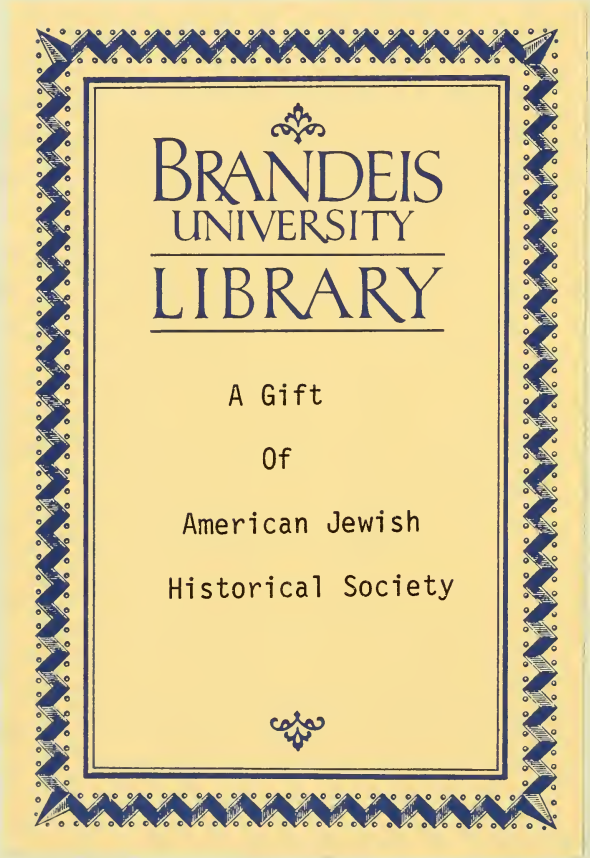
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Zionism and the Jewish Problem

by

LEON SIMON

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Prefatory Note

This pamphlet is a reprint of the first of a series published by the Editors of THE ZIONIST during the years 1915–17. The others are :—

" HISTORY OF ZIONISM," by S. LANDMAN.

" ZIONISM, ITS ORGANISATION AND INSTITUTIONS," by S. LANDMAN.

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" PALESTINE AND THE HEBREW REVIVAL," by E. MILLER.

The ready sale of these pamphlets has amply proved the need of giving the Jewish and non-Jewish world information in handy form on the spirit aims, machinery and achievement of Zionism. It is hoped that these reprints will continue the valuable work of enlightenment, which is their aim.

THE EDITORS.

London, March, 1918.

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Zionism and the Jewish Problem.

THE phrase "The Jewish Problem" is current on the lips of Jews and non-Jews alike. Its use indicates not so much a clear understanding of a definite problem which requires solution as a vague sense that there is something wrong about the position of the Jews in the modern world. The average English Jew, if he were asked what exactly is wrong, would probably say that there are a large number of Jews in the world who live under bad conditions, being either denied elementary human rights or exposed to social prejudice and the attacks of anti-Semites. He would define "the Jewish Problem," if he were pressed to define it, as the problem of obtaining decent treatment for Jews everywhere. But a very little cross-questioning would force him to confess that this definition was inadequate. He would have to admit that even in England, where anti-Semitism is practically unknown, there is none the less a Jewish problem, because the Synagogues are empty, and the younger generation does not seem to be so Jewish as its parents, and there is a great deal of drift into assimilation and intermarriage. If he were pressed further, he might be compelled to admit that the most Jewish Jews are those who live in countries where the Jews are not decently treated; that it is only the influx of Jews from those countries that saves the Jews of England from absorption, and that, therefore, from one point of view, the Jewish problem is more acute in England than in Russia. At all events, it would become clear that the problem is a more complex one than he had imagined, and is not to be solved simply by the grant of equal rights to Jews everywhere. The real solution must lie in something that goes to the heart of the problem. That Jews are persecuted in one country, attacked by anti-Semites in another, and assimi-

lated in a third—these are only the forms in which the problem presents itself. We must get beneath the forms and find the cause of these different phenomena. Then we shall know what the problem is, and if we can remove the cause we shall have solved the problem.

The root cause to which these different phenomena are traceable, put in its simplest terms, is that there is no country in which the Jews as a body are in the position of a man in his own home. The individual Jew is no doubt "at home" in those countries which tolerate Jews and allow them the rights of citizenship; but, as has been pointed out above, the Jewish problem would not be solved—it would only take on a different form—if that condition were universal. And the reason is that the individual Jew is not only an individual, but also a member of a particular ethnic group, and so long as he does not completely sever himself from that group there remains inevitably an element in his life which makes him to some extent a stranger, a being different from his neighbours. Some nations are by their nature and circumstances more tolerant than others of strangers; but at bottom all men have a certain feeling of mistrust and dislike for the stranger, and even where conditions are most favourable this feeling is liable to be roused to active operation by new circumstances. Further, in the case of the Jews this feeling, when it does become active, is apt to be intensified by the fact that they are not only strangers, but strangers who come from nowhere, who cannot point to any place where *as a body* they are not strangers. Hence the various phenomena of anti-Semitism, actual and potential. In one country Jews are subjected to positive persecution and restriction; in another they suffer under the milder forms of social anti-Semitism; in a third new circumstances lead to a growth of anti-Semitic feeling which may at any time break out in active intolerance. How shall the Jew escape these evils? At first sight there appears to be only one way. He must endeavour to make good his claim to be accepted as an equal by showing that he can cease to be different—that he can sink his own individuality and become an exact copy of his neighbour. Naturally, he

cannot do that completely without ceasing to be a Jew altogether. So, despite his efforts to become exactly like his neighbour, he remains something different, and his neighbour remains conscious of the difference. Thus the phenomena of assimilation and anti-Semitism show themselves side by side, and the very men who try hardest to assimilate are the targets for the arrows of the anti-Semite.

In a country where Jews play a large part in economic and intellectual life their success arouses the envy and hatred of those who feel that these aliens have no right to be running their businesses and writing their literature. And yet these very Jews may be Jews only in spite of themselves —only in so far as they cannot get rid of their distinctively Jewish characteristics. Even where open anti-Semitism does not prevail, it happens often enough that the reputation of Jews as a people suffers precisely because of an individual Jew who has lost all contact with Jews and Judaism. Such a man is of no service to his people, but he is made on occasion a stick to beat them with. Neither he nor his people is allowed to forget that he is a Jew so soon as he achieves an undesirable notoriety. Sometimes, again, a non-Jew who wishes to be friendly will demonstrate the excellent qualities of Jews by saying that he has known Jews for years without suspecting their Jewish origin ; or a Jew will himself boast that throughout a long literary career he has never betrayed his Jewishness by a single word. Such tragi-comedies as these can happen only in the life of a people which has not a home, which is and yet is not a people, which cannot be either itself or something else, but is always partly the one and partly the other

A people without a homeland of its own, without a centre in which its individuality can take shape in concrete institutions, loses the respect both of itself and of other peoples. Respect demands understanding ; but the Jewish people, situated as it is at present, cannot be understood—it cannot be understood even by Jews, and they begin to have doubts of its existence, because it has no recognised central institutions through which its ideas and aspirations can voice themselves. Hence, too, Judaism is always in solution ;

nobody can say what Judaism is, nor what being a Jew means. We can only attempt to say what Judaism ought to be and what a Jew ought to do. But even our abstract definitions of Judaism and of the Jew as he ought to be are a chaos of opposing conceptions, because we have no living reality to serve as a guiding norm. And so Judaism loses its hold on the individual Jew, and the process known as "assimilation" becomes possible. The tragedy of assimilation is not that the Jew ceases to be a Jew, but that he remains a Jew and becomes something else at the same time. He becomes an anomaly, Jew and not-Jew in one. He is bound by a close and well-defined tie to the people of his adoption; but he is also bound by a loose and indefinable tie to Jews in other countries, however much they may differ from him in religious ideas or political status. This anomalous position he can end at present only in one way—by giving up the Jewish tie. But it ought to be possible for him to end it by the other alternative, by rejoining the Jewish people.

He would have that possibility, if there were a concrete Jewish life of which he could become a member at the expense of renouncing something else—in other words, if the Jewish people had a home. Obviously not all Jews could or would avail themselves of that possibility. It would only be a minority of the Jews in the world who would actually return to their own land and their own people. For that minority the escape from the conditions of which anti-Semitism and assimilation are the fruits would be complete. But for the majority also, for those who remained outside the Jewish land, the existence of a centre of Jewish life would be a fact of profound significance. It would give Judaism a new meaning and reality in their lives. They would see in the Jewish land a living expression of the Jewish character and Jewish ideals; they would have in it a standard by which to measure their own Judaism, and a source of spiritual influence to keep their Judaism from decay. They would no longer feel it necessary to aim at becoming exact copies of their neighbours; they would find it worth while to be different from their neighbours, even at

some cost to themselves. They would be proud to carry into the world something of the Jewish outlook on life and to help in bringing the world to a better understanding of that outlook. Thus they would be a spiritual force in the world, giving as well as taking, and earning their right to a place in civilisation by remaining Jews, not by renouncing Judaism or whittling it away to nothing.

At present there is no centre in which the Jewish people can live in its own life, and from which Jews elsewhere can derive the knowledge and the influence of the Jewish outlook. The Jewish people, so far as it exists at all except in idea, is to be found in the great ghettoes of Eastern Europe. There Jews live as Jews, untroubled—or troubled comparatively little—by the need to accommodate the fact of their Jewishness, and the mode of life in which that fact expresses itself, to non-Jewish conceptions and institutions. In the ghetto Jews have developed a form of life which is their own, determined primarily by their own national character; and that centre of Jewish life has been for over a century the great reservoir of Judaism, the source from which the scattered Jewish communities outside it have been able to draw something of Jewish feeling and Jewish culture. It is because of the existence of that centre of Jewish life that the Jew in lands of freedom is able to remain in some measure a Jew, to import some treasured relics of his own tradition into the non-Jewish life which he is compelled to live. But, much as the emancipated Jew owes to the ghetto, he is unable to look on it with respect and affection as the source of his Judaism and the standard expression of what Judaism should be, or to imagine himself returning to it in order to regain closer contact with his people. To leave the ghetto is to escape from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light; and no sane man would travel in the reverse direction. For the Jews of the ghetto themselves, escape into better conditions is an ideal; return to it can never be an ideal. Thus the ghetto—the only concrete form in which the life of the Jewish people exists—cannot perform the function of a national centre. It has no moral hold on those Jews who are outside it, and it is a matter of necessity, not of choice,

for those who remain in it. No Jew can point to it with pride and say, "That is the home of my people, that is how Jews live when they are able to live as members of the Jewish people."

But even if the Jewry of Eastern Europe could perform that function, its day seems to be passing. It no longer holds together and resists external attack as it did. Before our eyes it is being broken up by the combined forces of persecution and European culture. Its time-hallowed institutions are losing their hold on those who are brought up under their influence; its capacity to reproduce a single type of life from generation to generation is undermined. The present war, bringing unthinkable loss and suffering to the Jewish masses, must hasten the process of disruption. That process will not be completed in a year or in a generation; but it goes on surely and not slowly, and it will end in the disappearance of the ghetto as we know it, the ghetto through which whatever of Judaism survives has come into the modern world. And with the ghetto there disappears the one unifying force in Jewry, the one concrete link between the present and the past. For centuries Judaism has had a home—though neither a comfortable nor a beautiful home—in the ghetto, where alone the Jewish people has lived as the Jewish people. If the ghetto disappears—and who does not want it to disappear?—Judaism will be left without even the semblance of a home, and the will and the power of the Jew to be a Jew will be weakened still further.

The Jewish people without a home and Judaism without a home—these are two sides of the same fact. For Judaism and the Jewish people are related as soul and body, and neither can exist without the other. And similarly the anomalous position of the Jews in the modern world and the decay of Judaism are two sides of the same fact. The Jew is both Jew and not-Jew, and is unable to be completely either, because there is no concrete embodiment of Judaism from which he can learn to understand what Judaism is.

It is this central problem—the homelessnesss of the Jewish people and of Judaism—that Zionism attacks. Its distinctive

feature is that it sees the problem as a national one, not as the problem of this or that group of individual Jews; and it aims at removing the conditions which make the problem so acute, not at administering a palliative here or there. For so long as the conditions remain, the problem must always recur. So long as the Jewish people remains without a home, it must always be faced with the same terrible alternative—either a cramped and stunted Jewish life in the ghetto, or the decay of Judaism and the Jewish consciousness under emancipation. But to find a home for the Jewish people does not mean to congregate all Jews together in one place. That is obviously impossible, even if it were desirable. The millions of Jews in Russia could not be transplanted by the wave of a wand to a Jewish land; and any gradual emigration must be more or less counterbalanced by the natural growth of population. The economic problem of the Jews in the countries of Eastern Europe must be settled, for the great mass of them, in those countries themselves. Emancipated Jews, again, are for the most part unwilling to leave the countries of their adoption. Materially speaking, they are sufficiently well off where they are, and probably it will only be a minority in whom the Jewish consciousness will be sufficiently strong to draw them back to their own national centre. But, taking East and West together, there is a sufficiently large number of Jews who would be eager, given the opportunity, to help in laying the foundations of a new Jewish life in a Jewish land. The task of Zionism is to create that opportunity. As to the land that is to be the Jewish land there can be no question. Palestine alone, of all the countries on which the Jew has set foot throughout his long history, has an abiding place in his national tradition. It was in Palestine that the Jews lived as a nation and produced the highest fruits of their genius. Palestine has been a vital element in the national consciousness of the Jewish people through all the centuries of exile, and the memory of it and the hope for it have been among the most powerful forces making for the preservation of Jewry and of Judaism. The task of Zionism, then, is to create a home for the Jewish people in Palestine; to make it possible

for large numbers of Jews to settle there and live under conditions in which they can produce a type of life corresponding to the character and ideals of the Jewish people. When the aim of Zionism is accomplished, Palestine will be the home of the Jewish people, not because it will contain all the Jews in the world (that is impossible), but because it will be the centre to which all Jews will look as the home and the source of all that is most essentially Jewish. Palestine will be the country in which Jews are to be found, just as Ireland is the country in which one would look for the real Irish type, though there are more Irishmen outside Ireland than in it. And similarly Palestine will be the home of Judaism, not because there will be no Judaism anywhere else, but because in Palestine the Jewish spirit will have free play, and there the Jewish mind and character will express themselves as they can nowhere else.

Such is in outline the Jewish problem as Zionsts see it, and such is the Zionist solution. In one form or another the idea of a national return to Palestine has been an active force in Jewish life for quite half a century, and it is therefore much older than the modern Zionist movement, which was founded by Dr. Theodor Herzl in 1896. But it is in the Zionist movement that the idea has taken most practical and permanent shape, and come most prominently before the world, and the idea is therefore rightly associated with the name of Zionism. A complete account of the Zionist movement, of its history, its organisation, its institutions, and its achievements, would be out of place here.* For the present purpose it will suffice to set forth the aims of the movement as formulated in its programme, and to indicate briefly the steps which have been taken to put theory into practice.

The programme of the Zionist movement was laid down at the first Congress, at Basle, in 1897, and is known as the "Basle Programme." The first article of the Basle Programme, which is a general statement of aim, runs as follows :—

"The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law."

* The various aspects of the subject are treated elsewhere in this series. See "History of Zionism" and "Zionism, its Organisation and Institutions" by S. Landman, in this series.

The programme was originally formulated in German, and the phrase translated above "secured by public law"—*öffentlich-rechtlich gesichert*—cannot be exactly rendered in English,* because of the difference between English and German legal conceptions. The distinction between *öffentliches Recht* and *privat-Recht* is one that does not exist in English law; and though *öffentliches Recht* may be rendered by "public law," the use of the word "public" does not give the term any precise meaning. What the framers of the programme meant, in effect, was that there was to be some sort of guarantee for the Jewish settlement in Palestine, a guarantee given to the Zionist organisation, or to the Jewish people, as a body, over and above the implied guarantee of rights which the individual resident in a country has as an individual. The precise form of the guarantee was not defined. In the early years of Zionism most people thought of a Jewish State under international guarantees, or of a charter from the Turkish Government with the guarantee of the European Powers for its observance. But later, and especially after the Turkish Revolution of 1908, this idea fell into the background, and, while Jewish life in Palestine was visibly growing from year to year, and the Jewish settlement suffered no molestation (though it was far from receiving active help or even official countenance) at the hands of the Turkish Government, the question of guarantees, international or otherwise, ceased to trouble Zionists to any extent. To this point, however, we shall have to return later in dealing with the means by which the Zionist movement strove to attain its aim.

These means are thus formulated in the Basle Programme:—

1. The promotion by appropriate means of the settlement in Palestine of Jewish agriculturists, artisans and manufacturers.

2. The organisation and binding together of the whole of Jewry by means of suitable institutions, both local and

* It should be superfluous to point out that the English translation which is—or used to be—current—"a publicly-legally assured home"—is quite meaningless, and is not even English. Another version is "publicly recognised, legally secured"; but this makes no real attempt to reproduce the sense of the original.

international, in accordance with the laws of each country.

3. The strengthening of the Jewish national feeling and national consciousness.

4. By way of preparation, steps towards obtaining the consent of Governments, where necessary, in order to reach the goal of Zionism.

Briefly, these four branches of Zionist work may be summarised as follows: first, the colonisation and development of Palestine; secondly, the cementing of the scattered sections of Jewry; thirdly, the strengthening of the Jewish national consciousness; and fourthly, the enlistment of the sympathy and assistance of powerful nations.

It is obvious that these four methods of activity do not all stand in the same relation to the aim of Zionism. Two of them—the first and the third—are direct means of promoting the end in view; the other two are indirect. That is to say, all that the aim of Zionism demands is, first, that conditions favourable to the rebirth of Jewish national life shall be created in Palestine, and secondly, that the right attitude of mind shall be cultivated among the Jews throughout the world, so that numbers of them will be willing to become pioneers in the work of building up a Jewish life in the country. To bring into closer connection the different bodies of Jews scattered over the globe, and to obtain recognition and assistance from the nations—these are subsidiary measures, however important; and the possibility of carrying them out in practice depends entirely on the progress made in colonising Palestine and in reviving the Jewish consciousness. For only those Jews in whom the Jewish consciousness has been awakened will join a world-wide organisation of Jewry; and the extent to which Zionism can become a political force, capable of winning the sympathy and the active support of governments, must be determined entirely by the strength of the Jewish holding in Palestine on the one hand, and the strength of the desire of the Jews for Palestine on the other.

In practice the kind of work which holds the second place in the programme—the organisation and knitting together

of the scattered bodies of Jews—has resolved itself into the formation in all Jewish centres throughout the world of Zionist Societies, which are grouped in local Federations, and through the local Federations in the Zionist Organisation. The aim of uniting all Jews in the organisation has not been realised. But the number of shekel-payers (the shekel is the symbol of membership of the organisation) has risen to something like 200,000—a number which is very considerable in view of the difficulties involved in organising groups of individuals spread over the whole world and speaking all the languages under the sun. And the effect of the Zionist idea on Jewish life is not wholly to be measured by the number of professed adherents of the movement. Large numbers of Jews in every country have shown practical sympathy with Zionist aims, though they have not entered the organisation.

The other indirect means to the Zionist end—that of winning the sympathy and support of the nations—played a large part in the early history of the movement. It was regarded by Dr. Herzl as a cardinal point in his programme. Approaching the Jewish problem as he did at a time when Turkey was "the sick man," and when the break-up of the Ottoman Empire seemed imminent, he not unnaturally thought that there could be no hope of security for the Jewish settlement in Palestine unless it were established under a charter signed and sealed by the European Powers. Hence he devoted a large part of his energies to negotiating not alone with the Sultan, but with the rulers of Western countries as well. This particular form of activity had its most splendid triumph in the offer by the British Government of a territory in East Africa for a large autonomous settlement of Jews. But the masses of Zionists would have nothing to say to a settlement outside Palestine; and the most important effect of the East African scheme was to produce a strong reaction in favour of immediate practical work in the country which was admitted on all hands to be the ultimate goal of the movement. Circumstances conspired to strengthen this tendency, and to throw diplomatic activity into the background. The death of

Dr. Herzl in July, 1904, robbed the movement of the leader whose gifts and genius fitted him pre-eminently for diplomatic activity. And later, the whole situation was changed* by the Turkish revolution, which gave the Ottoman Empire free institutions and representative government. In face of the new *régime* in Turkey, the need for a charter could no longer be maintained, and the sphere of diplomatic activity was much reduced. This combination of causes—the reaction against East Africa, the death of Dr. Herzl, and the Turkish revolution—led to a greater concentration of Zionist effort on those lines of activity which we have called direct means to the end—on the work of colonisation in Palestine, and on the strengthening of the national consciousness outside Palestine.

It is not the purpose of this essay to sketch even in outline the progress which Zionism has made along these two lines of activity. It may suffice to say that under the influence of the movement, direct or indirect, there have grown up in Palestine the beginning of a new Jewish life—small beginnings as yet, but full of promise for the future. In Palestine to-day there are Jews settled on the soil and in the towns whose national consciousness is Jewish and whose language is Hebrew. The ideal of the return to the land of Palestine, as the home of the Jewish people, has begun to take concrete shape. And concurrently with this development, and partly as a result of it, there has gradually come about a change in the outlook of Jews—a change which can be more easily felt by those who are in touch with Jewish affairs than it can be measured by facts and figures. There are still far too many Jews in whom the Jewish consciousness—the sense of belonging to the Jewish people and sharing its hopes—has not been awakened. But the national idea has begun to affect spheres of Jewish life in which a generation ago the drift towards assimilation was the only visible movement; and its influence will grow with the growth of its concrete embodiment in Palestine.

It will be apparent from what has been said that Zionist

* Or rather, seemed to be changed: for the promise of the Turkish revolution was not fulfilled, and the new *régime* has been if anything less friendly than the old to Jewish national aspirations.

activity has taken different forms in different periods. That is natural enough. The goal is one, but the roads are many, and the choice of road must be dictated by circumstances. What is essential is a clear conception of the goal, a clear understanding of the problem which Zionism sets out to solve and of the way in which it can be solved. Nothing but confusion can be caused by an attempt to represent Palestine as an immediate remedy for all the ills under which individual Jews or bodies of Jews suffer. Zionism does not hold out a prospect of a sudden and miraculous "ingathering of the exiles." There must always be Jews in exile—outside Palestine—so long as the human mind can foresee. But, when Jewish life is firmly established in Palestine, and Palestine has become the recognised centre of Jewry, the Jewish people and Judaism will no longer be in exile. That is what Zionism sets out to accomplish, and what it has begun to accomplish. To improve the conditions and relieve the misery of individual Jews is the work of other agencies. Zionism does not belittle the importance of such work. But the national need transcends the immediate needs of individuals; and Zionism, because its concern is with the supreme national need, claims to be more vital to the Jewish people than any philanthropic organisation can be. It does not combat philanthropic effort, but it does combat the idea that as between the Jews of the West and those of the East the proper relation is that of bestower and receiver. It rejects the notion, so natural to the English Jew, that our "foreign coreligionists" require help from us and can give us nothing. It recognises that it is these "foreign co-religionists" who have borne the brunt of the battle, and have preserved Judaism and the Jewish consciousness and faith in the Jewish future under intolerable conditions of life; whereas their would-be benefactors are giving up all that could make the long agony worth while. It sees the supreme task of Jews not doling out material aid to the poor and the persecuted—however necessary such work may be—but in staying the disruptive forces which threaten the very existence of Jews and of Judaism. That task can be accomplished by no philanthropist, be he never so

wealthy and so generous. It demands the united effort of all those Jews, be they rich or poor, in whom the consciousness of being Jews—of being the heirs of the Jewish tradition and of having the responsibility for its preservation—is still a living force. It is a task to which no man can set his hand in the right spirit if he thinks that he is working for others. Every man must work for himself and for the nation, for himself as a member of the nation in idea, if not in fact. Only if he has that ideal attachment to the nation can he help to create the possibility of an actual attachment, for himself or for his children. Just as " every Jew should regard himself as having taken part in the exodus from Egypt," so should every Jew regard himself as a participant in the national regeneration which is yet to come. It must be something vital to himself as a Jew. That is the key to the Zionist attitude of mind, and the measure of its difference from the philanthropic attitude.

Jewish philanthropists may alleviate the lot of individual Jews or groups of Jews who are less happily situated than themselves. But to create a home for the Jewish people, to transform " the Jewish people " from an abstraction into a reality, and to make the Jewish spirit once more a living and productive force : that is an aim which demands the heart and soul of every Jew who prefers life to death. And that is the aim of Zionism.

POSTSCRIPT.

The foregoing essay, which was written in 1915, is reprinted here in its original form, except for a few slight modifications. Since its first publication the Russian revolution has brought the hope of better conditions of life to large masses of the Jewish people, and the explicit recognition of Zionism by Great Britain and her Allies has put the Jewish national movement on a plane of political importance to which it could never aspire before. But while the Jewish outlook and the prospects of Zionist achievement in the near future are thus vastly improved, the fundamentals of Zionism, with which this essay deals, are in no way altered.

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