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ORIGINS OF THE  
BALFOUR DECLARATION  
Dr. Weizmann's Contribution

by

James A. Malcolm

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*Origins of the Balfour Declaration:  
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## ORIGINS OF THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

DR. WEIZMANN'S CONTRIBUTION

by

JAMES A. MALCOLM.

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In order to give the history of the Balfour Declaration it would seem necessary to explain why the Jewish problem and Zionist aspirations for self-emancipation in Palestine were of interest to me and how it fell to my lot to meet Dr. Weizmann and to initiate the negotiations which culminated in the publication of that historic charter of Jewish national resurgence.

My family, which is of Armenian stock, has been settled in Persia since before Elizabethan days. For two centuries at least it has been engaged in shipping and commerce in Bushire, and was always closely identified with British interests in Persia and the Arabian littoral of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. We acted for the British Government in various capacities in those parts. For instance, we were fiscal agents and during the Napoleonic wars we acted as treasurers to British Missions to the Shah of Persia. (My father and mother were married on board a British man-of-war by the British Admiral). Our Agents at Baghdad were the well-known and important David Sassoon family, who had originally hailed from Sasoun in Armenia. On one occasion the Sassoon family had to flee the rapacity of the then semi-independent Pasha of Baghdad and had lain hidden in our home in Bushire for several weeks until arrangements could be made to put them (with their treasures) on board one of our "Dhows" at night and send them off to Bombay. For many decades the Jews in Southern Persia always looked to our family for protection and sometimes hundreds of them sought safety and sactuary in the spacious courtyards of our houses in Bushire and Shiraz. We also sometimes acted as agents for Sir Moses Montefiore, who sent us money for distribution amongst the indigent members of the Jewish community. This was done by our cashiers who were all Jews and who had full charge of all the cash resources of our firm. (There were no banks in those days.)

It was therefore natural that when I came to England as a boy for my education, in 1881, I was placed under the guardianship of an old friend, and agent of the family, Sir Albert (Abdella) Sassoon in London, and cultivated Jewish friends, including Colonel Goldsmid. After leaving Oxford, while dabbling in journalism, I met Mr. Edward Fitzgerald, who was then a roving correspondent of the "Daily News" on the Continent. He had met Herzl in Vienna and Constantinople and told me a good deal about him and his Zionist ideas, which naturally interested me very much. In London, I heard from Colonel Goldsmid and other notable Jews about projected Jewish settlements in Palestine, El Arish, Argentine and Kenya. Of course, I had read Byron, George Eliot and Oliphant about the Jews. Later, during my business travels in Eastern Europe and in Russia, I saw something of the Jewish centres and I always remembered my father had told me that wherever they were, the Jews never failed each Passover to drink to "next year in the Land of Israel".

Early in 1915 I founded the Russia Society with the object of spreading knowledge of Russia among the British public as a means of improving relations between the two countries which



were allied in war. The Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Lowther (now Lord Ullwater) was President and nearly all the members of the Cabinet, including Mr. Churchill, were Vice-Presidents. Amongst the earliest of the distinguished members were Dr. J. H. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi, and the late Mr. L. J. Greenberg, Editor of the "Jewish Chronicle". They told me they hoped that better understanding between England and Russia might lead to better treatment for the Jews in the latter country.

At the beginning of 1916, with the sanction of the British and Russian Governments, I was appointed by His Holiness the Armenian Catholikos, as one of the five members of the Armenian National Delegation to take charge of the Armenian interests during the war and after. I was also the accredited official representative in London because the President, H. E. Boghas Nubar Pasha, and the remaining members were located in Paris.

In my official capacity I had frequent contacts with the Cabinet Office, the Foreign Office and the War Office, the French and other allied Embassies in London, and had also to be in touch personally during visits to Paris, with my colleagues there and with the leading French authorities. Among the matters I had to negotiate were the welfare of the Armenian refugees from Turkey (in whom the United States took a generous and practical interest), and the disposition of the Armenian volunteers in Eastern Armenia who, under General Antranik, were (as recorded by Lord Cecil) operating on the left wing of the British Army in Northern Mesopotamia. Other Armenian volunteers from France and U.S.A., Canada and elsewhere were being trained in Cyprus, and eventually 11,000 of them fought under Allenby with distinction in Palestine. These questions brought me into close relation with Sir Mark Sykes, Under Secretary of the War Cabinet for the Near East, and with M. Gout, his opposite number at the Quai d'Orsay, and M. Georges Picot, Counsellor at the French Embassy in London.

During one of my visits to the War Cabinet Office in Whitehall Gardens in the late autumn of 1916, I found Sir Mark Sykes less buoyant than usual. As I had known his family of old and our relations were unrestrained, I enquired what was troubling him. He spoke of military deadlock in France, the growing menace of submarine warfare, the unsatisfactory situation which was developing in Russia and the general bleak outlook. He also told me that the much publicised Arab revolt in the desert, which was intended to deal a mortal blow to the Turks from within, was a dismal and costly failure.\* The Cabinet was looking anxiously for United States intervention. I asked him what progress was being made in that direction. He shook his head glumly.

\* Early in the War the Arabs and their British friends represented that they were in a position to render very great assistance in the Middle East. It was on the strength of these representations and pretensions that the promise contained in the MacMahon letter to King Hussein was made. It was subsequently found that the Arabs were unable to "deliver the goods" and the so-called "Revolt in the Desert" was but a mirage. Their effort, at its maximum, never exceeded seven hundred tribesmen, but frequently less than 300, who careered about the desert some hundreds of miles behind the fighting line reporting for duty on "pay day". for this they received a remuneration of £200,000 per month in actual gold, which was delivered to them at Akabah. This sum represented a remuneration for every one of the tribesmen of more than the pay of a British Field Marshal.

Lawrence himself made no secret of his profound disappointment with the Arab failure to carry out their engagements. That Hussein and Feyzal were not in a position to give any effective help was afterwards made abundantly clear by the fact that Ibn Saud was easily able to drive Hussein out of his kingdom. Similar

"Precious little", he replied. He had thought of enlisting the substantial Jewish influence in the United States, but had been unable to do so. Reports from America revealed a very pro-German tendency among the wealthy American Jewish bankers and bond issuing houses, nearly all of German origin, and among Jewish journalists who took their cue from them. He was sorely disappointed and puzzled that two missions which had been sent from France and Italy had completely failed to have any effect. It appeared that the Tsarist persecution of the Jews, with the terrible record of pogroms at every Russian retreat, had made a deep impression. As the Germans had, on the contrary, shown in many army ordinances, especially in occupied Poland, a great understanding and sympathy for the Jews, the pro-German tendency of these Jews of German origin could not be deflected.

I enquired what special argument or consideration had the Allies put forward to win over American Jewry. Sir Mark replied that they had made use of the same argument as used elsewhere, viz. that we shall eventually win and it was better to be on the winning side. I informed him that there was a way to make American Jewry thoroughly pro-Ally, and make them conscious that only an Allied victory could be of permanent benefit to Jewry all over the world. I said to him, "You are going the wrong way about it. The well-to-do English Jews you meet and the Jewish clergy are not the real leaders of the Jewish people. You have overlooked what the call of nationality means. Do you know of the Zionist Movement?" Sir Mark admitted ignorance of this movement and I told him something about it and concluded by saying, "You can win the sympathy of the Jews everywhere, in one way only, and that way is by offering to try and secure Palestine for them."

Sir Mark was taken aback and confessed that what I had told him was something quite new and most impressive. He would talk to me again about it. A day or two later he reverted to the subject and again said it was most interesting, but there were very great difficulties. I did not know at the time the exact nature of these difficulties (it was only later that I heard of the Sykes-Picot Treaty with France and Russia.\*\*). I suggested that

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\* (continued)

exaggerated Arab claims have, it may be noted, also been made regarding their help in the present War. These noisy claims, with nothing to back them up, remind me of an Eastern proverb (from the Talmud I believe), "An oyster shell in an empty barrel makes a loud noise".

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\*\* This secret Treaty, signed in May 1916, divided Turkish territories in the Near East into three zones of influence, one British, one French and one Russian. Palestine was to have been divided in a haphazard way between France and Britain under some vague form of international control to be defined later. The Jews were not mentioned at all and had clearly not been intended to have anything to do with the future Palestine.

he should discuss it with Lord Milner, a member of the War Cabinet who was known to take a large and imaginative view of the several European nationalist issues raised by the War. He promised to do so and kept his promise. He told me that Lord Milner was greatly interested to learn of the Jewish Nationalist movement, but could not see any possibilities of promising Palestine to the Jews. I replied that it seemed to me the only way to achieve the desired result, and mentioned that one of President Wilson's most intimate friends, for whose humanitarian views he had the greatest respect, was Justice Brandeis, of the Supreme Court, who was a convinced Zionist. Sir Mark was much interested in this new aspect and said he would check up on the matter, but he still saw no possibility of the War Cabinet adopting my idea. I asked him why, and he replied, "We cannot act without our Allies and I am afraid they would never agree". I then suggested that if the object was to secure United States help, surely the Allies would agree. If he could obtain from the War Cabinet an assurance that help would be given towards securing Palestine for the Jews, it was certain that Jews in all neutral countries, especially the United States, would become pro-British and pro-Ally. He promised to put the question again to Lord Milner, with the additional arguments I had suggested.

About a week later he reported that Milner had informally discussed the matter with his colleagues, and they were favourably disposed to the idea. Of course they could not commit themselves, but advised that I should open negotiations with the Zionist leaders. I replied that this was futile as I could not go to them empty handed. I said I thought it would be sufficient if I were personally convinced of the sincerity of the Cabinet's intentions so that I could go to the Zionists and say, "If you help the Allies, you will have the support of the British in securing Palestine for the Jews". This appealed to Sir Mark as eminently reasonable but he saw grave difficulties. France would have to be persuaded to support the idea of Palestine for the Jews. Then there was the Vatican (Sir Mark himself was a Catholic) which would oppose any scheme which meant placing the Christian Holy Places under Jewish control. I replied that these difficulties must be overcome if the Allies wanted the help of the United States. Palestine meant Jewish support which was becoming increasingly necessary. Sir Mark then raised the objection of the apparent apathy of many Jews to the idea of Palestine and the opposition of others. I replied, "That is because you have not met the other kind of Jews, who are remarkable types and intensely attached to the idea of Zion. There are tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of such Jews. The wealthy Jewish bankers of London are completely out of touch with them." Sir Mark undertook to report our conversation to the Cabinet. He thought Lord Milner and George Barnes would understand. A day or two later, he informed me that the Cabinet had agreed to my suggestion and authorised me to open negotiations with the Zionists.

Remembering my conversations with Mr. L. J. Greenberg, the Editor of the "Jewish Chronicle", I wrote at once to him. I told him that from information in my possession I was sure the time had arrived when Jewry should cease "sitting on the fence" and come down definitely on the side of the Allies and use all their influence, especially in the U.S.A., to secure an Allied victory. The Jews wanted Palestine and now was a chance to get it. Such an opportunity would hardly recur and it was the duty of every Zionist to act quickly. I concluded by asking him if he could enable me to meet the leaders of the Zionist Movement. Greenberg replied in an enthusiastic letter, inviting me for a discussion.

After I had told him the position and of the favourable prospects, he offered to arrange a meeting between Dr. Weizmann and the other leaders of the movement, and myself. A Greenberg asked me to meet him at Dr. Weizmann's house in Addison Road and introduced me to Dr. Weizmann, Mr. Sokolow and some others whose names I do not remember (I am not sure if Dr. Tchlenow was there, but I met him later). Dr. Weizmann had moved from Manchester to London a few months previously and was working on explosives for the Admiralty and Ministry of Munitions. As is well known, he had invented an important process for the manufacture of acetone. Dr. Weizmann referred to his talks with C.P.Scott, Editor of the "Manchester Guardian", Mr. Lloyd George (then Minister of Munitions) and Balfour (then head of the Admiralty) and asked me what reasons I had for being convinced of success. I recounted the gist of my several conversations with Sir Mark Sykes and that I had the War Cabinet's authority for my overtures. Dr. Weizmann was most interested and asked his colleagues for their views. All of them, and notably Mr. Sokolow, were sceptical and hesitant. But Dr. Weizmann turned to me again and asked if I was really personally convinced that the Government seriously intended to make a promise of Palestine in consideration of the help required from American Jewry, and if I would advise them to accept, and I replied, "Yes, most certainly." Whereupon Dr. Weizmann shook hands with me saying, "I accept your advice", and asked when he could meet Sir Mark Sykes. I said if I could telephone to Sir Mark I might be able to fix it there and then. Accordingly, I rang him up, said I was speaking from Dr. Weizmann's house and asked when I could bring him along. Sir Mark fixed the appointment for the very next day, which was a Sunday.

My impression of Dr. Weizmann at this first meeting was of a man careful and yet quick to grasp the possibilities of a situation, looking ahead to the end of the process and expecting many setbacks on the way. His tall figure, his whole bearing, his pale face and keen eyes and his natural geniality, made a great impression on me which has not faded after nearly thirty years. The other gentlemen also struck me as equally passionate and devoted workers for their cause.

Dr. Weizmann was unable, owing to war duties, to accompany me to Buckingham Gate on the next day to meet Sir Mark Sykes, but Mr. Sokolow, Mr. Greenberg and one or two other Zionists attended. The results of the talk were very satisfactory. The first step was to inform Zionist leaders in all parts of the world of the compact and Sir Marks said they would be given immediate facilities for cables to be sent through the Foreign Office and War Office, through the British Embassies and Consulates. A special detailed message was at once sent to Justice Brandeis in cipher through the Foreign Office.

Further talks were held in various Government Departments, at which Dr. Weizmann was present. All these conversations took place with the knowledge and approval of Sir Maurice (now Lord) Hankey, Secretary of the Cabinet. The talks resulted in a general understanding, which I called a "gentleman's agreement", that the Zionists should work for active Jewish sympathy and support for the Allied cause, especially in the United States, so as to bring about a radical pro-Allied tendency in that country and that the British Cabinet would help the Jews to gain Palestine in return for this.

The negotiations were now carried on in Sir Mark's room at the Foreign Office, to which the matter was referred by the War Cabinet for action.

At that time one of the principal Under-Secretaries at the Foreign Office was Sir Ronald Graham, who worked in close confi-

dence with Sir Mark Sykes and who was of unfailing help during the whole time he was at the Foreign Office. The messages which were sent to the Zionist leaders in Russia were intended to hearten them and obtain their support for the Allied cause which had been affected by Russian ill-treatment of the Jews. Other messages were sent to Jewish leaders in neutral countries and the result was to strengthen the pro-Allied sympathies of Jews everywhere. A striking example of the effect of the message was reported to me from Petrograd. A wealthy and influential anti-Zionist Jewish banker there was shown the telegram announcing the provisional promise of Palestine to the Jews. He was very much moved and said, "How can a Jew refuse such a gift?"\*

At the request of Sir Mark Sykes I had an interview with General Haddad Pasha, the representative in London of the Sharif Husein and his son Feisal. There were two other high Arab officers present. Although they had already some inkling from Sir Mark of the new developments in regard to Palestine, they were not at all pleased with the information I gave them that the Jews were to be promised Palestine in consideration of their help in gaining pro-Allied support in the United States. They did not want Jews to go to Palestine, which was an Arab land. But when I explained the importance of the matter and that the War Cabinet had resolved on it, they reluctantly agreed as they, too, realised the vital importance of American help. The fact that the much vaunted Arab revolt had been of such small dimensions was not without its effect on their decision. They undertook to raise no objections and said we could count on the Arab leaders agreeing to the settled British policy. During my interviews with T.E. Lawrence in London and in Paris during the War, and with Feyzal and Lawrence during the Peace Conference, I found Lawrence entirely favourable and Feyzal reconciled to the bargain being carried out. The agreement signed by him with Dr. Weizmann about April, 1918, bears this out.

An informal Anglo-Zionist gathering took place at the house of Dr. Gaster on the 7th February, 1917, to meet Sir Mark Sykes, and Herbert Samuel (now Lord Samuel), James de Rothschild, Dr. Weizmann, Mr. Sokolow, Dr. Tchlenow and Mr. Sacher and one or two others were present. My official duties prevented my attendance. Dr. Weizmann was at that time too fully occupied with his chemical work on behalf of the Government to be able to devote himself entirely to the Zionist negotiations, and moreover, as Mr. Sokolow was a member of the Zionist Executive, which Dr. Weizmann was not at the time, Mr. Sokolow was deputed to continue the conversations with Sir Mark Sykes on behalf of the Zionist leaders.

One of the friends who helped me very much in gaining support for the Zionist idea was Mr. G.M. Fitzmaurice, the world famous dragoman of the British Embassy in Constantinople. He was a very devout and influential Catholic and believing that the success of Zionism would be beneficial to the world as well as to the Jews themselves, he gave me his powerful support and the advantage of his invaluable counsel and experience all through my approaches to various quarters and negotiations with officials and depart-

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\* Later I heard of an even more striking result of the message regarding Palestine for the Jews. The Jadidies of Meshed, in Persia, who are, like the Donmehs of Salonica, crypto-Jews, were on the point of embracing Islam en masse when they heard of the Balfour Declaration and changed their mind.



ments concerned. It was he who won over General Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of Imperial General Staff, General Sir George MacDonogh, Director of Military Intelligence, and one of his chief assistants, Colonel W.H.Gribbon, all of whom contributed to the success of the negotiations.

During the conversations with Sir Mark Sykes, Fitzmaurice had offered his assistance in gaining the concurrence of the French and Italian Governments, and also of the Vatican. As to Russia, he did not anticipate any difficulties there if all the other parties were agreed, especially as Russia at that time was on the verge of disintegration.

After several talks with Sykes, it was found necessary that I should also discuss the matter with Georges Picot, Counsellor at the French Embassy in London and in certain respects the French colleague and opposite number of Sykes in these matters. Picot was most understanding and sympathetic - not only to the Armenians but also to the Jews, and was most willing to help if he could. But he had one great difficulty - with the sole and honourable exception of Baron Edmond de Rothschild (to whom I was introduced many years previously by Mr. George Sheffield of the British Embassy in Paris), all the leading Jews in France were anti-Zionists and scoffed at the idea that any appreciable number of Jews would ever want to go and settle in Palestine. Picot was told by them that Zionism was only an idealistic obsession of a few Eastern European Jewish fanatical nationalists who themselves would never go to Palestine, much less settle on the land there. It therefore required a good deal of cogent argument, which I happened to have, to disabuse his mind of what he had been told. This being done, he promised to help, and acting on his suggestion I went to Paris and discussed the matter also with M. Gout, at the time the Under Secretary at the Quai d'Orsay for Eastern Affairs. As he was in closer contact with French Jewry even greater effort was needed to convince him and obtain promise of his help. As a matter of fact, until the last minute French Jewry, represented by the powerful Alliance Israelite Universelle and M. Bigart, the Secretary of that Institution, were straining every nerve to sabotage the project.

In December, 1916, Asquith resigned and Mr. Lloyd George became Premier. This change was beneficial to the Zionist cause inasmuch as Asquith had been definitely unsympathetic whereas Lloyd George, himself a member of a small and proud nation and having a strong religious bent, was naturally more predisposed to understand the Zionist Movement. Sir Mark Sykes and I were greatly helped in gaining his support by Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian), who was Lloyd George's Secretary and whose guidance in such matters he generally followed.

Although I had already prepared the way in Paris to some extent for a review of the Palestine question, it was decided at the Foreign Office that I should accompany Sokolow to Paris to ensure his being received at the Quai d'Orsay by M. M. Pichon and de Margerie. It was as well that I did so. On arrival I rang up M. Picot and arranged for Sokolow and myself to see him at his house. After a long and satisfactory discussion, he promised to see that we should be received by Pichon and de Margerie. Later he telephoned that, though difficult, the appointment was fixed for the following morning. Somehow the Alliance Israelite and its Secretary, M. Bigart, had got to know about it and we learnt afterwards that until the last moment they had thought they would be able to prevent it. But fortunately we had a staunch friend in Picot to see that nothing miscarried. The Alliance Israelite was so sure of their influence that at first they could not believe the news when, a few minutes after Sokolow's arrival at the

Quai d'Orsay. some friends of theirs had telephoned and told them. I had decided after all that it would be better for Sokolow to go alone, as I had reason to know that the Quai d'Orsay felt I might be pushing some British interest. They (the people of the Alliance) kept on telephoning to our room at the Hotel Meurice and asking if it was true that Sokolow was at the Ministere. I answered them all. "Son Excellence, M. Sokolow, est sorti". When they asked who was speaking I replied, "Le Chef de Cabinet de son Excellence"! Mr. Sokolow was much amused when I told him of my practical joke at their expense. Then a swarm of Jewish notables downstairs interrogated me - most of them I thought inwardly looked very pleased, though outwardly wearing a mask of disapproval, like a father who rebukes his son for jumping a dangerous obstacle and at the same time exults over it.

From Paris Sokolow went on to Rome, and in view of the excellent arrangements made by Fitzmaurice, it was not necessary for me to go with him. I made sure, however, that he took with him the indispensable frock coat and silk hat. The result of the interview is well known, viz. the official announcement that the Pope had said that the Vatican and the Jews would be good neighbours in Palestine. Sykes and I had arranged with the Marquis Imperiali, in London, for Sokolow to be received also at the Quirinale by Baron Sonnino, the Foreign Minister

All these steps were taken with the full knowledge and approval of Justice Brandeis, between whom and Dr. Weizmann there was an active interchange of cables.

The work was making satisfactory progress in the Spring of 1917, when the United States entered the War. Sir Mark Sykes was very confident that the promise of the Government would be publicly confirmed very soon. Unfortunately, however, a number of very serious setbacks occurred which delayed the matter and made the issue of the declaration tremble in the balance more than once. As is well known, there were very many military and naval setbacks in 1917 and the Cabinet was far too occupied with them to be able to deal with the question of Palestine and the Jews. More serious, however, was the information which reached us that one of the members of the British Cabinet was working with all his might to prevent the promise being given. This was Edwin Montagu, the Secretary for India, himself a Jew and the son of Lord Swaythling (the Banker).

Further opposition came from Jewish quarters in France and in this country. In France, as I have said, nearly all the leading Jews, with the exception of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, were bitterly opposed to the pro-Zionist declaration by M. Pichon. Their opposition was not only due to French patriotism, but also to their fears that a National Home for Jews in Palestine could somehow affect their political status in France. The same motive explained the growing opposition from the influential Jews of England. In May, 1917, the two heads of Anglo-Jewry, the late Claude Montefiore, President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, and the late David Alexander, K.C., President of the Board of Deputies acting through Lucien Wolf of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of these two bodies, gathered together a number of their colleagues and wrote to "The Times" protesting against the reported intention of the Government to adopt a pro-Zionist policy in regard to Palestine.

Fortunately, with the assistance of the editor of "The Times", Mr. Wickham Steed, who had lived for many years in Vienna, had met Herzl and understood the Zionist Movement, we were able to counter this move by publishing immediate replies from Chief Rabbi Dr. Hertz, Lord Rothschild and Dr. Weizmann. The Chief Rabbi's contribution was particularly useful to counteract the views of

Claude Montefiore, who was known as a religious and spiritual leader.

Lord Swaythling and the League of British Jews continued their active opposition and sent a very able memorandum to the Cabinet, drafted by Lucien Wolf, disavowing the Zionist claims. Sir Mark and I discussed the position and the Zionist leaders were advised to take up the challenge as it was absolutely essential to convince the Cabinet that Anglo-Jewry was Zionist in sympathy and outlook, although their official spokesmen were anti-Zionist. A rapid campaign among the members of the Board of Deputies was organised in order to prove that British Jewry was not anti-Zionist. A pro-Zionist resolution was introduced and carried by a large majority. This led to the resignation of the President, David Alexander, and the Vice-President, Mr. S. Q. Henriques, and the fact was duly reported in "The Times" and the general British press, and greatly impressed and influenced the Government.

It is extraordinary to me how obstinately these leading English Jews struggled to prevent the British Government from making the promise. They were able to postpone the matter for quite a long time and finally the War Cabinet determined to take the opinion of the leaders of Jewry in this country before finally deciding. Although the number of our friends in the Cabinet had grown and now included Lloyd George, Balfour, Milner, Barnes and General Smuts, we were very apprehensive because from the point of view of wealth and influence, the anti-Zionist Jews greatly outweighed the few Zionist leaders who were in London. The enquiry from the War Cabinet (not the Foreign Office) was sent to the following eight persons: Leonard L. Cohen, Claude Montefiore, Sir Stuart Samuel, Sir Philip Magnus, Lord Rothschild N. Sokolow, Dr. Weizmann and the Chief Rabbi. Three of them - Leonard Cohen, Claude Montefiore and Sir Philip Magnus - replied strongly opposing the proposed statement. The late Sir Stuart Samuel, brother of Lord Samuel, while not hostile, was not greatly enthusiastic. It was fortunate, therefore, that the Chief Rabbi, with all the weight of his ecclesiastical authority, sent a very emphatic reply in favour. This undoubtedly helped greatly to satisfy the Cabinet that the proposed declaration would be hailed with enthusiasm by the vast majority of the Jewish people in the British Empire. I personally was very pleased with this because this had been my point of view from the very beginning, and Sir Mark Sykes was also most happy with the reply of the Chief Rabbi.

Our method of operation from the outset had been the following. Once the Government had decided to adopt the pattern of pro-Zionist policy, it became necessary to pick up the various strands to be woven in to the pattern. Of these the most important was the work of enlightenment regarding Zionist aims, on which Dr. Weizmann had been concentrating since the outbreak of the War. Through the good offices of the late C.F. Scott, Editor of the "Manchester Guardian", the late Professor Samuel Alexander of Manchester University, Dr. Weizmann had over a period of years, interested in the movement Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Balfour, Lord Crewe, Lord Cecil, Sir Herbert Samuel, Philip Kerr, Professor C.K. Webster, Sir Ronald Graham, Colonel Meinertzhagen and others. Dr. Weizmann had already discussed Zionism with Mr. Balfour as far back as 1906. \* Books, pamphlets and articles were written and

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\* In 1900-1903 Dr. Herzl, the founder and first President of the Zionist Organisation, had been in direct contact with Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Lansdowne. Both of these statesmen had shown understanding and sympathy for Zionism.

published by a small group of Dr. Weizmann's disciples and friends, of whom I recollect Herbert Sidebotham, Professor Zimmern, Leon Simon, Harry Sacher, Samuel Landman, Simon Marks, Israel and Rebecca Sieff and S. Tolkowsky. The late Hertert Sidebotham was the famous military correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian" and "The Times" and also wrote under the name of "Scrutator" in the "Observer". His articles and books strongly urging the Zionist claims had a great following. The weekly publication "Palestine", the organ of the British Palestine Committee, established in Manchester at the suggestion of Dr. Weizmann at the end of 1916, was particularly helpful. Dr. Weizmann's own contacts with scientists and Ministers naturally brought us a number of valuable friends, among whom the late Sir Alfred Mond (Lord Melchett) deserves special mention.\*

Another strand was the military prowess of the Unit of Zionist Volunteers, first in Gallipoli in 1915 and later in Palestine. The credit for establishing the Jewish Unit belongs, as everybody knows, to the late Vladimir Jabotinsky, one of the most remarkable Zionist leaders I have ever met. It was in August, 1917, that he obtained the final consent from Lord Derby, on behalf of the British Cabinet, to establish the Jewish Unit and this also prepared the ground for the pro-Zionist declaration which had been held back for so long.

Yet another strand is associated with the name of Aaron Aaronssohn, who was a Palestinian agronomist of the first rank, whose work as the discoverer of a new kind of wild wheat was known and appreciated especially in the United States. Aaronssohn had remained in Palestine under the Turks till the summer of 1916, when he managed with great skill and bravery to make his way through the enemy lines and arrived in London in October, 1916. He had a plan for helping the British Near Eastern Campaign and this plan was greeted with enthusiasm by the Intelligence Department of the War Office and led to his being sent on a secret mission to Cairo. From that centre, with very devoted and skilful emissaries consisting of members of his family and friends from Palestine, he organised what became known as "Nili" - a Jewish secret Intelligence Service, which rendered most valuable service to Allenby in his great campaign. The personality of Aaronssohn had impressed itself on General MacDonogh, the head of Military Intelligence, and others, and helped to create a favourable atmosphere for the pro-Zionist policy on which we were working.

The original draft of the Declaration was prepared by Dr. Weizmann and his friends in London in the summer of 1917 at the instance of Sir Mark Sykes, and read (after various amendments at the instance of the anti-Zionists) as follows:

"His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish Race, and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object; it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious right of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed in any other country by such Jews who are fully contented with their existing nationality and citizenship."

This draft was cabled by Sir Ronald Graham to Brandeis in Washington for submission to President Wilson and to secure his concurrence. Baron Edmond de Rothschild also agreed to it and it was then submitted to the War Cabinet and to Mr. Balfour, who would have to sign it as Foreign Secretary. It underwent further amendment whereby the word "people" was substituted for "race" and the reference at the end to "fully contented" was omitted, and in this final form remained at the Foreign Office until the military situation in the East improved.

\* see footnote page 11.

Towards the end of October I heard from Sir Mark Sykes that the declaration was likely to come up before the Cabinet in view of satisfactory military progress in Palestine. He asked me to wait for him in the vestibule of the War Cabinet and arranged a code word to let me know the result. As he came out he called out to me, "It's a boy", to indicate success. I heard later from Sykes (and also from Mr. Ormsby Gore (now Lord Harlech)) that Balfour, as Foreign Secretary, in a five minutes speech, convincingly explained the value of the Declaration. In this he was strongly supported by Milner and Smuts, as well as the Prime Minister. Thus the War Cabinet arrived at a unanimous decision to issue the statement. I knew then that at last, after many anxious weeks and months, my seed had borne fruit and that the Government had become an ally of Zionism. The Declaration is dated 2nd November, 1917, and is known to history as the Balfour Declaration. The final text, as published, was communicated in a letter from Mr. Balfour to Lord Rothschild, and was as follows:

"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 this 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."

By issuing this declaration the British Government duly carried out - as I had all along been convinced they would - its obligation to promise British help for the Jews to obtain Palestine. It is therefore strictly correct for Professor Temperley, the official historian of the Paris Peace Conference, to describe the Balfour Declaration as "a definite contract between Great Britain and Jewry".\*\* The consideration for this contract had already been given by the Jews before November 2nd, 1917.

When I look back on that strenuous struggle I feel happy indeed that a kind Providence gave me the opportunity to place all my personal and official connections freely and fully at the disposal of my Zionist friends. Thus I was able to be of some service to the Jewish people at a great historic moment. In so doing I knew I was acting in the best interests of Britain and for the good of the world.

Although in a letter to me Dr. Weizmann has recognized my initiative in this work, I think it only fair to state that without his dynamic and persuasive personality, and without his quick and courageous decisions behind the scenes and the important secret and hazardous missions he successfully undertook, we might not have succeeded at all. He took the lead throughout and was regarded by all who came into contact with him as the

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Footnote from previous page.

\* Sir Alfred Mond, according to Wickham Steed, former Editor of "The Times", in his autobiography "Through Thirty Years" (London 1922), Vol. 2, P.392, was told by Ludendorff after the first World War that the Balfour Declaration was the cleverest thing done by the Allies in the way of propaganda, and that he wished Germany had thought of it first. As a matter of fact, the German Foreign Office had been in touch with German Zionists early in the war about Palestine, but the discussions were broken off when the German Government made it a condition that the language of the Jews who went there must be German.

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\*\* "History of the Peace Conference in Paris (London 1920). Vol. VI. Page 173.

one man who could decide for the Movement. He was particularly fortunate in that Mrs. Weizmann shared and supported his efforts to the fullest extent. \*

I have it from a good authority that as soon as Mr. Churchill became Prime Minister Dr. Weizmann was anxious to see him, but Churchill kept putting the meeting off and when asked why he was reluctant to give an appointment, he said, "I know he will convince me."

This was a great tribute from the greatest of British leaders to Weizmann, the most outstanding Jewish figure in modern times.

\* Ever mindful of the dictum of Marcus Aurelius that "no general, however great, can take a fortress without assistance", it has been my purpose to mention the names of all those who directly or indirectly contributed to the success of my endeavours. If perchance any name has been omitted, or if no exact dates have been given, it is because some of my records were destroyed by enemy action. Indeed, while writing this last footnote my windows are being violently rattled by explosions of the flying bombs which are falling hard by my abode in Palace Gate, London, W.8., England. July, 1944.