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## Editorial

### AMBASSADOR

Mr. James G. McDonald, once Assistant Professor of History in the University of Indiana and from 1933 to 1936 the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany, was appointed by President Truman as, first, Special Representative of the United States, and afterwards as United States' Ambassador, to the newly-erected State of Israel. He served in this position from June, 1948 till January, 1951, and the present volume, *My Mission in Israel* (Gollancz, 18s.), covers his experiences and impressions during this all-important period.

The book is personal in every sense and does not pretend to be a history or complete record. It draws largely on the author's diary. It follows the author's individual leanings. It offers day-to-day judgments on men and affairs. The starting-point is engaging in its simplicity and directness: "I had met Hitler; and I had become convinced that the battle against the Jew was the first skirmish in a war on Christianity, on all religion, indeed on all humanity. And I, a Middle Western American of Scotch and German ancestry, a teacher and student by profession and inclination, found myself increasingly engaged in an active career which gave me the privilege of fighting a good fight. The right of the Jew not only to live but to his own life is in its way a symbol of every man's right. It is in that spirit that I have sought, and continue to seek, to champion this right."

Mr. McDonald enjoyed the initial advantage of not being a professional diplomatist, although his previous experience in the international field had given him insight into diplomatic ways. The reader is thus allowed

many an incidental glimpse into the methods of the United States' Government in dealing with foreign affairs. At the very outset Mr. McDonald discovered that after all his endeavours at Washington he had learned little of his government's policy, and he voices the suspicion that the reason was not personal but that his government had no policy. He loyally attributes this to the "essential fluidity of international relations" and remarks on the "very pragmatic nature of foreign policy"; but this "fluidity" and "pragmatic nature" seems to have permeated the United States' dealings in Israel during the whole of Mr. McDonald's stay. Even in what, as Ambassador, he saw as a major crisis, and after an interview with the President himself (not to speak of talks at the Pentagon and the Near East—South Asia Africa Office [!]), he records: "In my own mind, I asked myself what had been accomplished. I had set out both to report and to listen. I had had little opportunity to do either and was as unclear as ever about the precise direction of future U.S. policy in the Middle East." One finds a similar remark on an earlier occasion: "We did not know exactly what special reasons motivated American policy; but we knew we must firmly support that policy whatever it might be or wherever it might lead." One begins to understand that an unprofessional diplomatist is not an unmixed blessing. Mr. McDonald's note on the British representative is almost wistful: "Always imperturbable, he managed to work two hours a day on his garden, to get away for duck-shooting week-ends and to preserve Sunday inviolate—all feats of which I found myself in-

capable." If he had been capable, he might have been less carried away by first impressions and become more reasoned in his enthusiasms.

He is at times perceptive enough. Take this on the new Israeli Government: "As I analysed it, the outline of the Government's policy-to-be was as follows: a guarded pro-Western foreign policy despite strict official neutrality; concern for international opinion but only to the limit of 'patriotic' public opinion; and a domestic policy attentive to certain religious and group demands and flexible enough to combine social control with private initiative. As for internal administration, the ghost of Andrew Jackson would not have been displeased. Each Minister began to fill his department with his own party regulars. High and low patronage, called *Protektzia*, or more cynically Vitamin P, became the bureaucratic order of the day." But he feels he has gone too far and adds at once: "This was almost inevitable [alas for that 'almost']; the party tradition was too strong, the partisans too numerous and too long starved, the backlog of public officials too small."

Truth sometimes emerges without qualification. "Modern Israel," he notes, "sometimes placed too much stress on physical problems and too much confidence in their solution by strength of arms," an observation which takes up the remark he reports of Dr. Weizmann on "the strong

influence of the military and the necessity of building up strong civilian counter-influences." The former High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany even allows himself to express uneasiness on the Israeli attitude towards the Arab refugees from the former Palestine: "It seemed to me there was a certain lack of imagination and humanity. What was wanted was a more humane, a more creative approach—one that would have preserved security but still allowed for positive action. Such an approach was lacking." And he adds: "I doubt that during this first hectic year of Israel the top officials ever took the time to concentrate on the refugee problem. I had the distinct impression that this was being left primarily to the technicians. Not one of the big three . . . seemed to have thought through the implications of the tragedy or of Israel's lack of concrete helpfulness."

British readers will note with bored amusement Mr. McDonald's anti-British bias. He goes so far as to repeat from his diary an Israeli business-man's stupid slander on the Post Office of the Mandatory Power, and notes even now, after the withdrawal of the British, the "pervading British influence," particularly in parliamentary institutions, law and business. He sees salvation, however, in the offing. It is "the United States which has come to represent the most important of Israel's foreign contacts. . . . The Israelis know that the United States is their strongest support and has no imperialistic interests in Israel." "On the economic level," of course, "Israel is rightly bound to the United States, its chief source of financial support—public, charitable and private. As the reader knows, Israel has already been the beneficiary of a loan of 100,000,000 dollars from the Export-Import Bank," and so on. But economics apart, "there is a considerable inflow into Israel of American books, magazines and records; and American films continue to be the most popular"; and Mr. McDonald sees American tourists not only as bringing "rich tourist income" but as being "real fertilizers of cultural exchange." (I have taken this last remark seriously but it may be a joke, perhaps at an Ambassadorial level. One may counter by quoting Bagehot *a propos* of the people who were afraid of the unreformed House of Lords: "Go and look at them!")

Mr. McDonald saw as one of his duties the doing of "as much background political reporting" as he could, "and this as objectively as possible." He adds, however: "But no man can be objective in the sense of being completely disinterested. Rarely was a situation such that a single interpretation could claim to be self-evident." This is fair enough, but facts are facts, and even the most disinterested of objective reporters

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and treat them as such, whatever the interpretation to be placed on them might be. The outstanding event during Mr. McDonald's term of office was the murder of Count Bernadotte, and Mr. McDonald, although the reader the impression that it was Count Bernadotte's own fault, is properly indignant. He reserves his energies in order to praise the energetic measures taken at once by the Israeli Government. For example, he would have believed that the authorities shut up the city of Jerusalem immediately. On this point he becomes almost lyrical: "We stayed together until long after midnight. As we spoke, Jerusalem lay under us; all roads leading into and out of the city were closed; all ports, harbours and roads were shut down tight; and, indeed, in its own agony, Israel girded itself for the morrow and what it would do." But it was on the morrow, and not the day, of the murder that the roads were closed out of the city were closed. The emergency measures, far from being immediate, were taken about 20 hours after the crime had been perpetrated and the crowds had scattered and disappeared in

at this point is crucial in Mr. McDonald's account of events and arouses suspicion in the rest. Perhaps other details are covered over or let slide or (as in the present case) mis-reported. The book may be a personal one, offered not as history but as a record of personal impressions. But what is an impression if it rests on what may be called, euphemistically, mistaken information?

It would be charitable. Mr. McDonald is an amateur and amateurs are easily misled. Public protestations and private differences with the great are one thing; the underlings, or even the great men themselves, actually do is another. But it is an ambassador's job to know, and to report, and to form his impressions on, what is really done. One begins to fear that in writing the makers of history the former Assistant Professor forgot the elements of his own science. It is a hard thing to say of an ambassador but it would appear possible in this, and indeed in many other cases, Mr. McDonald was taken in.

It is unprofitable to pursue the matter further. The world is becoming used to the "towering" figures of "six foot two-and-a-half," fresh-complexioned, white-skinned and starry-eyed, who are sent on special missions ("going to and fro in the East and walking up and down in it") and the Scripture. Although made pretty much to the same pattern as befits the nation they represent, they have in them a certain attractiveness. They bring a

"fresh mind." They are always ready to talk, occasionally even to listen. They learn from all men (particularly the last-comer). They have no settled policy and are humbly conscious of their open-mindedness. They know on which side their bread is buttered. They are of the genuine breed of false prophet. Whom they love they chasten (when it looks safe). They stand firm on points of other people's principles. They are all things to all men until they meet a MAN and then, at his downfall, they cry with the crowd: "Serve you right!" One wonders what Lincoln would have thought of the United States' Ambassador's treatment of and reflections on the whole episode of Count Bernadotte.

But the days of Lincoln are over and we must make do with American tourists ("real fertilizers of culture"), American detective stories, and American films, special representatives and ambassadors.

A. N. O. R.

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