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Headline: "Zionism According to the Opinions of the Jews"

Summary: “The old aspirations of the Jews resuscitated by new propaganda. A conference in Rome on Zionism. Reasons, discussions. - I. Precursors of the idea. Political Zionism proposed by Theodore Herzl. - II. Early enthusiasms: Congress of Basel: diplomatic actions. - III. Financial difficulties: internal contradictions. The proposal for Uganda. Death of Herzl. - IV. New colonial location. The war opens new hopes. The declaration of the English government. - V. The British Mandate for Palestine. Immigration: Jewish culture. - VI. Financial assistance: Jewish hopes and visions.”

Text: For nineteen centuries the people of Israel, scattered among the nations of the world, upon the vigil of the feast of Passover - 14 Nisan - have celebrated their traditional rites in all places of the world "standing up as one man at the same time, and taking in their hands the cup of blessing, repeating three time the consecrating phrase, "Next year in Jerusalem!" - Every day, at the hour of prayer, it is the custom of the sons of Judah to turn towards Zion with yearning, and one of them – a convert and a priest, Rev. Giuseppe Lémann – depicted with fraternal pity the love with which certain of his former co-religionists, too poor and too advanced in years to undertake the sacred pilgrimage to see with their own eyes the Holy City and kiss its walls, instead have sent to them little sachets filled with the earth where their fathers sleep and, at the end of their lives, advise their own sons to bury them with this earth upon their heart. But those who are more fortunate can visit the city and find asylum there, where they gather every Friday toward evening around the ruins of the ancient temple, hugging and kissing convulsively, repeating together, between sobs, the lamentations of Jeremiah, crying: "Have mercy, Lord, and gather the sons of Jerusalem; make haste, O savior of Zion! Act soon to restore the kingdom of David! Comfort those who mourn over Jerusalem."

But for nineteen centuries, until recently, those sobs and lamentations had no answer but the frightful echo of a curse. "May his blood be upon us and upon our children!" - Today it is said that things are different. A few weeks ago we even heard in Rome a voice that wanted to emulate that of the prophets of this people, publishing the news that from now on the Jew will no longer be forced to wander the earth: the roads of Palestine are reopened and the sons of Israel are going to rush frantically, not as they once did, guided by the wonders of the hand of the Lord, but by the simple escort of the Jewish Colonial Association under the guarantee of England. The difference is not a small one. The Jews feel, and the proponents of this Jewish revival are convinced, that under the name of Zionism they would like to restore to Israel its national unity on Palestinian soil: therefore indeed they turned all their powers of negotiation to an endeavor to obtain the assent and cooperation of governments, and today we see the head of the Jewish Zionists, Chaim Weizmann, trying even among the Italians to arouse sympathy for the cause of his political and religious ideals.

If we are not mistaken, the reception of his propaganda in Rome must have encountered the indifference of Italian public opinion, plagued by other problems domestically upon which the salvation of the country turns. And it is also known that, despite the twists and turns of diplomacy, there are more or less open oppositions and clashes against Zionist pretensions from many other nations, as well as from irate followers of the synagogue, among whom the new political movement for Palestine has already been a cause of lengthy quarrels. Our readers will not have forgotten how the Roman Pontiff intervened with his august words to remember the rights of Christians over the places of Palestine which were consecrated by the presence of the divine redeemer: and all Catholics must take to heart the protection of the holy places that has always been for their fathers a tradition of faith and honor.

Zionism, therefore, gives rise to a conflict of political and religious interests: and we want to explicate the events and their various aspects in order to administer to our readers, who have requested this, the necessary arguments to form a dispassionate judgment.

I.

The Zionist idea is not new: It is easy to recall the names of many pseudo prophets who, sustaining here and there the old messianic hope with the name of Jerusalem, attempted to agitate in the depths of the ghetto where the Jews crowded who were despised by all the nations. Also a Huguenot, Isaac La Peyrère, probably of Jewish origin, wrote in the 1600s about the return of the Jews and pleaded with Louis XIII to liberate, like a modern day Cyrus, the tribes of Israel from slavery and rebuild the temple of the Lord. In the past century, when wars of independence of the various peoples of Europe exalted the idea of ​​nationalism in contemporary politics, that idea was also applied in favor of the Jewish people, and in his <em>*Nuova Questione d’Oriente</em>* [New Question of the Middle East], Ernest Lajaranne, a relative of Napoleon III, proposed the redemption of Palestine from the hands of the Turk, and the establishment of a Jewish government for the territory from Suez to Smyrna, as a guard post for the route to the Indies and a mediator between the East and the West. The same proposal was put forward by Moses Hess, a friend of Karl Marx, published in his *Rome and Jerusalem*: the same as Moses Montefiore, moreover, who presented Mohammed-Ali, the Viceroy of Egypt, with a program designed to carry into effect the proposal: and from the year 1876 a society was founded to bring Jewish settlers to the banks of the Jordan.

Thus far, however, the movement appeared to be limited for the most part to hypotheses and systems of politicians and party leaders. For these aspirations to become popular, it took a man endowed with the magical power of speech, with that strength of persuasion that irresistibly attracts the multitude. Theodor Herzl, born in Budapest of a “Sephardic” family (footnote: The Jews are divided historically into two main groups: the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim. The latter bear the name of Ashkenaz, a descendant of Japheth; the former bear the name of Sepharad, the Biblical name of a region that is believed to be Spain. The Sephardim are considered still considered to be an aristocratic caste), with a degree in law at Vienna, then working in journalism and writing with the <em>*Neue Freie Presse</em>* [New Free Press]; from his youth he had been wounded in his pride to see the inferior condition in which the Jew was held, a fact signaling suspicion and aversion in the midst of the Christian nations. Later, in 1881, the prosecutions for the assassination of Czar Alexander II revealed the portion among the Jewish students affiliated with nihilistic sects: based on that, there followed violent repressions by the police, a more severe political and religious regime, especially through the work of Chief Procurator Pobedonostsev, and a stirring up of popular passions against this unpopular lineage, which here and there signaled bloody reprisals and forced them to escape from the universal hostility and wander in misery along the frontiers of eastern Europe or emigrate to the shores of Palestine. In the same years a movement less brutal but no less ardent in antisemitic hatred spread also among the nations of western Europe, especially in France with the Dreyfus case, and in Austria-Hungary with the founding of the Christian Social Party under Lueger and Wieskirchner against the danger of Jewish interference in the orders of the State.

This intolerable state of affairs moved Dr. Herzl to disdainful and compassionate reflections, which concentrated upon a practical conclusion: the necessity of returning to the children of Israel a free and independent homeland. This was exactly the thesis he put forth in a writing which later became the code of Zionism: <em>*The Jewish State: Proposal for a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question</em>* (1896). The book begins by positing the existence of a “Jewish question” which it would be futile to deny: “it arises in every country where Jews attain some importance.” What is it worth, he says, to turn to nations that are not persecuting us? Our appearance there will cause persecution. The Jewish question is neither an economic nor religious issue, although it takes on now one appearance, now another: it is a question of nationality: and to resolve it, we first of all make it a worldwide question and place the matter before the Great Powers.” Persecution has increasingly awakened the strong ethnic character of this nations that is distinguished in the midst of all the others and does not assimilate with them. “The Jews are a unique people”: If this people is given sovereignty over a territory proportionate to its legitimate interests, the Jewish question will be resolved. The territory of Palestine would be most suitable, where the memories of the national tradition reside. A society representing the Israelite people would collect the funds necessary to regulate immigration and implement the administration and the laws of the Jewish community under the form of an aristocratic republic, because, in the opinion of Herzl, ancient theocracy no longer corresponds to modern ideas.

“If the Sultan cedes Palestine to us,” he continues, “there would be enough to promise that in short order we would reset the finances of Turkey… We would form a neutral State in continuing contact with a Europe that would guarantee our existence. As for the Holy Places, they would be under a form of extra-territoriality that would accommodate all the interests. We would form the honor guard within the sanctuary and would stand up for our existence with the fulfillment of this duty which would be the pledge of resolving a question that has dragged on for 18 centuries of cruel suffering.”

II.

This little book caused an extraordinary commotion among all, but in the ghettos of Russia, Poland, Finland, Romania, it aroused a real delirium. The "mirage" of Jerusalem, the hope of seeing Zion again and the rebuilding of the temple, gave rise to enthusiasm in those wretched hordes at the mercy of the terrors of the "pogroms" that were spreading destruction and death: it was salvation, liberty, reconquest of the homeland. Theodor Herzl was the idol of those multitudes, who saw him as a prophet, a commander who would take care of oppression and slavery by leading them to the land of their fathers. The power of the impulse with which he gave new life to the Zionism of their ancestors, of the “Friends of Zion,” of the “Children of Zion” and other similar societies, derived from the audacity with which he, instead of a timid action, hidden and disguised behind the veil of private philanthropy, affirmed openly a political program, nationalistic, imposed on the public debate and the competition of public powers. An because of the manifest nationalistic character of his work, his first concern was to convene a worldwide Zionist congress, pan-Judaic, from which his mission and his program would receive authenticity and legitimacy. The venue of the congress was Basel, where for the first time after so many centuries, the people of Israel saw the dispersed tribes meeting, with representatives from all points of the globe. Zionism was no longer just an internal matter of Jewish life, but entered into the ambit of international life. Above the building of the congress, from August 24 to 28, 1897, waved a Zionist flag: on a white background, two bands of turquoise that frame two overlapping triangles forming a six-pointed star. From that time onward, Judah had its assembly every year, its week-long parliament. At the one in 1901 there were 200 delegates, coming from Manchuria, from Siberia, from America, from Lake Chad, from southern Africa, from Egypt, and from all the countries of Europe.

The voice that dominated those congresses was naturally that of Herzl, hailed as the “prince of the exile.” Elected president of the permanent committee for action, he immediately put himself to work on what was entrusted to him by the body, to “create for the Jewish people a protected refuge guaranteed under international law.” And because he knew that in the business world, everything is assessed by its value in cash, the first step he took was the establishment of a Jewish Colonial Bank, which was to be the indispensable financial instrument for Zionist activity. Thus, with the practical intuition that is traditional among his people, he resolved to present to the German Kaiser and win him over to the Zionist cause. Kaiser Wilhelm II had recently taken over the reins of the Empire, following the dismissal of Bismarck, and was keenly occupied with solving the problems that were agitating the Empire. He undertook then a trip to the Holy Land (1898): Dr. Herzl found a way to meet with him near the gates of Jerusalem. The residents of the Jewish Quarter had erected a triumphal arch with the legend, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” in German and in Hebrew: two old rabbis, wrapped in ritual cloaks, carried the heavy tablets of the law, and Jewish school children sang hymns to the Emperor about the Messiah. Dr. Herzl, as chairman of the action committee, directed a greeting to the imperial pilgrim, asking him, in the name of the friendship that ran along with the Sultan, of wanting to second with his patronage the actualization of the Zionist idea: and the German gentleman showed his agreement and assented, surely seeing an opportunity to extend German influence in the Middle East.

III.

But the hopes and enthusiasms did not last long. When the Zionist committee turned to Sultan Abdul-Hamid, there were many words and great courtesies, but the price demanded was even greater: 50 million Francs: the Colonial Bank had only collected five, donated by the little people. The rich Jews, the millionaires of Jewish finance, had only given a mite; the bankers Hirsch, Rothschild, had rejected Herzl’s idea as utopian. For the greater part of the merchants and usurers, the restoration of Jewish life, of Talmudic traditions, of the glory of Zion, left them indifferent: they had accepted the country where they had found prosperity, and if they had a concern, it was to conceal the traces of their origin. The Zionist movement could harm the smooth running of business by provoking antisemitism: thus it was annoying. It is indeed a rather curious thing to see Zionism opposed by the first among the masters of Israel, such as the Chief Rabbi of Vienna, Güdemann, and the one in London, Adler: The union of German rabbis deemed it necessary to publish a protest, accusing Zionism of being in opposition to the Messianic promises: the Conference of American Rabbis explained their refusal instead by the ample liberty they enjoyed, which could not be greater even in the purported Jewish State to be created. In essence, the pride of the well-fed rabbinate of the rich centers of European countries rebelled against the fanaticism of a man unknown to the synagogue, who was lifting the crowds of the eastern ghettos. The damage would have been minimal if Theodor Herzl had succeeded in laying a foundation with his diplomatic negotiations: but Wilhelm II, after the initial courtesies, dissuaded perhaps by other councilors, showed no more sign of sympathy. Then, with the Sultan, in addition to the difficulty of the price, there was a greater difficulty of legal guarantees to be established for the possession of territories conceded to the new State. Things took a long time, but it quickly became clear that the Turks did not intend to cede any of their sovereignty: and after a thousand verbal twists and turns, the concessions were reduced to this: that with the payment of two million pounds sterling, the Jews could acquire the right to found colonies distributed in various parts of the empire other than Palestine, but without any legal links among them. It was the reversal of Zionist aspirations.

Herzl’s entire work was in danger of falling apart. He tried to sustain strong support at least for the purpose of an independent State, even outside Palestine: and he was inclined to accept territories in Uganda offered by England. When he made this proposal to the sixth congress (1903), the more ardent Zionists, seeing themselves confined to a savage land on the African continent, after such hopes of a country, indulged in a scene of tragic despair. To restore calm to the agitated assembly, Herzl closed off the discussion by repeating, with raised hand, the solemn formula of the oath: “If I should renounced you, O Jerusalem,” which are the words of Psalm 136 (footnote: *Si oblitus fuero tui, Jerusalem, oblivion detur dextera mea, etc*., Ps. 136: 5 [“If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill …”]. After the death of Herzl, the question of Uganda was taken up again by Max Nordau, one of the Zionist leaders who succeeded upon his death: but England revoked the offer. Another Zionist, Zangwill, founded the Jewish Territorial Organization with the intent to accept whatever region for the new State: Cyprus was talked about, and Argentina, and Tripoli: the war interrupted all this.) Turning then to seek a way bring back his co-religionists to Palestine, which alone represented the religious ideal that could sustain a national movement among a proletariat who were tenaciously conservative of their traditions. And to resume diplomatic negotiations, he undertook a trip to Italy, where in Rome, wanting to overcome the distrust he suspected in the opinions of Catholics toward Zionist agitation, he turned to the Vatican, asking to be granted an audience with the Supreme Pontiff, who was then Pius X, having just succeeded Leo XIII. The audience was naturally granted with no other significance than a common act of courtesy to all visitors. He could have greater hopes in the support of Russia, which would have favored Zionism to get rid of those unwanted guests who infested its southern provinces and were the cause of continual troubles: and he negotiated at St. Petersburg with Minister Plehve, requesting support to obtain optimal terms from Turkey, when he died on July 3, 1904.

IV.

It might be thought that with the passing of Herzl the entire machinery that he had architected with great difficulty would be ruined: but this was not the case. The nostalgia for Palestine had by now taken control of the proletarian crowds of the synagogue: but disheartened by the bitter disappointments of Herzl's political initiatives, who had sought to realize the kingdom of David in international public law, the Zionists, following old advice, returned to the system of private immigration already initiated by Rothschild, adopting a course to succeed silently and securely by the usual artifices of which the traditions of this race have made them masters. Expert emissaries had the means to purchase large properties in the country. Setting foot at a point that was convenient to the ends, waiting for the propitious occasion, for example, a year of drought or bad weather, when the crops failed, so that the Arabs did not have much to pay: they offered then a loan against a mortgage of 200 per cent on the territory of an entire village, which in Palestine is an indivisible property: and at the end of the year the Arabs, insolvent, were obliged to cede all at that price. Entire villages were expropriated in this manner in short order, under the umbrella of the Alliance Israelite, with the support of the "English Palestine Company," and then again with subsidies from the JCA or Jewish Colonial Association founded by Hirsch, which had a fund, it is said, of 250 million. According to the information of the Bulletin of the Italian Geographic Society, already before the war a third of Palestine was in Jewish hands, especially in the districts of Jaffa, Tiberius, and the area surrounding Jerusalem. Certainly the new immigrants, unable or ill prepared to work the unfamiliar land, did not always receive enough yield to derive sustenance so as not to perish in misery. But they learned from experience. Thus there was a shrewdly expanding economic penetration via these events.

And the events were not slow to occur. When the great war . . .

Of these promises the first official document was the letter that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain sent to Lord Walter Lionel Rothschild, vice president of the Zionist Federation of England. The Allied troops were about to begin a march of invasion of Judea from the south. The British came and joined an Italian contingent. On October 31st they occupied Bir es Seba, the former Beersheba, and prepared to assault Gaza, which they took on 7 Nov. 1917; on the 17th the Allies were in Jaffa: twenty days later they entered Jerusalem. On the eve of these events, the 2nd of November, Balfour wrote these words:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

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 best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of the 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.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,  
  
(signed) Arthur James Balfour

V.

France and Italy subscribed to this English declaration. The League of Nations, noted for its Israelite affinity, took haste to confide to Great Britain the mandate over Palestine. Among the articles of this mandate, no. 2 provides: “The mandatory power shall organize in the country a political, administrative and economic government that will make possible the establishment of a national Jewish center (home), and develop for it autonomous governing institutions.” No. 6 provides that: “The administration of Palestine, shall be vigilant to respect the rights of all, shall Jewish immigration … Jewish settlement in the lands of the State and those *senza coltura*.” As the first commissioner of the British Government in Palestine, a Jewish Englishman, Sir Herbert Samuel, was appointed.

There was no greater occasion for the Israelite world to go wild with joy, seeing their golden dream come true and already sensing the rule of the universe in their grasp. The *Univers Israélite* had the courtesy to explain, however, that “the universal rule of the Jews will not be oppression or exploitation of the gentiles for the profit of the Israelites: indeed the mission of Israel is that of making humanity happy, and it is for that reason they are given the rule of the world.” A moving mission for which the world should certainly be grateful. But that concerns the future. As for the present, to take advantage of the favorable dispositions of the Powers, there quickly spread among the Jewish proletariat a new ferment for the most active emigration toward Palestine. In Jerusalem up to the 17th century there were barely 100 Jewish families: at the rise of Zionism there were more than 15,000 Jews in the Holy City: in 1900, it already contained 30,000. After the events of the war, they did not cease to rush in, to spread out through the region, to regroup everywhere more strongly. The preparation of housing, the purchases of land, and the provision of subsidies is assured by the Committee. In addition to Jerusalem, where there are today reported numbers of already 60,000, out of 85,000 residents, there is the colony of Safed, north of the Sea of Galilee, which contained already by the outbreak of the war 25,000, of a population of 40,000. Also Tiberius and Jaffa are two centers of great affluence and activity for the Jewish community: in the latter, especially, a school of agriculture was just opened, which is very useful for immigrants, for whom there were already established primary schools and technical instruction. Then the most special care is devoted by the Zionist Committee to the revival of the Hebrew language, abolishing the Yiddish dialect mixing Aramaic and Germanic, which the German influence had introduced: and already before the last war, much favor had been aroused for the strictly Hebrew school established in the settlement of Rehoboth. (footnote: It is noted that at the Peace Conference, a Zionist delegate, Menachem Ussichkine, was admitted and gave a speech in Hebrew. For several years among the Russian Jews, there was an awakening of study of the national language and it seems there were meetings in that language. In France, a Jewish youth admitted to the exams for the Central School a year ago, had permission from the Ministry to present his work in the Hebrew language.)

Of greater importance will be an institute of Hebrew culture, a University for which the first twelve stones were laid in July 1918 on Mt. Scopus, on the north side of Jerusalem, one stone for each of the ancient tribes of Israel, so that from this intellectual center the word that is already master of the world goes out. While the university is going up, however, the Committee decided to expand the smaller schools in the midst of the populations of the new settlements, under the auspices of the diplomatic conventions adopted by the governments of the Entente nations: and that is how we heard Weizmann, at the conference in Rome, affirm in a somewhat Oriental phrase that “already as of now in Jewish Palestine the children know how to cry and how to play in Hebrew.” How marvelous are these little ones! But the Jewish babies are not capable of these things.

VI.

To sustain all this movement, an appeal was made to the whole Zionist community, and their contribution was continually increasing with the hope of the coming national restoration. This we know from <em>Les Archives Israélites</em>, that, while in 1919 the Zionist administration collected the sum of 5,552,000 Francs, in 1920 it received 9,567,000 Francs collected from 45 States, among which the foremost was naturally the United States of America. Italy participated only in the amount of 92,000 Francs; but the Republic of Argentina contributed 918,000 Francs and Mesopotamia 621,000: tangible indications of the number of Jews that the aforesaid propaganda, despairing of being able to enter Palestine, had been sent to these regions. A striking peculiarity in the midst of this economic accounting was the announcement made in American newspapers of the founding of a Society in Boston to raise funds for the rebuilding of the temple in the Holy City to become once again the center of worship as the metropolis of the nation. We do not know any other news about the society, and probably the erecting of the temple will have been judged to be somewhat premature, but the problem is unavoidable, and it certainly stirs in secret every Zionist soul, in which the thought of the restoration of the kingdom of David cannot advance separately from the glorious memories of the temple of Solomon. It seems that the threat of evangelical prophecy casts a fearful shadow over those glories, and in spite of this, the Jew does not dare raise his voice against the voice of Christ, nor extend his hand to disturb the ruins fallen under the blow of the divine condemnation. What would the rest of the temple if God does not come down more to live there? What would be served, moreover, by rebuilding the temple if God does not come down to dwell in it?

Instead of the temple, Israel is perhaps content with a hall for parliament: and the vote already promulgated a decade ago by the <em>*Jewish World</em>* for the constitution of an International Jewish Assembly, appears to be on the way to actualization in the near-term future, since the English High Commissioner of Palestine, as announced by <em>*Les Archives Israélites</em>*, had already called, in March 1921, a Grand Council of seventy rabbis – the traditional number – and thirty-five laymen, to constitute a Grand Sanhedrin to which would be entrusted the Jewish religious organization in the Holy Land. The Grand Council established, among other things, the institution of an appellate tribunal presided over by two rabbis representing the Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities and composed of eight Jews to handle cases that concern religious law.

Such are the first steps, the first tests, with which the Zionists came to organize the establishment of the Jewish State which should give their people political and national unity. These invasions and these intentions collide with and offend other people and other rights that we will discuss in another edition.