

What the Jews Expect from this War.

AT a time when the belief is practically universal that we have arrived at one of the great turning points in the history of mankind, and are, as it were, on the threshold of a new epoch which is destined to usher in a higher stage of civilization, it is but natural that the Jews, too, should be expecting great things for their race as the outcome of the fierce struggle that is now convulsing the world. Indeed, if all the reports that have from time to time reached England be true (and there is no reason to doubt them), the Jews must, in proportion to their numbers, be counted among the chief sufferers of the World War, and stand in dire need of immediate help. It is too early as yet to estimate even approximately the effect of the war on the great Jewish centres in which a conspicuous part of it has been waged, and may yet again be waged; but it is already obvious that it will deal a heavy blow at what has been for centuries the great reservoir of Jewish strength in Europe, namely the numerous Jewish settlements in Russia, Poland, Galicia and Rumania. It is not merely that hundreds of thousands of Jews have been turned into homeless wanderers, exposed to the ravages of famine and disease, and with but the slenderest prospect of ever recovering such economic stability as they had before. But what, according to Dr. Weizmann, the President of the Zionist Federation of England, is of an even more awful significance for the Jewish people, is the destruction, as he affirms, of the homes of Jewish life and learning. The break-up of the social organism which, despite its lack of freedom and of material and political strength, has embodied most fully in the modern world what is vital and enduring in the character and ideals of the Jewish people. He does not hesitate to compare the havoc brought by the war upon the Jews of Eastern Europe to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, "for the fearful blow strikes beyond the individuals to the very heart of the nation."

What the spokesmen of Zionism are most concerned about, is that in the countries of Western Europe and America Judaism tends more and more to become (what the Reformed Rabbis wish it to become) merely a religious sect among a number of other sects, and is apt to lose that sense of attachment to the Jewish people,

its traditions and its ideals, that alone enabled the Jews to survive the unparalleled vicissitudes of an exile now almost two thousand years old. So long as there existed in Poland a vast Jewish community, homogeneous in character and type of life, speaking a language of its own, having its own system of education based on the Talmud, its own communal organization, its own mentality and standards of values, and differing in practically every respect from its Gentile neighbours, the future of the race seemed safeguarded, and the decaying communities of the West were kept alive by the continuous infusion of new blood supplied by the periodic overflowing of that main reservoir of Judaism. But if, as the result of the devastating war, the Polish Jewry is to break up, and hundreds of thousands of Jews are compelled to seek their livelihood in the democratic countries of the West, so inimical to separatism, their eventual assimilation to and absorption in their environment are conceived to be but a question of time. A new spiritual centre must, therefore, be found in Palestine, the ancient home of the nation, where the Jewish ideal can continue to develop free from outside influence or pressure, where the heart will beat normally and vitalize the whole body to its furthest limb. This has always been the main argument of the Zionist, and the stoutest plank in his platform ; but recent events have powerfully strengthened his position, and have given a tremendous impetus to his hopes and aspirations.

The happenings of the last year are fraught with such momentous possibilities for the Jewish people that, though many of our readers are familiar with them, we must concisely state some of these events. On December 9, 1917, on the eve of the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple of Judas Maccabeus, and exactly four hundred years since the city was conquered by the Turks, Jerusalem was taken possession of by a British army under General Allenby. But already on November 2, soon after the British troops had set foot on the soil of Palestine, Mr. Balfour informed Lord Rothschild that " His Majesty's Government viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and would use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object." This epoch-making declaration of the British Government was hailed by Jews everywhere as the greatest act of emancipation the race had ever witnessed in its whole history ; and it has been

not improperly compared with the famous edict of King Cyrus. "With one step the Jewish cause has made a great bound forward," says the *Jewish Chronicle* of November 7, in a leading article entitled "A Jewish Triumph." "The declaration of H.M. Government as to the future of Palestine in relation to the Jewish people marks a new epoch for our race. . . . Amidst all that is dark and dismal and tragic throughout the world, there has thus arisen for the Jews a great light. It is the perceptible lifting of the cloud of centuries, the palpable sign that the Jew—condemned for two thousand years to unparalleled wrong—is at last coming to his right. The prospect has at last definitely opened of a rectification of the Jew's anomalous position among the nations of the earth. . . . In place of being a wanderer in every clime, there is to be a Home for him in his ancient land. The day of his exile is to be ended." And sentiments like these have been enthusiastically echoed and re-echoed in the Jewish press of almost all the Allied and neutral countries, while a gathering of American Zionists at Baltimore went so far as to pass a resolution, "calling for volunteers in the Jewish industrial army for pioneer work in Palestine, as soon as peace is established. Our Jewish soldiers in industry," the resolution goes on to say, "will convert swords into ploughshares, and with the labour of their hands will fasten the hold of our people upon the soil of our ancestors. The European catastrophe has created the very condition whereby such an army can be readily organized. There will be hundreds of thousands of our soldier brethren who will return from the wars to the smouldering ruins of their villages, and to homes bereft of parents, wives and children. Thousands of these will welcome an association by which their lives will be made fruitful in a peaceful struggle of our people for a future home in Palestine." Backed by the powerful support of the whole of the English-speaking world, the Zionists of the British Empire and of the United States of America call now, in more definite language than ever before, upon their Jewish brethren everywhere to prepare to return to Zion. The form of government in Palestine does not at present trouble them much. "Zionism," says Dr. Nordan, "has no ambition of founding an independent Jewish State, be it a kingdom or a republic. All it desires is that its adherents should be allowed to immigrate without any-restraint to Palestine, to buy there as much land as they can obtain for their money, to enjoy autonomy

of local administration, and not to be hampered in their earnest efforts to create culture and prosperity. It goes without saying," he continues, "that Zionistic Jews pledge themselves to observe the most scrupulous, most generous loyalty towards the Power under whose sovereignty Palestine is placed." And particularly, we may be assured, if this power should prove to be England, as is all but certain.

But what prospect is there for the realization of these aims? Are they not, after all, the mere product of a distorted imagination? Is Palestine capable of supporting even a portion of the Jewish millions? Has not the Turkish misrule of four centuries resulted in the utmost neglect and ruin of the country? And have not, above all, the Jews themselves lost, in their long exile, the will and the capacity of ever becoming successful agriculturists again? These are important considerations, and most people but a generation ago, or less, would have felt inclined to regard them as obstacles too serious to be overcome. The costly efforts of Baron Edouard de Rothschild, and others, at colonization seemed doomed to failure, owing partly to climatic reasons, and partly to the inexperience of the settlers. All the more remarkable, therefore, is it to see what enthusiasm and perseverance have succeeded in accomplishing in the face of the gravest discouragements, in the space of a single generation.

Begun about the year 1880, the Jewish colonies in Palestine now number forty-five, with a population of 15,000 souls, and own among them about 123,000 acres of arable land, of which no less than 110,000 acres are already under cultivation. Thanks to the employment of modern and scientific means of agriculture, the Jewish colonists are now leaving the native (Arab) farmers far behind them in the nature, quality, and variety of the crops they are producing. Thus, to give but an example or two, in the cultivation of cereals, the average annual yield of the Arab is about £1 per acre, whereas in the Jewish colonies it varies between £2 8s. and £3 8s. per acre. Similarly with horticulture. In the Arab orange groves 350 boxes of oranges per acre is considered a very good average yield; the Jewish planters are said to obtain far higher returns, averaging, according to the season, from 600 to 750 boxes per acre, or practically double the quantity obtained by the Arab. During the past few years before the outbreak of the war,

Arab landowners have repeatedly had recourse to Jewish labourers for the establishment of their plantations and the pruning and grafting of their fruit-trees.

The following claims, put forward by a Zionist report in 1914, deserve special consideration :

“ Thirty per cent. of all the oranges and 90 per cent. of the wines which leave Palestine by the port of Jaffa are supplied by the neighbouring Jewish colonies, and oranges and wine by themselves represent nearly half the value of the total exports from Jaffa. On the other hand, most of the Jewish plantations are still in their infancy, and will not become fully productive for some years.

“ In 1890 an acre of irrigable land in the colonies near Jaffa cost about £3 12s. ; to-day, such land would not cost less than £36 per acre.

“ About 1880 the lands which form the colony of Pethach Yikwah were uncultivated, and were purchased for £1,200. In 1912, Pethach Yikwah had a population of 3,000 souls, the value of its annual production was £36,000, and it represents to-day a capital value of at least £600,000.” And this holds, on the whole, good of most of the other colonies also.

If it should be objected that the number of Jews (15,000) settled as agriculturists on the soil of Palestine is, after all, a mere fraction of the nation, and that the colonies have had to be largely supported by various philanthropic organizations before they could stand on their own feet, we would remind such critics that this is really beside the question. What matters is that the immigration of the Jews into Palestine represents an entirely spontaneous movement. Their return to the land of their ancestors is not incited by any propaganda, nor does anybody pay their travelling expenses, as in the case of Baron de Hirzch's colonies in the Argentine. It is on their own initiative, and at their own expense and risk, that the Jews return to Zion. The amount of success that has so far followed their efforts is chiefly of value, therefore, as affording indisputable proof of the fact that the Jew is both able and willing to till the ground, and that the soil of Palestine, given a rational and generous treatment, is still capable of reproducing its old fertility, and of rewarding the labour and attention bestowed upon it. And it is further worth while remembering that Palestine, which to-day contains only 700,000 inhabitants, supported ten times that number

in the first centuries of the Christian era, and was considered a granary of the Roman Empire. It only needs an industrious and intelligent population, we are assured by experts who have a right to speak authoritatively on the matter, in order to recover the pristine fertility of the country, regain its old economic importance, and enable it once more to support a population of some 7,000,000 souls, as in the days of its prosperity. And seven millions is more than a half of the Jewish nation.

We have dwelt at some length on the subject of the agricultural settlements mainly for the reason that agriculture must of necessity be the foundation of every state, and that no commonwealth is thinkable without it. But the colonies do not by any means represent the sum total of the Jewish activities in Palestine. Fifty years ago, the Jewish population of the Holy Land consisted of barely ten thousand miserable people, who lived on the charity of their co-religionists abroad. In 1914 it was already estimated to number 110,000, and to be largely self-supporting. In Jerusalem alone the Jews are 60,000 strong, and that in a population of only some 80,000 souls. Industry and commerce are gradually, but surely, passing into their hands, and it needs no prophet to predict that, with the removal of the blight of Turkish misrule, and under the benevolent aegis of Great Britain, Palestine and the Jews will come into their own again. This the more since the new generation of Jews that is springing up in Palestine is paying a degree of attention to educational matters that is really remarkable, and is bound to have a deep influence on the fortunes and development of that country. Already the Jewish schools can more than hold their own with the best institutions of the kind to be found in Palestine, and they leave many of them entirely in the shade. The whole gamut of the modern educational machinery can be traced through Kindergartens, Elementary and Middle Schools to Grammar Schools (the leaving certificates of which have been recognized as equivalent to University matriculation in several European countries, as well as in America), Commercial schools, a school of Arts and Crafts, Teachers' seminaries, and a Polytechnical Institute on the most approved modern lines. And now all this is to be crowned by the creation of a Hebrew University at Jerusalem, the foundation stone of which has been solemnly laid by Dr. Weizmann in the presence of General Allenby and all the notabilities of the Holy

City, as recently as July 24, 1918. Add to all this the fact that Hebrew is the language of instruction in most of these schools, and is becoming the everyday language of young and old alike in Palestine, and we may confidently say that we are witnessing the rebirth of the Jewish nation. And this is what the Jews are looking forward to as the outcome of the present war for themselves.

Israel is going back unconverted to the Promised Land; may she there find Him Who is the Light of the Gentiles, and the Glory of His people Israel!

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