

A Note on the Balfour Declaration in The Friend, 28 December 1917, pp 980-981.

Without pinning one's faith to particular readings of prophesy or entertaining speculations as to the precise service that may yet lie before the Jewish people, it is possible to see great significance in the recent advance of the Allied forces in Palestine, coupled with the previous announcement of the British Government.

Writing to Lord Rothschild from the Foreign Office on November 2nd, Mr. Balfour said:

"I have much pleasure in conveying to you on behalf of His Majesty's Government the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations, which has been submitted to and approved by the Cabinet:
"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their endeavours 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."

Much has happened in Palestine since those words were written. On November 7th Gaza (where the disastrous Easter action was fought) was taken by General Allenby; on the 17th he entered Joppa; and on the 11th inst., after its surrender on the 9th, he made an official entry, on foot, into Jerusalem. His proclamation of martial law was marked by that liberal spirit of tolerance (observed also on the taking of Baghdad) which we are glad to associate with the thought of the best British institutions,

"... It is my desire that every person should pursue his lawful business without fear of interruption. Furthermore, since your city is regarded with affection by adherents of three of the great religions of mankind, and its soil has been consecrated by the prayers and pilgrimages of multitudes of devout people of these three religions for many centuries, therefore do I make known to you that every sacred building, monument, holy spot, shrine, traditional site, endowment, pious bequest, or customary place of prayer, of whatsoever form of the three religions, will be maintained and protected according to the existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faiths they are sacred."

Remembering the blight which Turkish rule has cast over the lands where it has dominated, we cannot do other than rejoice in the prospect of a more healthy system of government, though we hope, in the day of settlement, such arrangements will be made as will prevent any future rankling sense of wrong in

the minds of the superseded. There would seem to be a great opening to so progressive a people as the Jews in the actual land of their fathers. Not that all the 13,000,000 Jews could or would dwell in Palestine, any more than all Britishers live in the United Kingdom. But that the homeless Jew shall have at last, once more, a "national home," to which the eyes of all his compatriots would always turn with love and from which, in many lands, he would still draw inspiration, would be a great achievement. In the current Zionist Review it is remarked that

"the Declaration is the greatest event in the history of the Jewish nation since the destruction of the Temple and the consummation of the ruin of the Jewish State ... No message that has run through the arteries of the Jewish world, not even the fall of the great tyranny in Russia, has moved the Jewish people so profoundly. There is a new light in the eyes, a lifting of the head, a straightening of the body, a squaring of the shoulders. They see the Promised Land within their reach and the chains falling that have clogged the Jewish spirit for nearly a thousand years."

And regarding the meaning of this event for the world, the Jewish Chronicle well said:

"We have called the Government declaration 'a Jewish triumph.' It is in truth much more. It is a triumph for civilisation and for humanity. For it points the way not alone to an ending of the brutal suppression of our people from which directly they have suffered the last two thousand years, but from which civilisation, albeit indirectly, has suffered no less certainly. It will mean releasing for mankind, as a great spiritual force, the soul of our people, cramped and bound as it has hitherto been because of the world position till now assigned to the Jew. The time can at last be descried when the Jew will be able, without let or hindrance, to perform for the world his mission of Judaism, that mission which alone is the justification for his existence as a Jew, and the sense of his responsibility for which alone has enabled him to endure the untellable suffering to which our people have been subjected."