

Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel

Simon Schama (1978)

Collins

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Flyleaves

The roles of Edmond and James de Rothschild in the development of Jewish Palestine have not been considered in any depth, and to this day the scope of their activity is hardly realized. The Jewish settlers in the final decades of last century, unable to identify their supporter, were forced to refer to Edmond as the 'Unknown Benefactor'; in later years, the initials PICA (Palestine Jewish Colonization Association) effectually cloaked the very personal work of James. To both father and son the establishment of a viable Jewish community in Palestine was all important, but recognition of the part they played, immaterial. Between Baron Edmond's first involvement in 1882 and the winding up of PICA in 1957 their contribution was, however, a prodigious one. To assess it in financial terms would be virtually impossible; in terms of human effort, completely so; it is enough to say that for 75 years both men dedicated themselves to the service of the embryo state and devoted their vast energies and resources to its prosperity. In the settlements which they nurtured 'the marshes were drained, the rocky hills and barren wastes were turned into fertile soil'; the pioneering work they sponsored laid the foundations not only of modern Israel's agriculture but some of her present industry. All did not go smoothly: there were wasteful mistakes, appalling rows between rival experts or between the settlers and the managers appointed by the Rothschilds. To some of the farmers their sponsors seemed remote, authoritarian, unfeeling; to the Rothschilds, those same farmers, experienced only in urban life, often seemed obtusely unwilling to learn the rudiments of farming a stony and desert land. Yet at the end of the day, when the body of Edmond de Rothschild was borne to Haifa by a gun-boat of the Israeli navy, to be met by a concourse

of settlers, each carrying a bag of earth from one of the colonies he had founded and supported, no one would have denied the triumphant success of the enterprise.

This is not a history of Zionism says the author, yet the history of Zionism would have been very different but for the initiatives which he describes. Nor is it a biography of Baron Edmond and Mr James, although it deals with that part of their lives to which both would have accorded paramount importance. From the massive archives of the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association, Simon Schama has built up a rich and vividly detailed picture of this epic story. Scholarly, lucid, brilliantly written, this is a history of an outstanding pioneering adventure.

Simon Schama was born in London in 1945, studied at Cambridge, where he was awarded a Starred First in History in 1966, and became a Fellow of Christ's College and Director of Studies in History. In 1976 he was made a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, and Lecturer in Modern History! His first book, *Patriots and Liberators*, was published in 1977 and hailed as an immensely impressive debut. Some critical opinions are to be found on the back panel of this wrapper.

It was a long hard struggle and the Rothschild's are to be commended for sustaining a considerable financial loss but never wavering in their tenacious support for the new pioneers. Read more. One person found this helpful.Â Not a great deal of context for Edmond and James de Rothschild's other activities and interests. Read more. One person found this helpful. They built the Israeli Supreme Court. They own Reuters and the Associated Press (AP), the two biggest media agencies in the world. They have a controlling share in the Royal Dutch oil company, the Bank of England and the LBMA (London Bullion Market Association). They foment wars, install presidents, dethrone kings and bankrupt nations, such is their power. The Rothschilds typically operate behind the scenes. In the case of Israel, the Rothschilds engineered WWI and waited until 1917 when Britain was in trouble. The Rothschilds then promised the British Government that they could get the US to In 1900, the Rothschild settlements had covered 67 per cent of Jewish land in Palestine; by 1930, the area had nearly tripled but was now only 34 per cent of the total. Even in the first year of the state, the Jewish National Fund budget for settlement was nearly twelve times that of PICA. Within a few years, the Jewish Agency was paying nearly 80 per cent of PICA's new colonization budgets.Â Not that one would move on from this to play down the scale of the Baron's legacy to Israel. Over three-quarters of a century, as the author says in summation, the work had yielded. fertile farms, gushing wells, plantations, factories, citiesâ€”the cornucopia of a living organic Jewish society where once there had been sandy, fetid waste and the timeless confrontation of merchant and schnorrer.