CHAPTER 6

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MANDATE

PROMISES

Long before the Ottoman Empire had been destroyed, the Great Powers allied against it had laid preliminary plans for the division of Ottoman territory. So far as Palestine was concerned, those plans consisted principally in the project of setting up a Jewish National Home. Yet, in the maze of pledges given during those years, there was some ground for the belief, on the part of some Arabs, that they had also been promised the inclusion of the Holy Land in the territory of an Arab State.

Considerable discussion took place within the British cabinet before it was decided that espousal of the Zionist cause in Palestine was fair to Arab interests. Finally, the British cabinet authorized its Foreign Minister, A. J. Balfour, to declare British support for Zionism. This step took the form of a declaration embodied in a letter which Balfour sent to Lord Rothschild, on November 2, 1917. The letter read:

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

On February 9, 1918, France declared her adherence to the declaration. On May 9, 1918, Italy adopted the same position. President Wilson had been consulted on the Balfour declaration prior to its issuance, and he had indicated his approval. On March 3, 1919, Wilson stated: " ... the Allied Nations, with the fullest concurrence of our own government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the foundations of a Jewish Commonwealth."