

*Hedjaz Delegation, Paris, March 3 1919*

*Dear Mr Frankfurter:*

*.....We feel that the Arabs and Jews are cousins in race, suffering similar oppressions at the hands of powers stronger than themselves, and by a happy coincidence have been able to take the first step towards the attainment of their national ideals together*

*Yours sincerely, Feisal*

(Quoted by Chaim Weizmann in Trial and Error )

In 1919 British government of Palestine seemed to many Jews a beacon of light. At the Peace Conference in Paris, Jewish co-existence with Arabs in Palestine looked no less possible than or the transformation of European Jewish tradesmen into farmers, or the reestablishment of Hebrew as a living language. T.E. Lawrence and Brigadier General Wyndham Deedes, both of whom had worked closely with Arabs and knew the situation well, considered the goals of Zionism and Arab nationalism compatible. Emir Faisal thought "Arab nationalism and Zionism complete one another, and neither can be a real success without the other." Like Chaim Weizmann, and other Zionists, Norman Bentwich had good hopes of British administration and faith in the Balfour Declaration statement that "His Majesty's government looks with favour on the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object."

After the Armistice was signed, Norman Bentwich returned to England on leave, and persuaded his wife Mamie to go back to Jerusalem with him. His sister Muriel, ( Budge ), who had worked as a nurse in London hospitals during the war, accepted a job in Jerusalem with Zionist Social Service. She went over with Norman and once there she set up public baths for children

When Orme-Clark, chief legal advisor to the British Army in Palestine was invalided back to England, Norman was appointed Senior Judicial Officer for the British Military Government in Palestine. He also served as government prosecutor. As Senior Judicial Officer for the British Military Administration, Norman was charged with replacing the multiple Turkish tribunals in the Occupied Territories with a system of British jurisprudence based on Common Law and English usage.

Before the British took over Palestine, Moslem law governed the Ottoman territories. Early efforts to modernize Turkey had imported into Ottoman territories, French, Swiss, and German law that sometimes replaced but was often superimposed on existing Moslem law. Religious law (Moslem, Christian, or Jewish) regulated family matters. English common law and principles of equity joined to create yet another layer to legal practice. But in Palestinian courts practice was hard to change.

Even where British law was well received, it could have unexpected results. On one of Norman's early tours of inspection, he met at Haifa Sir Abbas Abdul Baha, head of the religious communities of the Bahais. Norman reported: "He looked the prophet, and everything about him and his house and garden had a studied but appropriate beauty. Though I suspected that he knew English and other tongues, he spoke always through an interpreter of his Persian. His prophetic manner, however, could not conceal a manifest shrewdness. On this occasion when I asked him to let me have any criticism of our newly established courts and of the administration of justice, he first said that he heard nothing but praise. When I pressed him, he told of a talk he had had with the mukthar (headman) of a large village near Haifa, notorious for its unruliness. The headman spoke with admiration of the change we had brought about so quickly. In the old days it was scarcely worthwhile robbing. The thieves had to give so much to the police, to the public prosecutor, and to the judge that there was little left. Now we had abolished corruption. They had to give nothing to the police or to the prosecutor; and the English judge required strict evidence before he would convict. So they kept everything for themselves every time. (77yrs p 57-58)

Generally the inertia of traditional practice prevailed. Rules observed in Arab villages from time immemorial included mandatory hospitality to passing strangers as well as blood feuds. Edwin Samuel, serving as District Officer at the age of twenty-four, found himself regarded as an august figure. Charged with keeping civil order he negotiated government taxes from prescribed to realistic levels and supported Muslim judges who transmuted vengeance from murder to appropriate fines. He encouraged western standards of sanitation and succeeded to the extent that his approach, spotted miles away, was a signal for rapid cleaning of streets.

On June 30, 1920, Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner of Palestine under the British Mandate arrived in Jaffa. The British Military greeted him with private skepticism; the Arabs with resigned acceptance. The Jews rejoiced. On the first Sabbath that Sir Herbert spent in Jerusalem he walked the two miles from Government House on the Mount of Olives to Sabbath services in the Old City. Jews, old and young lined the streets cheering and weeping.

Samuel, a conscientious Liberal, as well as a Zionist, believed that Zionist aims could eventually be achieved through a harmonious process, with progressive enlisting of Arab goodwill and to the satisfaction of Arab aspirations. In pursuit of these goals he persuaded Brigadier General Wyndham Deedes to join the government as Chief Secretary to the Government of Palestine, that is,

as head of civil administration and principal assistant to the Commissioner. Deedes spoke Arabic and Turkish as fluently as English (Turkish was the language of authority for leading Arab families. He had undisguised sympathy both with Zionist hopes and with Arab national aspirations. Chaim Weizmann wrote: "with Deedes I could speak freely and dream freely....He listened patiently and benignly to it all, both critically and sympathetically. He took a human approach to every problem and every person." Deedes could also be relied on to take firm measures in a crisis.

In September 1920 Herbert Samuel put into effect a Land Transfer Ordinance that allowed sales of land to the Zionists, and an Immigration Ordinance that opened Palestine to legal Jewish immigration. At the same time he tried to institute an Advisory Council with members from the Arab and Jewish communities, but the Arabs were not interested. He also wanted to allow free speech, a notion totally foreign both to Arabs and to Russian Jews.

On May 1, 1921, Samuels' hopeful expectations were tested. A minor clash in Tel Aviv between rival parades of Jewish Socialists and Communists led to outbreaks of serious looting that began in Jaffa. Many Jews were killed in the Immigrants' House in Jaffa, and rioting erupted. Norman, as Attorney General, went down to Jaffa with Wyndham Deedes to deal with the situation. Deedes, who had spent years in Turkey, and in Cairo, knew the Arabs. At Jaffa, he faced, unarmed, the frenzied mob of Arabs who had sacked the Jewish Immigration House, and by speaking to them, brought the situation under control. Three days later he called up a squadron of the Air Force to prevent another Arab mob from attacking the Jewish village of Rehovoth. The attack on Jewish settlements led to the imposition of martial law, and the temporary suspension of Jewish immigration. (77 p 72] The aftermath of the Jaffa outbreak also left an oppressive sense of tension in Jerusalem. Margery found it strange that Norman who was "so gentle and diffident in his true character," was now by circumstances forced to take immediate, decisive and drastic action.

From 1920 until 1931 Norman served as Attorney General for the Mandate government. It was a difficult position. Zionists distrusted him because he was part of the British establishment, and they disliked his even-handedness; Arabs hated him because he was a Jew. His relations to individuals in the British administration varied widely. Herbert Samuel was Mamie's uncle; Wyndham Deedes was a close personal friend; most of the British administration found it easier to be friendly with Arabs than with Jews.

During the years that Norman was in office, he and his wife Mamie kept a home in Jerusalem. Mamie was a lively conversationalist and an excellent administrator (in later years she served on the London County Council and in 1956 became Chief). But she never learned Hebrew; she did not like Orthodox Jews; and she did not get along well with the Zionists. She had virtually

no contact with Arabs. The English official families among whom she found herself in Jerusalem did not share her socialist ideals. In unofficial situations, they often snubbed her, partly because she was Jewish. She told a young American woman that people coming from England or America to Palestine could count on losing four things (1) their memory, (2) their teeth (3) their hair (4) their reputation.

Norman's life in Jerusalem was further complicated by the family relationship to Herbert Samuel (Mamie's father was brother of Herbert Samuel's wife). "Uncle Herbert" counted on them to entertain visiting dignitaries, and to make conversation at dinner parties: and while those duties were sometimes fun, they were, in any case, unavoidable. Mamie describes the visit of the elder son of Stanley Baldwin (a prominent Conservative). The young man "frankly said he hated all Jews . I told him off for being a foolish youth with popular prejudices, & we thrashed it out till very late hours."

Margery gave another domestic picture in a letter to Lilian on July 26 , 1921: "Norman is so tired that he literally drops. Whenever he comes here to our little digs his great treat is to fall on the sofa immediately after supper and go fast asleep. He usually arrives half asleep, and it's a pity as we never feel he is able to put his mind to anything serious we might want to talk about. Still it's a pleasure to see him able to be at his ease and not have to screw himself up to the scratch of company small and big talk which is his fate or his choice every evening at home. However he manages it after a day's work that begins at 6:30 or 7 is only explainable by his restless fund of energy."

Mamie and Norman had a bookplate that showed the line "If I forget thee" running under two panels. One panel showed the Damascus Gate to the Old City; in the other panel Mamie was standing in front of an English farmhouse.

Michael Lange received his demobilization chit in January 1919. Two months later he and Nita returned to Palestine. They were happy to be back. Their neighbors greeted them warmly, and their house was in reasonably good condition. Six months earlier, Norman had contrived to pass through Zichron and had seen the house, which was then serving as Divisional Headquarters of the 54th Division. He reported that bare as the rooms were of any but the scantiest camp furniture, and though much of the interior was spoiled by three years' continuous habitation by rough Turkish soldiers, the house still had its beauty and the site its unspoilable charm. "The Joffes had looked after it and the faithful workman had remained there throughout the four years, and prevented the house and garden from falling into ruin. Indeed...the cypresses, the firs, and the eucalyptus plantations had grown sturdily and made a welcome belt of green around the house....The animals and carriages, and some part of the furniture [were lost], but their good friends in the village had been faithful stewards, and preserved much from Turkish rapacity."

Nita and Michael were less troubled by the condition of the house than by social changes. Zikhron Ya'akov, which had been more or less benignly ignored by the Turks, was now ruled by the British as a subdistrict Governorate, complete with soldiers, police, and regulations. Though the British presence brought money into town. It also meant the enforcement of British rules, which reduced liberty of movement, and encouraged new intrigues. And it raised the cost of labor.

At the end of the summer Nita wrote to her father:

It takes some time to sweep up the cobwebs of five years of war and absence; it has taken us some time to put ourselves in harmony with our new conditions and arrange our labour....Before the war with labour as cheap as it was, we could do what we liked to make the place beautiful and orderly, and we called in extra workmen to repair a road, or a troop of Yemenite girls to bring earth for a garden. It was not always economic, but still it was what a rich man allowed himself. We have, I don't know whether it is fortunately or unfortunately, still most excellent credit and the reputation of rich people who are laughed at when we talk of making our place pay, etc. We would both like to live like the country gentleman, have nice riding horses and not have to forgo a ride because the same horse must fetch manure; we would like to make a nice garden and a little park, but then we see big inroads in our capital."

Writing to Lilian, Nita described other aspects of her life: "It is rather strange that I who used rather to laugh at the philanthropic lady from the West imposing her ideas on the East, and who was a believer just in making a nice place of our own land, should now be immersed in philanthropic undertakings. I see the time coming when I shall really be the lady squire of the village, giving doles and clothes, and making reports. I have already started a sewing class for Yemenite women, many of whom hardly know how to hold a needle, and I am the representative of the orphans here, -some of

them boarded out on the colony. Public work is rather needed here, though, where most of the colonists won't do much for nothing."

In April 1920 Arab rioters attacked the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. In four days, between April 4 and 8, nine people died (five of them Jews), and 244 were wounded (211 of them Jews); most victims were old men, women, and children. Arab police sided with the rioters. The British Army stayed outside the Old City, forbidding Jews to organize their own defense. When Ronald Storrs, the Military Governor of Jerusalem called on Menachem Ussishkin, deputy head of the Zionist Commission, to express his "grief over the catastrophe which befell us," Ussishkin told him angrily that it was a pogrom, just like Russian pogroms, a situation brought about by a government that allowed the Arabs to make inflammatory speeches aimed at provoking riots, and then failed to protect Jewish victims when riots erupted. Nita wrote that she felt ashamed of being English.

Once settled back in Zichron Michael became depressed. He could not enter with a whole heart into Nita's plans for the estate, or into the life of the community. On the contrary, he found himself boiling with anger and jealousy. A friend suggested that a course of psycho-analysis in England would help him, and on November 3 he boarded ship for a three week sea journey to England. On shipboard Michael recovered his spirits. In England Nita's sisters, consulting him about their own concerns and worries, found him a sympathetic listener and a sage counselor. Margery said, "He was always the family angel." They thought him "Michael L'Ange."

The psycho-analyst in London to whom Michael had been recommended had no vacancy; he suggested a colleague in the Hague. From January to August 1920, while Michael was in analysis with this doctor in Holland, he lived with ultra-orthodox relatives, whose strictly ordered manner of life he admired, though he did not entirely share their devotion to ritual.

The analysis started out well. Michael wrote to Nita in March: "And now dear I will give you a little practical lecture on the psychology of man which I am learning. (In my own words): Our feelings to no one are really simple....It is inevitable that some things in me must annoy you ----- justifiably or not hardly matters....And once for all when you get in a pet with me, as you do from time to time, and will please God do again, - let it out." A little later he wrote: "I shall most certainly have profited by further insight into my own nature." But by the end of July he decided to quit analysis and return to Nita. "I think I shall have done enough of abstract thinking to last me the rest of my life. The only influence on the outside world that I am conscious of exerting is putting some Epikorsos [heresy] into the life of the A-s [his cousins], some ideas about Judaism into the head of X

[the doctor], and writing to T. Cook and Son about a mistake in their timetable, which they promise to correct in their next issue.”

On his way back to Palestine Michael stopped to visit his brother Reuben, who was living in Zurich. As he drifted off to sleep that night he saw a vision: “After thinking of R and his repressed manner I saw a piece of land covered with snow, but with tufts of vegetation sprouting through.” And he commented: “latterly I have been thinking that the visions of the Prophets were just the coming into consciousness of symbols of moral truths invented in the unconscious mind of men of genius and love of God. And this was an example I took it, to teach me to judge R charitably; and I thought and think that this is the same kind of thing as prophecy, though enormously different in degree of value.... Indeed I have long since thought that the inspiration of the Prophets is not essentially different from other great writers, etc, though primarily moral, not artistic” This rumination, with its glimpse of Michael’s basic connection to religious thought and feeling, contrasts sharply with the role he ascribes to himself in a conversation with Margery who was in Switzerland on summer holiday

As they walked by the shore of the lake, Michael said to her: “Without Nita, without Zichron, what am I? All my heart is there. What should I be without her? A cipher, a good for nothing. What a lucky dog I was to get a girl like Nita to plant me down and fix me to something. And yet I go back in fear and trembling. I am jealous of Zichron, of the time she gives the house and animals. I want her for myself. And yet I know that I myself am nothing, and my only practical capacity is the spending, as much as possible judicious spending, of money. I give her the means and she finds happiness in the work. Yet she has schemes that quite amaze me; vineyards and farmyards on a scale quite incommensurate with my estate and her own strength. She has no conception of the cost of upkeep of such a place as she plans. She has ideas, dear heart, that the place might be made economically productive.”

While Michael was away, Nita struggled with loneliness, with bouts of malaria, and with the estate. Two days after Michael left, she wrote: “The time I miss you most, old man, is in the morning before six o’clock. I don’t like to feel then that you are going away from me and I sometimes rebel, but only for a minute.”

Two weeks later she admitted suffering from what she called “sympathetic seasickness.” She wrote: “I have had the most horrible fits of sickness. Now I have a needle of quinine in either arm, and a promise of a third today in some other part.” Within a wee the whole household was sick. “It is perfectly awful how no one seems well. Levien [the head workman] is still bad, and today is

one of the alternate days of P's fever, and he is in bed, and so is Mrs. P, whose disposition has yet to make her careful, and your humble servant not too robust yet. However I have a message that Budge is coming tonight, so that she will take care of us all."

She felt depressed and lethargic. The responsibilities of the estate weighed on her. The weather turned suddenly from summer to winter, and the rain made defects in the roads, the weeds, and the leaks, all look worse.

At first she thought hopefully that she would soon get used to directing the workers, and resolved not to worry about little wastages of time and money. But she found herself getting angry.

One of the workmen declared that he would not dig holes in the stone. "He was not strong enough for such work."—although he admitted he was the strongest of the workmen. She kept out of his way the rest of the day so as not to have a real row, but reflected, "It really makes one sick with Jewish workmen and their principles. They won't work with the Arabs, but when you give them hard work, they want someone else to do it, and at the same time I am sure if I suggested that two Arabs should work with them, he would institute a strike."

She was also vexed that local officials treated her as if she was just playing at farming. "Why should you be bothered with growing crops when you have money to buy them?" She told Michael, "I shall try to get F here in daylight, and not let him see me as a social lady in a black satin frock, and cut glass and silver table. I think my work-a-day habits would give him a bit of a shock."

"Druckie" an English woman friend came out to help Nita with her work, and took a practical view of matters.

A young male calf was born, "beautifully strong...I shall call him Thunder in Hebrew as he was born in a great storm." A few days later, "Rachel came in to say that the calf clung hold of her finger by itself, and would I come and see if she would drink. So down we went, and by great patience we did the trick, and she sucked through my fingers into the bowl of milk, and I think tomorrow she will be much easier to feed." Though Nita found it hard to be strict with the calf, and was tempted to let it go to its mother, Druckie insisted that it be weaned. Nita writes, "Druckie sees all my weaknesses most clearly, and I am afraid I am a very difficult master. My two natures come in conflict, the artistic that will leave things beautiful as nature made them, and the practical which at other times would like things well ordered and cut down so as to produce more."

The next day Nita reported to Michael that the calf behaved beautifully, "and thinks me her truly begotten mother, trying to find teats between my legs." Michael answered, "You have committed a worse than usual malapropism in trying to adapt the phrase 'truly begotten son' to your

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relation to the calf. To beget is the action of a male parent, a woman cannot beget, much less be the begotten mother of a child.”

In February Nita suffered another debilitating bout of malaria and depression.

She wrote to Michael:

“My powers such as they are seem nearly to go when you are not there. I have often been very depressed about our estate – it seems so much to lack a head. I know I am not a good administrator, and I very often need your guiding thought. I shall try to leave you free from it as possible when you come back; but still, whether you work or not, it will always be you that are the guiding spirit of it.”

Again, few days later :“There is so much to be done and nothing completed and heaps and heaps pf work before it will be completed, and planting time ever less and less. For the planting of 50 cypresses there is more fuss, much more, than when we laid out our whole orchard. L. is a bit of an idealist. He takes so long in the perfect doing that it is not done, and he destroys before he thinks how to recreate. Perhaps in this he is the typical socialist. The present thing is not perfect – away with it. In it is hidden great wealth which we can use to build up the state. We must get that wealth , sieve it to its dregs, till it is pure as gold, so that only the very best is used in the new State. And in the mean time worldly interests intervene. The world cannot wait for the very best, and they put aside the hidden treasure and use some middling mixture because they could not wait.

This is rather the theoretic side of what has really happened to the filling of our holes. We have destroyed the whole top road for it –another of my silly giving in ways –and the holes in the end will have quickly to be filled with unsieved earth from somewhere else.”

Nita missed Michael’s presence. “ I believe what I miss most is someone who appreciates my little eccentricities and naiveties, and values me for my work-a-day mood. I am getting quite old, I feel, and have to have you to keep me young. [She was not quite 36.] Perhaps I have to have you to keep me in good health too. You have had a silly wife while you are away, and Druckie always makes me see my stupidity, and doesn’t at all appreciate my waywardness, and often makes me wonder whether it is all worthwhile. Why not leave the rocks rocks, and the weeds weeds and buy what we need outside; a cow, a few chickens, and a little kitchen garden which I might work as a hobby, and have horses when you want them to ride on, and so on. And you know I am impressionable, and so when I am in a thinking mood I too wonder why I should worry about all these things; and it is only when I am strong and well that I know I want them, and want to see something beautifully done in spite of difficulties.”

Still cheerfulness kept breaking in.

One day in March Nita was talking with her head gardener about the piece of ground behind the court where the cow was tethered. She looked forward fifteen years to when there would be carob wood there. She planned to plant the trees ten feet apart , with mulberries in between.

Suddenly she saw a party of children arriving, “Carmella, Daniel, and the two orphan kiddies of Mrs. M. all expecting lunch. So I put more milk and water in the onion soup, a bit more

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spinach, and an extra egg or so, and we had a grand pudding and cakes left over from Saturday, and I had a children's party for lunch without any bother. Our days are very full. The sun is strong and the whole land teems with life and growth. You can see things growing as you stand."

In spite of the difficulties Nita faced, her home in Zikhron Ya'akov changed the Bentwich balance. Between 1920 and 1922 the family center of gravity moved decisively from England to Palestine.

In March 1920 Thelma was recovering from a breakdown that resulted from professional pressure (she was starting her career as a cellist), and family conflict (she was involved with a young man who was not Jewish, and her father was furious at the thought of such a match).

She needed a complete change of scene. After some deliberation she decided to visit Palestine. Nita and Budge were settled there, and Norman had a senior post in the administration. Norman and Mamie were about to return to Jerusalem after a period of leave in England, and took Thelma with them. She spent some weeks in Jerusalem with Norman, and with Budge, she went up to Zikhron to stay with Nita.

In Zikhron Thelma came to a new view of life in Palestine. On July 11 she noted in her diary: "I keep thinking to myself 'Why should I go back home? Is not it a lasting happiness that I find in the beauty of the land, in the varied companionship of Nita, Norman, and Budge; isn't home here just as much as London?'"

A few weeks later after a talk with Dr. Eder, the psychoanalyst, she had a vision of a life of attainment: "Not to be ashamed of ripeness! Last night I played well, just a little without much strain....How good to be one of the workers, conscious at last of the impossibility of perfection, but of the possibility of attainment, excellence."

Montagu David Eder (1865-1936), the socialist son of a diamond merchant, had studied medicine at the University of London, and psychoanalysis with Freud in Vienna. In 1918 Chaim Weizmann persuaded Eder to join the Zionist Commission for Palestine. He remained in Palestine for four years, conducting negotiations for the Zionists with the old Yishuv (the Jewish community of Jerusalem who lived by funds from abroad that were distributed by the Commission), and dealing with the British military and civil administration. Weizmann says of Eder that while he had no language in common with the old Jews of Jerusalem, and his conversations with them were conducted through interpreters in a strange mixture of dialects, including broken German and

Yiddish, interspersed with the few words of Hebrew that Eder had picked up since his arrival in Palestine, the fewer words of English which the old gentlemen had acquired, and some phrases of Ladino, Eder's "real kindness, his tolerance and humanity, his eagerness to understand the other's point of view...served to establish not only communication, but confidence and understanding between Eder and his interlocutors." Dr Eder's presence as a house guest of the Langes in Zichron Ya'akov shows how in the small world of English Jews in Palestine, everyone knew everyone else. Nita may have invited him, while Thelma was there, hoping that conversations with him could help Thelma find her feet in Palestine, away from her conflicts with their father, and from the intense competitive pressures of musical life in London.

In October Thelma gave a concert in Tel Aviv, Her playing was intense and moving. The next night Eliezer Yellin, a new friend, proposed marriage. Eliezer, an architect, was the son of David Yellin, who twenty three years before had welcomed the Maccabean pilgrimage led by Herbert Bentwich. Thelma accepted his proposal, and cast in her lot with Palestine.

The wedding, on March 15 1921, took place in Jerusalem. Herbert Bentwich and Margery came from England. It was a magnificent celebration. Margery wrote to Hebe (then in Germany): "The Chupah was...golden velvet and deep blue satin with letters embroidered in gold; it was decorated with palms sent up from Jericho, long slender very beautiful stalks, reaching each the entire length of the poles. It was a great big hall and all garlanded; and at each end was a refreshment room and such an array of cakes, etc. as gave me two bad nights beforehand thinking of the horrible waste it would be....However, by 4 hardly a cake remained, and by 5 not a vestige of anything on the tables, food or flowers!....Thelma was radiant! The English think Eliezer 'A lucky cove' and Thelma "an absolute fizzer."

Herbert took the occasion of this voyage to bring the coffin of Susannah Bentwich from Willesden Cemetery, where it had been temporarily buried, and lay it in the family plot he had purchased on Mount Scopus. The grave stone was set in June. Margery, who had stayed in Jerusalem when her father returned to London, wrote to him: "The ceremony was very simple and unpretentious, like the stone itself....Nita has some very good ideas for green shrubbery (rosemary and violets in three sunk beds)... We were this morning our five selves [Norman, Nita, Margery, Budge and Thelma], Albert and Ethel [Solomon relatives], Pool, Yellin, and Miss Szold- just 10 for Kaddish."

Michael, back in Zichron in the fall of 1920, remained depressed. On a visit to Haifa in November he wrote to Nita:

“I have shrunk much from all human society when in the dumps, but you are not for me as others. Chiefly I have feared to be a burden, as so often is the case --a chronic valetudinarian husband, becoming more and more exigent towards his wife....But in this case I have gone to the opposite extreme --I must give myself up to you and not push “virtue” (false self-abnegation alloyed with, no doubt, other reasons, as in all the world), to the extreme. I have wanted in this extreme way to put your interest in the estate before your interest in me. This too is stupid. The estate is good and necessary, but our personal feelings are better and more necessary. I am rather sick of the incessant talk here; the only really happy time I have had was this morning quite alone on top of Carmel, gazing at Hermon covered with snow. I want to get back to you....This is a muddled letter, but from my heart; I can't amend it.”

Nita answered:

“I sometimes think you imagine that the estate fills up my whole life...but if you only knew how deep is my love of you, you would know that this is but my outside life and in the inner it has no part....(I should not like you to be active and who knows very likely if I had an active husband I should have been jealous of his activity and that he had no time for me.) So we are each made in our own way, and yours I feel sure, Boy, is for quietude and study, even study for its own sake....I can see now that it has its own purpose in that it gives peace of mind to those who study, and peace of mind gives judgement and a seeing spirit.”

Despite his doubts, Michael helped Nita to develop plans for the extension of the house and garden. They decided to add three rooms: a study for him, a spare bedroom, and a playroom for Joy Friedlander, the niece whom they hoped to adopt.

Joy's father, Israel Friedlander, had been murdered in July of 1920, while on a relief mission sent by the Joint Distribution Committee to Eastern Europe. Israel Friedlander had been a leading figure in the Jewish community. Lilian was left a widow, with six children, ranging in age from Herzl (13), to Daniel (not quite 2); Joy was the next youngest child. After Israel's death a mass meeting in Carnegie Hall was convened in his honor, and a substantial sum was raised, to be held in a trust fund for the support of the Friedlander family.

Among the several Bentwiches, and the American trustees of the fund there were differing opinions as to where Lillian and the children should settle. Herbert Bentwich believed that England would be best -- particularly for the children's schooling. Several trustees urged Lilian to stay in America. Lillian herself was torn; she had some inclination toward Palestine, particularly since Israel in one of his last letters to her had expressed the intention of focussing his life in “personal Zionism.” Before making a final decision, Lilian went to England with the children and with her

youngest sister Carmel who had been with them in America. They spent the summer of 1921 at Carmelcourt, the Bentwich country house in Kent.

In Zikhron, during that summer, construction of a new wing to the Lange house was underway, and Michael worked so obsessively that he ruled out a summer holiday. At the end of August Nita was worn down and clearly needed a break. Michael asked Margery to go with her on an expedition to Baalbek. At a little village on the way Nita fell violently ill. She and Margery had to take refuge in the Scottish Mission, where they nursed her until she was able to undertake the journey home. Margery reported: "She had no desire to stop anywhere on the way; her one idea was to get home as soon as possible. How fragile she was, and on what a thin thread her life hung was apparent to me then."

In October Lillian went out to see Jerusalem and Zichron, bringing five-year-old Joy with her. She found Nita and Michael in the thick of building. The new wing added to the two rooms and portico which had sufficed for them before the war was only three rooms more: but from a distance it made the home look like a castle

Lilian was appalled to see how tired Nita looked - "more austere than I should ever have believed possible of her." Nita herself, acknowledging her father's gift of Thoreau's Walden, wrote: "I doubt whether Walden would agree to the fulfillment of our 'castle in the air' in bricks and mortar... He would say reduce to two rooms at most, and three acres and a cow, and don't go apeing your neighbors and emulating them in wealth and splendour. I often think he is right." She added: "It will be nice if Joy is here to share it with us, and I believe she will be, for Lillian --from what I make out-- feels a thread drawing her to Jerusalem, and I believe she will settle there."

By the end of the year the work on the house was finished. All signs of builders and their mess were gone. The furniture and the blue drawing room curtains with a Chinese border, all brought from Cavendish Road, looked beautiful and appropriate. The trees and plantings had grown up, and the garden was laid out for great developments. In celebration of Hanukah Nita made a party to which she invited the men and women who had worked on the house and labored on the grounds, together with friends from Zikhron, and from the neighboring colony of Bat Shlomo. David Yellin, visiting from Jerusalem, remembered this somewhat diverse group being "transformed into one family as though by enchantment, [and] all walls of distinction and difference of station broken down."

At the end of December Nita went up to Jerusalem to help Thelma who was in the last weeks of pregnancy. She and Budge set up Thelma's room, taking out all that was not essential, so that the room was bright, and seemed spacious. The baby, the first Bentwich grandchild native to Eretz Israel, was born on January 10, and named Shoshana, for her grandmother. Nita stayed in Jerusalem a few days more, taking care of Thelma and enjoying the baby as if it were her own. She wrote a note to a friend asking to borrow weights for "our baby." She was happy. Norman thought, she "looked more lovely than ever, a Rose of Sharon in full bloom." She took out her violon-cello (generally neglected in Zichron in the face of the pressing needs of her home, her cows, her garden, and her working people) and played it in place of Thelma, as part of a trio at a concert of the Jerusalem Musical Society held at the Hadassah headquarters.

A month later, on February 13, Nita celebrated T'u B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees, by working in the village and in her garden with more than usual intensity. Michael, feeling depressed, had gone to spend the weekend with friends in Haifa. In the late afternoon Nita felt ill. She was in great pain. The doctor was called; he came, did what he thought proper, and left. Her agony continued. In the middle of the night he was called again. He came, injected some more morphine, and left her almost unconscious. At four in the morning, Mrs Friedenthal, the gardener's wife who had stayed with Nita through the long night, sent for the doctor again, with the message that Nita was dying. The doctor arrived to find her dead. The next morning Nita was buried in the village cemetery.

Michael, returning with Margery from the ceremony said, "It may sound terrible, but I would not have it otherwise." Perhaps he thought, like A.N.Whitehead, "the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time which is eternity." Ten years earlier, Nita had written: "Our work is just beginning....Someday we will all be on the land." She lived to see the family planted there: Margery in Tel Aviv; Norman, Budge, and Thelma in Jerusalem; the birth of Thelma's daughter Shoshana secured the future. Jose, studying mathematics at Cambridge, was about to meet Sara Joffe, Nita's neighbor, who, was in England studying agriculture at Reading College. (They fell in love; in September 1924 they celebrated their wedding in Zikhron Ya'akov; they settled in Palestine; their many descendants are citizens of Israel.)

Michael, left alone with the estate, considered making it an Agricultural School for girls as a continuation of Nita's interests. The Bentwiches prevailed on him to keep it, and he agreed to maintain it, if Lilian would use the house as her permanent residence. Lilian, who had been in England, made up her mind to go and carry out Nita's work in her own house and garden. It seemed to her God's will that she and the children should be planted in Palestine. She cited the verse of Amos: "I will plant them upon their land and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land."



**The Friedlander family 1921**  
**Ben Zion, Joy, Lilian, Daniel, Carmel, Judy**