

BAGDAD IS GONE AND GERMAN HOPES WITH IT

AT the moment of writing the real military situation is at or near the city of Bagdad. Now Bagdad is a long way off by linear measurement, but to the great political leaders of Europe it may seem closer, morally speaking, even than the Somme and the Ancre. For Bagdad is the terminus of the great international railroad which may be said to have its western beginnings in Hamburg and Antwerp. That railroad is intended to run south from Bagdad to the Persian Gulf, and even to connect with the frontiers of Egypt. No matter how large a position the German armies may seem to occupy in Belgium and France, no matter how ceaseless their activities in a dozen other directions, they are actually fighting for the possession of that railroad, and it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that they are now fighting for nothing else. If Germany emerges from the struggle in possession of that railroad she will have won the war. With the inevitable absorption of Austria, and with the practical vassalage of Bulgaria and Turkey, she would be able to point to an empire not only rivalling that of Great Britain, but threatening its existence. She would have Egypt and India within her reach, if not actually within her grasp.

It was in order to seize Bagdad that General Townshend was dispatched on the ill-fated mission that resulted in his surrender to the Turks at Kut El Amara. It was of course impossible from the British point of view that a Turkish victory should be allowed to end the campaign in Mesopotamia, and so another British force was dispatched from the Persian Gulf, a force that evidently avoided the rather happy-go-lucky methods that characterized the first campaign. This new force has now taken Kut El Amara from the Turks, heavily defeated them with great losses in men and materials, and driven them headlong toward Bagdad, less than a hundred miles away, and directly connected with Kut El Amara by the Tigris River. It is extremely likely that in the course of a few days we shall hear of the capture of Bagdad, and consequently of a definite British seizure of the terminus of the international railroad. Bagdad, as has been said, appears to be very remote, and to belong to a part of the world that may be described as obsolete. None the less its bearing upon the war as a whole is a very real and vital one.

BUT the result of the taking of Bagdad may be still more vital than has been indicated. For we must remember that there is, or was, a large Russian army under the command of the Grand Duke Nicholas somewhere to the northwest of Bagdad. This Russian army seems to have been inactive for some months, but it will be remembered that it captured Trebizond and Erzeroum, and that its left wing stretched well away into Persia. Now, if Bagdad can be taken, it seems well-nigh certain that there will be a junction between the British and the Russians, and that the beaten Turks will have to move quickly if they are to get around the eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea before they are cut off by the Russians coming southward, as they will certainly do as soon as they learn that the British are coming northward. With the Allies in possession of all the territory from the Persian Gulf to Alexandretta—and this is almost the case now—the situation for the Turks would be about as black as it could be. But unless we realize the intensity of German ambitions with regard to Asia and the international railroad, and her glittering vision of an empire extending from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, we shall fail to recognize the full import of the struggle for Bagdad.

While we are watching the course of the

The Possibilities of the Noyon Angle in France Analyzed

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battle of the Somme and wondering at the causes that have led to so definite a retreat of the German forces, it is well to remember that this particular struggle is probably in the nature of an overture, and that the actual programme has not yet begun. The British gains have been very large as gains go nowadays, but none the less the manner of the German withdrawal proves that it was an orderly and premeditated part of some larger plan. If the British were able actually to pierce the German lines it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that the war in the west would be over. Nothing could then save the German armies from rout and flight. But this is now an unlikely contingency, although it is always on the page of possibilities.

That the battle of the Somme is only a prelude is fairly certain from the fact that the present line is a very small one and that the British army is a very large one, far larger than any present or obvious need would justify. The British expenditure of ammunition has been of the most lavish kind, but it is almost insignificant in comparison with the accumulated stores, and we read that both the army and the stores in France are being increased as fast as the transports can ferry them across the ocean.

Evidently some great move is in contemplation, but its nature is so uncertain that we can do little more than guess at its direction. But whatever it may be, it is intended to end the war in France and Belgium before the increasing shortage of shipping can become still more serious. It is intended that there shall be no more "deadlocks." The "war of attrition" has become too horribly monotonous.

ALTHOUGH only folly would venture upon anything like a definite prediction, there are certain probabilities that it would be equally foolish to overlook. And so we may suppose that whatever fighting exists or will exist on an Allied initiative is intended directly or indirectly to crush in the German angle at Noyon. Now the vulnerable spot in every army is not on its fighting front, but on its line of communications. The utmost human valour and the most perfect fortifications are no more than air and tissue paper if there is a failure of fodder for men and guns, and the word fodder represents a continuous stream of supplies of almost incredible dimensions. It need hardly be pointed out that the German line in France occupies two sides of a square, and the two sides run north and south from the North Sea to Noyon, and then west and east from Noyon to the Rhine. The choice of that location was not by chance. It was intended to parallel the main lines of railroad, and as a matter of fact the chief French railroads, north and south, and west and east, lie behind the German lines.

The battle of the Somme was certainly intended, is still intended, to cut the north and south railroad line. It was, of course, precipitated by the battle of Verdun, and the necessity to create a diversion in favour of the hard-pressed French. But its particular area was dictated by the advantage of cutting the communications that helped to supply the Noyon angle. The French had attempted the same feat in the Champagne district, that is to say, on the east and west line, but had failed. And now within the last few weeks we find a German attack in the Champagne district, an attack that seems purposeless unless we suppose that it was intended to consolidate the position against a foreseen French attempt. In other words, we may look upon the Somme area and the Champagne area as roughly corresponding with one another in their mutual aspects toward the Noyon angle. A successful Allied offensive in the Champagne district would also have the effect of driving a wedge between the army of the Crown Prince and the other German forces to the eastward. But we can figure this out for ourselves if we can once accept the theory that the angle at Noyon is actually the Allied objective, and that the main intention is to cut the lines of communication coming from the north and from the east. And it is hard to see what more important objective than this there could be.

IF we may anticipate an Allied offensive in the Champagne district we may look for it somewhere in the neighbourhood of Rheims. The brunt of such an attack would probably fall on the French, and therefore we have still to find some scope for the British forces that, as has been said, are much larger than the needs of the Somme area would demand. It is hardly likely that the British forces would be moved down to the Champagne district. On the other hand, we know that British forces are taking over more and more of the north and south line running down through Arras to Noyon. Now Arras is an important railroad centre and the line that runs through Arras is largely used for German supply purposes, and it therefore seems probable that we shall see



"Damn the Torpedoes! Go ahead!"

—From the New York Times.