

FIGHT FOR THE HOLY LAND.

SIR A. MURRAY'S VICTORY.

20,000 TURKS DEFEATED.

900 PRISONERS.

Telegraphing on March 28 the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in Egypt reports:—

We advanced our troops a distance of 13 miles from Beke to Wadi Ghuzn (Gaza) five miles south of Gaza, to cover construction of railway.

On 26th and 27th we were heavily engaged in this neighbourhood with a force of about 20,000 of the enemy.

We inflicted very heavy losses on him and have taken 900 prisoners, including General Commanding and whole Divisional Staff of 3rd Turkish Division.

This figure includes four Austrian officers and 12 Austrian and German other ranks.

We also captured two Austrian 62 inch howitzers.

All troops behaved splendidly, especially troops of Welsh, Kent, Essex, Hereford, Middlesex, and Surrey Regiments and the Anzac and Yeomanry mounted troops.

THE NEW CRUSADE.

DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE KAISER'S HOPES.

The district of Gaza, which has from immemorial times been a stronghold of the Holy Land, is within 50 miles of Jerusalem. That this district has now been reached by British soldiers must give rise to many thoughts in British and German as well as in Turkish minds. It is now 29 years since the Kaiser made his progress through Palestine and the East, and in the spirit of the new crusade, and his mantle over Modern and Christian alike. The political dream which led to that visit are now in process of being shattered, and the Holy Land, it would seem, is on the eve of being rescued from a regime which, through centuries, has held it in bondage.

The victorious progress of the British arms is largely due to the remarkable way in which roads and railways have been pushed across the desert. When the enemy was crushed at Beke last August that place was a railroad, and from the above report it appears that the line has now been carried over 100 miles farther to the east.

Since our retreat from Beke last spring the operations which have now carried our troops into Palestine have been an unbroken series of successes. The principal engagements have been the following:—

Beke—A force of 18,000 Turks beaten at Beke. 1,500 prisoners taken in the battle and subsequent pursuit.

Beke—27 Arabs captured after being for two years in the hands of the enemy.

Beke—Turks captured at Beke. 1,100 prisoners.

Beke—Turks abandoned a very strong position between Beke and Beke. The enemy's loss.

THE ARAB WORLD. ITS PAST AND ITS FUTURE.

The following article is by the author of the article on the "Crisis Fighting Turke," which was published in "The Times" of February 20. He is a distinguished authority on Oriental affairs.

The fall of Baghdad has brought the British people directly into touch with the Arab world—that world of noise, battle, passion, and rhetoric which has lain under the deadening influence of the various Turkish dynasties near upon a thousand years. At this moment the Arab race presents a sad spectacle, divided, scattered, and tattooed by war, revolution, conquest, and deliberate misgovernment, yet one not devoid of promise. When the Arab has met civilization in the past the marriage of intellects has been fruitful. The nature of the issue is demonstrated by the ruins which scatter Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iraq.

The traces of columns at Tadmor, the vast temple of Baalbek, the palace of Al Hadra, the hippodrome of Otrank, the theatre of Amman, the basilicas of the Hauran and North Syria, the mosques and tombs of Damascus, the desert oases of Kerk, Salkhad, and El Nejin are witness to results of the meeting of the Arab mind with the successive cultures of Greece, Rome, Persia, Byzantium, and the Franks.

By the strange movements of the web of fate the British in Baghdad now come once more face to face with the Arab world for the first time since the last English, Irish, and Scottish Crusaders left the Holy Land. For though Egypt is Arab in tongue, the western desert in name, it is not until you arrive at Baghdad that you reach that roaring, chattering, clattering, arguing, bellowing, demonstrative world of Baghdadians just, caustic satire, plaintive poetry, sive invective, subtle flattery, remissive logic, and strident, cap-snapping din which stretches to the Mediterranean coast on the west, the Kurdish hills on the east, and the rugged fringes of the Taurus on the north, that spans of earth which the old Arabian geographers named Irak, Jazira, Shamiriyeh, Suriya, and Filistin.

FROM PROSPERITY TO DESOLATION.

Outwardly the Arabian world of to-day is unrecognisable; squalor, poverty, and misery are its outward hallmarks. As one who has seen some faith in the future, I dread the reaction which may take place in English minds when the public realises what a head of ruin and desolation the Turks have made of what was once the centre of a prosperity which had endured for 3,000 years.

The Arab is physically and intellectually as virile as he ever was, but superficially he is unrecognisable from his former self. In the early days of the Abbassid Caliphate, not only was the Arab world prosperous, but we have records of an elaboration of government and a complexity of administration which would astonish those who are only acquainted with the social and political conditions under which Arab life to-day.

The Baghdad of Harun-al-Rasid was not a desquarily agglomeration of tortuous streets, picturesque ruins, pointed arches, slender minarets, sagged awnings, and crumbling walls. It was built on a rigid system with broad businesslike Government offices, square towers, and massive walls. It was not inhabited by a squalid and ragged population, smitten in disease and poverty, but was an orderly capital with a perfect police system, regular embassies of troops, colleges, observatories, exchanges, law courts, hospitals, poor houses, public baths, trade unions, and guilds. There was society in Baghdad: wit and poets, philosophers and statesmen, lexicographers, learned doctors, and metaphysicians met and conversed in schools and assemblies. Through the pages of the old chroniclers one gets small glimpses of that extraordinary and elaborate world which pivoted on Baghdad, for Baghdad was not an oasis in the wilderness; Damascus, Kirzintin, Bagda, Mosul, Basra, Kufa, Erbil, and scores more great cities

surrounded it. Now many of them are marked by mere undulations in the soil.

Such was the Arab world which pushed forth armies to furthest Turkistan, and had, before the building of Baghdad, stretched out its advance guards beyond the Euphrates. And he it was, though the Arabs were conquerors, yet were they not destroyers. So long as the leadership of Islam was in Arab hands, intellect, architecture, and commerce flourished. Frequently oppressors, often tyrants, the provincial Governors of the Arab Caliphs hardly ever left a province without adding to it some monument or institution.

CAUSES OF DECADE.

Whence comes, then, this desolation and wretchedness of to-day? In the days of Charlemagne Europe was emerging from the darkest chasm of history, and Baghdad was at its zenith; to-day the flourishing provinces of which Baghdad was the Imperial capital, deserts, and of Baghdad itself there only remains a pile of 140,000 souls where 2,000,000 once subsisted in affluence. How the Arab degenerated? What explanation can account for the utter collapse of this people? Degeneration in the true sense the Arab certainly is not; you will find his memory as acute, his wit as nimble, his sense of humour as keen, his observation as direct, as in the days of Ibn Batuta, Abu Nowas, or Firdousi. Lilies and saffron, of good physique, his perfect features, glossy hair, small hands and feet, show he is in body as true to type as his pure, untainted, and unadulterated purity of mind to be unaltered; yet he who gave civilization and order to a third of Asia and the whole of North Africa now lives on a desolate and sterile waste and ruins. What is the answer to the enigma?

I think the answer is that the Arab intellect is one that only produces itself to the utmost by contact with other minds. For centuries the Arab of Arabia, which is the Arab of isolation, has remained in a position, neither advancing nor retreating, absolutely unchanged. In the days of the Prophet the Arabs of Arabia were, as today, interested in commerce, not in war, as regards birth and breed, dualistic but vocationalists, and astute diplomatists. The Arabs that Arabia has put forth have been whatever the contact has established with the outer world made them.

When they met Rome they produced Palmyra, when they met Byzantium they produced the brilliant Omayyad civilization, when they absorbed Sassanian culture they produced Baghdad, when they invaded Spain they produced Cordova, but when they were in turn subjected to the Turks, not by conquest, but by the infiltration of Turkish dynasties and the Turcofication of the territory, the Arab intellect and intellectual contact; they lost all the rappings of material civilization, they lost their fiery hearts, their agile thoughts, their poetry, and their individuality. The Turk has not been able to oppress an Arab and reduce him to slavery and sullen bondage as he could Armenians, Bulgarians, and Greeks. The Arab remained the intellectual superior of his master; the Turk could fight and bully, divide and rule, but he could not make the Arab admit Turkish superiority. But just as the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Sassanian, and Spanish contacts were fruitful, so the Turco-Arab contact has been sterile, fruitful only in ruins.

TURKISH MISDEEDS.

Turkish policy towards the Arabs has been consistently destructive. By means of the sale of land taxes a class of peasant-tax-farmers, has grown up, which batters on the poverty of the peasantry, encourages rapacity in the land-lord, and paralyses agricultural industry. In the cities the Turks have encouraged feuding and feud until every village is a seething mass of intrigue and hatred, amid which public works are neglected and epidemics gain year by year. On the country-side and in the mountains grinding taxation combines to ruin the peasantry by the spread of venereal disease, the impoverishment of family life, and the impoverishment of every essential factor. The breeds of cattle degenerate through want of winter fodder, the forests are burnt for charcoal, highway robbery blocks communications, deliberate fostering of local feuds prevents the possibility of education and common action. In the desert the Turks intrigue among tribal chiefs, set one against another, encouraging lawlessness, plundering, and tribal war. The assets of the country are bartered away. The assets of the coast are Levantine financiers, and such railways as exist carry through them a kind of accretion of German soldiers, the commercial pockets of Stambul "patriots," and one and all the Arabs, under such influences as these, have seen their cities and agriculture wither away, and, being easily divided, have sunk back into the misery from which they had emerged in a blaze of glory.

Let us be frank; the Arab has been steam-rollered by history, and has suffered in the process. In the marshes of lower Mesopotamia, whether he has fled from taxation and oppression, he is as a wild animal, his hand against every man's. He has known no government that did not mean oppression, extortion and slavery, he has known no neighbour who was not an enemy; the marsh Arab knows no law, he is desperate and unamenable. The forces which have turned his land from a garden to a swamp have changed him from a prosperous husbandman into an amphibious predatory savage. The Arab of Arabia and Nubia, isolated from the rest of the Arab world by schism and feud, hugs himself in proud isolation, increasing his mind with ancient griefs and indignation, and holding fiercely aloof from contact with strangers.

The Arab of good family, of the cities of Syria, with all his brains and intelligence, is of government under the atrocious system imposed and shackled by the atrocious system enter into a nest of corruption; to go in for municipal politics is to be the pawn of intriguing governors; to go into the army is to be a marked man; to remain in the city draining his income from his lands is to be exposed to every temptation which isolation and idleness can offer; for the Arab knows so to it that any man who rises above his fellows must either be corrupted or crushed. The Arab peasant, wherever the Arab land is tilled, is the snail in spite of tax gatherers, recurring sergents, highwaymen, raiders, and rapacious officials. The Bedawi of the desert flies from the bonds of settled life as a bird from a lime twig; he mocks at the universe; to him city or village is slavery; better it is to live out in the parching desert, ever wandering in search of scanty pasture, than to fall into those toils of slavery.

THE SPARK OF VITALITY.

Yet though the Arabs are brought to this pass, there are sure and certain indications that after centuries of deforming and crumpling circumstance they have within them still that eternal spark of vitality which enabled them to begin greatness in the past. The Syrian Moslems, and the Christians who go to America and dive into the sea of 80 million of Caucasian people, rise to

the surface, doctors, lawyers, journalists, and merchants, or else return to their homes laden with money the result of their labour in an open market. In Aleppo you may see today modern houses and buildings showing uncommon architectural originality and taste, European in outline, but purely Arab in thought and conception. In Egypt the Arab from the Turkish provinces rises to the highest posts in the civil service. In the desert the flame of poetry burns as brightly as in the days of Mu'taz-Nabi. On the Mediterranean littoral, in spite of administrative folly and wickedness, the towns have grown and prospered by contact with the world.

To-day a little breeze of life is stirring in the Arab world. Isolated, dispersed, sundered by creed and geographical circumstance, warped as they are by misfortune, nevertheless there is among the Arabs a movement toward cohesion, a new sense of being. There is an Arab movement, vague, undefined, at times almost imperceptible, yet it exists. The common tongue, the common vitality, the pride of race, the great memories of the past combine to stimulate through the Arab world a little throbbing pulse of life. The Arabs are so ancient and so unconquered a people that there is not yet a sense of nationalism, the Arabs are in a pre-nationalist state; but the racial sense is strong and deep, the pride of race is deeper still, the desire to realize their destiny is a growing force.

At this moment the British are in Baghdad. The Turks, please God, are going from the lands they have ruined and broken. The Arabs are on the verge of a new contact, contact with the post-war Europe that is not yet. What may come of it who can tell? Approached as "natives" or in "a white man's burden" manner the Arab will shut up like an oyster. Approached as what he is, in the light of what he was (and if the teachings of 2,000 years of history mean anything again shall be), the Arab of the future will prove to be one of the great world-assets. Firmness, tolerance, humility, and understanding are the qualities which those who would help to raise this people must possess. To help the Arab once again to greatness, to partnership in the fruitfulness of the earth, to break the spell of the Turanian destroyer, and begin afresh the great story of Semitic civilization is more than an Imperial task—it is a contribution to the fulfillment of the destiny of mankind.

PARCELS FOR PRISONERS.

SIR STARR JAMESON'S REPLY TO CRITICISMS.

Sir L. Starr Jameson, chairman of the Central Prisoners of War Committee, writing from the office of the committee, 4, Thurloe-place, S.W.1, says he desires, in view of the various criticisms in the Press and by members of the House of Commons, and seeing that some time must pass before the Parliamentary Committee can report, to summarize again the information already given to the public, and to perhaps to relieve the anxiety of friends and relatives of prisoners of war. He makes the following points—

That the Central Committee only supplies directly some 8,500 prisoners. The others, some 28,000 in number, are sent before by regional committees and approved associations, working under the Central Committee's sanction.

That the supply of bread from Denmark and Sweden was cut off because the prisoners themselves complained that such food from England arrived in a bad state as a rule.

The German railways carried no parcels at all from December 15 to 20, on account of the cessation of snow to Christmas. From January 7 to 27 the German military services sent much despatch boxes to accumulated in Germany and the subsequent distribution was most irregular. Records of despatches and the acknowledgment cards show the most extraordinary irregularity in the arrival of parcels; often a man will receive in February a parcel sent off in the first week in December, while he may have previously received information on. Or he receives quite a block at one time, and so on. Over 145,000 parcels have been sent by the Central Prisoners of War Committee to the men for whom parcels is done at 4, Thurloe-place, and up to date some 40,000 parcels of acknowledgments have been received. That despatch is absolutely regular can be readily proved, but after making all allowances for the main factors, there is written proof to show that 90 per cent of the parcels which leave Thurloe-place reach the hands of the prisoners.

The Central Committee and the different consular-tions throughout the country have nothing to do with the parcels from the moment the postal authorities take them over. At Thurloe-place they are placed in boxes which are sealed on the premises by the Post Office officials. If they are not delivered, the blame is by exception and protest between the Governments.

It is known that Germany's short of food and that this is increasing as the blockade continues. It must, under present circumstances, be a great temptation to hungry men charged with the conveyance of parcels, to open and make use of their contents. It is impossible to prevent this, but the men in the latter before giving them to the prisoners and, as this cannot be done at the present stage, to open all the parcels. We have protested vigorously against this practice through the Foreign Office and outlined the kind of offices of the International Red Cross, but so far without avail.

"My Committee," Sir Starr Jameson concludes, "was the first to suggest inquiry; we welcome and have always welcomed the criticisms and suggestions of fair-minded men. Till the Parliamentary inquiry, which we have been protesting, in bold, we ask the public to remember that a comparatively small number of instances are not necessarily typical of the whole, that the subject is large and complex, and that the defects, whatever they may be, must not be seen in common fairness, but too hastily assumed to lie on this side of the North Sea."

EXPERIMENTAL AEROPLANES.

MANUFACTURE FORBIDDEN EXCEPT UNDER LICENCE.

The Minister of Munitions has made an Order under the Defence of the Realm Regulations that on and after April 1, 1917, no person shall without a licence from the Minister of Munitions commence or proceed with the experimental manufacture of any aeroplane or seaplane or any part thereof other than any kind of aero-engine. Provided that where a licence is granted for a licence under the Order shall have been made and is pending for the carrying on of any experimental manufacture, which has been commenced before April 1, nothing in the Order shall prohibit the carrying on of such manufacture until the licence shall have been refused.

For the purposes of the Order experimental manufacture means any manufacture which is not under or for the direct purpose of fulfilling a Government contract, and includes the preparation of working drawings, but not the preparation of general arrangement drawings. All persons desirous of obtaining licences for experimental manufacture should apply in writing to the Controller of Aeronautical Supplies, Air Board Office, London, W.C., giving full particulars of the manufacture for which the licence is required.

The Order is not intended to prevent and discourage the design of new machines, but only to prevent designs and machines which have no realistic prospect of success. The Department desires to give every possible encouragement to original design, and no one should be placed in the way of any person being able to produce a useful design.

The Actors' Association will hold its annual general meeting next Sunday, at 8 o'clock, at the Ambassadors Theatre. Sir George Alexander will preside. The crisis in the history of the theatre will be discussed, and every member of the profession, whether a member of the association or not, is invited to attend.

Fight For The Holy Land.

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