules.

ISRAELI: But your new rules will be judged by old standards. In Spain hundreds of thousands of Jews said, “We’re no longer Jews. We’re Spanish Catholics,” but even after two hundred years Spain said, “Sorry, you’re still Jews.” In Germany the followers of Mendelssohn said, “We’re integrated Germans. We’re no longer Jews,” but the Germans said, “Sorry, your grandmother was a Jew, so are you, forever and ever.” But if you seek a classic application of your theory, go to the island of Mallorca. In 1391 a fearful massacre of Jews swept the place, after which those remaining converted to Catholicism. Study what happened to them. Massacred, burned alive, proscribed, jammed into a ghetto, always loyal Catholics but unable to escape being Jews. The story is too terrible to repeat, but remember this. Each Shabbat those one-time Jews used to eat pork on the public streets to
prove that they were no longer Jews, but after five hundred years no real Catholic of Mallorca had ever married one of them, for they were still Jews. And it’s our burden to bear this testimony.

AMERICAN: You try to argue that history never changes. America proves that history does change. What happened in Mallorca bears no relationship to what will happen in America. We are free, and our freedom is assured. The whole constitution of our society confirms that freedom, and I trust it.

ISRAELI: I do too, Zodman. Until the day when China becomes a major power and humiliates you in some way. Until the day when A.T. and T. drops to forty and you have another economic crisis. Until Senator McCarthy’s successor comes along. Those days will be the test. Some time you should talk with the secretary of this kibbutz. Last year he went back to Russia on a visit. For forty years Russia claimed that it was the new paradise for Jews, and many Jews agreed. You know, when he got to Russia last year not one of his relatives would even speak to him. They looked at him and slammed the door. They paid a trusted friend to visit him in the hotel. At great risk. To tell him, “Go home. Tell no one that you are related to us. And when you get to Israel, put nothing in the paper against Russia or we will disappear and never be heard of again.” Don’t you suppose that if Russia allowed Jews to emigrate, millions would fly to Israel?

AMERICAN: I must believe in the goodness of my country. I want Israel to be here, for others. I want the Vodzheimer Rebbe to have his synagogue, for others. And I’ll pay to keep his synagogue going. But my home, my entire future, must be in America.

ISRAELI: But your spiritual home will be here.

AMERICAN: I’m not so sure. The decisions of your rabbis on cases like my divorce will probably drive us further and further apart. We’ll have two Jewries: the spiritual one here, the great effective one in America, and between them little contact.

ISRAELI: No job is more important for each of us than preserving that contact.

AMERICAN: Now Vered and I must leave... for the best home the Jews of the world have ever had.

ISRAELI: And when the trouble strikes, Israel will be waiting.

This final exchange took place one night as Schwartz lingered at the table to listen, and when the conflicting points of view were neatly tied into gentlemanly packages, as in a formal debate between men dressed in black ties, he startled the group by voicing the hard truth of the matter they had been discussing: “You talk as if the future were going to be like the past. It’s all changed, Zodman. You live in a much different world. So do you, Eliav.”

“What do you mean?” Zodman asked.

“Just this. A couple of years ago a lot of synagogues were bombed in Florida. Remember?”

“What has Florida to do with me?”

“And it looked as if a strong anti-Semitic wave was beginning. My group here in Israel followed it very closely. And it may shock you to know that if those bombings had continued one more week we were prepared to smuggle armed volunteers into Florida. To train the loca? Jews. And to shoot it out... for keeps.”
Zodman gulped, Cullinane leaned forward to ask, “You were going to invade Florida?”

“Why not? Germany killed six million Jews and the world has never stopped asking, ‘Why didn’t somebody fight back?’” He rubbed his forearms and for the first time Cullinane saw that each had been badly broken. “I fought back. So did a lot of others. They’re mostly dead now. But if the good people of Miami, or Quebec, or Bordeaux decide some day to liquidate their Jews, I personally shall appear in that city to fight back again.”

A shocked hush fell over the room as Zodman and Cullinane tried to apply this challenge to America, but they were unable to do so because Schwartz was speaking: “You won’t fight back, Zodman, because your kind never does. You didn’t in Berlin or Amsterdam or Paris, And you won’t either, Cullinane. You’ll pray and you’ll issue most moving statements and you’ll regret the whole mess, but you won’t raise a finger. And Eliav as a trained seal of the government will announce, The responsible nations of the world really must do something,’ but he won’t have a clue as to what.” With contempt Schwartz looked at the three men and said, “But no one will ever again have to ask, ‘Why didn’t the Jews do something?’ Because my group will be doing just that.”

He moved to Zodman and said, “So when trouble starts in Chicago and you’re positive it will go away if Jews keep the governor and the chief of police happy, nobody expects you to do anything, Zodman. All we ask is this. If in that time of trouble you see me on the street and you realize that I have come over from Israel to lead the Jewish resistance, don’t betray me. Look the other way and pass on in silence. Because I shall be there to save you.”

He nodded brusquely to the three men and left the discussion, a hard-disciplined man who cultivated an unemotional view of the contemporary world. He was a man whom Cullinane had grown to respect and actually to like, a tough-minded man who stood ready to take on the whole Christian church, the united Arabs, the diffident Jews of Florida, the vacillating Gentiles and anyone else who wanted to break into the act. It was reassuring to know that such men populated the new Israel, and Cullinane offered a benediction to Schwartz’s self-contained arrogance: “If you can harness his courage, Eliav, you’ll build a great land here.”

Zodman said, “If I ever meet him walking the streets of Chicago, first thing I’ll do is call a cop,” but Vered said quietly, “You may think differently, Paul, after we’ve talked awhile.”

The following morning Zodman, the American Jew, took Vered, the sabra, to Cyprus, where they were married by a Church of England minister who made a lucrative business out of uniting couples who were honestly in love but who, under Jewish law, were not permitted to marry. He was a wizened little man with ill-fitting teeth, and when he blessed the Zodmans he said, “Tell all my good Jews not to be disturbed about this monkey business. Years ago my church used to have the same kind of silly laws, which made people run away from England to get married in Gretna Green, but we got over it. Bet you didn’t know Gretna Green was in Scotland.” He made the marriage a deeply tender thing, a true religious ritual, and at the end he asked shyly, “Since there is no one to give away the bride, may I be permitted to kiss the beautiful lady?” He was barely as tall as Vered.

The unpleasant manner in which Zodman and Vered departed from Makor left a
residue of bitterness, and it was Cullinane who observed, “In 70 C.E., after General Vespasian captured Makor, his son Titus captured the symbols of Judaism and hauled them off to Rome. Today Zodman buys them for immediate transshipment to America.” Eliav added glumly, “Maybe he was right. Maybe the leadership of Judaism will pass to American hands.” And the unhappiness of the two men was so depressing that Cullinane was relieved to invent an excuse for running off to Jerusalem. Explaining to no one he banged out of his office, calling over his shoulder, “You fellows better start boxing up the papers,” but Tabari, aware of Eliav’s gloom, thought: It would be a lot better if Cullinane stayed here and let Ilan get away for a few days.

The thoughtful Arab therefore scouted around for some fresh work to divert Eliav’s attention from Vered, and one morning as he stood on the bedrock of Trench B, under which there could be nothing, he chanced to notice that at the northwestern end of the uncovered rock there was a barely perceptible dip to the west, and taking a small pick he began gingerly to undercut the perpendicular west wall of the trench, finding, as he had suspected, that the falling away of the rock continued in the direction of the wadi. Satisfied on this basic point he sat in the trench for some two hours and did nothing but look at the massive rock; and as he visualized the various settlements that had occupied the tell he was constantly left with a mystery. Where had the original well stood? And he began to direct all his speculation to the earliest settlement—Level XV, about eleven thousand years ago, as man was just beginning to farm—and he came again and again to the conclusion that the original families must have lived somewhere off the face of this gently sloping rock and closer to the fugitive well, wherever it was. His thought processes were not entirely conscious: as a member of the Family of Ur he had a keen sense of land and he somehow felt that the earliest farmers must have sought fields at the bottom of sloping land, so that what rains fell would irrigate their crops and bring down each year fresh sediment to serve as fertilizer for soil which would otherwise be quickly depleted. Near the rock of Makor, where would such land have been?

He stopped his thinking, made his mind a blank, and tried to conjure up the bedrock of this tell as it had existed, not eleven thousand years ago, but two hundred thousand, three hundred thousand ... He began to perspire as his body grew one with the ancient land. His hands grew clammy and he breathed hard. For if he could calculate where this sloping rock had ended he might deduce where the missing well had been, and if he found that, he might project the history of the tell backward sixty or a hundred thousand years. Perhaps Makor would turn out to be one of the great archaeological sites, a classic that scholars would refer to as they now spoke of Carmel, Jericho and Gezer.

“Eliav!” he called at the end of three hours. The Jew was working at Trench A but a runner summoned him, and soon from the top of the cut he looked down.

“Find something interesting?” he asked, using the archaeologist’s constant inquiry.

“Come on down here,” Tabari said, masking the excitement he felt. When Eliav saw the pick work at the base of the west face of the trench he asked what was up, and Tabari said, “Study it. See anything?” The Jew dropped to his knees, inspected the unbroken rock closely and said, “No tool marks. No inscriptions.” He
drew back and looked at the whole area for some minutes, then dropped to his knees again and studied the level. He rose in great excitement and said, “The whole thing slopes definitely that way.” He paused, looked at Tabari with flashes of excitement in his eyes and said, hesitantly, “And if the slope continued, it could easily be that somewhere out there, outside the tell…” He stopped.

“Ilan,” the Arab said cautiously, “I think this slope may lead us to the well.”

“There’s a chance,” Eliav agreed, with even greater caution. “If so, the well would have to be down in the wadi,” and he pointed in exactly the direction that Tabari had deduced.

Controlling their eagerness the two men climbed down the steep bank to inspect each likely site for a well, but so much detritus had accumulated in that area that any source which might have been there had long since been smothered and now sent its water off through subterranean channels. The men therefore ranged far afield through the bottom of the wadi, searching for some undetected outcropping of water, but none showed. Finally Tabari said, “I think we’ve got to follow the slope of the rock. See where it leads.”

Eliav agreed, but protocol demanded that they get permission from John Cullinane, who was, after all, the man in charge. Eliav side-stepped this by saying slowly, “I think our responsibility permits us to make a little dig on our own,” and with timbers to shore up the ceiling behind them, the two men started a small boring which led them down past the edge of the basic rock. The timbers were not really needed, for over a period of some twenty thousand years the limestone from the waters that had seeped off the rock had transformed the once-soft earth into breccia, a kind of semi-rock which was easy to cut through but which held its own form, and on the fifth day of this digging Jemail Tabari encountered a small pocket of this breccia and realized that the dig was fundamentally altered.

“Get Cullinane back here at once,” he called as he stuck his dusty, dirty head from the minute tunnel.

“Find something?” Eliav asked nonchalantly.

“Not the well…” Tabari held out his hands and in them he carried a chunk of breccia containing a human bone, some sharp-pointed flints and a substantial deposit of charred fragments. “I think I’ve struck the edge of a large cave that had its opening on the face of the wadi.”

With controlled excitement Eliav studied the find and said, “Let’s get a girl in there to sketch it.”

“I touched only what my pick broke off,” Tabari explained. “The main part is encased in solid breccia, but I did see something that seemed indicative. The corpse was buried with these flints. It wasn’t an accidental burial.”

Eliav raised his eyebrows. “This could go back thirty thousand years,” he suggested.

“That would be my guess,” Tabari agreed cautiously. “And that’s not all. Right beyond the cave... It’s all filled up, you understand. I thought I was running into a rock that echoed. As if on the other side it were empty.”

“Unlikely,” Eliav replied.

“I thought so too. But go on in and take a sounding. I’ll call the photographer.”

So Ilan Eliav wormed his way through the low tunnel until he came to the end; and there, to the right or northern side, he saw imbedded in the hard breccia the
cache which Tabari had come upon. His first thought was: It'll take two years to excavate this properly. He felt a pang of regret to think that he would not be there to help; but then his imaginative mind started to dress in living flesh the ends of bone which projected from the breccia, and he wondered who this ancient thing—this man, perhaps—had been. What hangers had he known, what security from realizing that when he died he would carry with him stone beads? How had he gone finally to earth and with what immortal longings? Here in the darkness of the tunnel thousands upon thousands of years later, another man, much like him perhaps, still wearing his flesh for a few more inquisitive years, met him face-to-kneebone and knew only that there was mystery.

Eliav crawled a few paces beyond the imbedded skeleton and found himself facing the end wall of which Tabari had spoken. Using a fragment of the breccia which had held the bones he tapped on the wall ahead. In some strange way it echoed. He was convinced it echoed. He therefore tapped the side walls and the roof and the floor on which he knelt, and from them there returned a different sound. He tapped the end wall again, and there could be no doubt: perhaps it wasn’t really an echo, but it was something different.

He reached back for Tabari’s pick, left where the important bones had been found, and with it tapped cautiously at the facing semi-rock. The point of the pick dug in easily, and when it was pried backward, broke away a small chunk of the soft rock. Carefully he placed the rock behind him for the basket men to haul out, and with another cramped blow chipped away some more. On the third strike he was startled by the clarity of the echo sound, and he began to dig with some force, throwing the broken rock over his shoulder. His lantern was now obscured by the debris which he was accumulating, and he knew that he should stop to clear it, but he was gripped by a most intense excitement. Swinging his pick with un-archaeological vigor he felt its point bite through a thin layer of semi-rock and then leap forward into nothingness.

He began to perspire copiously, even though the tunnel was cool and he was lean, but he mastered his excitement and became again the professional archaeologist. He left the pick where it was and started slowly to back away, crawling over his own rubble. When he reached the spot where the bones projected he stopped and began flattening the rubble out, piece by piece, until his lantern again threw light on the face of the tunnel, from which the pick suspended at a curious angle. When the tunnel was again in order he returned to the pick and gently rotated it in various directions. Its hidden point contacted nothing and he was tempted to withdraw it and strike again, opening a real hole into the mysterious void, but he felt that this would be unfair to Tabari. He therefore left the pick in position, placed the lantern so that it illuminated not the pick but the projecting bones, and started the crawl back to Trench B.

When he got there Tabari had the girl artist and the photographer waiting, but Eliav in a businesslike manner called for a basket man to go in first and haul out the rubble. “And don’t touch the pick,” he warned. When the man was gone he instructed the artist and the photographer to get the most complete data on the breccia-held bones, and also to catch the details of the pick as it pierced the end wall. When the briefing was completed he took Tabari aside and said, “I dug out a little more of the end wall, and on the last blow your pick cracked through a thin
facing of the soft rock. It struck emptiness.”

Illustration:
Burial (shells and necklace flints enlarged

“You're sure?” Tabari asked.
“I tested it in different directions. Nothing. But I left it for you.”
“A cave? A well?”
“I don't even have an opinion,” Eliav said.

At lunchtime the girl who had crawled in to do the sketching took one of Cullinane’s cards and drew the probable disposition of the skeleton embedded in the breccia. There was hushed excitement as the card circulated, and Tabari asked, “Where’d you dredge up the date 70,000 B.C.E.?”
“Educated guess,” the artist explained. “The flints in the breccia seem to correlate with ones shown for such dating in Garrod and Stekelis.”

When the matter had been well discussed Eliav ventured the opinion that carbon dating would probably place the skeleton at no earlier than 30,000 B.C.E. and Tabari supported him. “Our bones aren’t going to be as old as those found in the Mount Carmel caves by Dorothy Garrod,” he predicted.

“You think the breccia indicates a cave?” the photographer asked.

“Let’s consider that for a moment,” the Arab said. “If it had originally been a cave, say, fifty thousand years ago, and the entrance was filled in, wouldn’t it now be filled in, too? How could there possibly be any empty space left?”

“He’s probably right,” Eliav confirmed, and the kibbutzniks dissected the theory for some time, concluding in the end that it could not have been a cave.

“Not an original cave,” one of the kibbutzniks agreed, “but why not a dug cave, like the ones Kathleen Kenyon found outside the walls at Jericho?”

“Let’s consider that too,” Tabari said. “In your opinion, what would be the oldest date we might logically assume for such a dug cave... one that wasn’t now filled in with breccia?”

“Kenyon’s graves were 2000 B.C.E.,” the kibbutznik volunteered. “And they were certainly not filled in. So ours could be... what? Maybe 3000 B.C.E. at the most.”

Eliav listened with pleasure. In Israel everyone was an archaeologist, and the kibbutznik had his dates right, but Tabari pointed out, “You’re a little early. Remember that Jericho is very dry and we’re very wet. In wet areas caves fill in much faster.”

“Then what is the empty space?” the kibbutznik demanded.
Tabari thought for some time, then said cautiously, “Since some of you want to
work here for the next eight or ten years, let’s try some pure deduction. I’ll tell you categorically that I’ve ruled out caves. Now what else might it be?” There was silence. “What major component of a tell are we lacking here at Makor?”

“Water supply,” a kibbutznik suggested.

“Correct.” He still pronounced it koe-rect. “And what does that suggest?”

“The source was either at the base of the tell, which at Makor seems unlikely because of the bedrock. Or it was outside, as at Megiddo and Gezer.”

“Correct. And where does that lead us?”

“Judging by what happened at those two places, sometime around 1100 B.C.E. they dug a vertical shaft through the tell, then a horizontal tunnel to the well.”

“Correct. And which have we hit?”

“If it were the vertical shaft,” a girl volunteered, “it would surely have been filled solid in three thousand years. Therefore it’s got to be the horizontal.”

“Correct, but what if I tell you that the horizontal would also be packed solid in that time?”

This stumped the kibbutzniks and there was silence. The English photographer asked, “Is your assumption accurate? Would it be packed solid?”

“Correct.”

General Teddy Reich’s daughter asked in a very small voice, “But we know there was a Crusader castle on the tell. They had to have water to withstand sieges. Couldn’t they have redug the tunnel? About a thousand years ago?”

“I wish I could say ‘correct,’ because that’s my theory, too,” Tabari laughed, “and I pray that we’re both right.”

The meal ended and he rose casually, sauntering out to Trench B with an insouciance he did not feel. Everyone who could get away from work tagged along with equal casualness but flushed with excitement, and kibbutzniks in the fields, sensing that something important was about to happen at their tell, quit their work to become archaeologists. At the site the Arab offered Eliav the lantern, saying, “You found the opening. Go ahead.”

The Jew would not accept. “It was your deduction.” He reviewed for the crowd Tabari’s shrewd guess regarding the sloping rock. “And it’s your deduction about the tunnel. Besides,” he added, “there may be one hell of a drop on the other side.” He led Tabari to the small tunnel and stepped away.

In this manner the latest scion of the Family of Ur crept back into the earth from which his prodigious people had sprung. He went past the bedrock on which the Canaanites had built; past the sixteenth and seventeenth levels where his ancestors had come upon the pre-primitive settlement which they had destroyed around the year 13,000 B.C.E.; down past the eighteenth level of men who had developed the concept of religion; to the nineteenth and twentieth levels where women had discovered that their dead could be buried with affection; and on to the face of the rock from which the pick handle projected. He was breathing hard, tense with the feel of his ancient earth, and he took the handle gently, twisting it in various directions. Eliav was right. The hidden tip was free.

Harshly he pulled the handle backward, dislodging a large chunk of semi-rock which started to come toward him, then teetered and disappeared in the opposite direction. Ominously, its fall made no sound. With four vigorous blows of the pick, using it head-on as a ram rather than as a pry, he knocked in the face of the wall
and found himself with a jagged hole leading into nothingness.

His lips were parched and his breathing forced as he grasped the lantern, and thrusting it before him, crawled halfway into the opening. At first his eyes could see nothing, for the falling rocks had aroused an ancient dust which obscured all, but as it gradually subsided he saw that his prognostication had been correct. He had come upon a long tunnel cut through the limestone accretion. To left and right the partially filled tunnel ran, its beautifully arched ceiling still showing the careful work completed in the year 963 B.C.E. by his ancestor, Jabaal the Hoopoe, and later reworked in the year 1105 C.E. by his other ancestor, Saliq ibn Tewfik, called Luke. The falling stones had made no sound because they had dropped into soft dust which had been filtering into the tunnel since that April day in 1291 C.E., when the Mamelukes had killed Count Volkmar and had started the destruction of the Crusader castle.

To the right or to the left? Which way lay the well? Stuck halfway through the opening he began patiently reconstructing his orientation, and he had such a keen sense of the land, even when lost in its bosom, that he could deduce that the well must lie to the right, or north, of the accidental junction he had made with the tunnel; so he eased himself through the opening and started lifting his feet slowly, quietly, so as not to disturb the dust, moving toward the phantasmagoric darkness which dissolved like the passage of time as his lantern brought light where for seven centuries there had been no light.

Through those years the dust, thick and silent, had sifted down, and now it rose revitalized by the touch of a living foot, only to fall back as the unaccustomed beams flashed upon his anides, and at last he came to a silent place where things ended, dust and footfall alike; and as he looked down into the darkness he could not estimate how far below him lay the water, but he dislodged a fragment of the roof and dropped it. After a while water splashed. The well of the Family of Ur was found, that sweet source from which all had sprung.

In the days that followed, Tabari and Eliav tried several times to acquaint Cullinane in Jerusalem with the stunning developments, but the telephone operators were unable to track him down, so on their own initiative the men strung lights which enabled them to work at the well, and after digging about the rim and finding only fragments of Crusader pottery—water jars broken by careless Christian women seven hundred years before—Tabari happened to notice in the wall, slightly above eye level, a discoloration of soil which previous visitors had failed to find, for they had been Canaanites or Jewish women like Gomer or Crusaders, and not archaeologists. But on a hunch Tabari began digging into the darkened earth and thus uncovered the original level of the well, finding a few charred stones on which men had sat around one of the world’s first intentional fires, and it was among these stones that Eliav found imbedded the item that was to give Tell Makor its prehistoric significance: a piece of flint the size of a large flat hand, shaped into an obvious weapon, slightly convex on the sides and sharpened along the pointed end. It was a hand axe dating back some two hundred thousand years to that nebulos period when beings walked half-erect and hunted animals with simple rocks, cutting the flesh apart with precious hand axes like the one the Englishman was now photographing in situ.
“My God!” he cried. “What’s that?” His flash bulbs had disclosed in the darkness a monstrous shining object, as big as a plate, serrated in many ridges. He had found a petrified elephant’s molar, relic of a great beast slaughtered at the water hole when the climate of Israel was different and the wadi a deep river.

To call them men—those walking creatures that had killed the elephant—was in some ways repugnant, for they could neither farm, nor fish, nor tend fruit trees, nor tame a dog, nor build a house, nor make clothes, nor even form words with their apelike lips; but neither could they be called animals, for there were these things which they could do: they could make a tool; they could grasp it in a hand; and by grunts and shoves they could organize a team and plan a system for killing a huge thing like an elephant... and for these reasons they were men.

When Cullinane finally returned to Makor he wore a black patch over his left eye, which he explained merely by growling, “Hospital.” Then he added, “The nurses told me you were trying to phone, so I knew you’d struck something great, but there was nothing I could do about it.” He climbed down to the first cache of bones, then on to the well and the charred stones. It was more than he had hoped for, more than any archaeologist had a right to expect. When he crawled back to sunlight he assembled the group and said, “We’ll be working here for years, and when Han Eliav becomes prime minister of Israel, say, about 1980, we’ll invite him to deliver the closing-down address.” The kibbutzniks cheered, after which he said, holding aloft the hand axe, “Whenever you think Israel is moving too slowly, remember that our ancestors used implements like this for more than two hundred thousand years before they reached the next big invention. Small flints shaped to a point that could be used in subtler weapons.” The first year of the dig was ending in a blaze of accomplishment.

When he was alone with the staff he said, “Tomorrow we must airmail carbon samples from Level XIX to Sweden and America. And I want everybody to pray that they prove out to some date before 30,000 B.C.E.”

A moment of silence followed, after which the photographer ventured, “There’s got to be one stinker in every show. Where’d you get the shiner, boss?”

Cullinane did not laugh. “It was Saturday morning and I was riding in a taxi to an informal meeting with the minister of finance. About getting our spare dollars cleared for transfer to Chicago. And suddenly out of hiding came a gang of boys and young men in fur caps, long coats and curls about their ears, screaming at us Shabbos and hurling rocks—not stones, rocks. The taxi driver shouted, Duck, but I didn’t catch the Hebrew soon enough, and by the time he repeated his warning I had taken one hell of a rock right in my eye. The doctors thought I might lose it.”

“I didn’t read about it in the paper,” Eliav said, half defensively.

“The government wanted no publicity. The cab driver said it was nothing unusual. Orthodox Jews insisting that no vehicle move on the streets of Israel during Shabbat.”

“So they’ve started the stoning business again?” Eliav groaned.

“I almost lost my eye. And the police made no arrests. They say that when they do the rabbis fight with them, pointing out that the Talmud condones the stoning
of Jews who break Shabbat."

"It's your problem," Tabari said to Eliav. "You're in the government now."

"Not quite," the Jew argued. "But when I am I'll do what I can to halt this Mickey Mouse stuff."

"This what?" Cullinane asked.

"A bad phrase I picked up," Eliav explained. "I'll have to drop it now."

"That Shabbat the young hoodlums broke lots of taxi windows," Cullinane said. "The taxi men are becoming afraid to drive on Saturday."

"That's what the religious group is after," Eliav explained. "They argue that Israel can exist only if it goes back to the laws of the To-rah... in every detail."

"Preposterous!" Cullinane said.

"As a Catholic you know it's preposterous," Tabari laughed, "and as a Muslim so do I. But the Jews don't, and even Cabinet Minister Eliav isn't quite sure. Because pretty soon he's going to have to face up to that problem."

"While I was in the hospital," Cullinane said, "I had the gloomy feeling that one of these days all of us were going to have to face up to certain moral problems. And we just don't seem to be wūling. I had a long talk with an official of the Italian government. Up to arrange with the Jordanians for the entry of Catholic pilgrims into Bethlehem. He told me how close the Italian voters had come to electing a Communist government. Explained how a small swing of the total votes would have done it. He asked, 'Supposing this happens? What does the world then do with the Vatican? Does it go to Russia? Or to the United States? Or does it stay locked up within the walls, impotent, in Italy?' The day could come when we'd have to face that problem."

"Religions are always in trouble," Tabari said. "In adversity they grow honest. It's good for them."

"And I also had the feeling," Cullinane added, "that perhaps at the same time the world might have to face up to the problem of Judaism. To what extent are we prepared to protect Judaism as our parent religion?"

Eliav caught the significance of this question, but Tabari did not. The Arab spoke first: "The other day I joked about putting the world's Jews into orbit, but seriously, I suppose the day is past when you can exterminate six million Jews."

But Eliav said, "You're equating Israel with Judaism and you Wonder what the world will do if the Arabs try to eliminate Israel altogether?"

"Yes," Cullinane said. "For the first time since I've been in Israel... lying there in the hospital with the crazy cut across my face, thinking of the distorted ideas behind the religious hoodlums who threw the rocks... What I'm trying to say is that if such zealots represent the new Israel, you can't expect people like me to come to your aid if the Arabs attack. And the death of Israel would raise the moral problem I spoke of."

"You're wrong and you're right," Eliav said. "You're wrong in equating the state of Israel and the Jewish religion. No matter what might happen to Israel, Judaism would continue. Just as Catholicism always continued when the territory of the Vatican was held by others. But you're right that all of us, Catholics, Arabs, Jews, have got to work out some sensible pattern of life for the world, or new alignments will occur so radical that no one here can visualize them."

"One afternoon," Cullinane said, "the doctors gave me a shot of something and I
had one of those visions ... of a Jerusalem that had been agreed upon by all the world as an isolated zone of ghosts in which the Pope had his little Vatican because he was no longer welcome in Italy, and the chief rabbi had the area around the Wailing Wall, because he was no longer acceptable in Israel, and the new prophet of Islam had his territory, because no one in the Muslim countries wanted him, and the Protestants and Hindus and Buddhists each had their corner, because nobody wanted them either, and all the rest of the working world was, as you say, realigned into radical new patterns. And over each gateway to Jerusalem stood an arch with a bold sign which read in sixteen languages: MUSEUM.”

“It was no vision,” Eliav said, “and it’s our job to see that it doesn’t become fact.”

On Friday the cable from Stockholm arrived, and three excited archaeologists gathered in the arcaded building to read the news which would determine whether the human bones imbedded at Level XIX were of crucial importance or not. The Swedish scientists reported:

YOUR SAMPLE NINETEEN STOP REPEATED TESTS YIELD SIXTY-EIGHT THOUSAND B.C.E. PLUS-MINUS THREE THOUSAND STOP SOUNDS EXCITING

Tabari cheered. “I’ve got a job here for the next fifteen years, plus-minus five.”

“We were lucky!” Cullinane said. “Of all the available tells we picked the good one.”

Eliav, always practical, reminded the men, “But to dig out that solid breccia will cost money.” The planners looked up from the cable, and Eliav made it clear that the Israeli government could not advance the funds, exciting though the find promised to be. After the men had explored various alternative avenues Tabari said glumly, “Well, let’s say the ugly word.”

“Zodman?”

“Correct.”

“After the way I gave him hell?” Eliav asked.

“I’d never ask Zodman and Vered for the dough,” Cullinane protested.

“My Uncle Mahmoud,” Tabari said slowly, “once wangled money for the same dig from the chief rabbi in Jerusalem, the Catholic bishop in Damascus, the Muslim imam in Cairo, and the Baptist president of Robert College in Istanbul. His rule was, ‘If you need money, shame has not yet been invented.’ I’ll send Zodman a cable that will break his heart.” He began to play an imaginary violin.

Cullinane advised, “Let’s wait till we get confirmation from Chicago on the carbon dating,” and the three leaders spurred the workmen to close down the dig, but each day one or the other crawled down the tunnel to sit beside the well of Makor where living creatures had crouched two hundred thousand years before. For each of the archaeologists it was a mystic rite, huddling there in the cavern: to Tabari it was a return to the ancient sources of his people; to Eliav it was the spot where man had begun his long wrestling match with the concept of God; to Cullinane it was the beginning of those philosophical analyses with which he would be engaged for the balance of his life; but to all it was the source, the primeval spot where the growth of civilizations had begun. At the end of the week
Chicago reported:

YOUR LEVEL NINETEEN STOP WE GET A FIRM SIXTY-FIVE THOUSAND PLUS-MINUS FOUR STOP CONGRATULATIONS

As soon as he read the confirming report Tabari drafted a hearts-and-flowers cable to Paul Zodman, begging him for money. When Cullinane read it he growled, “It’s repulsive. I forbid you to send it.”

So Tabari prepared an alternative which said that since Cullinane and Eliav were absent in Jerusalem he was forwarding the laboratory reports, and he trusted that a man as generous and as far-seeing as Paul Zodman...“It’s still repulsive,” Eliav grimaced.

“It’s how we handled the British,” Tabari joked.

“You really have no shame, do you?” Cullinane asked with admiration.

“You ever hear about my father, Sir Tewfik, when he was judge at Akko? One night he slipped in to see the litigant in a crucial case and said, ‘Fazl, I know I shouldn’t be here, but I just want to point out that you have three lawyers to choose from: an Arab, a Greek and an Englishman. Be sure you choose right.’ Fazl replied, ‘Ya-effendi, I was going to use the Englishman, but if you say so, I’ll switch to the Arab.’ My father said, ‘You misunderstand. Be sure to use the Englishman, because when he bribes me it’s in pounds sterling.’ I’ll bet my cable gets us another half-million dollars.” Two days later they had their answer:

I SEE THAT CULLINANE AND ELIAV DIDN’T HAVE THE GUTS TO CABLE AND AFTER THEIR INSULTING BEHAVIOR NO WONDER STOP BUT YOU HAVE THE GALL TO ASK FOR AN ADDITIONAL HALF MILLION DOLLARS TO COMPLETE EXCAVATION DOWN TO LEVEL TWENTY-FIVE STOP YES STOP YOU HAVE GIVEN VERED AND ME A TREMENDOUS WEDDING PRESENT STOP MILLION THANKS

“A man like that, it’s easy to hate,” Tabari laughed. “I should have asked for a million.”

“He has style,” Eliav granted. “Wedding present!”

Cullinane broke out some champagne and announced, “I’m going to crawl down there and give those old bastards at the well one of the best parties they ever had.” He haggled the bottle down the tunnel shaft and splashed the liquid against the bones protruding from the breccia of Level XIX. “My God, we’re glad to find you,” he whispered. Then he proceeded to the well, where he sprinkled the champagne as if he were a priest. “To all of you. We’ll be back.” And as he made this flippant remark the echo of his voice came back to strike him, and he fell heavily on one of the marble benches set there by Timon Myrmex in the time of Herod. He put the bottle aside and covered his face with his hands. “Vered!” he whispered, and where no one could see him except the ghosts he admitted how forlorn he was, how deep had been his need to marry the little Jewish scholar. He had the vague feeling, at that lonely moment, that he was not going to find a Catholic wife in Chicago, nor would Ilan Eliav find a Jewish bride in Jerusalem; like huge Father Vilspronck they would move about the Holy Land for some years, respected and even loved,
but men apart—a Dutchman married to a church, a German Jew married to a
state, and an Irishman obsessed by the philosophical analysis of history. “Vered!
Vered!” he muttered. “You could have saved me.”

At the surface he reported lightly, “The old reprobates lapped it up. They said
that if civilization could produce something as good as champagne they were going
to have children like mad so as to speed up the process.”

“How did they communicate those sensible ideas,” Tabari asked, “seeing that
when they lived speech hadn’t been invented?”

“To the silent ones,” Cullinane proposed, “deep in the earth.” And that afternoon
he took a plane for Chicago.

The last man to go down the tunnel before things were locked up for the year
was Han Eliav, who felt regret at leaving the dig just as the exciting years were
beginning. Descending to the well he sat in the gloom beside the cool water that
had brought life to so many. It surely didn’t start a mere two hundred thousand
years ago, he reasoned. Below this must lie the plain where animals had always
come to drink, and over there, hiding behind a tree, waited some creature who had
wandered up from Africa a million years ago, holding in his hand the first rock of
Israel that had ever been formed into a weapon. That had been the beginning, that
ancient first, and it would never be known, that hairy hand waiting in the reeds as
the animals came to drink; nevertheless, Eliav felt communion with that hunter.
At Zefat we Jews held the rock in our hand and damned little else. At Akko and
Jerusalem, too. He patted the cool wet earth. And now we’re climbing our way
once more. And he started the long crawl back to where Tabari waited.

As soon as he saw the Arab he said what was on his mind: “Get your records in
shape, Jemail, because Cullinane’s got to finish this dig by himself.”

“Why?”

“I’m taking the cabinet job. The prime minister announces it tomorrow. And my
first appointment will be you. Director-general.” He extended his hand to the Arab.

Tabari drew back. “You know what you’re doing?” he asked suspiciously.

“I sure do,” Eliav said. He threw his arm about Tabari’s shoulder and led him to
the edge of the dig, where they sat on stones that had once served as part of a
synagogue-basilica-mosque-church, and there the Jew and the descendant of Ur
fought it out, as their ancestors had done ages ago. They were two handsome men
in the strong middle years of their lives: the ascetic Jew, tall and serious, with
hollow cheeks and cautious manner; the man of Ur, with his five children, heavier,
browner, with a quicker wit and a more congenial smile. At the dig they had
formed a constructive team, assuming responsibility for decisions and sustaining
the creative mood on the tell. Now they were about to grope for a reincarnation of
that fruitful if tempestuous partnership which Hebrew and Canaanite had shared
four thousand years ago and which Jew and Arab had known for thirteen hundred
years following the arrival of Islam.

“It’s about time we Jews and Arabs made some real gestures of conciliation,”
Eliav began. “Looks like we’re going to share this part of the world for quite a long
time.”

“I have no wish to serve as an experiment.”

“And since in the matters I’ll be handling, you’re the best-informed man I
know...”
“If you appoint me there could be all sorts of hell.”
“There will be. But we’ve got to encourage the day when Nasser will appoint a Jew to some job of similar importance. And he will.”
“I don’t want to see you get in trouble, Ilan.”
“Trouble I can take. If they fire me I’ll come back here and live off Paul Zodman.”
“But you’ll be up to your neck in Arab-Jewish relations, and I could hurt you.”
“No. You’ll help. To prove that even in these difficult areas Jews and Arabs can work in harmony.”
“There aren’t six people in Israel prepared to believe that.”
“You’re one of the six, and our job is to increase the number.”
“I was always much impressed,” Tabari said, “when your Jewish God halted human sacrifice. Here you are, restoring it.”
“I’m trying to restore something much older. The brotherhood that used to exist on this land. Want to help?”

Tabari studied the invitation for some moments, then said, “No. I’m an Arab, and the fact that I stayed behind to help rebuild this country doesn’t make me any less an Arab. I’ll become your assistant, Eliav, on the day your government gives one sign that it understands Arabs, wants them to stay here, and is willing to accept them as full partners…”

“Haven’t I proved that this summer? Haven’t you and I been full, respectable partners?”
“You and I? Yes. Your government and we Arabs? No.”
“What do you want?”
“Take out your pencil. We want better schools, hospitals, roads to our villages, nurses, a place in the university for our best young men, a partnership in which our talents are respected. We want you to see that on this land there can be a fruitful association of equals. Your intellectuals have got to stop patronizing us as if we were idiot children. Your businessmen have got to accept us as men who can count and who are as honest as they are. Eliav, we want to feel that as Arabs we have a home in your society.”

“Haven’t I conveyed that promise in everything I’ve done this summer?”
“And there’s one other reason why I can’t accept.”
“Do I know what it is?” Eliav asked.
“I think you can guess. In those long discussions we had with Cullinane on the nature of the moral state, I noticed that there was one topic which he often led up to but always shied away from. Americans are taught to be so sensitive about other people’s feelings. Yet this is the problem which really tests the moral foundations of Judaism.”
“You mean the Arab refugees?”
“I do. Those refugees on the other side of the border were in Cullitiane’s mind every time he fell silent in our discussions. They’re in mine, too.”
“What would you have us do?” Eliav asked in frank perplexity. “In 1948, against every plea of the Jews, some six hundred thousand Arabs evacuated this country. They did so at the urging of their political leaders. On the promise that within two weeks they would come back as victors, take over all Jewish property and do what they liked with Jewish women. Now it’s sixteen years later. They tell us the number of refugees has multiplied to a million. Arab governments have not
allowed them to find new homes in Arab countries and the time has passed when they can recover their old homes here. What do you want us to do?”

“I’ll join you, Eliav, on the day Israel makes proper restitution for…”

“We’ve agreed to do that! In my first speech I’m to announce that Israel, before the bar of humanity and world opinion, is willing to discuss compensation for every refugee who can prove he left old Palestine, if such a settlement becomes part of a total peace treaty. I’ll go through the world begging Jews in every land to help us pay off that self-imposed obligation. I’ll propose taxes here at home higher than we’ve ever had before. Tabari! Work with me to reach this honorable solution.”

“And what about repatriation?”

Eliav fell silent. Uneasily he moved about the tell and from some distance said, “After we took Zefat I personally went out... in a captured English Land Rover... begging the fleeing Arab refugees to come back to their homes in Zefat. Twice I was shot at, but I kept on, because I knew then that we needed those Arabs and they needed us. But they wouldn’t listen. ‘We’ll come back with an army,’ they boasted. We’ll take everything. Our homes. Your homes. And all the land.’ And they walked over the hills to Syria. A couple of nights later, right where I’m standing, other Arabs killed my wife, yet the next morning, after we had the big fight in Akko... where I met you for the first time…” He looked across the tell at Tabari and asked in a low voice, “What did I do that morning, Jemail?”

The Arab remained silent, and with a sudden leap Eliav was upon him, grabbing his shoulders and shaking them. “What did I do?” he shouted. “Tell me... now!”

In a soft voice, barely audible above the November breeze that was coming down the wadi with the first hints of winter, Tabari said, “You went to the beach, where the boats were filling up with Arab refugees, and you pleaded with every man you could reach: ‘Don’t run away. Stay here and help us build this country.’”

“And did any stay?”

“I did.”

Eliav looked at his friend with the kind of quiet passion that history instills in men of perception. He sat down, burdened by the impossible complexity of the refugee problem, and recalled those fateful days when the Arabs had fled the country. “More than twenty thousand left Akko that day,” he said, “and I went from man to man, but of them all I was able to persuade only you.” He bowed to Tabari, then said with increasing bitterness, “And now they want to come back. When the land is fertile and the shops are filled, when the schools are productive and the mosques are open, they want to come back. It may be too late. In Cyprus we’re seeing what happens when you try to force two different peoples to live together in a majority-minority status. Would you have us create a second Cyprus here?”

“I want a state which preaches morality to practice it,” Tabari said. “Bring back at least a token of these refugees to prove...”

“We will!” Eliav cried. “In my speech I’m also to make that offer again. More than a mere token we will bring back. And we’ll absorb them in full brotherhood. But a million? Dedicated to destroy us? When only six hundred thousand left? No, dear friend, you cannot demand that we commit suicide.”

“I won’t take the job in Jerusalem,” Tabari said finally. “But I will say this. When
we were digging at Crusader levels I remember telling you that just as we Muslims drove out the Europeans after two hundred years, so we would push you into the sea. Now I'm beginning to believe you'll be here for a long time.”

“I'm sorry you won't help us,” Eliav said with deep regret.

“I'll always be an Arab,” Tabari replied.

“On that day in Akko in 1948? Why didn't you run away too?”

“I belong to this land,” the descendant of Ur said, “this well, these olive trees. My people were here before yours were formed. When it was prudent to be Canaanites, we were Canaanites. For the same lofty reason we were Phoenicians, and when Jews ruled the land we were Jews, or Greeks, or Romans, or Christians, or Arabs, or Mamelukes or Turks. If you allowed us to hold the land we never gave a damn as to which church we worshiped in or what flag we saluted. When my grandfather was governor of Tiberias he spent most of his time looking after his own affairs, and my father, Sir Tewfik, served the British in the same impartial manner, because all we wanted was the land.”

“Why this land, Jemail? What's so special about this land?”

“Here the pressures of the world are vital. After all, if this land was good enough for God to choose, and Moses and Jesus and Muhammad, it’s good enough for me.”

“You don't believe in God, do you, Jemail?”

“Indeed I do. There must be a god of the land, who lives in wells like ours, or on hills like that, or in olive groves that replenish themselves forever. He may even live in the religions which grow out of his land. But he cannot exist alien from the land which bore him.”

“We Jews believe in the same partnership of God, and a particular land, and a chosen people. We're very old brothers, Tabari, and in the future we shall meet many times, for we understand each other.”

Distressed at not having enlisted Tabari for the difficult job ahead, Eliav said good-bye to the dig and made his way eastward along the Damascus road and in time reached Zefat, where he intended spending a few hours with the Vodzher Rebbe reviewing a group of legal cases like Zipporah Zederbaum's. He had convinced himself that he had a chance of winning the old man over to a more liberal interpretation of Judaism, but he found him a shriveled wraith with a beard even longer and whiter than before and a fierce determination to resist any encroachment on the law. So Eliav retreated and turned the discussion to the heroic days of Ilana, Bar-El and Bagdadi.

“They're all dead, aren't they?” the little leader asked in Yiddish.

“Yes, but their ideas won.”

“And you've taken another name.”

“Yes, I'm part of Eretz Israel now.”

“And everything has worked out as I predicted, hasn't it?”

“With modifications.”

“And you're to be our minister in charge of the very ideas we used to argue about?”

“Yes, and I hope you'll help me find some sort of compromise.”

The rebbe's face darkened and with both hands he clutched his beard. “Compromise there can never be,” he said. “Israel has no right to exist except as a
religious state.” And when Eliav fought to gain a concession that would allow Zipporah Zederbaum to marry, the rebbe refused to listen. “There is the law,” he said stubbornly, and more he would not say. But he did take Eliav by the hands invitingly: “Come to the synagogue. Stay by my side throughout this night. And you’ll discover what Israel is.” Eliav protested that he must move on to Tiberias, but the rebbe would not allow it. “Your life is at stake,” he said, forcing Eliav to the synagogue, where the services were as moving as ever, except that now more than sixty men attended instead of a mere seventeen. And all roared the Lecha Dodi in some two dozen different styles.

After the evening service the old man returned home but he did not eat, nor would he allow Eliav to do so, but at quarter to midnight the two men said good night to the rebbetzin and walked out into the lovely crooked streets of Zefat to a barren hall where more than a hundred Jews in ceremonial garb were waiting: tall lean men in fur caps, short round businessmen in long robes, and numerous young men in white shawls. They were the Hasidim of Zefat, men violent in their love for God, and now they ranged themselves silently about a U-shaped table as their beloved rebbe made his way to the head position, where he sat alone like a king. Only he had a plate before him at this feast and only he would dine.

At midnight a senior assistant who acted as servant brought him a bowl of soup, and since no spoons or forks were allowed at this ritual the rebbe raised the bowl to his bearded lips, drank a little of the soup, then ceremoniously pushed it away. As soon as he had done so the silent Hasidim leaped from their seats and a hundred struggling hands dived for the bowl. Fingers were dipped into the sacred broth and then conveyed to the mouths until the bowl was dry.

Next came one fish, of which the rebbe ate only a morsel, whereupon the hundred waiting hands tore at the remains till nothing was left on the plate but a few bones, for it was a cherished thing to be able to say in Zefat, “I ate of the rebbe’s fish.” Now the servant brought a bowl of mixed vegetables, the ancient kind that King David had eaten with his bare hands when he traveled from Jerusalem to the Galilee, and again there was the ritual tasting by the rebbe and the mad scramble for a bean or a grain of groats; to Eliav the fight to thrust even one finger into the bowl was disgusting, even though he knew that such feasts were weekly affairs with the Hasidim.

Now came the meat, a large piece of roast lamb cooked precisely as it had been for more than three thousand years by the Jews of this region, but this time there was to be a variation in the eating procedure, for after the rebbe had tasted the lamb he did not push it away. Instead he rose, nodded his wintry head three times and said in a whispering voice, “To my beloved son Ilan Eliav, who has been chosen to help guide Eretz Israel, I give this meat.” And from the bone he tore off a small piece and with his trembling fingers pushed it into Eliav’s mouth. This done, he moved the plate away and his followers struggled for the fragments until the bone lay clean.

The rebbe’s midnight meal was ended and the devout silence which had marked it was broken by one old Jew who started clapping his hands. When he had set the rhythm he was joined by others until the room echoed to the commanding sound. A voice started chanting in Yiddish, and now the hall was filled with those wild songs of religious joy that had originated in Russia and Poland. The ecstasy of
God was upon this shouting congregation and for more than an hour the songs reverberated, not stately hymns in the Catholic or Protestant tradition, but cries of violent praise to the God who had shepherded them through another week.

At two in the morning a surprising thing happened: an elderly Jew, whom Eliav had noticed earlier as one of the more decrepit ancients, began to dance and quickly the floor filled with gyrating bodies, fur caps awry and coats standing out from hips. If the Hasidic songs were not hymns, neither were the dances customary religious posturings; they were wild prancings of abandonment which gave the impression that the dancers were drunk. Those steps are much too vigorous, Eliav thought, for the old men who are performing them, but at three o’clock the rebbe himself rose to dance, and for some minutes the others stopped to watch him. Incredible, Eliav said to himself. He must be eighty. For the rebbe was captured by the religious fervor he had learned from his grandfather in Vodzh, and he cavorted like a child, kicking his legs high and whirling about until his fur cap traced a brown blur across Eliav’s eye.

At first Eliav was afraid the old man might hurt himself, but as other dancers formed about the rebbe, Eliav realized that these men were in a kind of catatonic trance and if they were to be struck dead now they would die in maximum joy: they were truly children of God reveling in His goodness.

After the rebbe had continued his violent dance for some fifteen minutes, all the men of Zefat joined hands in a big circle that reached out to the four walls, and slowly this circle began to move counter-clockwise while Eliav remained in the middle, watching. An elderly Jew began singing and soon the hall throbbed with the sound of voices and feet which halted only when the rebbe stopped the dance.

“Tonight my son Eliav will dance with me,” the old man said, “that he may gain an understanding of this land he is to govern.” And the ancient rebbe left the circle, took Eliav by the hand and brought him into the group. With the old man’s hand clutching his, Eliav danced till morning.

As dawn came over the hills of Galilee the fur-hatted Hasidim began straggling out of the hall to wander home in groups of five or six, and as each group moved into the saintly streets of Zefat the rebbe gave them his benediction. When he and Eliav were alone he said quietly, “Eliav, we are depending on you to keep Israel a nation dedicated to God.” He asked the young minister to walk home with him, but Eliav said, “No, I have a mission to carry out,” and perhaps the old man guessed what it was, for he said, “Your true mission to Zefat you have completed. You’ve seen that we religious ones intend to fight for this nation. Not a single paragraph of the law may you change.” Then, as if he realized that he had not much longer to live, he reached up and kissed Eliav on both cheeks. “The dead are dead,” he whispered, “but they rely on us to fulfill their hopes.” And he followed the others through the narrow, arched streets of Zefat.

Then Eliav was alone in the city he had fought for, and he walked by twisting paths and alleys down to the foot of the English stairs to make a pilgrimage which in recent years had come to mean much in his life. Ahead lay twenty-one separate flights to be climbed, and reverently he began his ascent.

One, two, three: to the left stood the stalwart Jewish house pockmarked with bullets and unrepaired since the war; here Vered Yevneski had helped hold off three Arab assaults that would otherwise have taken the house and led to the
collapse of the quarter; she had been so young, so brave.

Four, five, six, seven, eight: to the right he saw the Arab mosque as he had seen it on the morning of victory, and to the left stood Rabbi Yom Tov Gaddiel’s blunt synagogue, still standing in opposition.

Nine, ten: he stopped in pain, for this was the spot at which Ilana Hacohen had fought off the first Arab attack across the stairs. Children were playing in the area now, and he wondered if, when they grew up, they would have the courage to do the things Ilana had done, that wonderful girl: she had been so powerful in her dedication; where would her like be found again?

Eleven, twelve, thirteen: he paused to look at the Arab homes, still painted blue to ward off danger, and the blue had protected them for thirteen hundred years—but in the end it had been powerless. How lovely the blue Arab homes were, with their unexpected arches and little gardens; how empty they seemed now, staring up without roofs toward the impartial sun. He had never hated Arabs, Eliav reflected, and he wished that they had remained to make their singing arches and their gardens part of his land as before.

Fourteen, fifteen: he was on the small plaza where the trees grew so charmingly, flowers on each side, and grapes running up the Jewish wall, and on the Arab side the six tall evergreens which gave the plaza distinction and beauty; here Ilana and Vered had held off the enemy for three hours and in the trunks of the slim trees one could still find bullets. Beyond were morning-glories prolific in their blue loveliness; and if the stairs of Zefat contained only this one small area, they would be memorable.

Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen: now as he neared the head of the stairs he could see the brooding gray walls of the police station, still marked with bullet holes where Teddy Reich and Nissim Bagdadi had tried so vainly to assault the fortress; he still wondered how they had managed to take this forbidding stronghold.

Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one: he found no words, only the terrible ache of lost companionship; here Bagdadi had fallen; there Ilana and Bar-El had stood, and they were dead; what a terrible burden a man must bear if he climbs the stairs of the years, if he survives and attempts to govern as his dead companions would have wished.

On this crisp dawn he would ascend beyond the last flight of stairs, for his mind was carried upward to the Crusader ruins, from which he had first seen the Galilee in snow, and as he climbed he saw to the east that impregnable fortress against whose capture his mind had rebelled, and he chanted, as David did when making his ascent to Jerusalem: “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us.” Beyond the fortress, which had fallen as miraculously as any in the Torah, he could see once more the flawless land whose sweeping hills moved in majesty and whose towering clouds still twisted in violence above the lake hallowed to so many.

He saw the lake itself and, toward the far end, that bit of land which Shmuel Hacohen had finally purchased from the emir in Damascus, the land where Jews had proved that they could not only read Talmud but also farm their inheritance. I suppose you have to be like Shmuel, Eliav reflected. You stake out your land. You ride around it on a donkey to protect it. And if somebody shoots at you, you fight
back. And if in the end you’re killed, you trust that your granddaughter Ilana will carry on where you left off. He bowed his head and whispered, “How can any man have the courage to govern a land like this?”

Then, as he raised his head, he discovered, from an unexpected quarter, the answer to his question; for he looked down upon Tiberias, that insignificant, that precious town which had given the world both the Talmud and the Bible. Outside the old Crusader walls he could discern the tomb of Moses Maimonides, of whom it was said, “From Moses to Moses there was no one like Moses.” Eliav thought: I hope I find one tenth the wisdom he did; and he promised himself that this afternoon, when he passed Tiberias, he would pause to light a candle at the tomb. He doubted that any part of the great philosopher’s corpse had reached this burial ground. The tomb could only be a cenotaph, for legend explained that as Maimonides lay dying in Egypt he asked to be buried in Israel, whereupon his corpse was lashed to a donkey and the beast headed north. The animal had died at Tiberias, so there the tomb stood, reminding ordinary men that even they could attain reason if they applied themselves. “I’ll light three candles,” Eliav said.

Then his eye climbed the hill back of Tiberias, toward those fatal Horns of Hittim, and he could imagine the cave in which another legend placed the grave of Rabbi Akiba, and as he paid homage to this great leader he thought: I wish we had him with us now.

For there was beginning to be an outcry, both in Israel and in the world, against the arbitrary structure of contemporary Judaism: Zipporah Zederbaum unable to marry because of an outworn law four thousand years old; Eliav forbidden to marry Vered because of the Cohen legalities; Zodman’s divorce not legal because modern-thinking American rabbis could not be trusted; the German woman, faithful to Judaism even at the cost of her eye and her life, with children who were not accepted as Jews; the Indian Jews who were disbarred; and Leon Berkes who could not work as a Jew. Eliav was particularly worried by such rigid crystallization because he had read enough history to know that if it were continued, the revolt of the kibbutzniks and people like Ilana and Vered could become damaging. In any other nation a typical official like Eliav would find himself allied against the priests who insisted upon such irrefragible law, and even he had begun to echo the warning voiced by Ilana Hacohen: “this Mickey Mouse crap.”

But Ilan Eliav was not in “any other country,” nor could he ever be “a typical official.” He was a Jew, aware of the unique history of his people. They had survived persecution, as the Vodzher Rebbe knew, only because their stern rabbis had kept them faithful to the law, and if now this law raised certain difficulties, that was nothing new; it had always been so. The law need not be abrogated; what was needed was some new leader to refight in the twentieth century the battles that great Akiba had fought in the second. The law must be humanized, brought up to date. Eliav felt sure that were Akiba alive today he would long since have simplified it, adjusting it to modern life as he had once adjusted it to Roman.

But the law would continue, for only it could keep Israel alive. Where were the Chaldeans and the Moabites, the Phoenicians and the Assyrians, the Hurrians and the Hittites? Each had been more powerful than the Jews, yet each had perished and the Jews remained. Where was Marduk, great god of the
Babylonians, and Dagan of the Philistines; and Moloch of the Phoenicians? They had been mighty gods who struck terror in the hearts of men, but they had vanished and it was the conciliatory, sometimes awkward God of the Jews Who not only persisted but Who also vitalized two derivative religions. And God exercised His power through the law.

It was no mean thing to be a Jew and the custodian of God’s law; for if His law was exacting it was also ennobling. It demanded respect if not blind obedience. There could be no larger task, Eliav thought, than devising procedures whereby the Jews of Israel and their more numerous cousins in America could share this vital law and the responsibility for keeping it vital. He recalled a cynical joke: “The function of the American Jew is to send money to a German Jew in Jerusalem, who forwards it to a Polish Jew in the Negev, who makes it possible for the Spanish Jew in Morocco to come to Israel.” There was more to it than that.

On the day he left, John Cullinane had asked in his easy Irish manner, “Han, why do you Jews make life so difficult for yourselves?” At the time Eliav had thought of no reply, but now, having lost Vered for a Jewish reason and having been projected into the heart of Jewish responsibility, he understood: Life isn’t meant to be easy, it’s meant to be life. And no religion defended so tenaciously the ordinary dignity of living. Judaism stressed neither an after-life, an after-punishment, nor heaven; what was worthy and good was here, on this day, in Zefat. We seek God so earnestly, Eliav reflected, not to find Him but to discover ourselves.

From where he stood at that moment he could see the spot in Tiberias where he blew up the English lorry, the streets of Zefat in which he had used his machine gun, and he vowed that violence was behind him; he would try to be the kind of Jew that Akiba had been, a peasant who had passed the age of forty before learning how to read, a self-taught man who had become the legal master of his day, a man who at seventy launched a whole new way of life and who, when the Romans finally executed him by tearing away his flesh with hot pincers—a man ninety-five years old and perhaps not legally a Jew, for it was believed that he descended from Sisera, that lascivious general whom Jael had slain with a tent pin—proved himself so dedicated to God that when the Roman soldiers gripped the flesh near his heart, he forced himself to stay alive until he could finish his defiant cry, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one,” to die on the long, wailing pronunciation of the word “one.”

Acknowledgements

The translations of Psalm 6 and of Proverbs 31 are from Samuel Sandmel, The Hebrew Scriptures, An Introduction to Their Literature and Religious Ideas (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1963). Psalm 33 was specially translated by Dr. Sandmel. The Psalms of Ascent were translated for this book by scholars in Israel.

Other Biblical quotations are from the King James Version, except the words of St. Paul, which are taken from II Timothy 4:7–8 in the Revised Standard Version, and those passages from Deuteronomy specifically noted, which are from The Torah, the Five Books

The response which appears has been adapted with permission from Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, Responsa from the Depths (Brooklyn, 1959).

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Direct quotations from the sayings of Rabbi Akiba have been adapted either from the tractate Pirke Abot of the Mishna or from the excellent life by Louis Finkelstein, Akiba, Saint, Scholar and Martyr (reprinted by arrangement with World Publishing Co., New York—A Meridian Book).

Quotations from and references to the Pirke Abot tractate of the Mishna are taken principally from Judah Goldin, The Living Talmud (New York, The New American Library, 1957).

Quotations from and references to the Babylonian Talmud are taken principally from Leo Auerbach, The Babylonian Talmud (New York, Philosophical Library, 1944).

Quotations from and references to the Jerusalem Talmud are taken principally from Dagobert Runes, The Talmud of Jerusalem (New York, Philosophical Library, 1956).

Quotations from Maimonides have been for the most part adapted from Leon Roth, The Guide for the Perplexed: Moses Maimonides (London, Hutchinson’s University Library, 1947).

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Details of Judenstrasse life appearing in the third part of Level III are verified principally by Marvin Lowenthal, The Jews of Germany (New York, Longmans, Green, 1936). By permission of David McKay Co., Inc.