

ORIGIN OF THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

Sir.—Dr. Chaim Weizmann's autobiography, *Trial and Error* (reviewed in your columns on April 23), contains a rather surprising error about an important matter of history; an error which seems rather surprisingly to have been widely overlooked.

The winning of the Balfour Declaration from the British Government in Novem-

ber, 1917, was the decisive achievement of Dr. Weizmann's career. It opened the way for the establishment of the new State of Israel, and made Dr. Weizmann's life story a vital chapter in world history. How the Declaration was secured is therefore a matter of front-rank historical moment. Now, the facts about the negotiations have during the past thirty years been correctly set out without challenge by men of unquestionable authority in various publications. Thus, in his monumental history of Zionism, *Die Zionistsche Bewegung* (Vol. I, p. 656), Dr. Adolf Boehm says that when the U.S.A. had turned down the Sykes-Picot proposals for partitioning the Near East, "Mr. Malcolm, President of the Armenian National Committee in London, advised Sir Mark Sykes to influence Wilson through Brandeis, and to guarantee Palestine forthwith to the Jews, in order to gain their support. After discussion with Lord Milner, Sykes begged Mr. Malcolm to put him into touch with the Zionist leaders, because Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Balfour were convinced of the justice of the Zionist demand for Palestine. Through Greenberg, Malcolm made contact with Weizmann." Mr. Samuel Landman tells the same story in the *Essays presented to J. H. Hertz*, and these facts are also recorded in a number of other publications.

I myself, when writing the biography of the late Earl Lloyd George, studied the mass of documents dealing with the affair, and independently reached the same conclusion. In brief summary I noted how, when earlier efforts of Dr. Weizmann and his friends had failed to influence the Government to support their Zionist programme, Mr. James A. Malcolm suggested and initiated, on the ground of Zionism's potential value to the Allied war effort, a fresh approach to Sir Mark Sykes, the Under-Secretary to the War Cabinet; put him in touch with Dr. Weizmann and his associates; and was a member of the deputation that visited the Quai d'Orsay to win over the French to the proposal, after it had found favour with the new Coalition Cabinet under Lloyd George and the Foreign Office had sent word to Brandeis and through him had worked on Wilson, in Washington.

Curiously, in the account which Dr. Weizmann gives of the Balfour Declaration in chapters XV-XVI of his autobiography he makes no mention of Mr. Malcolm's vitally important intervention, and attributes his own introduction to Sykes to the late Dr. Gaster. I have communicated with Mr. Malcolm, who informs me that Dr. Gaster was only brought in some months after the negotiations had commenced, in February, 1917, on a single occasion—no doubt the one described by Dr. Weizmann on page 230 of his book. Dr. Weizmann's omission is the more surprising, because he wrote to Mr. Malcolm on 5th March, 1941, saying: "You will be interested to hear that some time ago I had occasion to write to Mr. Lloyd George about your useful and timely initiative in 1916 to bring about the negotiations between myself and my Zionist colleagues and Sir Mark Sykes and others about Palestine and Zionist support of the Allied cause in America and elsewhere." The omission in Dr. Weizmann's autobiography was no doubt due to a lapse of memory; but in view of the historical importance of the matter and in justice to Mr. Malcolm, I feel that the true facts should be clearly stated.

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