

The Frontiers of New Syria

A mere allusion has been made to the wider question of the frontiers of the New Syria as a whole. At this stage it is premature to attempt a full answer to the question. But our survey of the land has made some outlines more or less clear.

The southern border of Syria, from time immemorial, has been a line drawn from el-Arish on the coast to the head of the Gulf of Akaba—all the desert beyond has been regarded as belonging to Egypt. Under the conditions of ancient and mediæval warfare, and indeed down to the time of Napoleon, this desert was considered as strong a barrier and bulwark as is possible between two States. In Napoleon's own words: "De tous les obstacles qui peuvent couvrir les frontières des empires un désert pareil à celui-ci est incontestablement le plus grand . . . car, si on a tant de difficulté à transporter les vivres d'une armée que rarement on y réussit complètement, cette difficulté devient vingt fois plus grande, quand il faut traîner avec soi l'eau, les fourrages et le bois, trois choses d'un grand poids, très difficiles à transporter et qu'ordinairement les armées trouvent sur les lieux."

Modern means of transport have indeed rendered the Syro-Egyptian desert somewhat less formidable; yet even so we may doubt the Zionists' contention (by which they appeal to British interests) that Egypt and the Suez Canal require "a buffer state" in Palestine, and more particularly on the Judæan plateau. And, besides, if this State is created, where is its own *northern* frontier to run? Hardly over Esdraelon, for that, as we have seen, is neither a political nor a strategic border.¹ If the next natural line were chosen, the Nahr-el-Kasimiyeh,² then "the buffer State" would itself require a buffer,

¹ See above, p. 13.

² See above, p. 12.