

CHAPTER IX

WORLD EMPIRE

The mind of Germany has been more definitely fixed upon the Bagdad Railway and the "Drive to the East" than upon any other imperialistic project. This has awakened the imagination of the people. It has received every support the government could give. The Kaiser proclaimed himself the eternal friend of the Turk; the protector of the Mohammedans in Asia and Africa. The sending of the *Panther* to Agadir in 1911, which precipitated the Morocco crisis, was a demonstration of moral support to Islam and the Mohammedans of North Africa. The bankers and financiers, the great iron and steel interests—the industrials of all classes, the intellectuals, and many of the common people, came to look upon the project of a Pan-German Empire much as Bismarck looked upon the north German federation as the inevitable and necessary destiny of Germany. The overseas colonies and adventures in Morocco and South Africa,

in the Pacific and Kiaoutchou were of small concern in comparison with this dream of empire, either economic or political, extending from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf and containing 200,000,000 people. The Morocco incident, the intrigues in the Balkans, the diplomatic controversies with England, France, and Russia during the last twenty years, and finally the war itself, revolve in large part about this adventure in diplomacy, statecraft, and high finance.

The Bagdad Railway was a means of economic, military, and political power. It was an agency of imperialism, of control of the Balkan states, Turkey, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia. It was to be a through system from Hamburg to Bagdad with connections running to every portion of the German Empire. It passed through the heart of Europe. It cemented the union of Germany and Austria-Hungary. It placed the Balkan states under the potential dominion of Prussia. It ran threateningly close to Roumania. It passed through Serbia, which must be under German control in order that the railway should pass through German territory. Greece lies just

outside of its pathway, easily accessible for trade and military conquest. The Adriatic is but a short distance away with Italy in a position of easy vulnerability by land and sea from Trieste and Salonika. The soldiers of the Kaiser could be easily mobilized against this whole territory.

Turkey and Bulgaria were under German influence. But little Serbia blocked the corridor to the Mediterranean and the Orient. And Serbia was unwilling to prostrate herself to Austria. The railway must pass through Germanic territory from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf. In addition, Austria-Hungary was covetous of an outlet to the Mediterranean through the Vardar Valley to Salonika. Austria-Hungary was driving to the southwest and Germany to the southeast. The Jugo-Slavs of Serbia stood athwart the pathway of Pan-German conquest. The assassination of Grand Duke Ferdinand was the pretext. The blocking of the Bagdad Railway and with it the project of Pan-German world conquest was probably the real cause of the ultimatum of 1914. For Serbia was increasing in prestige and power. She was supported by Russia.

An examination of the Mediterranean basin indicates how the railway, with its branches radiating out like a fan, also fits into a plan of economic and military control of Turkey and western Asia. It covers Anatolia, Armenia, Syria, Palestine, the Tigris-Euphrates valleys, Mesopotamia, and on down to the Persian Gulf, which was to be the eastern terminus of the system. Western Asia was to be networked by a German railroad system which spread out from the eastern side of the Bosphorus. It checked Russian advance into Asia Minor from the north. It tapped Persia under Russian-British control and brought that country under German influence. It threatened Persia and India as well.

The harbors on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean were to become German ports. They were potential naval bases. Branch lines ran southward through Syria and Palestine, easily accessible to these harbors. This brought the arms of Germany and Turkey close to the Suez Canal and Egypt. The distance from the southern terminus to Port Said was only three hundred miles. This region is semidesert, wanting in water and vegetation. But it is level

and easy of transport. A military railway could readily be built into Egypt for the transportation of troops. Such an attack, if successful, would cut off British connections with India, Australia, the east coast of Africa, and her Far-Eastern possessions. It would cut off France from her colonies. It would permanently end the British project of a Cape to Cairo Railway through eastern Africa planned by Cecil Rhodes, as well as the British project for an inclusive British empire beginning at the Cape of Good Hope on the south and the Straits of Gibraltar on the west, and extending by way of Egypt, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf to India.

To defend her empire England would be required to maintain an immense standing army, possibly a million men, in the Near and Far East. She would have to erect munition plants and provide great stores and equipments. For Egypt is the keystone of the British structure. Land transportation is so much more rapid than water that control of the railways of western Asia by Germany would place England at a terrible disadvantage. It would be a checkmate so complete that Great Britain

would scarcely be able to accept the gage of war for the retention of her empire. No matter what the British alliances may be, no matter from what corner of the globe her support may come, she could scarcely expect to cope with German and Turkish armies in control of the land transportation as well as the strategical seaports upon the eastern Mediterranean.

Moreover, possession of the Persian Gulf would give Germany a naval base on the Indian Ocean from which her fleet could strike at British possessions in the Far East. How fully this danger was appreciated is indicated by the diplomatic moves, the demonstrations of force, the occupation of territories by Germany and England in the Persian Gulf which was a centre of activity by these Powers for nearly twenty years.¹ In fact, with the exception of Canada and the west coast of Africa, the entire British Empire, as well as the Near and Far

¹ Admiral A. T. Mahan, the authority on sea-power, wrote: "The control of the Persian Gulf by a foreign state of considerable naval potentiality, a 'fleet in being' there, based upon a strong military port, would reproduce the relations of Cadiz, Gibraltar, and Malta to the Mediterranean. It would flank all the routes to the farther East, to India, and to Australia, the last two actually internal to the empire, regarded as a political system; and although at present Great Britain unquestionably

Eastern possessions of France, were involved in the struggle.

The completion of the Bagdad Railway and the control of Turkey would also place southern Europe, Africa, and Asia under the menace of Berlin. The Mediterranean had become as strategic to-day as it was in the days of Rome.

German ascendancy in the Near East would also threaten the states bordering upon the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to Persia. It threatened France, Spain, Italy, and Greece. Egypt, Tripoli, Algeria, Tunis, and Morocco would be under the menace of German battle-ships.

With Germany in control of the Dardanelles Russia would be able to reach the seas only with German assent. Her naval power would be under German control. She would be unable to sell her wheat, oil, and other raw materials where she chose. This would make it

could check such a fleet, so placed, by a division of her own, it might well require a detachment large enough to affect seriously the general strength of her naval position."—*Retrospect and Prospect*, by A. T. Mahan, pp. 224-5.

For discussion of British strategic interests in the Persian Gulf and the conflict with Germany over this part of the world, see also *The German Road to the East*, Evans Lewin, pp. 82 *et seq.*

impossible for her to negotiate loans except through Berlin. She might be compelled to grant preferential or exclusive tariffs and privileges to Germany under which her own industries could not live. She would be coerced into granting concessions for the development of her resources, as was done after the Japanese war.

The war has shown the military value of railroads. Strategic railways are the equivalent of a great army. A small force with well-arranged railroad transportation at its back is more than a match for a much larger force which has to rely upon water transportation for support. An army with a railroad is mobile. It can move quickly. It can be here to-day and elsewhere to-morrow. It can be fed easily. It can be supplied with munitions. Reinforcements can be quickly brought forward. A railway moves in secret. Not so a fleet. Its movements are known. And a nation which desires to mobilize secretly can do it by rail quickly and quietly.

Whoever controls the railroads of a country controls the life of that country. Military strategy as well as economic development lay

back of the plan of Cecil Rhodes for a Cape of Good Hope to Cairo Railway, as well as the efforts of Great Britain to secure control of the southern section of the Bagdad Railway which terminated at the Persian Gulf; or when Germany would not consent to such control, to have this section internationalized. This consideration also lay back of British proposals for a British Bagdad Railway long discussed in Parliament, which was to start from the Persian Gulf, run northward through the Tigris-Euphrates River territory to Bagdad, and from Bagdad westward through Damascus to the Mediterranean at a point somewhere between the Island of Cyprus and Egypt. Such a railroad would have been under exclusive British control. It would not connect with Constantinople. It would offer no means of connection with Turkey or Russia. It would block Turkish and Russian advance from the north. It would be free from attack by any of the European Powers, and would place Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Persia under British control. Had this project been carried out, the German Bagdad Railway would probably never have been ventured on, and the

European War might have been averted. The project was abandoned, however, when England acquired control of the Suez Canal and an all-water route to her Eastern possessions.¹

Such is the importance which railroads play in modern wars. The Bagdad Railway was the key to the Pan-German dream of empire.

Germany, it is true, did not herald any such military designs. She dared not. To discuss the military aspects of the railway would confirm the apprehensions of the rest of Europe, and justify their efforts to thwart the project. And French assistance and co-operation from the other Powers was necessary because Germany was unable to finance the railroad herself. Moreover, the publication of military and political plans might have caused Turkey to take fright at the thought of economic penetration being converted into military occupancy.

Some German authorities, however, have been frank in their admissions that the Bagdad Railway was for other than purely economic

¹ For a discussion of the British plans for a railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf see *The German Road to the East*, Evans Lewin, p. 55.

purposes. Doctor Paul Rohrbach is recognized as the most eminent German authority on the Near East. He is the author of a book published in 1911 entitled *Die Bagdad Bahn*, as well as *German World Policies*. Doctor Rohrbach says:

“England can be attacked and mortally wounded by land from Europe only in one place—Egypt. The loss of Egypt would mean for England not only the end of her dominion over the Suez Canal, and of her connections with India and the Far East, but would probably entail also the loss of her possessions in central and east Africa. The conquest of Egypt by a Mohammedan Power, like Turkey, would also imperil England’s hold over her sixty million Mohammedan subjects in India, besides being to her prejudice in Afghanistan and Persia. . . . The stronger Turkey becomes, the greater will be the danger for England, if, in a German-English conflict, Turkey should be on the side of Germany.¹

Another German writer says:

“When England—the European outsider who lags far behind Germany in national power, individual talent, and political strength—loses India, then her world power will disappear. The ancient highroad of the world is the one

¹ *Die Bagdad Bahn*, p. 47.

which leads from Europe to India—the road used by Alexander—the highway which leads from the Danube via Constantinople to the valley of the Euphrates, and by northern Prussia, Herat and Kabal to the Ganges. Every yard of the Bagdad Railway which is laid brings the owner of the railway nearer India. What Alexander performed, and Napoleon undoubtedly planned, can be achieved by a third treading in their footsteps. England views the Bagdad Railway as a very real and threatening danger to herself—and rightly so. She can never undo or annul its effects.”¹

¹ Trampe, *Der Kampf um die Dardanellen*, Stuttgart, 1916.