

Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel

Simon Schama (1978)

Collins

Contents

List of Illustrations and Maps page	9
Preface	11
1. Introduction	13
2. The Two Worlds of the Dispersion	25
3. The Encounter 1882-1887	54
4. The Experiment 1887-1899	88
5. Principles and Practices:	
The JCA Stewardship 1900-1914	137
6. Turning Points 1914-1930	190
i Towards the National Home	190
ii Wartime	209
iii Fat and Lean Years: Aspects of Agriculture 1918-1929	218
iv PICA and the Diversification of the Economy	242
v Problems and Accomplishments	251
7. Stresses 1930-1940	264
8. Endings and Beginnings 1940-1957	295
Exchange of letters between Mrs James de Rothschild and Mr David Ben-Gurion	327
Glossary	331
Notes for Further Reading	336
Notes on Text	337
Index	385

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.

Abstract views reflect the number of visits to the article landing page. Total abstract views: 0 *. Loading metrics He founded two wineries in Israel, one in Rishon LeZion and one in Zichron Yaakov, which were among the world's largest at the time. Visiting Zichron Yaakov in 1893, Edmond commented not only on the flourishing town he'd helped create, but also on the deeper meaning of Jewish connection to the land of Israel. "I did not support you and take you under my wing due to your poverty," he explained, "but due to your passion to work and live in the Holy Land, and to live in accordance with the spirit of the Torah." Did not Baron Rothschild and Rabbi Kook work out a way for the Kibbutz movement to avoid leaving the land fallow on the first seventh year, and every seven years since? I read that the Baron was concerned they would lose the momentum that had been built up during the six years.