

THE JEWISH NATIONAL HOME.

It is just fifty years ago since Theodor Herzl, a Viennese Jew who, short of baptism, was completely assimilated, went to Paris to report the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jew and an officer of the French army who, like Herzl, had ceased to be Jewish in anything but name. The extraordinary outburst of anti-semitism to which the trial gave rise and the completely unjustifiable conviction of Dreyfus moved Herzl to the depths. The Jewish problem, the present plight and future destiny of the Jewish people, became the dominating concern of the remaining years of his life. Three years later a Zionist organisation was set up under his leadership. Its aim was formulated by its first Congress, held at Basle in August, 1897. 'Zionism,' the Congress declared, 'aims at establishing for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.'

Twenty-five years later, on November 2nd, 1917, a letter was addressed to the then Lord Rothschild by Arthur James Balfour, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, viewing with favour 'the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,' and undertaking to 'use their best endeavour to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'

To-day Jews throughout the world are looking anxiously towards Palestine and with very mixed feelings towards Great Britain to whom under the terms of a Mandate granted by the League of Nations in 1922 was entrusted the responsibility 'for placing the country (Palestine) under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home. . . . and the development of self-governing institutions, and also for safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion.'

The anxiety with which they look to Palestine is not difficult to understand. To many of them this country with its hallowed associations of centuries ago and the amazing achievements of Jewish settlers in the present generation seems to offer the only door of hope in a world almost devoid of hope for Jews. They have seen in it not merely a land in which refugees can be settled and re-

habilitated; not merely a home in which they can plan to develop their social, religious and cultural life and interests, but a country in which they can organise themselves into a national state, comparable in all respects with other national states. And it is to the establishment of such a state that fifty years of propagandist activities carried out against the background of the increasingly desperate plight of the Jewries of Eastern and Central Europe, has led them to look for the solution of the Jewish problem.

The mixed feelings with which they look to this country are equally understandable. The reference in the Balfour Declaration to 'a national home for the Jewish people' is not readily susceptible of precise definition. It is, in fact, open to a wide range of almost conflicting interpretation. The administration of the Mandate has never been easy, nor at all points successful. The situation in Palestine itself could hardly be more complicated than it is at the present time. And from March this year, according to the terms of the White Paper published in May, 1939, there is to be no further immigration of Jews into Palestine without the consent of the Arabs—a condition which many Jews regard as tantamount to saying that there will be no further immigration. There is great divergence of opinion as to the validity of the White Paper itself, and its critics never tire of pointing out that its provisions were rejected by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League on the ground that it was incompatible with the terms of the Mandate. Unfortunately, owing to the outbreak of war the report of this Commission was never considered by the full Council of the League.

But it is not Jews alone who are anxious concerning the present situation and possible future developments in Palestine. Not only is it the Holy Land of the three great monotheistic faiths of mankind, and therefore the centre of a great deal of religious sentiment, but politically and economically it is of the greatest strategic importance for East and West alike. It has always been at the crossroads of the world. Moreover, though very small, Palestine is very far from being an empty country, and although the Arabs have failed during the centuries of their occupation to approach even remotely the successes achieved by a comparative handful of Jewish pioneers in the compass of a single generation, their claim to consideration in everything that affects the future of the country cannot be overlooked.

It is clearly, therefore, of the greatest importance that non-Jews as well as Jews, leaders and lay-folk alike, should give time and thought to the issues at stake, issues which relate not only to the political and economic factors inherent in the immediate situation,

but also to such fundamental considerations as the whole historic destiny of the Jewish people. Indeed, there is little hope of reaching any lasting solution of the more immediate problems until a good deal more progress has been made in the direction of understanding what is the real function of Israel among the nations of mankind.

On this question there is the utmost confusion not only among non-Jews, but even among Jews themselves. There are those who going back to Sinai, find their answer in the words spoken through Moses: 'And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.' This has been interpreted by a modern Jewish writer (Morris Joseph in *Judaism as Creed and Life*) in the following terms: 'Thus Israel's mission, like his election, is purely religious. His is no worldly vocation, he has been called not for empire, for earthly power, for conquest, but to distribute the spiritual riches that have been entrusted to him. He has been called to be not the master but the servant of mankind.'

There are others, of whom Theodor Herzl was the great apostle of modern times, who feel that such idealism is in the main unreal and unpractical. For them the Jewish people is primarily to be thought of as a nation which has for centuries been without a country and whose future well-being and security depends upon the setting up of a Jewish state as a separate and independent political entity. They do not quote as their Scriptural authority for this point of view the plea of the people who came to the prophet Samuel in the early days of the Jewish settlement in Palestine: 'Now make us a king to judge us like all the other nations,' but they represent that element in Jewry which ever since those times has looked to the political arm as being of primary importance.

And there are, of course, those who have sought, and still seek to harmonise these two apparently divergent points of view. Of these the outstanding example of modern times was Asher Ginzberg, who, writing under the pseudonym of Ahad Ha'Am, became one of the leading philosophers of the Zionist movement. Of his point of view another Zionist leader, Nahum Sokolow, President of the Zionist Organisation from 1931 to 1935, wrote: 'To Ahad Ha'Am the soul of Jewry was of far more consequence than its body, but he realised that a soul cannot live on earth without a body. Therefore a Jewish population in Palestine, a healthy, in mind and body, self-supporting Jewish population was a necessity, and one of some proportion relative to the total population of the country, but this did not mean that a Jewish majority in Palestine was a necessity, still less a Jewish state or government or army or navy.'

At the present time those whose interests are primarily in the establishment of a Jewish national state are in the ascendant. This is hardly surprising. The amazing achievements of Zionists in Palestine during the past twenty-five years, often in the face of tremendous difficulties, seem to many ardent Jewish nationalists to-day in danger of being overthrown, and must therefore be protected. Secondly, some place of refuge must be found for hundreds of thousands of Jews threatened with extermination at the hands of the Nazis. It is true, of course, that the immediate rescue of many of them is practically impossible, but it is not difficult to understand why their fellow Jews should be so anxious to secure the right of immigration into Palestine at the earliest possible moment of the greatest possible number of these unfortunate people.

And there is a third consideration which occupies an important place in the mind of many Zionists. Viscount Cecil relates in his Foreword to a volume of essays recently published in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration¹ how, when he first met Dr. Chaim Weizmann, this greatest of all living Zionists said to him: 'A Jew has always to explain himself.' He is, in fact, everyone's neighbour and yet is everywhere without a home. Those who feel this most deeply are convinced that only in what they regard as the normalising of the position of the Jew in the world by the establishment somewhere—which for them means Palestine—of a Jewish National Home or State can they hope to evade this tiresome necessity of having to explain themselves.

In all this the responsibility of the Christian is clear. There must be sympathy with, and practical support for, the plea that the right of immigration to Palestine be safeguarded for many of the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution. It is important, too, that those who are granted this facility should be allowed also to feel that they are there, as the British Government itself stated in its basic definition of Palestine policy in 1922, 'as of right and not on sufferance.' The achievement of this end calls for wise statesmanship on the part of the leaders of all the parties concerned, Christian, Jewish and Arab alike, if the provision of the Balfour Declaration that the civil and religious rights of already existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine is to be fulfilled.

Secondly, it is clearly in the interests of non-Jews as well as Jews, both in Palestine and outside, that the achievements of the Zionists to date should be safeguarded. Those who desire information as to the nature of those achievements will do well to consult the volume

¹ *The Jewish National Home*. Edited by Paul Goodman. (Dent. 7s. 6d.).

of essays mentioned above. There are to be found not only sections dealing with the origin, background and significance of the Balfour Declaration, but also essays on every aspect of Jewish life in Palestine to-day, together with some important pronouncements on Zionist policy for the future. A detailed appraisal of the volume is not possible here, but it can be safely commended to all who feel some concern in this matter and who are prepared to make some allowance for the fact that the essays are all written by enthusiastic protagonists of a 'cause.'

Finally, the Christian should feel a particular responsibility in helping the Jews to work through the dilemma with which so many of them are grappling to-day, and which concerns the true character of the Jewish community. Here the Catholic surely has much to give, for Catholics have known what it is to be in the minority. They, too, have had to wrestle with the problems consequent on dual loyalties to national and supra-national communities, loyalties which in some instances have been conflicting rather than complementary. For the non-Catholic Christian the present dilemma of the Jewish people constitutes a challenge not merely to the assisting of a fellow human in distress, but also to a good deal of re-thinking as to the fundamental character of the Christian as well as of the Jewish community ideal.

There is obviously need for short as well as long-term policy and action, but it is of the utmost importance that the two should be kept in close relationship with each other. It would perhaps be too much to anticipate a solution of all the problems connected with Palestine in this generation. It is almost inevitable that mistakes will still occur. But many of the difficulties can be overcome, and the risk of mistakes reduced to a minimum as the deeper issues which are at stake are more clearly understood. There is a very real sense in which the Jewish problem is the focussing point of all our problems to-day, and at the very heart of the Jewish problem is the question of the Jewish National Home.

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