

Syria and The Holy Land

by The Very Rev. Sir George Adam Smith

The Limits of the Jewish Area

Again there is the question of the limits of the Jewish area with all the difficulties it raises, both ethnic and strategic. Zionists claim for the Jews “the whole country” of Palestine; and one writer adds: “there must be no partition of Palestine; the Jew in Galilee must not be cut off by an international frontier from the Jew in Jerusalem.” But what is Palestine? Save under the Romans, the name has never had exact borders; today it is perhaps more vaguely applied than at any other time.

For at least fifteen centuries Lebanon has been Christian territory, and as we have seen has enjoyed since 1860 a separate constitution with a Christian governor under the 10 protection of the Powers of Europe. The population is about 400,000, of whom 320,000 are Christians, 50,000 Druzes and beyond the rest Moslems with practically no Jews. There is Beyrout with a population of over 100,000, of whom two thirds are Christian and the rest Moslem...What is the evidence of history as to Jewish rights over these eastern provinces?

Except when Herod had the legions of Rome behind him the Jewish nation failed to exercise authority or keep order in Hauran in parts of Gilead and in Moab. Their conquests were temporary, their settlements inconstant. The civilisation of those provinces was never Jewish but Greek, Roman or Byzantine; and the last was long ensured by tribes of Christian Arabs -- wardens of the marches -- who themselves

developed and impressive culture and have left, standing to this day on the desert- margins, monuments of their ability and character. These Arab Christians have not died out; scattered communities of them still endure east of the Jordan, as far south as Kerak, at other points in Moab and Gilead, and even in Hauran and on the Druze- Mountain. Again, there is the Negeb, where the only remains of settled life are Byzantine. There is Philistia, only occasionally in Jewish hands.

Judaea, Samaria and Galilee are left. Is the whole of each of these to be the area of the Jewish “national home”? The religious history of Jerusalem and the devotion to her of so many living faiths point to the conclusion that the city and its territory should be absolutely neutral under international guarantees. But if the rest of Western Palestine be given back to the Jewish people as a people, what of the Christian communities within it, especially in Bethlehem and its neighborhood -- where they have given as good proof as many Jewish colonists of their power to farm the soil -- and in Nazareth and its neighbourhood, also at other points...

Thus the claims of the Zionists, strong though they be, raise larger and more detailed questions than their copious literature has discussed or even stated. The Zionist rightly appeals to history; but his appeal must be decided on wider and more complicated considerations than he advances -- not only the Jewish associations and achievements in Palestine, but Jewish limitations and failures as well, along with the rights that other races and faiths have undoubtedly earned in that doubly and trebly sacred land.

It is not true that “Palestine is the national home of the Jewish people and of no other people.” It is not correct to call its non-Jewish inhabitants “Arabs,” or to say that “they

have left no image of their spirit and made no history -- except in the great Mosque.” We may rule out the Franks, their brief discipline of Syria and the many monuments of 45 this that remain. But what of the native Christians, Syrian and Greek? They doubtless claim that their faith is the moral heir of all that was best in ancient Judaism.

In short, the Jewish question in the Holy Land cannot be decided by itself, nor merely upon general assurances that “the rights of other creeds and races will be respected” 50 under Jewish dominance. Obviously a very great deal of difficult detail has still to be thought out by the Powers of Europe -- and the democracies of Europe educated in the thinking thereof -- before the future of Syria can be settled on lines of justice and security for all nations and creeds alike.

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