

1878 BERLIN CONGRESS OF NATIONS
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JERUSALEM AND ITS PROSPECTS

In “*The Watchword*,” Mr. Oliphant is reported to have said that within the last twenty years the population of Jerusalem has at least doubled, the increase consisting entirely of Jews and Christians. The various nationalities and sects there “all seem to labor under one impression or presentiment, and that is, that before very long the Holy City will undergo a change of some sort. The nature of this change naturally takes the form peculiar to the national or religious tendency of thought. With the Russians and French it is summed up in the word annexation. This idea is more firmly fixed among the Russians than the French. With the Protestants there is a large class who base their belief in an immediately pending alteration in the political conditions under which Jerusalem now exists, based upon their interpretation of prophecy. They infer from the predictions in the Bible that the protectorate of Palestine is to be vested in England. Among the Jews there are many also, though they interpret the prophetic writings in a totally different sense, who believe that the fulfillment of the prophecy which is to restore them their ancient country, with its sacred city, is at hand; and all Moslem tradition points to the present time as one critical to the fortunes of Islam, with which the fate of Jerusalem, which is to them also a holy city, is inextricably interwoven.”

It is not generally recognized, we think, that England has already become the protectorate of Palestine, and indeed all of Turkey’s Asiatic provinces, of which it is one. England for a long time has felt a necessity for preserving Turkey for these reasons: first, her wealthy classes are large holders of Turkish bonds; second, if Turkey went to any one of her neighboring nations, or were divided among them, England would get little or none of the spoil, and the other rival nations would thus be lifted more than England into prominence and power in the control of the affairs of Europe; thirdly, and mainly, England realizes that with the Turkish government out of the way, Russian influence would be greatly increased in southern Asia, and would ere long absorb the India Empire, of which England’s Queen is Empress, and from which England draws rich revenues in commerce, etc. Hence we find the Royal or Tory party in England strenuously supporting the Turks; and when in 1878 Russia was about to enter Constantinople, England interposed and sent her fleet of gunboats into the harbor. The result was the Berlin Conference of June 13, 1878, in which the chief figure was a Hebrew, Lord Beaconsfield, Prime Minister of England, and Turkey’s affairs were then settled so as to preserve her national existence for the present, and yet so arrange her provinces that in the event of final dismemberment each of the great powers would know which portion they would be expected to seize. It was at this time that all the provinces of Turkey were granted greater religious freedom, and England by secret treaty with Turkey became protector of the Asiatic provinces. In the language of the historian, Justin McCarthy:

“The English government undertook to *guarantee* to Turkey her Asiatic possessions against all invasion,... formally pledged herself to defend and secure Turkey against all invasion and aggression, and occupied Cyprus in order to have a more effectual vantage-ground from which to carry on this project.”

It will be seen, then, that Palestine, as one of those Asiatic provinces, is already under England’s care, and accounts for greater laxity on the part of the Turkish government in the enforcement of its laws unfavorable to Jewish interests. And this providential opening of Palestine to the Jews was followed by renewed persecutions in the “north country” – Russia and Roumania – certain to induce emigration from those countries to their own land. As a result of this combination of circumstances, Palestine, and especially Jerusalem, is rapidly increasing in Jewish population of the “orthodox” type. Already the Jews in Jerusalem outnumber all other nationalities combined, whereas for centuries they have been a small minority.