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The Near East

THE immediate problem of the Near East is the reconciling of the old Turkish status quo with the growing Imperialist business of Greece; the appeasement of the rival ambitions of Turkey and Greece for sovereignty over the lands and peoples of the Near East. The desire for this sovereignty springs directly from the desire to possess the natural resources within such territory; that desire, in turn, being fostered and compelled by the exigencies of capitalist society. And as long as capitalist society exists that ambition shall be the driving impulse of every economic—and in great part of every social—problem, and the arch of every international crisis.

To be successful capitalist business must expand; ultimately that expansion assumes the proportions of Imperialism, in rivalry for commercial supremacy. Those rival Imperialisms are vast networks of diplomatic intrigue and interlocking monopolies, originally, perhaps individual and national; latterly, wholly international in scope, in organisation and personnel. Through this intrigue of business and politics runs the red thread of national ambition and dynastic sovereignty, absorbed in its own exclusive interest, hiding, pleading, fawning, obstructing, conciliating, as it counters and encounters the subconscious currents of native custom and social discipline, and the invisible forces of foreign intervention. Now appearing on one side, now on the other, as the turn of events favors its prime objective, sailing, like Ella Wilcox's ships, "East and West, with the selfsame winds that blow;" but continually scheming for the furtherance of its central ambition and never, however contradictory the actions appear, forgetting the "main chance."

The main chance is business: the control of peoples and resources: the fundamental assurance of tribute. As business entails growth, growth entails contact with external sources, and the particular conditions of the country determine the nature and direction of the relationship. And inevitably that relationship involves particular interests,—with the sure accompaniment of particular power. So the concession and syndicate obtrude themselves subtly and inconspicuously against the old national interest; the commerce of the Imperial Empire dominates the trade of the national domain; and the life and activity of the society of the people is farmed for the behests of the society of finance. And just as the wealth, the power, the influence of the vertical trust ramifies in countless directions and its potency is maintained—yet concealed—through subsidiary associations and interlocking directorates, so the spreading flag of the Empire overshadows all the activities of the financially subsidiary little nations, bidding the iron hand of control beneath the velvet glove of a skeletal "majesty" or the mask of an "elected" chief.

The evidence is everywhere abundant: so abundant it is wonderful it escapes general notice. In all times, in the daily press, world wide. The "freedom" of Napoleon draped the traders of the 3rd estate. The same principle was crowned at Sadowa—at Versailles—at Sevres. The national aspirations of Serbia concealed the rival aggressions of Russia and Germany, of Britain and France. The Balkan Wars were but minor eruptions of the underlying competition of the "All Red Route" and "Deu-

thland Uber Allies." The ups and downs of Mexican politics reflect the counterplay of Standard oil and Royal Dutch. The land of the Incas presents the same pull to the same powers. Monarchical or Republican China is the manifest of vested interests. In the Transvaal, and in Haiti we saw the little people in the dark toils of giant finance. In India and in Egypt we see independence, "with gyves upon its wrist." In lovely Tahiti, in "mandated" Nauru, amongst the fisher folks of Saghalien and the untutored tribes of Africa exploitation reaches out and drags down. Feisal rode out of Syria—for overstepping the limits of French "protection". Britain made him a "king"—and he is now tripping the beatific dance of freedom under Sir Percy Cox.

We said that the problem of the Near East was the settlement of the national differences of Turkey and Greece. It is. Nevertheless that would be a false impression, left unqualified. Certainly the problem is the composition of the Graeco-Turkish quarrel, but it involves the settlement of the deeper quarrel of Imperialist rivalry for commercial supremacy. Behind Greece and Turkey are Britain and France, the primal participants for Empire—and with them the whole world will participate in the final issue. Three quarters of the Turkish debt (about £150 million) is in French hands. And the security from that debt is precisely the question at stake—the resources of Asia Minor and its hinterland. Greek capital is interlinked with British capital in the lucrative Eastern traffic, in fruit, corn and cotton. Greece and Britain are in collusion in the cotton enterprises of Egypt. Their common interests are deep, and for Britain momentous. Consequently, if the Greek drove the Turk clear of Europe and out of Asia Minor, Greek nationality, i.e., the royal and merchant charters of capitalist Greece, would triumph,—and British influence would be in the ascendant. But Turkey would disappear as a catspaw nation and her defeat would involve the dividend bearing bonds of the Parisian money-lords. France, thwarted in reparations, stripped of her Russian investments, partially dependent on Britain for oil and opposed by Britain in her Meternichian scheme of hegemony is in no mood to calmly suffer the further looting of Asia minor. If the Turk vanquished the Greek that would make little material difference to Greek capital; but it could eliminate Greek ambitions of sovereignty—and might seriously menace the luscious fruits of the British Empire.

During or after the war the Allies partitioned the Turkish Empire among themselves. To France was awarded the "mandate" for the "protection of Syria and its Christian populations." To Britain came Mesopotamia, and Greece was "awarded" a rather precarious footing in Western Asia Minor. But the "protection of Christian minorities" in Syria—or elsewhere—carries with it exactly the same obligation as the protection of British freedom in Canada—the exploitation of the natural wealth of the country. And the independence which Britain presented to Irak was—as Karl Radek pithily puts it "independence from the naphtha deposits of Mosul." While the holy Greek, in pursuance of his Christian principles pushed the Sick Man back to the fastnesses of Angora. Here the young Turks succeeded in halting the Greek "Drangosten," subsequently in-

stituting a vigorous offensive. Britain averred that those man-eating monsters the Bolsheviks supplied their brother terrorists the Turks with the golden means for that purpose. Miserable people. But Britain—wise in the ways of the dove and the serpent—was partly right. For in 1921 there was a bumper wheat crop in the plains of the Turkish East; and as Russia was a land of famine there was a ready market for the golden staff of life. Russia paid for that wheat in good metal roubles of gold,—enabling the Kemalists to fortify their hopes and their hands with the bounteous products of Schneider-Creusot. Truly it would be a doubtful shekel that failed to tickle the eye of Sir Christian Capital.

So the tables are completely turned. During the war, when the main business of life was the annihilation of the "corps-stewing" Hun, Tino was deposed—as a possible emissary of enemy machinations—and Venizelos "guided" the Republic—the mediating Pope of Graeco-French capital. When the Turks were flying from the proselytising Greeks there arose a clamor in the land of the Olympian gods for the beloved Tino. For does not Royalist Greece fly the house flag of English finance? With the Turk once more overlooking the storied fields of Thrace the good Cretan casts darkling looks on the place of the throne. These incidents are the indications of the undertow of the rival Imperialisms of Britain and France. They are insignificant in themselves; and the local suffering they cause is the direct—and foreknown—result of a mendacious diplomacy in the interests of the rulers of the world. The atrocities of Armenia, like the atrocity of war, is the inevitable sequence of capitalist privilege in wealth production; and whether those atrocities eventuate in Armenia, or China, or Timbuctoo, they happen always with the long cognisance and direct connivance of world finance. It is not chance and it is not a calamity. It is the studious fostering and the studied direction of national and international misunderstandings for the seizure, or the maintenance, or the further extraction of privilege and profit in the common means of life.

But there is a deeper significance to the question. "Oil," said Briand, "is the key to the future." Mosul, the oil centre of Syria is more securely in French influence with the demise of the Greek from Asia Minor. And since Turkey is linked with French interests on one side, and with Russia on the other, it might be that France dreams of a contact with Baku—direct or indirect. With the Turk reinstated in Constantinople, the hinterland of Thrace, and with Thrace, Bulgaria cannot but be a fertile field for intrigue. In that intrigue the chief prizes will be the right-of-way of communication, and the oil wells of Rumania and Macedon, now controlled by Anglo-Persian. And with Central Europe in the leading strings of France—and partly of Italy, an associate of France—with French post war necessity, the failure of reparations, the burning of Russian bonds and the necessity of salvaging Europe for and to her own supreme interests there can be no amicable relations between France and Britain.

Britain fought the good fight of Empire through the medium of Greece because it was probably cheaper that way; because she was invisible in the affair
(Continued on page 7)