

The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs

Part 1: The Formative Years, 1882–1918

Taufiq Canaan

Editor's Note:

In September 2016, Fauzi C. Mantoura decided to transcribe the memoirs of his grandfather, physician Taufiq¹ Canaan (1882–1964), which had been in the archives of his late mother, Layla N. Mantoura (nee Canaan). The text of Dr. Taufiq Canaan's "Family Story" spanned 284 pages, which he had handwritten in a Eupharma pharmaceutical diary issued in 1957. Therefore these memoirs were written in the period after 1957, when Dr. Canaan was retired and residing in a guest house of the Augusta Victoria Hospital compound on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem. During the summer holidays of 1955–1963, which Dr. Fauzi Mantoura spent with his grandfather in Jerusalem, he recalls seeing Dr. Canaan methodically writing these memoirs every evening. The diary, excerpted by Carol Khoury and annotated by Andrea Sakleh, cover up to the end of World War I. Part 2 will be published in a future issue of *JQ*.

Parents and Childhood

My grandfather, Hanna Canaan, came from Kfar Shima [Lebanon] with his three sons and two sisters (Martha and Christina) to Jaffa. He had to flee from Lebanon, as the persecution of the Christians was very severe, and he was a very brave young man who fought against the killing of Christians [by Druze in sectarian battles in the area]. Two of his sons, Anton and Bishara (my father) entered the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem,² while the eldest son Habib remained with his father. Father was born in Kfar Shima on 6 August 1849. His mother died soon afterwards.

My mother Katherina was also from Lebanon. She was born in Bhamdun and was a member of the Khairallah family. She lost her mother at the age of about 4 years. Her father remarried soon, but as her stepmother treated her harshly and badly, her father brought her to the girl's orphanage in Beirut. This was a Kaiserswerther Deaconesses institution. When she finished the prescribed course at the school, she remained in the orphanage first as a teacher and later as a deaconess. A few years after her dedication as deaconess, she was sent to Talitha Kumi in Jerusalem. This was another orphanage for girls established by and belonging also to the Kaiserswerther Deaconesses.

Father got to know mother while she was at Talitha Kumi. He was very scrupulous in choosing his life companion, and took always the advice of the Director of the Syrian Orphanage, who loved him as a son. The director thought this young deaconess was the most suitable companion. She had, as he did also, a German education and was as engaged as he in missionary work. She was Lebanese and a Protestant as he was. Mr. Schneller blessed his choice. After marriage she went to Bayt Jala with him.

I was born on 24 September 1882, as the second child. My sister Lydia was one and a half years older. As I was the first male child in the family, the joy of the congregation was exceptional. A male child perpetuates, according to Arab customs, the name of

the family and the clan. At my birth we lived in the house of Abdullah Toa, which lies in the eastern part of the village. As the customs of the Arabs dictate, everyone who came to congratulate brought something with them. Usually such presents were intended to help the receiver reduce his expenses down. Every person who came to congratulate had to be served with sweets, coffee, cigarettes, and in Christian families, with arak. Such presents were brought on the birth of a child, the marriage of a member of a family, the return from a long “journey,” and at the death of a member of the family. All such presents had to be repaid, as the Arab proverb teaches: *Kul shi fi dinyadayn, hitta dumu’ al-‘anayn*, that is, everything in this world is a debt, even the tears of the eyes: كل شي في الدنيا دين حتى دموع العينين

A few words have to be said about my other brothers and sisters. In all we were six children, four boys and two girls. According to our age, we were Lydia, myself, Wadi’, Badra, Hanna, and Nagib. As I was the eldest boy my father was called Abu Taufiq. From our youth, father gave a lot of time and energy to bring us up in the right Christian spirit. He told us Biblical stories and other stories, putting especial stress on morals. Whenever it was possible, we were allowed to accompany him on his official walks and visits. On summer vacations, he took us on excursions to historical sites around Bayt Jala. This ensured we got to know the topography the surroundings of Bayt Jala, all while visiting such sites as Solomon’s Pools, St. George’s Convent, Bethlehem, Artas. During our walks, he related to us the life history of important men in religion and politics, speaking simply to showcase the history and traditions of the place.

During summer vacation, he arranged for long tours to Tannur, Battir, Bayt Sahur, al-‘Arrub, etc., where we rode on donkeys. Such tours planted in me the love for country and the *fallah*. In the summer, father leased a vineyard. We had to get up early and walk to the field and bring figs and grapes for the day. These had to be ready for breakfast. It was a nice custom to have, while carrying the fruits home, acquaintances whom we met on our way would help themselves. In most afternoons the whole family went again to the vineyard to spend one hour in the fresh air. Nothing was lost of the fruit we brought home. Berries which were not suitable for eating were pressed for vinegar. We made our own wine; as we had no wine press, the grapes were crushed by treading upon the vats after washing all our feet.

The missionary work grew quickly. A big terrain was bought in 1882 and a beautiful but simple church was erected in 1886. Thus the congregation could now boast like the Orthodox and the Latin congregations of having a good and spacious church. On both sides of the church two buildings were erected, the one to the south was a school for the boys and the one to the north was partly a school for the girls and partly the



Figure 1. Taufiq Canaan with his wife Margot Eilender. IPS collection.

living quarters of the teacher. Within the boys school was a second story that was built for the quarters of the pastor. We moved into those quarters and for the first time we had a comfortable living space.

Father was one of the very first Arabs in Palestine who learned to play the organ. When we were still young he began to teach us and gave us lessons. He was strict in his teaching. In order to teach us not to move our hands unnecessarily, he used to place a small coin on the back of our hands. Whenever it fell down he beat us on the hand. Of course, the beating was not hard.



Figure 2. From left to right: Dr. Saphra, Dr. Canaan, Marogt (Canaan's wife), and Moshe Krieger. Courtesy of Norbert Schwake.

Schooling and Medical Training

When I was six years old I entered the primary school of our mission in Bayt Jala. I still remember when the school comprised only two rooms. As these were in no way sufficient for the number of applicants which increased yearly, the Jerusalem Verein built on the southern side of the church a hall and two rooms. When I entered school there were already three teachers and my father. The subjects taught were: Arabic, reading, writing, composition, elementary mathematics, geography, singing, drawing, and Bible history. Physical education was introduced for the first time in southern Palestine in our school.

Beside our work in school we had special lessons at home in German, music, and grammar. At the age of eleven, I was taken by my father with my brother Wadi' to the Syrian Orphanage where I finished elementary school and three and a half years of teachers' seminary before going to Beirut. No English was taught in the Syrian Orphanage. We learned French but advanced very slowly in this subject. The subjects taught in the seminary were: algebra, geometry, physics, history, advanced German and Arabic, music, history of the Bible, religion, and pedagogy. The method of teaching was good and the teachers thorough, thus a thorough training was given. The moral standing of the institution was very high and this was an important cornerstone for future study and work.

A few words have to be said about the training in the Syrian Orphanage. All the children had to get up at half past five, dress, and wash so that everyone could do his daily house work between six and seven. Every student had a specified chore: the cleaning of the dormitory, of the courtyard, one of the class rooms. These duties were changed every few months so that the student rotated to different house duties. After breakfast, the boys went either to their classes or to the workshops. Following lunch there was a short break, after which the lessons began again and remained to four o'clock. At this time the general work began in the garden, the building, etc.

Every Sunday afternoon the children would go on an outdoor walk where they could enjoy themselves in the fresh air. Flowers were gathered and we would bring them to Mrs. Schneller, who was called by everybody “Mamma Schneller.” In return she would give us a handful of dried figs. Every Sunday after supper there was a religious meeting held by “Papa Schneller.” Most of us slept for he spoke long.

During the harvest time, all the children had to get up at “five” in the morning and go to help in harvesting the crops. We worked until “eight” in the morning and then came back to breakfast and to begin our studies or work. I remember so well how my hands were wounded, as we harvested with our hands. On these occasions, I gathered beetles, scorpions, small serpents, etc. and put them in bottles of alcohol. We sold them to German teachers who then sent them to Germany. After the harvest, the whole institution was granted a three-day picnic to ‘Ayn Far‘a. This was one of the best periods in the school year. Another lovely period, but much more tiresome, was our 4–5 day trip to Jericho. This was done in the spring time. At four in the morning, the boys walked down, rested at the Samaritan inn for several hours, and resumed their walking in the afternoon. We arrived exhausted in Jericho and camped in Wadi Qilt. On these occasions, my father would allow me and my brother to hire a donkey.

Medical Schooling in Beirut

One afternoon on one of the summer vacations my father had to make a visit to the neighborhood of Rachel’s tomb. I accompanied him. On our way back he asked, “What do you like to study and what profession have you chosen?” I answered “a physician.” It seems that the sight of the doctor coming from Jerusalem to the French hospital in Bethlehem made a deep impression on me. He always rode on a beautiful horse with a white ‘abaya. Father kept my answer in mind and soon sent me to American University in Beirut. It was called in those times the Syrian Protestant College and Dr. Daniel Bliss was the president.

In the winter of 1899 I arrived in Beirut. The journey was very tiresome. One had to go on the railway to Jaffa, and then on the steamer to Beirut. I journeyed in third class, that is, deck passenger. Although the next morning I was in Beirut, the journey was very hard and I was terribly seasick.

I had to begin from the bottom, that is, class D in the preparatory, for I knew no English whatsoever. However, I studied very hard and in three months I advanced to the third class. In the second school year it was possible for me to go through classes B and A. I advanced to the Collegiate Department, having studied hard all vacation. I took an examination and was able to skip the freshman class and enter as a sophomore. This required continuous and strenuous work the whole year to satisfy my professors.

Reverend Fritze, the German pastor of Beirut, whom I had already visited a few times, brought me the news of the death of my father in the latter part of February 1899. The news broke me down, for I did not know how it would be possible to continue my studies. He wisely said, “... my dear Canaan, trust in God, everything will be arranged.” He rose up, asked me to play on the piano, gave me a choral book, and left the room saying, “music is the best comforter.” This I found to be true in every difficult occasion. The pastor personally went to the president of the college and arranged that the whole tuition fee was granted.

The death of my father imposed upon me great restrictions. I looked for some ways to earn a few pennies. Thus, I helped some of my co-students in their lessons regularly. To others, I gave German lessons. In the German Girls Orphanage, I taught

two deaconesses Arabic. I imposed a strict economy on myself making it possible for me to somewhat assist my mother with my heavy expenses. The death of my father also meant putting a greater investment in my studies. As we were not allowed into the preparatory department to study later than 10 p.m. and as everything had to be darkened at this time, I used to wait until the supervising teacher went through the dormitory and retired to his room. Then I lit a candle and continued my studies.

Medical school lasted four years and at the end of the fourth year we received our diploma. I studied very hard and was always the first in the class. In the practical work in anatomy, that is, in the dissection of human bodies, I had the greater chance of doing my part and that of many students who did not care to do their work. In this way I had the exceptional opportunity to thoroughly study anatomy. On vacation, I anesthetized cats and dissected them, thus studying anatomy in a living animal. On commencement day I received honors in anatomy, chemistry, physiology, histology, internal medicine, surgery, ophthalmology, dermatology, therapeutics, ear-nose-throat diseases, and hygiene

Augusta Victoria and the Beginning of My Medical Career

After receiving my diploma, I hurried back to Jerusalem and rested for one month before I took on my duties at the German hospital.³ During this period I had to search for quarters to live in. But the month came to an end before a house was found. I had to live for about two weeks with my cousin (the son of father's sister), Mr. Bishara Fata. My mother moved to Jerusalem when a house, composed of a big hall and three rooms, was found. The greater part of mother's furniture was moved to the new quarters.

My decision to go to Jerusalem and to work in the German hospital decided my whole future. I never was sorry for this decision. Jerusalem lived mainly from the tourists and pilgrims who used to flock yearly in great numbers, especially during the two main Christian feasts. Due to the troubled condition of the country caused by political unrest, only very few dared to come. Another important source of income was the work offers by many Christian institutions. Their number decreased greatly after the Arab-Jewish war. Add to these causes the poverty of the refugees, who had lost all their possessions and means of living, one can understand the abnormal position of the country. Thus, every woman who could find employment snatched at it. However, the Augusta Victoria Hospital⁴ and the other few institutions could employ only a small number.

My working hours in the hospital were officially from 7 a.m. to 12 or 1 p.m., and two hours in the afternoon. The work was so extensive that I had to put daily three to four hours more to be able to finish it. As assistant, I had to examine every new patient, to write the history, make the morning rounds with my chief, conduct evening rounds alone, assist in the operations, hold the greater part of the polyclinics, and perform the laboratory work. My chief, Dr. Grussendorf, was a very conscientious and good surgeon. He became the best known one in Palestine. His fame was so wide that people from all directions came to him for consultation. His private polyclinic was always full. He was at the same time asked by the chief of the Shaare Zedek hospital⁵ to conduct all the operations in this hospital.

Our operating days were Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. But we had many emergency operations which were performed whenever they came. At seven, we began to operate and I assisted Dr. Grussendorf. He was kind to explain to me the anatomy of the surgical field and the different stages of the operation. After a few months he allowed me to operate under his supervision. Slowly I mastered the most important



Figure 3. Dr. Taufiq Canaan's laboratory with Ms. Elisabeth Hegler to the left and Dr. Bader to the right. Courtesy of Norbert Schwake.

operations and methods. I used to wonder about how quiet and sure he was. It must be said, in his honor, that he endeavored to never cut a fiber when it was not absolutely obligatory. In internal medicine, he was not so sure. Dr. Grussendorf was influenced by the practical physicians in Jerusalem, especially by Dr. [Adolph] Einszler, who thought that by far the greatest part of all diseases in Palestine was malaria or the results of malaria. Dr. Grussendorf adopted this theory. As a result, we had many disputes in the diagnoses. Thus he did not believe that we had typhoid, tubercular peritonitis, muscular rheumatism, etc.: everything was malaria or one of its consequences.⁶

One day while making the morning round I read the history of the woman who was admitted the day before. In conclusion I said the diagnosis is tubercular peritonitis. He was excited and said all the symptoms cited are the consequences of chronic malaria. No discussion was allowed. He turned to the deaconess and said, "To prove to Dr. Canaan that his diagnosis is not correct I will operate on this woman tomorrow." The method of treating tubercular peritonitis at these times was laboratory. I was greatly perturbed to be the cause of an operation when my chief thought it was not necessary. But the operation showed the best tubercles I had ever seen. He turned to me and said, "I am thankful that you were so positive in your diagnosis. Now I see how often I made faulty diagnoses." The same difficulties in diagnosis were present with typhoid; nobody could convince physicians in Jerusalem of the enteric fever's existence. Even though repeated blood tests did not reveal any parasites and there was a lack of medicinal effectiveness, physicians were still not convinced that the disease was not malaria. They believed that continuous fever, bleeding from the intestines, peritonitis (after perforation) were all results of intestinal malaria. Only when Professor [Peter] Mühlens came to Jerusalem to study the diseases of the Holy Land, did the scientific research (agglutination and culture) prove the correctness of my observations.

On operating days I made the rounds alone between 11 and 13, while Dr. Grussendorf continued operating. On every operating day, five to eight operations were performed.

The evening visits were made by me alone. Dr. Grussendorf visited only the bad cases and the newly operated. Slowly I mastered the German methods, of which I had seen none in university. Dr. Grussendorf lent me German books where I found a mine of treasures. At the same time, I subscribed to German medical journals to expand my knowledge. Due to all of my extra work, I was able to abstain completely from the first year of private practice. My monthly salary of gold francs (at this time there were no paper money in circulation in Palestine) sufficed for any living, and I could lay a few pennies on the side.

The work in the hospital, especially my close connection with the patients, gave me great experience with the folklore of the country. This interested me so much that I began to enquire about the amulets, which most of the patients carried: how they were thought to act, how they have to be carried, who makes them, etc. All of this information was put on record. This was the stimulus which made me so interested in the customs and beliefs of the people and which allowed me to write many articles and books.

Just before Professor Mühlens arrived to Jerusalem in 1912, we had an epidemic of cerebrospinal fever. Hundreds died. The epidemic began in the Jewish quarter and raged frightfully amongst the Jews, especially amongst children and young people. It spread slowly among the whole population of Jerusalem and the villages around it. The disease was known as the "Jewish disease." Dr. Grussendorf, Dr. Wallach, and I recognized the character of the disease. Our treatment was repeated lumbar puncture and serum. All the other physicians laughed at our diagnoses and assured that it was nothing but severe cerebral malaria. Their standpoint was held firmly in an assembly of physicians, arranged by the Turkish government, and to which physicians from Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Nablus were called. My studies of this epidemic gave rise to my first lecture at the Medical Congress at the university in Beirut which was then printed by the university in their bulletin, *al-Kulliya*. My professor in internal diseases, Dr. Graham, congratulated me on the publication.

In my contract with Kaiserwerth, we had agreed that if no party announced three months before the end of the year the annulment of the contract, it would continue for a second year. Two months after the first year elapsed Kaiserwerth announced that the contract would be terminated, giving as cause that there was a young German physician, a relative of the old director of the hospital, who had applied for the post. I was deeply hurt, not only because my contract was broken without any cause, but for the preference of a European to an Arab. Due to the fact that I had dedicated my whole time to the work in the hospital, I was unable to build up a private practice.

In the year 1906, I got sick with appendicitis. At midnight the pain began and got more and more severe, until I had to awaken Dr. Grussendorf at 5 am. He was angry, but came and although he did not diagnose the disease, he gave me a morphine and left. At 9 am., he was recalled. I begged him not to give any morphine for it caused very severe vomiting. After I was slightly better and I could not feel the pain, I took a carriage to the hospital. Dr. Grussendorf knew now that there must be something serious. He called a consultation of Dr. Wallach, Dr. Jamal and Dr. Hoffman. Dr. Grussendorf and Dr. Jamal were not in favor of an operation. Wallach and Jamal asked, "What do you expect to find?" I, however, insisted on an operation. They found an appendix full of pus that burst before it could be removed. Unfortunately, the course of my recovery was complicated due to acute dysentery. My operation was the first appendectomy made in Jerusalem. The Arab population in Jerusalem was very irritated. They accused Dr. Papiona of poisoning me. He had to hide himself for a few days in his house.

During the First World War, I had typhoid and later cholera. Both were very severe. (In 1954 I had an operation for an enlarged prostate. Dr. Sami Khouri made the operation

at the AVH. Soon after, and with no known cause, I was diagnosed with thrombosis in the posterior wall of the heart. This forced me to live a quiet and careful life.)

When I left the German hospital I had no income whatsoever, except what could be earned by private practice. However, my practice was just in its very beginning and could not support me. My mother had moved to Jerusalem to live with me. Thus, I was forced to look for another house. My brother Hans was teaching in the Syrian Orphanage and he had to accumulate whatever he earned for his future education.



Figure 4. Dr. Taufiq Canaan and Dr. Nashat Bey in Russian Hospital in Jerusalem. Courtesy: Library of Congress.

Slowly, my private practice increased so that my time was filled with work. This put me in a position not only to live well, but help my brother Hans, who had gone to Germany to study engineering, and my sister Badra, who was studying to be a kindergarten teacher in Dresden. My increased work necessitated my buying a donkey for riding. In those days it was à la mode to ride on a donkey.

At this point some description must be made about the prevailing conditions of the country under Turkish rule. I spent fifteen years as an Ottoman subject and the conditions were primitive. No asphalted roads existed in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan. The carriage roads were few in the Holy Land. Such roads connected Jerusalem with Nablus, 'Ayn Karim, Jericho, Hebron, and Jaffa. In the summer, the desert clouds from the streets were bad, while in the winter the roads were muddy. These terrible conditions increased during World War I, when tanks used the roads.

To reach any city, the inhabitants had to use a donkey, or a horse. Most peasants around the main cities came walking whenever they had anything to do. Early in the morning one could see groups of peasant women carrying baskets full of vegetables or fruits on their heads and coming to the cities to sell them.

There were government schools only in the cities, however, and these were only primary schools. If anyone wanted to have a higher education he had to go to Constantinople or to Beirut. Most of the Muslim young men went to Turkish universities in the first city, while most of the Christians went to Beirut. After the First World War, Muslim and Christian went to the Beirut, either to the American or the French university. There were no schools in the Muslim villages. In most Christian villages, missionary day schools were to be found. If there was a school in a Muslim village, it was a private one led by a shaykh.

There was always a slight misunderstanding between the socio-political stance of the Muslims and the Christians. The Muslims felt themselves and behaved like the ruling class. The Christians were despised. They were protected by the different convents. The Latins [Roman Catholics], as well as the Orthodox, supported their congregations. They gave them free quarters and bread was distributed amongst them. The military fee was

also paid for every male member after reaching the age of seventeen years. While every Muslim had to serve three years of military service or pay a large sum of fifty Turkish pounds, the Christian was exempted from such a service on paying two yearly sums.⁷ The system of continuous help from the convent was a drawback for the members of the Latin and Orthodox Churches. The Protestants, who had no such help, became more independent and better workers.

The sanitary conditions in Palestine were very backward. The Turkish government had only three hospitals in Palestine, one in each of the main cities: Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Nablus. The latter was built by donations of the inhabitants of the city itself, and was taken over by the Turkish government only in the last year of the First World War. The Latin and Orthodox convents had their own physician who cared for the sick of the congregation. Besides a polyclinic, the physicians visited the sick in their own houses. Such a treatment was never thorough or scientific. The different Christian communities had several hospitals in the country. The Orthodox Church had only two: a Russian hospital and one directed and supported by the Orthodox Convent.

Till Death Do You Part

When I had established a good reputation in Jerusalem and my income was good, I began to think about finding a suitable partner for my life. My ideal was to find a healthy girl who had a good education and an agreeable character. As I did not mix much in general society, I knew only a few. Therefore I made a list of girls, and began to study secretly every one. One after the other was taken away until only three remained. Two were Protestant and one was a Catholic. One of the Protestants had to be eliminated as she still was, according to my idea, young. With the names of these two I went to Miss A. Landau, an elderly Jewish lady and a good friend of mine. She at once said she knew both and I believe that Miss Margot Eilender is a fine young lady, who is the most suitable one for you. Asking Miss Landau to introduce me to her, she said: "Miss Eilender comes twice a week for an Esperanto class. Come and study this language and I will then ask you to bring her home." In this way we got to know each other more and more. I thought Miss Eilender to be a most suitable life companion. I opened my heart to my mother and asked her for advice. She agreed to my choice but thought that I should take more time to know her better.

Therefore, I went to Mr. Eilender and asked him to give [me permission to] come to his house to better know his daughter, for I intended eventually to ask for her hand. I said she should also have the chance of getting to know me better, in order to decide if I am a suitable person. Mr. Eilender was happy for the idea. A few days later and after having discussed the question with his wife, he sent me an invitation for dinner. In welcoming me in his house he said: "Dear Doctor, excuse us that we have yet shown our gratitude for your professional help." After dinner it was agreed that we should have two evenings for chess. A few weeks later, I asked Miss Eilender while we were walking on the roof and in the moon light, if she would accept to be my wife. She accepted. We descended and announced our engagements. Two days later engagement cards were sent to all friends. Amongst the Germans, the news exploded like a bomb.

4 January 1912 was fixed for our marriage. Propst Jeremia held the ceremony in the Church of the Redeemer. My brother Nagib and her brother Roland were the best men. My sister Badra and Margot's sister Nora were the bridesmaids. The ceremony was the best I had seen in Jerusalem. A big reception was given for all those invited in St. John Hotel (adjoining the church). After the reception we went to Jericho.

Medical Work in Jerusalem during the Mayoralty of Husayn al-Husayni

The London Jewish Society engaged me to work in its hospital – also known as the English hospital. One of its physicians took his vacation and went to England. I worked here for eight months and had the magnificent opportunity to learn the English methods. The next year I worked again for eight months, as the same doctor had his vacations. In the third year after leaving the German hospital, I had the exceptional opportunity to work at the Shaare Zedek hospital alone. Dr. Wallach, the physician of the same, went ten months to Germany to rest and to raise money. This opportunity gave me the chance to do many operations and to introduce me among the Jewish population. My work in the London Jewish Hospital paved the way for working among the Jews and the Shaare Zedek increased it more.

The mayor of Jerusalem, Husayn al-Husayni, who was a dear friend, gave me, in 1910, the position of Municipality Doctor. My duties were to inspect the sanitary conditions of the city, to treat the prisoners and to act as the medico-legal advisor. Every day I made a round in one of the quarters of the city and reported officially to the mayor. The sanitary inspector who accompanied me promised on every occasion to do what I proposed, but he rarely did it. The municipality had its own difficulties; I could not remain more than 1 3/4 years in this position, as my private work increased so much that I had to buy a horse.

In the year 1910, I and some graduates of the Syrian Protestant College founded the Alumni Association of the Syrian Protestant College. We met every month in the house of one of the members. I was chosen as the president. At the same time, the graduates of the Syrian Orphanage organized the Brotherhood of the Syrian Orphanage. The founder was the late Pastor Esber Donnet. He was the president for three years after which I was chosen as the president. The YMCA in Jerusalem was founded under the British Committee and in the second year after its formation, Dimitri Salami, who was the



Figure 5. Dr. Taufiq Canaan at the Ottoman Military Hospital in Jerusalem. Courtesy of Norbert Schwake.

Secretary, had to hide all the documents in order that we should not be accused by the Turks as Anglophiles.

In the year 1911 a pious Muslim, Ibrahim Kleibo, opened the first private Muslim polyclinic. He appointed me as the physician and I found a pharmacist. Three times a week the clinic was opened. As it was situated inside the Old City, and not far from the Dome of Rock, the attendance was very great, the number of patients in the summer reaching 100 a month. This polyclinic made me a very good name amongst the Muslims of the city and the villages around Jerusalem. However, the polyclinic had to be closed at the outbreak of the First World War.

In 1912, Professor Mühlens arrived to Jerusalem. He was sent by a committee to investigate the diseases of the Holy Land. The German consul general introduced him to the German institutions, and to the doctors. He brought him to me saying this young doctor can help you more than any other one. I still remember his visit on a hot summer day. When I asked the consul general if he would prefer beer or Arabic coffee, he answered, "Of course, beer – in this heat." Professor Mühlens and I became good friends. On the one side, he taught microscopy, while I introduced him to most of the schools. This was very important for his work, for he wanted to examine the blood of the greatest number of people, to determine the rate of infection. At the same time, the two Protestant German educational institutions, the Syrian Orphanage and Talitha Kumi, put their children who had parasites in their blood for treatment, at his request. In a short time the professor had examined several thousand inhabitants of Jerusalem. The infection rate with malarial parasites was found to be high (*ca.* 22 percent).

As I mentioned, he taught me the microscopy of blood. I used to ride three times a week to the Augusta Victoria Stiftung, where he lived, to examine the blood films for parasites. Soon I was an expert in microscopic diagnosis of malaria, and he employed me in his laboratory. A big house outside the New Gate, and to the east of Notre Dame de France, was rented and laboratories were arranged. It has to be mentioned that a few months after the arrival of Professor Mühlens to Jerusalem, he had to go back to strengthen the institution, to gather a library and to secure quinine for the treatment of malaria. Before he went, I showed him some cases of *Typhus exanthematicus*. There was a small epidemic in the local prisons. Professor Mühlens had not yet seen a case. Later, during the First World War, he saw very many.

World War I

In 1914 the First World War broke out. I was at once appointed as the doctor of the 27th Infantry Regiment, which was made of two companies. The first company which was under my direct care was situated in Nazareth. All orders received from the headquarters had to be communicated to the 2nd Battalion of my regiment. According to Turkish regulations, I tried first to pay the prescribed fifty Turkish pounds to be released for one year from military service. This is because I was the only male member in the family who could earn a few pennies for the upkeep of the family. Further, my son was only a few days old and he suffered from acute dysentery which he had caught most probably from his mother during birth. But a new Turkish regulation excluded physicians and pharmacists from this privilege. Thus I had to enter service and was sent to Nazareth. I lived in a room situated on the second story and had an excellent view of Nazareth and its surroundings.

After two months stay, our division was ordered to move to Ma'an, to prevent English troops from landing in 'Aqaba. We camped to the south of Ma'an in the desert.

Happily, at the end of one week of my stay in Ma'an a cable came to the commander-in-chief in Ma'an ordering that I should proceed at once to Damascus to the headquarters of the army.

As soon as I could journey, I was given the order to go back to Jerusalem to recuperate. I journeyed with the train and arrived after two and half days to Sileh [Silat al-Dahir], a village to the north of Nablus. This was the end station of the railroad. From here I had to use a carriage to Nablus and to Jerusalem. That night at 2 am we continued our journey to Jerusalem. The two sisters took utmost care of me. It was cold. In the afternoon we reached Jerusalem. My people were very happy to see me. Professor Mühlens, who happened to be in Jerusalem, visited me at once and said, "We need you badly for the desert. We must have laboratories and you should take me over."

In two weeks, I was sent to Bir Sab'a where I organized a laboratory. After a few months of work in Bir Sab'a, I was ordered to Hafir al-'Awja. During the years 1915–1918 I was in several places. My last position in the Sinai front was in Bayt Hanun. While I was in the Sinai Peninsula I could buy for my family many provisions. These were sent by German military truck to Jerusalem. Wheat, butter, eggs, and chicken were sent. The eggs (100–120 every time) were put in a tin filled with a contracted solution of lime.

After Sinai was lost, I was ordered to go to Nablus. While in Nablus I was imprisoned by the Turks and sent to Damascus to the chief doctor who was from Aleppo. This man ordered me to work in a laboratory, where I had nearly nothing to do. This doctor, who was more of a Turk than the Turks, was very mean in the method he used and I suffered much from him. After a few weeks, he ordered me to go to Aleppo, where I had the biggest laboratory in southern Turkey.

It was agreed between Prince Faysal and the British that no Arab soldiers captured in Damascus and north of it, could be taken as prisoners by the British. All Arab soldiers were his prisoners, whom he at once set free. Thus I was not taken by the British.

Theo and My Children

Up to 1912 I lived alone with my mother. Our home soon became the assembly place of the Protestant congregation. All my brothers and sisters were away. Lydia married soon after my graduation. Wadi' was teaching in the Armenian orphanage, "Armenische Waisenhaus." Hans (Hanna) and Nagib were studying in Germany. My sister Badra was in the Frohlininsitute in Dresden and later in Koln. Before marrying, I took the advice of the German consul general about the nationality of my wife after marriage. I asked if it is not preferable to leave her as a German subject. He advised strongly that she should become an Ottoman subject. This is best for her and her children's future. Thus soon after my wedding I inserted her as an Ottoman subject. Her name was officially taken off the German subject register, when we had our civilian marriage in the consulate.

This step saved so many difficulties at the time of the British Mandate. The harmony at home was the greatest blessing. My mother became slowly the centre of the whole family, not only to its members, but to the whole circle of friends. Mother and my wife complemented each other. My brothers and my sister Badra lived permanently with us, whenever they were in Jerusalem. God blessed us with four children: three daughters and one boy. The first born was Yasma (21 November 1912). My mother was so happy and she called her always "*binti habibti*," or "my beloved child." Yasma, thinking that this was her name, answered whenever she was asked about her name: "*binti habibti*."

A few days before the beginning of the First World War, my son Bishara-Theo was

born (26 August 1914). My wife was at the time suffering from dysentery. He was born very small and weak. The two others, Nada (10 October 1919) and Layla (4 June 1919) came after the end of the First World War. The following anecdote happened at the birth of Yasma. I had called a German midwife during the delivery of the child. When the child was born, my wife bled much, and while I was occupied with her the midwife said in Arabic, "Dr. Canaan, do not get angry." I of course thought that something had happened to the child and shouted: "What is the matter, is the child dead?" She answered: "No, but it is only a girl." She was following the local custom of wishing always for a boy.

When Yasma was born, I asked my wife, "What name shall we give her? Do you not think that a German name would be best?" I asked this question to see her ideas. She answered at once: "No, Taufiq, you have in Arabic the most beautiful names. Further, you are an Arab and the children must have Arabic names." Thus all my children are given Arabic names. Yasma is the abbreviation of Yasmin; Bishara means "good tidings," Nada means "dew," and Layla is the name of a renowned Arabic woman. Bishara was also the name of my father, and it is an Arabic custom to give the first born boy the name of his grandfather.

We were the happiest family. The boy developed slowly, as he was sickly for the first two years. When he began to talk he brought new life in the house. We had a maid servant from Bayt Jala, called Mariam. Bishara was greatly attached to her. When she died and he was told that Mariam would never come any more to us, as she went to God, he cried bitterly and said: "What does God need Mariam for – this old lady. I need her so very much. I am angry with God who took away my Mariam."

We made many excursions with the children, who spoke all week of the coming Sunday and the picnic we would make. Such excursions were made especially after the First World War, as I had a carriage, which was the best one in Jerusalem. A few years later, I got a car. It is interesting to note the change I had during the years: I began my practice walking, and when the work increased I bought a donkey, later I had one, then two horses, and after the First World War I had a carriage and then a car. In 1948, when the Arab-Jewish war had broken out, I lost my car with my house, and all my furniture and I, again, began to do my visits on my feet.

Our picnics were often to far places: Jericho, Nablus, Jaffa, Hebron, 'Ajjur, Tiberius, Bisan, Transjordan, and so forth. In such excursions our food was prepared, packed and taken with us. Nearly always friends who accompanied us were from the Gmelin family, Propst Herzberg, German Consul [Eric] Nord, some deaconesses, etc. In this way [it became possible for us] children to know the whole country. I received many invitations to far places for taking lunch. As a rule the food was first class. The host always served food and never sat with us. Friends were always invited to accompany us. In such excursions we inspected the archaeological remains in the vicinity. For the children, it was a great day. Thus, we were invited to 'Ajjur, Bayt Dajan, Bab al-Wad, Dayr Naja, Jericho, Hebron, Nablus, Wadi Qilt, Tal al-Safi, Bayt Jala, Artas, and so on.

Sharafat was never to be forgotten. The children clung to it. In the summer and autumn months we went nearly every Sunday to our vineyard. It was only 20 minutes by car. We always asked the sisters from the hospital Tabitha Kumi to come. It was a very great joy. My wife always prepared coffee and cake for these occasions. After having grapes which everyone cut for themselves, coffee was served. My friend Faydi al-'Alami, a rich and respected Muslim, had a very big garden in Sharafat. One day he said: "Doctor, I will give you a small piece of land, if you promise me to buy a few dunums and add them to it." I accepted thankfully his proposition. He bought me seven dunums. Thus I was his neighbor in Sharafat and in Jerusalem.

Our family life changed slowly. First, our circle of friends – especially among the better classes – increased and, secondly, the house got richer in children. We had nearly daily visits. Our friends were: Husayn Salim al-Husayni (the mayor of Jerusalem), Faydi al-‘Alami (a member of the Ottoman parliament), ‘Ali Hasna, ‘Abd al-Razaq Kleibo (both in the government), Nakhlé Trek (the Arab Head Teacher in the English College), Rev. H. B. Haddad, Direkt Schneller, Propst Jeremias, Consul General Dr. Gmelin, Dr. Biskin, Theo Fast, and so on.

Yasma and Theo went to the German school. Soon my son had a very good companion in Alfred, the son of Dr. Emil Farah, from Nazareth. Alfred’s mother was a German. She wanted to give her son a good education and thus sent him to Jerusalem. Alfred lived with us. He and Theo understood themselves well and remained always friends. Christmas Eve was an important day. The children sent, already a week in advance, their wishes to “Christkindlein.” After the death of our servant Mariam, Theo wrote to the Christchild, “I want to have nothing for Christmas but my Mariam.” St. Nicholas came regularly. The children were at first afraid of him, but later they expected him with impatience. On Christmas Eve, we always had a beautifully decorated tree. Only in 1947 did we stop putting up a Christmas tree. The children sang, told some Bible verses, and then enjoyed themselves enormously. The same joy and happiness took place on Easter Sunday, when early in the morning they went to the garden to search for the eggs. In all these days of joy and happiness my dear wife would arrange everything nicely.

In the German school there were no Arabic courses. I hired an Arab teacher to give them private lessons. Theo, however, did not show a special interest. All other studies



Figure 6. Cnaan’s house in al-Musrara. The third floor was added by the occupying Israelis after 1967. Located within the Armistice Zone in the No-Man’s Land just below the Notre Dame de France, the house was damaged and inhabited between 1948 and 1967. The street’s name during the British Mandate was Godfrey de Bouillon Street, while the present Israeli name is Ha’ Ayim Het Street. Photo taken in 1998, courtesy of Fauzi Mantoura.

were given in the German school. He also had lessons in the English language. In order to master the English language, I sent Theo, after attending the German school, to St. George's. At the age of nineteen he went to London's university to study architecture where he graduated from the Architectural and City Planning Department. It was easy for me to place Theo in the university. Sir [Henry] Wellcome,⁸ whose medico-historical museum I had sent 230 amulets,⁹ helped me. He was accepted at once on the recommendation of Sir Wellcome. As it was not easy to call him by his first name "Bishara," he was called by his second one, "Theo." This name with time took the place of the first one.

Yasma went, after finishing the German school in Jerusalem, to the Paulinen Stift in Friedrichshafen, where she remained four years. Later I sent her to London to take a course in office work. When she arrived in London, the following anecdote took place: She had on arrival to present herself to the police office with her passport. As soon as the police officer went through her passport, he fixed her with his eyes and asked: "Is your father Dr. Canaan?" Yasma answered, "yes." "Have you a brother called Theo?" Yasma answered, "yes." "Is your house to the East of the Notre Dame de France?" "Yes," said Yasma. "Don't you remember me? How often did we come to your house and had tea. I belonged to the formation who lived just beside your house. If you should have any difficulties come always to me."

While in London, Yasma lived in a house of a Moravian Pastor Wilson. He had no children and wished so much to adopt her. She was very happy to come back home. Arriving she looked very emaciated, and we had to feed her slowly until she regained her health.

Nada went to Germany after finishing her studies at the German school of Jerusalem. In a school in Stuttgart she learned the domestic sciences. From there she went to London for a visit. Her chances were really not good. She married a Spanish gentleman whose family was good. However, after two years, she found out that he was a rascal and had to leave him. She came back from Madrid with her daughter.

Layla finished the kindergarten of the German school. The school had to close due to the Second World War. She was put by Yasma in Talitha Kumi and later in the Schmidt School, for I, my wife and sister were in the concentration camp. As soon as it was possible, she went to Cairo to the American College and finished her studies in the Girls College in Beirut. She was more talented than any of her sisters, but not as persevering. Layla taught after graduation in the Girls Friends' School in Ramallah.

Of the three daughters, Yasma was the hardest worker and she was an expert in what she did. Soon after she returned from England, she became the secretary of the YMCA general secretary, Mr. Miller. In her gratitude to the Almighty, she gave the first monthly pay to the mission and the following one to her parents. Only later she kept the money for herself. She bought with the money dedicated for her parents a divan and two easy chairs. After several years with in the YMCA, she opened a pension [hostel], first in the house of her grandfather, Mr. Eilender, in the Greek Colony and later in my house in Talbiyya. Business went on very well. The pension was called "Jasmin House."

Theo came back from England just before the outbreak of the Second World War. He taught English in an Arab private school and later he took over a position in the archaeological department where he had to rearrange the fallen stones of Qasr Hisham, just north of Jericho, in order to give an idea just how it was. He had also supervised part of the excavations. Later he was employed by the PWD [Public Works Department under the Mandate] to build large caserns which were scattered all over the country (Tegart forts).¹⁰ In the year 1943 he decided to open a separate architectural bureau with his friend George Reyes with whom he had studied in London. They began their work in

Haifa and moved when the troubles began to Beirut. It is astonishing how Theo gained the confidence and love of the people. Everywhere he was highly esteemed. In Beirut, he was the friend of high class circles. His attainment in architecture was first class.

The three daughters married. It is curious that the three husbands were British subjects; one of them was an Arab whose father had acquired British nationality. Another curious thing was that the three sons-in-law had their birthdays on one and the same day – on 10 September.

Endnotes

- 1 It is now more common to find the name spelled Tawfiq, but he himself spelled his name Taufiq.
- 2 The Syrian Orphanage was established by Johan Schneller in Jerusalem originally for Christian orphans from Lebanon; it later became known as Schneller School and enrolled both Moslem and Christian boys.
- 3 The German Deaconess Hospital.
- 4 The Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH), Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, was established in 1910 as a guest house and hospice for malaria sufferers, and later became a hospital complex.
- 5 Shaare Zedek in Jerusalem, established in 1902, is a private hospital in West Jerusalem.
- 6 “Malaria shaped and influenced the history of Jerusalem and Palestine in the early twentieth century....The Ottomans only employed token efforts to control this widespread disease,” see Vicken V. Kalbian, “Reflections on Malaria in Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 67 (2016): 82–96.
- 7 See Erik-Jan Zürcher, “Mobilizing Military Labor in the Age of Total War: Ottoman Conscription Before and During the Great War,” in *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour 1500–2000* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).
- 8 Sir Henry Solomon Wellcome was a founder of the pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome & Company and formed the Wellcome Trust, one of the world’s largest medical charities.
- 9 Part 2 of Canaan’s memoirs, which will be published in a future issue of *JQ*, has a detailed account of his amulet collection.
- 10 A reference to the scores of police fortresses built on the recommendation of Sir Charles Tegart, the British Mandate advisor on counter-insurgency, in the wake of the 1936–1939 Revolt.