

The ROAD to INDIA

IT is never difficult to view objectively the Imperialism of some enemy or inferior country ; and it is perhaps for this reason that Americans are at present doing a signal service in providing us with histories and analyses of the Imperialism of Europe. This present work* by a young Professor of History in Columbia University, U.S.A., gives us a very thorough and realistic history of one phase of the Imperialist struggle which preceded the war of 1914. In this story of intrigues for financial dominance of Turkey and of the strategically important railway from the Bosphorus to the Persian Gulf, we are shown the real forces at work in their crude elements. Instead of being told, as would be the instinct of most bourgeois historians, that the railway was built for love of the brown eyes of Turkish and Arab babies, we are shown clearly the economic motives which dominated. "It was the expectation of the owners of the line that the construction would materially increase the volume of German trade with Turkey—an expectation which was justified by subsequent developments. . . The officers of the *Deutsche Bank* firmly believed that the export of capital and the export of commodities should go hand in hand. The other

* *Turkey, the Great Powers, and the Bagdad Railway.* By Edward Mead Earle, Ph.D. (The Macmillan Company 10s. 6d. net.).

banks associated in the Bagdad Railway enterprise likewise were closely affiliated with important industrial enterprises." Historians usually praise the impartiality of the officers of the State, who are "above the battle" of economic rivalry. Here we are shown that "the German diplomatic and consular representatives in the Ottoman Empire rendered yeoman service in furthering investment, trade, and commerce by Germans in the Near East. . . . The British Consul-General at Constantinople informed British business men that his staff was at their disposal for any service designed to expedite British trade and investments." And the Kaiser's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1898—even that was "closely connected with the proposed Bagdad Railway concessions." And was there honesty in the dealings, befitting the champions of capitalist civilisation? Not a bit of it! Included in the promoting expenses of the railway "was a large item for *backshish*—gratuities to Ottoman dignitaries. . . . Djaird Bey informs the author that the item of *backshish* must have amounted to almost £100,000." In this gigantic game of grab we are shown religion, missionaries, and educational establishments playing an important rôle, alike in the hands of Germany and of France and of Britain.

The result of this German expansion in the Near East was that "Russia, Great Britain and France were gradually led to obstruct the progress of the railway by political and economic means—at least until such time as they could purge the project of its political possibilities or until they could obtain for themselves a larger share of the spoils." Russia disliked it, because she always wanted control of the Straits. France feared it would endanger her trade with Syria, and French finance had important holdings in the Ottoman Public Debt. Britain had interests in Persia, and wished to retain control over Egypt and the Persian Gulf as roads to India. Formerly she had feared the threat of Russia. Now it was the power of Germany which reached down into the sensitive zone.

A further signal merit of the book is the concluding chapter of forty pages which deals with "The New Struggle for the Bagdad Railway" since 1918. "The Great War may be said to have terminated the first episode of the great Bagdad Railway drama—the rise and fall of German power in the Near East; it opened a second episode, which promises to be equally portentous—an Anglo-French struggle for the right of accession to the exalted position which Germany formerly occupied in the realm of the Turks." The "characteristic fields" of this struggle "have been diplomacy and culture, its entrenchments, embassies, consulates, religious missions, and schools." We are given a very good account of the factors leading up to the Crisis of the Straits in the autumn of 1922—France intriguing with Turkey; Britain, having obtained

many spoils already, supporting the Arabs and also the Greeks, desiring particularly to keep Turkey weak. We are given a very interesting description of the Lausanne conferences, at which the crisis came over France's claim for restitution of her pre-war concessions. At Lausanne "the claims of Great Britain (for Mesopotamia and the neutralisation of the Straits) were more easily reconcilable with the Turkish programme than were the claims of France. Concessions obtained by British nationals between 1910 and 1914 were largely in areas detached from Turkey during the war—chiefly in Mesopotamia—whereas many of the most important French concessions were in Anatolia, the stronghold of the Turkish Nationalists." Hence Britain tended to gain, and to transfer her favour to Turkey, and "on May 15th it was announced that a syndicate of British banks had purchased a controlling interest in the *Deutsche Bank's* holding company for the Anatolian and Bagdad Railway Companies. . . . Thus British imperialists had won possession of the 'short cut to India'!" The book closes rather significantly with the arrival of America on the scene. The Chester concession of April, 1923, provides for the construction of 2,800 miles of railway in Asia Minor by a company controlled by an American syndicate.

This is quite one of the best histories of Imperialism which have appeared for some time, and ranks in importance with Leonard Woolf's *Empire and Commerce in Africa*. It should have a prominent place as an addition to the bibliography of our Imperialism Text-book. It should be in every working-class library, and should be studied by all lecturers on modern imperialism.

MAURICE DOBB.