



Dear Gaby, Dear Isaiah
***Correspondence between Gaby Cohen
and Isaiah Berlin 1962–1990***

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Dear Gaby, Dear Isaiah

Correspondence between Gaby Cohen and Isaiah Berlin 1962–1990

Most of the surviving correspondence was kindly donated by Cohen's daughter Ya'alah Cohen in 2024. A selection is transcribed below. Part of the letter of 4 January 1971 also appears at B 441, and eight other letters in A+.



Gaby Cohen

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

TO GABY COHEN

16 March 1962

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

I, too, was very sorry not to see you before you left – but it is pleasant to think that I shall be able to see you soon again. I leave for Israel on 24 March and shall stay at the King David Hotel. So do ring me up. The 25th until the 29th or so will, I suppose, be filled with the affairs of the Hebrew University, which, as you know, is in a very critical position. Still, I cannot believe that I shall be doing nothing else at all during this time – at least I shall see my aunt and, I hope, you.

I should love to meet the young intelligentsia – and anyone you like. I propose then to go for a short rest to the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, then Aline comes on the 4th and we fly off together to Teheran and come back on the 12th when my stepchildren also arrive and we proceed to ‘see’ the country. If you could do something for us at that time, we should be truly grateful. We shall leave on the 23rd, I think, and the base will be the Sheraton Hotel in Tel Aviv as from the 12th onwards.

We are still not clear about the seder – Yigal Allon has been kind enough to ask us to his northern outpost, and Weisgal will expect us at his hospitable board – but I do not believe that either is ideal from the point of view of my stepchildren, who ought to go to something at once slightly more traditional and not so overcrowded with rich American benefactors. So we shall try and make some arrangements with a Youth Aliyah Centre, or something of that kind, where the meal is not too unsponsored and not too strict. If you have suggestions about that – what there may be near Tel Aviv – of a suitable kind, I should again be very grateful. So do get in touch with me at the King David after my arrival.

Yours ever

Isaiah

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

TO ISAIAH BERLIN

6 April 1964

47 HaRav Berlin Street, Jerusalem

Dear Isaiah

Yigal rang me up yesterday and startled me with his good news. It was so unexpected – a real fairy-tale surprise. I have indeed lately been troubled with the problem of money since I changed my plans and decided to go to England for a longer period, which would involve of course further expenses, particularly in connection with taking the family. And I did not want to apply again to the College. But it did not occur to me to bother Yigal, nor, needless to say, to bother you at all about it. However Yigal, who knew of my problems, was so kind as to take the initiative, and you were so considerate as to make it all so simple. So much like both of you. Though still I feel somewhat uncomfortable that you should have been bothered about my financial affairs. Thank you very much indeed, anyway.

Yigal tells me that you very kindly offered £1,000 from a fund with which you have some connection, and that you will pass the money on to the College and not directly to me. I wonder whether you could let me know if there is anything I have to do? Are there any formalities? Any forms to fill in?

I am now writing the thesis at a pretty good pace; teaching duties are far less of a strain than they were during the first two years, and I hope, as Yigal probably told you, to come at the end of the academic year and stay in Oxford for as long a period as will be needed.

Things in the Weizmann letters are apparently not too happy. Boris and Prawer approached me to ask whether I would take on the editorship of the last volumes (from 1933, or 1937 or 1939, to 1952). They apparently want to divide the work among three groups which would work simultaneously. I agreed in principle but I am waiting to see what will be decided about the way the work is going to be reorganised in the future. I feel that I can do the job, and I am keen to work on the 1930s and 1940s, but I shall have to

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lay down certain conditions regarding responsibilities, status and division of labour generally. I need some assurances that I will be able to contribute towards the finding of solutions, towards the acceptance of the speedier completion of the work. [So?] I shall, if I may, take the liberty of consulting you further. Meanwhile I intend to take no initiative, and would like you please to consider this part of my letter as strictly personal.

Herbert Hart has probably told you a lot about his experiences here. We saw a lot of him and enjoyed every moment of it. We consider him undoubtedly one of the shrewdest and most open-eyed of the visitors we have had. Not naive as the American so often [are], and not super-polite in the British way. He saw things cleverly, and, what is more important, he spoke his mind when he met people.

I saw your mother some days before Pesach. I hope she is now better. She was so sorry to miss the Seder. But yesterday I heard from Yigal that you have not been well either, and I do hope that you have completely recovered.

Best regards and love to Aline and the children, and deepest thanks again for everything.

Yours ever,

[Gaby]

TO GABY COHEN

26 April [1964]

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

How nice that you should live in a street¹ called after my non-relative, a political priest if ever there was one.

Yes, it is all perfectly true about St Antony's, but you must formally apply to them, of course. I have something to do with a body called the Humanitarian Trust, which authorises me to spend

¹ GC lived at 47 HaRav Berlin Street in Jerusalem.

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occasional sums for academic purposes, and I have promised £1,000 to Ezra Talmor in 1964/5 – also St. Antony's – who is approved of by the philosophers here. When he has done his year, that is, by the autumn of 1965, a further £1,000 will be available for you for one year. This depends, of course, on Talmor's really only staying for a year: I am assuming that this is so, and am proposing to behave as if it was so, whatever his own position may be; so that if at the end of the year he suddenly feels that he must stay a little longer, and needs money, I shall, I am afraid, be unable to provide it. I propose to make this quite clear to him. Still, I am saying this to you because you know too well the situations that sometimes occur when things are not made clear to some very nice and good and decent and worthy and sympathetic people. So you may count upon £1,000 in 1965/6, i.e. from the autumn of 1965 onwards. Alas, the only fly in my ointment over this is that Aline and I will not be here until the summer of 1966, and will only overlap with you, therefore, by a matter of two or three months, for I am taking my sabbatical year off in various doses: one this summer term, then I am here for the year 1964/5, then two more terms off in 1965/6, autumn and spring. Still, this is not to the point.

I am glad you liked Hart. He certainly came back most enthusiastic from Israel, and his wife even more so. I was not sure about him: I thought the chauvinism might get him down a little. The only thing he really objected to was the Rabbis, and that I fully understand and sympathise with. I shall be in Israel, I hope, this summer in August; I should think that Teddy will know where to get hold of me, roughly from August 10 to August 20, or thereabouts. Can I see you then?

Yours ever

Isaiah

PS I have taken the 'confidential' part of your letter under advisement, as we say here.

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PPS Thank you very much indeed for going to see my mother – she was deeply touched.

TO GABY COHEN²

4 January 1971 [*carbon*]

[Headington House]

Dear Gaby,

Your delicious grapefruit has arrived and bears with it memories of you and Italy and the summer, all of which delight us. I hope you received that tiny box of crystallised fruit sent to you at Tel Aviv University – I had lost your address in Jerusalem; all I remembered was the name of my distinguished namesake, but I thought that without a number this was less individuating than the University. *Do not on any account* bother to acknowledge this if it arrives, only if it doesn't. I distrust the posts terribly, particularly now – on the other hand there is something disgusting about giving people very small presents and then writing and saying, 'Have you received it? If so why have you not acknowledged it?' The desire to be thanked seems to me a terrible indication of insecurity and inability to communicate adequately.

However, I shall not continue with this piece of amateur psychologism and report to you only that I am very sorry indeed not to be able to come to Israel this month – that I shall, alas, not be able to come, so far as I can see now, until this time next year: the news from the Middle East, as seen at this end, does not seem too encouraging – the ferocity of the Russians is not altogether easy to explain³ – these things always have something to do with

² Most of the second paragraph of this letter also appears at B 441.

³ In a speech on 21 December 1970 the Soviet Prime Minister, Aleksey Kosygin, pledged Soviet support for the Arabs in their 'just struggle' against Israel. His speech came after high-level discussions in Moscow with an Egyptian delegation, the first such meeting to take place since the funeral of Nasser on 1 October: 'Now that we are here together with our Arab friends we can say with

internal stresses and strains and not simply considerations of foreign policy; I assume therefore that discontent is more rife than correspondents report, although it will not shake the foundations of the state any more than it did at this time a hundred years ago. I am glad I am not a Russian historian, I mean a historian of Russia: it is too gloomy to have to write about a state in which the government is, with very rare intervals, always oppressive, cynical, cruel and opposed to every human end that either its citizens or anyone else regards as worth living for, and sometimes dying for – the only persons upon whom one can dwell with any degree of satisfaction are in bitter opposition to the state or at best indifferent to it – this is a record exceeded in no other country, I suspect, not even Spain or Turkey, which after all was very nice to its minorities. And this is a government which, despite everything, still engages the feelings, the affections, in some sense a kind of loyalty on the part of some people in Israel, which would come gushing forth, I suspect, if it showed the faintest sign of favour or even absence of disfavour! Can one talk of human emancipation when the ex-slaves still think fondly of the lash?

Until this century it was perhaps difficult to understand Moloch worship – but now one sees that the tyrants of the victims but the victims themselves probably leapt into the flames with colossal enthusiasm, the part in denouncing all this on the part of the Prophets becomes even more fascinating.⁴ I wonder if one ought not to produce a proper work of Jewish martyrology beginning with the Maccabees and ending with the martyrs of Riga etc. It would not be a very cheerful work and would depress a good many people who would protest that the dead ought to be left to look after their dead. I do not believe this: I was as much against Eichmann's execution, which I still believe was wholly wrong, but I think it is right to preserve the memory of individual fortitude,

all certainty that the Israeli aggressors and those behind them will never reach the aims of their expansionist policy in the Middle East' (*Times*, 22 December 1970, 1e).

⁴ It is not clear how to rescue this garbled sentence.

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not those who were slaughtered like helpless animals but those who could have surrendered and didn't. This would be a noble substitute for mindless nationalism. Is there anyone capable of producing an authoritative work of this kind? There would, I suspect, be no difficulty about material support: room would have I fear, to be made for annual supplements.

Yours,

[Isaiah]

TO GABY COHEN

30 November 1973

Wolfson College

Dear Gaby

This is only to warn you that we may turn up in Jerusalem in the last week of this year, for a short while – we (i.e. + Aline) shall be staying at Mishkenot Sha'ananim, by the grace and favour of the Mayor. If there is a telephone in our room (I shall come with Aline) I shall try to get in touch with you on arrival. If you are absorbed in some national, or personal, preoccupation, you must not hesitate to say so. This is no time for idle callers. Ignore me by all means.

Yours

Isaiah

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

FROM GABY COHEN TO AN UNNAMED
CORRESPONDENT⁵

n.d. [between 1967 and 1976, perhaps December 1975] [*manuscript draft in Hebrew, perhaps not sent; transcription, translation and notes by Arie Dubnov*]

n.p.

אישי/סודי

לפני צאתי את אנגליה שוחחתי טלפונית עם ידידנו המשותף ישעיה ברלין ששהה בחורף בארצות הברית, נפגש עם אנשי ה'סטייט דיפרטמנט' 'על כל דרגיהם ושלביהם', כלשונו. רצה מאוד לדווח לי בהרחבה אבל לא היה לי זמן. אני מקווה שמצא דרך אחרת להעביר את המידע במירבו אליכם. ישעיה נשמע פסימי למדי בעקבות שיחות אלה שכולן היו באותו סגנון רוח. (א) עתידה לפרוץ מלחמה בין סוריה וישראל, ביזמת סוריה או ביזמת ישראל (ב) ישראל תנצח (ג) ברית המועצות תתערב (ד) ההתערבות יכולה לשאת צורות שונות, פוליטיות וצבאיות (נוסח אנגולה, נוסח קוריאה, וכו' וכו') (ה) התערבות זאת תביא לנסיגה ישראלית עד גבולות 1967. 'והלוואי ורק עד גבולות אלה.' לפי הערכתי, אנשים בוויינגטון ששוחחו עם ישעיה מניחים שהוא מעביר את המידע והערכות לישראל. אני מעריך, איפוא, שתסריט את זה מופץ לצורך שתי מטרות אלטרנטיביות

(א) ייתכן שאמנם מאמינים בזה.

(ב) ייתכן שרוצים לשכנע את ישראל, ובעיקר את ידידי ישראל שבעיית ישראל-סוריה טעונה חומר נפץ שעלול להביא גם לנזק ישיר לישראל וגם לעימות רוסי-אמריקני. ועל רקע סכנת עימות כזה האם לא מוטב שישראל תוותר במשהו בגולן, כדי למנוע הסלמה ולהביא להסכמה וחידוש כוח החירום הסורי. ואין ההכשרה דעת קהל לקראת מאי 1976.

פרטים נוספים מדווח לך בהזדמנות בעל פה.

⁵ Possibly Yigal Allon

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Personal/Confidential

Before I left England⁶ I had a phone conversation with ~~our mutual friend~~ Isaiah Berlin, who spent the winter in the United States, and met with staff from the State Department 'of all levels and stages',⁷ as he put it. He really wanted to report to me in detail, but I didn't have time. I hope he found another way to convey the information to you.

Isaiah sounded quite pessimistic after these conversations, all of which were in the same ~~style~~ spirit. (a) A war is expected to break out between Syria and Israel, initiated by either Syria or Israel. (b) Israel will win. (c) The Soviet Union will intervene. (d) The intervention could take various forms, political and military (like Angola, like Korea, etc., etc.). (e) This intervention will lead to an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. 'And, it is to be hoped, only to these borders.'

In my estimation, the people in Washington who spoke with Isaiah assume he is passing this information and these assessments to Israel. I therefore estimate that this scenario is being disseminated for two alternative purposes:

(a) It is possible that they genuinely believe this.

(b) It is possible that they want to convince Israel, and especially *Israel's friends*, that the Israel–Syria issue is primed with explosives and might lead both to direct damage to Israel and also to a Russian–American confrontation. Against the backdrop of such a dangerous confrontation, wouldn't it be better for Israel to concede something in the Golan to prevent escalation and bring

⁶ In colloquial Hebrew, 'Britain', 'England' and 'UK' were used synonymously.

⁷ Odd Hebrew. Probably an attempt to offer a literal translation of an idiomatic phrase in English used by IB. What is clear is that IB wanted to emphasise that he met with rank and file persons alongside more senior State Department officials.

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about an agreement and renewal of the Syrian emergency force?⁸ [For example, evacuating Jewish settlements in the Golan.]⁹ And there is no preparation of public opinion for May 1976.

I will report additional details to you orally on another occasion.

TO GABY COHEN

13 December 1976

Headington House

Dear Gaby

Thank you ever so much for both *Churchill and Palestine* and *Winston Churchill and the Cabinet Committee on the Palestine Question (April–July 1943)*.¹⁰ To say I had read them fully would be an exaggeration: as you know, I read Hebrew painfully slowly and inefficiently. Nevertheless, I have rapidly perused every English word in both publications. The consistent and fearless behaviour of Winston Churchill is more splendid than I had imagined. He

⁸ The term ‘Syrian emergency force’ is unclear, and the letter – hastily written – is confusing because it might be understood as implying that such a Syrian force was present in the Golan heights (which makes no sense, since the Golan Heights were under Israeli control from 1967 onwards, and there was no Syrian force in the Golan). My best guess is that Gaby Cohen alludes here to the fact that in May–June 1976, a few months after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, Syria sent an assistance force of about 40,000 soldiers to Lebanon. The purpose of this assistance force was to support the Maronite-Conservative camp in the civil war against the Palestinian-Radical camp. (Lebanon was seen by Syrian nationalists as part of ‘Greater Syria’, of course). The name of the force sent to Lebanon varies according to the sources and media one relies on (the *New York Times*, for example, referred to the force as the Syrian Peace Force).

⁹ Explanatory insertion by GC.

¹⁰ Published in 1976 as *Churchill and Palestine 1939–1942* (Jerusalem, 1976: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Publications) and *The British Cabinet and the Question of Palestine, April–July 1943* (Tel Aviv, 1976: Tel Aviv University). See also Gabriel Cohen, ‘Churchill and the Establishment of the War Cabinet Committee on Palestine (April–July 1943)’ (in Hebrew), *Zionism: Studies in the History of the Zionist Movement and of the Jewish Community in Palestine* 4 (1975), 259–336; English summary 447–8.

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was really alone against the Cabinet – Labour and Liberal ministers who might have thought this or that – but none of them would have stood up to the Foreign, Colonial and War Offices if the Prime Minister (and before that the First Lord of the Admiralty) had not stood immovable before the huge tide of Government and Civil Service opinion, not to say fanatical conviction. Not that it did much good in the long run, I suppose, but it certainly helped in the shorter – I expect the behaviour of the officials in Palestine was to some degree inhibited by the restraints imposed on the ferocious anti-Zionism of the entire Foreign Office and War Office, and large sections of the Colonial Office.

Surely both the book and the article ought to be translated into English, if not as independent publications then at least in periodicals (here or in the US. are you doing anything about that? it wd interest *many* people.)

CHURCHILL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE WAR CABINET COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE
APRIL—JULY 1943
by Gabriel Cohen

The author describes and analyses the background to the War Cabinet decision, in July 1943, to seek a new policy for Palestine destined to replace the policy laid down in the White Paper of May 1939, and to set up a special Cabinet Committee for this purpose. He deals with a variety of assessments and attitudes towards the future of Palestine then prevailing in British Government circles: in Whitehall as well as in the Middle East and Palestine; among ministers, politicians, diplomats and civil servants; among the military on the one hand and the civil authorities on the other.

Special attention is paid to Churchill's attitude and his views, his controversies with his colleagues with regard to the Palestine issue, and the *modus vivendi* eventually reached. Three phases of Churchill's attitudes and activities are dealt with: a) His term of office as First Lord of the Admiralty, b) The first period of his premiership (up to the winter of 1942/43), c) The months following the turn of the tide in the war, in particular April—July 1943.

English summary of the 1975 article mentioned in note 10

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

The other day I went to a lecture by Martin Gilbert at Yarnton – did I tell you about this? – and, seasoned as I am in this respect, was shocked by two quotations which he read out (I imagine his lecture will soon be published, but I do not know when) – one about the vigorous congratulations conveyed to, I think, the Foreign Office by George VI for blocking immigration into Palestine, and secondly his message to the British Embassy in Berlin, in March 1939, asking for a joint *démarche* with the Americans (who by this time had, of course, withdrawn their Ambassador) to the German Government, asking them not to allow German ships to be used for the emigration of Jews from German territories. This in some sense does seem to me to mark a depth of degradation, beyond that of the White Paper, in sheer moral squalor, inhumanity and sheer incredibility – that the British and American Governments should appeal to the Nazis to restrain the Jews from fleeing the country, in March 1939 – indeed, it is not Lord Halifax only who has enormities to answer for. Who was in charge of the Eastern Department then? Whose initials would there have been on that particular telegram? Martin Gilbert will provide the obvious reference.

Last but not least, may I tell you how deeply touched I was by the last sentence in your preface. Thank you very much. And now I must get a Hebrew dictionary and get to work (having just had an operation, I am relatively free to read what I like – alas, this won't last long, for my health is returning much too rapidly).

Love to Batya, and my greetings to your colleagues Yavetz and Confino – the latter's piece on Bakunin/Nechaev is a masterpiece.

Yours ever,

Isaiah

PS If the second copy of your book turns up, what shall I do with it? I should love to present it to someone, but *Hebraica sunt*, non

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leguntur¹¹ – it would be of little use to the London Library or All Souls College. The Wiener Library doubtless have a copy – shall I send it to Kedourie? My best moment in reading the English references was the short one from, I think, Eden, complaining that there were too many Jews in England already (in 1941, I think).¹²

TO ISAIAH BERLIN

3 January 1977

Jerusalem

Dear Isaiah,

Thank you ever so much for your kind letter of 13 December, which, by the way, nearly went astray. It was posted to the Political Studies Department, with which I have no connections whatsoever. I got the letter yesterday. I wonder how many letters get lost in the University.

I have not tried to publish the monographs in English, as they would be too long for periodicals. Three of the monographs (Churchill 1939–1942; Churchill and the Cabinet Committee; and Mussolini, Italian Policy and Palestine)¹³ would be 110 pages long

¹¹ ‘They are Hebrew, they are not read.’ Medieval scribes who knew no Greek often wrote, ‘Graeca sunt, non leguntur’ when they encountered a Greek passage in a Latin manuscript.

¹² Not 1941 but 1943; not Eden but Sir Maurice Peterson, Minute of 1 May 1943, FO 371/35033 (E 2341), 41: ‘If we are to give the Zionists Eritrea or any other African territory, it is surely to be as a Jewish state, to which the National Home in Palestine may be affiliated. Only thus will we be able to silence the wealthy Jews in America who pay for this agitation without any intention of sacrificing their American Citizenship, and only thus will we be able to get some of the Jews out of this country, in which there are now far too many.’ ‘Churchill and the Establishment of the War Cabinet Committee on Palestine’, 298 note 108.

¹³ Gabriel Cohen, ‘Mussolini, Italian Policy and Palestine 1933–1935: A Chapter in the History of the Idea of Partition’ (in Hebrew), *Zionism: Studies in the History of the Zionist Movement and of the Jewish Community in Palestine* 3 (1973), 346–417; English summary 603–4.

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in the English version. (A translated article into English is 40 per cent longer than the Hebrew one.) Moreover, I usually write in a very condensed way and readers complain about it. That means that it would be difficult to shorten the articles by good editing.

MUSSOLINI, ITALIAN POLICY AND PALESTINE

1933—1935

(A chapter in the history of the idea of Partition)

by *Gabriel Cohen*

Mussolini was apparently the first to suggest the establishment of a Jewish state in a part of Palestine, in the pre-Peel Commission period (except for Dr. Jacobson's confidential initiative within the Zionist Organization). Mussolini presented it as the best solution to the Jewish problem as well as to the Palestine problem, but regarded it — at least after 1933 — first and foremost as being in line with Italian interests in the Mediterranean vis-à-vis British Imperialism.

The departments concerned in the Italian Foreign Ministry were strongly and consistently against the project; Zionists and Arab leaders were against it, or at best evasive and non-committal; Whitehall, from whom the Italians tried to hide their initiative, was at the time far from ready to consider any such approach. And yet Mussolini pursued the idea until the autumn of 1935, and discussed it with Dr. Weizmann, Dr. Goldmann, Rabbi Prato, and probably P. Rutenberg.

There is no evidence that Mussolini was active in the matter during the Ethiopian War and the Arab revolt. However, in some Italian quarters a new idea was current: the establishment of a Jewish autonomy in the Godjam province of Ethiopia — as a short run policy; and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a promise for the long run.

After the publication of the Peel Commission recommendations, Italian diplomacy was set on preventing their implementation at all costs. The recommendations were seen as new proof of the basic assumption of the Italian Foreign Ministry: that a Jewish state in Palestine would serve British Imperial policy and was bound to be anti-Italian.

English summary of the 1973 article mentioned in note 13

However, one article is in the process of translation and it will be included in a collection of historical studies published by Tel

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Aviv University. The editors were eager to publish an English version of my *Churchill 1939–1942* but Yad Ben Zvi did not withdraw their copyright as they hope to publish the whole book in English. That's for the time being about your kind interest in publishing my monographs and articles in English.

I was toying with the idea that the form in which I published *Churchill and Palestine 1939–1942* would be of use to the English readers too, as the combination of the English abstract and the selection of documents would enable one to follow the story of the struggle on the political future of Palestine through the documents. I am not sure that I have succeeded as apparently readers don't read documents nowadays, even students and scholars. I cannot complain about the reviews, all of them were flattering, but only one reviewer mentioned the documents as an integral part of the book, all the others surely have not read them. And it's a shame, as I am sure that they contain by far more interesting material than my monograph. Anyway, my next volume (British Cabinet and Palestine 1943), which is about to be printed any day, will be in the same form and will include sixteen fascinating (and many of them depressing) documents. They too, I believe, are much more interesting than my own long introduction. I shall then have to make up my mind whether to go on with this form of publication or give way to a conventional way of writing longer texts of my own (that would contain long quotations or paraphrased parts from documents in the Gilbert way).

You ask what to do about the second book should it turn in. I think you could send the book – the copy without my inscription – to Sir John Martin (I could not get his address). He would surely enjoy the English part of it. He deserves real credit from Zionist history point of view, and the credit is given in pages 56–8 of my introduction, including the sentences 'John Martin was in charge of the Palestine "desk" in Churchill's office. He happened to be an expert on Palestine. He also knew what were Churchill's inclinations and sympathies and what should be brought to his notice on this subject. It seems to me that John Martin's role [...] was very important. The Zionist leaders were lucky, from many

points of view, that Martin was holding this post (Principal Private Secretary). Weizmann met Churchill only four times during the war, but his and other Zionist meetings with Martin were more frequent. The “legend” about Churchill and Weizmann’s constant contacts is based largely on the sympathetic and active role that Martin played, and that is why the “legend” is basically real [...].’

I may come to St Antony’s for a good part of Hilary Term. I was hoping to check the 1946 documents. As you may remember I wrote fifteen years ago a draft of a long book on British policy in Palestine 1945–8. I waited with the draft as I felt that the proportion between the secondary and oral sources on the one hand, and the primary sources on the other, was not satisfactory. Now, apparently, I shall have to wait another twenty years. Well, I shall probably not wait that long, and publish at least some parts now, without the PRO’s help. [?] I am little tired of British policy in Palestine and hope to turn away from diplomatic history altogether.

HMG’s decision to withhold 1946 Palestine documents is a real mystery to me. I spoke yesterday to Alan Bullock on the telephone and he knew nothing about it (being in bed after heart condition), or he was not free to tell me. I am still not sure about the details. Did they really withhold the whole lot? It is incredible. There are ‘nasty’ stories in every aspect of British (or any other state) foreign and colonial relations, and the files containing those ‘ugly’ facts of intelligence and secret services can be closed for 50, 100 years or for ever. But singling out Palestine files *en masse* cannot be explained by this affair or another (evidences of piracy plans for the British Navy, anti-Semitism, cheating the US, etc., etc.), but by the sensitivity of the subject in general, and this is a frightening phenomenon, no matter what are the exact reasons. It is another demonstration of – from an entirely unexpected direction – our precarious situation. Our – Israelis and Jews in general. It is interesting that the publication of the volume of American

documents (FRUS)¹⁴ on Palestine 1948 was postponed three times by Kissinger's instructions. (It was published. Kissinger's last instruction was to wait until after the Presidential elections in the US.) Well, another proof of the dictum שכון יעם.¹⁵ We are destined to dwell alone even in archives.

Coming back to your letter, the 'Gentleman' who minuted in 1943 about too many Jews in England and the US was Sir Maurice Peterson and not Eden. He was in charge of the Eastern Dept (the Head of the Dept was Maurice Baxter and officials in the Dept were, inter alia, Harold Caccia and Robin Hankey). The documents drafted by Caccia, Hankey, Baxter and Peterson were usually very harsh in contents and tone. Eden would usually (but not always) adopt the contents but soften the tone. As for Gilbert's quotations about HMG[s] diabolic means of fighting Jewish immigration in 1939, I know them well. I discussed it with Martin. Well, it is of course another proof that immigration was the crux of the matter, and in 1939 it was the test case, in Arab eyes, whether HMG was genuine in her White Paper policy. Heavy pressure was brought to bear partly by Harold MacMichael's initiative, not only on Germany but on Greece and other Balkan states from the ports of which boats with Jewish refugees would embark to Palestine. MacMichael, at least, learned the lesson from this drama. In 1944, he was persuaded that immigration was still the crux of the matter, but that no British Government would be able to fight against illegal immigration. (How right he was in predicting that Churchill's Cabinet would not want to fight against it and that other Governments may try to fight against it, but would fail.) I think I gave you my article on MacMichael.¹⁶ This was the basis for his change of mind to supporting partition as the only solution.

¹⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, a series of volumes providing **'the official documentary historical record of major US foreign policy decisions and significant diplomatic activity'**.

¹⁵ Numbers 23:9. 'the people shall dwell alone'.

¹⁶ First published in Hebrew as 'Harold MacMichael and the Question of the Future of Palestine' in *Hamizrah Hebadash: The New East*, Quarterly of the Israel

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

Well, I think that I have to apologize for a boring and too long a letter anyway. More important and more current problems will have to wait for my next letter.

My best wishes and regards for all my friends. By the way, what were Henry Fisher's impressions from his visit? I think I could detect relatively good judgement of people from some of his remarks.

Love to Aline and regards from Peter, whom I saw on Saturday.

Yours ever,

[Gaby]

PS My addresses are:

(a) 47 Harav Berlin, Jerusalem (private); (b) The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, POB 4040, Jerusalem (where I have my best secretarial services); (c) School of History, Tel Aviv University (and *not* Dept of Political Studies).

TO GABY COHEN

13 January 1977

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

So sorry to have written to you at the wrong address – History is a reputable subject, whereas Political Studies ...

Thank you for your letter. Alas, my spare or second copy of your admirable book was unfortunately picked up by the Ambassador of Israel, who came to visit me in All Souls and saw it on the table, and 'borrowed' it. I do not know when he will return it. But in the meanwhile, if you could conceivably spare one more copy I will send it on with a note to Martin with greatest pleasure. I am glad that Yad Ben-Zvi is contemplating publishing your whole

Oriental Society, Jerusalem, 25 (1975) Nos 1–2 (97–8), 52–69, then in an expanded form in English as 'Harold MacMichael and Palestine's Future', *Studies in Zionism* 2 (1981) No. 1, 133–55.

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

book in English: in the meanwhile, I will make what propaganda I can for it here, e.g. to Wilfrid Knapp, who is in Washington at the moment collecting materials for his book on America and the Middle East, which I suspect will incorporate a point of view very different from yours or mine: but he is a very honest man and will not ignore the evidence. Do let me know at once if you are coming to St Antony's.

As to the shutting down of the Palestine documents for twenty years, I suspect it is not so much, as Shinwell and A. J. P. Taylor said, to defend Bevin, as because they are nervous of adding fuel to what are still merrily burning flames, produced by all sides, this way and that, and no doubt because various persons are still alive at whom terrible thunderbolts might be hurled by one side or the other; but mainly, of course, Zionists and Israelis, given the policies at that time and the kind of minutes written by the people in the Foreign Office that you mention. As you say, uniqueness is a tragic privilege and the Jews are still condemned to it. I am glad that it was Maurice Peterson who wrote those horrible things and not Eden: he is dying in Wiltshire at the moment, and by the time you receive this letter will probably have left this life. We shall doubtless have to go to the memorial service or the like, since his wife is a very old friend of mine, with very sound views on the Middle East: I can mourn him in his post-1956 rather than his earlier phases with a clear conscience – even though he, too, made a disparaging, indeed snubbing, little reference to me in the minutes that I saw in the PRO.¹⁷

You ask about Harry Fisher. He was delighted by his visit. He would like to go back, and would like to establish scholarships in Wolfson for Israel students and academics – but the College lacks the money. Gideon Rafael says he spoke to Leonard Wolfson about this, who showed some sympathy for financing such a project. I have written to Abe Harman to that effect and hope he has taken it up – now certainly is the moment, in fact I shall have

¹⁷ 'There is perhaps a too generous Oriental flavour': 28 January 1944, FO 371/38537 ('Political Situation in the United States'), paper 324, f 236.

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

to remind him. Fisher is likely to be in Tel Aviv on some kind of legal business, accompanied by the new Warden of All Souls, Patrick Neill, so you may see him then. Peter will be able to tell you when he is coming. I do not know whether this will coincide with your visit to Oxford – in either case, I am sure he will be extremely glad to see you. Meanwhile, you must soldier on.

Yours ever
Isaiah

TO GABY COHEN

5 May 1980

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

Thank you ever so much for your letter to Aline and me. She is in Italy for a week, so I had better reply – and to the right address, I hope. It was very disappointing not to meet, but of course the reason is plain enough.

I think we did realise that Yigal's death had a colossal effect in Israel – out of all proportion to his actual political weight, and affecting deeply either those who did not particularly want him as e.g. Prime Minister, or in any case thought that he would not make it owing to lack of 'guns' in a figurative sense. The reason for this is what you declare it to be: a huge nostalgia for a past that was purer, more heroic, part of the myth of what Israel was intended to be by the pioneers, of which he became the symbol inasmuch as he was not felt to be tarnished, as many of the political leaders were and are felt to be, whether by faults of character or actual misdeeds. There was, I realised at the time, a vast outpouring of sentiment, which I expect continued for some weeks, and there will surely be all kinds of commemorative institutions and events and stamps and anniversaries – in my opinion, rightly so. The fact that even the Prime Minister had to describe him as a hero is significant enough. It was all a function of the bitterness and what you rightly call frustration with the present: in this atmosphere I

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suspect that Begin will absolutely refuse to go, for even in opposition he is likely to prove much feebler than he was in the past.

But what is all this about your second operation? I hope it is nothing serious, but whatever it is it would be a great kindness to let us know – or ask Batya to do so – how you are now, presumably after your operation. Myself, I mind operations rather less than most people, but they are not welcome events – the shock to the system exacts its costs. Please let us know.

Thank you for ‘My Father’s House’; and thank you for saying you will investigate AVIAF’s¹⁸ failure to get its publicity through to potentially good students. I expect you are right – thirty-five is perhaps the wrong limit for post-doctoral scholars – I shall try to take that up with the Foundation.

Are you planning to come to this country at all? We shall be here till about 15 July, then in Italy as usual, then for the last ten days of August in Austria, then in Italy again for a while, and back, I should say, in mid-September. I expect you know that Stuart’s wife has died; although he is behaving with predictable stoicism, his condition is basically very fragile. I literally know of nobody – other than, perhaps, myself – so totally adrift without his wife. My friend Professor Wollheim is back from Beersheva, which he disliked, physically even more than morally; he really sees no reason for the existence of the state of Israel, Zionism, etc.; he does not think much about his origins – his father was a German Jew, his mother an English variety actress, and he has no bonds of a conscious kind with Jews as such. His opinions are those of Chomsky, and when I asked him whom he most enjoyed meeting he thought that particularly Amos Elon stood closest to his own views, and when I asked him who was the most chauvinistic person he met, he said without hesitation Noel Annan, who was there at the same time. With this *bonne bouche*, I leave you.

Yours ever

Isaiah

¹⁸ Unidentified.

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

TO ISAIAH BERLIN

9 July 1980

47 Harav Berlin Street
Jerusalem

Dear Isaiah,

I have recovered, almost completely, from the operation. Peter will testify to it. I hope to resume my normal way of life next week.

I attach to this letter some papers of Dr Ron Barkai, who is thirty-seven years old, whose PhD thesis was submitted when he was thirty-six and is a superb work of historical research. Dr Barkai, who is a first-class scholar by any standard, is a striking example of what I told you in my previous letter. The purpose of the Foundation *cannot* be achieved in the *humanities*, as long as the age limit of thirty-five exists. I can think of no better example that would suit the purpose of the Aviaf Fellowship. It is nearly the model for it. A young scholar (in Israeli terms, and again, in *humanities*), who proved himself as a very good scholar and teacher and should, from all points of view, spend two years in universities abroad, in relatively reasonable conditions. Barkai is an ideal example. But I can think of many other excellent candidates who would suit your criteria, and are past the age of thirty-five. I think that the terms of the Fellowship were advertised and circulated in a much better way this year. At least in Tel Aviv University. The Department of History got the forms in the normal bureaucratic channels of the university, a week ago .

The death of Talmon came as a real shock to a certain part of the intellectual and academic world here. Apart from my personal appreciation of him as a teacher during my first stages in the university and other, somewhat mixed and complicated, aspects of his impact, about which I may write one day, it brought me and probably some of my colleagues to think about our role now, in Israeli universities.

Talmon's death, after Wirszubski's and Fuchs's passing away marks in a way an end of an era or of a generation in Israeli Historical academic life. One looks around and, distressing as it is,

one realises that the buck has passed to one's own generation. It causes a real heart-searching as to what one has already done in academic life and what one ought to do. What one's scale of priorities should be? What is the state of historical research, teaching and writings in Israel {is}? Is there a real good background for an attempt (by whoever it may be) on Jewish history, written as a part of general (mainly European) modern history? Why is it that *Hochmat Israel* is not in a very good shape in Israel? Where are we – the Israelis – vis-à-vis the outer world, Jewish and non-Jewish, in those days? I found myself the other day listening to a tape of a radio programme, recorded four months ago, during which I described my days in Oxford in the late 1950s, early 1960s: '... it was good to be an Israeli in Oxford in those days. It was comfortable, politically and socially; it was good academically. Those were the days when the respect for Israeli academic achievements and scholarship was at its peak.' I was rather confused about the last sentence. Was I right? That implies, of course, a feeling of decline even in some parts of our academic life, or its reputation. Why? It is only a glimpse of what bothers me now. On my part, I believe that one of my duties, if not a major one, is the encouragement of the young generation of historians and others (which in our case includes, again, those who are in their late twenties and thirties) to pave their way and establish themselves solidly but relatively comfortably in academic life. The fight for a good department and school of general history as a means against parochialism, provincialism and charlatanism. Twenty years ago I thought that my duty was to introduce history of Zionism and the Yishuv as a respectable academic subject. I dare say that something of the kind has been achieved. Our Institute in Tel Aviv did the pioneer work. Caution and zeal for solid research marked our work in those days, and I believe that this was the secret of our relative success. Now this topic is a very popular one, though not always solid enough any more, but well established. Now, it is the good, conventional historical studies that need nourishing and guarding. This has been, and will always be, the basis and reservoir for any new field or new experiment. The talents are there. They have

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always been. With some empathy and magnanimity (which are not always there) towards those young talents, one can safeguard a good future for historical studies in our universities.

Well, that should be enough for today.

Love to Aline,

Yours ever,

Gaby Cohen

TO GABY COHEN

14 July 1980

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

It was very nice to get a letter from you via Peter. I am very sorry that you have had this painful experience and, according to Peter, that you are in some pain still. I have never had this particular illness, but I can very well imagine what it must be like. You have a fund of stoicism which will doubtless enable you to cope with it better than I should have been able to. Still, it is not worth having one's moral attributes put to the test in this way – there are better opportunities.

Sad about Talmon: with all his comical qualities, he was sincere, brave and utterly decent, and had interesting and original ideas, and was a source of vitality to the subject. I am very sorry indeed, for I have lost a friend. And now, as you say, you are in the front rank – it gives one a slightly eerie sensation to be so exposed, but there is nothing but to march forward and train historians. I am sure that what is needed are people who integrate Jewish history into some general pattern, and not endless theses on the rise of the state of Israel, this and that Commission, or American intrigue, or anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century, or what the French thought about the Jews. It is not easy to mesh Jewish history into the general development of, say, Europe – but nevertheless, this is the only way to do it: if you can generate historians who do that, you really will be performing a unique service.

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I understand very well what you say about [Dr Ron] Barkai, and others like him. I do not suppose that the rules of the Rothschild Foundation can be changed so easily, because, if they are, what will happen is that a number of able persons up to the age of, say, forty-five will apply, and no young graduates will get anything at all, since the quota system does not work very well: one does not want an overweight of young academics who already have posts over the very young who have not yet become set in a pattern, and whom a journey abroad will not merely help but in some cases act as a transforming influence. I shall send the papers to Max Rowe – some ad hoc step can at times be taken, over and above the official Fellowships. Where do you think he ought to go, and for how long? What does he want to do? What is his present field of interest? If you could write me a letter, or if he could, I would do my best to forward his interests. I shall not be back until mid-September, so could it be done after that? It is impossible to do anything from Italy, as you know, for the posts don't work: everything gets lost.

I saw the Ambassador to the Court of St James the other day: he defends the West Bank settlements, etc., but I suspect that none of the diplomats have their heart in this – he is very distressed when he is told by the ill-wishing Mr Hurd at the Foreign Office that the FO knows that [the] Jewish community itself does not support present Israeli policies. He knows that this is true, and tries to bluff it out – I am very sorry for him and for all Israeli representatives abroad. Yadin's behaviour seems to me intolerable – I suppose we shall have to go on with this nightmare until next year: I do not see what is to shift the present Government. All my sentiments are with Peace Now, provided they are not foolish and do not seek to become a political party. Poor Yaakov Talmon! He had such plans for the future.

Yours ever

Isaiah

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

TO GABY COHEN

2 November 1981

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

Thank you ever so much for the bi-lingual Bialik – my Hebrew is such that it will be a source of instruction as well as nostalgic memory for me. I must have read it first at the age of seven, and I met him when he visited London, I cannot remember exactly when – in the 1930s sometime. He strongly urged me to read Emerson, of all people. He was just as unlike a poet (many people have remarked this) as T. S. Eliot or Thomas Hardy – not a self-conscious, picturesque bard-actor like Yeats or Tennyson or Victor Hugo or Alexander Blok, all operatic, all tenors. Whether Aline will take to Bialik is another question. Meanwhile, I hope to come to Jerusalem in March for five or six days, to sit on the Rothschild Scholarships Committee, and before then to spend two or three weeks in New York – otherwise nothing new. Every country in the world seems to be in a state of crisis – perhaps Switzerland and Denmark are not, but who would wish to be Swiss or Danish? (Answer – none of us would refuse.)

Love to Batya,

Yours ever,

Isaiah

TO GABY COHEN

24 December 1984

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

It is a small but to me slightly irritating matter which I wish to tell you about. It concerns the excellent scholar Porath, now at St Antony's. As you know, there is an Academic Study Group in England, which sends British academics to Israel (supported by one of the Rothschild foundations, which, however, may withdraw

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its grant if the Israeli Foreign Office persists in saying that they cannot produce the smallest token help – e.g. buses and meals – as it is now doing). This body occasionally suggests to visiting Israeli academics that they might accept two or three invitations to speak at British universities about Israeli topics. Every academic so far approached has agreed to do this, as you may imagine, willingly. Israel Friedman, also at St Antony's, has just been round with some success. Porath is the first Israeli academic who refused to do this except for a fee. This naturally somewhat shocked the relevant persons at the Academic Study Group.

I don't for a moment suggest that you or anyone else write to Porath about this. Raymond Carr complains about his manners and appearance at College meetings – and Raymond is the last person to be a stickler over these things, as you know: St Antony's is not noted for conformism in dress, manners or anything else. I am sure that Porath will profit by his stay here – he is an admirable scholar – but I could not resist registering this fact with you. I don't think it is necessary to tell academic visitors from Israel that it would be nice if they could accept occasional invitations to talk. Arieli has done real wonders in several places – the whole thing is not of the first importance. But why does Porath behave in this curiously mercenary manner?

I hope to be in Jerusalem for the Rothschild Fellowship interviews on 10–12 March: please telephone me immediately at the King David.

Yours ever

Isaiah

DEAR GABY, DEAR ISAIAH

TO GABY COHEN

4 November 1986

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

I will not stand in the way of Mr Zuckerman. That said, let me nevertheless get certain things off my chest.

First, I wonder whether he is likely to pay any attention to the quite large literature on his topic – the reception of the French Revolution in Germany. There are at least four classical works on the subject, in French and German; as well as one in English (by Gooch), as well as at least a dozen works which indirectly touch upon it. I suspect he will set them all aside, if he has heard of them, in favour of the new method, which is an infallible scientific approach to something which has hitherto been done in a confused empirical fashion.

Secondly, when he says that the Frankfurt School combines Freud and Marx, that is not the case. Marcuse's later work certainly attempts to do this; so have several psychoanalytic writers who are not members of the Frankfurt School; but neither Wiesengrund-Adorno nor Horkheimer (the most prominent masters) did this. Still, perhaps that doesn't matter either.

Thirdly, I knew Wiesengrund (Adorno came later, it was not his name when he was at Oxford for four years in the 1930s) very well. He was an exceedingly amusing, amiable, sharp-witted Frankfurt Jew, quite an interesting writer on music (being a pupil of Schoenberg), but as a philosopher a deliberately 'dark' writer, as he himself knew. He did not take himself all that seriously. In Oxford he was regarded as a joke – that was perhaps too critical. I got on very well with him, and realised that although he was agreeable to talk to, as a thinker he should not be taken altogether seriously, and was in fact, in a kind of jolly, unpompous way, half phoney (Scholem, who knew him very well, since he was a common friend of his and Benjamin's, also knew this).

The Authoritarian Personality was written in America during the war, and he sent me drafts of his chapters. Even by the very

tolerant standards of American sociology it was not regarded as a major work – somewhat blown out, full of platitudes and obscurities. It has made very little impact since, except on dedicated followers of the Frankfurt School, of whom I am glad to say there are not many, nor are they – as you know – very highly regarded in America now. In Germany it all came to an end in about 1968, when the radical students decided that Adorno was not radical enough for them, and a lot of topless girls danced round him and said ‘The episode Adorno is over.’ He was terribly upset, as he wished to be on the left of the left, had a heart attack, and died in Switzerland. His widow wrote me a heartbroken letter about this dreadful fate visited upon him by wicked German radicals.

But all that is irrelevant. The only other objection I wish to offer is that Zuckerman’s English is pretty loose. This, perhaps excessively, irritates me: why do Germans, Austrians, French, Swiss, Italians write English in a grammatical and often elegant fashion, whereas Israelis do not? Perhaps because they are taught by teachers who are themselves somewhat wanting. If Israelis are to have a second language, and if this language is to be English, cannot something be done, if only by way of hiring quite inferior Englishmen, from England (not Jews from Manchester or Leeds), to teach them ordinary English? However, nothing I can say is going to make any difference to that, I say irritably.

But, as I say, I will not stand in his way. Let him proceed with his socio-analytical, Freudo-Marxist analysis. At best, it will pitch him into the present dispute, which he refers to, between German historians about whether National Socialism was a natural product of earlier German tendencies or a sudden aberration (as some German historians obviously prefer to believe) – a split which is going on both in Germany and in Israel, and to which there is no foreseeable solution.

Anyway, let that be. I only wish to add that I do not wish to see the result of Zuckerman’s labours – I prefer to remain obscurantist. If *The Authoritarian Personality* is a serious work for him, to be used in explaining the causes of National Socialism and the reception of

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the French Revolution by German thinkers of the early nineteenth century (he is right in saying that in the late eighteenth they first acclaimed it and then, as the result of the execution of Louis XVI, recoiled from it), it will not add to the sum of human knowledge; but it may to that of human ignorance. But I repeat, take no notice of what I say.

Yours, as ever,
Isaiah

TO GABY COHEN

19 November 1990

Headington House

Dear Gaby,

I have just read Kaganskaya. It is a remarkable piece of work, no doubt of that; one of the best things about Tsvetaeva ever written, I should imagine. To translate it into English seems to me a heroic task – I don't know who could do it adequately. The prose is so poetical, so allusive, so Russian, that I think it would take an exceptionally gifted translator steeped in poetry and literature – above all, contemporary literature – to do it an adequate degree of justice. What I am not sure about is whether the NYRB is a suitable medium for it: the average reader of that periodical would have little idea of what it is all about. If there were a more directly literary periodical in the United States, in which poetry and essays on poetry were published, with a reasonable circulation, that would be a better medium. However, I may be wrong – perhaps Silvers would like to do it. There is no reason why you or Avishai should not tell Robert Silvers that I think it a most penetrating, sensitive and wonderfully phrased piece of work, which, to those who know about modern Russian poetry, in particular about the four great poets of whom Tsvetaeva was one, would constitute a fascinating essay. So he must judge for himself: he is a very skilled and sensitive judge of writing, both [its] substance and its intelligibility. In my view, this essay would not cause a sensation in America.

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Yours ever,
Isaiah

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