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THE PRESENT CONDITION OF PALESTINE.

[Reprinted from the *Jewish Chronicle*, by kind permission of the Editor.]

I.—THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY.

SINCE the completion of the Survey of Palestine—which is on the same scale and which aims at giving the same amount of detail given for England by our Ordnance Survey—we may be said to possess more detailed and accurate information regarding the present condition of Palestine than exists in the case of any other Asiatic or African country. The waste lands, forests, and deserts are distinguished on the great map from the cultivated districts. The olives, figs, vines, and enclosed vegetable gardens are all shown, the springs and streams have all been surveyed, and the memoirs which accompany the map give detailed accounts of the water supply and cultivation. We have, therefore, at the present time reliable data ready for publication for a true estimate of the present condition of Palestine, and of its possible future value.

The desolate condition of the country has been over-estimated. It has been supposed that a great change in climate has occurred, and that there has been a great destruction of former forests. Both these statements are far beyond the true facts. The seasons of Palestine are identical with those described in the Mishna, and although we have no ancient observations to compare, and cannot therefore say with certainty that the rainfall is the same as in older times, still the springs and streams mentioned in the Bible are all yet flowing with water, and the annual rainfall of about twenty inches would be quite sufficient for the wants of the country if it were stored in the innumerable "broken cisterns," which only require a coat of cement to make them serviceable.

The climate is, no doubt, far more unhealthy than formerly, but this is due in great measure to the destruction of the splendid old system of drainage and irrigation, and to the loss of trees raised by cultivation. Good drainage and tree planting would do much to restore the land to its former condition as regards climate.

Palestine is by no means bare of trees, and its water supply is most abundant in the cultivated districts. A forest of oaks covers the hills

west of Nazareth—a beautiful woodland extends westwards from the low hills into the plains of Sharon. On Carmel and in the Hebron hills the thick copse has spread over former vineyards and orchards, and in lower Galilee many districts are clothed with a dense tangled brushwood, and with oaks and mastic trees. This luxuriant wild growth flourishes in spite of wholesale destruction by the fire-wood sellers, and unprotected by any forest laws, evidencing the richness of the soil where it grows.

This richness of the soil is also attested in the plains by the beautiful crops of barley and wheat, raised by merely scratching the ground with the light native plough; and the oil from the long olive groves on the low hills (of which 1,800 tons were exported in 1871), is said to be the finest in the world. On the high Hebron hills, and on Hermon, the vine grows most luxuriantly, and good wine is even now manufactured in Lebanon. The fruits of the country are numerous and delicious, and cotton, tobacco, indigo, millet, and sugar cane can all be grown easily.

The riches of the land are mainly agricultural. Mines have been found at Sidon and in Lebanon, copper, coal, and even tin having been discovered, but the quality of the mineral does not appear to be very good in any case. It seems, however, that rock-oil may be expected in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea (where indications of its presence are said to have been noticed), and bitumen and salt are already obtained from the same vicinity.

There is one particular in which a marked difference is observable. This is in the amount of cultivation as compared with that of former times. The ancient terraces so carefully built up or hewn in the hill-sides now produce rich crops—but crops of weeds and thistles. For every inhabited village ten ruined towns are found. In the copses and on bare hill-sides the ancient wine-presses are cut in rock. The site of the vineyard of Naboth at Jezreel is marked on the Survey map by a collection of these ancient presses on the hill above the city, where not a vine plant is now grown. Old orchard walls and watch-towers of huge stones stand half ruined in the wild districts, and the same story is repeated throughout the length of the land—the cultivation has shrunk with a decreasing population.

The population of Syria is stated in consular reports not to exceed the incredibly low figure of two and a quarter millions in 26,000 square miles. In the country the people are packed in villages, containing 100 to 500 inhabitants, and the grounds of a village will average about 10 acres per soul. Two-thirds of the peasantry are Moslem. About 40,000 Jews are said to live in Syria, and in Palestine they are found chiefly in the four sacred cities, Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed, and in the coast towns. The greater number are poor, and many are supported by the Halukah. The richer class are merchants and traders. The majority of the Jews are Ashkenazim, from Germany, Poland, and Russia.

It is said that if fully cultivated, even after the native fashion, Palestine is capable of supporting ten times its present population.

The question which really requires to be answered is: In what manner can this cultivation be carried out? It is proposed to show, in the succeeding articles, the reasons why former attempts have failed, and the true principle to be adopted, whether on a small scale under the existing government, or on a large scale, under a more enlightened and juster administration. It has been already proved that none are better fitted to carry out these improvements, and to direct the present population in agriculture, than the descendants of the ancient conquerors who made hewers of wood and drawers of water of the aboriginal population. The energy, industry, and tact, which are so remarkable in the Jewish character, are qualities invaluable in a country whose inhabitants have sunk into fatalistic indolence; and Palestine is still so cheap a country, and requires so moderate a capital for investment, that it may well attract the attention of the middle class among its rightful owners.

Of late years the Jewish population in Palestine, and in Jerusalem especially, has greatly increased in numbers. The community has also gained in power and importance. A building club has been established, and houses have, by means of Jewish co-operation, been built outside the city on the west. Many of the Jews are under British protection, and the total Jewish population of the Holy City is estimated as being from 8,000 to 10,000 souls; the trade of the town is rapidly falling into their hands, and they are buying up all the available land in the vicinity.

II.—PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT COLONISATION.

No attempt to develop the resources of Palestine has as yet proved successful, though several have been made. The reasons of the various failures will be seen on examining the method of the various communities which have made attempts at cultivating and civilising the country.

A favourite idea among writers of late has been that the land should be colonised by the Jews. Colonel Warren proposed that the Morocco Jews—who are known to have made excellent workmen in Gibraltar—should be induced to emigrate to Palestine. But this was actually attempted, without success, long before he visited Palestine. In 1850, A.D., a colony of thirty families of Mugarbee Jews settled at Shefa 'Amr in lower Galilee, near Nazareth—a town famous in Jewish literature as being the ancient Shafraim where the Sanhedrin sat after leaving Jamnia. These colonists, or peasant Jews, cultivated corn and olives on their own land; yet, in a few years, they relinquished agriculture, and gradually withdrew to the seaport of Haifa, where their children are engaged in trade. The Jews in Palestine themselves remind Europeans that they are not an agricultural people.

Two important colonies have been founded in Palestine by a society of German Protestants, who denominate themselves the "Temple Society." In spite of the curious religious tenets of these peasants and mechanics, they have shown themselves very practical in their method of proceeding. The sites for the first settlements were wisely chosen in tolerably healthy

positions at the two ports of Jaffa and Haifa. Two neat villages have been erected, and in 1875 the Jaffa colony numbered over 200 souls and cultivated 400 acres; while that at Haifa numbered 300, and cultivated 700 acres.

Yet although both communities consist of sober, hard-working, domestic men, many being skilled artisans and all energetic and enterprising, they cannot be said to have been successful in their ambitious schemes for colonising the whole of Palestine and finally gaining possession of Jerusalem. They are divided among themselves; they have no leader of any capacity; and their cause is prejudiced in the eyes of practical and sensible men by their claim to represent the "true Israel," for whom they say the prophecies of a return to Palestine were intended—an idea not peculiar to Germans, but also shared by certain persons in England.

The Germans have never made friends with the native peasantry, whom they despise. They are, therefore, subject to continual persecution from the surrounding villages. They have never obtained title deeds to their possessions from the Turkish Government, and are liable to eviction at any time. Finally, want of money, and the entire unfitness of European constitutions for hard work in the fields under an Oriental sky, internal dissensions, mixed marriages, and individual self-seeking, are undermining the very existence of the community.

Near Jaffa are the lands of the "Mikveh Israel," better known as the Jaffa Agricultural School of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, consisting of 780 acres of market gardens, where Jewish children are trained and educated. This institution has also suffered from the hostility of the native population, and from the corruption of the Turkish Government.

It is said that 100,000 plants have been raised in the gardens of the Mikveh Israel and half a million vines. Unfortunately, however, the land is close to the great sand-dunes which bound the shore of Palestine, and which are being gradually blown inland by the sea breeze, advancing, it is said, a yard every year. These dunes threaten to invade the property, and to swallow up the gardens unless their course can be stayed by plantation.

The native peasantry are well worth a few words of description. They are brutally ignorant, fanatical, and, above all, inveterate liars; yet they have qualities which would, if developed, render them a useful population. They are naturally a clever and energetic race, industrious, and possessed of immense powers of endurance; their fortitude in bearing pain is remarkable, and their temperance and frugality enable them to endure the great heat of the sun when employed in the fields in a manner impossible for Europeans. They are good-natured and very docile under recognised authority. What is really wanted to improve their condition is: 1st. Impartial administration of justice; 2nd. A just system of taxation; 3rd. Security from the violence and exactions of the irregulars employed in levying the taxes. These three points are all included in the English scheme of reforms, which has been

signed by the Sultan, and it is earnestly to be hoped that the execution of these reforms, under the eye of England, may bring relief and prosperity to the down-trodden peasantry of the Holy Land.

In dealing with the fellahin, Jewish settlers would have one great advantage. They would probably learn the language easily, for the peasant dialect is very close to the Aramaic or Chaldean, which we know was spoken as late as the fourth century in Palestine, and which is called in the Talmud "the language of the ignorant."

Two attempts at agriculture have been made on the sounder principle of employing native labour. The northern half of the plain of Esdraelon was bought by a Greek banker named Sursuk about 1872. He is said to have obtained possession of seventy square miles, with twenty villages, for the sum of £20,000. The taxes alone of the villages are rated at £4,000 a year, and the income, taking good and bad years together, cannot be less than £12,000 per annum. How so one-sided a bargain came to be made is a piece of secret Turkish history, perhaps never to be cleared up, but the title cannot be considered secure under the ordinary government of the country.

The well-known Jewish banking firm of Bergheim in Jerusalem have cultivated their farm of Abu Shusheh on the same principle observed by Sursuk, namely the employment of the natives of the place. A very little justice and kindness is enough to secure the affections of these poor peasants. The Bergheims own 5,000 acres, and have already introduced various European improvements. The native sheikh, or chief of the village, holds the position of foreman on the property, and the rest of the population obey him cheerfully. The younger Bergheims, well acquainted with the peasant dialect and with the customs and traditions of the country, are eminently fitted to manage the property. This settlement, conducted on sound principles by men who have command of money and experience of Palestine, ought to be a success.

The Bergheims, however, experience the same difficulty which lies at the root of every past, present, and future failure—the corruption of the Turkish Government. From the pacha down every official is venal and tyrannical. Nothing can be done with them without "buksheesh," and all their efforts are directed to the hindrance of an enterprise from which these harpies can gain nothing.

Native trade is killed by taxes on raw material, the peasantry are ground down by unjust taxation and shameless spoliation, agriculture is ruined by the conscription. The hills of Palestine might be covered with vines and the valleys run with oil, the plains might be yellow with corn and the harbours full of ships, but for the greedy pacha and the unjust judge.

III.—THE PROPER METHOD.

In the previous notes attention has been drawn to the capabilities of Palestine, and to the reasons why former attempts have failed to develop those capabilities. It is not any sterility of the country, any

change of climate, or any absence of cheap labour, which has to be feared. The failures have been due, first, to want of money; secondly, to the false principle of endeavouring to introduce foreign labour which could always be undersold by the peasantry; thirdly, to the hostility of the natives, which was only natural towards those who threatened to dispossess them of their land; last, but not least, to the passive resistance of Turkish bureaucracy and to the insecurity of title which has deterred capitalists from embarking money in the attempt to develop the land.

The true principle to be wrought out is not that of superseding native labour, but of employing it under educated supervision. The peasantry are an energetic and very stalwart race, with immense powers of endurance, seasoned to the climate, temperate, good-natured, and docile. They are accustomed to obey their chiefs and elders, and when they see any prospect of fair pay and just taxation they can be made to work very hard, as has been proved in more than one instance. They are a people capable of great improvement, their faults are those of an oppressed race, and their natural quickness and power of adaptation would render it easy to accustom them to European improved methods of agriculture if gradually introduced and not forced upon them.

The best way of enriching the country is by purchase of estates in convenient and fertile districts, and the employment of capital in cultivation of the native products. The richness of the crops and the variety of the produce would then yield an ample return, and Palestine might become the garden of the world, situate as it is in so accessible a position, with the great Mediterranean waterway so close to its corn plains and olive yards.

The policy of the owners of property in Palestine should be to encourage the revival of the ancient native chief families whom the Turks have endeavoured to exterminate, and to rule the people through their native chiefs, whom they are accustomed to respect. Responsible agents would be required in every village, and these should be selected from among Europeans, and not from the upper class of Syrians, nor from the mongrel Levantines, Greeks, or Maltese, for an enterprise committed to the honesty of such men, would, from the first, be doomed to failure.

In choosing the best centre for such operations, the two main requisites would be accessibility and healthiness. The country has no roads and no drainage. It is, therefore, necessary to begin in a district easily reached from the shore, and, at the same time, to avoid the malarious districts along the coast. For this reason the plains of Sharon and of Acre, the Jordan Valley, and the Jerusalem mountains, should be avoided at first. Jaffa is not a good port, for during the winter it is almost entirely closed, and the rugged mountain wall, west of Jerusalem, makes communication with the coast difficult.

Modern Palestine has only one real harbour. The ports of Tyre, Sidon, Cæsarea, and Jamnia, are closed, choked with sand, or artificially filled up. But in the centre of the coast line, the Bay of Acre is three miles broad, at the mouth of the Kishon, and eight miles long, and on

its south side the ridge of Carmel, reaching an altitude of 1,700 feet above the sea, runs out north-west and forms a promontory which breaks the force of the sea, while the hill affords shelter from the wind during the winter or autumn storms which beat from the south-west.

Under Carmel, in the hollow of the bay, lies the town of Haifa, the ancient Hephah of the Talmud ("the Haven"), famous for its Hizlon fishery, whence the Tyrian purple was derived. The town is walled, and has a population of 4,000, of whom 1,000 are Jews. It has a Jewish cemetery, and from the middle ages has been a favourite resort of the Hebrews. The Carmel bay is even now a roadstead which good-sized vessels can visit throughout the winter. At a small expense it might be converted into a valuable harbour. A mole running out in continuation of the Carmel ridge might easily be built of the limestone from the mountain, and there are still ruins of an ancient port near this headland. Not only is the harbour good, but the position of the place is most favourable as regards the remainder of the land. The broad plain of Esdraelon—the richest ground in Palestine—lies immediately inland, and joins the plains which stretch northwards from Carmel. The river Kishon runs down from Esdraelon to the sea near Haifa, and along its course the roads to the interior rise with easy gradients. Haifa has on the other side easy access to the plains of Sharon. The great corn harvest of the Hauran is brought on camels by the Arabs, by the highway from Jordan, to Acre, at the north end of the bay; the main roads to Damascus, to Beyrout, to Upper Galilee, and to Nâblus, all lead from Haifa.

It has lately been proposed to start the Euphrates Valley Railway from this port, and although the steep gradients in the Jordan Valley and the waterless deserts beyond may make this route impracticable, there can be no doubt that the railroad to Jerusalem should start here. The Jaffa-Jerusalem railway would be a work of great engineering difficulty, because of the sudden slopes of the hills, which have a rise of 500 feet in less than half a mile. A railway to Nâblus from Haifa, and thence along the backbone of the country, would be more easily constructed, and would form a more important line of communication leading to a better port. If the Jaffa line is ever made, it must follow the course of the Valley of Sorek, or it would never reach the watershed at all. It would be about fifty miles long, while the watershed line through Palestine would not be more than eighty, connecting Nâblus and Jerusalem with Haifa.

It is in the proximity of the Haifa port that the first possessions of our farmers would be situate. Not, indeed, on Carmel itself, which is rugged and steep, covered with copses and having little arable soil, though that soil is of excellent quality. Nor would it be in the malari-ous plains of Acre and Sharon, which should be reclaimed gradually, like the *Maremma*, by drainage and plantation.

South of Carmel, about twenty miles from Haifa on the southern border of lower Galilee, there is, however, a district well suited as a

starting point. It is called the "Breezy Land," and consists of open downs of chalk, the feet clothed on the west by a beautiful open woodland of oak. The downs rise to a height of about 1,000 feet above the sea; the village lands extend into the plain of Sharon on the one hand, and to the plain of Esdraelon on the other. Further south is the rich plain of Dothan, and further east the well-watered valley of Jezreel, full of springs and extending to Beth Shan, of which Rabbi Simon ben Lachish said, "If Paradise is to be found in Palestine its gate is at Beth Shan."

The western side of the plain of Esdraelon runs with water in fresh sparkling streams, and clear springs which, even in autumn, swell the Kishon. The ground is in many parts only occupied by wandering Turcomans, and is not cultivated at all. Towards the north the villages belong (or did in 1875) to the Sursuk family, and the rich corn harvests and peasant prosperity of the Sursuk villages contrasts forcibly with the desolation of the Turkish hamlets.

At the south end of the great plain is the charming village of Jenin (En Gannim) with its palm groves and little stream. Corn, sesame, and millet, cotton, tobacco, and castor oil are cultivated in this district. The soil is a rich friable basaltic mud from the extinct volcanoes of Gilboa and Sheikh Iskander east and west of the plateau. Sugar might be grown at least in the Valley of Jezreel, and olives and figs abound on the western hills. This fertile district is easily reached either by the main road at the foot of Carmel, or by the route along Sharon, which intersects two ancient highways across the "Breezy Land."

The plain of Esdraelon is the part of Palestine which, if any military operations should be undertaken in the country, must be the scene of the decisive battle. Palestine is the natural bulwark of the Suez Canal—a country scarcely larger than Cyprus, surrounded by deserts and through which any hostile army *must* advance in order to reach Port Said.

An English occupation of this part of Palestine would have the great advantage that it would not conflict with French interest in the Holy Places. Jerusalem and Bethlehem are far south, Nazareth is north of this central district. The industrial and military centres are not in the towns which Christians agree in holding sacred. English occupation, or protection, would be an assistance to colonisation, or rather to farming by means of native labour. The English are favourites in the country. "England is the Sultan's sword," the peasants say, and while the Sultan as "head of the faith" holds a secure place in the affections of his people, the native Syrians are only too eager to carry out the "bag and baggage" policy, and to drive out the whole tribe of corrupt and tyrannical rulers whom the Turks send to administer the country.

Insecurity will always deter capitalists from sinking money in the East. Given a strong, wise, just government, and the country may be trusted to assert its ancient reputation for fertility. So long as an unjust and weak tyranny prevails, the Bedawin nomads will from time to time

range over the fertile plains and the peasant will not dare to till the land. The only radical change required is the total abolition of the present official staff, from the pacha down to the lowest mudir or kaimakam.

The gradual change which might be wrought even by private enterprise would be astonishing. The ancient cisterns, wells, and aqueducts would first be cleaned and repaired, and the system of irrigation extended. The old Roman roads would be re-made of the good material which lies ready to hand; wheeled vehicles could then be introduced, tram-lines and railways would follow.

The headquarters would be fixed in the healthier hill villages, but the uncultivated districts in the plains would gradually be taken in; the ancient system of drainage which carried the streams through the low rock-wall west of the plain of Sharon, would be repaired, and thus the stagnating water would run into the sea again and the marshes would be reclaimed. Quick growing grass would check the encroachment of the sand dunes on the coast, and as there is no frost in the plains the blue gum tree (*Eucalyptus Globulus*) with other fast growing trees would be planted, and must materially affect the climate in time. As the colonisation spread to the higher hills, where frosts occur, the old vine cultivation would be revived, Beth Laman and Beth Rima might again be famous for their wine, Tekoa and Netophah for their olives, Michmash for its wheat, and Jericho for its palms.

The scheme thus proposed may, however, appear too large to be of any great present interest, and unless a general movement towards the country occurred, the change effected in its climate and productions would be very small, but the preceding remarks will serve to show that there is nothing in the present physical condition of the country or in the character of its native inhabitants over other Europeans who may be interested in the development of the country. Palestine requires nothing but good government, an increased population and civilised cultivation to restore its prosperity.

The double object of promoting agricultural and mechanical education and enterprise is of primary importance for the future of the land, and it cannot be doubted that the remarkable linguistic talents of the Jews would give them great advantages over other Europeans. Palestine is said to have been so drained of men and money during the late war that the present time cannot fail to be a good one for the introduction of even moderate capital into the country; but the condition of the country, without roads or public works of any kind, seems to render agriculture more probably remunerative than mechanical employment. There is, however, no doubt an opening for such trades as smiths, carpenters, joiners, weavers, &c., for the native work is rude and clumsy, while the German productions are too expensive for general use.

It is with a sincere interest in the future of Palestine that these lines are written, and with a conviction that the duty of that influential

people which once ruled the land, is to support with the whole weight of their influence those projects for reform which at present seem to give the only hope of prosperity for the Holy Land.

C. R. CONDER.

ZOAR.

WHERE was the *little* city to which Lot escaped from Sodom?

It may be visited from Jericho without much trouble, unless the rapid Jordan be swollen with water and Sheik Goblan with greed. Only a mighty man among the Gadites would defy both. (1 Chron. xii. 15.)

We propose to demonstrate the precise *position* of the long-lost survivor of the cities of the plain, grateful to the American Exploration Society for a *name* which is the very name we want, and hopeful that an intelligent traveller will carefully describe its *ruins*, of which we can speak only at a venture.

(A) As to the position.

The Biblical evidence is conclusive; it is, needless, therefore, to refer to Josephus, Jerome, &c. As camp-followers or prisoners, they are in this case but encumbrances.

Geological investigation has brought to light the fact that the Jordan, within historic times, can never have flowed into the Red Sea, but must have terminated in the Dead Sea, now 1,300 feet below the level of the ocean.

1. From the heights near Bethel, Lot "beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah," &c. (Gen. xiii. 10). As the southern end of the Dead Sea and the western side of the plain near Jericho are hidden from these heights by intervening mountains, we should be predisposed to think that Zoar near Sodom was at the *north* end of the Dead Sea and on the *eastern* side of the plain. The expression, "Lot journeyed east," also inclines us to infer the same.

Abraham, near Hebron, "*looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the plain*" (Gen. xix. 28). It is not said of him, as of Lot, that he *beheld* Sodom, &c., so that this passage is neutral in the controversy.

2. The four kings returning from Kadesh (from the south) "*smote also the Amorites that dwelt in Hazezon-Tamar*"—which is Engedi (2 Chron. xx. 2). "And there went out the king of Sodom . . . and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim" (Gen. xiv. 7, 8). If the cities of the plain were at the south end of the Dead Sea, then the invaders must have marched half way up on its western side to Hazezon-Tamar, then turned back to Sodom, and then retraced their steps northwards once more. This is absurd; therefore we conclude that Zoar and the cities of the plain could not possibly have been at the southern, but, of necessity, at the northern end of the Dead Sea.