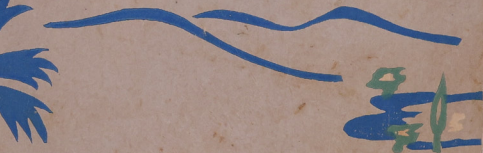


JOSEPH BARATZ

# DEGANIA

THE STORY OF PALESTINE'S  
FIRST COLLECTIVE SETTLEMENT



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J O S E P H   B A R A T Z

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DEGANIA

The village of Degania in the Jordan Valley holds a proud place in the annals of Jewish settlement in Palestine. Known as the "Mother of Collective Villages", it was at Degania that the system of living was developed which is one of the most interesting and novel features of Jewish Palestine.

Degania was founded in 1911, thirty years after the first attempts at Jewish settlement in Palestine. It was in 1881 that the first Jewish settlers arrived in Palestine from Czarist Russia bearing with them the banner of Hibbath Zion — the Love of Zion. The physical and economic persecution of the Jewish masses in the Russian Empire in those days was the cause of a large-scale migration. Scores of thousands of Jews streamed across Europe, their eyes turned towards the free western world, in the attempt to find a refuge from a life which had become unbearable. Most of these migrants found homes for themselves in Western Europe and across the ocean in the American Continent. There was one group which separated itself from the general stream and refused to be carried along by it. These were the men who belonged to the newly formed "Lovers of Zion" societies which were built round the idea that Jewish life would be secure only when Jews had a country of their own to live in, a country where they would be free to work and live on their own responsibility and in their own way. Among these societies were to be found men and women with the courage to try to put this idea into practice. Leaving the towns of the Pale of Settlement\* behind them they found their way to the ancient Jewish Homeland

\*) Pale of Settlement — the Western and South Western districts of European Russia where alone Jews were free to live without special permission.

— Palestine, where they sought to lay the foundations of a revived Jewish people. Among them were the members of a Jewish Student Organisation, the B.I.L.U., a name made up of the initial letters of the Hebrew slogan: "House of Jacob, Come! Let us go forth." The B.I.L.U. dreamed of building a model village based on principles of social justice as the foundation of a new Jewish life.

These newcomers were new alike to agriculture and to hard manual labour, and the country which they found on their arrival was hardly a "land flowing with milk and honey". The first villages encountered tremendous hardships and were saved from collapse only by the generous aid of Baron Edmond de Rothschild. These early villages were constituted on the lines with which their founders had been familiar in Europe. Most of the farmers planted vines, producing for the export market. The farms were so organised as to make hired labour a necessity. The early dream of a settled peasantry, each man growing food for his own needs, did not become a reality. The hard conditions and the unending struggle to make ends meet resulted in the waning of the early idealism.

In 1897 the World Zionist Organisation was founded and among its early achievements was the foundation in 1901 of the Jewish National Fund. This Fund was to be used for the purchase of land in Palestine which would belong to the people as a whole and be available for large-scale settlement on planned lines. The Fund began its activities in Palestine in 1905. A year before, a new type of immigrant had begun to flow into the country — young men and women, fired by the Zionist ideal of rebuilding the Jewish Homeland, and by the conviction that this ideal could be attained only on the basis of what they called "self labour", that is to say, if Jews themselves were to work in every aspect of the life of their new home. These new immigrants were pioneers in the real sense of the word; their ideal was to pave the way for the people who were to come after them, by creating the conditions for large-scale immigration. Instinctively they realised that in order to withstand the hardships of a pioneering life in a difficult, and what was then, a dangerous and

unlawful country, and in order to overcome their own inexperience and rawness in manual labour, they must cooperate. On their arrival the newcomers got work in the existing Jewish villages, but after a time many of them began to see that along that path they would not achieve their objective. They began to dream of creating villages of their own on new principles, which would cut out the need for hired labour entirely and which would lay the foundations for a really independent Jewish peasantry. On the land bought by the Jewish National Fund these men were to get their opportunity of putting their ideals into practice. The first attempt was made at Degania which stands to-day as a living testimony to their success in these interconnected ventures: making the land of Palestine fit for cultivation and human settlement under decent conditions; creating a society based on principles of social justice, and creating the economic conditions which would make it possible for Palestine to give a decent livelihood to large numbers of Jews.

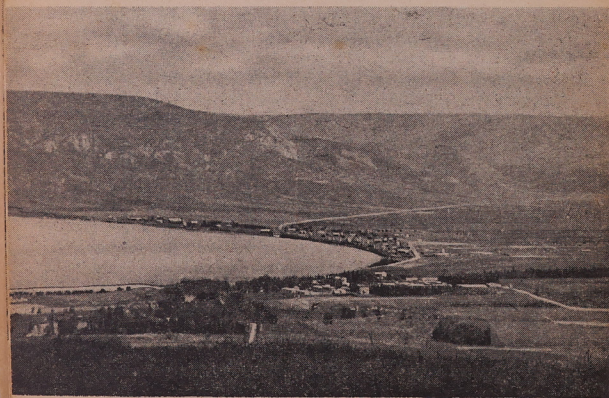
In the pages which follow, the story of the pioneers who built Degania, who lived and died for Degania, is told by one who was himself a fighter for it.

Baratz is a pioneer, a creative and devoted worker, an experienced farmer, an organiser and leader of the labour movement in Palestine. He was about 17 years of age when over 35 years ago he emigrated to Palestine from Kishinev in Russia. As a youngster he was a member of the Zeire Zion, one of those early manifestations of Zionist youth whose members in Palestine constituted the founders of the first Palestine Labour Party, Hapoel Hatzair.

Soon after his arrival in Palestine he became a member of one of Palestine's first trade unions, that of the Jerusalem stone-cutters. Later, together with several of his friends he went to work in one of the most trying and dangerous spots of all, malaria-infested Hadera. There was created the first collective group which subsequently served as the nucleus of Degania, where Baratz to-day is one of the leading members.



Surrounding of Degania in 1909.



Degania and surroundings in 1940.

## THE FOUNDING OF DEGANIA

### THE "ROMNI GROUP"

In 1908, a group of youngsters from the town of Romni in Ukraine came to Palestine. They had known each other in their home-town, having been members of the "Zeire Zion" party. In Palestine they decided to carry on working as a unit, sharing their earnings. Their first job was at Petah Tikva where they worked as hired labourers for the Jewish farmers, but their dream was to strike out on their own to reclaim a new area of land. It was not long before they were to get their chance.

Between 1905 and 1907 the Jewish National Fund bought land, among other places, at Ben Shemen and Kinnereth. In 1908 the Zionist Organisation established a Palestine Office under Dr. Arthur Ruppin to commence settlement activity. In the same year the Palestine Land Development Company was formed. These institutions were the mainspring of Zionist activity in Palestine settlement until 1921 when the Palestine Foundation Fund (Keren Hayesod) was formed to facilitate settlement on land acquired by the Jewish National Fund.

At Ben Shemen the new-comers got their first taste of work on National Fund land. The National Fund was then starting the planting of the Herzl Forest, the first of the large afforestation schemes to be inaugurated, and the Romni Group worked in the tree nurseries, earning a good reputation as conscientious workers. The supervisor at Ben Shemen, Berman, was very impressed with them and when, in 1908, the Palestine Office was looking around for men to settle on the Kinnereth lands, he asked them to tackle the job.

In those days, travelling to Galilee was no easy thing.

There was as yet no railway between Jaffa and Haifa, and automobiles were as yet unknown in Palestine. To go to Galilee involved either tramping it or riding on horseback by way of Zichron Yaacov and Haifa. The journey from Judea to Galilee, which took several days, was considered an "event", and it meant entry into a totally new life. The distance between Judea and Galilee was more than geographical; conditions in the two zones were radically different. To Judean ears the adventures of the workers in Galilee sounded like so many legends; they told of sowing and reaping grain in wide spaces, of defence against frequent Bedouin attacks. These tales aroused longing in the hearts of the Judean labourers to go to Galilee themselves and lead the true peasant life.

#### AT KINNERETH

The first pioneering group of eight arrived in Kinnereth in the autumn of 1908. The first domicile of these young men was described as follows by a writer at the time:

*... "There was a ruined khan (Arab inn) on the top of a hill facing the sea, which had formerly served as a sort of half-way house for travellers. Round about were ruins of ancient fortifications. The land of Kinnereth is situated west of the Jordan, where the river flows out from Lake Kinnereth (the Sea of Galilee). For in the distance Mount Hermon is seen, wearing a crown of white snow. The domicile was like a cave for wild beasts."*

Those young men could endure the living conditions in the khan only because of the high significance of their task, which was to mark a turning point in the history of Palestinian settlement.

As time went on, however, the khan became intolerable. When the rains came the roof leaked and water coursed down the walls, while the winds howled and wailed inside the rooms. The work was very hard, and the food very bad. Clearing the fields of stones and blasting out the rock demanded feverish activity from dawn to dark.

The year 1909 was full of many other difficulties and perils as well, for public security was then unknown. The

labourers guided the plough with one hand and carried a rifle in the other. The air of Galilee was charged. Kinnereth suffered much from the jealousy of a neighbouring tribe which attacked the settlers on the roads, lay in wait for them in the fields and behind the khan, set fire to the threshing floors, and gave them no peace by day or night.

Nor was there greater security in the other villages of Galilee. At Sejera, a quarrel broke out between the Jews and the Arabs of a nearby village. During Passover of 1909, a Jewish watchman named Israel Korngold, and S. Melamed, a farmer, were killed.

To add to all this, malaria was rife, and one by one the workers of Kinnereth were taken to the hospital at Zichron Yaacov.

In summing up the year, however, the workers at Kinnereth felt it had been worthwhile. They had learned a good deal about the work from their supervisor, and each man had come to know what he might and might not expect from himself.

There was one aspect of the life at Kinnereth which was irksome. The workers were not independent but were controlled by a supervisor with whose opinions they often disagreed. They felt that they had it in them to work on their own responsibility. It was no part of their purpose to live and work for their own gain; they aimed at performing a great national task. Men of that kind resented being treated as hired workmen doing a job only for the sake of the wages paid to them. Their hearts were full with a great idea and they wanted an opportunity of carrying this idea into practice by their own labour and on their own responsibility. The pioneers (who had meanwhile been strengthened by the addition of other workers at Kinnereth including Joseph Bussel) decided that at Kinnereth they would not reach their goal, and they moved over to Hederā in Samaria.

#### UM JUNI

Finding the administrative methods at Kinnereth inadequate from every point of view, the Palestine Office of the

Zionist Organisation considered handing over the land to the labourers themselves. Such an experiment, however, was difficult to carry out on a large scale. It was therefore resolved to hand over to the workers' group that part of the Kinnereth lands whose cultivation involved special difficulties, since it lay beyond the Jordan. This was the Um Juni tract, the site of Degania.

Um Juni covered an area of about 3,000 dunams (a dunam equals  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre). It had been purchased from a Persian effendi by the National Fund, but about 2,500 dunams remained in the possession of the original owner for several years after the Jews settled there. The effendi worked his land with Arab labourers who received a certain part of the crop in addition to their wages. Cultivation at Um Juni was very difficult for the Jewish workers, since the land was not definitely parcelled out, making it necessary to work different sections each year. Besides, lacking all other accommodation, they had to live in a nearby Arab village.

When the Jordan was in flood, during the winter, it was impossible for the workers at Um Juni to reach Kinnereth on horseback or by wagon. Only boats were available for transporting freight to Tiberias. They had to bring their loads by wagon to the banks of the Jordan and then transfer them to boats. The mules were unharnessed from the wagon, and set to pushing the boats. Often the mules would become confused and pull the boats far from the ford, endangering the lives of the occupants. At night matters were still worse, because the Arab boatmen would not respond for fear of the robbers who requisitioned the boats for their own purposes.

The Romni pioneers were the first to be asked to take over the cultivation of Um Juni land there. When they refused, another group composed of the flower of Jewish labour in Galilee, occupied the tract. This was in 1910. The members of this latter group had no fixed plans, nor did they attempt to look far into the future. But they did bring a keen sense of responsibility to their task, realising that upon its success or failure might depend the fate not only of their comrades in Galilee, but of the future of Palesti-

nian labour settlement as a whole. This group consisted of six men and one woman, additional labour being engaged when seasonal work demanded it.

A contract was made for one year between the new pioneer group and the Palestine Office, as an experiment. The experiment proved a success. The very first year the threshing floor covered all expenses, so that the farm paid its way. At the end of the year, the Palestine Office agreed to hand over the tract for permanent labour settlement. But — who were to be the permanent settlers?

The Romni pioneers, then at Hedera, were again asked, and they finally accepted the offer and decided to leave Hedera. In their year at Hedera they had been unable to find a farm to work on their sole collective responsibility, but their experience there had done them much good. They had learned all branches of farm labour and had gained much experience in the collective mode of living. By this time they had become a firmly knit unit. Their days were spent at work and the evenings were devoted to discussions on the details of the work, on the problems of the group, and on Jewish settlement as a whole.

The departure of the Romni pioneers for Um Juni caused a great stir both in Hedera and throughout the country, for all saw in it a new phase in land settlement. On their way to Um Juni they passed through the Judean villages as on a triumphal tour. They left during the week of the Feast of Tabernacles, 1911. The festival season they spent in Jaffa, attending a conference of the Hapoel Hatzair party, of which they were all members. Their presence invested the gathering with deep meaning, so that it was afterwards referred to as the "settlement conference".

The group, on taking over Um Juni, consisted of ten men and two women.

#### IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The chief motive of the Romni group in settling at Um Juni was to conduct a farm on the collective responsibility of its own members. Penetration to positions of hired labour in the existing Jewish villages did not content them. Nor

did they approve of the type of agriculture carried on in the Judean villages, which depended wholly upon foreign markets. They saw the Jewish farmer in Judea surrounded by a multitude of workers, ruled by officials and supervisors doing exactly as they saw fit, and they said:

*"On this road lies no redemption for the people. True, the national humiliation would be less because Jews would be doing their own hard work; but the crops of these villages are intended for export and must necessarily depend upon hired labour. Here is neither salvation for the individual nor redemption for the nation. The Jewish workers must adopt other methods of settlement. They must work the soil with their own hands and raise primarily those crops required for their own sustenance."*

But how achieve all this? Other pioneers had preceded them. There were the Bilu, who had come to Palestine with the same ideals as theirs. They too had wanted to set up a different economic system, one free from the shame of parasitism. Yet in the end they had yielded to circumstances. How could this danger be forestalled?

To all these doubts and qualms, the Romni group had one certain answer. All obstacles would be overcome with the united strength of the collective. Individuals were apt to give way under the strain of the hardships peculiar to Palestine; but cooperative life and work would triumph over everything. The central thesis of the plan was mutual aid, the root of all successful effort. By means of the cooperative system, a life of fellowship and justice would be achieved. This was the basis of the collective village, the Kvutsa.

At Hedera there had grown up a spirit of patience, equality, mutual aid and freedom in the relations between the members. Their aims were modest and limited, and they did not try to anticipate the future. There was nothing dogmatic about their ideal of the Kvutsa. It had not been borrowed from other lands or other peoples. It had not been dug out of musty volumes. It was an original, Palestinian creation deriving from the sources of the national and ethical idea which the pioneer movement brought to the Jewish homeland. The members chose this form of society

because it suited their own needs and desires and they had no intention of imposing it on others. Nor had they any fears that this form of society might not be acceptable to the "masses". The path of the crowd was broad and smooth; but for themselves the Romni group chose a rough and narrow path to a far-off goal. For themselves they would create the cell of a righteous society as they conceived it. At the same time they did not want their kvutsa to be an exclusive, arrogant sect. Even in the earliest days the men of Degania and especially Joseph Bussel had dreams of a network of Deganias in the Jordan Valley. Degania was to be the pioneer and prototype of the Kvutsa Community. There would be others to follow the example.

#### THE FIRST YEAR

The tract assigned to the Romni group, when it settled at Um Juni in 1911, was only half the area acquired by the National Fund. They took up their lodgings in Arab clay huts and wooden huts. At first the Arabs believed that, like the other Jewish farmers in Galilee, the new group would have to hire Arab labour for sowing and threshing their grain. When they found, as they soon did, that these were farmers who did their own work in the fields, they came to esteem them highly, and mutual relations were quite good. Boundary lines not yet having been defined, the division of tracts for cultivation between Jews and Arabs was purely temporary. The former therefore could not make any definite plans for the development of their farm.

The contract between the workers and the Palestine Office provided that the workers were responsible for the operation of the farm. Capital investments were to be made by the National Fund which was to receive fifty per cent of the net profits, the other fifty percent going to the workers who, in addition, were to receive fifty francs each a month as wages. Apart from the Romni group there were other workers at Um Juni who had not yet adopted the principles of collective sharing. All the workers ate in the central dining hall, the expenses of which were divided equally among all. Other expenses, such as clothing, boots and shoes



and assistance to relatives, were charged to each worker individually, for whom separate accounts were kept. The Romni group, however, kept one account for all its members, into which the earnings of all were paid. Among them there was no individual ownership of money.

Health conditions, during those early years, were none too good. The site at Um Juni brought on a recrudescence of the malaria which had stricken down the workers at Hedera. Many fell ill with it, some even of yellow fever. Death came stalking through Degania.

Nor were robbery and murder infrequent at first. The farm was close to the ford over which robbers used to carry off their booty to Transjordan. Guard duty in the fields was very exacting. As the two regular watchmen were unable to cope with the task, the workers took turns with them in the fields after the long day's work was over. The watchmen were also members of the group. In those days the slogan was: he who works the land must also be able to protect his crops! It would happen that men on guard in the grain fields, rifle in hand, ears attuned to every slight rustling, eyes closing from fatigue, would suddenly feel a bullet from some hiding place whizz past their ears. Yet the danger did not deter them. If anything, it added a new zest to their effort.

That first year at Um Juni was a joyous experience. The men would go out to the ploughing before dawn. Song would burst from the throats of the six riders who with their six pairs of mules moved along the banks of the winding Jordan. The forsaken waters had not had such a welcome in many a day.

The six ploughs turned up black clods in widestretching fields. Sacks of seed were emptied happily one after another. The workers were happy: at last they were peasants, tillers of the soil in their homeland.

It was dark again when they returned from the fields. Hurriedly they bathed, ate their supper. Then to the clay hut that served the farm for an office, where Bussel had established himself. Bussel would then read out the official correspondence to the interested listeners.

The contact between the kvutsa and the Palestine Office (of which Dr. Ruppin was then the head) was very intimate. When a mare died, the misfortune was sorrowfully reported to the Palestine Office, and words of comfort would come in reply. Or, if a wedding or other happy event took place, cordial congratulations were sure to follow. But the workers had the full responsibility for the management of their farm, and they took their job very seriously.

For more than a year the group continued to live in the Arab clay huts and in the rickety wooden cabins which rocked every time the wind blew. Once, on a very stormy night one of the cabins was blown down, and the wind carried its remnants far off to the village of Semakh. Meanwhile the all but naked comrades stood about joking over the incident.

The first attempt at living collectively which was then being made at Um Juni had a great effect upon the labour conferences, and traces of that influence were long evident in the developments of the labour movement throughout the country. Um Juni became the symbol of "self-labour" and cooperative living in practice.



Threshing in the Arab fashion during the early years.

## BUILDING THE NEW VILLAGE

After a year or so in the Arab village, the group began to consider erecting permanent structures for their settlement. The site finally chosen had both advantages and disadvantages, but it was felt that the former outweighed the latter. The advantages of the site were its proximity to Lake Kinnereth and the Jordan, to the Tiberias-Semakh high road and the railway station. The disadvantages lay in the nearness of the Jordan swamps and the long distance between the dwellings and the fields, which made guard duty very difficult and expensive during the early period. After all the pros and cons had been thrashed out, the site was fixed at a point where the Jordan flows out from Lake Kinnereth, nine kilometres from Tiberias and more than a kilometre from Semakh. The location is 198 metres below sea-level. The buildings were planned not for a modern mixed farm, such as Degania is to-day, but at the same time not for the usual type of Galilean grain farm. There was a large barn, but the original plan did not include either a cow shed or poultry run. Nor were the dwelling quarters arranged in accordance with the requirements of the climate. The barn was too near the kitchen; the sleeping rooms were too near the mess hall. These mistakes were avoided in later settlements. The water installation was planned for household needs alone. There was one small pump worked by a single mule and a small cistern which are now insufficient even for domestic needs.

Together with the erection of the buildings, trees were planted. The group had no liking for the bare Galilean villages without trees or gardens, and wanted their farm to resemble a Russian village with all kinds of shade and fruit trees (plum, apple, pear). A few years later, it was found, of course, that many of these varieties were unsuited both to the soil and the climate, and the trees had to be uprooted. On the other hand, local varieties such as the olive and carob flourished. Soon rows of cypress and pepper trees sprang up near the houses.

The permanent foundations of the village were laid during the spring of 1911. Then came the question of a name

for the settlement. Some suggested Kfar Goon, the historic name of the site. In the end, the suggestion of Joseph Bus-sel was adopted: Degania, the name of the blue flower that springs up between the blades of corn.

The erection of permanent buildings meant that the group had passed from a provisional to a more or less fixed form of existence. The number of members had grown, and the state of public security was somewhat better, though for a long time there was no security in the fields. A year and half after the Romni group had occupied the Um Juni tract, one of the members was murdered.

### MOSHE BARSKY

My friend T. and myself, both members of the group, were returning from Damascus on mules which we had gone there to buy. For two days we rode through narrow, stony paths among the mountains of Transjordan, much concerned for the welfare of our animals. As we descended

into the valley and neared the shores of Kinnereth, we spurred on and entered the borders of Degania after dark, singing, in a happy mood. But a blank silence met us. Our comrades were standing at the entrance to the grove of trees, their faces grief-stricken, guns in their hands. Then they told us that the night before, two of our friends — Moshe Barsky of Degania and Joseph Salzman of Kinnereth — had been murdered.



It had happened in this way. One of the workers at Degania had fallen ill. Moshe Barsky, who was always the first to volunteer for any task, rode on a mule to Menahemiah, a nearby Jewish village, to secure some medicine. At twilight his mule returned riderless. A search was made for him on all the roads by the light of lanterns, but it was almost midnight before he was found murdered near the road between Degania and Menahemiah. It appeared that Mo-

she had purposely sent the mule home so that, as he had always declared, no animal of his should fall into the hands of the robbers, while he tried to defend himself. Three bullets pierced his body, and then his assailants had clubbed him in the face until he died.

Joseph Salzman of Kinnereth had been shot by four Arabs while ploughing in the fields.

Barsky was still under 19 when death marked him down. The son of parents living in a small Russian town, he was ardently devoted to the ideal of the Jewish Renaissance. He came to Degania on his first day in Palestine, and threw himself into his work with a devotion that knew neither weariness nor conditions. He loved his friends and was beloved by them. Eight months after his arrival he was laid to rest in the olive grove he himself had tended beside the waters of the Jordan. His was the first grave in the Degania cemetery. When his death was reported to his parents in Russia, this is the answer that came from his father:—

*"I have received your precious letter. I found there true words that had welled up from loving and faithful hearts bound together by an eternal bond. Dear Brothers! The unexpected has befallen us. Great as is the disaster that has come upon us, you will not—God forbid!—let your spirits fail you. On the contrary, may the memory of my son inspire you with still greater strength and courage to fight your holy battle until you attain to the great ideal for which my son gave his life.*

*"Comrades in spirit! It is not only to thank you for your sympathy with my grief that I write you, but also to send you words of comfort. For, is not your grief my own? Come, therefore, and let us hope together that the blood of our precious victim, of my son and your comrade, Moshe, will be accepted, and that he may be the last sacrifice upon the altar of our exalted ideal."*

This letter infused us with renewed faith and courage. And soon after, Moshe Barsky's younger brother came to Degania—"to fill the place of the son who had fallen." At Degania we said: "If such parents remain in Israel need we grieve or despair?"

#### OUR NEIGHBOURS

The early settlers in Galilee can tell of many conflicts with brigands in the villages and on the fields. In the cemetery of each village there are graves of watchmen and of workers who fell. In later years I happened to hear the story of all these events from the very lips of one of the greatest robbers in Galilee.

I was travelling from Jerusalem to Tiberias by taxi one day, when we had a puncture which delayed us so long that we arrived in Tiberias late at night. I rarely stay overnight in Tiberias since it is only six or seven miles from my home, so I decided to leave, late as it was, for Degania.

The road from Tiberias to Degania is very beautiful. It stretches for the whole of its length along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In the darkened stillness one may hear the quiet lapping of the waves. I walked along at ease, heedless of the passing time. As I passed the hot springs of Tiberias, I suddenly saw the dim figure of a man in the distance. Some thirty feet away he stopped and asked me in Arabic, "Who are you?" I answered, "A friend, and who are you?" "A friend too," he answered and stood waiting for me.

I was a bit uncertain. People don't walk about at night unless they have "had a puncture," or are going to do the sort of job which is best done at night. But I had no choice. I approached the Arab, greeted him warmly and asked him where he was going. It turned out we were both going in the same direction: I to Degania, he to Semakh. The Arab was pleased to have my company. I slackened my pace so that he could keep in step with me. He noticed it and remarked, "Ah, you are young and quick. I was young once but now I am old and drag along like a woman".

He stopped abruptly and turned to me.

"Have you been in Degania long?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Do you remember how the first year you came to Degania one of your men and a woman were riding a mule from Tiberias to Degania, and were shot at and their mule killed?"

"Yes I remember."

"That was my job. There were a couple of us. We lay

under that rock there. When they got near us we ordered them to halt. The man took a shot at us. So we fired back and the mule dropped right away. We were sure we had got the woman also, so we went off."

We continued walking. Again he stopped.

"And do you remember when they held up an Arab coach, took four horses and wounded two Arabs? Do you remember that? That was my job too. There were three of us. One of us lay by the road, one in the ditch and the third on the mound. Eh!... the old days are gone. You are young but I am already old; can't make time. Since the English came into this land, they have arrested many of our fellows and shot them. I, Abu Diab, sell fish now. The old days are gone. Here, a bit-further on, we shot the settler from Yavniel. He didn't want to give up his horses peacefully, so we shot him. Muhamed Duban had a hand in that, the one who was killed in your village of Degania. That was a man! Now he is dead, his brother is in jail, and I sell fish." He laughed. "See how we ended up? Eh, the good old days are gone..."

"Do you know the story of how Muhamed Duban was killed in Degania?" I asked him.

"Of course, I know," said he.

"It was a dark night and raining hard. We were sure no living soul would be out. We thought it a good time to herd the cattle out of the Jewish village. We went in a group of three. I, Muhamed Duban, and his brother. We sneaked into the courtyard quite silently. There was a light in the stable. A woman sat there milking a cow. So we thought: let her finish, she won't milk on forever. Meanwhile we saw the watchman. We hid ourselves and waited until she had finished, and both of them, she and the watchman, went home with the pails of milk. Then we stole into the stable, loosened the cows from their chains one by one, until we had untied eight cows—fine Beirut and Damascus cows they were! Suddenly we saw someone coming. We went out immediately and hid. The watchman went into the stable and saw the cows straying around loose. He was suspicious, it seems, and went out into the yard. There he found a couple

of cows. He began to run back and forth, stumbled over one of us and began shooting. We shot back. He was a quick man, shooting with both hands, and we retreated. Muhamed didn't come back. The watchman shot him. We were completely discouraged by his death. Then the English began to get after us. We had to go far from the place, but we didn't forget Muhamed's death."

The time had passed so quickly, I hadn't noticed that we had reached Degania. I had recognized Abu Diab by now. His breath was heavy with brandy. He was a fisherman for a Jew in Tiberias, a merchant. The old drunkard, who mourned the romantic times that were passed.

Indeed, they had not forgotten the death of the robber in Degania. Exactly a year after, to the hour, his brother Achmad came to Degania to seek revenge. That very night the same watchman who had shot the Arab was on guard. We have no permanent watchmen; they relieve each other every two weeks, according to a definite schedule. Precisely at twelve o'clock at night when we were at a meeting in the dining hall, shots were heard. When we went outside bullets flew over our heads. The watchman ran up the path shooting continuously. He told us he had been shot at from the gate while leaving the stable and had answered the fire. The shooting was heard in the nearby police station and an English officer came with some policemen. By the light of the lanterns blood tracks were seen on the path. The trail led to Bedouin tents some distance away. There they found the wounded Achmad. His act of vengeance had not succeeded.

A few weeks later I happened to be going to Haifa. On the train I met a Bedouin in chains, accompanied by two armed policemen. It was Achmad Duban. They were taking him to the prison in Acre. He was a young handsome Bedouin with flashing black eyes, and thick black hair which lent him a peculiar charm. He was chained hand and foot, but his pride was still high.

Months passed. Our prestige among the Arabs had risen and in a little while we might have forgotten the whole matter. Then one day I met Achmad again in the train from

Haifa to Semakh. This time they were transferring him from prison in Acre to be tried in Tiberias. He had changed markedly. His eyes were sunken, their glow had disappeared, his face was yellow. Confinement had done its work with the free, wandering Arab.

He was brought to trial without a lawyer. He defended himself. The judge read a long list of charges against him: larceny, murder of Arabs and Jews, as well as of an Indian soldier, whom he had killed during the war while stealing horses. To all these charges the Bedou gave only one answer. "Did you catch me at it, did anybody see me do it?" And the prosecutors had no answer. He admitted only one charge: he had stolen horses from the Indian soldiers but he had paid for this crime sufficiently with a year in prison in Acre. So Achmad was acquitted.

One bright morning I was called by phone to Jerusalem. I was informed that the matter was urgent. I left for Jerusalem immediately. When I arrived the political chief of the Zionist Executive told me he had heard the Bedouin were preparing to take revenge on Degania. I told him that I knew about it already, and we were not frightened. If they attacked us they would simply lose once more. If the matter had seemed so urgent he might have told the police, instead of calling me to Jerusalem. He assured he had done so, and that the police commandant had replied: "If you are speaking to me officially, I promise you that I will call the Bedu and warn him that if anything happens in Degania, he will be held strictly responsible. What more can I do? But if you are speaking to me privately, I should advise Degania to make peace with him. For what is likely to happen? The Bedu will come to the fields when they are ploughing, will shoot and kill somebody. Afterwards they will trail him and perhaps find him, but the dead man in Degania will not be brought to life." I pondered this suggestion and though it scandalous. To submit to threatening Bedouin? It was unheard of: I went home without agreeing to the proposal.

This did not end the affair. The Arab kept sending one messenger after another. From all sides an attempt was



Palm trees near the First House

made to persuade us to make a peace settlement. In the end we agreed.

Both parties met in a nearby village in the guesthouse of the sheikh. There were three of us and the fiery Achmad and several Sheikhs of the vicinity. After a friendly chat about the weather, the cows and sheep, we drank some black Arab coffee. Then one of the Sheikhs made a short speech concerning brotherhood and friendship, about letting bygones be bygones, about peace and quiet which would reign everywhere from now on. Then the Bedu stretched out his hand to me, his gleaming eyes saying, "I beat you". I gave him £ 20.— and thereby the peace between Degania and Achmad Duban of the tribe of Dalayko Eissa was concluded.

#### EXPERIMENTS IN FARMING

Though European ploughs and sowing and reaping machines were acquired at the start, and a threshing machine some years later, the Degania farm did not differ materially from others in Galilee. The use of machinery involved no actual change of method, which was that of the single grain crop. If that crop failed, a whole year's work went for nothing. So it was in the Galilean villages, which restricted themselves to grain growing, and bought all their household necessities such as eggs, milk and vegetables, from their Arab neighbours. The Degania group finally realised that success did not lie in that direction, and therefore, decided to vary its crops.

It was not an easy decision to carry out. We all lacked experience in other branches of farming, nor had we anyone to teach them to us. There was as yet no agricultural experiment station in the country, and the Jewish farmers in Galilee had adopted the traditional Arab methods of concentrating on the growing of grain. There was nothing to do but to experiment, and to learn from experience. We groped in the dark, making many mistakes wherein the ridiculous alternated with pathetic; we wasted much time and money.

#### TREES

It was after much consideration that we first tackled the question of planting our trees. I well remember the day when the pepper saplings were set out in rows at the entrance to Degania. Since the members were grain farmers and knew nothing of horticulture, it was decided to invite experts to plant the trees—some girls from the training farm at Kinnereth. Deep trenches were dug. Water was brought to the scene in barrels. The trenches were filled with water from the barrels, while a young man and a girl descended into the trenches and planted the saplings in fear and trembling. Despite this treatment, the trees took root and grew quickly. And we grew along with them, learning many new things. After the pepper saplings, a small orange grove was planted, and eucalyptus, olive and almond trees. The planting of the trees had no particular relation to our economic plans. We did not expect to derive any income from them. For our income we looked to our grain crop alone. The trees were intended merely to provide a rural atmosphere and some fruit for our household needs.

The same attitude applied to the vegetables as well. Little was expected from the kitchen garden, since it never occurred to anyone that vegetables could be grown for sale. The idea was merely to have a few green things for the table.

It cannot be claimed that the members showed any great skill in laying out the kitchen garden. When the first tomatoes were to be planted, two young men armed themselves with great shovels and dug trenches like those intended for grape vines. Then the tomato plants were set out in the trenches. The irrigation, too, was no more expertly arranged.

#### ADVENTURE WITH COWS

Our dairy dates back to the Um Juni period. Two Arab cows were bought from a local Arab village and housed in the stalls. They were most carefully tended.\* In fact, we paid more attention to the needs of the cows than to our own. For all that, the yield of milk did not increase. I remember the rousing reception which these two cows received.

The entire kvutsa followed them, frightening them so much that they refused to budge. The cows were accustomed to complete freedom and Bedouin supervision and refused to remain confined to the cowshed or submit to European handling. They lay on the ground and refused to stand up. It was with difficulty that we brought them home. Later a few more cows were bought, and in 1913 the foundations of the present dairy were laid with the importation of some cows and heifers from Beirut. The kvutsa suddenly found itself with the makings of a large dairy on its hands, but with no proper facilities and without much of a market for the milk. Even today, herds of goats can be seen stopping at the kitchen doors in Tiberias, the housewives buying their milk at the source. How much more did the Tiberias community have to be persuaded in those days to buy and drink cow's milk.

There were no dairy experts to consult. Our notions of feeding were more than vague. Everything was experimental, and the number of experiments was equalled by the number of errors. Most of the Beirut cows died in a cattle plague that broke out in Galilee. Only stubborn faith and energy carried the dairy of Degania forward to its present status as one of the most important features of the farm.

Even in the growing of grain, we engaged on many experiments. Conditions in the Jordan Valley are different from those in other grain zones in that it has not much rain and no dew at all. It is impossible to plant summer crops, and a special rotation of crops had to be devised for restoring to the soil the richness sucked from it by the corn, and the fertility of which it had been robbed through many generations of neglect. Our efforts had their due reward. Then came the War and the Jewish population in our district increased considerably owing to the expulsions of Jews from Jaffa. Palestine being besieged and cut off from the world, there was a great scarcity of grain. All the settlements in Galilee increased their wheat and barley crops without a thought of what would happen later. The grain they grew then did indeed bring high prices, but when the War was over, those gains turned into losses. The abused

soil refused to respond to the efforts of the tillers, and it required much hard work to restore it to its former fertility.

After all its trials and experiments, Degania has discovered that the proper form of agriculture in the Jordan Valley is that of the mixed farm with diversified crops, based chiefly on large-scale irrigation.

#### THE WOMAN IN THE KVUTSA

The kvutsa was also faced by many human problems, for some of which no complete solution has been found to this day. One of these problems is the place of the woman in the kvutsa. Inequality between the men and women members became obvious at Um Juni as soon as the group had occupied the tract. The men went out to work in the fields, while the woman remained at home beside an old stove whose bitter smoke all but blinded them. The men would return from their day in the fields happy and cheerful only



A Daughter of Degania tending the Calves.

to find the women exhausted and depressed at the sight of their day's work: a meal amply spiced with smoke but only half cooked.

All of us, men and women alike, had come to Palestine with the same aim of changing our lives through and through. Here, we thought, the woman would find freedom and equality in tilling the soil beside her brothers. But the group that had gone up to Um Juni, numbering twelve souls, included only two women— just the number needed for the domestic work.

The difficulties of the situation were not easy to overcome. Our first place of settlement was only temporary, and it was impossible to set up a permanent homestead. There was no irrigation, and so there could be no vegetable garden. However, it must be confessed that the men were still psychologically unprepared for the radical step of allowing the women to work in the fields. All of us had come from middle class families, where the father was always the wage-earner and the mother always cooked, took care of the children, and so on. This attitude on the part of the men made it difficult for the women to secure their rights. Even later, when irrigation facilities were installed, the question cropped up time and again as to whether it would not be better to put a man in the vegetable garden and keep the woman in the kitchen. This controversy continued at Degania for a long time and is still pending in some of the other kvutsot, even though certain important farm activities are today conducted entirely by women.

#### TEMPORARY HANDS

The problem of temporary hands, also, was a harassing one for us. As long as the farm was restricted to the single crop of grain, it was not possible to have a fixed number of workers for the whole year. During the sowing season, twelve to fifteen men sufficed, whereas when there was weeding to do or the crop had to be harvested, a large number of temporary workers was required for a few days or weeks. The presence of these temporary workers had serious social implications in a kvutsa. Though the working

conditions were identical for all, it was not possible to ignore the existence of two distinct groups with differing rights: the one a group of established settlers, the other a temporary group of labourers, doing as they were told and then free to go where they would — or could.

The problem was partly solved with the introduction of fruit and vegetable-growing, for then it was possible to keep the same number of workers busy throughout the year, merely transferring them from one crop to another with the changing of the seasons. The problem is not as acute today as it was in the early period even though we are still in need at times of additional manpower. At times we make use of the help of members of new kvutsot who come to get their agricultural training with us. But it is still premature to say that the problem has found its final solution.

To take on the temporary workers as full members was also not simple. There long remained a clear demarcation at Degania between the Romni group and the individual members who had been admitted at different times and who did not, like the original pioneers, form a unified group with common memories. However, as time passed, this distinction was blotted out. There is now no such thing as a group within a group at Degania and personal accounts have long been abolished because there is a full sharing of all wealth.

Yet certain essential differences between new members and old still persist. The past of the kvutsa in which they themselves have had no share, arouses a sort of envy in the hearts of the newcomers, and they feel a strong desire to begin all over again, to become creators in their own right. This was one of the reasons for the constant shifting of personnel in the kvutsot. At Degania these changes caused severe losses because, instead of continually improving its methods and increasing its income, the kvutsa became a sort of training school. The newcomers paid no attention to what had been tried and tested before their time. The opponents of the kvutsa idea offer this shifting about as proof of their contention that the collective is merely a transitory form of organisation, a station on the way to a more permanent form of settlement.



But there was yet another reason for workers leaving kvutso. For the pioneer who came to Palestine twenty to thirty years ago, the country was a field of struggle. As long as the pioneer settlements were only temporary affairs, keeping themselves going as by a miracle, and the workers lived in Arab villages or rickety huts, with danger lying in wait for them everywhere, the pioneers looked upon themselves as trail-blazers. Later, however, when children were born to the first pioneers and they embarked upon family life, they accused themselves of having "taken a conquered city", the desire growing within them to arise and move on to new areas in need of development. At times the men of Degania felt the mountains beyond the Jordan beckoning and calling to them to come up and redeem their wastes; and they yearned to answer the call. There was a good deal of talk in those days about Baron Edmond de Rothschild's holdings in the Hauran. Some of our members wanted to turn Degania over to others and themselves go on to new outposts. But others opposed this tendency. Bussel, in particular, skilfully explained that there was no especial heroism in conquering new places. "It is easier to stand on the battlefield during a violent assault when your life is not worth a minute's purchase than to remain patiently and persistently at one spot from the time the foundations are laid until the last slate is affixed to the roof".

This desire to bring new lands under cultivation is proof not only of pioneer zeal, but also of a certain light-minded attitude toward the established villages. The labourer who entered a kvutsa in those days did not think of making a place for himself, or of founding a family, but always regarded himself as a sojourner, a passerby preparing the way for others yet to come. Hence the idea of bachelorhood which for so many years prevailed in the labour ranks. Here is the real cause for the shifting of personnel which so handicapped the first kvutso. Things were begun and left unfinished, one method was dropped and another tested. There were always new people, new methods. So many changes were made in the farming methods that the very

existence of the kvutsa was endangered. Degania finally succeeded in rooting out from its midst this tendency to wander. Certain kvutso still suffer from this evil, but the day is not far distant when it will be left behind. Where words have not availed, experience has convinced.

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHILD

With the advent of the first family and of the first child, still another problem arose. What of the mother of the child, she who had been so active and efficient a worker on the farm? What was she to do now? Was she to give up her work and devote all her time to the child? All were at a loss for an answer.

The idea of the kvutsa was, that since the women worked on the farm together with the men, they ought not to be burdened with the sole care of the children. But how was this theory to be applied in real life? No one knew. However, the first mother herself solved the problem. She simply took the baby with her to the scene of her work, to the barn of the vegetable plot. And when the baby cried, all Degania cried with it. Everyone resented the mother's "cruelty". She tried hard to appease us: "Don't worry about him. He'll surely stop. He has nothing at all to cry about." The child became accustomed to this novel method and all of us recognized the inevitability of having the mothers working in the field while tending their children.

With the birth of the second child, the problem grew even more acute and more complicated. How would the mothers be able to continue their work on the farm? How would they be able to continue their participation in the communal life? Would any woman be willing to hand her child over to another woman's care? One of us suggested that each family look after its own children; others suggested that the kvutsa itself employ a nursemaid to look after all the children. But Joseph Bussel said: "The duty to take care of all children rests not only upon the mothers, but upon all the women of the group, even upon the unmarried ones. If all the women would take a share in the rearing of the children, the mothers would be able to do other forms of work too. As for the

expense of rearing and educating the children, this should be shared by all the members of the group. No one should be exempt merely because he himself has no children. All such distinctions undermine the basis of the collective idea."

And by these words of Bussel's the children's mode of life was determined. A hired nurse was not employed; instead one house was set aside for all children to live in, under common supervision.

Degania has been visited by many afflictions — by disease, death, famine, and war, but all these have passed the children by. No harm has ever befallen them. In the trying climate of the Jordan Valley they have been guarded by the kind care and attention they receive in the nursery.

To this very day, the attitude of a woman towards the common nursery is still the touchstone of her fitness for life in the kvutsa. She can be judged as soon as her first child is born; and not every mother measures up to the test. Age-long habit holds the young mother in its clutches. She has all sorts of fears and suspicions that her child will not receive proper care. These bugbears can be dispelled only by a well equipped and hygienic nursery in charge of experienced children's nurses.

#### GROWTH OF EDUCATION

The children at Degania are divided into three age-groups. The first group, comprising those up to two and a half years of age, remain in the nursery from morning until the evening, under the care of members of the kvutsa who are trained as nurses. Towards evening these children return to their parents' quarters, where they remain over night. In this respect Degania differs from other kvutsot where the youngest children sleep in the nursery.

The second age-group comprises the children between the ages of two and a half to six who attend the kindergarten. The kindergartner is a member of the kvutsa. These children, too, spend their nights at their parents' quarters.

The third age-group comprises children of the age of six and upwards who attend the "Joint School for the Children of the Jordan Valley", which is situated in Degania. They

spend the greater part of the day at the school. The older children sleep in special rooms, usually adjoining their parents' quarters.

During the course of thirty-three years, ninety-nine children have been born at Degania, while another thirteen came to the kvutsa with their parents. Of these four have died and five have left with their parents.

Thirteen of our children are now fully-grown workers, while another ten work part-time. Four of our children are already married and we have four grand-children. We traversed a long road from our first child to our first grand-child. The first child to be born in Degania suffered much from the lack of companionship of other children. He did not have a kindergarten or a school, consequently he spent too much time with the adults, taking part in their activities and maturing much too early. The first grand-child found an environment more congenial to his development.

For many years the children of Degania attended the little school which served Degania exclusively. In the meantime the number of children in neighbouring kvutsot increased, and a spacious building was erected to serve as a joint school



for all the children of the Jordan Valley. Due to the generous helpfulness of Miss Henrietta Szold we obtained a loan which enabled us to build our schoolhouse. Since then several new buildings have been added to the original schoolhouse, with the help of funds invested by the kvutsoth which the school serves.

The foundation stone of the Jordan Valley School was laid on September 19th, 1930. A parchment scroll with the following text was placed in the foundations:

*"On Friday, Ellul 26, in the Year of the Creation 5690 (i.e. 1930), we laid the cornerstone for a School where it is hoped that the children of the Jordan Valley may grow up in the ways of labour and learning. May this house, to which its builders attach their dearest hopes, rear our children in knowledge and understanding, teaching them the virtues of cooperation, loyalty and efficiency, so that they may carry forward the task begun by this, our generation, which has transformed a hot and barren land into a region teeming with life, yielding abundant harvests, and blessed with a labouring community, strong and numerous, which will render back to the land its pristine strength as in days of old. May the blessings of plenty, cooperation and love of country rest upon the sons of an exiled people which has returned home."*

The scroll was signed "by the men of the first generation of the labour settlements in the Jordan Valley: Representatives of Degania A, Degania B, Kvutsoth Kinnereth and Beth Zera."

It was nearly nineteen years since the cornerstone had been laid for the first permanent buildings of Degania, then the only Jewish settlement in the Valley. Never had we expected to see such mighty changes in the district. Only ten years before we had thought that children could not be brought up in the trying climate of Degania. And now in 1930 at the opening of the School, we saw a troop of more than a hundred healthy and vigorous children ready to follow in their parents' footsteps. Our joy at this achievement can be imagined. The founding of the School was living evidence of our success in the effort to create a permanent Jewish settlement in the Jordan Valley.

Since 1930 there has been an increase in the Jewish community in the Jordan Valley. 320 children now attend the school in Degania. The school is encircled by a flower-garden and lawns. Behind the flower-garden there is an orchard and a vegetable-garden. The school-garden, cultivated by the children, supplies a considerable portion of their needs. All the children, large and small, do their share of the work in the garden, as well as in cooking and house cleaning. They also wait at table during meal-times under the supervision of adults.

During vacations the children work alongside the adults in the fields and gardens. They are superb workers and need no special training. But their work is productive only when they feel that it is of practical use to the kvutsoth and on the same level with the work of the adults. When they suspect that the work they are engaged in has been given to them only in order to keep them busy, the results are poor.

Besides formal study, the school curriculum includes other activities: manual work, play and physical culture. It is thrilling to see them in the waters of the Jordan and the Kinnereth. Every child, including the very young ones, swims like a fish. Swimming is the most popular sport in the Jordan Valley. The children enter the school of the age of five and study for twelve years. In their ninth year at school they spend two thirds of their day at their studies and one third at work in fields. In the eleventh school year they spend two thirds of their day at work in the fields and one third in study.

The programme of studies is of the "realist" type, although much emphasis is placed on the humanities: literature, Bible, etc. The objective of the school is to train good citizens and good workers who will continue to build the collective community. It is too early to draw any conclusions about the results of our education. But we are convinced that our children are getting an education which prepares them to continue the life we have begun.

On the outbreak of the war all our children were eager to join up. The new responsibilities thrown on Degania by the war situation — the maximum increase of agricultural production — called for an increased number of hands, and so



we were unable to let them all go. Five of them are now in the army. One, Shmuel Tanpolov, was drowned while on active service. He was young in years, loyal and devoted to his kvutsa. The time will come when we shall raise a suitable memorial to a dearly-beloved comrade whose loss was a great blow to us.

#### DEGANIA AND THE COMMUNITY

A further problem is that of the relations between the kvutsa and the rest of the Jewish community in Palestine. The path of the kvutsa has not been strewn with roses. The economic and social problems of the group have always exceeded the powers of the active members to cope with them. Nevertheless, both the kvutsa as a unit and its individual members have always taken part in the activities both of the labour movement and of the Jewish community in general. These public activities interfere with the work on the farm, because it is often the most efficient farmers who are most active in public affairs. On most occasions the sense of public duty triumphs and so far as possible Degania tries to release its members for public service. For example, during the last war, when the Jews were expelled from Jaffa, Joseph Bussel devoted much time and energy to the exiles and especially to the orphaned children. Many Palestinian Jews were at that time carried off to prison in Damascus and one of the members of Degania, Ben Yaacov, went off to Damascus to help them.

Ever since the first World War members of Degania have been frequently sent on missions for the labour movement. Difficult as it is for the kvutsa to permit its members to leave Degania for these activities, it is aware of the compensation which comes from being in touch with the Jewish community and the labour movement, and from keeping informed about what is going on in the outside world. This gives us the reassuring feeling that we are an organic part of a larger social body.

On the outbreak of the present war, Degania realised that in addition to expanding its agricultural production to meet the war needs of the country it had to release manpower for service in the armed forces. Forty men and women accordingly joined up, their work on the farm being taken over by others.

#### DEGANIA: TRAINING GROUND

Degania has always been a centre to which members of other kvutsot have come to gain experience and training. Hundreds of pioneers newly arrived in the country received their agricultural training in Degania in the course of the last thirty years. In recent years this training, or hachshara as it is called, has assumed a more organised form. There are now many kvutsot up and down the country, and they have formed an Association of Kvutsot known as Hever Hakvutsot. This Association is linked up with two youth organisations, Gordonia, and Maccabi Hatsair which have branches throughout Palestine and in many other countries. In these organisations boys and girls prepare themselves for pioneering life. Degania provides training facilities for them. With the increasing immigration of Jews from Germany, Degania accepted many members of the Maccabi Hatsair; in addition groups of the Palestinian youth organisation "Noar Haoved" (Working Youth) came to us. These youngsters usually spent a year and sometimes more in Degania. Their hachshara did not consist of manual work only; it also helped them in their adjustment to the life of the kvutsa and its problems under the guidance of men and women deeply experienced in the collective way of life. They learned to speak Hebrew at the evening courses specially provided for them. This hachshara was a boon for these young people, most of whom joined kvutsot after their training was completed.

The hachshara of the German-Jewish youth — the "youth aliyah" — is a story in itself. At first we could not make up our minds whether we should undertake the training of young children of the age of 15. Was Degania with its difficult climate a suitable place for such training? Were we com-

petent to train young people raised in an entirely different environment, wholly unfamiliar with the country and the Hebrew language? After much deliberation we decided to accept a group of 16 boys and girls. Most of these were young, children of overfond parents, accustomed to a high standard of living and not used to fending for themselves. The first group spent two years in Degania, and then went out to work in the villages. They have now settled in Matsuba, near Hanita, where they have founded their own kvutsa. Degania will not forget the day of parting with this group. To the young emigrés from Germany it was like another leave taking from home, from father and mother. In the two years which they had spent in Degania they acquired new attitudes and sentiments: love of country, Hebrew, skill in work, adjustment to kvutsa-life. They had become full-fledged workers! Degania showed them the "road to life". They did not remain in Degania, although they would certainly have been accepted as members of our community. They refused to enjoy the ripe fruits of Degania which had been made possible by more than a generation of pioneering toil. They wanted to be pioneers themselves. That was their motive for leaving Degania, but they are linked to us by strong bonds of friendship and comradeship.

Degania is now giving training to a group of immigrant youth as well as to a group of youngsters from the Gordonia Zionist youth organisation, and to Noar Haoved.

A few months ago we received a group of 14 boys and girls from Poland. They escaped from the Germans at the beginning of the war and after 3½ years of wanderings came to Palestine, via Russia and Teheran. Young though they are they have had their fill of suffering. Most of them are orphans; all know what it is to feel hunger and cold, to steal across frontiers in a desperate effort to save their lives, to languish for months in prison camps. With us they have found a home, and in a few short months have adopted themselves to a regular life.

#### INDEPENDENCE AND MATURITY

At the end of the last war the possibilities for Zionist work in Palestine increased. In 1917 the British Government issued the famous Balfour Declaration promising the Zionist Organisation assistance in the creation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. In 1920, Great Britain took over the administration of the Government of Palestine under a Mandate from the League of Nations which was subsequently ratified in 1922. The Mandate incorporated the pledge contained in the Balfour Declaration. In 1920 Palestine was thus on the threshold of a great new period of development, a period which was to witness the transformation of the country under the impetus of British rule and Jewish settlement.

In 1920 the Zionist Organisation held an important conference in London at which decisions were taken designed to prepare the organisation to cope with the great task which awaited it. Most important of these decisions was the creation of the Palestine Foundation Fund (Keren Hayesod) to finance Jewish settlement in Palestine. The Jewish National Fund now concentrated on the purchase and preparation of land for settlement.

Following on this decision the original contract between Degania and the Palestine Office was rescinded and the lands and properties of Degania were transferred to the control of the kvutsa itself which now farms the lands under a lease from the Jewish National Fund and entirely on its own responsibility.

Since that time Degania has not stood still. Improvements have been made with the help of money loaned from the Keren Hayesod and the profits from the farm have also been invested in further development. The installation of irrigation works in 1928 facilitated progress and solved many of the problems by which the kvutsa had hitherto been confronted. Large motors driven by electric power supplied by the Rutenberg Electric Works at nearby Naharaim, drive the waters of the Jordan through concrete pipes to irrigate the fields of Degania, Beth Zera, Afikim and other Jordan Valley settlements. The water reaches a distance of 2 to 3

kilometres. Areas where only wheat and barley were cultivated only a few years ago are now producing vegetables, fodder crops and fruit.

Degania has served as an experimental station for the new type of land settlement. Out of its trials and tribulations there has emerged an accumulation of experience and knowledge of farming in Palestine in its various branches. This experience was invaluable in the settlements founded later.

As soon as Degania came under the full control of the kvutsa, its whole internal organisation was changed. All the individual accounts were dropped, the small inner group was dissolved, and the whole kvutsa went over outright to the collective form of society.

Degania would long ago have become a large kvutsa had it allowed itself to grow haphazardly. But the kvutsa did not take the easy path. Applicants for membership were asked not only to consent in principle to its theoretical basis, but also to prove their ability to adapt themselves to its practical requirements. Such a choice is not easily made. Many people have passed through Degania without being absorbed into its organism, and many were doubtless unable to find their ideal of society in the kvutsa. But that period is now de-



Bringing milk to the "Tnuva" Dairy at Degania.

finitely in the past. In the course of the last years very few have left us permanently.

For a long period it was the custom at Degania to permit a new-comer to stay for two or even three years without requiring him to decide whether or not he wished to become a permanent member. Later, an end was put to this excessive freedom, and one year was set as the trial period. In exceptional cases, the period of trial is extended to two years. At the end of that time he has to decide whether he wants to stay permanently, and the kvutsa has to decide whether to accept him.

As time went on Degania had developed economically to so great an extent that it was capable of absorbing a large population. To have absorbed too many additional members would, however, have resulted in the weakening of the close personal relations which, in the view of the members of Degania, are the basis of the kvutsa form of society. Degania met the problem by deciding to give up part of its land. In 1920 we gave 1000 dunams of our land to a new group known as Degania B. In 1921 Degania C was founded on a further area of 1000 dunams handed over by the mother village. This arrangement, however, did not work. It was soon discovered that 1,000 dunams was insufficient for the requirements of each group. The members of Degania C, therefore, went off to found a kvutsa at Ginegar in the Valley of Jezreel and the area of Degania B was expanded to 1500 dunams. In this way Degania achieved its object: its lands were put to the fullest use in enabling the settlement of the maximum number of people, while the intimate nature of the closely-knit kvutsa society was safeguarded.

The two Deganias have now a combined population of nearly 700. The economic structure of the kvutsa is based on diversified farming. Wheat, barley, vegetables, grape-fruit, bananas, table grapes, olives, fodder crops, dairy products, poultry and eggs are the main items of production. In recent years the area allowed for fruit and vegetable growing has been increased, the area for grain cultivation being correspondingly reduced.

Our wheat and barley crops are dependent on the caprice of the weather. But agricultural science seems to promise that in the near future it will be possible to irrigate these crops artificially. Some countries are already experimenting in this direction, and a day will undoubtedly come when through the irrigation of our cereal crops we shall cease to depend on the idiosyncrasies of the rainfall.

The tropical climate and the proximity of Lake Kinnereth and the Jordan make it possible to raise early vegetables at Degania. The areas for vegetable-growing are being increased from year to year. Potatoes which were at first unsuccessful are now doing well and provide the bulk of our income from vegetables.

Our most profitable fruit crop is the banana, which was first grown in the Jordan Valley in 1924. The experiment showed that the Jordan Valley was well suited for the cultivation of the banana, and it has been introduced in all the villages in the region. Oranges do not thrive in the Jordan Valley as well as in Judea, but the grapefruit flourishes. Our grapefruit plantations have developed nicely and compare well with the Judean plantations. Olive cultivation on unirrigated land is not profitable. But the trees near the houses, on lands which are irrigated, always thrive.

Indeed, since the planting of improved olive species, our yield has increased considerably and in addition to supplying our own needs leaves us with quantities for marketing. We have also started date cultivation. The date palm flourishes in the Jordan Valley. Our fruit orchards have been put in good condition. Our apple trees which were at first unsatisfactory, now give good yields, thanks to the introduction of the species most suitable to the conditions and the experience we have acquired in tending them. We have learned that there is very little which cannot be grown with success in the Jordan Valley.

Degania has unusually large fodder crops. With irrigation, alfalfa yields 8 crops a year, from 28 to 32 tons to the acre. This is a yield uncommon even in California. These excellent crops have enabled us to keep our dairy well supplied and it has thus developed very satisfactorily. We are raising alfalfa not only for own needs, but also for sale to the army and the police.

One of the most important branches of our farm is the dairy. We started out with a local breed of cow whose

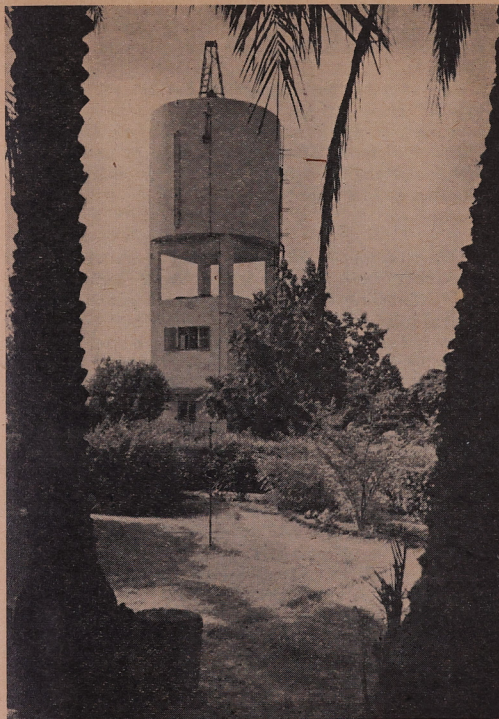


annual yield was about 700 litres. In the course of time we have developed a breed of our own whose average yield is 4100 litres a year with a fat content of 3.85%. We now, 1943, have 160 head of cattle. A number of calves are sold every year in addition to those killed for our own use. About 25% of our income is derived from our dairy production. Our milk is sold to the central dairy of the Tnuva Cooperative Marketing Society, located in Degania itself, where it is turned into butter, cheese and other dairy products. The central dairy serves all the villages of the Jordan Valley.

The poultry branch of our own farm has been progressing in recent years. We are no longer experimenting and groping in the dark. Our poultry stock is growing from year to year. The home market for eggs and poultry has expanded considerably in recent years and its possibilities are still far from exhausted. As far as the yield of our poultry is concerned, we have raised it to 140 eggs a year per chicken in contrast to the yield of 70 eggs a year when we first started poultry farming. A new branch recently developed in Degania and all the Jordan Valley settlements is fishing. All over the valley artificial ponds have been constructed for the breeding of carp. At one time Palestine was dependent for its fish supplies on imports from the neighbouring countries and even from Europe. The great strides which have been made in local fish-breeding and sea-fishing ensure the country of the prospect of self-sufficiency in this regard.

With our first thirty years behind us, we still find joy in experimentation. In the early days we made experiments on our own initiative. Now the Agricultural Experiment Station of the Jewish Agency and, at times, the Government Department of Agriculture come to our aid.

Our growing economy has as yet not reached saturation point. We are still on the march towards a larger and richer Degania. There are still many tasks before us. Irrigation facilities are far from complete, and we know only too well that every irrigated dunam means more working hands and new people. Our children when they grow up need not fear about being economically absorbed in the kvutza where they were born. There is enough room for them as well as for



The Water Tower for Supplying Domestic Needs.



new people from the outside in our continually expanding community. We frequently make new investments which come from our profits and from loans. In 1936 we were able to start repaying the loans we had received from the Keren Hayesod.

I have said that our development has not yet come to a standstill. However, one lesson from over thirty years of pioneering and experimentation is now beyond dispute: that the diversified farm is the healthiest form of agriculture in Palestine. Diversified farming makes us independent of foreign markets and imported goods.

#### HEALTH

Health conditions at Degania were not at first very favourable, so that there has always been much sickness in the kvutsa. Nowadays, before a settlement is established, preliminary reclamation works are carried out by draining swamps and centralising all the water in one spot. Such preliminary works were not carried out at Degania, which was surrounded by large swamps on every side. The Jordan overflows at this point; on the west there is a valley rich in springs, and the river Jarmuk to the east. All this resulted in an abundance of mosquitos; so that malaria used to be an ever-present guest at Degania. The heat also caused much sickness and weakness. Health conditions improved somewhat when Rutenberg's electricity reached Degania, and the draining of the swamps was a great boon. There is still need for sanitation measures on a large scale, but these cannot be paid for out of the ordinary income of the village. The health situation is today satisfactory. The preventive measures we have taken have reduced the incidence of disease.

## THE ORGANISATION OF THE KVUTSA

The kvutsa is the complete form of collective society. All property is owned by its members and there is no private property except in articles of personal use. All the property of the kvutsa is owned by the kvutsa as such which is registered with Government as a cooperative society and thus has the legal right to own property and to transact business.

The kvutsa is a democratic society. All members are on a footing of equality, no matter what function they may happen to be performing at any particular time in the economic or social life of the kvutsa. Democracy in the kvutsa extends to economic affairs as well as to social and public affairs. The supreme governing body of the kvutsa is the general meeting of all the members. In the early days of Degania, when there was only a handful of members, it was possible for all questions to be thrashed out at the general meetings which were held very frequently. Now that Degania has grown to a membership of nearly 300 it is impossible for the general meeting to do more than discuss questions of principle and to appoint committees which are entrusted with the task of carrying out detailed organisational work. Even today, however, a general meeting is held usually once a week, so that there is a constant opportunity for all aspects of the life of the kvutsa to be passed in review.

One of the most important of the committees of the kvutsa is the committee for the allocation of work. This committee, like the others, is elected at the general meeting for a period of several months. Its task is to allot work to each member. Every evening a notice is posted in the dining hall informing members of the work which they are due to carry out the following day. Naturally, so far as humanly possible, the committee tries to allocate to each member the work he prefers and at which he is most expert.

Other committees appointed are the economic committee which draws up and supervises the application of the complete plan of economic activity in all spheres; an education and youth committee, a housing committee, a building committee, and a committee for the supervision of the kitchen. There is another committee called the members' committee, whose task is to examine any personal requests which members may have, and to do everything possible to meet them. All the members of these committees are elected by the general meeting, usually for a period of one year, though often members carry on their duties for much longer periods. The general objective is to activate all members of the kvutsa in some aspect of public life, for it is understood that a democracy of this kind can only work if every member is conscious of his duties towards the kvutsa society as a whole. The work of all the committees is coordinated by a central committee which is called the secretariat, and which is composed of the secretary and the treasurer of the kvutsa and of the members who are responsible for important branches of work.

The basic principle of kvutsa life is "share and share alike" in work itself and in the enjoyment of the products of work. One member may be doing highly responsible work as the kvutsa secretary, while another may be doing the work of a navvy, but both are on exactly the same footing and enjoy exactly the same rights and privileges. All the members eat together in the central dining hall, which is the centre of all the kvutsa's social life. Here the general meetings are held and frequent lectures and concerts arranged by the education committee. The kvutsa's clothes store and laundry provide the member each week with a fresh supply of clean clothing, while the shop keeps his boots and shoes in repair and provides him with new ones when occasion demands. The sick member is cared for at the kvutsa's responsibility, no matter how long the period of his sickness may be. Not only is he not penalised because of his incapacity to work, but on the contrary, he receives the care and attention necessary for him, no matter how expensive it may be. The kvutsa insures all its members with the Workers' Sick Fund of the General Federation of Jewish Labour.

In a society of this kind money has no place. The kvutsa itself, of course, conducts business relations sending its produce to market and buying the requirements which it cannot produce itself. But inside the kvutsa there is no need for money. All those small personal requirements which a member needs, such as cigarettes, toilet articles, and so forth, are provided to him by the kvutsa, which also makes it possible for him to get an annual holiday. As the economic position of the kvutsa develops it is possible to make larger sums available for the provision of comforts of this kind.

New members are accepted into the kvutsa by the decision of the general meeting. There is however no hard and fast rule as to a majority vote on the acceptance of a new member. No new member will be accepted if an appreciable number of people object to him. The reason is that it is understood that the kvutsa is not a mechanical form of society. It can only work if its members are suited to each other temperamentally. That, at any rate, is the opinion of the kvutsot of the type of Degania which see in the kvutsa an extension of the family circle.

The kvutsa society is the negation of the idea that a man can only be happy when working for his own personal advantage. As against this the kvutsa asserts that cooperation is a great activating force, and that it offers a greater degree of security from all points of view than the usual system of competition. The habits of cooperation which are formed inside the kvutsa result in the development of a spirit of national responsibility. We have seen how Degania is constantly answering calls made on it by the Zionist movement and the Jewish community. This response to public duty is a natural result of the cooperation which lies at the foundation of the kvutsa society.

#### ASSOCIATION OF KVUTSOT

There are many kvutsot in Palestine, and their number is constantly growing. It is only natural that these kvutsot should cooperate with each other in order to meet problems by which all are affected. To this end the Association of Kvutsot was brought into being. Degania is a member of the Association.

The principles upon which the Association is based are:

1. The kvutsa is founded upon absolute cooperation with regard to property, work and consumption, and upon the constant effort to strengthen the cooperative basis in all aspects of life and work.

2. The kvutsa builds its life upon the individual education of each member, upon the improvement of human relations, upon maximum cooperation by each individual in the affairs of the kvutsa, and upon the establishment of agencies and institutions appropriate to and helpful in the organisation of a cooperative life and economy.

3. The size of each kvutsa is determined by the kvutsa itself in consultation with the responsible institutions of the entire Association, and is dependent upon its economic and social capacity. The relation of the individual to the group and the opportunities for individual development are always given due consideration. The final decision as to the size of the kvutsa rests with the kvutsa itself.

There are 27 kvutsot in the Association, in addition to 6 young groups still awaiting settlement. These 33 groups have a membership of 3484 men and women and a total population, including children, of 6470, of these 820 men and women have joined the army and the security forces.

In the last three years, hundreds of German boys and girls have made their homes in the kvutsot of the Association. A number of them have already finished their two year period of preparation and study and are now independent workers in the villages.

The new Association of Kvutsot has a number of youth movements affiliated with it, chief among which are Gordonia and Maccabi Hatsair. On the outbreak of the war these movements had 30000 members in countries outside Palestine. They train their members for a pioneering life. Their graduates organise themselves into new kvutsot. The children in these movements and our own children growing up in the existing kvutsot are our guarantee that the way of life we have started will be continued and that the ideals for which we live will be carried forward into realisation.

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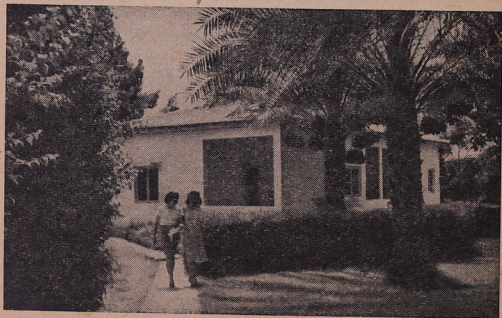
## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JORDAN VALLEY

When in 1935 the Jewish National Fund acquired an additional tract of land in the Jordan Valley, the question arose whether it should be divided between the kvutsot Degania A, B, and Kinnereth or whether a new kvutsa should be settled on it. The decision was in favour of the latter solution and sometime afterwards the kvutsa Beth Zera was established. After irrigation facilities were installed in 1928 and production was in consequence intensified, the older kvutsot in the Jordan Valley set aside about 500 dunams of their land for a new settlement, Afikim. These land contributions on the part of the older settlements were motivated by the desire to make possible a larger Jewish population by creating new villages rather than by the expansion of the population of the existing villages. The national character of the villages led them to repudiate what to others might have appeared to be the natural course: they refused to use the new economic opportunities to grow rich at the expense of their main object—the increase of Jewish population.

Degania is no longer isolated. Around it has sprung up a network of new Jewish villages: Degania B, Menahemia. Beth Zera, Afikim, Ashdot Ya'akov, Gesher and Tel Or. At the latter the Rutenberg Electric Works are situated. During the three years of the disturbances which started in 1936, three new settlements were established in the Jordan Valley: Masada, Mishmar Hagolan, and Ein Geb. Ein Geb is situated across the Sea of Kinnereth. Together with kvutsa Kinnereth, the settlements of the Jordan Valley to-day contain a population of some 4700 souls, 3800 adults and 900 children. This population farms an area of 27000 dunams. Long ago the founders of Degania used to sit together in the

evenings dreaming aloud of the time when the barren area of the Jordan Valley would be covered with a series of Degania's. Many of those men of vision have passed on but those whom hardship and struggle have spared have lived to see that dream come true. To-day the Jordan Valley is throbbing with life, a tribute to the men who devoted themselves to the creation of conditions in which an oppressed people could find ideals of social justice and of human helpfulness.

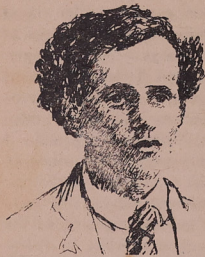
The aspect of the Jordan Valley has completely changed since we came here thirty years ago. The villages are growing and continually expanding. Many new branches of agriculture have been introduced. Things which we never expected to be able to grow have become acclimatised and are producing good crops. Nor have we been content with the intensification of our agricultural production. In recent years, we have introduced industrial establishments, Afikim boasts the largest box-making factory in the country. Ashdoh Ya'akov is operating a large jam making factory. Kinnereth has developed a large quarry, and in various villages the settlers have commenced the artificial breeding of fish. The other kvutso't, too, have all established small industries. Day by day the lorries carry our agricultural produce and our manufactured goods to all parts of the country.



With the development of its population the social aspect of life in the Jordan Valley has changed completely. We are no longer cut off from the rest of the country as we were in the old days. To-day the trains coming from Haifa stop at the Arlosoroff Station near Afikim. At Kinnereth we have a central post office for the Valley and a special bus service links us with Tiberias while the Egged busses travelling from Tiberias through the Valley of Beth Sha'an to Haifa and Tel Aviv pass our villages. The Central Committee of the Jordan Valley Villages has been instrumental in developing a whole series of services for the inhabitants of the Valley. It operates the central school at Degania, maintains the Gordon House, arranges regular concerts, film shows and theatrical shows and is now planning the establishment of an agricultural school for the senior boys of our villages. Recently a magic enterprise was completed. This is the central Jordan Valley water supply system, whose construction took one and a half years. The new aqueduct leads water from the Yarmuk to Kinnereth, Beth Zera, Degania A, Degania B and Afikim, enabling these settlements to put thousands of dunams under irrigation. The Yarmuk waters are preferable to those of the Jordan, since their salt content is far lower; moreover, they are said to lead to a quicker ripening of the crops. This is one of the largest water enterprises in Palestine, and it has already had a vital effect in converting barren land into fertility.

I vividly remember the day when we were gathered round the graveside of one of the men of Menahemia who was killed during the disturbances. The father of our dead friend said: "Conditions will force us here to build a link between the Valley of Jezreel and the Jordan Valley and to extend the lines of security of the Jewish population of this country." To-day this prophecy is being clothed with reality.

The story of Degania would not be complete without a short account of the lives of four men who were largely responsible for its development: Joseph Bussel, A. D. Gordon, Yitzchak Ben Ya'akov and Dr. Arthur Ruppin.



JOSEPH BUSSEL

Joseph Bussel was one of the first to envisage the kvutsa as the basis of the new Jewish community in Palestine. The kvutsa was to be the unit of the nation, and the nation in turn a unit of the great family of a regenerated humanity, living in amity and equality. With patience, trust, and heroic effort he went forward steadily toward the goal which beckoned his spirit.

Bussel came to Palestine from the small Lithuanian town where he was born in 1891. The son of pious parents, he was attracted to the Zionist movement at a very early age. A good speaker, he soon became the guide and adviser of a group of his youthful friends. At first Bussel studied for the Rabbinate, believing that in that field he could render great services to his people, but he found no satisfaction in his work of preaching the Zionist idea. He decided to practice it, and came to Palestine to devote himself to the re-creation of the Jewish Homeland.

His comrades looked upon Bussel as a dreamer. They could not imagine that this frail, slender youth would rise up from his Talmud to become a tiller of the long-forsaken soil of Palestine. Their doubts could not deter him. At seven-

teen he left his native town for the Jewish villages in the Russian province of Kherson, where he did a year's preparatory work on the soil. Then he set his face toward Palestine.

Bussel's first experiences — at Petah Tikva — were very unhappy. He went on to work as a hired labourer at Rehovoth, where he was somewhat more contented, but still could find no peace of spirit. He aimed at establishing a free society, a village where all would work equally and live equally in common devotion to the cause of Zionism and social justice.

He was the first to go up to Kinnereth in Galilee to work on the land of the Jewish National Fund. There he found congenial companions with whom he went from Kinnereth to Hedera, and from Hedera to Um Juni to found Degania.

The delicate young man became adept at every form of hard labour, in which he was excelled by none. He was ever active. At the end of a long day in the fields, when the others were sleeping, Bussel sat by a tiny oil lamp making up accounts, writing letters, giving expression to his ideas on life and society.

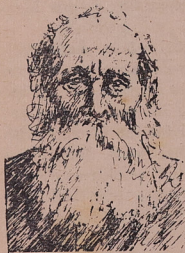
The affairs of the community as a whole made their demands upon him. Whenever and from whatever quarter a call for help came, he was the first to respond. He worked with others, but followed no light save his own. During the war, when Galilee had to provide bread for the whole Jewish population and to help it in many other ways, Bussel was to be found at Tiberias, devoting himself wholeheartedly to the refugees, and especially to the orphans who had been exiled from Judea and were roaming the streets hungry and neglected.

Degania for him was the centre of everything, for in the kvutsa he saw the basis for the revival of the national life.

Malaria and even the dread yellow fever attacked his meagre frame. He was waiting for me to take his place. It was in 1919. I was on my way back from Russia. But when I reached Constantinople, I was refused permission to re-enter Palestine. It took a whole month to secure that permit. Finally I took passage on a Russian ship carrying timber.

Hardly had she set sail, when she collided with another ship and sank like a stone. I escaped as by a miracle. A week later I was about to travel by a ship which was carrying my baggage, but she, too, sank before I could come aboard. When I finally managed to reach Beirut, I hurried on to Metulla. I did not know Bussel was waiting for me in order to take the rest he needed so badly, but my homesickness hastened me on, and I engaged a wagon to take me to Degania. On the road I met a young fellow from Tiberias and asked him for news of Degania. He replied rather casually, "Someone was drowned at Degania to-day!" It was Bussel.

He had gone to Tiberias on some business for the Association of Galilean Villages and was returning in small boat when it was overtaken by a sudden storm. The heavy waves overturned the boat. His fellow passengers — two Arabs and a Jew — managed to reach shore, but Bussel could not hold out. When I reached Degania at last, he was no longer there. All I found was a heap of stones piled on his grave.



A. D. GORDON

Aaron David Gordon was born in 1856 in a rural district of the Ukraine and grew up among the forests of his birth-place. The impressions of those early days remained strong throughout his life. It was from this early direct contact with nature that he later developed his doctrine of the "covenant between man and nature".

This faith he expressed not only in teaching and preaching, but in his every daily act. His migration to Palestine itself was due to a keen desire to change his whole environment, to enter upon a life of physical toil. When he came to the Land, he was already forty-eight years old, and had never done any physical work. His friends tried to persuade him to accept professional work suited to his intellectual abilities, but in vain. He would not agree. From his first day

in Palestine until his death he did physical work. That such labour was difficult and trying mattered not to him. Labour in itself, he held, was wholesome for body and soul. The individual Jew and the whole people should mould themselves anew through work. Therefore, every individual ought to labour: the teacher, the community leader, the writer — all of them.

He knew difficult times in Palestine, suffered much from malaria, and from unemployment. Many times he was offered professional posts but he would never accept them. Even before coming to Palestine, he had refused to become a professional teacher. The same motive impelled Gordon to refuse fees for his articles. I remember that he once received a cheque from an American editor for an article of his. He was very uneasy over the matter for a long time, until finally he decided to give the money to help a local newspaper. To enjoy it himself was out of the question.

What he demanded of others, Gordon first of all practised himself. He demanded that each human being be independent, and tolerated no subservience to the authority of others. All this he applied first to himself, making a personal trial of any idea which occurred to him. Later, he expounded this idea in writing. He once explained this fundamental idea of his to Ussishkin, the President of the Jewish National Fund who had come to Degania to visit him; he stood spreading manure with a pitchfork in the fields. "You understand," he said, "when you stand in the field and use the pitchfork like this... and this... you feel very fit, you feel that you have a right to live in this world."

So thought Gordon. Here was no thinker sitting in the seclusion of his study and drawing up programmes. He was very realistic, and knew how to take life as it is. When living with us at Degania, he took part in all our daily problems. Just as he thought about and discussed philosophic problems, so also he took part in decisions affecting the farm animals, manuring, ploughing and planting. But always, in every practical matter, he emphasized the moral bond between the individual and society.

He never found work burdensome, performed all his tasks

with precision, orderliness, and good taste. When he hoed a row, it ran firm and straight. Whatever he did—whether it was tidying up a room or making a bed—the result was neat and trim. Work was a religion for him, though he never used that term. He did not want to confine himself to easy tasks only, so we had to be very careful lest he suspect that he was being assigned to light work. He considered easy work degrading.

In his intellectual labours, he was just as orderly as in his work in the field. When he sat down to write, the table had to be in apple-pie order. All the writing materials had to be in place and in good condition: the pencil sharpened, the pen-knife ready beside it, the paper arranged in a neat pile of square sheets. His handwriting was clear and neat. So a man does the work he loves, work not forced or imposed upon him.

Gordon was a very persistent worker. His writing was done at night. We would hear him walking up and down his room in the upper storey after we were in bed. Then we knew him to be in a creative mood, inspired by some idea for which he was seeking expression. And expression was not easy for him. He worked long and hard at his writing.

But if he was steadygoing at his work, he was also a restless soul. He sought no permanent niche for himself, but went about from one place to another. It was only in his later years that he seemed to feel the need of a permanent habitation, of a home. His last years were spent at Degania. He was not a member of the kvutza, but on the contrary, used to argue with us and lecture us severely. He wanted men to improve not in their outward seeming, but in their inmost selves. For all that, he stayed close to us and was, in actual fact, one of us. During the time he spent at Degania, he greatly enhanced the social-ethical development of the kvutza.

In 1922, in the sixty-seventh year of his life, death struck him down. Gordon's influence on the youth and on the growth of the kvutza was tremendous. The whole passion of his life and philosophy was work. Jewry must get back to healthy and creative manual labour, for along that road lay the way

to the regeneration of the individual and the nation. His creed was the negation of selfishness and the insistence on social usefulness. These were the central themes of his writings which to this very day exercise a profound influence on the Jewish youth; and they were the central themes of his daily life. Gordon's life and writings are closely linked up with the development of the kvutza. His ideas are the cornerstone of the structure we have raised.

#### YITZHAK BEN YA'AKOV

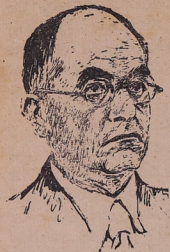


Yitzhak ben Ya'akov was one of the founders of Degania and the best of its sons. He was a man of great quality and excelled in all aspects of our work. In times of crisis for the Jewish community of this country he was called on to assume important and responsible tasks. He was a man burned up by a tremendous energy. He could never rest. He always had to be turning his hand to something new. Only a few years before his death he devoted himself to the development of civil aviation in this country, for which he saw a great future. He was among the founders of the Aviron Aviation Company and its first managing director. It is significant of the wide scope of our pioneering horizon that Ben Ya'akov did not consider it anomalous for a farmer to leave the plough in order to take up a responsible position in so different a field of work. He saw in aviation an important service which our country lacked and which somehow or other had to be provided. Together with Dov Hos he set himself the task of training Jewish pilots who would be capable of operating the commercial air lines which he was determined to establish. In a short time he made great headway. To-day, Aviron is a firmly established company enjoying the services of a growing number of trained Jewish pilots.

In a road accident, on the 29th of Kislev, 5702; (the 29th of December 1941), Ben Ya'akov and Dov Hos met their death. He was 49 when he died. Few of us have succeeded

in packing so much achievement and so much service into so short a life.

DR. ARTHUR RUPPIN



On the 1st of January, 1943, after a lifetime of unremitting service; Dr. Arthur Ruppin, the Head of the Jewish Agency's Agricultural Settlement Department and Economic Research Institute, passed away. In his will, he expressed the desire that he should be buried in Degania. His wish was carried out and the carriage bearing his coffin drove from Jerusalem through the Plain of Sharon, the Valley of Jezreel and the Jordan Valley, to bring him to his final resting place. Along the route there gathered the men and women of the Jewish settlements which he had helped so much to bring into existence.

Ruppin came to us from another world. He was a man of science, an economist and sociologist. Brought up in Germany, he visited Palestine in 1907 to make a study of Jewish agricultural settlement, and the following year he was appointed as the director of the Palestine Office of the Zionist Organisation, charged with the responsibility of implementing the organisation's settlement programme.

Dr. Ruppin was not only a man of affairs but also a man capable of great human understanding. At the very commencement of his work in Palestine he appreciated the great constructive qualities of the Jewish workers, and it was he who gave them the opportunity of showing their mettle. Those of us who worked at Kinnereth and Degania in the early days were amazed at his deep penetration into our outlook on the tasks confronting us. Without his help and constant advice, we could never have succeeded in putting our ideas into practice.

For thirty-five years Dr. Ruppin laboured to place Jewish agricultural settlement in Palestine on a firm foundation. With the care and precision of a scientist he directed daring

experiments, the success of which was destined to transform large parts of the country. Towards the end of his life, his eager mind ever in search of new fields of endeavour, he created the Economic Research Institute of the Jewish Agency which has played a vital part in drawing up the blue-prints for the further expansion of the Jewish National Home. As Professor of Jewish Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he became the foremost authority in this subject throughout the world, his searching analysis of Jewish life pointing the way to the steps which have to be taken for the solution of the Jewish problem.

He died while working in his garden and was brought to his rest in the place which marked the turning point in the history of Jewish settlement in Palestine. He is for us a symbol of understanding, of patient steadfastness and of nobility of character. His memory will abide with us forever.



Elliott Roosevelt, the President's son on his visit at Gordon House, accompanied by Joseph Baratz.



In Gordon's memory we have established at Degania a Museum of Nature and Agriculture known as Beth Gordon — Gordon House — a fitting tribute to a man who in the eve of his life taught us that for us Jews the way to new life is the way of work in the harmony of nature.

The main feature of Gordon House is the excellent collection of the flora and fauna of Paestine and of the various branches of agricultural production. The library contains everything that has been written in Hebrew on agriculture and on Palestine's natural history. A large collection of foreign works on agriculture and the natural sciences has also been gathered.

One room in the House is called "Gordon's Corner" and there we have assembled everything connected with Gordon's life and work: his published writings and manuscripts and his personal property. In this room, too, we have gathered a collection of belles-lettres whose theme is labour, land and nature.

The funds for the building of Gordon House were obtained from his friends in Palestine and abroad and from various institutions. The kvutzot associated with the Hever Hkvutzot made their contribution to the building in the form of labour (a half-day's work for each of their members) instead of in cash. Gordon House is now administered by the Central Committee of the Jordan Valley Villages.

On one side the House is flanked by the buildings of our School and on the other by an experimental orchard of tropical and subtropical fruit trees, named after Dr. Arthur Ruppin and planted on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. Here, then, in this section of our village we have concentrated the institutions which are designed to serve the younger generation and to act as a living symbol of the ideas for which we stand.

The Jewish National Fund was founded in 1901. Until 1920 it served as a general settlement fund, but since then it has concentrated on land purchase and amelioration (especially drainage), and allied activities, such as afforestation and water supply. It retains the paramount ownership of the land purchased by it, which is thus the inalienable property of the Jewish people. Its holdings and sites in rural and urban districts are placed at the disposal of settlers on hereditary leasehold. Lessees are obliged to pay rent based on a low proportion of the assessed value of the land. This system of land nationalisation is a bar against speculation and ensures that the land is used in accordance with national interests. Some 50% of all the Jewish villagers in Palestine to-day are lessees of the Jewish National Fund. The Fund has been responsible for reclaiming large stretches of land which were formerly malarial. In addition, it has been very active in afforestation, having planted over 3000000 trees in various parts of the country. It now holds nearly 600,000 dunams and is the largest single landowner in the country.

\*

Founded in 1920, the Keren Hayesod has been responsible for the progress of Jewish settlement in Palestine. Its functions are not limited to agricultural settlement though in that sphere it has many achievements to its credit. The Keren Hayesod is, as it were, the National Treasury of the Zionist movement. It was responsible for the creation of a Hebrew educational system; it has invested large sums in labour, health, housing and public works; it has made funds available for the regulation, selection, training and reception of immigrants; it has come to the assistance of industry and it has laid the foundation of a whole system of industrial development institutions; finally it has helped important Jewish public institutions and made funds available for the strengthening of the security of Jewish places of settlement. In the sphere of agricultural settlement the division of functions between the Jewish National Fund and the Keren Hayesod is that the former makes land available for settlement while the latter assists the settlers by means of long term loans to settle on the land.

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