

Sodomy, Locusts, and Cholera: A Jerusalem Witness

Sami Hadawi



Editor's introduction: Sami Hadawi's Early Years

This is the first of two selections Jerusalem Quarterly is excerpting from the parts of the memoirs of Sami Hadawi (1904-2004) dealing with his childhood and early years. Hadawi was a leading expert on land issues in Palestine. His unpublished memoirs were distributed to his family and friends before he died in Toronto at the age of one hundred years and one month. He was a relentless fighter on behalf of Palestinian refugees and their rights, for which he received the Jerusalem Prize from Yasir Arafat in 2002. His book Palestinian Rights and Losses, published by al Saqi in 1998, was a thorough review of the survey of Palestinian landed property undertaken by the UNCCP, and a critique of its findings. One of the most controversial features of this episode is Sami's narrative about his family origins.

His father appears as an enigmatic character with very little known about his family except that they were German, possibly Templar missionaries in Palestine. Wasif Jawhariyyeh, who was a family friend and Hadawi's colleague in the Land Registry in the early 1920s, refers to his father as a German Jew who converted to Christianity along with his mother in the Eye Hospital in Baq'a. His mother, also according to Jawhariyyeh, was a Muslim woman from Mt Hebron. Wasif visited Sami and his family on a number of occasions in Me'a She'arim. (See al Quds al Uthmaniyya fil Mudhakkarat al Jawhariyyah.) If this story of his origin is true, then Sami Hadawi would be the product of the three religious communities of Palestine, making his conflicted family roots a most representative lineage of all communities in Palestine.

From Sami Hadawi's *The Story of My Life*

Birth and Early Childhood

I was born in Jerusalem during the first decade of the twentieth century into a middle-class Christian family with an Anglican background.¹ At that time, it was not possible in Arab circles for male and female to intermingle, fall in love, and decide their own destiny. Moslem town women were veiled and restricted, not seen and not heard by a stranger of the opposite sex – a practice of so-called 'hareem' copied from the Ottoman Turks, the rulers of the country. Marriages were arranged between the families without the participation or consent of the individuals concerned.

Conditions were slightly different for Christian women. With very few exceptions, they were not veiled but were nevertheless restricted where the sexes were concerned. Marriages were also arranged by the elders, sometimes with the assistance of the priest or minister of the church, but the young couples had at least the opportunity of seeing each other either in church or at family social functions.

My father was an extremely religious man who attended church regularly. It was in church that he first saw my mother and fell in love with her. He sought the advice and assistance of the minister of the church. At first there was opposition to the marriage because mother, the oldest of six orphaned children, was only thirteen years of age, but my father persisted and said he would wait until she was considered old enough to get married. At her reaching the age of sixteen years, they were married and soon after mother had her first-born, a boy, whom they named Joseph after his paternal grandfather, but he died in infancy.

The loss was a tragedy to the young couple who looked to the future with great hopes, and they prayed fervently that their expected next child would be spared to live a full life. A week before my mother was due to deliver, father had an unusual dream which he described to my mother: An old man, he said, with a long white beard, dressed in a flowing white robe, and with a staff in hand, appeared to him and said, "Elias, wake up! Your wife is about to give birth to a son. If you name him after one of the prophets, he will live, be successful in life, and become a source of blessing and

a savior to your family; but if you give him any other name, he will suffer the same fate as your first-born and die in infancy.” With these words the apparition vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

It took my mother some time before she was awake enough to comprehend what father was trying to tell her. At first she did not take the dream seriously. But belief in ghosts, spirits, and the unknown was still a part of the everyday life of many people, and even those who did not credit such phenomena were careful not to disregard them altogether for fear of the unknown. Mother was now perplexed. “We have already decided on the name of ‘Sami’ if we were blessed with a boy,” she said. “Now that you have had this experience and appear affected, what other name would you suggest if we were to take your dream seriously?”

Father replied that he too was not serious about dreams, but he was not prepared to take chances. “Considering that we have already lost one child,” he pointed out, “I feel that if we do not comply with the warning, we will continue to live with the fear of losing our second child.” He then added that the apparition that appeared to him looked very much like the Prophet Samuel as seen in pictures. “Why don’t we,” he suggested, “give our expected child, if he is a boy, the baptismal name of ‘Samuel’ and yet use the selected name of ‘Sami’ in our everyday life? In this way, we will have complied with the warning of the apparition for what it may be worth and at the same time set our own minds for the future at ease.” Mother considered this to be an excellent idea, and it was so decided on that night of early March 1904. On the sixth of the month, mother gave birth to a boy as foretold.

Dream interpretation is an old practice in the Middle East. It was still in vogue, in the early part of the twentieth century in the Middle East, for some people to get up in the morning and relate to each other their dreams of the night before and try to interpret their meanings. Vendors made a lucrative business by going from door to door advertising that they were able to tell fortunes and interpret dreams. The believers were told in obscure terms to either expect an early or delayed solution to their problems, or to anticipate a happy occasion of fortune, or warned against an impending unhappy event or catastrophe and were advised to take precautions. The lives of the superstitious were governed by dreams, but as the younger generations began to acquire education and knowledge, the practice lessened but did not die down altogether and exists to this day.

Although neither parent took dreams seriously, yet mother continued to exercise caution and she would insist on me in future years to always use the name “Samuel” in my official dealings and documents to keep the tradition alive, and I did so not only to please her but, admittedly, to put my own mind at ease.

My parents, as far as I was later made to understand, came from two different environments, but they both belonged to the Christian Anglican Church and, therefore, any difference in background was hardly felt.

My maternal grandfather came from Ramallah – a Christian town some ten miles north of Jerusalem. He married a girl from Jerusalem, but died at the early age of thirty-two years, leaving behind six children – two boys and four girls. Mother was the eldest.

On his death, the Church arranged for the six children to be placed in English and German missionary orphanages. Mother was sent to the German orphanage where her mother had found work as a seamstress. The German education mother received had a great influence on my future.

The people of Ramallah have an interesting background. Their origin can be traced to the Christian tribe of Bani Ghassan, then located in the Syrian Desert (as it was told). On the rise of Islam, in the seventh century, part of this Christian tribe embraced the religion of the invader, and the other part remained faithful to Christianity. Nevertheless, the relations between them were said to have remained cordial.

The story continues that one day the Emir of the Moslem tribe paid a social visit to his cousin, the Emir of the Christian tribe, and during the course of the conversation, a little girl of about six years of age came into the tent and sat on her grandfather's lap. Naturally the conversation turned for a while to admiring the lovely little girl and ended with the Moslem cousin remarking that when she grew up he would like her to be the bride of one of his grandsons. As a matter of courtesy, the Christian cousin replied in the usual Arab tradition that such a union would be an honor.

The years went by and the girl-child grew up into a beautiful young woman. During one of his usual visits to his Christian cousin, the Moslem Emir raised the subject of the marriage. The Christian Emir was shocked as he presumed that his Moslem cousin would have understood that his consent of years before was a mere formality, knowing the difference in religion. He now found himself in a predicament. He gathered his seven sons, told them of the request of their Moslem uncle, and asked for advice. He pointed out that while Islam permitted wedlock with a Christian girl, the Christian church denied such a union. He then said, if we refuse the request, it would be regarded as an insult and might end up in war. In the end, it was decided they had no alternative but to stealthily move away without arousing attention. They folded their tents, gathered their cattle and belongings, and stole away, accompanied by certain Moslem members of their tribe.

They traveled westward in search of a suitable site and eventually found one ten miles North of Jerusalem. They pitched their tents and called their new home "Ramallah" which means "the house of God." Their Moslem cousins settled close by and called their place "EI- Bireh."

Ramallah is still made up to this day of seven clans named after the sons of the Emir. My grandfather belonged to "Hamulet [clan] of Dar Yusef." Although people from Ramallah are dispersed throughout the world, they still recognize one another by the clan to which they belong.

As for my father's background there is very little that I know for certain, except to say that he had no family in Jerusalem, and had no contact with the country of his origin. It was understood that he had arrived in the City some years before and established himself in a lucrative job as manager of a carpentry shop. He was a loving father and husband, religious and regularly went to church, and was highly respected by members of the community. Of one thing mother appeared certain, as she told us in later years, that he came from an affluent background and, was well educated with a

fluent knowledge of English and Arabic.

My early childhood was like that of any other infant born into a normal middle-class family. The birth of a sister followed, and she was given the name Adele, then four boys were born. As the first-born, I was naturally pampered and spoilt by the family, especially by my grandmother and great-grandmother.

I enjoyed visiting grannie, whom we called “Teita,” because she made me jump on her aching back to relieve the pain and I thought this was fun. For this I would be compensated with some German cookies. When mother wanted me out of the way she would send me to Teita with a message I was not supposed to understand. I was to tell Teita, “Hold the sheep by the ear until I come,” meaning to keep me with her until mother called for me.

I would also visit my great-grand-mother, whom we called “Jiddeh.” She lived on her own in the St. Paul Anglican Church compound, where women of her generation resided and enjoyed passing their time reminiscing and relating stories. I would sit by her side and ask her to tell me a story. She was a fountain of fairytales and fables hundreds of years old which she had inherited from her own mother and grandmother. She was an eloquent story-teller who was sought after by old and young alike and was able to keep her audience excited and thrilled. In later years I tried to record her stories, but she was already over one hundred years of age, blind, and easily fatigued. Her mind and memory however, remained active. I regretted having to abandon the project, as such a book would have been invaluable as a record of beliefs that have come down to us by word of mouth from generation to generation.

In the early years of childhood, children are susceptible to certain illnesses, such as measles, mumps, whooping cough, etc., and I was no exception. In those days there was no immunization and parents usually followed the old methods handed down from mother to daughter.

I had measles at an early age and managed to get through, but mumps evaded me until I had reached adulthood. Whooping cough, however, when it came, lingered for several months and father was advised that I would need a change of climate to get rid of it, preferably somewhere close to the sea. He therefore arranged to rent accommodation for me and Teita, who offered to accompany and take care of me, in Jaffa, a city some sixty kilometers west of Jerusalem and located on the seashore. Father took us down in a carriage, left us in the room he had rented, promising to visit us the following weekend and returned to Jerusalem the same day.

As soon as the landlord’s family realized that I was recovering from whooping cough they immediately threw us out into the street. Teita and I sat for hours by the side of the road without food or water, and wondering what to do. As dusk approached, we both began to cry. An old man happened to come by and stopped to inquire what we were doing on the street at that late hour. Teita explained our predicament. The old man took pity on us and said, “Come with me.” He took us to his own home. He was the patriarch of the Zabaneh family of Jaffa and by coincidence belonged to the Anglican community like ourselves. He and his wife lived with their three married sons and their families in one large compound apartment house, each

son occupying a room, with the wives sharing in the cooking under the supervision of the mother-in-law. There were many children playing in the hall as we entered. Teita, seeing the children, protested to our benefactor that since I had the whooping cough it would be inadvisable for his grandchildren to have me around. The old man replied with a reassuring smile that it was in God's hands.

A room was set aside for us and we were provided with all our needs, including an evening hot meal, which was more than welcome since we had had nothing to eat or drink during the whole day. We spent three months with the Zabaneh family while I played with the children without restraint. During this period I was getting well and, indeed, God did take care because not one of the children contracted whooping cough.

When father arrived in Jaffa the following week to check on my progress, he was surprised to find that we were living in a different place from the one he had rented for us. Teita explained what had happened and how she had come to be in the Zabaneh house. Father was unable to express sufficiently his appreciation and gratitude, especially when our host refused to accept any rent for the room we were occupying. Father, however, was obliged to find some other way to return the generous favor. Out of this hospitality a friendship developed between our two families which lasted for many years.

Shortly after returning to Jerusalem, I was placed in a German kindergarten. At first, I protested and cried, but a kindly teacher, on whom I later had a crush, took me in hand and before a few days had passed I began to participate in and enjoy the school activities. On other days father would send for me to spend time with him in his place of business, and at the end of the day we would walk home together with me trying to keep pace with his footsteps.

Sundays were exciting days for me as I accompanied my parents to church. Father always wore his special Sunday suit, and looked distinguished with his well-groomed large mustache pointed at each end and his hat tilted to one side. Mother, who was slender with beautiful red hair, always wore a plumed hat. Walking between the two in my shorts, white shirt, and starched collar, I would feel happy and proud. As we walked through the narrow cobbled streets of the Old City, we would meet members of the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Lutheran, and other communities, dressed in their best, also on their way to their places of worship, greeting each other with smiles and a few words.

One Sunday, my father said to me: "Son, always remember that at one time Christ walked these cobbled streets as we do today, and He must have at one time leaned against these walls," and he would touch the wall with his fingers as if he were touching the body of Jesus. There was hardly a time when I passed through the streets of the Old City in later years that I did not remember father's remark and experience a feeling of awe.

The celebration of Christmas in Jerusalem had a special meaning for us children. Unlike the practice in the United States and Canada, where Christmas is commercialized and preparations therefore begin weeks before the actual day and there is no secrecy whatsoever about the Christmas tree and the source of the presents, in Jerusalem the

Christmas tree was put up and decorated on the afternoon before or during the night of Christmas Eve and the presents piled under it, out of sight of the children.

In my father's house, the Christmas tree was usually put up during the night before and the presents were arranged while we children slept. When we awoke on Christmas morning and saw the Christmas tree and piled-up presents for the first time, our pleasure and excitement were worth the trouble our parents went to. We would be told that Father Christmas had come during the night, put up the Christmas tree, with all the presents under it because we had been good children during the year that was about to end. We would then wash and dress hurriedly, gather around the Christmas tree, listen to a prayer and some advice by father before we were handed our presents and told what Father Christmas expected of us during the coming year. We were allowed to open and play with our presents for a short while, after which we were to have breakfast and prepare to go to church.

On our return home we would sit around the dining room table ready for our Christmas Day lunch and pudding. After a short thanks-giving prayer by father, we would dig into the food but anxiously await the Christmas pudding as it was brought in on a flaming tray. We children would clap our hands until the flame went out, and the tray was placed on the table. With lunch over, we children would immediately return to our toys while our parents welcomed and entertained their friends who had come to wish them a Merry Christmas.

The whole week between Christmas Day and New Year's Day were days of religious celebration filled with excitement. The day following New Year's Day, in most homes the Christmas tree would come down and that would be the end of the holiday celebrations. However, some families kept the Christmas tree up until after the Greek Orthodox community had celebrated their Christmas, which fell on 7 January. Just as members of the Orthodox community visited us on the occasion of our Christmas, we also would visit them on their Christmas Day to return and share with them the joys of the occasion. For us children, it was an additional pleasure since we returned home with cookies and candies.

At the turn of the century, three methods of entertainment were available to the public in Jerusalem. The first was the theatre, which provided plays mostly of an educational character about the history and culture of the Arabs. The second in cafes, where men gathered in the evenings playing cards or trick-track (backgammon), consisted of a show called "Karakoz-wa-Awaz" where the entertainer sat behind a white sheet of cloth and lamp juggling his puppets and relating stories of Arab valor and heroism to entertain. The third form of entertainment was the magic lantern. A vendor would go from street to street carrying his apparatus on his back and a stool or bench under his arm, calling out to children to come and see the wonders of the world. For a small fee we would sit on the bench and peep through a hole while the vendor described what we were seeing in a glowing tone. This type of entertainment continued for many years but was later confined, as I grew up, to the poorer classes.

In those days, electricity was non-existent in Jerusalem, and the cinema was a new phenomenon of which few had yet heard. When the first cinema was opened in

the city, it was received with mixed feelings. The ignorant described it as the work of the devil; others merely expressed surprise and doubt. Father was fond of the theatre and when he heard of the cinema, he decided to visit it and took me along with him. The cinema was housed in a building with a corrugated iron roof capable of accommodating about fifty people. As we entered, father looked up and wondered how the small light bulbs suspended from the high ceiling could be reached to be lighted. When the lights went off for the film to start, father almost jumped out of his seat at the extraordinary phenomenon of lights that go on and off without anybody attending to them I remember so vividly that the film was about Moses appearing before the Egyptian Pharaoh demanding the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. When the film reached the part where Moses throws his staff on the ground and it turns into a snake the Moslem members of the audience went wild with anger, calling the showing of the Prophet Moses and the image of God sacrilegious. The showing was stopped and the lights went on, but the audience continued to protest and shout. In the commotion, my father took me by the hand and we left quietly.

When we got home, father told mother what had happened, but he was more interested in describing how the electric light bulbs went on and off without anybody touching them. At that time, people were still using kerosene lamps in their homes and sidestreets, while the more affluent families and main streets had “lux” lamps. I often wondered in later years why my father did not know of the invention of electricity which was being used in parts of Europe and America. But then I do not recall seeing a newspaper in our home in Jerusalem when I was a child.

During one summer, father and a close friend took a picnic trip to Wadi Kelt – an oasis in the hills close to Jerusalem. Although I was still young, father would insist on my accompanying him. Wadi Kelt consisted of a stream surrounded by vegetable gardens some ten miles northeast of Jerusalem. The area was extremely picturesque with its mountains and valleys, and the stream itself gushed out of one of the caves and watered the small patches of gardens in the immediate vicinity, before it wound its way to the Jordan Valley to irrigate the banana plantations of the Husseini family of Jerusalem.

We were supposed to spend three days in the area hunting, fishing, and relaxing. I remember I occupied my time building a barricade of loose stones across a shallow part of a pond to prevent the small fish from swimming down the stream, and I gathered my catch by hand for our evening meal. In the meantime, father and his friend were out hunting partridges and quails.

During this period, two British travelers arrived, and father invited them to share with us our evening meal of fried fish and partridge. I later learned, as he related the story to mother, that one of the two Englishmen had asked father if he would be willing to allow him to adopt me and take me back with him to England, where he said I would have a good education and a brilliant future. Father considered the suggestion preposterous and politely replied that he could not part with his son for any reason whatsoever. Besides, he pointed out, he was financially able to give his son the best education possible and he, too, planned to send me and my brothers to England for our higher education. This

conversation with mother remained in my mind and had a great impact on my life as I gradually watched my hopes, but not my determination, fade away.

No child growing up is immune to adventure or danger, and I had my fair share. Not yet old enough to venture away from home without an escort, I was usually warned that any child who was not accompanied by a member of his family might be kidnapped and would never see his parents again. To protect us further from animals, carriages, and carts, children were warned, in the absence of side-walks, to keep their distance to avoid being kicked or run over. For some unknown reason, a false belief was implanted in my mind that donkeys turn into thieves at night and I was warned to be careful and keep my distance from them. One morning I decided to make it alone to the nearby Damascus Gate and visit one of my friends who lived inside the Old City. As I was about to enter the Damascus Gate, I observed a group of donkeys approaching from the opposite direction. I was so frightened that I immediately scurried behind one of the massive gates of the city. Believing that they were waylaying me, I remained behind the gate for hours, not daring to come out. In the meantime, mother noticed my absence. Search parties went out and word was sent to my father that I was missing. Jiddeh took the road in the direction of the Old City in the hope that I would be found in the home of one of my friends. As she was about to pass into the Old City, I saw her and called out. She spotted me, beckoned me to come out, and inquired why I was hiding there. I told her that donkeys had passed and I was afraid they would kidnap me, so I hid. I had been so frightened by my ordeal that my parents did not punish me for wandering away alone. Apparently they felt guilty for making me believe absurd stories.

Across the road from our home, there was a large piece of vacant land, part of which was being used by the boys of the locality as a playground. Moslem boys would come out of the nearby Old City, Jewish boys from the close by Jewish section of the Musrara Quarter, in front of the Damascus Gate, and Christian boys from the compound where I lived. The fraternity that existed between the boys reflected the harmony and tolerance enjoyed between the members of the different communities in Jerusalem at the time.

It is not unusual for children to disagree while at play and to have innocent brawls, but two incidents which occurred during my early years had great significance for me when I became an adult: The first involved a Moslem and Jewish boy who quarreled over a marble and almost came to blows. A passer-by, acting the good Samaritan, separated the boys and reminded them that they were from the seed of Abraham and, therefore, cousins and should not be fighting. He knocked their heads together in a friendly gesture, made them shake hands, and told them to return to their game. That night I told my mother of the incident and asked if Muhammad and Moses were indeed cousins, what am I to believe of them? Mother replied that I, as a Christian, am a brother to both of them. This explanation satisfied me, and I fell asleep.

The second incident foretold what the future had in store for the inhabitants of Palestine. Again, the quarrel was between two Moslem and Jewish boys. Suddenly the Jewish boy blurted out in a fit of anger, "You wait. Who do you think you are? This

country belongs to us, and you Arabs must get out. You belong to the desert. Palestine is the homeland of the Jews, and we intend to have it.” None of us who heard this outburst understood or paid any attention as to its meaning. The incident came back to my mind in 1920 when the first riots broke out between Arabs and Jews following knowledge of the Balfour Declaration.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire reached such a state of stagnation, corruption, and inefficiency that it came to be described as “the Sick Man of Europe.” In 1908, a revolution by a Turkish group calling itself “The Young Turks: Committee of Union and Progress” took place, and among its leaders were Enver, Djemal, and Talaat, who became notorious in the years that followed.

The first action of the Movement in 1909 was to end the tyranny of Sultan Abdul Hamid the Second by forcing him to abdicate. The group revived the 1876 Constitution whereby Moslems, Christians, and Jews in Palestine were regarded as brothers entitled to equal Turkish citizenship. Until then only Moslems were drafted into the army while a nominal sum exempted Christians and Jews from military service. In the first zeal of the Reform, many corrupt officials were removed; and in the elections of members to the Turkish Parliament, first only two delegates from Jerusalem were chosen: Said El-Husseini and Ruhi El-Khalidi; but they were later joined by Ragheb Bey El-Nashashibi – all members of leading Palestinian families.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were overjoyed by the revolution and celebrated the occasion with the hoisting of flags, fireworks, and dancing in the streets. They now looked to the future with confidence, believing that the “Young Turks” would fulfil their promises of freedom and progress. When father came home from work, he took me to watch the displays and fireworks.

Little was it then realized that the joy the Arabs expressed would be short-lived and that the future would be filled with anxiety and foreboding, because the events that followed resulted in the replacement of one type of tyranny by another of greater proportion and magnitude.

One day father came home excited and told mother that an airplane had landed in Jerusalem for the first time and he wished to join the crowd to go and see it. I asked if I could go with him, but father explained that the area where the plane had landed was a good distance away and that I could not possibly walk there and back. On his return he excitedly related to us how the plane looked, said there were two men in it, and how it took off for display like a bird.

The following morning we watched the plane from our balcony as it circled over the city before it disappeared into the horizon on its way back to Istanbul. We later learned that the plane had fallen into the sea between Jaffa and its destination with the loss of the lives of both pilots. In their ignorance people remarked at the time that men were not made to fly otherwise God would have given them wings.

In 1910, the inhabitants of Jerusalem witnessed the appearance of a comet in the sky. This created a commotion and their superstition interpreted its appearance as a bad omen that either an important world figure was about to die or that a catastrophe was due to hit the earth. I stood between my parents on the balcony of our home

watching this unusual sight on a bright and cloudless night and listening to what my parents and neighbors had to say. When King Edward died that year, it was attributed to the appearance of the comet, and when World War I broke out in 1914, even that was blamed on the comet.

In April 1911, an incident occurred that came close to creating a Christian riot. Several years before an agent, acting mysteriously on behalf of a group of Englishmen, purchased a piece of land in the close proximity of the Haram Esh-Sharif area, claiming that the land was to be used for the construction of a school and hospital. But when the group arrived, they brought with them many cases of implements for excavation. Their work aroused suspicion among the Moslem inhabitants who came to believe that the group was trying to penetrate below the Dome of the Rock in search of the Ark of the Covenant which they believed to be buried here. There was a hue and cry against the Christians as a whole and in the interval, the perpetrators slipped away. Were it not for the wisdom of some members of the Moslem community and Christian church leaders, the incident would have ended in a massacre of Christians who, until then, were living in peace and harmony with their Moslem brethren.

Schooling and the outbreak of World War I

By now I had reached five years of age and was ready for school. My knowledge of the German language, which I acquired in infancy, had improved by my attending a German kindergarten; while Arabic was my mother-tongue, which I practiced with my neighborhood friends and at home. My father was anxious that I should receive my preliminary instructions in English to prepare me for advanced education in England. So he decided to send me to an English boarding primary school where speaking English was compulsory. In this way I would learn English more quickly and my accent would be better.

Away from home and the pampering I had gotten used to, I felt lonely and miserable at first and cried quietly in my bed. Each time father visited me to find out how I was doing I would cry my eyes out and beg him to take me home. It was not easy for father to see me suffer so, but the headmaster assured him that children are quick to adjust to new situations and are known to learn other languages faster than adults. It was not long before I was able to make friends with some of the boys, particularly since I was in a position to share with them the sweets and cookies my father brought me each time he paid me a visit. I no longer asked to go home and when, at the end of each month, I was allowed to spend a day with the family, I longed to return to school laden with sweets and cookies to show off and share with my friends.

With my anguish about school now out of the way, my father felt it was time for him to have a man-to-man talk with me. He began by warning me about matters that were of vital importance to a growing child but failed to be specific enough for me to understand what he was talking about. He urged me to promise to say my prayers

each night before I went to bed; to adhere always to the teachings of the Bible; never to tell a lie, cheat, or steal; always to tell the truth no matter what the consequences; to be kind and helpful to my fellow students; and, lastly, to keep away from bad boys. Here he found it difficult to explain what he meant by “bad boys,” because I was still ignorant of sex and what went on in some boys’ schools. I am afraid I had to learn the hard way when I walked one afternoon behind the latrine enclosure in the schoolyard and saw two boys in the act of sodomy. I was so shocked and ran away. This behavior attracted the attention of the perpetrators. Two boys followed me, and when they caught up they threatened that if I said a word to anybody I would receive a beating. I promised I would not, but remained numb and could not forget what I had seen.

I was once again to witness an act of sodomy, and I allowed myself to suffer punishment because I would not mention the names of the participants. It was my duty to make the rounds of the dormitories in the late afternoon to close the shutters before the students retired. As I approached one of the rooms from the north side, I observed the housekeeper about to enter from the opposite direction. At that moment we both simultaneously saw two boys engaged in an act of sodomy, and when they saw the housekeeper, they rushed out of the room in my direction and disappeared. The housekeeper was shocked, and apparently took me to be acting as the lookout. She admonished me severely and, without giving me a chance to explain my innocence, she said she was going to report the matter to the headmaster. Next morning after breakfast the headmaster gave the student body a lecture on decency and then mentioned the incident that had taken place the afternoon before. He then called upon me to divulge the names of the other two boys. I protested my innocence and refused to give the names of the two guilty boys, for such a disclosure on my part would have earned me the enmity of the entire student body. I was put on dry bread and water for a month while the guilty boys remained unknown and went unpunished.

It was the custom of the headmaster of the school to make his announcements for the day at breakfast time after prayers had been said. On 15 August 1914, he stood up solemn and concerned and announced that war had broken out between Germany and Austria on one side and England and France on the other. He said that it may last a week, a month, or perhaps even as much as one year. No one can tell. We will therefore have to adjust our way of life and economize in expenditures because our financing came from England, and this source may not be available to us so long as the war lasted. He then outlined his program which included sending the foreign students back to their homes, and he stressed the necessity of preserving existing stocks of food and other commodities to last to the end of hostilities.

The situation of the school would not have been so difficult had Turkey not entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. But on 3 November 1914, Turkey joined Germany and Austria against the Allies. This made the receipt of any help from England not only out of the question, but as an English-operated school, it became open to possible treatment as an enemy.

The headmaster was, therefore, obliged to keep a low profile and draw as little attention as possible to the existence of the school. We no longer were allowed to take

our weekly excursions into the countryside; we ceased ringing the church bells on Sundays, and generally tried to keep out of sight even within the school playground. For the sake of economy, food was rationed, and we were allowed two thin slices of bread with each meal and two lumps of sugar on the side for our morning tea. Those boys who could drink their tea without sugar usually exchanged their share for bread.

On the declaration of the entry of Turkey into the war, conscription was immediate. All men of military age – Moslems, Christians, and Jews – whether married or single, were called up, and father was one of them. But he was allowed to continue living at home. On the day it was my turn to serve as gate attendant, I heard the gate bell ring and left my kiosk to investigate. I saw a man in European dress wearing a tarboush (fez) on his head standing on the other side of the gate. When he saw me he smiled but I did not recognize him as my father. This time he took off his tarboush and laughed. It was my father. I inquired why he was wearing the tarboush for his headdress instead of his usual hat. He replied that now all men were required to wear the tarboush to distinguish them from the Europeans.

With the war in the Middle East growing fiercer, Jerusalem became a center of recruitment for the inhabitants of the area. Meanwhile, Turkish troops poured into the city on their way to the front in the Sinai Peninsula, where the British forces, who were occupying Egypt, held positions on the bank of the Suez Canal. The congestion of troops in the city created health and other hazards for the inhabitants. Lice became a problem, while epidemics of typhoid, typhus, malaria, and dysentery spread like wildfire. To combat the spread of lice and disease among the troops, the army established fumigation centers in certain parts of the city and one of these was located in our church compound at the entrance of the school. Soldiers would be lined up naked while their clothes were being processed through the fumigation machine and then allowed to dry. The odor and the dirt surrounding the operation were terrible. No precautions were taken by the army to take into account the presence of ladies living in the buildings overlooking the compound. The headmaster did his best to protect his students from the spread of lice and their resulting diseases. Fortunately, we were able to remain free of any form of sickness, but we were confronted with the lice, which somehow reached our area. We were warned to search our underwear every morning and evening, and finding even one louse created a furor among us. During the period in which the fumigation center was in our area, the school was called upon to provide certain services that brought us in closer contact with the soldiers. To refuse cooperation would probably have been interpreted as sabotage, especially since the school was still regarded as English and, therefore, suspect even though there were no English or foreign boys among us. The most the headmaster could do was to cooperate and hope for the best.

One time a member of the Anglican Church was overheard to mention the name of a minister who held the title of “Canon” at St. George’s Cathedral, the seat of the British Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. Misinterpreting the reference to be to the presence of a “cannon” hidden somewhere inside the cathedral, the Turkish authorities carried out meticulous searches of St. George’s Cathedral and Christ Church,

interrogated the staff extensively and, in the case of the cathedral, even dug up the altar area before it was realized that the reference was to a minister of the church and not to a military weapon.

Father visited me one day and informed me that he had now been drafted into the fighting force and would soon be leaving for the front. He said that during his absence Jiddeh would pay me periodic visits and bring me news of the family, check on how I was getting along and, of course, bring me cookies that mother made especially for me. Later I learned that the way father was to go to the front was most unusual. He was given, like others, a box of ammunition and told to deliver it and himself to army headquarters in Beersheba, some ninety kilometers away. Those who could afford it shared in hiring a carriage, and together, with their burdens, made their way to Beersheba. That was the last time I saw my father.

Jiddeh made it a point to come and see me at least once a week. One day she told me that mother was no longer able to find sugar in the market. Instead of cookies, she brought me this time a loaf of home-made bread. At this piece of news I decided to drink my tea unsweetened and save my ration of two lumps of sugar a day to send home for my sister and younger brothers. At times I would swap part of my bread for sugar with other boys. I went so far as to ask Jiddeh to bring me an extra loaf of bread which I used to exchange for sugar. Every two weeks I would hand over to Jiddeh what sugar lumps I had gathered for her to take home.

One morning after breakfast the headmaster made an announcement that the storeroom had been broken into and that a quantity of sugar had been taken. This meant that we would have to drink our tea without sugar. He asked those who stole the sugar to be courageous enough to come forward and confess. None did. He then declared that our closets would be searched and the boys in whose possession the sugar was found would be severely punished. Sugar was found in the closets of two boys, and they were punished. Fortunately for me, the sugar I had saved during the two previous weeks I had handed over to Jiddeh only a day before the search.

Once again I got into trouble but this time it was due to my own foolishness. An older boy challenged a group of us younger boys to prove our bravery by running out of school. The challenge was foolish in substance and purpose, but after all, we were children and could be affected easily by older boys, some of whom we regarded as heroes. I felt the challenge would be an insult to my pride if I resisted it, and so I stepped forward and said I could and would run out of school to prove I was no coward. At this point I got my head into the noose and there was no longer any way to retreat without losing face. The next day I got up before dawn, put on my clothes as the other boys watched, said goodbye, and was off like a thief in the night. I slipped over the wall into an alley behind the school. Once on the ground I realized what a fool I had been to listen to the challenger, but now there was no turning back. I could not climb back the same way I had come because the wall was too high on my side. I could not go to the school gate and admit my folly, because a caning and humiliation before the entire student body would be awaiting me. If I went home and confessed my foolishness, there was still a return to school and punishment. So I decided to take

the road to Bir Zeit, a small town some fifteen miles north of Jerusalem, and seek refuge with an aunt of mine who lived there with her family. What the outcome of this decision would be I did not stop to think.

As I walked out of the city, I met a peasant woman riding a donkey and leading a few others. She inquired where I was headed, and when I told her she said she would be passing through Bir Zeit and offered me a ride on one of her donkeys. I was obliged to decline, because at that age I was susceptible to dizzy spells if I got on anything that was moving; so I walked by the side of her donkeys all the way to Bir Zeit. We arrived in the village in the early hours of the evening. I thanked the woman for her company and went straight to my aunt's house. She was surprised to see me and inquired how I had come and with whom. Naturally I told her a pathetic tale of why I had run out of school and hoped for her sympathy. She gave me something to eat and put me to bed. She sent word to mother that I was safe with her because she knew mother would be anxious. In the meantime, the hue and cry had gone out. When word came from my aunt that I was in Bir Zeit, Jiddeh made the trip and took me back to Jerusalem and school. Naturally, my reception was not a pleasant one. The boy who talked me into running away appeared unconcerned, and I did not give him away for fear that I would be despised by the other boys. I received a caning and the punishment of having to live on bread and water for a month. That foolish deed taught me a lesson I was to remember as I grew up, namely, never again to take up a meaningless challenge that did not concern me personally.

The tragedies of war, the separation of families, and the short supply of food appeared not enough punishment for the peoples of the area. Nature had to step in and make its contribution of pestilence and death. In 1915, when the war was at its highest, the entire region of the Middle East, stretching from Turkey in the north to Egypt and beyond in the south, was invaded by swarms of locusts, the extent and density of which was said never to have been known in any part of the world. The locusts appeared over Jerusalem about 2:00 p.m. in such density that they eclipsed the sun. The headmaster gathered the boys and told us to get hold of tin cans and bang on them, moving around all the time to prevent the locusts from settling on our small vegetable gardens. But nothing we did prevented the locusts from coming down and devouring everything green, even the bark of trees, in a matter of minutes. They moved into every opening, and we had to shut doors and windows tightly, yet somehow they managed to get through in some places. Frightened, we gave up and retreated indoors. For days the sky, the ground, the streets, homes, and shops were full of locusts until they had devoured everything edible and were ready to lay their eggs in soft soil. After laying their eggs in open fields, the locusts disappeared as quickly as they had come. During the period of incubation, the government issued orders requiring every able-bodied person in the city to collect and bring to a specified center one four-gallon tin of eggs for destruction. One such depot was established on our school grounds and we could watch what took place. Like everything else in a corrupt society, the government officials who were receiving the eggs would pour the contents of the tin cans into a room for eventual destruction while standing at a window

overlooking the street, stood another official who would hand out locust eggs in return for a certain sum of money, and that person would bring his share for the day only to be sold again to another client.

I had never before seen locust eggs, how the locusts were hatched, and how they changed from crawling creatures to flying pests, and now watching the process of nature was an experience. The eggs are said to be ninety-nine in number arranged in the form of an oblong cone. Each locust lays one cone in a hole that it digs in soft soil with its hind legs. The cone is then covered and left for two weeks to hatch. The young ones, when they appear, are no larger than an ordinary grasshopper, but they have a far greater appetite and grow much faster. Once the larvae hatched, they covered the whole country searching for anything they could find to eat; and since the earlier swarms had eaten everything, there was very little left for the young breed to feed upon. The city streets were filled with them, and as one walked along, the locusts marched in front in soldier-like fashion. The headmaster made us dig trenches in the school garden, place sheets of corrugated iron on one side of the pit, and start the pests marching into it while the older boys trampled them underfoot as they fell into the ditch. But whatever we did, the end result was infinitesimal. When it was time for the young locusts to reach maturity and fly away, they would hang on a branch by one leg, slip out of their baby skin, and off they would fly in search of food. Within a few days hardly any locusts remained in the city. With the locusts came large flocks of storks. It was said that each stork devoured something like 50,000 locusts a day, and as we watched them in their heyday, many of us received their excretions on our faces and clothes.

Soon after the locust invasion and with the war still in progress, the situation of the school became desperate. The headmaster gathered us one day and announced that the war had lasted much longer than he had anticipated, that the funds needed to maintain the school were no longer available, and that the supplies of food he had the foresight at the beginning of the war to stock up had all been used. In these circumstances, he said, he had no alternative but to send the boys away to their homes and to close down the school. A few days later Jiddeh came and took me home. That brought to an end my regular schooling for the rest of my life, as I joined my mother, sister, and younger brothers at home.

The year 1916 began with us in unhappy circumstances. Father was away at the front fighting a war he did not believe in; mother was heavy with child and laden with responsibilities beyond her age for a family of six; her eldest son was out of school and still too young to assume the responsibilities of an adult for the family; prices of foodstuffs were soaring because the Turkish Government would not allow the importation of wheat and cattle from east of the Jordan River; and disease and pestilence were rampant in the city.

The locust invasion in 1915 left a great deal of filth in the country which, it was said, brought in its wake an epidemic of cholera for which neither the government nor the people were prepared. I remember that one day, standing on the balcony of our home, I counted ninety-seven biers passing below on their way to the cemeteries.

The inhabitants were terrified, but there was nothing they could do because of lack of health facilities. Mother took her own precautions to protect her family. She kept us indoors, avoided the purchase of any fruits or vegetables, boiled the water before we were allowed to drink it, and kept insisting that we wash our hands well with soap before eating anything.

Later mother related how close we had been to becoming victims of the epidemic. She had been standing on our balcony when she saw her uncle pass by carrying a basket of provisions. She had called out to him to come up for a rest and a cup of coffee but he had declined and hurried on his way. Mother then remarked that her uncle, known to be a miser and always indifferent to the children of his dead brother, was apparently afraid that if he had come up he might have to leave behind something from his basket for his niece and her children. But unknown to him, he had been carrying death in his basket. That night he and his wife died of cholera and were hurriedly buried by the municipality without ceremony.

Contact with father at the front was through a soldier who, in private life, had worked with father as a carpenter and was now a member of his military outfit. For some reason, this man was allowed to make periodic visits to Jerusalem. On such occasions, he would carry a letter from father to mother telling her what things he needed. She would write back giving him news of the family and loading the kind messenger with the items father asked for.

The last letter mother received from father told her that he could take it no longer and that he had decided to desert. Mother wrote back drawing his attention to the latest proclamation of Jamal Pasha in which he declared that all deserters would be shot or hanged, and she begged him not to desert but to be patient and trust in God. At the same time she informed him of the birth of another son whom she named George as I had suggested. But father did not receive that letter and he never got to see George whom he had been expecting.

On his last trip to Jerusalem, this kind messenger returned to the front to find, as he later related, that father was missing. The assumption then was that he might have deserted, since many Arab soldiers had heeded the call of Sherif Hussein of Mecca, and father had already said he was contemplating it. The fact that he did not turn up at home and had not been heard from proved that something else must have happened to him. We thought of the possibility that he might have been taken prisoner by the British forces; but if he had been, he would have received his release as an Arab in order to join the Sherif's army.

As we had had no news of father for months, mother began to fear that he might have died from one of the sicknesses then prevailing among the troops, such as typhoid, typhus, dysentery, malaria, or even cholera. The army did not keep a record of those who died nor did it have facilities for notifying the next of kin. The death of a soldier became known to his family only through word of mouth. Years later, the Arab soldier who was our contact told me in confidence that father had, in fact, died during his absence in Jerusalem and that he decided not to tell mother in order to save her from added misery. It is very likely that this was true, because father was a

faithful family man and was very much attached to his children, especially our brother William, who had been born shortly before father left for the front.

Ignorant of father's presumed death, mother kept up her vigil for his return, or at least for word from him, throughout the years of the war; and even afterwards she hoped he might suddenly turn up, as so many did. She consulted fortune tellers and those who indulged in coffee-cup readings or in cards in an effort to raise her hopes. In fact, she remained hopeful until the day she died in 1961.

Although father was missing or dead, the army continued to pay mother the allowance due to the families of soldiers recruited and serving in the war. But with prices soaring and bread becoming more and more difficult to procure, the allowance was not sufficient to provide us with the immediate necessities of life. It was not that wheat was unavailable for Jerusalem; but once the Turkish authorities realized that the Arabs as a whole were not wholeheartedly behind the Turkish army and that some of them were even assisting the Allies, the government placed an embargo on the movement of wheat from across the Jordan River so as to make it difficult for the residents of Jerusalem to resist. The net result was that wheat and meat were plentiful and cheap in the territory east of the river and scarce and expensive on the western side. The black market in Jerusalem flourished and only those who had the money could afford the prohibitive prices. Hence, starvation occurred among the poorer classes who found no way to satisfy the hunger of their children except by begging or rummaging in garbage cans and picking up orange peels off the streets.

In a way we were better off than others because of mother's insight and courage. Although still in her twenties when father was taken to the front, she was mature enough to realize and assume her responsibilities for the family. She stocked the house with provisions of flour and other food commodities, turning our sitting room into a storeroom, and arranged with one of our neighbors, who happened to be a baker, to pay his rent as a sub-tenant in flour. In this way, with the allowance she received from the military, mother was able, with care and economy, to make both ends meet for the immediate future, at least.

But with no end of the war in sight and our food provisions dwindling, mother began to worry. She had a close friend, who when things became tough in Jerusalem, had moved with her family to join her husband in Amman on the east side of the Jordan River where he had a business. This friend sent word to mother that bread and other food commodities were plentiful in Amman and living expenses were much cheaper than in Jerusalem. She pointed out that the allowance mother was receiving from the army would be more than sufficient to maintain the family comfortably, and she advised mother to join them in Amman where she would be assisted and looked after by herself and her husband. But mother preferred for the time being to stay on in Jerusalem in case father should reappear or try to contact her if he had in fact deserted.

During this period an incident occurred that made mother change her mind and decide to leave Jerusalem. As the eldest son in the family, it was my duty to take the dough to the public bakery for it to be baked, and return home with the bread. One day as I was about to pass by the police station just inside the Damascus Gate,

I was stopped by a policeman who took the bread away from me. I went home empty-handed and crying, and related to mother what had happened. Mother went immediately to the police station and demanded the return of the bread, but it had already been eaten, apparently by the hungry policemen. She accused them of being “protectors turned thieves,” and raising her arms to Heaven, called upon the Almighty God to destroy the wicked Turks, the despots and criminals against humanity and the weak. Such an outburst would normally have been punished, but being a woman with a strong case against the police saved her. That night we all slept hungry.

This incident made mother realize that, conditions in Jerusalem being what they were and probably getting worse, and with the army allowance proving from day to day to be less than adequate to sustain the family, it would be wise to move her family to Amman. She discussed the move with her mother and grandmother who encouraged her, and she immediately sent word to her friend in Amman. She then began her preparations by gathering together the items we needed most during our stay in Amman, and arranged to hire a carriage for the journey. The type she selected for her large family had four rows of benches open on both sides. The style was then called “American,” apparently because it resembled the wagon train (or coach) used by the American pioneers in the early days of their settlement. The carriage was drawn by a pair of horses, the coachman, Abu George, was accompanied by his son as his assistant. The trip was estimated to take three days and two nights to cover the distance of about one hundred kilometers between Jerusalem and Amman. The route from Jerusalem ran eastward passing through Jericho below sea level, over the Jordan River, then up a range of mountains along Wadi Shu‘aib to the town of Es-Salt, then the capital of the area, and eastward through open country to Amman.

Warned that Amman had no doctors and no pharmacies, mother made sure to take with her plenty of aspirin, quinine, eye drops, castor oil, etc., to treat any illnesses that might confront us. Her insight paid off, and she was able to treat many a needy family during our stay in Amman.

Next came the bedding, the kitchen utensils, and the remnants of supplies we had at home. These were all piled on top or under the seats while we sat perched on them. Mother then locked the door of our home as if we were going on a short visit, bade goodbye to Teita, and the neighbors, asking them to look after the place during our absence, and got into the carriage with baby brother George sitting on her lap.

The day we left Jerusalem was in the spring of 1916. The sun was bright but not hot and the air invigorating, and I felt as if we were going on a picnic, little realizing what that trip was to mean in our lives. As we passed by the Damascus Gate, Herod’s Gate, the Garden of Gethsemane, we began our ascent to Bethany and then descent into desolate open country towards Jericho, I observed my mother crying quietly. I could not comfort her because I did not know what to say. Once we were on the open road, I decided to get out of the carriage and walk alongside in the open, fascinated by the variety and colors of the wild flowers and gathering the most beautiful among them only to allow them to fade and wither away. By dusk we had reached the outskirts of Jericho and Abu George suggested that we should spend the night outside

the town. He unsaddled the horses and let them loose to graze in the open fields, while he and his son slept on the ground close by. Mother gathered us all inside the carriage, put the flaps down, covered us well against the cold breeze of the night, and, with baby George on her lap, watched over us as a hen watches over her chicks.

The following morning mother told us that during the night a hyena visited us and kept roaming around the carriage, apparently in the hope of picking up something to eat. On more than one occasion it had stood up on its hind legs and attempted to peep into the carriage, whose seats were fortunately too high for it to reach. Mother had kept on sending it away, but this meant she had not slept a wink until the hyena went away with the break of dawn.

The countryside of Palestine in those days was infested with hyenas which preyed on cattle and, in some instances, attacked even human beings. The number had increased during the war on account of the many carcasses of dead horses, mules, and camels left behind by the Turkish troops. A popular superstition used at the time to warn people away from hyenas was that this dangerous wild animal lured its victim to its den by stealing behind him and letting out a deafening howl that would frighten him out of his wits and cause him to run after the hyena crying out: "Father, father. Wait for me!" When the victim had entered the den, the hyena would savagely attack him from behind, and the rest followed.

The second leg of our journey began after we had said our prayers for God's continued protection and guidance. We passed through the orange groves and banana plantations of Jericho as we sped towards the Jordan River. We found no oranges because the season for the Jericho citrus was over, and bananas do not ripen on the tree. At the edge of the Jordan River, mother stopped to remind us that it was in these waters that Christ had been baptized by John the Baptist and that it was at this very same spot, she said, where Christianity had been born. Since I had had Sunday School lessons, it was an exciting moment for me as I remembered my old school friends and wondered what they would say if I were to tell them I had been to the Jordan River and stood at the spot where Christ was baptized.

After crossing a shaky wooden bridge, which seemed to give way at each step the horses took, we began our ascent into the mountainous regions towards the town of Es-Salt. The dirt road up Wadi Shu'aib was narrow, steep, and hazardous with stones and pebbles scattered here and there. The coachman and his son descended from their seats and told us that, except for mother and little George, we must get out and walk at certain spots in order to lighten the burden of the horses as they pulled uphill. He took hold of the bridle of one horse and his son the bridle of the other to make sure that the carriage did not slide backwards. As we progressed uphill the road became more and more dangerous and the carriage would be stopped at intervals to give the horses a chance to rest.

As we climbed higher and higher up the road, we observed in the valley below people moving about to draw water from the flowing stream or to cook their meals over smoking fires. These cave dwellers turned out to be some of the remnants of the Armenians who had escaped massacre at the hands of the Turks in Anatolia and

had found temporary refuge in the valley. After a stop-over in Wadi Shu'aib, they eventually settled in Lebanon and Syria.

The third and last leg of our journey was easy and enjoyable, especially because we were getting closer to our destination. For the first time mother looked relieved, and she broke out in song in which we all participated. We entered Amman in the early afternoon still singing. This strange noise coming from a strange-looking carriage full of children drew the attention of passers-by, who regarded us as a Christian school invading the town, and we later heard that some had resented our arrival and intended to request the government to expel us.

(End of Part 1.)

Endnotes

- 1 I was born in a house immediately outside the Damascus Gate, situated about 1000 yards from the Mount – now a Moslem Cemetery and presumed to be the site of the Crucifixion – and some 500 yards from the present Garden Tomb which is presumed to be the site of Christ's Burial and Rising from the Dead.