The two and a half years covered by this volume of the Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann introduce a period of unparalleled tragedy for the Jewish people, with, ironically, the Zionist movement in deep conflict with Great Britain, for most of the time the only Power actively engaged in the struggle against Jewry's enemy, Adolf Hitler.

Despite ever-increasing evidence of Nazi intentions towards the Jews, British immigration policy as regards Palestine remained tied to the rigidly-enforced limits set by the White Paper issued by the Chamberlain Government in May 1939. The arrival without prior authorization of refugees twice led (from October 1939 to March 1940, and again from October 1940 to June 1941) to a total ban on certificated entry. The doors of Palestine virtually remained sealed even after the first authenticated news of the 'Final Solution' reached the West, in mid-1942. By the beginning of 1943, the extermination of a people in the Nazi death-machine had begun, yet nearly half the White Paper immigration quota of 75,000 remained unused. (During 1935, the peak year for Jewish immigration into Palestine, some 60,000 Jews had entered in a single year.) For Weizmann himself, this period was marked by his frustration both as a political leader and a scientist, and embraced a direct challenge to his stewardship of the Zionist movement. It was also marked by deep personal grief. He was a man older than his years witnessing the disappearance of the world with which he was familiar, and all that it represented. As a consequence he was to suffer an almost complete breakdown of health.

Weizmann refused to believe that the 'true spirit' of England would not one day emerge. He was convinced that the presence of such trusted friends as Winston Churchill and Leopold Amery in the Cabinet would bring about a change in political attitudes, once war conditions had passed from the Middle East. In fact, his approach was anachronistic
and his estimation of his own potential influence outdated. He harboured hopes of repeating his 'scientist-statesman' role of World War I. In place of acetone, one might read oil and synthetic rubber. And he intended this time to make an overt claim for his 'reward'—a definite undertaking to establish a Jewish State. However, he was unable to achieve his anticipated tour de force. The British remembered only too well the lessons of World War I, and, furthermore, the oil companies, particularly in America, had a vested interest in blocking his scientific initiatives.

The volume opens in the shadow of major disasters for British military fortunes: June 1940 had seen the entry of Italy into the war, and the fall of France. What until then had been essentially a European conflict now extended to the Middle East, and the yishuv (the Jews in Palestine) could expect to be actively involved. Earlier Zionist offers to organize a specifically Jewish formation to join the struggle received added relevance and urgency as Italian armies began to concentrate on the Egyptian frontier and advance into British Somaliland. Indeed, Zionist expectations were high, for on 3 September 1940 Churchill agreed to a draft plan to mobilize Jews to fight in Palestine and in the Middle East, and details were soon agreed between the Zionists and the government departments concerned. Weizmann envisaged, in the first instance, a Jewish Division of 10,000 men, 3,000 of whom were to be mobilized in Palestine, the rest to come from the United States. Despite the officials' warnings that such a force would lead to political embarrassment for Great Britain, the Cabinet gave its approval to the scheme, though insisting upon complete secrecy until after the Presidential Election in the United States on 5 November 1940.

In the meantime, opposition to the proposed force in the Foreign Office and Colonial Office gathered momentum, and could have been immediately decisive were it not for the emotional tidal wave engendered by the Patria disaster (see below), which made this an inopportune moment for inflicting further political setbacks on the Zionists. Moreover, Churchill had given his personal support to the scheme, and he was not alone in the Government to appreciate the strength of the Jewish claim to the right of self-defence in Palestine.

Thus, concurrently with the Zionist initiative, pressure increased for some compensatory gesture to the Arabs. It was contended that the Government would incur
their odium with the creation of a Jewish army, and this called for implementation of the 'constitutional clauses' laid down in the 1939 White Paper but suspended because the Government did not wish to relinquish control over Palestine during the war. These clauses provided for the appointment of Palestinian Ministers from the local communities, in the proportion of two Arabs to each Jew. In July 1940 a British officer, Colonel S.F. Newcombe, had, under the auspices of the Ministry of Information, conducted talks with the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem and the Iraqi Foreign Minister Nuri Said in Baghdad which led him to claim that implementation of the constitutional clauses would bring the support of the Mufti's Husseini faction to the British war effort, while the Iraqi Government would supply two Divisions for service in Libya. Newcombe's belief in the wisdom of such a course inspired this observation from Weizmann: 'In your memorandum all the British statesmen concerned with Palestinian affairs up to 1939—Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Balfour, Lord Curzon, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Amery, etc.—appear as nitwits, and myself the villain of the piece. It is only Mr. Malcolm MacDonald at the Palestine Conference (so aptly renamed by you the "Arab Conference") who sees the light. This reminds me of the fond Scottish mother who, seeing her son's regiment march past, observed, "they are all out of step, except our Jock".'

Following the American Presidential Election, negotiations between Weizmann and the Government were resumed and on the last day of 1940 a Commander was selected for the proposed Division. The Zionists had hoped that the command would go to Orde Wingate, but the latter's outspoken sympathy for the Jewish cause debarred him. To Weizmann, nothing now remained for discussion except the technical details of the scheme, but the government departments concerned began to impose conditions which threatened to deprive the plan of much of the moral value it held for the Jewish people and the Zionist movement. In particular, Weizmann was incensed at the deletion of all mention of himself and the Jewish Agency as initiators and organizers of the project. Further, the Government was insistent about requiring a guarantee from recruits that their countries of origin would receive them back after the war. Lord Lloyd, the Colonial Secretary, stated that this proviso had been inserted because 'the Revisionists had been saying that the Jews were going to use the force to "gate-crash" into Palestine.' In a heated argument with Anthony Eden, newly-appointed Foreign Secretary, in January
1941, Weizmann, in a typical outburst, declared that the Jews had no intention of using backdoors after the war; the clamour for Palestine would be taken up by sixteen millions, and at least two millions of these would need to immigrate there. Doubtless such outbursts could have served only to reinforce Eden's strong feelings against the Zionist plans.

Soon, the hard-pressed Middle East Command added its objections to the weight of governmental opinion against the Jewish Force. General Wavell warned in February, 1941, that the raising of a Jewish army might well incite the Arabs to rebellion, at a time when his forces were over-stretched on three fronts. Churchill therefore bowed to the view of the new Colonial Secretary, Lord Moyne, that consideration of the Jewish Division scheme be postponed for a further six months, insisting all the 'while that the sole reason for postponement was lack of equipment. The Prime Minister himself received the Jewish leader and took the occasion to reassure him that this in no sense constituted a reversal of policy, and he 'would not let the Jews down'. Weizmann appears to have accepted this at face value, and telegraphed the head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department in Jerusalem, Moshe Shertok, to consider practical measures which would hasten formation of the Division when the scheme was resumed.

The negotiations had taken place against a backcloth of deepening gloom over the fate of European Jewry, with the Baltic States occupied by the Soviet Union and the Balkans newly under German domination. Appeals for exceptions to the immigration policy were met by refusals from a Government torn between its humanitarian sense and its fear of jeopardizing its paramountcy in the Arab world. Only in the case of the Patria disaster at the end of November 1940, in which some 240 Jewish refugees from Austria, Czechoslovakia and Danzig lost their lives, was mercy shown. Apparently it was through Weizmann's personal appeal to Lord Halifax, still Foreign Secretary, that permission was given for the survivors of the ill-fated ship to remain in Palestine. Further exceptions were ruled out by a decision not to facilitate immigration of aliens from enemy, or enemy-occupied, territories other than those already fortunate enough to be in possession of certificates.

With Britain determined not to incur Arab wrath, the Zionist movement turned to the great centre of free Jewry in the United States. Weizmann, particularly, felt that much
political capital could be gained out of the alleged influence of American Jewry on the Administration, both as serving notice on the British Government that support for Zionism was part of America's price for strengthening Britain's hand in the war, and because American support for the Zionist platform would be of the greatest significance when the Great Powers came to settling the fate of the Middle East. He set off for his second war-time visit to the United States in March, 1941. Three months in the country, however, did not convince him that American Jewry would be quickly mobilised to a common, Zionist-orientated front. As he commented to Justice Felix Frankfurter: 'Somehow Zionists remain outside the mainstream of Jewish life and have not reached out beyond a narrow compass'. He also made mention of 'the waste of a certain amount of energy which is expended on undue friction inside the machine'. As regards the structure of the American-Jewish community in general, Weizmann was painfully reminded of the situation in pre-war Germany. The Zionist movement, as yet without a clear, crystallized programme, did not occupy the central position in the American-Jewish community which Weizmann wanted for it. On the contrary: 'There is a certain part of Jewish bourgeoisie—rich, quasi-powerful, loud, vulgar, pulling weight far in excess of their numbers, ostentatious—who, in the eyes of the Gentiles, they and almost they alone represent Jewry, and this is the grave danger. . . The Gentiles somehow expect the Jews always to be united. . . And the moment a group of Jews, however small, proclaims an opinion which happens to differ from ours, it somehow affects the minds of the statesmen more deeply than both the nature of the views and the character of the exponents would justify. The British Government, and particularly that of Palestine, have always made good use of such an opposition, and are likely to do so in the future in an increased measure.'

The dangers were compounded, in Weizmann's opinion, because the officials of the Near Eastern Division at the State Department were 'not one iota different from the Colonial Office officials'. And President Roosevelt himself, despite his 'great sympathy for the Zionist cause', could not help being influenced as a consequence. This had already been demonstrated when Roosevelt accepted the British pretext of lack of equipment for the postponement of the Army project. Weizmann was now convinced that the main reason for the postponement was 'political, and bound up with the appeasement of the
Arabs'. In his opinion, the Zionist movement would have to embark on a great publicity campaign, similar to that mounted prior to the issue of the Balfour Declaration, in order to prepare the ground for a future favourable settlement.

Weizmann's apprehensions were increased when Eden, in a much-publicized speech at the Mansion House in London, declared that his Government would encourage any Arab initiative towards union in the Middle East. Weizmann regarded the speech as an 'inkling of the shape of things to come', especially in its 'one grave and significant omission—the Jews and Palestine'. In a message cabled to Churchill's secretary from the United States, he warned that the speech would have adverse effect in the United States. He notified Jan Smuts, the South African statesman and Zionist sympathizer, of the 'complete neglect of the Jewish people as an active factor in the Middle East', and expressed the somewhat far-fetched idea that Eden's declaration might one day be seized on by the Arabs in the same way that they had in 1919 seized on ambiguous British undertakings given during World War I.

According to Weizmann, the role of the Zionist movement in rousing the American Administration against British policy was crucial. He described a British myth that had to be exploded in a letter to his devoted aide in New York, Meyer W. Weisgal: 'Our opponents in the Cabinet maintain the following point of view: it is true that in the last war the Jews of U.S.A. played an important part and contributed greatly towards the entry of America into the war. But things have changed. The Jews are deeply divided with regard to Zionism. The American Government did nothing when the White Paper was issued and is therefore indifferent to the question of Palestine. We need not take America into consideration, and can pursue our policy of placating the Arabs'.

With America's entry in the war at the end of 1941, Weizmann himself began lobbying the Administration in the name of Zionism's contribution to the Allied cause, and despite his allegiance to Great Britain he had no scruples about personally pressing for American intervention to persuade the British to change their Middle East policy. He was now a bitterly disappointed man, for in October, 1941, he was informed of the final abandonment of the 'Jewish Division' scheme.

He had demanded of Lord Moyne a definite and final answer regarding the fate of the scheme on his return to London, in August 1941, and he had addressed a final appeal
to the Prime Minister. His letter reviewed the ironic tragedy of the Jews' situation—their position in Palestine, where British fortunes could literally mean a matter of life and death, and in Europe, ‘tortured by Hitler as no nation has ever been in modern times’—yet permitted to serve 'only under humiliating limitations and conditions'. Weizmann absolved Churchill himself from responsibility for this policy, which had sacrificed the Jews 'in order to win over the Mufti of Jerusalem and his friends who were serving Hitler in the Middle East'. The letter deftly played on Churchill's known preoccupation with American aid. In the United States, Weizmann claimed, forces were finely balanced, and the 'one big ethnic group... willing to stand, to a man, for Great Britain [is] the five million American Jews'. Weizmann intimated that American Jewry awaited a British gesture, such as the formation of the Jewish Division, before they would tip the scales decisively in Britain's favour, inferring, quite wrongly, that this had been the case in World War I.

But for all Churchill's sympathy, he was out-voted within his Cabinet. The War Office doubted the military benefits that would accrue, and the Foreign Office now insisted that the announcement of the formation of any Jewish Force include specific reassurance to the Arabs that it would not be used in the Middle East. Moyne rightly pointed out that the new conditions would render the scheme unpalatable to the Jews. The Cabinet therefore decided definitely to reject the scheme—once more officially on the grounds of lack of equipment.

Weizmann's first public revelation of the negotiations and their outcome, in November 1941, came as a shock to the Zionist rank and file. The initial Cabinet agreement to the scheme had been regarded by a former Minister, the strongly pro-Zionist Walter Elliot, as 'Weizmann's greatest achievement since the Balfour Declaration'. The reversal was proportionately disappointing, and the greatest blow to the Weizmann school of Zionism since the 1939 White Paper. The Government's decision to form a Palestine Regiment during the retreat in the Western Desert in the summer of 1942 did not compensate for this setback, for the regiment merely grouped together those battalions already in service, without giving them a separate Jewish identity or allowing them a full combat role as a regiment of the line.

The British rejection of the Division scheme marked the end of an era in Zioni,
and in Weizmann's own, strategy. There were those, like David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency, who abandoned further hope in Great Britain, placing all faith in the United States. Weizmann himself was emotionally unable to sever his affinity to London. But he did appreciate that the centre of gravity of Zionist work must now pass to the United States, and he was to spend over a year on his next momentous visit there, from April 1942 until May 1943.

The failure of the Jewish Division negotiations precipitated a direct clash between Weizmann and Ben-Gurion. The latter had long been suspicious of Weizmann's penchant for Britain and its `Establishment', and already in 1940 he had begun to boycott meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive in London, considering its members to be too much under Weizmann's influence. Ben-Gurion felt that Weizmann was too remote from the realities of Palestine itself. During the negotiations on the Army scheme, he had warned that he could only ask Palestinians to enlist if it was understood that they were to be employed in the defence of their country. On the other hand, Weizmann and his circle in London believed that they should seize on whatever concessions could be wrung from the Government, even without an immediate undertaking as to the theatre of operations of the force. Ben-Gurion charged Weizmann with weakness, and a failure to consult.

The Zionist President was now to pay a heavy price for having staked his political career on the Anglo-Zionist connection. Despite a plea from Dr. Stephen Wise that internal feuds be laid aside in times of crisis (Egypt, and therefore Palestine, was at the time under the gravest threat from Rommel's armies), Ben-Gurion insisted that the American Zionists consider and take action on his accusations against Weizmann. But he was over-estimating his strength among them, for the Americans refused. He therefore warned that he would press the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem and Zionist General Council (the Actions Committee) to demand Weizmann's resignation as leader of the movement. Declaring that he personally was unwilling to continue working with Weizmann, Ben-Gurion ignored a proposal to establish a branch of the Jewish Agency Executive in New York. A deadlock ensued, and remained unbroken with the termination of this volume, with the two leaders following their divergent paths.

The personal conflict between Weizmann and Ben-Gurion found its political expression in their differing interpretations of the Biltmore Programme, adopted by a
meeting of Zionist leaders in May 1942 at the Biltmore Hotel, New York. The Biltmore resolutions, which did not become official Zionist policy until the end of that year and were not adopted officially by American Jewry until mid-1943, spoke of Jewish Agency control over immigration into Palestine, and the eventual establishment there of a Jewish Commonwealth. This programme was based on an article written by Weizmann the previous January for the American journal Foreign Affairs. Weizmann himself regarded the resolutions as a long-term goal, without specific timetable, and to be implemented if possible within the framework of the traditional partnership with Great Britain. On the other hand, Ben-Gurion seized on the Biltmore resolutions as the instrument with which the movement would embark on a direct clash with the British Mandatory. He did not believe that Britain would ever agree to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, in any form. He saw the solution to the plight of European Jewry in the mass migration of two million Jews to Palestine in one great operation. Weizmann regarded Ben-Gurion's interpretation as a tactical ploy in the struggle for the leadership of the movement, calculated to demonstrate the victory of his own policy, as against Weizmann's moderate formulation of the same aims. Ben-Gurion's proposal, fantastic though it might be, took official Zionism away from the path along which the other had directed it for a generation, and towards full confrontation with the Mandatory. (It was perhaps an instinctive, more representative reaction to the confirmation of the scale of Nazi genocide which reached the United States on the eve of Ben-Gurion's departure for Jerusalem.) Meanwhile, Weizmann's 'gradualist' programme of political pressure exerted through powerful connections could not succeed while American Jewry remained divided. The need for this unity was all the more urgent, given 'the temporary obliteration of something like eight million Jews in Europe'. During his 1941 visit to the United States Weizmann had initiated talks between representatives of the various groups there in an attempt to arrive at some common, 'mini mum' Zionist-orientated programme. The net result then had been the formation of a working committee of Zionists and non-Zionists, in an attempt to reach a consensus. Negotiations began tardily and continued intermittently, though the prospect looked promising while the American Jewish Committee was headed by Maurice Wertheim. But there soon arose an opposition group within his own ranks, headed by Judge Joseph Proskauer, which forced his resignation.
Negotiations between the two streams in American Jewry consequently reached a stalemate.

Weizmann had earlier made a similar unsuccessful effort in London to reconcile the Anglo-Jewish leadership to the Zionist movement. The talks proceeded in both countries throughout 1942, but the results were meagre, and Weizmann remained pessimistic. He wrote: 'It is all like 1917 in England. . . history repeats itself. As in World War I, the struggle between the nations created new outlets and demands for Weizmann's scientific skills. Two of the most critical problems for the Allies were the supply of oil and rubber. The former was concentrated most accessibly for Great Britain in the Arab Middle East. The latter was at a premium following Japanese successes in Southeast Asia during the winter of 1941-42, especially when the United States entered the conflict unprepared at the end of 1941. Weizmann believed that he had the answer to both problems, in the work he was doing on grain fermentation from mid-1940 in his Government-sponsored laboratory in London.

In September 1940 Lloyd had intimated to Weizmann that at the root of the Government's Palestine policy lay the fear that Britain would one day be totally dependent on the Arabs for its oil. Weizmann had retorted that 'he could make the Empire flow with oil', from sources within the Empire itself. Weizmann was concurrently negotiating with Amery at the India Office to exploit the Indian Government's expected surpluses of molasses likewise through his own fermentation process. At the interview with the Colonial Secretary, Weizmann alluded to the link between his own work on acetone during World War I and the Balfour Declaration. This time, Weizmann insisted, there would be no ambiguity; he wanted Palestine. Once more he helped condemn his own aspirations with untimely, over-revealing remarks.

At the end of 1940 Weizmann was simultaneously negotiating the details of the Jewish Division scheme and discussing his own scientific contribution to the Imperial cause. The Government's retraction, early in 1941, from its agreement to raise the Division also militated against Weizmann's proposals for solving the fuel problem. In January, 1942, the Ministry of Supply pronounced its official, negative verdict on Weizmann's process for the manufacture of aromatic fuels, offering in meagre recompense to recommend the process to the appropriate authorities in the United States.
Undoubtedly, the oil cartels must have seen here a threat to their interests, but one cannot rule out Weizmann's declared political motive as a factor in the rejection.

The by-products of this process were important in the production of synthetic rubber, a problem on which much effort and money was being expended, primarily by the large American oil companies. But on his arrival in 1942 Weizmann was alarmed at what he regarded as the totally inadequate measures to produce the quantities of rubber now needed following American entry into the war. Vast sums had been given to the oil industry to produce synthetic rubber, but appreciable quantities were not expected from this source for at least 18 months. The solution, in his opinion, lay in his own fermentation process, which could exploit the huge American grain surpluses now lying unused.

Weizmann devoted much of his first interview with President Roosevelt, on 7 July 1942, to expounding his fermentation process. Perhaps he felt that only after he had made his scientific contribution to the war effort would his political demands carry real weight. As for Palestine, Weizmann had for the present to accept the President's reluctance to press the British over the Jewish Division issue. He had, in the meantime, a calculated scale of priorities and, like a 323 chemical experiment, events had to take their proper course: 'The scientific work has opened many avenues for me which, as you will probably gather, I am not neglecting to use for our own affairs. They may prove decisive at the opportune time'. But he found himself in the midst of a struggle between the oil concerns and the National Farmers' Union, each seeking lucrative Government subsidies. Roosevelt followed Weizmann's advice and appointed a governmental committee to investigate his process for the production of synthetic rubber. However, for reasons which are not entirely clear, it advised against adoption of his ideas.

Weizmann's disappointments in the scientific field were not confined solely to his dealings with the British and American governments. His own beloved contribution to Palestine, the Daniel Sieff Research Institute at Rehovot, suffered from his prolonged war-time absence from Palestine. His scientific staff did not live up to his 93 expectations: 'I have now received the reports of the various scientists, and I am sorry to have to tell you that they have made me thoroughly unhappy. The results are very meagre, and I cannot for the life of me understand how so much time can have been spent
He therefore notified the Administrative Director of the Institute, Benjamin Bloch, of his intention to cut down on staff and budget for the duration of the war. Of course, much of the trouble was due to his inability to exert personal control over the Institute's affairs, and being compelled to rely on unpredictable war-time communication. One cannot avoid the impression that Weizmann's disappointment was an overflow in part also from his own inter-connected political and private misfortunes.

The Weizmanns suffered a tragic loss in February, 1942, when their younger son Michael was reported missing on a flying mission. They were informed of the news at Bristol Aerodrome, on the point of their departure for the United States, and postponed their journey for some weeks, in the vain hope of news of their son's safety. The tragedy marked both parents indelibly. Undoubtedly, it contributed to Chaim Weizmann's breakdown and lengthy incapacitation from August to November 1942, requiring long convalescence, while his wife's suffering caused her ill-health that gave him permanent anxiety.

Thus bleakly did the year 1943 begin. In Weizmann's report to his London colleague Mrs. Blanche (‘Baffy’) Dugdale, he summarized the political constellation as he saw it. He attacked BenGurion's thesis that the movement must look solely to the United States for its political future: 'It is quite true that America will arise as a very great force in the world. . . but whether the United States, after the war, will take an interest in Middle East politics, or whether it will again retire from continental and European entanglements—this is a very moot question. . . in view of the present (isolationist) tendencies. . . it would be a great mistake to discount Great Britain and to over-emphasise the importance of America for our cause'.

After the war, Weizmann believed, British colonial enterprise would concern itself with the development of Africa, where the war had enabled a consolidation of its position to that of paramount power. Palestine, situated 'across the Canal', might well fit in with the Imperial scheme of colonial development. He regarded the scheme propounded by the American soil expert, Walter Lowder-milk, for the extensive irrigation of Palestine under a Jordan Valley Authority’ as providing the key to the future absorption of at least four million people. This project might also win over liberal
America to Zionism and demonstrate the chauvinism of Arab nationalism.

Yet to Weizmann the future for Zionism was without promise unless the schisms within Jewry could be healed. He saw his two main tasks before leaving the United States to be: to convince the State Department of the justice of the Zionist programme; and to organize a democratic conference of American Jews, which might end the domination of the 'self-perpetuating group of plutocrats of the American Jewish Committee'.

In both these tasks, political and human factors outside Weizmann's own control would affect the degree of success he was to achieve in the crucial last two years of the war, years in which the nations' thoughts turned to a new world order. And above all, the Jewish psyche during these years would be profoundly affected by the gradual realisation of the full dimensions of the Nazi 'Final Solution' to the Jewish problem.

MICHAEL J. COHEN