

EASTERN.

[October 13.]

CONFIDENTIAL.

SECTION 4.

[E 10617/178/65]

No. 1.

Mr. Lloyd George to Cardinal Gasparri (The Vatican).

Your Eminence,

October 13, 1922.

I HAVE the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your note of the 21st September regarding the project for the Holy Places Commission put forward by the British representative on the Council of the League of Nations during the recent meetings of the latter at Geneva.

2. I need hardly assure your Eminence that the scheme proposed by His Majesty's Government for the constitution of this commission was carefully considered, and was framed, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, in such a way as to ensure that the claims and rights of the three great religions in Palestine, as well as of the great Christian Churches, should be impartially examined and determined in a spirit of even-handed justice. As mandatory for Palestine, and as representative of an empire which includes among its citizens devoted adherents of all these religions and Churches, His Majesty's Government could indeed have sought no other object.

3. In putting forward a scheme which, in their view, appeared to be essentially fair and honest, His Majesty's Government did not in any way intend to exclude a full discussion of its merits or any agreed modifications which might result from such discussions. As a matter of fact, the particular objection to which your Eminence has drawn attention—the powers of the proposed American president of the main commission—appears to rest on some misapprehension. Not only did His Majesty's Government believe that the world would appreciate the obvious advantages of having as a judge a man who widely sympathises with the religious sentiments of all those concerned, while himself wholly unconnected either with one party to the litigation or with the other; but they had also intended that whether the president received a unanimous report or a majority and minority report from any sub-commission, his finding should be subject to the ultimate confirmation of the Council of the League, on which, as your Eminence is aware, the Catholic countries are not without strong representation. Whether or not the intentions of His Majesty's Government on this point were rightly understood when their draft project was originally circulated to the members of the council, no misapprehension could have remained as a result of the discussions inside and outside the Council Chamber which followed, and clearly showed that His Majesty's Government were prepared to consider any reasonable and agreed procedure to settle those cases where unanimity was not achieved in the sub-commissions. In point of fact, the chief stumbling-block to agreement in these discussions appears to have been the presidency of the Christian sub-commission, and not that of the procedure to be followed by the sub-commissions, main commission and the League.

4. Since, unfortunately, agreement on this point could not be reached, Lord Balfour formally withdrew the British project at the last session of the council on the 4th October, making it clear that His Majesty's Government were prepared sympathetically to consider any equitable scheme which commends itself to the other members of the council and might be brought forward in agreement by them.

5. I trust that these explanations will satisfy your Eminence that the sole desire of His Majesty's Government throughout these proceedings has been to find, as quickly as possible, some impartial arrangement which might meet with the ready assent of all parties concerned, and not least with that of the great Church of which your Eminence is so distinguished a representative. If such agreement has not yet been found, the fault does not lie with my Government or its delegate at Geneva, who spared no pains to bring the discussions of the council to a successful issue.

With sentiments of profound respect, I have, &c.

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

[128 n—4]

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