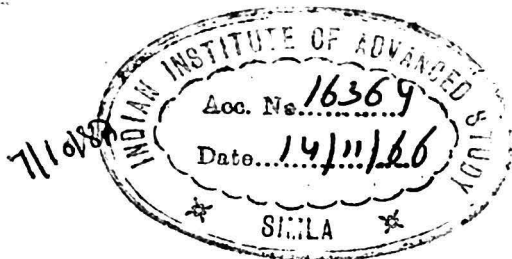


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THE BEDOUIN OF THE NEGEV

By HIS EXCELLENCY MR. ELIAHU ELATH

ISRAEL AMBASSADOR

Report of a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on Wednesday, January 22, 1958, Sir Hugh Dow, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen—It is my pleasant task to introduce our lecturer, His Excellency Mr. Eliahu Elath, who is Israel Ambassador. I realize that to many of you this introduction is quite unnecessary because Mr. Elath has been a member of our Society for more than twenty-five years, dating from his student days. Following the conclusion of his education in Jerusalem and Beirut, he served Israel, first of all, as Minister from 1950 onwards, and since 1952 he has been Israel Ambassador to the Court of St. James. You will realize that, in view of the shifting climate of opinion during those years, both in Israel and in this country, Mr. Elath has had a very difficult task. It is within my knowledge, at any rate, that he has filled his position as Ambassador, with all its difficulties, with a very rare distinction.

I do not think Mr. Elath will mind my saying that his acquaintance with the Bedouin does not, as with many of his compatriots, date only from the time when the Israel Army occupied the Negev. As long ago as 1933, His Excellency wrote a book called *The Bedouin—Their Customs and Manners*, in which he described his experiences with the tribes in Transjordan and the Syrian desert. And, as Mr. Epstein, he contributed, before the War, some articles on the Bedouin to our Journal. That is a long time ago, and I have no doubt that he will now tell us something about the changes that have taken place in the conditions of the Bedouin since that date. I now call on His Excellency to give his lecture on this very important subject.

MAY I begin by saying how honoured I feel by this renewed invitation to address our Society, and especially by the privilege of speaking under the distinguished chairmanship of Sir Hugh Dow.

The subject of my paper this afternoon is "The Bedouin of the Negev." It deals with present conditions among the tribes living in the southern part of Israel, and the problems with which they, and we, have to deal. I shall be basing myself on data obtained from official sources, and also on personal observation during my recent home leave, when I had an opportunity of visiting the Negev, and talking to a number of the tribesmen, as well as to the Government officials in charge of the various activities connected with the Bedouin. Of special interest to me were the views about the Bedouin expressed by their Jewish neighbours living in the Negev agricultural settlements, some of which were established well before the creation of the State of Israel. Their settlers are thus well placed to report on the changes which have taken place among the tribes in their vicinity during the last decade.

Here I must mention that the subject of my paper has been studied, more thoroughly and systematically than I have been able to do, by a number of Israeli students of Bedouin life. Among the "non-academics" who particularly impressed me by their penetrating understanding and

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human approach to Bedouin affairs were a group of Government officials and young army officers who have acquired an intimate knowledge of desert life and a mastery of many of the local tribal dialects. They were of great assistance to me in preparing this paper, which I would, however, ask you to regard more as a summary of impressions—in parts of quite casual observations—than as anything like a comprehensive survey of a wide and complex field. Completeness would involve careful and systematic research into the effects of the new social, economic and political conditions in the country, not only on the material aspects of Bedouin life in the Negev, but on their psychology, customs and manners, and indeed on the whole structure of their life in all its individual and collective expressions. It would also require a comparative study of the changes taking place among the Bedouin in neighbouring countries. For such scholarly research I have had no opportunity, and without it I cannot pretend to deal comprehensively with my subject.

Before turning to my impressions of the present situation among the Negev tribes I thought, however, that it might be useful if I gave a brief survey of the conditions prevailing among them before the creation of the State of Israel, so that it may be easier to appreciate the changes that have since taken place. But perhaps, before that, we might take a glance at the general background—because the problems of the Bedouin in the Middle East generally are also, to a great extent, the problems of the Bedouin in Israel.

1. THE DESERT AND THE SOWN

The Bedouin constitute one of the most interesting, as well as one of the most truly indigenous, societies in our part of the world. From a study of their problems we can learn not only about the desert nomads themselves, but may also be able to take a close look at some general problems of the area and its inhabitants. Moreover, a sociological survey of present conditions in areas where the Bedouin and other nomads constitute the majority, or a substantial part, of the population can provide varied and constructive data about the rapidly changing social structures of a number of countries in the Middle East and the far-reaching effects these changes are producing on their economic and social as well as in their political life.

Today we are witnessing the impact of the outside world on Bedouin society on a scale which is, I believe, unprecedented in the whole course of its long history. In the past the desert—the natural realm of the nomad—has on the whole been successful in protecting its own. Until quite recently it has been able to resist the impact of the changes that have overtaken the rest of the Middle East. But in the last few decades, and especially since World War II, these changes have begun to penetrate more and more deeply even into the closed circles of the Bedouin.

This is important and interesting in itself. It is even more important, I think, for students of Middle Eastern and Arab affairs, because of the influence which the Bedouin way of life—what some scholars call “the desert civilization”—has always exerted, and to some extent still exerts, on the life and outlook of all sections of the population of the area, whether in the towns or in the rural districts.

For generations past, the desert has preserved the life of its nomadic inhabitants virtually untouched. Till recently, their society remained one of the most primitive still surviving in the modern world. Living far from any settled or cultivated land, farther still from any towns or cities, the desert-dwellers had to learn to adapt themselves to conditions rather than to struggle against them. Ungrateful soil and lack of water combined to direct their attention mainly to pastoral pursuits, while the need for fresh grazing-grounds forced them to travel widely. And wherever the men of the desert went, with their tents and their flocks and herds, they took with them their own unchanging problems, of which the main one has always been that of wresting a livelihood, however scanty, from sparse and infertile pastures, without the means to take advantage of any opportunities which might from time to time offer themselves. Thus, however far the Bedouin might wander, their way of life remained substantially unaltered through the centuries—as unaltered as their black tents and their complete dependence upon the forces of nature.

It was a stagnant society—economically, socially and culturally. Again and again, through the constant movement of his flocks, and through his constant raids on the cultivated fringes, the Bedouin has in the past helped the desert to encroach upon the sown. It is no accident that one who knew him—and his destructive qualities—well has called him not only “the son” but also “the father” of the desert. Like a sea, the desert has seemed to have flood and ebb tides of its own, sometimes overflowing its shores and destroying fields and farms, leaving only a barren expanse where later Bedouin might come to graze their flocks for a season and then pass on. This happened in many parts of the Middle East, where once fertile countrysides are now no more than camping-grounds for Bedouin tribes, whose camels, sheep and goats graze among the ruins of once prosperous villages and townships. This kind of “man-made desert” may be observed in many parts of Israel, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Often it is the nomads themselves who are primarily responsible for the fact that some vast areas in these countries, known in ancient times as the granaries of the Middle East, can today provide no more than the scantiest subsistence for the Bedouin.

The history of the Negev is perhaps one of the most dramatic chapters in the age-long battle between the desert and the sown. Here, for long periods, the process just described has been reversed. In the Negev a settled civilization has, from time to time, victoriously attacked the desert. In the Nabataean and Byzantine periods, for instance, cultivation was pushed far out into what had been the immemorial heritage of the nomad. The remains of cities, terraces, irrigation works still bear witness to the achievements of ancient cultures in various parts of the Negev, and indeed throughout the Beersheba-Elath-Dead Sea triangle. The patient work and recent discoveries of Professor Nelson Glueck and other archæologists in these districts have added much to our knowledge of the high levels achieved in antiquity.

But even at the peak of their achievement, the settled areas in the Negev remained islands in a surrounding sea of nomadism, which was

only awaiting its opportunity to reduce the Negev once more to its "natural" state of barren wilderness.

I think we have to realize that the main impulse behind these encroachments by the desert-dwellers on the cultivated areas was neither racial nor religious. It was primarily the nomad's deep-rooted hatred of settled life—a hatred as old as the story of Cain and Abel—which still smoulders among the Bedouin, and which, incidentally, makes it on occasion so difficult to improve their conditions or to introduce the changes which are vital to their survival. It was this elemental antagonism which often forced the Moslem cultivators of the Negev to fight a losing battle against the attacks of nomadic tribesmen who were their brethren in faith.

Some of the same problems we in Israel have inherited, though on a smaller scale. I shall deal with them later.

The years after World War I saw the beginnings of many radical changes and developments in the Middle East generally. More slowly, change penetrated to the Bedouin. But after World War II these processes were speeded up, introducing some complex problems into Bedouin life. The foundations of their social and economic existence have been undermined, and their political independence further diminished. The Bedouin economy, which in parts of the desert has been self-sufficient, and in the more isolated areas practically independent alike of city and farm, is now deteriorating through the changes and chances of contemporary development, and particularly through the increase of modern mechanical means of communication. Today many tribes, all over the Middle East, have to face the choice between increasing impoverishment and degeneration on the one hand, and a gradual transition from nomadism to settled agriculture on the other. Not that, even in the old days, there were not Bedouin tribes engaged, to a larger or smaller degree, in agriculture. But these were mostly tribes whose migrations brought them into fairly close and regular contact with settled communities cultivating fertile lands. The beginning was usually when a tribe took to agriculture as a "side-line," and became semi-nomadic, gradually spending more and more of its time in the fields and less in wandering. A characteristic of this process is the tribe's progressive limitation of the scope of its travels, and the progressive addition of new occupations to its economy; ultimately all this will lead to permanent settlement on the land.

Governments of Middle Eastern countries with large Bedouin populations are faced with a twofold task: first to improve the conditions of those Bedouin still able to maintain themselves in the desert, and then to help those who may wish to take to settled agriculture. There is much fertile land in the area, especially in Iraq and Syria, providing ample opportunities for large-scale development. The Governments of these countries are preoccupied with this important problem, and some promising results have already been attained. It is true that, in the process of agricultural settlement, time is needed for the Bedouin to adjust themselves, mentally as well as physically, to conditions which usually differ widely from those of the desert. But no less necessary are understanding and good-will on the part of the Governments concerned, to enable them to deal constructively with this complex problem.

2. CONDITIONS BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL

I now turn to my main subject—the Bedouin of the Negev, commonly grouped, from earliest times, under the generic name of “the Gaza Tribes.” The Census of Palestine Report (1931) gave their number as 47,981, but about 1947, just before the establishment of the State of Israel, they were estimated to number between 60,000 and 70,000.¹ At that time there were eight tribes (singular: *qabila*) in the Negev, consisting of 85 sub-tribes (singular: *'ashira*). The largest and most important were the Tayaha, the Terabin and the 'Azazma. Among the smaller tribes the more prominent were the Hanajra and the Jabbarat.

The history of the Negev tribes is rather meagre and obscure.² It is not possible to determine with any certainty their origin, their connection with the tribes of Arabia, or the dates of their migrations to Southern Palestine. The names of the Negev tribes, even the most important of them, usually arouse little interest when mentioned to tribesmen of neighbouring countries. The desert world clearly does not regard them as comparable with any of the leading tribes elsewhere in the Middle East. I could easily see that this was so from my own conversations in the past with tribesmen of the Syrian desert, and even of less-distant Jordan: in neither case did the tribal elders—the main repositories of desert traditional history, who often show a remarkably detailed genealogical knowledge—show any recognition of the Negev tribes.

The Negev Bedouin's own tribal traditions about their origin and earlier history are too hazy and confused to provide any basis for reliable conclusions. This obscurity of descent is important, and in part explains their comparative isolation from the rest of Bedouin society in the area. They do not appear to form an integral part of any nomadic community of the Arabian or Syrian deserts. Their separateness complements their geographical isolation: before the establishment of Israel they formed a closed nomadic unit with the Sinai tribesmen, wandering generally only within a limited area, and even in those days having little contact with tribes outside it. The Dead Sea, the Arava (Wadi Araba) and the Gulf of Aqaba have always been a serious physical barrier between the Bedouin of the Negev and Sinai and those of Jordan and the Land of Midian. Difficult climatic conditions in the Arava Valley during the greater part of the year made it unattractive to the Negev Bedouin, who preferred to migrate south to Sinai or north to Judea and even Samaria. The Arava, in Nabataean times the main connecting link between Arabia and the Mediterranean, later became the main partition between the two parts of the nomad world, and marked the eastern boundary of the migrations of the Negev tribes. Prior to the establishment of Israel there was, however, a strong bond between the Negev tribes and those of Sinai. Some of the former (for instance, the Tayaha, the Terabin and the 'Azazma) were closely related by family ties and tradition to Sinai tribes bearing the same names.

The oldest and most important of the Negev tribes remaining in Israel after the establishment of the State is the Tayaha. Tradition has it that this tribe was the first to take possession of the Wilderness of Tih, from

which they took their name. Before 1948 the Tayaha consisted of 28 sub-tribes, numbering in all between 15,000 and 18,000 souls. They held some of the best lands in the Negev and controlled its principal highways. Travelling in the sixties of the last century in Sinai and the Negev, Palmer³ observed that once a year the Tayaha gathered in great strength, sometimes as many as a thousand warriors, to go out on foray against neighbouring tribes and plunder all they could lay their hands on. In the Negev Palmer met tribesmen returning from one of these successful forays, bringing with them as spoils a flock of as many as 600 head of camel and sheep.

The Terabin tribe was the largest of the Negev tribes before the establishment of Israel. Its 25 sub-tribes numbered between 18,000 and 22,000 people in all. They held the central and south-eastern part of the Negev, and were apparently among the first of the Negev Bedouin who, according to Musil,⁴ attempted to cultivate, even before World War I, some of the best of the Negev land around Beersheba. Before World War II they were regarded as one of the more successful and agriculturally advanced of the Negev tribes.

The 'Azazma consisted of 12 sub-tribes, totalling about 10,000 or 12,000 people. This tribe was among the latest arrivals in the Negev. They came from Sinai, and secured the mastery over the south-western region only after a fierce struggle with the other tribes. The poor soil of that area gave them little opportunity, and they were the most agriculturally backward of the Negev tribes. They cultivated only a small part of their land, and continued to depend chiefly on camel- and sheep-rearing.

Under the Ottoman régime, various attempts were made to encourage the agricultural settlement of Bedouin tribes in the Negev. The Turks hoped, by this policy, to improve security conditions in southern Palestine, and to strengthen their hold on the districts bordering on Egypt. But the Bedouin saw through to these ulterior motives, and these early endeavours served only to increase their fear and dislike of any form of forced settlement, and to retard, rather than promote, their transition to settled agricultural occupations.

It was only after World War I that the Negev, like other parts of the Bedouin world in the Middle East, entered upon a new era of rapid change, consequent on the general changes taking place throughout the area which were to have lasting repercussions on the fundamentals of Bedouin life in all its aspects. Two books in Arabic by Mr. Aref el Aref, District Officer in Beersheba under the Mandatory Administration of Palestine, give a detailed description of the changes taking place in Bedouin life in the Negev after World War I. Mr. Aref has done a most valuable and scholarly piece of work, which must have demanded much tact and patience in the collection of the material. His books are of great value to anyone interested in the subject, and, in their Hebrew translation, have given much help to Israeli students in this field.

Describing the main causes of the economic transformation of the Negev Bedouin after World War I, Mr. Aref mentions the impact of new technical devices, especially the motor-car, the introduction of which had seriously affected the camel- and horse-breeding industries—previously two important and profitable items in Bedouin economy. He points out that

a camel which, before World War I, would have sold for about £20 or £25, would fetch, in the thirties, no more than £3.⁵ He had seen with his own eyes a camel sold for 20 piastres (about 4s.)!

The sharp decline in the former sources of the Bedouin's livelihood gave a strong impetus towards increased (if not always willing) cultivation of the soil as the only means of keeping the wolf from the door. The Bedouin who had previously tilled a small plot for his own needs now took to cultivation on a rather wider scale for the market, in order to get some income to compensate for his losses in other branches of his economy. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the nomads of the Negev, any more than their brethren elsewhere, turned easily or rapidly from their free pastoral life to the more arduous work of cultivating the soil. Bedouin, in the Negev as elsewhere, despised agricultural labour, and were only too pleased to lease their land to any tenant on almost any terms, so long as they did not have to work it themselves. Such leasing of Bedouin lands was widespread before 1948, particularly among tribes living near villages, who were anyhow accustomed to get labour for working their land from the fellahin of Southern Judea and the Hebron district. How little the Bedouin cared about agricultural pursuits was clear to me when, before the last World War, I watched tribesmen in the Negev sending not only their young sons, but also their daughters, to plough their fields. They had little heart for the job of tilling the soil—no interest in the work or in the tools. Loans or advances for the purchase of seed or tools were all too likely to disappear in quite other directions.

In these circumstances, it was hardly surprising that the post-World-War-I expansion of land cultivation in the Negev led to no very marked improvement in the Bedouin standard of life, and to no real advance in the area's general development. The few small Jewish agricultural settlements established in the Negev in the later years of the Mandatory period, often in the midst of Bedouin encampments, were only tiny—but challenging—oases.

Bedouin social life, in the same period, was similarly undergoing transformation. New conditions were gradually destroying most of the old nomadic traditions which for generations had been the backbone of tribal life and the mainstay of its culture and moral code. It was these traditions which had raised the life of the desert-dweller to the level of an organized society, with laws and customs regulating the life and conduct of the individual and the community. Under the impact of the many radical changes taking place in the country generally, and particularly within the Arab and Moslem communities—changes which often conflicted with Bedouin social and political concepts—the old traditions and outlooks were dissolving, leaving bewilderment and confusion in their wake.

To sum up, as regards the situation of the Negev Bedouin before 1948, I would emphasize its transitional character at this stage. Tribal society was already moving rapidly from nomadic pastoralism to the cultivation of the soil. Even though Bedouin lands were cultivated only in the short seasons needed for sowing and harvesting, the tribesmen were none the less obliged to shorten the periods and limit the scope of their pastoral wanderings. In the 1931 Census of Palestine, some 89.3 per cent. (42,868

persons) of the Negev Bedouin were returned as deriving their livelihood from agriculture, while only 10.7 per cent. (5,113 persons) were registered as occupied solely in cattle-raising. These figures indicate that the percentage of pure nomads in the Negev tribes was already quite small in 1931. And although the semi-nomads continued to live in tents under their old tribal systems, many changes were taking place in every aspect of their lives in the course of their movement from the purely pastoral to the semi-agricultural existence.

In 1934-35, some 2,109,234 dunams of the Negev's total area of about 12,000,000 dunams were under cultivation.⁶ This comparatively large area was at that time worked on the most primitive of agricultural systems, yielding harvests only once in two or three years—the Bedou being accustomed to leave part of his land as uncultivated fallow for one or two years between crops. It may thus be assumed that the actual area under some kind of cultivation in the Negev in this period may have been as much as 3,500,000 dunams.

The methods in use were most primitive as well. In spring and autumn the Bedou-fellah would scratch the surface of the soil with his hand-plough, and then pray for rain, on which his crops were entirely dependent. After sowing, he felt himself freed from any further obligations to the soil until harvest-time; he returned thankfully to his flocks, and to his customary wanderings with them in search of pasture, coming back to his cultivation only in the autumn for the short reaping and threshing season.

This was the usual order of things in years of sufficient rainfall. But if there was too little rain (or none, as sometimes happens in the Negev), not only would his crops fail, but pasturage for his flocks would grow scarcer. There being in those days no provision for any kind of water-conservation in years of good rainfall, the Bedou had to expect to suffer badly from hunger and thirst when the wells and wadis ran dry in years of drought. On the other hand, when storms brought heavy downpours of rain, not only was most of the water lost, but the sudden overflow of the wadis often brought floods endangering life and property, and causing irreparable erosion of the scarce fertile soil. As I have already said, in times of drought the Negev Bedouin were accustomed to seek relief by migrating to more fortunate areas in the north of Palestine, or across the Egyptian frontier in Sinai (if that region was not also suffering from drought). In settled areas of Palestine, these Bedouin migrations always had a disturbing effect, particularly on the labour market and on security conditions.

The most important Bedouin crop was, and still is, barley, which accounts for some 80 per cent. of the area sown. Other crops are wheat, durrah, water-melons and beans.

The 1931 Palestine Census provides some interesting data about the ownership of land in the Negev, and the number of people dependent for their livelihood on agriculture and pastoral pursuits respectively: there were 7,869 landowners and 2,508 tenants.⁷ It is not to be inferred that all landowners actually cultivated their land. The high proportion of tenants in the primitive and impoverished Bedouin economy only goes to confirm

my earlier remark about the Bedouin tendency to relieve themselves as far as possible from the burden of personally working their lands.

Most of the land cultivated by the Bedouin in the Negev was *mewat*⁸ land. The Bedouin know no form of communal ownership of land—the *mush'a*, a type often found in Palestine Arab villages. Every Bedou holding a piece of land holds it as his own private property, not as that of the tribe. But a notable feature of land-holding among the Negev tribes (as among Bedouin elsewhere in the Middle East) after World War I was the growing tendency towards the concentration of land in the hands of the sheikhs, with the resulting transformation of the sheikh from a tribal leader into a landlord able to force members of his own tribe (and sometimes of others) into the position of tenants.

Such was, by and large, the situation among the Negev Bedouin in the period preceding World War II. Though no further statistics were published during the war years, it may safely be assumed that most of the processes at work within Bedouin society already mentioned continued to operate with increasing speed and force. During the war years, a good number of tribesmen must have turned from nomadic and semi-nomadic occupations to daily labour, as employees of the British military authorities on the building of their many installations in the area (the Negev was an important British base for Middle Eastern operations during the war). Many of these no doubt found their new occupations more profitable—if not easier—than their old way of life, and although some maintained regular contact with their tribes, and often returned to their families considerably enriched on the conclusion of their outside labours, some undoubtedly found the outside world more attractive than the nomadic way of life, if also more strenuous, and showed no desire to go back. I am not aware of any statistical data on which a reliable estimate of these trends could be based; but some indication of the practical effects of these and other changes in Bedouin life during the war years may be inferred from the picture presented by the Negev as we discovered it when we took over after 1948. With this I shall deal in the concluding part of this paper.

3. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The establishment of the State of Israel has brought many fundamental and far-reaching changes in the life of the Negev Bedouin. Their numbers have fallen by some 80 per cent. since 1948, and at present there are only about 13,900 of them. They belong to the same three tribes as in the past: the Tayaha, the Terabin and the 'Azazma, comprising between them some twenty sub-tribes. The Tayaha is the largest; the Terabin and the 'Azazma now number less than one thousand each.

During our War of Independence the Negev once more became, as in the days of Allenby, the scene of some of the fiercest and most decisive battles. We were thus obliged to leave, for the time being, the few isolated Jewish settlements already established in the Negev to fend for themselves, and to do the best they could, with the very limited means at their disposal, not only to ward off the Egyptian attacks, but also those of some of the Bedouin tribes in their vicinity.

The Egyptian Army's retreat from the Negev was followed by the withdrawal of most of the Bedouin in the area, who folded their tents, collected their flocks, and moved from the areas occupied by Israel into the Egyptian-held Gaza Strip and the neighbouring districts of Sinai and Jordan. The Hanajra and Jabbarat tribes, whose *dīra* (usual district of migration) lay partly within the Gaza Strip, gathered all their tribesmen together within the Strip, and thus maintained their tribal structure and organization intact, though living in more crowded conditions and in a much smaller area than previously.

Not one of the other Negev tribes escaped the effects of the war. Most of them found their established tribal structure broken: tribes, sub-tribes, and even family units (singular: *hamula*) found themselves separated, often on opposite sides of the armistice lines when these were established. A good few sheikhs of tribes and sub-tribes decided to cross, with some of their tribesmen, into neighbouring countries, leaving in Israel usually the smaller part of their tribe without a recognized sheikh. The general result may be illustrated by the fact that, of all the Negev tribes, only two Tayaha sub-tribes remained in Israel intact—*i.e.*, in full strength and with their recognized sheikhs. In all other cases, either the sheikh had remained with only a part of his sub-tribe, or part of a sub-tribe had remained without its sheikh.

As may be readily understood, there developed among some of these remaining fragments of tribes or sub-tribes a desire to rejoin their sheikhs and the rest of their tribal units outside Israel. Every assistance has been rendered by our authorities in such cases, and the reunion has normally been effected through the Mixed Armistice Commissions and their United Nations supervisors. After 1951, however, this phenomenon ceased altogether: conditions in Israel generally, and especially in the Negev, were improving fast, and the Bedouin tribesmen showed less interest in emigration as their own situation improved.

The new Israel Administration had to face a twofold task when it came to deal with the problems of the nomadic and semi-nomadic population of the Negev: on the one hand, to provide what was immediately necessary to prevent further disintegration among the tribes left to face their future under conditions strange to them; and, secondly, to try and plan for them a satisfactory future in accord with the general trends of constructive development in Israel as a whole and the Negev in particular. In view of the great strategic importance of the Negev to Israel's defence system—its long and mostly uninhabited frontiers with Egypt and Jordan—there is need for special security arrangements pending a permanent settlement with our neighbours. It has therefore been found necessary to restrict the movements of the Bedouin in the Negev to a defined area, and to place the administration of the tribes in the hands of the military, jointly (in some matters) with the Ministry of the Interior.

The first efforts of these two authorities were directed towards restoring the traditional tribal leadership system and other features of Bedouin social organization. Sheikhs were officially recognized as the heads of their respective sub-tribes by a decree of the Minister of the Interior, and a Central Tribal Court was set up to deal with internal disputes among the

Bedouin. This Court consists of nine members, usually chosen from among the leading sheikhs of the various tribes, with a representative of the District Court to act as secretary. As in the past, the Bedouin prefer to arrange for most of their disputes to be settled according to their own jurisdiction, and the Court acts in accordance with traditional Bedouin customs. It can impose fines up to £45, and terms of imprisonment up to three months. Appeals from its decisions lie to the District Court, but only a small proportion of cases reach that tribunal.

With the steady normalization of Bedouin life in the Negev, there has come a noticeable reduction in internal and inter-tribal quarrels, as well as in the incidence of crime. It may, however, be of interest to mention that when, a few years ago, trouble broke out between the Terabin and 'Azazma tribes in Sinai, and the news filtered across the border to the remnants of these tribes in Israel, tension developed between their Israel branches (small as these are), and our authorities felt obliged to take precautions against any possible spread of the dispute.

The Bedouin in the Negev are now scattered over an area of 1,100,000 dunams. Of this some 400,000 dunams are used for cultivation; most of the remainder is pasture, and the pasture area is seasonally increased to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of Bedouin livestock.

Our policy as regards the Negev Bedouin is to encourage and assist them to the full in turning from a nomadic or semi-nomadic life to permanent settlement on the land. In time, we hope, they will come to live by agriculture run on modern lines, like their neighbours in the Jewish settlements. We believe this to be the inevitable and constructive solution to many of the problems at present confronting a large proportion of the Bedouin in many parts of the Middle East; and we are, in any case, interested in promoting such a solution for Israel's general welfare, which depends to a considerable extent on our ability to reduce, so far as possible, the differences which still exist between the standards of living of our Jewish and Arab citizens. Thus we hope to promote our country's general prosperity, as well as better understanding between the two sections of our population.

But, while encouraging every tendency among the Bedouin in this direction, our authorities take great care not to force the pace, or to try and impose changes before the Bedouin themselves are ready to accept and co-operate in them. We continue to provide every possible assistance—*e.g.*, large and regular supplies of drinking-water, especially vital in the dry season—for those tribes which, like the 'Azazma, still prefer the nomadic way of life to the settled, and to rely on camel-breeding rather than on tilling the soil.

By and large, however, we have found the Negev Bedouin responsive to the opportunities now opening up to him. He is taking advantage of the help made available to him, and is becoming steadily more inclined to accept agriculture as an all-the-year-round occupation. For this branch of assistance our Ministry of Agriculture is responsible. It falls to their representatives to instruct and assist the Bedouin in the use of modern scientific and mechanical methods of agriculture. Not many of the Negev Bedouin have remained in occupation of the original land they used prior

to 1948, and as a general Land Settlement has not yet been carried out in the Negev, it has been necessary for the District Administration's Land Development Department to allocate land for cultivation, on lease, to Bedouin families according to their numbers and needs. Only a nominal annual payment is required. Sizes of such allotments vary with the quality of the land, but average about 75 dunams to a family. In making the allocations, the Ministry of Agriculture usually finds it convenient to operate with the assistance of the sheikh, though the actual arrangements are mostly made with the heads of families direct, in order to emphasize individual responsibility for the land and the credits provided for specific development purposes. There have been occasions when the authorities have had to intervene in order to protect individual Bedouin settlers against exploitation by their sheikh in matters which formerly lay, by custom and tradition, within his tribal authority.

During my recent visit to the Negev, I had a number of conversations with the instructors assigned by the Ministry of Agriculture to assist in agricultural development among the Bedouin. I found among them both Jews and Arabs, graduates of different agricultural institutions in the country, and all very sensible of the special character of their social, as well as their technical mission with the tribes. They told me that they had been, at first, received with suspicion, and even hostility, but that after gaining the confidence of a few members of each tribe, who had set an example, they soon found themselves accepted by the majority. At present they find little difficulty in working with the Bedouin, and several of them told me that, once started, the work usually went more easily than among the fellahin. Once a Bedou has decided that your guidance is worth having, he co-operates with you loyally and actively.

Bedouin farming consists today, as in the past, mainly of barley, and thus remains essentially dependent on rainfall. But since rainfall in the Negev is small, and drought frequent, no settled agricultural life is possible there without assured water supplies. The first requirement, therefore, for encouraging the settlement of the Negev Bedouin was a reliable and adequate water supply—both drinking-water for the tribes and their flocks and herds while they remained nomadic, and water for irrigation to make possible their increasing reliance on agriculture, and more particularly for vegetable growing, both for the settlers' own use and for the market. During the last few years a number of water-pipes have been laid in Bedouin areas, and the water they provide will increase with the completion of the main Negev irrigation schemes and with the growing needs of the Bedouin farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture is also engaged at present on securing Bedouin co-operation in the work of soil and water conservation by the construction of local dams built to hold excess rain-water after the occasional heavy storms. In this the experience of Jewish settlers in some of the Negev villages is of the greatest assistance. From Jewish farmers to whom I spoke, I heard general praise for Bedouin ability—and increasing readiness—to profit from the experience of their Jewish neighbours: they learn quickly once they have made up their minds to adjust themselves to changing conditions. Though most of the Jewish farmers are themselves

newcomers in the area, they were prepared and equipped to face the many obstacles presented by the soil and the climate, as the desert nomads could never be, even though they had lived there for generations.

For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture has provided tractors, as well as other agricultural machinery, which the tribesmen had never used in the past. They have also provided a comprehensive programme of training in elementary mechanics to ensure their proper use. Training is also given in other modern agricultural methods, including the use of chemical fertilizers. The results of applying these methods and machines are convincing arguments which are leading even the most conservative of the tribes (with a few exceptions) to turn to agriculture of a more varied and intensive type than was possible in the past. When you see with your own eyes that a dunam of land which in 1953 (incidentally a year of good rainfall) produced only 30 kilograms of barley, produces with the new methods of cultivation 150 kilograms, you begin to think again about the relative attractions of camel-breeding and agriculture!

An interesting start has been made by the Ministry of Agriculture in the social as well as in the economic field. Assistance is being given to a number of Bedouin to form themselves into two agricultural co-operatives, sharing the use of tractors between them, and also undertaking tractor ploughing, for payment, on other lands within the Bedouin area and in the neighbourhood outside. One of the co-operatives, *al Salam* ("Peace"), consists of members of the 'Atawna and the Hudheil sub-tribes; the other, *al Negeb al Jadid* ("the New Negev"), was formed by members of the 'Uqbi and the A'asim sub-tribes. The tractors are in the care of Bedouin mechanics, who share the profits they earn, after provision has been made for repaying the long-term loan given for their purchase. I was told that the tractors are admirably maintained in these co-operative groups, and that the Bedouin are in good heart and on the best of terms with their neighbours.

The material successes achieved in this case may well stimulate others to follow suit, though there is no intention of forcing on the Bedouin any form of social or economic organization unless and until they show some interest in trying it out for themselves.

None the less, livestock breeding—mainly sheep—still remains a very important, and indeed a growing, element in the Bedouin economy in the Negev. According to official estimates the total head of stock in their possession has risen since 1955 from 30,000 to 50,000—this in spite of the fact that these flocks constitute a principal local supply of meat for the whole country. Meat is scarce in Israel, and Bedouin mutton and lamb are of great importance to the country's general economy. Every encouragement is therefore given to those tribes which wish to continue and expand this branch of their activities. The high prices which the meat commands contribute satisfactorily to their income, and it is further estimated that about 60 per cent. of the total comes from this source, and the rest mainly from the sale of surplus crops.

In various conversations I had with Negev sheikhs, what most impressed me was their obvious anxiety to make more rapid progress along the new lines. They complained of the Government's "slowness" in

providing necessary assistance. They said they needed more tractors, larger loans, and some spoke of their wish to exchange their tents for permanent houses.

So far, practically all the Bedouin continue to live in tents, and normally they move them from time to time within the limited area covered by the families belonging to their tribe. Tent-dwellers can more easily follow the movement of their flocks from pasture to pasture. But in present conditions, which confine the tribe to a more limited area, and with the growing emphasis on agriculture—the need to cultivate a given area of land—the tent is, no doubt, becoming less of a necessity, though still, of course, a much cheaper form of habitation than a house.

Though the authorities dealing with the Bedouin have been obliged, in these early stages, to concentrate their efforts mainly on improving material conditions, they quite realize that changes for the better in this field alone do not necessarily spell progress—either for the tribes themselves or for the country as a whole. Change and progress are not necessarily or always the same thing. To achieve real progress requires much more than an increased annual income. A general rise in the Bedouin standard of living (as in any other society) involves a transitional stage, when serious attention has to be devoted to the social and cultural aspects of their lives. This is one of the main reasons why, from the outset, the Israel Ministry of Education has been doing its best to introduce more schools among the Bedouin, following up the modest start made in this direction before 1948 by the Mandatory Government. But I was sorry to learn that results have not so far come up to expectations, and that so far there are only five schools in the Bedouin area, with a total of 180 pupils—all boys. The teachers are appointed by the Ministry of Education from among the graduates of the Arab Teachers' Training College. Hebrew is taught in addition to Arabic, and some of the children, like a few of their parents, already speak fluent Hebrew. Most of the 180 pupils are sons of sheikhs. About twenty older boys (also mostly sons of sheikhs) have been sent by their fathers to continue their education outside the Bedouin area. At present, the proportion of literates among the tribesmen probably does not exceed 3 to 5 per cent. On enquiring into the reasons for the modest results so far achieved in this important field, I was told that one of the main difficulties in getting Bedouin parents to send their children to school is still the semi-nomadic character of their lives, and the fact that children, even very young children, can be profitably employed as shepherds. Though Israel has, of course, a law of compulsory education, our authorities have had to be careful not to impose it on the Bedouin before they show themselves ready to welcome and co-operate in it.

The Arabic programmes of the Israel Broadcasting Station make their modest, but important, contribution to adult education among the Bedouin, to whom some of its regular educational broadcasts are specially directed. It is true that there are as yet few wireless sets in Bedouin tents, but there is a lively interest in the programmes, and it is a very normal ambition among the tribesmen to acquire a battery-operated radio.

Medical services are freely available to all Bedouin through the six clinics established in the area. More serious cases are treated at the Beer-

sheba Hospital. But, as with their children's education, in matters of health the Bedouin continue to show themselves more conservative than in agriculture or mechanics: they remain reluctant to avail themselves of the facilities afforded them, and seem to prefer their own "doctors." Only after these "doctors" and their primitive "remedies" have failed, do they usually decide to approach the clinics. Some improvement is, however, noticeable even in this field, especially among the women. These now bring their young children much more frequently both to the clinics in their own areas and to the Beersheba Hospital. Our Medical Institutions are engaged in research into the diseases endemic among the Bedouin, and are investigating the effects on health of the normal Bedouin diet. An attempt is being made now to train a few young Bedouin—men and women—as nurses, and so prepare them to carry on the work of education in hygiene among their own people.

In earlier parts of this paper I have tried to touch briefly on some aspects of Bedouin life in general, and to deal in some detail with their current problems arising from the rapidly changing conditions practically all over our part of the world. Those changes affect the dwellers in the black tents everywhere, and not only those in the Negev. But in Israel there are other problems over and above those specific problems which face the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples in countries where the Moslem religion and Arabic culture are important factors facilitating their social and economic transformation.

In Israel, the basic problems are further complicated by the political uncertainty due to the still unsettled state of our relations with our Arab neighbours. When I had the privilege of talking to you, some two years back, about Israel's population problems, I said of our Arab minority that it is "the declared ambition of my Government to raise the standards of its Arab citizens to the level obtaining among the Jews, as the first and most decisive step towards full practical equality between all citizens of Israel, irrespective of race, creed or language." This applies, as I have tried to indicate, to our Bedouin citizens no less than to others of our non-Jewish population. But it is only human that the Bedouin, who find themselves transformed, almost overnight, from being the virtual masters of the Negev into a minority occupying a limited area, should be suffering from the effects of the profound psychological upheaval which has accompanied the dislocation of their social and political life. For them the upheaval has been more radical than for the rest of our Arab citizens. And we, on our part, with all our genuine desire for, and interest in, the real and practical integration of all our Arab citizens into the democratic, progressive structure of our State, cannot force the pace. Often we must wait till the Bedouin themselves are ready. For some things we must wait till there is a firm peace between ourselves and our neighbours: till then there will remain certain security considerations which neither our Administration nor our Military Authorities would be justified in ignoring, though some of the restrictions on this score have of late been considerably relaxed.

Having said all this, I would not like to leave you with the impression that Israel, with all the help she has undoubtedly given to the Bedouin in

spite of her many other urgent pre-occupations, has as yet succeeded in solving or even in tackling comprehensively enough, the deeper problems which beset Bedouin society today. I would not even say that we are nearer to such a solution than some of our neighbours. Though the number of our Bedouin is smaller, and our problem, quantitatively, that much simpler, qualitatively, in terms of the *nature* of the problem itself, it is very much more difficult, and it may take some time yet before we achieve what we could regard as full success.

In conclusion, I should be happy indeed if I could think I had helped, however, inadequately, to arouse your interest in what appears to me to be one of the most fascinating subjects of our time. By virtue of its human character, it transcends alike the geographical boundaries of the Negev, and the merely economic, or merely political, aspects with which we have, on the short view, to be mainly concerned. It is a problem with far-reaching implications for the future of a number of countries in the Middle East, and whatever we can do towards solving it will be a worthwhile contribution to the prosperity and progress of the entire area.

The CHAIRMAN: I am glad that the lecturer has expressed his willingness to answer questions because I want to ask one. I have had a certain amount to do with the difficulties arising when pastoral people are moving into a non-pastoral and land cultivation way of life. The lecturer stated that when land was allocated a Bedouin family received 75 dunams, which is about 16 acres. I am not clear whether that is irrigated land and, if so, what kind of irrigation it is, or whether it is unirrigated land. If the latter, then it seems to me to be in the Negev a very small amount of land for a man and his family to live on even if a reasonable crop is raised. In many areas there will be no crop at all because there is no rainfall. In that case, is there a kind of shifting cultivation so that the Bedou can move to where the chance of producing a crop is better?

Allied with that question, to what extent are old rights in land by graziers recognized when the Bedou wishes to cultivate? I understand that until recently, at any rate, the land was tribally held. Is an arrangement entered into between the individual Bedou and the Israeli Government, or is the head of the tribe brought into the matter?

H.E. Mr. ELATH: I mentioned that the average amount of land allotted to a family is 75 dunams. Much depends, of course, on the size of the family and on the relative fertility of the land allotted. Possibilities of irrigation, existing or in prospect, are also taken into account. Families whose main occupation is still grazing livestock naturally require larger allotments, and here the main consideration is the amount of pasture available in the area, and the existing sources of drinking-water both for the tribesmen themselves and for their flocks. In years when rainfall is scarce, the pastoral area is usually temporarily extended to meet the needs of the tribe as a whole or of the particular family. As I have already mentioned, we hope that with irrigation and the use of mechanical implements, and with some training in how to make the best of their land, on the same lines as Jewish settlers in the area, the Bedouin will ultimately be considerably better off on smaller areas of land than they formerly were

on much greater ones. We, on our side, are doing all we can to ease the transition stages.

As regards the Bedouin's legal title, this cannot be established until there has been a general Land Settlement in the area: none was carried out in the past, and—as I have said—only a few of the Bedouin occupy today the same lands they occupied in the past. It will be some time before formal legal titles can be established. While we recognize the existing tribal associations within areas occupied by families belonging to the same tribe or sub-tribe, with a recognized sheikh with whom the Government is in touch on matters relating to his people, we are at the same time dealing direct with individual Bedouin heads of families. We hope thus to increase their sense of personal-responsibility, both for the land allotted to them and its proper cultivation, and also for the implements or loans supplied to them.

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: The lecturer referred to the alarming drop in the value of camels. Where there are many people whose riches are largely expressed in the form of camels, does such a drop in price cause dissatisfaction with the Government on the part of the Bedouin? Or are they sufficiently recompensed by being allocated land on which to start cultivation? Has the drop in the price of camels arisen owing to the increase in mechanical transport? Have horses dropped relatively in value with camels?

H.E. Mr. ELATH: The phenomenon of the drop in camel prices to which I referred on the authority of Mr. Aref el Aref was more characteristic (so far as the Negev is concerned) of the years between the wars than of present conditions. I believe that in a number of neighbouring Arab countries the demand for camels, and hence their price, was higher, even between the wars, than the figures given by Mr. Aref. It should be remembered that camels are not used only for transportation; they are also used a good deal in agriculture, and for meat, camel meat being considered by many Arabs, including a good few of the townspeople, as something of a delicacy. Since in our part of the world there will always—or anyhow for a very long time—be deserts beyond man's ability to conquer, it will be very long before "the ship of the desert" disappears. I feel sure he will remain for a long while the characteristic feature he has always been of our landscape. In Israel today, camel prices have risen considerably since 1948. A good camel may now fetch something like £50 sterling, or even more. They are still used by the tribes largely for transportation, and also as plough animals, and there is some demand for them from Arab villages in other parts of Israel.

The CHAIRMAN: Our time is up and it only now remains for me to thank His Excellency Mr. Elath for what to me, at any rate, and I believe to all present has been a most interesting lecture. (*Applause.*)

REFERENCES

¹ It should be mentioned that nomadic conditions, and the inherited suspicions of the Bedouin about the intentions of any Government enquiring into their internal affairs, make statistics about them of only relative value. In connection with the probable increase of the Bedouin population, it is interesting to note the remark in

the Census Report about the low-birth-rate obtaining among the Bedouin (see: Census of Palestine Report, 1931, Part I, pp. 328-335).

² See: E. Elath (Epstein): "Bedouin of the Negev," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, April, 1939.

³ E. H. Palmer: "The Desert of the Exodus," Part II, 1871, p. 295.

⁴ A. Musil: "Arabia Petraea," Vol. III (1908), p. 32.

⁵ "Kitab al Qudhā bein al Bedū, Qūds," 1351 Hijra, p. 224.

⁶ 1 dunam = 1,000 sq. metres, or 0.247 acres. Figures given by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Palestine Government (see: Area of Cultivated Land in Palestine, Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, 1936, p. 26). A comparison with the figures for 1928 shows that in the six-year interval there had been an increase of about 750,000 dunams in the area under cultivation. To my knowledge, there are no official figures available between 1934/35 and the end of the mandatory period.

⁷ Census of Palestine, 1931, pp. 334, 335.

⁸ Land without registered ownership, not used for public purposes by villages.



