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Palestine Anniversary



IN THE FALL of 1917, when General Allenby's mobile British armies were knocking on the gates of Jerusalem after routing the Turks, the Allied cause in the western theaters of war was receiving reverses. Astute British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour, casting about for financial and moral aid for the Allies, attempted to win over world Jewry (then in part neutral or pro-German) and issued the now famous Balfour Declaration. His war government, he declared, "view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." World Jewry, idealistic and heartened by recognition of its fond dream, swung over "to save democracy for the world."

Next week, on November 2, twenty years to the day after the Balfour Declaration, John Bull, having thoroughly considered his Palestine mandate (granted by the League of Nations and America in 1920), is beating a partial retreat, virtually confessing failure in his effort to administer this Maryland-sized state.

The Holy Land, home of 900,000 Arabs and 370,000 Jews between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, is sacred to 300,000,000 Moslems. Arabs, children of Mohammed, protested vigorously against the Balfour Declaration, accused John Bull of double-dealing, and reminded Downing Street that in 1914 and 1915 it had given anti-Turkish wartime pledges to the Sherif of Mecca respecting Arab sovereignty in Palestine.

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But John Bull ignored their plea—and has regretted it since. Arabs, never reconciled to the British act, since then have been in conflict—often bloody—with the Jews, proving to be a lasting embarrassment to the administration. Hot-headed “nazified” young nationalists have carried on a reign of terror against Jews while the British took no action, fearing a Moslem rising. Last year 260 murders, springing from racial and political antagonism, attracted world attention. They caused Edward VIII (as one of his few official acts) to appoint a commission to study Palestine’s situation. Thus was born a British-Jewish-Arab triple partition plan (see July 24 number).

Recently the assassination by Arab nationalists of a high British official made the London Lion bare its teeth for the first time since the mandate. Sir Arthur Grenfell Wauchope, High Commissioner, took drastic action, arrested and deported the Arab High Committee (heroes of the young nationalists); then deposed the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem as president of the Moslem Supreme Council. Last week, however, the Mufti, disguised as a peasant, escaped to neighboring Syria, where he is expected to incite Moslems against British and Jews.

Meanwhile, Mussolini’s paper struck out, and Moslem leaders in Ethiopia ironically protested to the League of Nations against alleged British ruthlessness in Palestine.