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RAILWAYS IN WESTERN ASIA

BY

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RAILWAYS IN WESTERN ASIA

SYRIA, ASIA MINOR, AND MESOPOTAMIA.

IN dealing with the question of Railways in Western Asia, I propose to take them in the following order and grouping: Syria, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia, then the Caucasus, and, lastly, Persia and Central Asia.

A glance at the map will show that Asia Minor and Mesopotamia are portioned out into two great divisions of table-land and plain. The table-land—of an elevation of from 3,000 to 7,000 feet, forming part of the high plateau which reaches from the Himalayas to the Mediterranean—is buttressed by the great circle of mountains extending from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Inside this half-circle lie the rich plains of Mesopotamia and of the Karun, the seats of ancient civilizations, and the valuable prize for which the East and West have so often struggled in the past, and are fated to struggle in the future.

When in the fifties the question of connecting the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf first came into public view, Western Europe alone appeared vitally interested. There was no Eastern European competition of any consequence; the question seemed one more of finance than of politics. Now we hear again the ancient clash of contending interests; Russia has risen above the horizon as an embodiment of European as well as Asiatic might. Mesopotamia is to her a factor of great interest, and it is

the clash of Eastern and Western ideals which makes the question of such supreme import.

At the time the project for uniting the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf was first mooted there were no railways in view nearer than Brindisi, on the overland route to India. The natural basis, therefore, for the proposed line lay in the Mediterranean, in the waters directly east of the island of Cyprus. The problem of Asia Minor and its bearing on the future of Turkey was at that time but partially understood, and it was very natural that directness of route to India and the saving of time and money determined the question of the *tracé* of the line.

It is still of considerable interest to us to take note of the various routes to which the attention of the promoters of the Euphrates Valley Railway were directed. The following alternative routes were considered: that of Alexandretta viâ Aleppo to the Euphrates, thence by the right bank to Koweit; or that from the same point, crossing the Euphrates at Belis, thence by the left bank of the Euphrates, or the right bank of the Tigris, to Baghdad and Koweit; or, again, that from Bir on the Euphrates, thence by Urfa and Diarbekr by the left or the right bank of the Tigris to Koweit.

Other proposed routes ran from Tripoli or Beyrout, across the desert to Palmyra, and so to the Euphrates and Koweit; also from Haifa across Arabia to the Shat-el-Arab, the shortest of all in point of time, but of little value in other respects.

Mention was also made much later of a line to run from Ismailia to Koweit, just north of the 30th parallel of latitude. Very little is known of this latter scheme, which seems to have died a natural death.

The estimates of these lines varied from 6,000,000 to 10,000,000 sterling. Particular stress was devoted to the advantages of direct routes as being the more economical.

Capital was not then abundant, and questions of expenditure were thorny ones which loomed even larger in the eyes of the promoters of 1857 than in those of their successors in 1900. That Great Britain should prefer the most direct and least costly route, though that route might not perhaps be to the greatest advantage of Turkey, affected that country but little as long as she did not provide any definite guarantee. The conditions, of course, changed when kilometric guarantees were demanded, and the question had to be recast in an entirely different mould—viz., as it affected primarily the interests of that country.

The opportunity lost to us in 1857, when the Government of Lord Palmerston refused its support to the scheme, could not be restored again in 1872, when the question was referred to a Parliamentary Committee. In the eighties the situation had entirely altered. The development of the railway system in European Turkey had brought about important changes in the outlook of the Porte. Asiatic Turkey had sprung into significance, and through communication of that country with the capital was more essential to her than through communication with the Mediterranean. The strategic value of linking Constantinople by rail with Asia Minor and Baghdad was now clearly seen.

As early as 1858 it had been pointed out that the secure possession of the Euphrates line would be decisive as regards the ownership of Mesopotamia and Syria, and in the hands of a first-class Power might give the control of the Suez Canal. Also that Russia could not turn upon Turkey through Asia until she had secured her left flank by seizing Azerbaijan and Armenia, and that, given their possession, she would advance from the direction of Kars to the valley of the Euphrates, as well as from Erivan by Lake Van to Mosul in the valley of the Tigris. Further, it was also seen that predominance in Azerbaijan would

enable her to threaten the southern part of Mesopotamia by way of Tabriz and Kirmanshah.

The full meaning of all these possibilities was meanwhile only gradually brought home to the Porte; but, once realized, the furtherance of a scheme with a débouché on the Mediterranean, instead of on the Bosphorus, could no longer be entertained. The deputation which waited on Lord Palmerston in 1857 stated the general conviction that the Euphrates Valley route would most assuredly pass into other hands if England declined the task. Their words were indeed prophetic. The task, as the original syndicate first saw it, could, in 1872, be no longer accomplished—our opportunity had been lost.

Having failed, then, to bring about the construction of the Euphrates Valley Railway, the attention of British capitalists turned to more local projects in Syria and Asia Minor. I will briefly refer to the Syrian railways. The most important of these are as follows: The line from Haifa to Damascus and Bosra, the concession for which was granted in 1890. It was partly constructed by a British company, and was spoken of as one of the most important of existing or proposed railways in Asiatic Turkey. It attracted great attention at one time from the belief that it was destined to become the terminus of the Euphrates Valley Railway. Its present importance is due to its port, which is by far the best for large ships on the Syrian coast, and because it taps the exceptionally fertile districts inland. In November, 1902, the Sultan purchased this line from the liquidators of the Syrian Ottoman Railway Company, and the works on it are now being pushed forward under the superintendence of German engineers at the expense of the Sultan's civil list. The line has been completed as far as Beisan—the Bethlehem of the Bible—and it will shortly reach the Jordan at Jisr-el-Majania. This line will traverse those scenes with which Christians are familiar until it reaches Damascus,

which Mahomet deemed so strong a rival of the heavenly Paradise.

The line Beyrout-Damascus-Hauran, which is in French hands, was opened for through traffic to Mezerib in 1896. Considerable difficulties were met with in taking the line over the Lebanon, and a heavy expenditure was made in consequence. The port is unsatisfactory, steamers of any size having to lie outside, whilst the port dues are heavy. Despite these drawbacks, the commerce is increasing. Beyrout itself has grown from 25,000 inhabitants in 1860 to 140,000 in 1900. This railway, which has not yet realized the fond hopes of its promoters, will doubtless ultimately benefit by the great increase in the prosperity of the surrounding country, which is rapidly opening up both as regards population, agriculture, and home industries.

The Ryak-Hamah branch, opened in 1902, with its different gauge and rolling-stock, may be cited as a separate railway. This line is remarkably well built, and will be extended ultimately to Aleppo and some point beyond, to connect it with the projected Baghdad Railway. The Turkish Government pays a kilometric guarantee on this line, and will do the same when it is prolonged northward. Branch lines are to be built to the sea, as long as the rights of the Baghdad Railway are not infringed. This branch represents the northern portion of the Hejaz Railway, which will unite the Baghdad Railway with Damascus, and ultimately with the holy cities of Islam, Madina, and Mecca. About 300 kilometres of the Hejaz Railway have been constructed, and trains are now running as far as Maan. Funds for the purposes of the line have hitherto been found by the Sultan's civil list, assisted by the offerings of devout Moslems, but other financial arrangements will be necessary as the line is extended.

Another link in the Syrian railway system is the line

marked as British, and intended to unite the Haifa-Damascus line with Ismailia and the Egyptian system. It runs parallel with the coast, and at no great distance from the sea. No special mention need be made of the Jaffa-Jerusalem Railway.

It will be seen from the foregoing short sketch of railways already built or building that Syria is being rapidly opened up by a well-conceived system of railways, subsidiary to the more ambitious schemes of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. Taking Kilis or Birejik as the point of junction on the future Baghdad Railway, we may at no very distant date be able to traverse the whole of Syria in its length from north to south. The prolongation to Medina and Mecca will be the first step at breaking ground in Arabia, and must lead to great economic and social changes in that portion of Asia.

That British enterprise and capital should have so little part in the opening of Syria by road and rail is not surprising. The political influence of France was for long supreme in Syria, and we could, I think, have viewed an increase of that influence with perfect goodwill, but French influence is on the decline.

The most suggestive factor in the present economic situation in Syria, to my mind, is the entry *en scène* of German agencies for the financing and construction of its railways. German engineers trained on the Anatolian Railway are now supervising the construction of the Haifa-Damascus and the Hejaz Railways, the Sultan's own pet schemes, and there seems no doubt that German financial assistance will be offered, and probably accepted, when the cash resources of the Sultan's civil list become exhausted.

I now come to the network of railways of Asia Minor, and will take them in order of construction. The Smyrna-Aidin Railway dates from 1856, when a concession was granted to British capitalists without the advan-

tage of a kilometric guarantee. The line was constructed by English engineers, and opened in 1866. It continues to be worked under English management.

Major Law, who reported on this line in 1896, and to whose report I am indebted for many of these details, stated that 'It is the only railway in Asiatic Turkey which, on its own merits and without Government assistance, has proved a profitable concern,' whilst Government revenue and the prosperity of the population have been greatly increased by the remarkable development of the fertile districts opened up. The mileage has gradually been extended eastward to Diner and Chivril, tapping further rich districts. The latest reports for 1903 are extremely satisfactory, and within its present restricted area it continues to prosper; but the dream of the promoters of a future extension to the Euphrates Valley has definitely vanished, owing to the advance of the Anatolian Railway to Konia. This dream was a very natural one, for the route taken by the Smyrna-Aidin line followed the ancient caravan route by which the famous cities of Asia Minor conducted their commerce with the interior.

The Smyrna-Kasaba Railway also owes its inception to an English company, to whom a concession was granted in 1863. The progress of the line was slow, and in 1893 only 105½ miles were ready for traffic. Financial difficulties supervened, owing to the failure of the Turkish Government to fulfil its obligations, and in 1894 the company accepted an offer for its purchase. It is now under French control, and enjoys a Government guarantee. Owing to engineering difficulties, the construction caused a heavy outlay, and confidence in the line has not yet been justified. It was hoped that the working would leave but a small margin to be met by the guarantee, but at present it draws heavily upon Turkish funds. The overpowering interests of the Anatolian Railway have also reacted to the

detriment of this line. The extension to the Anatolian Railway at Afium-Karahissar was broken at the instance of the Anatolian Railway, to prevent goods seeking an outlet at Smyrna instead of at Ismid. Perhaps the best that the line can expect is final absorption in the greater scheme.

The Mersina-Adana railway, like the foregoing, was built with English capital. The concession was granted in 1883, the line opened in 1886. In 1896 it was transferred to a French company. The promoters had other aims than the exploitation of the rich belt between the sea and the Taurus. They had in view a prolongation to Birejik, where it was hoped it might affect a junction with the Syrian system. Extensions to Eregli and Konia were also under consideration, but all these plans were held in abeyance owing to the opposition of the Anatolian Railway. Quite a large trade has developed at Mersina, despite its want of a port, but the future of the line must depend on its community of interest with its Anatolian rival, with which it will effect a junction when the Konia-Eregli section is protracted southward. I believe it has already been merged into the greater scheme.

The Mudania-Brussa Railway of $26\frac{1}{2}$ miles, though dating from 1876, was only completed in 1892. It is held in French interests, and doubtless, like all other Asia Minor railways, will become a dependent of the Baghdad Railway. Until such time its extension to Levke and Ine-Oenu is not likely to take place. There is no port, though the roadstead is sufficiently sheltered, and no Government guarantee.

The first section of the Anatolian Railway, from Scutari to Ismid, 58 miles in length, was built by the Turkish Government in 1871, and afterwards leased for a term of twenty years to an English company. This lease was held till 1888, when a German syndicate, operated by the Deutsche Bank of Berlin, acquired rights over the Haidar-Pasha-Ismid

Railway, together with the ninety-nine years' concession for an extension to Angora, the Government guaranteeing mileage revenue over each section. In 1893 the Anatolian Railway came into being. It was under this company that the line to Angora was completed, and further concessions obtained for prolongations to Eski Shehr, and Konia, and from Angora to Kaisariyeh. These concessions were, as before, supported by kilometric guarantees. The concessionnaires were bound to build a railway from Angora to Sivas, from Sivas to Diarbekr and Baghdad, as soon as the receipts on all the lines reached a figure freeing the Government from the kilometric guarantee. The line to Angora was completed in 1892, to Konia in 1896, both sections having been pushed on with energy, despite physical and climatic obstacles. The extension to Sivas and beyond was abandoned out of deference to Russian susceptibilities.

The financial results of the line to Angora have been poor. The main line to Konia tells a different tale. It would appear from recent results that the company will shortly find itself independent of the Government guarantee. The utilization of that guarantee for the extension from Konia to Eregli on the Baghdad line has even been contemplated, but it is doubtful that the Anatolian Railway will forego its rights, when the prosperity of the line might be seriously affected, by bad years and failing harvests.

Before proceeding to the question of the Baghdad Railway, I would like to pass in review certain appreciations of the circumstances attending railway construction in Asia Minor. Just as British enterprise was first in the field when the Euphrates Valley scheme was under consideration, so was it first in opening up new ground in Asia Minor. With the exception of the short line from Mudania to Brussa, every one of the lines mentioned, the Smyrna-Aidin, Smyrna-Kasaba, Mersina-Adana, and the

Haidar-Pasha-Ismid Railways, were built, I believe, in the first instance, with English capital, under English management, with English material, and yet at the present day all we have to show for our labours is the Smyrna-Aidin Railway, certainly the most successful financially of the various schemes, but, still, a poor result after all our effort.

I need not trace the reasons of our want of success in the Euphrates Valley Railway, but it seems necessary to attempt some analysis of our failure in Asia Minor. It would appear that British financiers asked for little or no support from the Turkish Government: they were satisfied with the results likely to follow on legitimate business, and were prepared to await the development of the country before projecting their lines into the interior. Progress was to be slow but sure. Now, this policy, though excellent in itself, was not suited to its environment. The Ottoman Government demanded an instrument adapted to the rapid construction of railways, to subserve Turkish interests rather than the immediate profits or views of the individual; moreover, an instrument with a large financial backing, and this our British companies in Asia Minor never appear to have had. English financial establishments, too, are often averse to risking their capital under foreign guarantees. They discount the support they are likely to receive from their own Government, and are consequently afraid of tying up their capital. It follows, therefore, that where large and influential banks are afraid to tread the public will not venture. British enterprises must suffer in ventures such as those under discussion when opposed by foreign companies having strong financial backing as well as Government support. This was the kind of competition encountered in Asia Minor, and with the advent of the Deutsche Bank of Berlin the tide set steadily against us.

Another and perhaps even nearer cause of failure was the inability of British companies to keep in touch with

Turkish ideals. They were never able to realize that whatever advantages the Mediterranean may have had in the fifties, in the seventies Turkey was more interested in linking up her capital with the outlying provinces. She was not a sea Power, and free communication with Constantinople was everything to her. The base had shifted from the Mediterranean to the Bosphorus, and we had not shifted with it. She had found German agents capable of fulfilling her purpose, and of building railways in Europe to suit her needs ; she now turned to these same agencies to assist her in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. They were adaptable, ready to meet the wishes of the Porte, and to accept her guarantees. What more could be desired ? The *Times* makes the following somewhat involved lament on our displacement : ‘ It is hard to refrain from indulging in a lament at the remorseless regularity with which the life-long efforts of more than one patriotic Englishman were destined to flicker out in a pitiful succession of unrewarded and abortive endeavours. The attempts made during the first half of the nineteenth century to navigate the Euphrates . . . followed during the early years of the latter half by the railway schemes inseparably connected with the names of Chesney and Andrews ; the reawakening of public interest a few years later in a short road to the East, which led to the drawing up of a report by a Select Committee, and which was indicated again early in the last quarter of the waning century by the formation of the Euphrates Valley Railway and Association, pass successively across the scene, to terminate by a group, chiefly English, to obtain a concession, up to the very time that a telegram was despatched to the Emperor William at Windsor granting to a German syndicate a concession to draw up a report concerning the construction of an iron way which should pass through the heart of the Asiatic dominions of the autocrat at Yildiz.’

The apathy of our statesmen in the past has brought

us to the present *impasse*. It was against this apathy and want of imagination that all the genius of a Chesney and the persistence of an Andrews beat in vain.

I will now pass on to the Baghdad Railway scheme. The attention paid by German financiers to railways in European Turkey had as a natural corollary their counterpart in Asiatic Turkey. The Anatolian Railway Company were either compelled to extend their scene of operation or to submit to absorption by extensions inland from the Smyrna side. They were quick to realize the trend of feeling in Constantinople, and, strengthened by the Deutsche Bank, found no difficulty in retaining the field their energy had opened up to them. The course of their negotiations with the Porte has been drawn by Mr. Chirol in his book on the 'Middle Eastern Question.' He mentions that in 1899 the right was accorded to the Anatolian Railway Company to extend their system from Konia to the Persian Gulf. The negotiations, continued till 1902, resulted in 1903 in a convention giving to the 'Imperial Ottoman Baghdad Railway Company' the right of constructing railways to the Gulf in extension of the Anatolian Railway system. This convention not only assured to German enterprise a monopoly in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, but added thereto a predominance in Syria.

The Baghdad Railway, as at present traced, is to run from Konia through the Taurus, whence it descends by the fertile plains of Southern Cilicia to Adana (here it joins the Mersina-Adana line); from Adana to Kilis and Tel Habesch, thence east across the Euphrates to a point 20 kilometres south of Birejik by Haran, Ras-el-Ain, and Nisibin to Mosul, and so to Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. Branch lines are to run to Aleppo, Urfa, Khanikin, and to a point of the Gulf from Zubeir.

The line has been divided for financial reasons into sections of 200 kilometres, each of which will benefit, when

constructed, by a kilometric guarantee from the Turkish Government.

Before the ratification of the convention, the Deutsche-Bank, representing the financial interests of the Baghdad Railway Company, addressed themselves to the Ottoman Bank, as representing French interests, with a view of obtaining their co-operation in the undertaking. The Ottoman Bank would, it was hoped, insure the political support of the French Government as well as the financial support of the French public. Later, similar advances were made to financial houses in Great Britain, with the same objects in view. Both advances were met in the first instance favourably, if without enthusiasm. The Governments of France and Great Britain expressed their general acquiescence by supporting the scheme, but it is said they took no active part in the negotiations between the principal parties concerned. That the German syndicate wished to internationalize the scheme certainly, in a measure, tended to advance its interests. France had been one of the first in the field in both Syria and Asia Minor. It was plain that if they did not march with the times they would be driven out of the field, to find themselves in the same position towards Germany in Asiatic Turkey as they are towards Great Britain in Egypt.

The enterprise had its detractors in France as in Great Britain. The question of French support was early raised in the Senate. M. Firmin Faure argued that the construction of the Baghdad Railway could only injure French influence, and build up the trade and prestige of Germany in Asia Minor. M. Delcassé's views were diametrically opposed to those of M. Faure. M. Delcassé said: 'If this great scheme is to be realized any way, it is better that France should have a hand in it than be left out in the cold,' and on the motion that French capital should be prevented by law from joining the enterprise, the Chamber

expressed its opinion in a very decided way by registering 398 votes to 72 against the motion.

The discussion raised in the House of Commons followed a different course, though the views of the respective Governments were curiously alike. The scheme was regarded with much benevolence by Government, but, as we know, was opposed by a strong party in the House.

Mr. Balfour's views were based on the belief—I give his own reported words—that ‘whatever course English financiers may take, and whatever course the English Government may pursue, sooner or later this undertaking will be carried out. There is no difficulty in point of money. Whether the English Government do or do not assist, it is undoubtedly in the power of the British Government to hamper and impede and inconvenience any project of the kind, but that that project will ultimately be carried out with or without our having a share in it there is no question. Therefore, the point on which His Majesty's Government will have ultimately to decide, and which the Government may safely and wisely take into consideration, is whether it is or is not desirable that, if this railway connecting the base of the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf is to be constructed, British capital and British interests should be as largely represented in it as the capital of any foreign Power.’ If Mr. Balfour has correctly summed up the situation, too much emphasis cannot be laid on the fundamental and dominating factor—viz., that whatever our attitude, be it for or against, the enterprise will be carried through. In the debates in the House attention was devoted rather to the detail of the scheme. The fundamental factor received scant consideration, and the Government, as we know, reluctantly withdrew its countenance. The situation is a curious one. In the days of the Euphrates Valley Railway the public favoured the scheme, and Government withheld its support. Now the rôles are reversed.

France followed our lead, and for the time being it would appear that negotiations are in abeyance.

The attitude of Russia has been consistent throughout. Her press threw the whole weight of its opposition into the scales ; it expressed more of sorrow than of anger at the attitude of France. That her ally should support a scheme carrying in its train the possible rehabilitation of Asiatic Turkey was to her indeed surprising. It pointed out that the project conceived in Germany would, despite all internationalization, remain German in its essence, and would only lead to German aggrandizement at the expense of Europe in general, and of Great Britain in particular. Dire pictures were drawn of loss to British trade and prestige, of the aggressive element imported into the Persian Gulf, where Great Britain had hitherto reigned supreme. The Russian press deprecated also, with all its voice, a change in the *status quo*, and sought to emphasize other personal differences between the two countries. Finally, Great Britain and France were heartily congratulated when the negotiations came to a standstill.

Let us now criticise some of the details of this scheme. The generally accepted view was that the offers made by the German Syndicate for British support were inadequate. In return for providing some 30 per cent. of the capital, for assenting to an increase in Turkish tariffs, for finding a desirable port for the terminus of the line in the Persian Gulf, we were to receive inadequate representation on the Board of Directors. The question of equality of treatment was to be an open one ; nothing was said of special spheres of influence, though the Anatolian Railway was to maintain its separate entity.

Taken at their face value, some of these details appear to offer an insuperable obstacle to a fair understanding, but I venture to submit that they are not really as grave as they would appear at first sight. They seem to be

rather of the character of those ordinary business interests negotiation and goodwill often succeed in reconciling.

Take the question of the enhancement of the tariffs. To this we may apply the arguments that the rights of the bondholders would be effected, and that Great Britain would have to find the greater part of the enhanced rates. Now, are the exclusive interests of the bondholders to be allowed to wreck a scheme of reform the reasonableness of which is generally admitted? Is the country at large to suffer because a small body of foreign bondholders take a hostile attitude? Surely this is a matter for compromise! The argument that Great Britain would pay the greater part of the revenue raised by the higher tariff is probably true.

As to equality of treatment. Reports appeared in the press that preferential rates were to be granted for all goods in through transit from Europe—*i.e.*, not breaking bulk on reaching the Bosphorus—and it was argued that British imports, having to unload after their sea journey, would naturally suffer. I have never seen any confirmation of this report. It was explained that what British goods would have to pay in excess of German goods would be for storage whilst awaiting transit, and possibly certain port dues. Against this we must consider that British sea-borne goods could be landed cheaper at the Bosphorus than German rail-borne goods, and that the balance would thus probably be struck in favour of British goods.

A fear, again, was expressed that German influence might be exerted in favour of special rates for different classes of German goods. It is often argued that so-called equality of treatment does not always mean justice of treatment. The recent commercial treaty, for instance, between Russia and Persia may be instanced as a case in point, for although we are supposed to benefit by the most favoured nation clause, the treaty was so framed as to favour Russian

imports. The remedy would seem to depend upon fair and equitable representation on the Board of Directors. It would, moreover, be essential that the Anatolian Railway should be subordinated in all such vital questions as rates to the common interests of the through line.

Much has been said and written of the choice of a Gulf terminus to the Baghdad Railway. The advantages of Koweit were recognised in 1857. These advantages remain the same now as then. The line does not, however, depend upon Koweit, other places may be found in Turkish territory; but it is of much importance to us that the terminus should be located in some place where we can readily exercise political control.

Of our financial share in the enterprise, it has been suggested that, whilst German and French capital might well finance and construct the northern part of the line, British capital should do the same for the southern, the respective spheres of interest and control following the same broad division. This would seem to offer a possible practical solution of our differences. The Anatolian Railway on the north and the British Railway on the south would thus hold the same relative positions towards the scheme as a whole.

Much has been said in disparagement of the kilometric guarantee, and of the burden it imposes upon the Turkish Government. The burden would presumably be much less if the British Government supported the proposal for the enhanced tariffs. The fact, too, must not be forgotten that the Anatolian Railway is now doing so well as to be practically independent of the kilometric guarantee. There is no reason for thinking that the Gulf-Baghdad section would not in reasonable time do equally well, as soon as the branch line be built to Khanikin. The desert section would certainly entail heavy sacrifices on the part of the Turkish Treasury, which, by all accounts, it is prepared to accept. In any case a guarantee found good

enough for German money might be found good enough for British.

Another and important question remains—that of representation on the Board of Directors. The representation, as originally proposed, was based roughly on a capital basis, with special regard for the rights of the Ottoman Government and the Anatolian Railway, and would have given an overwhelming voice to German capital. This, Mr. Chirol says, was admitted by the Germans both in Paris and London to be an impossible arrangement. If this be so, both France and England could doubtless obtain such representation as the material and moral advantages they have to offer would warrant. Any special rights accorded to the German Anatolian Railway might well be accorded also to the British Southern Railway, and a satisfactory answer found on these lines. In fact, I venture to believe that the whole question of detail might be settled on business principles. I do most sincerely hope that we shall take up the thread of negotiation, and give our best support to the fulfilment of this enterprise. The solidarity of our permanent interests with those of Germany should be strong enough to brush away the cobwebs ephemeral jealousies have woven. The *status quo* in the Persian Gulf, as we now know it, can no longer be maintained, and it is to our interests to take a leading part in a scheme which will ultimately change the political and social relations of the whole of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia and the Karum districts are the richest undeveloped fields in the Middle East, of surpassing promise and potentiality. I pray that the genius of the Anglo-Saxon races may be the moving powers in the regeneration of these regions.

CAUCASUS AND PERSIA.

I now come to that branch of my subject which refers to the Caucasian system of railways, more especially in its relation to the future question of Turkey in Asia and Persia. The map will show that great efforts are being made to remedy the chief defects in the communications between Russian railways in Europe and the frontiers of Turkey and Persia. The gap on the western littoral of the Black Sea separating the Kerch-Dhankoi line from that of the Black Sea coast-line remains to be bridged, whilst direct central communication between the lines on the northern and southern side of the Caucasian mountain range has yet to be effected. The Russian Government have, it would appear, under consideration a new line to connect the European and Western Asiatic railway systems. This line will pass through Voznessenk, Nicolaiev, and Kherson, in order to meet at Dhankoi. The Kerch-Dhankoi line is to be extended towards Anapa and Novorossisk, to effect a junction with the Black Sea coast-line, which will finally branch to Kars and Erivan. The Tiflis-Erivan line is to be extended to Julfa. The European system will thus be brought into direct touch with the Turkish and Persian frontiers, Kars being the objective in the one case, Julfa in the other.

Another extension to connect the Batoum-Baku line with the Caspian provinces of Talish and Gilan has been repeatedly talked of. This branch would start from a point south of Baku on the main line, and run through Lenkoran and Astara to the south and east till it reached the Persian tableland. It is doubtful whether this latter project has ever assumed any practical shape. It would be difficult to construct, expensive, and neither commercially nor strategically would the gain be commensurate with the cost. Leaving this extension, therefore, entirely out

of the question, we see that much remains to be done before Russia can be satisfied with the means of communication by land between her European provinces and those of her Western Asiatic frontier.

It is an appreciation of such factors that has induced Russia to impose on the Government of Persia an agreement by which railway enterprise must lie dormant for a term of years. She thus prevents any competitor entering the lists before she is ready to do so herself. In the present state of her finances it stands to reason that she cannot undertake any large scheme of construction in a country of no immediate vital importance to her. Railways in Persia such as Russia would require would mean not only a large initial outlay, but a continuous burden for their maintenance, whilst their strategic value would be doubtful. For these reasons I am inclined to believe in the continuance of her present policy—that is, a renewal, if possible, of the present agreement with the Persian Government.

That Russia would have liked to impose a similar paralysis on railway enterprise in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia I have no doubt. Any change in the status of Asiatic Turkey, or any concentration of European interests in Mesopotamia, can only prejudice Russia's future in those regions, and that she should stand as the exponent of the *status quo* in that country, as also in Persia, is the natural result of her present stage of development and of her resources.

It was about eight years ago that Russian engineers, bent on railway reconnoissance, commenced to travel over Persia. They examined the following lines of country : from Abbassabad or Julfa on the Araxes to Tabriz, Tehran, Kashan, Yezd, Kirman, Bander Abbas, and the ports on the Persian coast of the Indian Ocean ; from Tabriz again by Kurdistan to Kirmanshah and Khanikin on the Turkish frontier ; and quite recently the country between Meshed

and the Indian Ocean, striking Persia from north to south. Another line of importance likewise examined in Eastern Persia is that which may one day unite the Quetta-Chaman Railway with the Transcaspian system, passing through the north-eastern corner of Persia. This can better be touched upon when referring to the Transcaspian Railway system.

The through line from Meshed southward along the borders of Afghanistan and Baluchistan, which has caused so much discussion, has been shown by Sir Thomas Holditch to offer almost insuperable difficulties. The trend of the mountains is against its *tracé*, its cost would be prohibitive, whilst the danger to which it would be exposed in the event of trouble along its Afghan and Baluchistan border would recommend caution.

The question of a defensible port for the southern terminus of the line is one also now likely to be a factor of much greater consideration in view of recent Russian experience in the Far East. The Indian Ocean, with its open roadstead, dominated by a great naval power, offers no attractions in this respect.

A more likely line would be that from Tabriz to Bander Abbas viâ Tehran, Yezd, and Kirman. It presents no great physical problems. Engineers might, indeed, regard it as an ideal line for constructive purposes. It would, moreover, be protected either by its proximity to the Russian frontier or by the great desert of the Lut. On the other hand, its cost and maintenance would be heavy. Finally, there is the same inhospitable coast of the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean.

Its construction would foreshadow a serious alteration in external relations with Persia. It would affect the integrity of that country, and would appear to menace the Baluchistan frontier. Mahan talks of the fear of Russia outflanking the mountains of Afghanistan, a fear which would be accentuated if Russia were ever in railway

communication with a point so far south as Kirman. A rearrangement of the Baluch frontier might then become necessary, whilst the Nushki line of railway would possibly be prolonged to the west and south towards Bander Abbas. It must always be remembered in this connection that the Nushki line could be projected westward to strategic centres very much more quickly than could any line starting from the Russian frontier. The political advantages of this line do not seem to balance its inherent disadvantages, whilst, financially speaking, the outlook would be deplorable.

A much more important line to Russia would appear to be from Julfa to Tabriz, Kirmanshah, and Khanikin, pointing directly at Baghdad—a line easily protected, easily constructed, and offering many facilities for trade.

It must be remembered that Fuad-Pascha, in his political testament of 1869, gave it as his belief that ‘in future the most serious attacks of Russia will be directed on Asia Minor.’ If Fuad-Pascha’s prediction be of any value, a line through Azerbaijan to the Turkish frontier would add considerably to the striking power of Russia. It would place her in a safe position on the flank of the whole of Mesopotamia. At Kirmanshah she would be able to feed and mass troops not only by her line of rail, but by road from the Caspian viâ Kazvin and Hamadam, at all of which places would supplies and transport be sufficient, if not abundant. At her back would be Azerbaijan, with the best fighting material in Persia, supplying men by no means adverse to leading an attack on their traditional enemy across the border. I need not comment further on the fresh complications with which Turkey would have to deal with an Achilles’ heel in Mesopotamia.

It is regrettable that British enterprise, under present economic and political conditions, is unable to interest itself seriously in railway construction in Persia.

TRANSCASPIA.

Now, to pass to Transcaspia. The main features of the railway system of Transcaspia have not been altered in great degree of recent years. The progress of construction has not been rapid, but up to the present the single line of rail from Krasnovodsk to Tashkend and Andijan has fairly well met the economic needs of the country.

The amount of land under cultivation is strictly limited by the water-supply, and as that cannot be added to without great initial outlay, for which money is not available, there can be no expectation of further rapid development of new agricultural areas. The railway has effected a curious economic change, for a large proportion of the area, once under wheat and other cereals, now grows nothing but cotton. To such an extent is this the case that Turkistan has become an important consumer of Russian and Persian wheat, immense quantities being imported from the Kuban and other districts of the Caucasus, as well as from Khorassan. It was at one time thought that the country irrigated by the Zerafshan River would be able to meet the deficit in Bokhara, but this proved to be far from the case. I travelled through Turkistan in 1893, before the cotton cultivation had reached its present expansion, and even then found that grain was pouring in from Russia. Russian civil officials have always taken rather the economic than any other view of the cotton question in Turkistan, and the pessimistic fear of the military element as to the difficulties a shortness of grain foods might give rise to in time of war were never allowed to react to the detriment of the industry of the country.

I have drawn attention to this one fact to show that an important economic as well as strategic question had to

be solved in Turkistan. From both these points of view the early construction of another line striking back from Tashkend through Orenburg to Russia became an imperative necessity. As long as Turkistan was served by a single line of rail losing itself in Ferghana, the situation was one of isolation, if not of danger. Now the loop to be formed from Krasnovodsk around to Orenburg viâ Tashkend will, in case of trouble on this Eastern border, serve the double purpose of allowing an influx of food-stuffs from Russia for military exigencies, as well as the usual efflux of cotton, any check to which would be severely felt by the merchants of Moscow and Poland. Turkistan, instead of being a detached province of the Empire, will thus form a part of the body politic of Russia, and, both economically and strategically, be not inadequately served.

This line is under construction by way of Orsk, Irghiz, and the valley of the Syr Darya, and is said will be completed early in 1905. Russian papers speak of it as part of the great scheme whereby Moscow is to be united with the heart of Central Asia and of Afghanistan, and which will place the keys to the routes of India in the hands of Russia.

This may or may not be so, but it will certainly enable her to carry out all her movements, military or otherwise, in Central Asia behind a screen almost impossible of penetration.

A scheme very dear to the heart of General Annenkoff, of Central Asian fame, was a prolongation of the Trans-caspian system, viâ Chinkend, Auliata, Vernoe, and Semiretchi, to Semipalatinsk, north of which it would unite ultimately with the Trans-Siberian line—another ideal line from a purely engineering point of view, the only works of first-class importance on it being probably the bridging of the Ili River and the Irtish at Semipalatinsk. This is a line which must eventually be made

to insure direct communication between Transcaspia and Siberia.

I travelled through Kashgar to Semipalatinsk in 1892, and my experience leads me to doubt that any great economic change south of Semipalatinsk would follow on this extension. Rich lands exist between Chimkend and Vernoe, but north of that to Semipalatinsk it is either monotonous steppe or desert—chiefly desert. Along the Irtish itself there is a first-rate opening for cereals. The year of my visit to that river, in 1892, was that of famine in Russia, and thousands of tons of grain were rotting in piles on the banks for want of transport. Annenkoff's scheme will, I believe, have to await on happier conditions.

At present there is only one branch line south of the Transcaspian Railway—viz., that from Merv to Kushk. This line was a reply to our Quetta-Chaman Railway, and was made for the express purpose of bringing Herat into similar touch with the Russian system as Kandahar is with the Indian. The nearness of our approach to Kandahar was for many years a cause of serious anxiety to Russia. That anxiety ceased when the Murghab River line ran into Kushk.

I remember meeting General Kuropatkin in Ashkabad in 1894, when he led the conversation on to our relationship with Afghanistan, and the effect our presence at Chaman might have on the existing political situation. The Russian press was at that time fully convinced of our intention of immediately pushing on the Quetta-Chaman line to Kandahar. This belief was apparently shared by General Kuropatkin, and he asked me to take note that any movement of this kind would be unhesitatingly replied to by the occupation of Herat by Russia. He hoped that the Russian press was misinformed; his Government was quite reconciled to our presence at Chaman, but any alteration of the *status quo* would be resented actively.

The Turkestan system of railways will only approach completion in Russian eyes when its branch lines from Charjui and Samarkand are projected to the Afghan-Turkestan border—one in prolongation of the Transcaspian Railway from Charjui along the course of the Amu Darya to Kerki and Kilif, the other in prolongation of the Orenburg-Tashkend line from Samarkand by Karshi to Kilif. These branches will bring Afghan Turkestan into direct touch with Central Russia by what are practically two distinct and intercommunicating lines of rail—a desideratum to her of the highest importance in case of war.

Another branch to the south, of less immediate importance, to which I have already referred when speaking of railway projects in Persia, may strike off at Askabad, and run viâ Kuchan to Meshed and the Herat frontier. The wall of mountain such a line would have to climb before reaching the Persian plateau makes it probable that the alternative route from Dushak viâ Sarakhs to the same point will be chosen. Meshed would in this case, I presume, be joined by a short branch from Sarakhs. I have never heard the opinion of a competent engineer as to the feasibility of the Askabad route, but from personal inspection can state that the mountain section would prove costly both to build and maintain.

Before closing my remarks on Transcaspia, I would like to add a word on that gigantic enterprise which is to establish direct communication by rail between the heart of Russia and China. Andijan, in Ferghana, the present terminus of the line, is sometimes mentioned as its starting-point, whence it would run viâ the Alai and the Terek Pass to Kashgar, Ak Su, Karashar, Turfan, Hami, Suchuan, to Lau Chau, on the Hwang Ho River—a river watering seven of the richest provinces of China, altogether 1,664 miles in length. I have myself been over the section between Andijan and Kashgar, and can speak

of this part of the country as likely to defeat any such project.

A point west of Kulja, in the direction of the Ili River, on the line some day to be built from Tashkend through Semiretechi northward, is also sometimes mentioned as a starting-point for the China project. This line would have to cross the Thian Shan Mountains before reaching the basin of the Tarim River, whence it would progress as already indicated to the Hwang Ho.

Though this scheme would seem to carry in its train the vassalage of Tibet and the conquest of China, it may fairly be granted that nothing is too difficult for a nation which could conceive and carry out such a scheme as the Siberian Railway ; but, nevertheless, it forms part of a train of Arabian Nights' fancy, having no chance of realization in the present or the near future.

DISCUSSION AFTER COLONEL PICOT'S LECTURE.

GENERAL SIR THOMAS GORDON: With regard to communication between the Gulf and Persia, the scheme which appears to me most feasible and which recommends itself most readily is from Mohammerah to Ahwaz by the Karoon River, and from Ahwaz by rail to Kermanshah. Passing through districts which might add to the granaries of the world, the line would have an economic as well as a strategic value. It could be quickly and cheaply built, as the rise is gradual to the plateaux of Persia. Steamers of 300 tons cover the 70 miles from Mohammerah in twenty hours; they come downstream in from ten to twelve hours. The cost of a light line would probably be about £1,000,000. It would be the answer to the line which Russia could bring to point at Baghdad. Germany would not like it, as she anticipates trade in those regions. This scheme would include 70 miles of river and 270 of rail. Persian trade would not have to pass through Turkish territory; and thus there would be no transit dues. The line would have both commercial and strategic value. England is regarded with favour because she is the mainstay of Persia's independence.

SIR LEPEL GRIFFIN: I wish to express my sense of the value of Colonel Picot's lecture. While I have been listening to what he has been telling us of railways in Western Asia, my mind has been occupied with one special question. I venture to ask, with the utmost humility, to whom are we indebted for the fine old crusted map on which we have been trying to trace the lines referred to by the lecturer? The map may have been suitable to the days of Herodotus or Marco Polo: it might be Asia as viewed from the planet Venus; but it is entirely inadequate to the needs of the present day. I should like to suggest that the sooner it is replaced by an up-to-date map of Asia, the better it will be for lecturers who deal principally with geographical features and for those who listen to the lectures. I should like to associate myself with Sir Thomas Gordon as to the advisability of a line of communication from Mohammerah to Kermanshah and Teheran. It is the only line worth making. English financiers will not consider a scheme if it is not likely to pay. If the Russian taxpayer objects to taxation, he is flogged and sent to Siberia; but the cost of Russian

loans has been rising enormously, and no line in Persia, except that from Mohammerah to Teheran, can pay $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. It may amuse strategists, politicians, and engineers to work out railway lines in Persia, but there are immense difficulties in the way of their accomplishment. The population is small, and there is little cultivation. Russia will not be able to continue to build impossible lines leading to nowhere in order to satisfy vague political ambitions. They are dreams of the future, and their record need not trouble us.

MR. CAZALET : With regard to a line from the Caspian to Teheran, I may say that I rode for two days in that district over very bad roads. It is the line most studied by Russian engineers. If Persia allows it to be built, Russia will be able to strike right into the heart of Persia, and will command the whole country. £300,000 have been spent in the construction of a road from Resht to Teheran—a road which has now broken down. A railway could not cost more than £1,000,000.

MR. J. D. REES, C.I.E. : I should like to ask the lecturer whether he considers that the control of Mesopotamia connotes the control of the Suez Canal? also what progress has been made with regard to the Askabad-Meshed line, and with the line from Kalgan through to China?

SIR ALFRED LYALL said that the Society was deeply indebted to Colonel Picot for the admirable and careful lecture he had given them, and he tendered to the lecturer the hearty thanks of the audience. According to his own views, Sir Alfred Lyall said, the only sure method of opening out Central Asia to European civilization and progress, and of improving the administration of such countries as Asiatic Turkey and Persia, would be by developing communication and commerce.

COLONEL PICOT : The road from Resht to Teheran mentioned by Mr. Cazalet is, owing to its mountainous section, extremely difficult to maintain. I doubt whether its conversion into a line of rail has ever been contemplated. That from Askabad to Meshed is useful as a cart road. There are no signs of railway construction along it. The railway spoken of by Mr. Rees as in course of construction between Kalgan and Pekin is outside the scope of my paper. If I rightly understand Mr. Rees' question regarding Mesopotamia and the Suez Canal, it is one of international law, on which I should be sorry to hazard an opinion.



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