

**On 2 and 3 September 1939 the historian Arnold Berney, an émigré in Jerusalem,
records his gloomy prognoses on the outbreak of war¹**

Diary of Arnold Berney,² Jerusalem, entries for 2 and 3 September 1939

2 September 1939

The Reich German National Socialist short-wave station reported on numerous border skirmishes, adding that these demonstrated the inner disintegration and demoralization of the Polish army.

If you are so brave, so soldierly, so chivalrous: why then this weak, pathetic, and furthermore stupid and fatal belittling of the enemy? But that's how you are: you also didn't defeat your internal enemies in a manly fashion, nor did you chivalrously allow them some kind of right to exist afterwards; instead, you plagued them, defiled them, tortured, slandered, and robbed them, and then banished them. Even now the (shockingly hysterical) voices of your radio announcers shriek into the microphone, 'the Jews are to blame'. In this, too, you are blind and cowardly. You would do better pointing out that it is nothing other than the hulk of the old Entente that is revolting against a violently ascendant Germany – but also a Germany very much in need of growth. Why do you mislead your people (possibly towards new pogroms)? Where is your much-touted political intelligence, your soldierly sense, your Germanic cleanliness? One fights the enemy; however, when one refrains from abusing him and insulting him, one respects in him one's own manliness that has been forced to fight.

From Chamberlain's speech yesterday afternoon it's clear that England and France will fight.³ I no longer dare to think that this battle might be replaced by a blockade of Germany, for example, and instead [think] that England and France are getting ready to enter the war, and that means at best systematic air raids and the tying down of major forces at the West [...] ⁴ means at worst a French–English offensive in the West, Italy's entry into the war, and fighting in the Mediterranean. Turkey will then no longer be able to remain neutral. One can be relaxed about the Turkish decision only if it means neutrality.⁵

3 September 1939

England has declared war on the German Reich.

1 CAHJP, P/179, box 1, folder 3. This document has been translated from German.

2 Dr Arnold Berney (1897–1943), lawyer and historian; adjunct professor in Freiburg im Breisgau from 1927; had his teaching permit revoked in 1935; professor at the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies in Berlin, 1936–1938; in 1938 emigrated via Switzerland to Palestine, where he worked as a private tutor.

3 The British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced to the House of Commons on 1 Sept. 1939 that France and Britain would lend military support to Poland if German troops failed to withdraw. Since Germany had, he said, refused to enter into negotiations on the peaceful resolution of the German–Polish conflict, it bore sole responsibility for the imminent war. See 'Prime Minister's Indictment of Germany', *The Times*, 2 Sept. 1939, p. 5.

4 One or two words are illegible.

5 Turkey maintained its neutrality until 23 Feb. 1945; only then did it declare war on Germany and Japan.

When a loved one passes away after lengthy suffering and after lengthy and searing uncertainty for their family, the first thing felt by those closest to them is liberation. Pain, sorrow, worry, loneliness, desperate homesickness – all that only begins *later*. War is the death of peace – and, seen from here, the boundless sorrow now being invoked across the Occident has begun its wild, unstoppable campaign of conquest in utterly terrifying silence. Like a giant barely awakened, calamity is stretching itself, roaring from its oft-interrupted slumber. Inconceivable to hear the noise from the streets, the chatter of children playing, to hear a Bach fugue being practised on the sixth floor, to eat one's dinner (still plentiful, but for how long?) from a white-clothed table, and to know that thousands are already lying in their own blood, wounded, maimed, or dead – that houses are already collapsing again, their smouldering walls pointing up into the sky – that tormented women and frightened children are screaming, that farmers are fleeing along country lanes on overloaded carts.

Despite knowing all too well that National Socialism has incurred blood guilt, lies, and deception, I have no side in this war. In 1914 and again in 1916, when I was a soldier, I had a fatherland, which, like the other 70,000 German Jews that fought, and like the 10,000 that fell, I unthinkingly and enthusiastically served.⁶ Now I have been hounded to the far end of the Western world, and live within a Jewish society that has barely begun. I look back: I do not weep for past 'happiness', I do not blame anyone for anything, I am free from resentment, I feel no hatred towards others. 'Blessed is he who walks apart, though no hate he bears.'⁷ Walking apart is allowed, of course – and blessedness impossible for anyone. But the state of 'not bearing hatred' (and resisting all forms of fanatical partisanship) is like a spiritual home which, despite feeling as though I am covered up and buried, despite 'having' nothing, despite seeing neither a way forward nor a use for myself, I wish to build for myself.

6 Of a total of more than 100,000 Jews who served in the First World War, around 12,000 are likely to have fallen on the front line; the figures vary from source to source. The Reich League of Jewish Front-Line Soldiers recorded around 10,200 dead: Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, *Die jüdischen Gefallenen des deutschen Heeres, der deutschen Marine und der deutschen Schutztruppen 1914–1918: Ein Gedenkbuch* (Berlin: Der Schild, 1932).

7 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'To the Moon' (1789): 'Blessed is he who walks apart, / though no hate he bears, / Holds a friend within his heart; / And with him shares ...'.