Samuel Montagu and Zionism*

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Zionism as a modern political movement in Britain made great strides after the English Zionist Federation was founded in 1899 as the British wing of the International Zionist Organization, itself set up in Basel in 1897; but interest in Jewish settlement in Palestine had been significant long before this. Sir Moses Montefiore led efforts to promote colonization of the land, and some well-respected Anglo-Jewish figures were active in the English branch of the Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) movement which sought to encourage Jews to colonize Palestine. Then Theodor Herzl’s second visit to London in 1896 changed the whole outlook for Zionism in Britain so that, within 21 years, even the British Government appeared to have been won over to the cause. Herzl’s appearance in London’s East End produced scenes of great enthusiasm for the new Moses who, it was hoped, would lead the Jews back to the Promised Land; but most Jewish leaders in Britain were hostile to the idea of Jewish settlement in Palestine. These leaders, who made up the Jewish establishment, were anxious to anglicize the increasingly large numbers of poor immigrant Jews who came into Britain after 1881, so that they would become ‘Englishmen of the Jewish persuasion’. Zionism was abhorrent to most Jewish leaders in Britain for many years following the establishment of Herzl’s organization. Sir Francis Montefiore, one of the few upper-class Jews in favour of Zionism, pertinently remarked to Herzl that a Zionist victory would make Jews feel free, so the rich ones would no longer be ‘able to dictate . . . as they now like to do in return for the money which they . . . give to . . . charities’.1

From the 1880s onwards, the champion in Britain of impoverished Jewish immigrants, especially those who settled in London, was Samuel Montagu. Montagu was Member of Parliament for Whitechapel from 1885 to 1900, and is an important figure in British Jewish history. A man with a deep conscience, he was concerned at the plight of the mainly penniless Jews who came into Britain during the period of mass immigration between 1881 and 1905, and spent much of his time and money working on their behalf. Montagu was involved in almost all aspects of Jewish communal life, religious, social and cultural: the Board of Guardians, the Shechita Board, the Poor Jews’ Temporary Shelter, the Russo-Jewish Committee, the Jewish Religious Education Board, the Jewish Working Men’s Club and many others. The Federation of Synagogues, which he estab-

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lished to improve the religious organization of the immigrants, is a living monument to his work.

It might have been expected that Montagu would have been in favour of Zionism: it certainly would have helped provide a solution to the Eastern European Jewish problem. Many of the books which refer to or deal specifically with Montagu’s role in the history of British Jewry either ignore the subject altogether or give the impression that he had Zionist sympathies. The Social History of the Jews in England 1850–1950 by V. D. Lipman, and Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History edited by V. D. Lipman are in the former category. Additionally, The Jewish Encyclopedia (1905) entry on Montagu and the Jewish Chronicle obituary in January 1911, as well as those in The Times and the New York Times, make no reference to Zionism, although the Jewish Chronicle and The Times obituaries do record his 1875 visit to Palestine. At his death a number of tributes were delivered from synagogue pulpits, but again no references to Zionism appear to have been made. The Chief Rabbi spoke at his memorial service but, once more, there is no indication that the subject of Zionism was mentioned. Books on the history of the Zionist movement, such as A History of Zionism by Walter Laqueur, Zionism by Leonard Stein and Exile and Return by Martin Gilbert, contain no references to Montagu’s stance on Zionism. Israel Cohen’s two important books, The Zionist Movement and A Short History of Zionism, also make no reference to Montagu, but the same author’s biography, Theodor Herzl, does include a number of citations on Montagu, and these do not give the impression that Montagu became strongly opposed to Herzl’s plans. Hibbat-Zion in Britain 1878–1898 by E. Oren (in Hebrew) claims Montagu was an important and influential member of Hovevei Zion, and other books making passing reference to Zionist sympathies on Montagu’s part include The Cousinhood by Chaim Bermant, Herbert Samuel: A Political Life by Bernard Wasserstein, The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870–1944 by Lloyd P. Gartner, Remember the Days edited by J. M. Shaftesley, The History of the Jews of Britain since 1858 by V. D. Lipman, The Balfour Declaration by Leonard Stein, History of Zionism 1600–1918 by Nahum Sokolow, Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel by Simon Schama, The Rape of Palestine by William Ziff, and Germany, Turkey and Zionism 1897–1918 by I. Friedman. The Jewish Community and British Politics by Geoffrey Alderman, Zionism in England 1899–1949 by Paul Goodman and The Origins of Zionism by David Vital are ambivalent on the subject. On the other hand, The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry 1880–1920 by Eugene Black, English Zionists and British Jews by Stuart Cohen, Englishmen and Jews by David Feldman and the Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971) entry (which was written by V. D. Lipman) do indicate that Montagu was no friend of Zionism. Daniel Gutwein’s recent book (1992) The Divided Elite is the first serious attempt to place Montagu’s contribution to Jewish life in Britain fully in perspective, and he gives the impression that Montagu was, if anything, a Zionist sympathizer. Lily Montagu’s biography of her father is dealt with more fully later.
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It is this paper's objective to do fuller justice to Montagu's attitude towards Zionism. Montagu, particularly when he was MP for Whitechapel, was careful in the manner in which he publicly reacted to the Hovevei Zion movement and to Herzl. His real feelings towards Zionism became fully explicit only after he abandoned his Whitechapel seat. He stood for Leeds Central in the 1900 general election, but he knew he had no chance of winning the seat and he was then more forthright in his views. Essentially, his position was similar to that of the majority of the Jewish upper class, a position exemplified by Charles Emanuel, the Secretary of the Board of Deputies in evidence he gave to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration in 1902. He said: ‘[The Zionists’] suggestion is that Palestine is an alternative to England as a place of emigration from Russia. As we have no home in Palestine at present, and no right to go there, I contest that.’

Montagu was a classic example of one who spoke equivocally on the subject in order to avoid unpopularity with certain sections of the Jewish community in Britain, but many of his key statements point to an intellectual dislike of Zionism and what it stood for. When he first met Herzl in 1895 he told him that he felt himself more an Israeliite than an Englishman, and that he would be willing to settle with his entire family in Palestine, ‘a greater Palestine [not] the old one’; but this can be dismissed as cheap rhetoric. He also told Herzl that he would have nothing to do with Argentina and that he was ready to join with him as soon as one of the Great Powers took the matter seriously. Montagu’s daughter Lily, in her slim biography of her father, maintained that he was a sincere Zionist in the biblical sense and had been awaiting a ‘personal Messiah to lead him back to Palestine’. He would ‘cheerfully have given [up] his luxurious home . . . if the Mount of Olives had shown the Scriptural signs of welcome’. Again, these words lack conviction; it was easy to express the natural hopes of Jews, especially religious ones, who patiently awaited the Messiah. The East End Jews were enthusing about Herzl, and Montagu had no wish to antagonize his Whitechapel voters. He was, in fact, accused by his 1892 general election opponent of being afraid to offend ‘the alien support on which he depends his seat’.

Montagu was not voluntarily going to lose the love and admiration of the East End Jews – hence his prevarication and equivocation. From the time when he became MP until near the end of the century, Montagu was inconsistent on the subject of a Jewish National Home. He did show some support for Hovevei Zion, but it is doubtful if he was really sincere in this. In his first defence of his Parliamentary seat in 1886, Montagu increased his share of the vote very significantly against the national trend but, in his two subsequent campaigns, his share was reduced in both cases against that national trend and, in the latter in 1895, his majority was a paltry 32. Was he now being seen by Jewish voters as one giving inadequate support to Zionism? In 1900 he came out with some very strong anti-Zionist statements.

Montagu had, however, shown some interest before Herzl’s arrival on the
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Zionist scene. With Dr Asher Asher, Secretary of the United Synagogue, he visited Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land in 1875 on behalf of the Sir Moses Montefiore Testimonial Committee. In his report of the visit he made a number of positive and practical suggestions. He deplored the lack of manufacturing facilities, and suggested that some tools of trade, such as sewing machines and turning lathes, be made available so that some 40 families could start up small workshops. The soil was fertile but poorly cultivated, and Montagu believed that vine, olive and mulberry culture could be made to yield dividends. He recommended also that some thought be given to possible cotton and silk weaving. He was optimistic about some colonies that had been projected beyond the Jordan and Jericho, and a school established in Jaffa had impressed him – he recommended that some youths be brought to London for training in handicraft work; but he was in favour also of setting up an industrial school in Jerusalem. He was critical of housing conditions in Jerusalem, and recommended that improved dwellings should be made available outside the walls of the Old City. A loan fund should be established for financing trading operations, but Montagu was adamant that such a fund should not provide money to those who wanted to become money-lenders. He believed also that a local board like the London Jewish Board of Guardians should be established. He concluded that ‘there is a wide field open to Western Jews to assist their brethren in Israel and improve their condition’ and he urged that some sort of European agency be set up in order to effect this.

Montagu was at odds with Sir Moses Montefiore, who visited the country later that same year, on the giving of halukkah (the system of distributing money collected in diaspora synagogues). While he did not think it advisable to stop halukkah for the old and infirm, Montagu preferred the residents to help themselves more, and was against Montefiore’s support of those engaged solely in talmudic study. Oren claims that as a consequence of these views the rabbis placed a cherem (excommunication) on him, but there is no evidence for Oren’s assertion. There was, however, a major controversy some five years later which involved Montagu. In April 1880 Nathaniel de Rothschild and Montagu purchased a house in Jerusalem for conversion into a secular school, and the local journal Ha-Bazeleth reported on the news being received ‘with great jealousy and indignation by certain parties in Jerusalem opposed to the extension of secular instruction and who see the probable success of the new venture [as] a blow to the halukkah which is the bane of the Jews of Jerusalem’. So opposed were some Orthodox groups to the proposed school that a cherem was issued against those believed to be the main promoters of the scheme. Apparently, this was a renewal of one which had been made some years previously; but Montagu could not have been subjected to this punishment. A letter written by 20 heads of Collelim (rabbinical colleges for married students) and endorsed by the two leading rabbis in the city (one, the Chief Rabbi who held office for 60 years) was sent to Rothschild and Montagu. In it the rabbis pleaded with the two men not to allow such a school to be
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established in Jerusalem, where pupils would be taught ‘different languages through which [Rothschild and Montagu] imagine that the youth of our people will thereby attain high success’, because ‘these foreign studies [will] bring in their wings a terrible disaster whose products become sinners and very evil’.11 This letter was addressed in very flowery but highly respectful language, and it is inconceivable that the rabbis would have used such language if a cherem had, in fact, been issued against Montagu.

Montagu’s 1875 report was actually rejected by the Testimonial Committee.12 It aroused a storm of protest in Jerusalem, and an opposing memorandum was written by two leading Jerusalem rabbis who challenged Montagu’s findings and recommendations point by point.13 His comments on halukkah were especially objected to. For the record, it is worth noting that, ten years later in July 1885, Delegate Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler told a colonization meeting that ‘the present system of distributing the halukkah is a disgrace to the Jewish body’, and urged reform.14 All this demonstrates that Montagu was sympathetic to the settlers in Palestine at this period and that he believed there was genuine scope for improving their conditions; but some 28 years later he was contradicting this view, saying that he had never believed that Jews could successfully settle into forms of agriculture. During his visit, Montagu did buy some land there which his daughter claimed was his way of ‘preparing for the arrival of the Messiah’,15 but he must have lost faith because he sold the land in 1891 although he donated the sale proceeds to Hovevei Zion funds.16 The representations from the Jerusalem rabbis failed to stop the establishment of a school, which was called the Baron Lionel de Rothschild industrial school, and Montagu did, subsequently, take some interest in its progress.17 His view of Zionism, however, seems to have changed as it started to become attractive to the Jewish lower classes. His younger son Edwin inherited his dislike of Zionism and, of course, went very much further.

There were societies supporting Jewish colonization in Palestine founded by Jews and non-Jews in London in the 1860s,18 but fully-Jewish Hovevei Zion societies sprang up in Britain soon after the movement’s birth in Russia in 1882. There was a fair measure of support in Britain for colonization of the Holy Land before Herzl. Initially, Hovevei Zion branches were opened in Tredegar in South Wales, Leeds and Manchester,19 but the movement quickly spread to London. An early Hibbat Zion (Love of Zion) pioneer, David Gordon, who was editor of the Russian Hebrew journal Ha-Maggid for many years, criticized Montagu’s lack of Zionist endeavour: ‘I know that Mr Montagu is no longer [associated] with the idea of Eretz Israel with all his heart and soul, [for if he was] he himself would stand at the head of the group [in England]’ he wrote.20 After the Kattowitz conference of Hovevei Zion in 1884, a branch of the society called Lamaskereth Moshe was established in London, on Christmas Day 1884,21 which had, as its main objective, action together with the central committee in Berlin for cooperating with a Russian society of that same name. Montagu was not present at the
initial meeting when 40 members were enrolled, but Gordon’s criticism may have had the desired effect because he became its treasurer shortly after. His association with the Hovevei Zion movement is a difficult one to unravel, and he changed his public stance on a number of occasions. At that particular time he was seeking the Liberal nomination for the Whitechapel parliamentary constituency which he gained soon afterwards. In view of his later public statements, one can, perhaps, speculate on whether his support for colonization of the Holy Land was taken for political reasons or through genuine sincerity on the issue. Montagu does, however, appear to have taken his membership of Lamaskereth Moshe with some seriousness, because he arranged for the Christian-Zionist Laurence Oli-phant to advise the society on colonization problems, and he also persuaded the society to support the new colony at Petah Tikvah which had been set up by Hovevei Zionists from Eastern Europe. Lamaskereth Moshe, however, seems to have become inactive soon afterwards, by which time Montagu was busy nursing the electors of Whitechapel. He was successful at the November 1885 general election and became Liberal MP. When he visited Russia in 1886 on behalf of the Russo-Jewish Committee, Montagu met a leading Russian Hovevei Zionist, Rabbi Samuel Mohilever of Bialystok, who tried to win him over to his cause, but a number of years were to elapse before Montagu showed any further interest in colonization in Palestine.

There are a number of curiosities about Montagu’s involvement with Hovevei Zion, one of which is that, from the time of his membership of Lamaskereth Moshe in 1885 until April 1891, he does not appear to have spoken publicly about Jewish colonization in Palestine. Hovevei Zion was not very active in Britain from the demise of Lamaskereth Moshe until early in 1890, but then a society called the ‘Hovevei Zion Association for the Colonization of Palestine’ was formed, motivated by the arrival in London from Russia of the renowned ‘Kamenitzer’ maggid, Rabbi Chaim Zundel Maccoby. Maccoby, a vigorous proponent of Hovevei Zionism, had been forced to leave Russia because he had incurred the wrath of many rabbis as well as that of the Russian authorities. Soon after his arrival he addressed a meeting of the Kadimah society, a society formed in 1887 with the objectives both of promoting the Jewish national idea and of founding and maintaining colonies in Palestine. Maccoby electrified his audience to such an extent that Hovevei Zion was re-founded, and within three months it boasted 300 members, ‘the majority of them well-known in their respective spheres for their learning or for services rendered to the community’. The association did, however, complain that it was being ‘cold-shouldered by our richer brethren’. Was Montagu one of these brethren? It was anxious to quit the Anglo-Jewish Association from criticism, and this was an organization to which Montagu generally showed antagonism. (The Anglo-Jewish Association’s president, Sir Julian Goldsmid, positively supported the colonization movement.) Montagu was certainly not at this time a member of the movement. Many Hovevei Zion meetings were held and
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an important one in June 1890 was presided over by Joseph Sebag-Montefiore. This meeting was recognized as a special event, and there was such a large attendance that police were needed to keep the crowd under control. Benjamin Cohen, Board of Guardians President and a future Conservative MP, Leopold de Rothschild and Revd Simeon Singer all sent their apologies, but Montagu’s name was not mentioned. Sebag-Montefiore said he was honoured to be asked to preside; it was the first time he had associated himself with Hovevei Zion and he admitted he knew little about the society. It was quite common then for eminent (and usually wealthy) men to be invited to preside over such public gatherings, but in view of Montagu’s position as the leading East End lay Jewish leader and his previous involvement with Hovevei Zion, it might have been expected that he would have been invited ahead of Sebag-Montefiore. Was he then seen as one who did not support the colonization movement, or had he turned down an offer to preside? Stuart Cohen in his book English Zionists and British Jews notes that Montagu attended the 1890 meeting at which the Hovevei Zion central organization was established in Britain, and that he was there with Lord Rothschild and Sir Benjamin Cohen as well as Delegate Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler and Haham Moses Gaster. But Cohen is wrong and must have been referring to the one presided over by Sebag-Montefiore. That Benjamin Cohen, who was no Zionist sympathizer, felt it necessary to apologize for not attending suggests that the meeting was seen as an important communal event. Hovevei Zion grew in popularity and had over 1100 members by the following September and 1300 four months later. Two years later the East End branch (or ‘tent’ as it was called) of Hovevei Zion comprised a membership of 1500.

By the beginning of 1891 a number of leading figures were expressing sympathy for Jewish colonization of Palestine. Montagu’s first excursion into the debate, after a long absence, came in April 1891 when he addressed a Federation of Synagogues meeting and expressed strong reservations on colonization in Palestine. He did not want ‘to dampen the ardour of the thousands who favoured the movement’; their motives were well intentioned, but he believed the Hovevei Zion plan was not a practical one. Some day, perhaps, it might be possible for large numbers of Russian Jews to settle in Palestine, but he would ‘be sorry to see . . . any persons . . . putting their hard-earned savings into the project’, and as a practical man he could not support a scheme until it was, in fact, practical. He pleaded with the Jewish community not to split, which suggests that there had been some discord. This point about lack of practicability was to be repeated throughout the years.

Matters quickly took a strange turn, however. Hermann Landau, one of Montagu’s close associates – the two men worked together harmoniously in establishing the Federation of Synagogues and subsequently in conducting its affairs – was a Hovevei Zion supporter, and three weeks after Montagu’s Federation speech he spoke at a Hovevei Zion meeting presided over by the lawyer, politician
and Reform Synagogue member, Sir John Simon. A number of communal dignitaries, including Sir Philip Magnus, Sir Francis Montefiore and Colonel Goldsmid, were also present. What Landau said contradicted so much of what Montagu had said that, in view of subsequent events, it would seem that Montagu had decided to change tactics and used Landau to prepare the way. It is difficult to believe that Montagu and Landau would have been completely at odds, in view of their close relationship. Landau said things in praise of Reform which were, from a traditionally Orthodox standpoint, heretical: ‘Some people ridiculed the [Hovevei Zion] movement because it could only be by some miracle that Jews could return to Palestine’, but ‘[it was] an age of miracles’. Landau then went on to compliment the ‘lights of the Reform Congregation’ who taught the Orthodox community how to make the return of Jews to Palestine practicable, and to say that it was ‘a miracle that the ultra-orthodox and ultra-reform should combine on one platform for a common religious movement’.37 A few years hence, such talk would be almost seditious.

Then, three weeks later, in May, Montagu appeared on the Hovevei Zion platform at the Great Assembly Hall in Mile End – in fact he presided. He was greeted with ‘loud and continuous applause’ when he expressed great sympathy with Hovevei Zion.38 ‘There were, he said, many reasons why Russian Jews should not emigrate to Britain, and he believed that Jews forced to leave Russia should be allowed into countries with adequate space for them, so that wherever possible they could work on the land. He had seen Jews doing this successfully in the United States, and he had ‘always preferred Russian Jews to emigrate to the West than to the East, to the United States and Canada rather than to Palestine’ because Jews could settle freely in the New World. His 1875 visit to the Holy Land had not impressed him on its agricultural possibilities, although he did admit that prospects there might have improved. He justified his support now for Hovevei Zion, despite this view on emigration, because he could see that ‘many considered it a religious duty and privilege to cultivate with their own hands the soil of the Holy Land’, and in any case, any refuge was welcome. Since Arabs were also descended from Abraham, with religion, customs and language ‘nearly akin to those of the Hebrews’, it was better for Jews ‘to be under Ishmael rather than Esau, to live with Arabs rather than persecuting Russians’. Arabs, too, practised circumcision and ate kosher meat. Montagu was evidently trying to have it both ways. While supporting emigration to North America, he was careful to draw favourable comparisons between Arabs and Jews, at least to allow Palestine to be looked at differently from Czarist Russia as a potential Jewish home. He did emphasize that colonization in Palestine would not be easy and he drew attention to the potential financial problems, but he certainly impressed his listeners on his ‘conversion’ to Zionism. The meeting, which was said to be ‘the largest Jewish meeting ever held in Britain’ with 4,000 present,39 was primarily arranged to publicize a petition to be sent to the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, asking the
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Government to use its good offices, with those of other Great Powers, to press the Russian Government to allow its Jewish citizens to leave the country unhindered, and to appeal to the Turkish Government to allow Jews to buy land in Palestine for settlement. The second part of the resolution was based on a suggestion of Landau's at the beginning of the year, that Hovevei Zion should seek permission from the Sultan for Jewish emigration into Palestine.34 In view of Montagu's well-known views on Turkey, which were later forcibly aired, it is odd that he went along with Landau on this. He gave the impression that it was he who was mainly responsible for organizing the meeting, and claimed he had asked both Lord Rothschild and Baron Hirsch for their advice before calling it. At a later date he said that the petition had been signed in large numbers by foreign Jews anxious to leave the East End for Palestine,40 but the meeting report provides no indication that this was so.

Why did Montagu suddenly make this volte-face? He certainly planned his move towards Hovevei Zion carefully, if rapidly, because he wrote a letter to Hovevei Zion's secretary S. A. Hirsch on 20 May 1891: 'I wanted to remind you of our appointment at Cohn's Restaurant 101 Hatton Garden at 7 o'clock Saturday for dinner. I need hardly impress you again not to allow anything to be published about the petitions or anything besides the ordinary announcement of the meetings of your society.'41 This letter was written only three days before the East End meeting, and the dinner at the restaurant was to take place on a Sabbath just prior to the meeting. This suggests he was very anxious to see Hirsch to discuss (or more likely lay down) strategy, as well as to impress on Hirsch the need for secrecy. Why he felt the latter was important is difficult to understand, unless it was to ensure that he could make a strong personal impact on the audience. But there was not in fact a great deal in his speech to demonstrate support for colonization of Palestine. Suddenly, Montagu found that Hovevei Zion did have a competent programme – he emphasized that he had refrained from supporting it until it did have some practical plans – and yet Hovevei Zion's policy had not altered within the six weeks or so during which he had apparently changed his position. There could, however, have been local political reasons for his conversion. The next general election was imminent, although it was in fact delayed until July 1892, and he may have been worried about the effect non-Zionist views would have on the Jewish voters of Whitechapel who were now most enthusiastic about Zionism. Gutwein has suggested that Montagu may have changed his position on Hovevei Zion following massive expulsions of Jews from Moscow, and that he saw the circumstances created by these expulsions as allowing him to turn Hovevei Zion into a political asset,42 but there is no evidence that the expulsions were a prime factor in his joining Hovevei Zion. An imperial ukase was issued in April 1891 expelling all 30,000 Jews from the city,43 and many were subjected to savage treatment by the Russian authorities. Montagu drew Gladstone’s attention to newspaper reports,44 but the expulsions were not
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mentioned in his Hovevei Zion speech. Gutwein’s other theory, that in joining Hovevei Zion Montagu was motivated by a dual threat from Lord Rothschild and from Hovevei Zion to his own position in the Jewish leadership, is much more credible. Montagu, furthermore, used the Zionist card in his 1892 election address, making it clear that the Salisbury petition was his idea. He told the electors that he would ‘renew his efforts with the next Liberal Foreign Secretary to press the Turks to allow land colonization in Palestine’.40

Hovevei Zion must now have seen Montagu as a real ‘catch’, and it moved quickly to capitalize on this. Elim D’Avigdor, who became Hovevei Zion’s leader, recruited Montagu to the movement and also prevailed on him to become Chief (sic) Treasurer in July 1891. This must have been a titular appointment, because Montagu accepted office on the basis that he would not be asked to do any work.46 While all other Hovevei Zion office-holders were members of the movement’s Executive Committee, Montagu was not. He was, however, also elected as one of eighteen delegates from the East End ‘tent’ to the HQ ‘tent’ of Hovevei Zion, but he does not appear to have been an officer of his own ‘tent’. Montagu’s involvement with Hovevei Zion from the restart of the relationship was very tenuous, and it is much more likely that local political factors motivated his ‘conversion’. There is nothing in his record to account for this on intellectual grounds. We shall see shortly that he was courted by Theodor Herzl, but that this courtship did not last long.

D’Avigdor must have sent Montagu some Hovevei Zion plans because a few weeks after the big East End meeting he wrote to D’Avigdor:

Almost the whole of the enclosed programme is well considered and satisfactory. I fear, however, that no large financial support will be given unless our Government can decide upon promoting colonization in Palestine. Pending their final decision would it not be wise to form an agricultural school to test the capabilities of introducing Jewish colonists? Mr Landau had some plan of farming in Essex with Russian-Jewish labour [and] we were successful in teaching a dozen Jews farming in Aylesbury but this course might be adopted systematically . . . I may be able to help your society financially but doubt if Lord Rothschild would be inclined to give for Palestine colonization unless Lord Salisbury gives satisfactory encouragement to the schemes.48

Montagu’s use of the term ‘your society’ suggests that, despite the apparent enthusiasm shown at the East End meeting, he did not see himself as an activist. He was essentially a sleeping member of the organization. He did claim he worked for Hovevei Zion, but the record shows he did little on its behalf.

Communal dignitaries often attended Hovevei Zion meetings held in London (mostly in the East End) in 1891 and 1892, but rarely was Montagu present. One observer later claimed that Montagu had given serious thought to resigning because progress was slow and because Jews were withholding support from the movement, but if this was so, the personal lack of enthusiasm of such a leading
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Jew would not have helped the movement to expand. When he did attend a meeting (he presided), he expressed disappointment that the petition sent via Salisbury to the Sultan was ineffective. The Sultan, he said, was ‘afraid of Russia’. At this meeting he announced that 2,400 acres of land in Palestine had been purchased and that it was intended to make a start there. He personally offered the Society some 20 acres of land near London in order to establish an agricultural training school, but this could have been identical to the offer he had announced a few months earlier of 20 acres of land at Edmonton, rent-free for seven years as a market-gardening training school for Russian Jews. No mention had been made then of the country of destination of the trainees. There must have been doubts about Montagu’s genuine support for colonization and agricultural work, because in November 1892, at a very well-attended meeting, he had to defend himself with a ‘slight explanation’ of his position. He claimed full sympathy with Hovevei Zion’s objectives and said he would ‘yield to no-one in his appreciative regard for the Holy Land. Nothing would delight him more than to know that a multitude of Jews were happy and prosperous cultivating the soil of Palestine and endeavouring to make that land flow again with milk and honey as in former times.’ He went on to explain the difficulties Jews faced in entering into and being accepted by host countries, and he continued: ‘The best solution . . . was in cultivation of land. Whether the soil was in North or South America or in Palestine, there was no doubt that the Jew in following agricultural pursuits would not cause jealousy nor create dissatisfaction.’ There were many problems, but the chief one was ‘the hostile attitude taken up by the Turkish Government who would not allow them in any numbers to emigrate . . . Until that difficulty was overcome, he did not see how they could undertake much.’ He then emphasized his support for Hovevei Zion by saying that the movement ‘was not an idle dream but a practical proposal by earnest and practical men’, but he undermined this by following up these words with the impracticable suggestion that the Turks should be requested to allow able-bodied Jews into Palestine with a promise of freedom from taxation for seven years. Once they had become consolidated, this privilege should be extended to others. He then repeated his previous comment about Ishmael and the Arabs. The meeting took up Montagu’s suggestion of sending another petition to the Sultan, and one asking for Jews to be allowed to buy land for settlement and development on the east side of the Jordan was passed by him to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Roseberry, for transmission to Turkey. Montagu gave details of this petition at an East End meeting, thereby fulfilling his 1892 election promise. When Montagu first met Herzl he told him that he had petitioned the Turkish Sultan to grant 250,000 acres east of the Jordan for Jewish colonization, and that although Gladstone supported the plan it had been ‘pencilled out of existence’ by Lord Rothschild. The petition in fact referred to ‘the portions of land’ and was signed by the members of the Executive Committee (of which he was not a member) as well as the commanders and secretaries of
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each Hovevei Zion ‘tent’, and he was being deceitful in suggesting otherwise. Montagu resigned as Hovevei Zion Chief Treasurer in May 1895 soon after D’Avigdor’s death; and this seems to have ended his direct association with the movement, although as late as December 1897 he received good wishes from Hovevei Zion on the marriage of one of his children,57 which suggests that Hovevei Zion was anxious to maintain some links with him. It is worth noting that his resignation was not recorded in Palestina, Hovevei Zion’s quarterly journal, and the only indication given to members that he had departed was when the list of officers published in the next issue of the journal named the new treasurer.58 His election address later that year stated that he ‘continues [his] exertions in diverting as far as is practicable the stream of foreigners to those places which are more suitable for them than this crowded country’.59 There was no suggestion that Palestine should be one of these places.

The story of Montagu’s Hovevei Zionism is not a simple one, and the man was inconsistent in his views and actions. At times he did favour the Zionist cause. One of these related to the Federation of Synagogues during his Hovevei Zion phase. When the Federation’s Minister, Rabbi Mayer Lerner, returned to Europe in 1894, Montagu appointed Rabbi Maccoby in his place in the knowledge that Maccoby would continue his colonization work.60 Lerner also had supported Hovevei Zion. As it happens, Maccoby like Montagu became a strong opponent of Herzlian Zionism. Montagu also showed some sympathy for the Zionist movement when he sent Gladstone a copy of Herzl’s The Jewish State soon after its publication. There were, of course, important differences between Hovevei Zion and Herzl. The former’s main aim was to settle Jews in Palestine under Turkish rule where they would work on the land, whereas Herzl headed a political movement which wanted to win a sovereign country for the settlers. That the Hovevei Zion movement was non-political should have met with Montagu’s approval, but most of the time he said that the movement’s objectives were impractical. One important piece of evidence comes from a speech he made in 1903, which points to the fact that his heart was never in the colonization movement and which goes much further in showing his hypocrisy on the issue. Montagu stated that his opinion that Jews would not, in large numbers, take to agriculture in Palestine was unchanged from the time of his 1875 visit to Palestine – so it appears he never had much sympathy for the well-known position of Hovevei Zion all the way through his association with that movement. It suggests also that his offer of land for training potential settlers in Palestine was made from motives which were far from sincere.

Theodor Herzl’s diaries make it clear that at first he had a high regard for Montagu. Montagu was not one of those Jews Herzl was advised to see when he first came to England. Zangwill gave him some names but Montagu was not one of them; and it was Chief Rabbi Adler who suggested he see Montagu.61 Herzl’s second diary entry on Montagu refers to him as a ‘splendid old chap, the best
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Jew I have met thus far,3 (Montagu was in his early 60s!) and his manner later was said to be an ‘at your service’ one which gave Herzl the feeling that he was succeeding in the East End.62 The two men first met in 1895 in Montagu’s office in the City, where the Zionist leader was ‘sandwiched between two brokers’. Montagu told him that he (Montagu) was no longer fit for a big undertaking,61 but two days later at Montagu’s home for lunch, where ‘kosher food was served by three liveried footmen’, he said he was ready to join Herzl’s organization as soon as one of the Great Powers took the matter seriously.3 He also said that he believed the Turkish Sultan would accept an offer of £2 million for Palestine,63 but Herzl in his diary wrote that he and his associates were thinking of a sum ten times larger.64 This in itself suggests that Montagu, the shrewd financier, could not have been thinking very carefully or seriously about the issues involved. Herzl’s plans included going to Constantinople to see the Sultan; he was anxious to have Montagu’s financial expertise with him and he therefore tried to court him. The Revd Simeon Singer, Minister of the New West End Synagogue and a committed Herzl supporter, advised Herzl that Montagu was unwilling to come forward in support because he believed the impetus should come from Germany, Austria or Russia, the countries with most Jews, and that he would be persona non grata because of Britain’s poor relationship with Turkey. Montagu’s opinion was that ‘Turkish suspicion is invincible; a settlement in Palestine will only be possible when the division of Turkey is resolved upon by the Powers’.65 For some reason Herzl was reluctant to speak to Montagu directly. He said he was unable to express himself well enough in English and ‘clarity is important’, but this so-called lack of proficiency in the language had not deterred him with others. He wrote to Singer: ‘Have a serious talk with Montagu, for our cause is an exalted and serious one. In him I see a suitable force for part of our task. No material sacrifices of any kind are being asked of him; he need not give a penny’. But ‘if he does not want to participate we shall simply get along without him’.66 Montagu told Singer that he ‘dare not officially associate himself with a matter which is more or less abstract’ (Shades of Hovevei Zion!). He was willing ‘to answer any concrete question of finance . . . and . . . help in putting the advanced scheme on a sound basis’.67 When Herzl saw the Turkish Grand Vizier, he told him that Montagu would submit a financial programme if the Sultan was prepared to consider selling land to the Zionists.68 In actual fact Montagu had agreed no such thing and Herzl took a big risk in saying this, although Herzl later assured Nordau that Montagu had ‘in absolute privacy’ finally agreed conditionally to this proposal.69 Montagu’s first concern when Herzl reported back on this trip was that the Sultan might ‘kick the immigrants’ once he had the ‘Jewish tribute loan’.70 He did, however, tell Herzl that the Hirsch Foundation was sitting on a lot of money and that it might be possible to wean a large sum from it. Montagu assured Herzl he would support him on three conditions – that the Great Powers consented, the Hirsch Fund gave its liquid capital estimated at £10 million, and Edmond de Rothschild
in Paris was won over.\textsuperscript{62} As he was about to cross the English Channel to visit Edmond de Rothschild, Herzl summed up his English trip by writing that Montagu’s conditional promise to join with him satisfied him for the present.\textsuperscript{62} But despite this, he was still uncertain of Montagu’s support and was worried at the impression this would make in Constantinople.\textsuperscript{71}

Herzl was without doubt deceived by Montagu’s charm. The whole tenor of Montagu’s remarks suggests ambivalence. Would such a powerful and domineering man have insisted on participation in the land-purchase deal only if Rothschild and Hirsch acquiesced? Did Montagu deliberately propose a low monetary offer to the Turks because he knew this would be dismissed out of hand? And what about his excuse about his not being physically fit? His health until his last years was remarkable and he took on a number of key commitments in later years. At this distance of time it is of course not possible to judge Montagu’s intentions accurately, but his nephew Herbert (later Viscount) Samuel believed that Montagu had decided to ‘stay aloof’ on Zionism.\textsuperscript{72}

Despite his reservations, Herzl still was impressed with Montagu, and in his diary describes in some detail his reception in the House of Commons. After being told of the Turkish negotiations, Montagu became enthusiastic and he was a ‘splendid old fellow’.\textsuperscript{73} Five days after this came Herzl’s renowned introduction to the East End when he addressed a public meeting in the Jewish Workingmen’s Club in Aldgate. As the leading figure in the Jewish East End, Montagu was asked to preside, but he adamantly refused saying it was premature and would incite the masses. Herzl replied that although he did not want a demagogic movement, ‘if the worst came to the worst – if the aristocrats proved too aristocratic – I would set the masses in motion too’.\textsuperscript{74} It was during this visit to London that Herzl addressed the Maccabees group of intellectuals and suggested his ‘Society of Jews’ which became the prototype of the World Zionist Organization. He offered to submit all documents relating to his discussions in Turkey and elsewhere to the Society, which would then take it on itself to acquire, using the procedures of international law, land for settlement by Jews who were unable to assimilate themselves in Europe.\textsuperscript{75} For this purpose he proposed a committee of distinguished Jews which was to include Montagu.\textsuperscript{76} Herzl realized he had a problem with Montagu, but he believed he needed him and therefore had to handle him carefully.\textsuperscript{77} Soon afterwards news came from Turkey that the Sultan was prepared to consider proposals. Herzl’s scheme involved an offer of £20 million as a loan, in return for which Jews would be allowed to return to the Holy Land. They would have autonomy, but an annual tribute would be paid to the Sultan. Herzl’s intention was to write to Montagu to give him this information and to plead with him to join him in Constantinople to negotiate a deal. ‘Consider well, Sir Samuel, in what a historically memorable situation you now find yourself! Understand the full greatness of the task which is confronting you! Be the man we need!’\textsuperscript{78} In the meantime, however, an Armenian bomb attack on the Ottoman
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Bank followed by some changes in his journalistic assignments forced Herzl to pause, and the letter was never sent. Montagu was spared a decision, but Herzl did claim that Montagu approved his plan.79

Herzl invited Montagu to attend the historic first Zionist Congress in Basel in August 1897, and this gave Montagu his opportunity to call it a day. He wrote to Herzl:

I fear I must disappoint you. I cannot attend the Conference for reasons I gave you when you honoured me with a visit. I do not think you should act internationally on political matters. I do not think that Jews can be established in Palestine excepting by the voluntary combination of the great powers or by some leader who would command the confidence of the Jewish race. I would not like to see a very large number of Jews placed under Turkish rule at the present time. I send you herewith my portrait. I will also post you an old biography but I see no necessity for troubling you in the matter. I am glad to notice that the condition of the Jews in Russia is slightly better.80

This was more or less the end of whatever relationship existed between the two men. The letter showed Montagu’s interest in Zionism to have always been slight – if that – and there had never been any sympathy for political Zionism. One consistent feature of Montagu’s position was his view on Turkey, made clear in this letter and well known by the English Zionists. How he could have reconciled any attachment to Hovevei Zion with these views is a puzzle, and it does point to the conclusion that his association with Hovevei Zion was a somewhat insincere one. His comment on needing a commanding leader was also a slap in the face for Herzl. The break with Herzl would have come as no surprise to some observers. A year earlier Zangwill, who was certainly no admirer of Montagu, had rumbled him. At a meeting in the East End he had made a veiled attack on Montagu: after an innocuous remark specifically about Montagu, he criticized the fact that ‘we are supposed to pray three times a day for the return of Jerusalem but, as soon as we say we want to go back, we are accused of blasphemy’.81 This attack may also have been directed at religious leaders, but the juxtaposition of an irrelevant comment about Montagu does point to Montagu as his major target. Some time after this Montagu prepared the ground for an attack on what he called ‘political Zionism’, when he arranged a meeting of communal dignitaries to consider the issue,82 although what came out of this conference is unclear. This may have been linked to a plan to involve Hovevei Zion in countering political Zionism. A letter from Singer on 1 November 1898 to Hirsch reads: ‘I saw Sir S. M. yesterday, he had previously seen Col. Goldsmid. He wants a meeting . . . to consider the question of Political Zionism. Kindly consider this as your invitation. I hope we shall come to some practical conclusions.’83 Singer’s involvement is curious in view of his strong support for Herzl.

By 1898 things had turned sour between Herzl and Montagu. Herzl attacked Montagu at a mass meeting in the East End, and Hermann Landau, ‘an ugly
Mauscher (as Herzl described him), tried to defend Montagu and there was a nasty scene.\textsuperscript{84} Herzl complained to his diary that he was abused by Landau on orders from ‘other scoundrels like Montagu and Rabbi Adler’.\textsuperscript{85} In the speech, Herzl had criticized some bankers who only dealt with things practical and who regarded Zionists as ‘something despicable’ and ‘dreamers of dreams’.\textsuperscript{86} Herzl was clearly referring to Montagu. As the meeting was breaking up, Landau was allowed to speak. He said he himself was ‘willing to go to Palestine if land was available’ and that ‘Montagu agreed with him’.\textsuperscript{87} He went on to criticize the ‘lack of Torah’, an interesting contrast to his praise of Reform Jewry a few years earlier. There were, incidentally, a number of religious dignitaries at this meeting, including Rabbi Werner of the ultra-Orthodox Machzike Hadath, and it was presided over by Haham Gaster. Montagu himself counterattacked three weeks later when he addressed the Board of the Federation of Synagogues (many of his statements on Zionism were made at Federation meetings). He said that he believed Herzl was a ‘thoroughly honourable and disinterested man and the Zionist movement served a good purpose inasmuch as it had revived and fostered the desire that lay dormant in the hearts of all Jews’.\textsuperscript{88} He told the Board of the letter he had sent Herzl when he had opted out from helping him, and he emphasized his concern that there had been no ‘religious spirit’ in speeches delivered at the Herzl meeting; in his opinion ‘a Zionist movement without a religious influence would be disastrous’ and he ‘could not attach himself to it’. Montagu was very critical of Haham Gaster and others who could acknowledge a leader who was ‘even less observant than Reform’. Montagu showed his utter contempt for the proposed Bank, which would do incalculable harm to the Jewish community; its idea was absolutely repugnant to him. He even brought in Roman Catholicism, referring both to the Pope, whom he accused of resenting the Zionist movement, and to French Jesuits, whose antipathy to Jews could partly be attributed to Zionism. Montagu added that ‘without the assurance of neutrality and without the protection of the Great Powers, the mere idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine was madness in the extreme’. He urged the Federation to ‘use its influence to prevent the poor Jews in the East End from becoming involved in this ill-judged scheme of political Zionism and especially from taking shares in the Jewish bank’. Although not mentioning Montagu by name, Herzl responded to him at a meeting some months later in London. ‘[It was] here in London at a public gathering that a gentleman with whom I have not intimate acquaintance but who . . . had more to do with money matters than I have gave expression to the thought that we [are robbing] the pockets of the poor . . . May I ask whether he meant that every financial undertaking spells robbery?\textsuperscript{89}’ The Jewish Colonial Trust, which was the initial financial instrument of the Zionist Organization, was registered in London in March 1899 with a capital of £2 million and it became important to the movement. Herzl started thinking of this bank in 1897 and naturally tried to involve Montagu, but Montagu was vigorously against the idea. Asked once whether Montagu was
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supporting it, Herzl replied in the negative and added: 'If one day we take revenge on the big bankers, it will be well deserved'.

Herzl did not, however, give up hope of using Montagu despite these unpleasant public quarrels. Early in 1900 he was receiving information from England that the activities of the Trust (Bank) were in some disarray and he decided he ought to go to London to investigate. There was some correspondence with his English associates; and one letter, from Sir Francis Montefiore, is of particular significance:

With regard to [the] conference you suggest, my colleagues think it would be as well to wait until you arrive in London . . . [I believe] that such a conference is not desirable because, with the exception of Seligman, the others whom you mention have shown themselves to be so hostile to Zionism that even if they were now to pretend to be favourable to it, I should have doubts as to their motives. Moreover, [Montagu] has always been opposed to the Turkish Government that I fear if his name were openly connected with the Zionist cause it might prejudice the Sultan against us.

Nothing appears to have come of this. Herzl then became so hostile to Montagu that he even mooted the possibility of trying to have him replaced by a Zionist sympathizer as Liberal candidate in Whitechapel at the 1900 general election. Today, this may sound incredible, but such a fanciful idea was in his mind and he was serious about it. He wrote to Joseph Cowan, a leading English Zionist, to suggest Sir Francis Montefiore as Montagu's replacement. 'Sir Francis Montefiore must be elected for the House of Commons in the East End instead of Sir Samuel Montagu. Zion expects every man to do his duty. If Sir Francis is not willing you [i.e. Cowan] must be elected.' Montagu, however, was already giving up his Whitechapel seat in favour of his nephew, Stuart Samuel, probably because he felt he was likely to lose it anyway because his majorities had steadily fallen. By now Montagu's views were being openly criticized and the Jewish Chronicle reported that if Montagu stood at Whitechapel 'some Jewish electors who are Zionists will abstain because [he] is an anti-Zionist'. It noted also that the (non-Jewish) Conservative was ostentatiously in favour of Zionism. In fact Montagu gave old age as his reason for abandoning Whitechapel, saying it was becoming impossible for him to climb five- and six-storeyed tenement blocks to attend to his constituents' needs! He was then prevailed on to challenge Gerald Balfour, Arthur's brother, in Leeds Central, presumably because of its sizeable Jewish vote, but he was badly beaten and Balfour almost doubled his Conservative majority. The 1900 general election saw some lobbying, for the first time, by Zionists. The English Zionist Federation, not without criticism from some Jews, sent a letter to all Parliamentary candidates asking for their views on Zionism and assured those who said they supported the Zionist aim that 'our friends in the constituency you seek to represent would be advised to give you all the support they can'. All 114 replies were, unsurprisingly, in favour, and 45 of those replying
won seats; but neither Balfour nor Montagu replied to the letter. In this election Montagu initially referred to his sympathy for Zionism, pointing out that ‘he had sought to divert the stream of immigrants [away] from [Britain] . . . [and aiding] the Zionist movement’.97 He also reminded the electors of the petition delivered to Lord Salisbury which he claimed to have organized, but his actual election address made no reference to Zionism.98

Montagu’s antipathy to Zionism was now firmly in the open. Just before the election, the Conservative Yorkshire Post carried an article:

The hopeless position in which Sir Samuel Montagu found himself at Whitechapel arose in Parliament from the decided stand he made against the Zionist movement . . . The only hope . . . of retaining his seat was his being heartily supported by his co-religionists but he was assured the Jewish population would not do. The East End Zionists are strong in number and influence and they have determined to make their influence felt in the general election . . . Sir Samuel Montagu was so averse to the movement that he was informed by the Zionists they would keep away from the poll in hundreds.99

Before the election, a Leeds Zionist delegation called on him to solicit his views and his response was ambivalent. He told them that while he was a ‘biblical Zionist quite prepared to return to Zion and end his days there if by doing so he thought he could be of service to the Jewish people’, the land of Palestine did present many natural disadvantages which would stop many Jews from settling there. But he was prepared to support any scheme for colonization which was practical – even though he was doubtful that it would succeed in the face of the Turkish attitude towards Jews.100 After his defeat in Leeds his distaste for political Zionism was made absolutely clear. ‘For a Jew to espouse political Zionism rendered him unfit to be a member of the British Parliament and he personally would neither work nor vote for a Jewish candidate who professed to being such a Zionist’. He believed Zionists were ‘dreaming a beautiful dream’ but he urged them to wake up before it became a nightmare. Zionism was making a ‘laughing stock of this country’ and he was so disgusted and contemptuous of the tactics used by the Zionists that he would not want a ‘single vote from [any] man who was prepared either to give or withhold it on a Zionist issue’. Zionists were urged to refrain from heckling parliamentary candidates, because it would ‘reflect discredit and possibly bring trouble on the loyal and patriotic Jews of England’.100 These latter comments may well have been motivated by his experience of fighting Leeds Central, but more explicitly than anything else he had written or said they show where his sympathies did not lie. He was very severe on the Zionist movement and of Francis Montefiore in particular for having ‘levelled the Zionist pistol’ at the heads of candidates, which led to some verbal exchanges. Firstly, Leopold Greenberg questioned Montagu’s consistency in not wanting Zionist votes in London but wanting them in Leeds. He asked Montagu whether:
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he did not feel it inconsistent with his work on behalf of our people and his professions as a 'biblical Zionist', whatsoever that might mean, merely to stand outside the Zionist movement and criticize. If he was anxious to see that movement shape itself rightly to right ends, why in the name of all that was sacred did not Sir Samuel come over and help them? If he would do so he would set a fitting crown to a worthy life and by thus living for Zion would do more good for the Jewish people than by, as he had suggested he might, going to Zion for the purpose of ending his days there. Even Sir Samuel would have to concede that Zionism had succeeded for the first time in the history of Judaism since the dispersion in bringing Jews together from all parts of the world. That was a great step for anyone who wished to serve his people. Perhaps Sir Samuel would reply that asking him to come into the movement was one of those dreams which those wretched Zionists were continually indulging in and beg them to pause before it became a nightmare.101

Sir Francis commented that Montagu was 'not infallible'. He defended the English Zionist Federation decision on lobbying and added: 'When Montagu talked about dangers in the spread of Zionism, he should be more explicit on what he meant. After a month's visit to Palestine, Montagu had said the country was unfit for Jews but others contradicted this view.' He added that 'the great desire of the rich anti-Zionists was to crawl into society under cover of their wealth'.102 Montagu's reply came in the form of a letter to the Jewish Chronicle. He considered it 'presumptuous on the part of observant Jews to think they can anticipate or disregard the prophecies of events which must precede the restoration'.103

Despite all this, however, Herzl still did not give up hope that Montagu would come back and work with him, although he continued to make depreciatory remarks, in 1901 calling him a 'gros légume' and a 'big shot'.104 Further attempts were made to lure Montagu to support the Jewish Trust Company. Isaac Seligman, a London banker, pledged to assemble some wealthy men including Montagu to find £5 million for the Land Company once it received its charter, although Seligman was uncertain of success.105 In March 1902, however, Herzl was telling Reitlinger, a French financier, that although he had his differences with Montagu, the latter had changed his mind and was prepared to help financially.106 Perhaps this was said more in the hope that Reitlinger would pay up than that Montagu had agreed to cooperate. There is no record of Montagu helping. Herzl also pressed De Haas, a member of the Zionist Actions Committee and one of his disciples, to influence Montagu. A letter from Leopold Greenberg is particularly relevant. Herzl was being told that Montagu could still be important to him, and there was some discussion on whether to try to win him over. Greenberg wrote:

I have just seen the letter De Haas has sent you in regard to Montagu. So far as this gentleman is concerned, he is for the most part a benevolent fraud. Nothing he does in the way of charity is done unless the Charity very much begins at home. Still, he has a good deal of influence, and of course is rich... there is just a chance that you can get him to serve our ends in order that he may take a chance away from Rothschild, whom... he hates like the devil does holy water. If you could get him to think that Rothschild
It is remarkable that after all that had transpired, there was still a belief that Montagu could be enlisted to aid the Zionist cause. Israel Zangwill, who was as vehement as any in his criticism of Montagu, even tried to recruit him to the International Council of his Jewish Territorial Organization in 1905. Montagu declined the invitation because, according to Zangwill, he was ‘too old and set in his way’.108

Lily Montagu only once mentioned Herzl’s name in her book (this in itself is significant), and made no reference to Hovevei Zion; but she attempted to justify her father’s attitude by writing that he mistrusted all the Zionist methods because the leaders were unobservant Jews. ‘Without the Messiah there could be no return to Palestine and [he] never wavered in his expectation that the Messiah would come. He often smiled over the fact that he might be considered the founder of the modern Zionist movement since he assured Dr Herzl who at the beginning had a different view that the name “Palestine” would serve as a rallying cry in a Jewish movement.’4 But she also added: ‘His good sense and judgement ... forced him to the conclusion that, pending miraculous intervention, the Jew in Palestine could hope for very little improvement in their position, and it would be a cruelty to increase their numbers to any considerable extent ... He had no sympathy with the political aspect of Zionism, believing it savoured of treachery to the country which gave the Jews hospitality, while it did not satisfy any of his religious aspirations’.15 Only Lily and her father could ever have believed Montagu to be modern Zionism’s founder!

There were personal reasons which eventually led to the break between Herzl and Montagu. Two such individuals could never have had an easy relationship, although to be fair to Herzl he did try, but religion was also an important factor. Herzl was a secular Jew with little religious commitment, whereas Montagu’s Orthodox religious convictions were deeply held. There is no doubt that Herzl offended Montagu’s religious scruples when he wrote him a postcard on a Sabbath day, and this may well have been the reason for Herzl’s diffidence in speaking to Montagu personally on the Turkish financial project. Joseph Fraenkel’s remark is worth noting: ‘The pious Samuel Montagu could have achieved the immortal stature of David Wolffson in Zionist history had he ever been able to forgive Herzl for having sent the ill-starred Sabbath card. And others followed Montagu when he turned away from Herzl.’109 Herzl could surely never have persuaded Montagu to help him significantly as the latter’s support for Zionism was shallow. The Zionist card was used only when it suited him. The man was always suspicious and hostile to non-believers, and yet he asked the 1891 Hovevei Zion meeting to accept that he thought there could be a religious urge to go to Zion,
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even when most of those yearning to make Aliyah did so for quite secular reasons. What, moreover, were his feelings towards Goldsmid, a Reform Jew? He was apparently happy to associate with Hovevei Zion when Goldsmid was an important figure in the movement. On a number of occasions Montagu was telling members of his Federation of Synagogues to stay away from Zionism. He organized a meeting of Federation of Synagogues constituents and of Provincial synagogues, which resulted in the establishment of the Jewish Congregational Union and the Jewish Dispersion Committee, but he made it clear that Zionism would not be on the agenda. ‘No religious question will be discussed and consequently none but laymen will be delegates . . . Zionism being considered a religious question by the vast majority of Jews and a foreign question by others, its discussion will be outside the scope of the conference’ he declared.\textsuperscript{110} This was his personal decision.

Montagu’s Holy Land visit in 1875 was a landmark in his attitude towards Zionism. Although he changed his views in later years, he understood then what was needed to ensure successful settlement, and his support in the founding of an industrial school in Jerusalem in the teeth of rabbinical opposition emphasizes his interest in trying to help settlers make a success of their efforts. It may be that the severe criticisms by the Jerusalem rabbis and the apparent lack of support from most of his Testimonial Committee colleagues affected him deeply and conditioned his later attitude towards Zionism. Things were different during the Hovevei Zion phase. He held the office of ‘Chief Treasurer’ for three years, but this was a titular appointment accepted only on the condition that he would do no work. There is no evidence that he played any significant part in the movement except in lending his name and donating some money to it. There is no proper explanation for his sudden conversion to the aims and objectives of Hovevei Zion in 1891 unless it was for personal and political reasons appertaining to the voters of Whitechapel and to his ambitions for communal leadership. Herzl at first believed that Montagu would be able to help his cause substantially, partly because of his political and communal influence but primarily because of his undisputed financial expertise, but there is nothing in the dealings between the two men that really indicates Montagu ever supported Herzl’s mission. Montagu’s speech after his electoral defeat in 1900 is an absolute declaration of his anti-Zionist views. Why Herzl and his English advisers ever believed that he could still be recruited to help after that speech must remain a mystery.

Montagu sat in the House of Commons for fifteen years, and in that time never uttered any words on the subject of Zionism. He spoke in the Commons only occasionally, and only once, in February 1893, on immigration in a debate on destitute aliens. He referred then to his two visits to Russia and to his visit to the Jewish agricultural settlements in the United States, and said he would welcome any wise measure for emigration or migration, or for diverting the stream (of Jewish immigrants) from Britain; but he made no mention of Jewish colonization
in Palestine. Yet he wrote to correct The Times report of the debate and added that ‘another mode of turning the stream of immigrants and of diminishing the number of aliens here would be by inducing Turkey to allow Russian Jews to become Turkish citizens and colonizing Palestine’. He mentioned that plans were in hand to send a petition on these lines to Lord Rosebery. That he omitted any mention of this petition in the Commons debate suggests that it was put together in a hurry. (Incidentally, Montagu’s speech was made during a Saturday sitting of the House.) He was clearly reluctant to use the phrase ‘Palestinian agricultural colonies’ and he usually, but not always, omitted the location. A good example of this was his letter to Gladstone asking for Russian Jews to be given time to arrange emigration to ‘agricultural colonies’. Gladstone in his reply had no problem referring to the plan ‘for the introduction of Jews into Palestine’.

Bernard Wasserstein’s Herbert Samuel: A Political Life is one of the few books which has examined Montagu’s attitude towards Zionism in a manner other than by a brief comment. Wasserstein, however, gives a quite misleading impression in claiming that Montagu was one of the earliest enthusiasts in Britain for Zionism and he ignores the many points of conflict between Montagu and Herzl and between Montagu and Herzl’s supporters in Britain. Daniel Gutwein’s The Divided Elite is a brave attempt to place Montagu’s role in the Jewish community of his time into context, and especially his relationship with his arch-rival Lord Rothschild. One important factor in all Montagu’s actions was his rivalry with Lord Rothschild for communal leadership. For many years, until 1900, it made him very sensitive to the need to imply he was not against Zionism; he would not have wanted to be upstaged by Rothschild on this. There are a number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Gutwein’s book relating to Montagu’s links with Hovevei Zion, and Gutwein draws conclusions which cannot be supported by the known facts. He places far too much emphasis on these links and relies a great deal on Oren’s Hibbat-Zion in Britain 1878–1898 which is most misleading in the manner in which Montagu’s role in Hovevei Zion is portrayed.

The conclusion must be drawn that Montagu was hypocritical in his attitude to Zionism. While he gave some support to Hovevei Zion, most of his actions point to a distaste for what Zionism as a practical and political force stood for. Montagu’s comment in 1903 that he had always believed Palestine was unsuitable for Jews to work on the land, since he had visited Palestine some twenty-eight years earlier, confirms the hollowness of his support of Hovevei Zion ideals. Until 1900 he was reluctant to come out into the open on this, because of his fear of offending his supporters in the East End who had become enthusiastic for Zionism even before Herzl’s appearance. There is the strange affair of his sudden conversion to Hovevei Zionism in 1891 soon after he had spoken critically of the movement, but all the evidence following his rejection of Herzl’s invitation to the first Zionist Congress, and especially after the 1900 general election, demonstrates incontrovertibly that Montagu was anti-Zionist. Incredibly, Herzl and his British
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supporters still believed he could be recruited to aid their cause even when it became clear that he had discarded whatever sympathies he had possessed for the movement.

Montagu was, of course, a deeply religious Jew and it is easy to accept that he would believe a return to Zion was possible only if led by the Messiah. But it is hard to reconcile this with his statements criticizing or supporting Hovevei Zion and Herzl. The only example on record of his using the Messianic argument was in his *Jewish Chronicle* letter replying to Montefiore and Greenberg. His two addresses of support for Hovevei Zion in May 1891 and November 1892, as well as his comments to Herzl when they first met, were inconsistent with the need for Messianic assistance. His letter of rejection to Herzl in August 1897, his critical speech in 1898 to the Federation of Synagogues and his comments to the Leeds Zionist delegation in 1900 also emphatically contradict Lily Montagu's statement on his Messianic beliefs.

The love for Eretz Israel claimed for him by Lily Montagu did not extend to his last will and testament. His estate was valued at well over a million pounds, and while a number of charities benefited from this great philanthropist's estate, no Zionist undertaking did.\(^{115}\) Do these not also confirm that Montagu's Zionist beliefs were slight or non-existent? Montagu was a great Jew and generous to the underprivileged immigrants who came to Great Britain from Eastern Europe, but a love of Zionism was not one of his attributes.

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NOTES

7 *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *JC*) 27 August 1875, p. 350.
8 E. Oren, *Hibbat-Zion in Britain 1878–1898*
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97 Leeds Mercury 21 Sept. 1900, p. 5.
98 Leeds Times 29 Sept. 1900, p. 4.
99 Yorkshire Post 26 Sept. 1900, p. 6.
100 JC 2 Nov. 1900, p. 22.
101 JC 16 Nov. 1900, p. 27.
103 JC 30 Nov. 1900, p. 8.
104 Patai (see n. 3) III: 1166.
105 Ibid. III:1199.
107 Letter from Greenberg to Herzl 5 March 1902. CZA file H VIII 291.
108 Cohen (see n. 1) 94.
110 JC 8 Nov. 1901, p. 13.
112 The Times 16 February 1893, p. 7.
113 Ibid. 29 May 1893, p. 12.
115 The Times 6 March 1911, p. 9.