

# Economic conditions caused me to leave school.

I did so in sorrow but couldn't any longer tolerate our living conditions. I was 14. After the First World War our lives improved and we no longer faced the threat of constant hunger. My older brother had left school as a child, as well, and gone to Haifa in search of work. He'd send us part of his paltry earnings which hardly covered our basic needs. Then despite the opposition of my mother and brother, I too abandoned school because it simply wasn't affordable to continue. In effect, I was already a big guy, and my ambitions and needs were big, as well. No one could stop me from fulfilling my desires.

One day in the summer of 1924, my mother packed my clothes into a kajeh, a cloth bag, and added some victuals for the journey in al-karusa (that's what they called the horse-drawn travellers' carriage). Then she accompanied me to the yard of the caravansary of carriages going to Haifa. The carriage took six voyagers, and a seventh, the youngest, would sit beside the driver. Two powerful horses pulled the carriage which travelled non-stop until Jida (Ramat Yeschi), then continued in the direction of al-'Abhariya (Kiryat Amal). The ascent there was difficult, indeed impossible. We had to get down from the carriage, climb the hill, and meet it at the top. After climbing back onto the carriage, it descended towards Haifa till it reached Sa'ada where the waters of the spring of



'Adiva flowed, today known as "Check Post". We and the horses drank water from the spring before continuing on our way to Haifa. This journey of 1925 wasn't my first one to Haifa. I'd already visited it more than once. My brother was working there, and my grandfather from my mother's side lived there.

But I now was moving into the unknown, to a world different from mine. I'd entered, as my mother said, "the world of people", and she alluded to her affection for the place of her birth. Haifa was undoubtedly more developed than Nazareth. As the centre of administrative government, the railway and the port, which were playing an important role in the development of transport and commerce, it had become the capital of Northern Palestine.

Nonetheless, Haifa was nowhere as big 60 years ago as it is today! The carriage came into the city centre from the east, the commercial centre for cereal produce and wholesale goods. Entering the market on both sides there were shops of all sorts. The Victoria Hotel, centre of Haifa's cabarets and traditional Arab folk dancing, called "al-'Awalim", was to be found there. Near the hotel and the old prison and al-Jarina Square was the Friday mosque, surrounded by small shops. We entered Suq al-Abyad which extended into al-Hanatir Square or Hamra Square, what's called today Paris Square. It was the main marketplace of Haifa, extending from al-Jirina to Hamra, filled not only with people and goods, but animals, carts, sellers of dates and prickly pears, and all means of transport. From the carriage we'd travelled in for more than

seven hours from Nazareth to Haifa, the driver cried out, warning people of its passage: "Watch your head, your body, your back!" Many curses reached us voyagers, particularly me as I was sitting right next to the driver!

That was the only route into the city centre, or the Arab part of it. Kingsway, what's today called Rehov Haatzma'ut (Independence Street), hadn't yet been finished. The same was the case for Stanton Street, the second road into the city from the east which wasn't used because of its narrowness and the fact that it went by the fortress. The horses couldn't get through to reach Khatib Street or al-Hanatir Square. From the west side of the city there was no connection with Jaffa



**THE ARRIVAL OF HERBERT SAMUEL.** *British High Commissioner from 1920 to 1925.*

other than by rail: if you wanted to travel by road to Jaffa you went by Jenine-Tulkarm-Qalqiliya...

I felt like a stranger, cut off from my friends, my family, and the natural beauty of my town; but from another angle I felt that a great change had taken place in my life. Here there were the foghorns of ships, the sounds of trains, the murmurings of the sea, city clothes. No sheep nor camels here....Haifa even had cinemas, the first being called Kolozbaum on Allenby Street near the Hotel Nassar (now the office of the Haifa Electricity Company) opposite the entrance to Mar Yohanna Street. Initially the cinema had no more than 150 seats. Clowns riding on horse-drawn carriages publicised films by crying out "Today and only today playing in the Kolozbaum Cinema, the famous film and undefeated hero..." They would praise the courage of the actors and the beauty of the actresses. For me, that cinema was a change from the Box of Wonders. I had no idea, nor did anyone else, how these men and women moved on the screen. We'd pay a girsh or two, which was a lot of money for us, to get into the cinema; to the owner of the Box of Wonders we'd give no more than a bit of bread or an egg.

That was Haifa when I arrived and settled there, though I can't claim, of course, to have given a complete picture of it as I saw it then. I forgot to say that one of the loveliest of walks we used to take was to al-Nashrah Gardens that were kept up by Tannus Salma and his sisters. The gardens contained sights that made people forget the hardships of daily life. It was located in a place called today Hamerkaz Hehadash (The New Centre) and extended along the Street of Banks from Allenby Street to Jaffa Street at its lower end. It was as wide as it was long. That garden was a place of live entertainment for the residents of Haifa, indeed the only such place. There I heard the songs of Munira al-Mahdiya, watched a play with Yusuf Wahbi, and saw the 'Akasha comedians and other Arab theatre and comedy groups.

**BULUS FARAH** (1910- 1991) was a Palestinian trade unionist who founded the Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labor Societies in 1942. Farah went to work in the Haifa workshops in 1925 as a fifteen-year-old apprentice and is also known as the author of a book on the railway workers of the post-First World War period.

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