

CURRENT EVENTS.

The Sheikh-ul-Islam, the official head of the Mohammedans, whose decrees even the Sultan is bound to obey, has recently pointed out to his people that there is no verse in the Koran which calls the Christians infidels. It gives this name to fire worshippers; but towards the Christians, whom it calls Nazarenes, the Koran commands Mohammedans to cherish friendly relations. By this it appears that the dread of a general uprising of Mohammedans against Christians has no foundation. Instead of such a "holy war" being a religious duty with the followers of Islam, it is directly contrary to their religion.

The railway from Damascus to Mecca, for which the present Sultan receives the chief credit as being the originator of the movement for its erection, is built to enable faithful Moslems to perform their pilgrimage to the holy places in greater comfort, and not with any expectation of its ever yielding a profit. A stamp tax is to be levied to help pay its running expenses. It crosses the Jordan at a place eight hundred feet below sea level, by a branch line, and reaches the Mediterranean at Haifa. The main line keeps to the east of the Jordan, and soon reaches the desert regions, passing through most fascinating scenery, unlike any other in the world. The greater part of the country traversed is almost without water and without inhabitants; but the line will further the interests of the Sultan's religion and bind together the outlying portions of his empire.

A great earthquake in western Persia has destroyed many villages, with a loss of perhaps six thousand lives. It is thought to have been as violent as the earthquake in Italy, but the country was sparsely settled. The peasantry lost practically all their herds, their only wealth; and several villages are reported to have been completely swallowed up with all their inhabitants.

China now has railroads, projected or running, in every province except Kansu. The latest of these have been financed, constructed and run by the Chinese themselves, without any foreign assistance or advice. The telegraph extends to every province; and the postal service is now one of the best in the world. The dismissal of Yuan Shih-kai was a personal matter, now believed to be chiefly due to the fact that he was of the Chinese race and was considered a leader of the Chinese party, and was therefore unacceptable to the Manchu leaders who are in power. It does not follow that the appointment of a Manchu statesman in his place will bring a change of policy. The wonderful progress that China has been making in the last ten years cannot be stopped by any change of leadership.

Japan is feeling the effects of the destruction of small birds, the skins of which have been exported to America and other countries in great numbers. In view of the alarming increase of insect pests, the traffic is to be prohibited.

The province of Bongba, discovered last year by Dr. Sven Hedin, he describes as the richest and most important province in Tibet; yet before he penetrated its protecting mountain chains even China had no idea of its existence.

Wonderful stories are told of the riches of the newly found diamond fields of German Southwest Africa.

An interesting discovery of early Christian remains has recently been made on the Blue Nile. It is the first time that Christian remains have been met with so far south. Other discoveries of much interest to historians are reported from Egypt and the Soudan, and also from Asia Minor and the Arabian desert, where buried cities are being explored; and of scarcely less interest is the announcement that extensive ruins have been discovered in southern Peru.

As one of the features in the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Hudson river, there will be a reproduction of the "Half Moon," the vessel in which Henry Hudson sailed on his memorable voyage of discovery. The little vessel is to be constructed in Holland, and will probably be sent to New York in September next with a fleet of Dutch battleships as escort. The commissioners who have the preparations for this celebration in charge hope to make it equal, or excel, the celebration of last year at Quebec.

As an outcome of the collision between two ocean steamers off Nantucket, and the saving of so many lives by the use of the wireless telephone, the British parliament will be asked for legislation requiring British-owned steamers to carry a wireless equipment.

The seventh and largest of British warships of the "Dreadnought" class has recently been launched in Great Britain. Five more are to be laid down this year.

The Norwegian government has voted a subsidy to Captain Roald Amundsen for his proposed exploration of the North Polar Basin. This is not to be a spectacular effort to reach the Pole, but a scientific expedition for the fullest possible investigation of the Arctic seas. Captain Amundsen expects to start this year and be absent five or six years.

France and Germany have signed a far-reaching agreement concerning Morocco. The only apparent danger to the peace of Europe at present is the ill feeling between Austria and Servia, which still gives cause for alarm. The very pronounced ill feeling between our own people and the Germans seems to have been wholly allayed by King Edward's recent visit to Berlin, and his hearty reception by the populace in the German capital.

Newfoundland and the United States have agreed in respect to the submission of the fisheries dispute to the Hague court for arbitration. The international waterways treaty, however, in which Canada and the United States were mutually interested, has, for the present, been held up by the United States senate, which has declined to take action upon it until next session.

Grain from Alberta is to be shipped via Vancouver as being the most economical route. When the Hudson Bay route is opened up, in the somewhat distant future, this will probably be changed. Meanwhile there is a probability of the Georgian Bay route being made available by the building of the proposed ship canal.

A union of the British South African states under one government, somewhat similar to that of the Dominion of Canada, is near. A bill for this purpose will be submitted to the imperial parliament at its present session.