

C. P. Scott, Editor Of The Manchester Guardian, On The Balfour Declaration

This was Scott's leader in the Manchester Guardian (now The Guardian) on the day that the Balfour declaration was published in the paper.

PALESTINE AND THE JEWS

Wednesday, November 7, 1917

We speak of Palestine as a country, but it is not a country; it is at present little more than a small district of the vast Ottoman tyranny. But it will be a country; it will be the country of the Jews. That is the meaning of the letter which we publish to-day written by Mr Balfour to Lord Rothschild for communication to the Zionist Federation. It is at once the fulfilment of an aspiration, the signpost of a destiny. Never since the days of the Dispersion has the extraordinary people scattered over the earth in every country of modern European and of the old Arabic civilisation surrendered the hope of an ultimate return to the historic seat of its national existence. This has formed part of its ideal life, and is the ever-recurring note of its religious ritual. And if, like other aspirations and religious ideals which time has perhaps worn thin and history has debarred from the vitalising contact of reality, it has grown to be something of a convention, something which you may pray for and dream about but not a thing which belongs to the efforts and energies of this everyday world, that is only what was to be expected, and in no degree detracts from the critical importance of its entry to that world and the translation of its religious faith into the beginnings at least of achievement. For that is what the

formal and considered declaration of policy by the British Government means. For fifty years the Jews have been slowly and painfully returning to their ancestral home, and even under the Ottoman yoke and amid the disorder of that effete and crumbling dominion they have succeeded in establishing the beginnings of a real civilisation. Scattered and few, they have still brought with them schools and industry and scientific knowledge, and here and there have in truth made the waste places blossom as the rose. But for all this there was no security, and the progress, supported as it was financially by only a small section of the Jewish people and by a few generous and wealthy persons, was necessarily as slow as it was precarious. The example of Armenia and the wiping out of a population fifty-fold that of the Jewish colonies in Palestine was a terrible warning of what might at any time be in store for these. The Great War brought a turning point. The return of the Turk in victorious power would spell ruin; the rescue of this and the neighbouring lands from Turkish misrule was the first condition of security and hope. The British victories in Palestine and in the more distant eastern bounds of the ancient Arab Empire are the presage of the downfall of Turkish power; the declaration of policy by the British Government today is the security for a new, perhaps a very wonderful, future for Zionism and for the Jewish race.

Not that it is to be supposed that progress in such a movement can be other than slow. Nor does the British Government take any responsibility for it beyond the endeavour to make it possible. In declaring that "the British Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object", the Government have indeed laid down a policy of great and far-reaching importance, but it is one which can bear its full fruit only by the united efforts of Jews all over the world. What it means is that, assuming our military successes to be continued and the whole of Palestine to be brought securely under our

control, then on the conclusion of peace our deliberate policy will be to encourage in every way in our power Jewish immigration, to give full security, and no doubt a large measure of local autonomy, to the Jewish immigrants, with a view to the ultimate establishment of a Jewish State. Nothing is said, for nothing can at present be said, as to the precise form of control during the period of transition, which may be a long one. Doubtless the form of government, or ultimate authority, would be similar to that which may be set up in other and neighbouring regions from which the authority of the Ottoman Government may be removed. Palestine has a special importance for Great Britain, because in the hands of a hostile Power it can be made, as our experience in this war has shown, a secure base from which a land attack on Egypt can be organised. The attack in this war has been feeble because the preparations were wholly inadequate and the force ill-organised. But with a European Power in possession it might easily be made infinitely more formidable, and might even make our position in Egypt untenable. Our interest, and practically our sole particular interest, in Palestine is that this danger should be effectually guarded against, and that no Power should be seated in Palestine which is or under any circumstances is likely to be hostile to this country. That condition would be fulfilled by a protectorate exercised by this country alone or in conjunction with, say, the United States or by the United States alone, or by an international body designating us as its mandatory on conditions to be mutually agreed. Such may be the ultimate development of our policy, but in any case the fundamental principle now laid down will condition it. We recognize, and we shall continue to recognise, the Holy Land as the " national home of the Jewish people ".

Other conditions are involved, and are stated or implied in the present declaration. The existing Arab population of Palestine is small and at a low stage of civilisation. It contains within itself none of the elements of progress, but

it has its rights, and these must be carefully respected. This is clearly laid down in the letter, which declares that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing communities in Palestine'. There is, again, the question of the custody of the Holy Places, in which Russia and France are alike warmly interested. This is not expressly referred to, but will undoubtedly have to be carefully considered, and, with goodwill, should present no great difficulties. The final words of the letter may not, at the first glance, be perfectly intelligible. Not only are the rights of existing communities in Palestine to be protected but it is also declared that " the political status enjoyed by Jews in any other countries " are in no way to be prejudiced. That may appear a rather far-fetched precaution against an imaginary danger, and so perhaps it is. But if anxiety is anywhere felt on this score, it is well that, so far as we are concerned, it should be allayed. And anxiety, though it may not be widespread, no doubt there is. It is feared that Jews who have made their home in foreign lands and have accepted to the full the new allegiance may suffer in esteem, if not actually in political status, by the creation of a distinctive Jewish State, and may come, in a new sense, to be regarded as aliens. No such danger can possibly arise in this country or in any other country which, like the United States, welcomes its Jewish citizens on a footing of absolute equality. In countries where anti-semitism still prevails it is not likely to be given a fresh edge, but the risk, such as it is, must be run and it is to be feared the declaration in the letter cannot prevent it, though it is a protest in which, at the Peace Conference, other Powers may be invited to join. But in any case what is this for the Jewish race compared to the hope and the promise of re-entry on their birthright? A small people they must be, for Palestine will hold but perhaps one-fourth of the scattered Jewish race, but they were a very small people when they gave two religions to the world, and, seated in their own land, they may yet become the vital link between East and West, between the old world and the new.