

The Long Road to Baghdad

ful wisdom. Once established at Qurna and Amara, we were in a position to protect the Anglo-Persian Oilfields and to safeguard the Gulf. Political reasons were urged for going on; but it is a sound axiom that political reasons should wait upon strategical, since they are ultimately decided by them. In Mesopotamia the penalty exacted for the reversal of this order was the more heavy as our policy was one of opportunism. The objects pursued in our advance were vaguely defined by Mr. Asquith in the House of Commons (November 2nd, 1915) as being "to secure the neutrality of the Arabs" and "generally to maintain the authority of our Flag in the East." If we had had any clear vision at the start of what we proposed to do and where we proposed to stop we might have provided adequate means and resigned ourselves to the sacrifice of man-power and war-material elsewhere. But our aims were undefined. We were drawn on headily from Qurna to Amara, from Amara to Kut, and from Kut to Ctesiphon. There was a complete lack of perspective in the co-ordination of our resources with our aims. Our grasp at Baghdad in November, 1915, without the transport to convey our reinforcements to the front when they arrived, is impossible to defend. It was the old story of vague and ill-considered policy, dissipation of resources, vacillation and compromise in the essential and ultimate thing, blind and bull-necked confidence in the immediate means to the end.

In his speech of November 2nd Mr. Asquith told the House of Commons that we were "within measurable distance of Baghdad." At the same time a marked uncasiness became apparent in the German Press, an uncasiness that might have awakened our suspicions. For the Hun, more even than ourselves, minimises the importance of a reverse, and is tardy in his recognition of it, if indeed he gives it publicity at all. And here