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The Senussi as a factor in North African development

Mrs. Rosita Forbes

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CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY

A MEETING of the Central Asian Society was held in the rooms of the Royal Society at Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W., on Wednesday, May 18, 1921, the Rt. Hon. Lord Carnock, P.C., etc., presiding. A paper was read by Mrs. Rosita Forbes on "The Senussi as a Factor in North African Development."

The CHAIRMAN: Before we begin I should like to remind the members of the Central Asian Society that the general meeting will be held at the Royal Astronomical Society's rooms, just across the courtyard, at three o'clock on June 15; that a lecture by Sir Michael O'Dwyer will take place at 4.15, and that the annual dinner will take place in the evening at a quarter to eight. Those Members of the Society who wish to attend the dinner are earnestly requested to send in an application for tickets to the Secretary at 74, Grosvenor Street. I will now ask Colonel Yate to read the list of members who have been elected since our last meeting.

The HON. SECRETARY (Colonel Yate): Twenty members have been elected since our last meeting: The Right Honourable Winston Spencer Churchill, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies; as you know he is the head of the new Middle East Department of the Colonial Office. I may mention that on his return from Cairo he was invited to join the Society and accepted. Field-Marshal Sir A. A. Barrett, G.C.B., Major A. B. W. Bentinck, Coldstream Guards, Captain F. W. Chardin, Mrs. Carver, Captain Leslie L. Bright, Mr. Allan Cheeseman, Mr. M. Courtier Forster, Mr. Rea Davies, Mr. K. H. C. Badger, Captain H. M. J. MacIntyre, R.A., Captain J. H. Moore, Major H. C. Pulley, Captain H. G. Rivett-Carnac, Mr. P. H. J. Tozer, Captain H. I. Todd, Mr. A. J. Tomlinson, Mr. Douglas W. Gumbly, Mr. J. Horridge, and Captain D'Arcy Bingham.

The CHAIRMAN: I omitted to say that the principal guest at the dinner on June 15 will be Lord Chelmsford, late Viceroy of India. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I am sure I am expressing the wishes of all those present in offering a very warm welcome to that intrepid traveller Mrs. Rosita Forbes (applause) on her safe return to this country. I think we should all have been glad to have heard from her own lips the narrative of that adventurous journey which she undertook to Kufra, in which, if I may be permitted to say so, she displayed

most magnificent fortitude and endurance. But, unfortunately, another Society had already obtained her consent to give the history of her journey; and so, naturally, we were precluded from having that great advantage. At the same time, I think that the subject on which she has been kind enough to say she will address us this afternoon is one of great importance to our interests, not only in North Africa and Egypt, but I daresay still farther afield, as I do not think it possible to predict with any precision the limits to which the influence of this Moslem Confraternity may subtly and gradually extend. I have no doubt that from the knowledge which she has derived from her recent experiences, Mrs. Rosita Forbes will be able to give us this afternoon some very valuable views, and also much useful information in regard to the subject which she has kindly undertaken to deal with. I will now ask Mrs. Rosita Forbes if she will kindly read her lecture. (Applause.)

THE SENUSSI AS A FACTOR IN NORTH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

BY MRS. ROSITA FORBES.

THE present political position in Tripoli and Cyrenaica appears to mark a definite stage in the history of the Senussi confraternity and to offer a point from which may be examined the past history of that curious brotherhood, its present situation, and future prospects with which, more especially in Cyrenaica, are bound up the fortunes of Italian colonization.

The order is of comparatively recent inauguration. Sidi Mohammed ben Ali es Senussi was born in Algeria in 1787, of a Berber tribe, yet a descendant of the Prophet through Idris, founder of the Moroccan dynasty.

He studied at Fez at the Karuim university at a time when Morocco was the nursery of many religious confraternities. During the seven or eight years he spent in that most beautiful city of the world, he won some renown as an ascetic who wished to amalgamate every Moslem sect on a basis of pure and simple Islam, in strict conformance with the teaching of the Koran, but shorn of every modern digression and addition.

It appears to have been during his course of study at this university that his doctrine, based on the strictest interpretation of the letter of the Koran, took the definite form of opposition to all innovation, whether by Mohammedans or Christians.

Except in his teaching against Turk and Christian alike, there was no striking novelty in his ideas, which appear to have gained their

force rather from the earnestness of his preaching than from any generally felt desire for improvement, or any public expression of dissatisfaction with the current affairs in Islam.

They consequently found a readier audience amongst the uncontrolled Beduins, to whom Turk and Christians were equally hateful, than among the town dwellers of settled occupation.

To clear the religion of all scholastic accretions, to rid it of all sophistical interpretations, and to secure a return to the pure theocracy of Mohammed's days was his fundamental teaching, to which he added a mysticism in his personal conduct and a resolute detachment from the daily routine of life.

No exalted or historical ritual was then, or later, imposed on his disciples, nor was any outward or visible sign denoting membership of the order insisted on, either by him or by his successors.

Sidi ben Ali returned to Algeria in 1829, and taught grammar and jurisprudence at Laquat. He left the country on the eve of the French occupation and, undoubtedly, his fanaticism was strengthened by the sight of his native land in the hands of unbelievers.

Having wandered along North Africa preaching his mystic doctrine of a purer Islam till he reached Cairo, he proposed to continue his studies at the El Azhar university. Here, however, his asceticism, intolerance and hatred of innovation made him many enemies among the Ulema and his teachings were condemned by one of the most famous Sheikhs. He therefore went on to Mecca, where he became the pupil of a famous theologian, Sidi Ahmed ibn Idris el Fasi, head of the confraternity of El Khadria, of much influence in Morocco. Here at last he found a mind akin to his own.

Master and pupil travelled together to the Yemen, during which missionary journey the former died, having left instructions to his followers to transfer their allegiance to his favourite pupil, who thus found himself the head of a definite group of fervent ascetics.

Therefore, when the opposition of the older Sheikhs, who expressed a doubt as to his orthodoxy, forced him to leave Mecca in 1838, he definitely formulated the Senussi policy of keeping away from all centres of civilization and, thus, avoiding contact with those countries which were under European rule or protection, while uniting the various Beduin tribes in an immense religious organization, which should eventually include the Negroid races of the South and stretch in an unbroken line from the Hejaz to the Tuat Oases.

The Senussi are sometimes wrongly spoken of as a sect, but at no time have they been other than an ascetic confraternity, opposed to all form of luxury or of ceremonial, intolerant of any intercourse with Jew, Christian, or infidel.

Since spiritual and temporal power in Islam are inevitably synonymous, Sidi ben Ali towards the end of his life was looked upon

as the actual ruler of the Cyrenaican hinterland, but his aim probably did not go further than a Moslem freemasonry, primarily religious, but depending for its wealth and political power on the mercantile organization of the ancient Saharan trade routes by which the commerce of the Sudan came north to the Mediterranean Ports.

Thus his Zawias were always built at strategic points where passing caravans must stop at the wells. While camels were watered, the merchants were entertained by the Senussi Sheikh, who was thus afforded the best possible opportunity for propaganda. The Zawias, which were colleges and marts at the same time, gave three days' hospitality free to any traveller and, gradually, as the fame of the Senussi spread among the tribes, Ekhwan were appointed to accompany the more important caravans to prevent attacks from Beduins.

Thus the doctrine of Sidi ben Ali was eventually carried to Kanem and Borku, to the Comalis and Senegambia without the existence of any written dogma. There is, in fact, no special Senussi ritual, nor have I heard any unusual prayer or rite used in their mosques. The use of gold or jewels or any form of luxury was forbidden, as was tobacco and any alcoholic stimulant.

Women were allowed to adorn themselves in order to retain the affection of their lords, thus ensuring a large progeny to Islam, but the only other exception was made in favour of the sword hilt, which could be studded with gems, as it might serve in a holy war against the infidel. Coffee was forbidden and also sugar, because the latter might have been refined with substances containing the bones of animals killed by non-Moslems.

In 1856, Sidi ben Ali retired to Jaghabub. Doubtless this was a precautionary measure, in accordance with his habitual policy of avoiding any open conflict with existing governments, for Turkey was growing nervous with regard to the Senussi power in Africa. At first she had supported the order, according it important privileges, such as grants of land and exemption of the Zawias from taxation.

Sidi ben Ali, however, was not to be won over from his condemnation of Turkish unorthodoxy and, in 1852, he had excommunicated the Sultan. It was, therefore, obviously necessary for him to remove his headquarters from the territory nominally under Ottoman jurisdiction.

Undoubtedly while Sidi ben Ali was in residence at Jaghabub, he made the little oasis on the edge of the Libyan Desert into a centre of political propaganda and mercantile activity, but it is hard to believe that it ever had the importance ascribed to it by Henri Duveyrier, who, in 1880, described it as arsenal, factory and barracks, as well as college and court.

About 1857, a deputation of Zouias visited the Senussi Sheikh at Jaghabub, and offered him the allegiance of their tribe, which had recently conquered the Tebu in the desert oases of Kufara, then

known as Tazerr. Sidi ben Ali must have realized the strategical importance of Kufara as a basis of propaganda from the Sudan to Lake Chad, for he instantly despatched Ekhwan to disseminate his doctrine through the four oases.

It is probable that he contemplated a further withdrawal from the zone of Turkish activity, but his death occurred suddenly in 1859, before he had been able to realize his project.

He was succeeded by his son, Mohammed el Mahdi, then a boy of fourteen. At this time there were thirty-eight Zawias in Cyrenaica and Sirte and eighteen in Tripolitania. Others were sown broadcast through Algeria, Tunis and the Fezzan, but in Morocco there were only five, probably due to the opposition of other great religious orders.

By way of the Western Sahara and Timbuctoo, the Senussi Ekhwan had penetrated Senegal, where they must have found fertile soil for their doctrine, as in 1879 Senegalese pilgrims travelled 4,500 kilometres across Africa to visit the Mahdi at Jaghabub and returned to their own country without troubling to continue the pilgrimage to Mecca.

From Air to Gonda, from Lake Chad to Wajanga, as well as among the three millions in Wadai, it may be supposed that the Senussi influence was preponderant.

The Sultan of Wadai had been wont to entrust his north-bound caravans to the care of his brother and "fellow-ruler," Sidi ben Ali, and immense gifts of slaves and ivory cemented the friendship between the two potentates.

In Egypt the influence of the confraternity was never very strong, though in 1882 there were fifteen Zawias within its borders exclusive of the mother house of Jaghabub. At the same date there were Zawias at Jedda, Mecca and Taif and, at least, nine others in the Hejaz and Yemen. Duveyrier estimates the number of brothers of the order as anything between one and a half and three millions at the time when the Mahdi's minority was ended.

Each of these Ekhwan was a more or less active missionary agent, and each was ready at the bidding of his superiors to turn himself into a soldier to fight the hated infidel. Thus the power given into the hands of the young Mohammed el Mahdi was great.

An ancient prophecy foretold that the Mahdi, who would reconquer the world for Islam, would attain his majority on the first day of Moharram in 1300 Hegire, November 12, 1882. The son of Sidi ben Ali, having fulfilled this condition, might have declared a holy war and had as amazing and meteoric a career as the humble carpenter of Abba Island in the Nile, but he preferred to strengthen his position at Jaghabub, and to carry on his father's policy of holding aloof from centres of civilization and avoiding open rupture with European Powers.

Two opposing and mutually destructive forces faced Mohammed el

Mahdi throughout his life—the one the pull away from civilization, the Khalifat and its traditions; the other the push towards civilization, to which, by the extension of his domain, he was slowly but inevitably forced.

As his career proceeded, it will be seen how, on more than one occasion, the guiding rules of his father influenced his actions, but, consciously or not, from the day of his accession, he began to destroy the basic elements of the foundation of the order. The selection of Jaghabub as the mother Zawia was emblematical of the founder's desire for detachment from the affairs of the world, and even if it be true that he so far abandoned his standpoint of opposition to the Ottoman Sultan and all that he stood for as to secure the grant of this territory by political intrigue at the "Sublime Porte," the intrigue was only employed to secure a refuge far removed from all contact with civilization, whether Islam or Christian, and the excommunication of the Sultan in 1852 may have well rehabilitated the founder in his own eyes and those of his followers.

The Senussi organization was obviously capable of indefinite expansion and, for the peculiar circumstances in which this order was working, admirably designed to give the best and quickest results. The missionaries who were despatched amongst the Beduin tribes first made good their ground on a purely religious footing, and then swiftly acquired the temporal power, which, in a Mohammedan community, must accrue to the dispenser of the law.

Doubtless Sidi ben Ali had been responsible for the stubborn resistance of Laghuat in Algeria in 1852, when the French were obliged to fight their way, literally from tree to tree, among the palm gardens of the oases, as well as for much of the opposition to the French occupation of Nigeria and Senegambia, but it is doubtful whether he would ever have cared to come into open conflict with European Powers.

In this his son followed his example.

It is possible that the Mahdi had in view, if not an empire, at least a sphere of influence among the Negroid races between Wadai and Lake Chad, for which reason he was prepared secretly to oppose the French advance into Borku, but in his withdrawal to Kufara in 1894 is seen his determination to avoid any declared hostility.

Mohammed el Mahdi was the great figure of the confraternity, and under his rule the Senussi attained the zenith of their power. Since the acceptance of his tenets meant the payment of tithes, the leader of the confraternity had by this time considerable wealth at his disposal.

Having established a profitable trade in slaves and arms between South and North Africa, he also possessed the nucleus of a Negroid army, yet the Mahdi aimed at peaceful penetration rather than

military occupation. His Zawias were neutral meeting-places, where difficulties—tribal, commercial, legal, or religious—could be settled by unbiassed authority. His Ekhwan were judges as well as missionaries. They defined tribal areas, settled water and grazing rights, as well as meting out the justice of the Koran to those who infringed the stern code of Islam.

In view of the undoubted influence and prestige of such a confraternity, it is not to be wondered at that wholly exaggerated ideas of its importance were brought to Europe by rare travellers, who, impressed by the dangers they had escaped from, overlooked the fact that the order must necessarily lack cohesion, disseminated as it was through countries differing in race, tongue, custom, and form of government, and hemmed in on every side by gradually encroaching European Powers.

This gospel of fear is the prevailing note of all travellers' reports between the years 1850-1890 and colour was lent to these by the successful revolt of the Sudan Mahdi, with which the son of Sidi ben Ali refused to have anything to do, though approached on more than one occasion by envoys from the Sudan. It is to be remarked, however, that the writers of this period can seldom have been in a position to inform themselves exactly on the situation, being dependent for their facts either upon the ignorant intolerance of the Turks or the fanatical arrogance of those in whose domain they were such unwelcome and suspected wayfarers.

It is only of recent years that opportunities of studying undisturbed the problem at first hand, and in the light of recent developments of modern warfare, have enabled a more exact and proportionate estimate to be made of this supposed threat to the world's peace, and of the future prospects in the general scheme of things of a most extraordinary confraternity.

The second period of Senussi history is initiated by the move of the Mahdi to Kufara, which isolated him in an almost impregnable position, where he could command the trade routes of half a continent. From this date the growth of the mercantile power of the order was assured. Kufara, under the rule of the Zouias, a noted warrior tribe coming originally from the Fezzan, had been the most formidable centre of brigandage in the Sahara. Mohammed el Mahdi substituted a regular system of customs duty on all merchandise passing through. He built the towns of Jof and Taj, each with a large Zawia and, in the course of a few years, developed the oasis into an entirely self-supporting centre of civilization and the headquarters of the confraternity, visited by large numbers of "brethren" from all parts of Africa. Nevertheless, he had to acknowledge that temporarily the North offered no further field of expansion for his teachings. Any open trial of strength with France, Turkey, or Egypt could have but one issue. Therefore,

he concentrated his energies on Borku, Wadai, Kanem, and the Western Sudan. He sent his Ekhwan throughout these districts with instructions to settle disputes between the tribes, thus inducing them to acknowledge Senussi authority, and to build Zawias in such places as would control the wells and markets.

In 1899 he himself went south to Ghiru, from where he directed the opposition to the French advance from Lake Chad. This step was notable, because it was in direct contravention of the policy initiated by Sidi ben Ali and previously adhered to by the Mahdi.

At no time a military power, the Senussi depended for their wealth and influence upon the stability of their mercantile-organization. The French were the first Europeans who seriously imperilled their profitable trade in slaves and arms. The latter merchandise came from Constantinople and was disembarked at Tobruk or Benghazi. Since its principal markets were between Darfur and Kanem it was essential that France should not advance further towards Wadai. Tuareg rebels, flying North from Nigeria, came in touch with the Senussi at Kanem, were converted to their tenets, and joined with Arabs from Kufara in opposing French penetration, while the Zawia at Bir Allahi became a definite centre of opposition until it was taken in January, 1902.

By this open aggression, Mohammed el Mahdi apparently pledged himself to a definite campaign against the French, yet he had no regular army. His policy was to unite the tribes against the Christian, himself supplying arms, money, and ammunition. Borku was virtually under his rule. He had a Wazir in Wadai and Zawias in Nigeria and the Cameroons.

Mohammed es Sunni, one of the most famous Senussi Ekhwan, was adviser to the Sultan of Wadai, for whom he had obtained the financial support of the Tripolitanian merchants. The extent, therefore, of the confraternity's influence in the South can hardly be overestimated.

The sudden death of the Mahdi, in 1902, removed the motive force of the order.

From all that can be learned, this great leader of the Senussi was a man of considerable ability, who is entitled to full credit of the progress made by the confraternity under his guidance. He used to the full the fanatical devotion of his followers, while at the same time he guided them wisely according to his policy. He wrapped his personality in a cloak of mystery, which appealed to the ignorant, but he was none the less accessible to those who required his direction. It must be counted to his judgment and restraint that he trusted so largely to the religious hold he had over his people, and until the last year of his life did not force the issue by seeking a verdict through the trial of arms.

— He is reported by Sidi Ahmed Tahiaty, whom we met at Taj, to have warned his successor never to enter a contest against the English, who would beat him with their machines.

— As his sons were minors at school at the time of his death, he was succeeded by his nephew, the famous Sayed Ahmed es Sherif. The new Sheikh of the Senussi remained at Ghiru, from where he continued to oppose the French advance, until a bad defeat, in December, 1902, decided him to retire.

For some years he moved his headquarters between Jaghabub and Kufara, so that he was able to keep in touch with his northern Zawias without relinquishing the hold gained by the Mahdi on the Negroid races in the South.

Since the Anglo-French Treaty of 1904 ceded the Zinder-Chad route to France, the advance of the latter Power has inevitably involved the ebb of Senussi influence throughout the occupied districts.

The years preceding the winter of 1913-1914 were notable for a series of defeats, eventually culminating in the occupation of Abeshe, while Senussi propaganda was finally put an end to by the French advance into Tibesti and Borku in the spring of 1914.

Meanwhile, Cyrenaica and Tripoli having been acknowledged an Italian sphere of influence, Sayed Ahmed was fully occupied in the North. When the Italians landed in Libia in 1911, there existed a kingdom within a kingdom and the Turks were only masters in name. They were almost as much despised as the Christians, by the ascetic confraternity of Sidi ben Ali, who held themselves entirely aloof from the Ottoman Government. Therefore, when Sayed Ahmed definitely allied himself with Turkey, he departed from the fundamental principle of his order. The personal influence of a clever and unscrupulous Turk in a few months swept away what remained to him of prudence, principle, and devotion to his original tenets. From this day the confraternity came out into the light of day, submitted its cause to the judgment of the world, and stood to win or lose on its merits as a fighting machine.

As a religious community, by amalgamation with the Turks, whose Calif had been excommunicated as an unbeliever in 1852 by their own chief, the Senussi withdrew at once from the standpoint that Turks and Christians were alike "outside the pale."

Sayed Ahmed was persuaded by Enver Pasha to allow the tribes of the Interior to take part, under Turkish leadership, in the long-drawn-out guerrilla warfare, which was so successfully carried out, that in 1914 Italy was left in possession of the coast towns of Tripoli and Cyrenaica only, while the Interior was in the hands of the Senussi.

The principle of religious detachment, for which the order had originally stood, had disappeared, and the confraternity had resolved itself into a political weapon in the hands of Turkey.

From this standpoint it was but a short step to the declaration of war on Egypt.

At no period was Sayed Ahmed really anti-British, because he knew that Britain had no interests to serve in Libia. Moreover, she facilitated his trade with Egypt, a vital point for the welfare of the Beduin, for the Cyrenaican ports were already closed to them. Bribed by Germany, Sayed Ahmed's most trusted counsellors built upon his fanaticism and his superstitions. His principal confidant went so far as to relate a dream, in which he had met the prophet Mohammed, who offered only his left hand, saying that his right was with Germany and Turkey.

Mannisman and Nouri Pasha, German and Turkish agents respectively, provided arms, ammunition, and money, while holding before the Senussi Sheikh the idea that the Egyptian Beduins would all join him and that he would be the ruler of Egypt.

Yet in spite of Teuton organization and of a widely preached Jehad, it is doubtful if the Senussi could ever have put in the field more than 4,000 men.

The history of the war is well known, but it may be briefly recapitulated. Sayed Ahmed established his headquarters at Bir Waer and the Egyptian coastguards were persuaded by religious fanaticism to join him. Jaafer Pasha, a keen and capable soldier, an Arab from Baghdad, trained in German methods, was in command of his troops. On Christmas Eve at Medwa began a series of defeats, which resulted in the reoccupation of Sollum on March 14. The following day the Duke of Westminster made his famous dash to Bir Hakim on the Tobruk-Jaghabub route, some sixty miles inland, and 120 miles from Sollum, to rescue the heroic Tara prisoners.

Sayed Ahmed retired through Siwa to Dakhla, while the remaining portion of his force went to Baharia. Kharga was immediately evacuated by the British, and then, with a successful army occupying the coast, a beaten enemy practically cut off from all supplies in two isolated desert oases, a disaffected and half-starved Cyrenaica heartily tired of its ruler's policy and already turning to Mohammed Idris, whose pro-British attitude was obvious from the beginning—then was continued the scheme for fortifying Egypt at an expense of many million sterling against an enemy which possibly numbered 2,000 men.

The whole of the summer of 1916 was spent in fortifying the line of the Nile Valley and, in October, the Senussi were driven out of Dakhla and Baharia by camel corps and light car patrols and Sayed Ahmed retired to Siwa. In February, 1917, after a sharp engagement at Girba, where, east of Munasib Pass, some twenty armoured cars performed the amazing feat of sustaining a twenty-four hours enfilade from 800 of the enemy hidden in the rocks above them, the Senussi were finally driven out of Egyptian territory.

For eighteen months Sayed Ahmed spent a precarious existence in the hinterland of Cyrenaica and, in August, 1918, retired to Constantinople by submarine.

Meanwhile, in 1916, an Italo-British Mission under General (then Colonel) the Marchese di Vita and Colonel Talbot had approached Sidi Mohammed Idris es Senussi at Tobruk and Zuetina with a view to arranging a *modus vivendi* in Cyrenaica.

Sayed Idris had taken no part in his cousin's campaign against Egypt. On the contrary, he threw all his influence as the son of the Mahdi into the opposing scale.

As soon as Sayed Ahmed decided to attack, the younger Senussi retired to Jedabia with his brother Sayed Rida, writing to General Maxwell to say that he did not support his cousin's policy.

He continued firmly in this course, though when Sayed Ahmed was defeated, Mannisman came West, with some Turks and Egyptian coastguards, to try and persuade him to continue the war. Sayed Idris refused and Mannisman was killed on his way to Tripoli, a journey he had undertaken in direct opposition to the Senussi's advice.

It was thus natural that both Cyrenaica and Italy should turn to the eldest son of the Mahdi for help in the work of reorganization, necessitated by Sayed Ahmed's disastrous policy.

A dual agreement was drawn up in 1917 between the British and Italian Governments on the one side and Sayed Mohammed Idris as the head of the confraternity on the other, by which it was agreed that:

- A. The Italian Government will retain the coast towns, and certain already occupied posts a short distance inland but will create no new posts.
- B. Commerce is to be unrestricted between the Interior and Bengazi, Tobruk, and Derna.
- C. Courts according to Sharia Law and schools for the education of natives will be built and maintained by the Italians, who will also restore Zawias and Zawia property not still required for military purposes, and be responsible for the salaries of Sheikhs el Zawia appointed by Sidi Idris.
- D. Material assistance will be rendered to Mohammed Idris by the Italian Government supplying him with arms, ammunition, equipment, and food for a limited number of men. For the moment 4,000 is the number fixed. These are to be used partly against the enemy and partly for the purpose of maintaining public security in the interior of Cyrenaica.
- E. Personal allowances to certain members of the Senussi family are to be paid monthly.
- F. In return for this Mohammed Idris will make himself responsible for the maintenance of peace in the Interior, but will

form no new posts, will gradually disarm the population, will place no obstacles in the way of the Italian Government for the forcible disarmament of hostile groups, will allow Italian delegates to enter the Interior for the settlement of affairs with his local representative, while the Italian Government may at any time send a representative to discuss matters with him in person.

Since then an excellent understanding has been arrived at, chiefly owing to the personal influences of H. E. the Governor of Cyrenaica, Senator de Martino and Sayed Mohammed Idris, and Cyrenaica bids fair to have a prosperous commercial and agricultural future.

By the accord of Regima in November, 1920, Italy and the Senussi ratified the Italo-British Agreement before quoted.

Sayed Idris was given the hereditary title of Emir with jurisdiction as "an independent ruler on behalf of Italy" over the oases of Kufara, Jaghabub, Jalo, Aujela and Jedabia. He is to disband his karakols and armed camps in Cyrenaica and the Italians are to find employment, in a regular police force, for the men thus left unemployed. The terms of the new constitution granted to Cyrenaica provide that five members out of the forty-four constituting the legislative assembly shall be elected from the oases of the Interior. It is expected that a port will be built at Zuetina and that the Trans-Saharan trade from Wadai and Darfur will pass through Kufara, Jalo and Jedabia on its way to this Mediterranean outlet.

It will not be difficult to realize the problems inherent in such an agreement, which relies for its success not only on the mutual goodwill of the two parties, but also on Mohammed Idris having a commanding position in the eyes of his followers. In Cyrenaica, to a large extent, mutual goodwill is present and confidence exists, but if the new Emir becomes strong and sure of himself, he is regarded with apprehension by the Italians. If he remains weak and dependent upon them, he can never acquire a predominant position among the Beduins. For the Italian people the situation is a diminution of their sovereign rights. For the Senussi confraternity it is the complete negation of that for which it originally stood.

It is idle now to wonder whether any other solution of the problem could have been found, but the future provides interesting ground for speculation.

In the Senussi War our victory was decisive, but the ease with which it was won perhaps blinded us to the fact that at no time were we fighting an organized revolt of the whole, shall we say, Senussi sphere of influence. To begin with, as Sayed Ahmed was not the son of the Senussi saint, Sidi el Mahdi, he had much less influence than was generally believed, and he still further diminished his prestige when he allied himself with the hitherto despised Ottoman Govern-

ment. Moreover, the wealthy merchants of the Interior refused to countenance a war which must of necessity annihilate their trade. Thus the Senussi campaign really resolved itself into a series of encounters with those lawless elements among the tribes who looked upon any fighting as an excellent chance of looting, and who ran away when it was obvious that they could not benefit their greed.

Nevertheless the war did prove that as a serious military peril the Senussi do not exist. From that standpoint, however, it is a very long step to the idea that they have no political influence. With the destruction of their Egyptian Zawias, officialdom is inclined to believe that it has uprooted the power of the confraternity. If you destroyed the masonic halls in England would you put an end to freemasonry? On the contrary, would you not merely force it to act secretly in channels where its activities could not be observed, rather than openly, where a watch could be kept on its movements? I first came in contact with the Senussi Tarika in Fez, and next in El Oued in the French Sahara, yet I have repeatedly been assured that it does not exist west of Tripoli to-day. I made exhaustive enquiries in the Sudan, and found that the number of "brothers" there was considerable. When I reached Egypt on my return from Kufara, there was no need to enquire. The news that I had been to their sacred oasis made many Ekhwan come to me. At first they used merely to ask for news of friends and relatives, but very soon out came the Senussi oath, "By the truth of Sidi el Mahdi," changing now to "By the faith of Idris," and I learned that the Senussi influence still exists in Western Egypt. I am convinced that the confraternity has also a considerable following in the Hejaz.

Up to the time of the war we overestimated its power. Now I think we are likely to underestimate it.

We have said that, as a military force, the Senussi do not exist. At no time could they put more than a few thousand men in the field—the whole population of the Kufara group of oases is not more than three or four thousand Zouias, exclusive of the negro slaves.

In Cyrenaica the tribes have had their lesson. It is exceedingly doubtful if they would ever care to engage in another struggle with Egypt, the last one having resulted in their almost complete starvation, for the hinterland is not self-supporting and the Beduins must depend for many of their stores on the Egyptian market.

On the other hand, as a mercantile and political influence, the Senussi undoubtedly rank among the most powerful in North Africa. Kufara is the spider at the heart of the web of the trans-Saharan trade routes. South to Wadai and Durfur, east across the dunes to Faraifra, north by the new route which we discovered to Jaghabub, north-west to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, west to the Fezzan, the caravan routes go forth. On all these routes the Zouias, the most fanatical Senussi

tribe, are the only trusted guides. It is undoubted that these guides and camel-drivers spread the doctrines of their leader throughout the countries they visit.

Before the war the chief product of Cyrenaica was hides, and the greater part of those hides came via Kufara from the Western Sudan. There was also a large trade in ivory, feathers, and sandalwood. When it is remembered that ivory costs 10 francs a pound in Darfur and that a completely tanned and scarlet-dyed goatskin can be bought for 14s. in Kufara, the possibility of trade in these goods will be easily understood.

Kufara is likely to remain long in the hands of the Senussi. With the existing means of modern warfare it would be almost impossible to organize a military expedition capable of taking it. The group of oases is practically self-supporting. It is protected by a barrier of immense dunes, roughly 100 miles wide, which would prevent the approach of light car patrols. Beyond this, again, is a stretch of waterless desert, varying from 200 to 350 miles in length. Without reliable guides, it would be impossible to discover the few wells which exist at the edge of this appalling waste, and these guides would of necessity be Zouias, whose loathing of the stranger is an inherent part of their religion.

At the same time much might be done to develop the trade routes of the region. At the moment the sentiment of the confraternity is entirely pro-British.

They deprecate Sayed Ahmed's action in making war on England and enthusiastically support the modern and enlightened policy of the present Emir, who is known to be an enthusiastic friend of the British.

The Senussi are typically merchants. Their livelihood depends upon their trade. At Jalo we used to spend hours sitting on mats, drinking coffee and discussing the possibility of new routes to Egypt. Before the war all European stores and stuffs came direct by camel through Siwa and the cost was infinitesimal compared to the freight and customs duties which must now be paid on Egyptian goods travelling by sea to Bengazi and thence inland.

It is natural, therefore, that all the more progressive Sheikhs look with enthusiasm to the resumption of overland trade with Egypt. The destruction, however, of all the Senussi Zawias within Egyptian territory has made this very difficult. The Zawia was not only a college, remember, it was a resting-place for the merchants, a mart and a general meeting-ground. In view of this drastic policy, it is not to be wondered at that the Senussi traders view with doubt and some distrust any incursion on their part into the country through which they used to travel so freely.

It will be interesting to observe in what direction the confraternity

will develop in the future. Beginning as an isolated religious confraternity, it has expanded by way of mercantile and political influence into a dynastic entity, whose desire for civilization must necessarily force it along lines widely divergent from those contemplated by its founder.

It is certain that the Emir Idris will have the whole-hearted support of the country in whatever course he chooses to pursue and, with the present sympathetic co-operation of the Italian Government, it is probable that he will lead the van of Arab progress in North Africa. How far are we likely to be concerned with this progress?

At present England is like the bad tailor who cuts his cloth without regard to the shape of his coat, so that at the last moment he has to snip off a little bit here and add on a little bit there till his original conception of the garment is entirely lost.

England was the first to conceive the possibility of helping the development of the smaller nations and peoples until they could stand alone. Eight years ago, England's name throughout the Middle East stood for the highest qualities that the minds of its races could grasp. To-day, owing to the disastrous policy of the last few years, we, and the world in general, have lost sight of our original attitude. We talk of reducing our liabilities, but the little bit we have tried to add on in Mesopotamia is costing us dear and the little bit we have cut off in Libia may cost us even more! The Senussi influence is felt from the Western Sudan to the Mediterranean, but it is strongest in Libia, and Libia lies on the borders of an Egypt anxious for self-expression and self-determination. Not all the Beduin tribes of the Western deserts would be in favour of submission to a national government in Cairo and never, since the days of Mohammed Ali, who subsidized the tribe of the Aulad Ali for that purpose, has Egypt guarded her own frontiers. Beyond the Western deserts is Italy, whose eyes must ever be turned to Egypt. In Alexandria more Italian is spoken than Arabic. Inter-marriage between the two races is the rule, not the exception. Commercially and socially Italy has already penetrated, if not permeated, Egypt. When Cairo can dictate her own foreign policy it is not difficult to prophecy an Italo-Egyptian alliance which might be awkward to British interests in the Middle East. The present political situation, therefore, affords infinite possibilities for expansion on the part of the Senussi, and surely it behoves England to keep on friendly terms with the Emir Idris, a neighbour who is paramount in Libia, whose sentiments are notably pro-British, and whose interests must always be bound up with the commercial prosperity of Egypt. We talk of the lack of unity in Islam, and insist on considering every part of it as a separate problem, yet Kufara takes as much interest in the doings of Damascus as London does in those of Melbourne or Ottawa and, unlike the British Empire, Islam

has one common meeting-ground where, for several uninterrupted weeks, delegates from every Continent and every people discuss in a secrecy beyond the possibility of being betrayed or overheard, the affairs of its world—I mean the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the one window that must ever remain blind in our house of knowledge.

NOTE.—A considerable portion of the information given in this paper is quoted from Egyptian Government files dealing with the subject, and I am particularly indebted to officials of the Frontier District Administration for the loan of their documents. To the generous assistance of H.E. Senator de Martina, Governor of Cyrenaica, are due the details concerning the Italo-British and Italian treaties with the Senussi.—R. F.

The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the pleasure of having among the audience Captain Gwatkin-Williams, who was, as I daresay some of you know, a captive in the hands of that confraternity in regard to which Mrs. Rosita Forbes has given us so interesting an account. If he will kindly give us a few of his experiences, we shall be very glad.

Captain R. S. GWATKIN-WILLIAMS, R.N.: Ladies and Gentlemen, if you had asked me about seven years ago what the Senussi were I am afraid I should not have known whether they were a patent medicine, a new disease, or what they were. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. In this case we have already had the angel who did not fear to tread—Mrs. Rosita Forbes—but we have not had any of her adventures. I was one of the unfortunate fools pitchforked amongst the Senussi. I was in 1914 in command of a little warship called the *Tara*. We were torpedoed, and the submarine made us prisoners, and took us into a secret base he had got there in the Senussi territory, and turned us over to the Senussi. I and another hundred British sailors spent five months of terrible captivity amongst the Senussi. They marched us about 130 miles into the Libyan desert. I will tell you some of my adventures, it will help you to realize what Mrs. Rosita Forbes has gone through. To start with, we were very hungry; I know some of the things we have eaten. I know we had to live on a camel once that had been dead three or four days down a well. We had had no meat for three or four weeks. We had a great craving for meat. I went down the well and swam round in the dark until I found the camel's foot sticking up. We pulled it to the top—a hundred prisoners standing around hoping for a feed. We stuck a knife in, and such an aroma came out that we realized the camel had been dead for three or four days. At first we buried the camel, but, later on, at night, we thought better of it, and dug up the camel and lived on it for four days. We had it fried and boiled; we had camel soup and camel liver. If anyone has not tasted camel and wonders what it is like, he should go to the Zoo and smell the live animal, and that will give him an idea.

We were marched in by an Egyptian traitor called Achmed—a hundred unfortunate sailors. The sailor is not a very great walker as a rule; you see him in London in a taxicab or a 'bus, he is not a great walker. We had a hundred men, some of them sixty, and one of them nearly seventy years old. Others were boys of sixteen or seventeen. We suddenly found we had to march thirty or forty miles a day across the desert. One man ran away, and because of this the Egyptian traitor who was marching us in resolved to punish us all. He soon found an excuse. He found one of the sailors trying to destroy his rice because he did not want to carry it with him all day—he foolishly tried to burn it. So we were marched two days and two nights without food or water—that was under a blazing sun, but what we suffered from most was the cold at night. Everywhere in the North African desert in the winter months it is most bitterly cold at night; the temperature comes down to freezing-point, and we had nothing to cover us. There were sea fogs and bitter winds. The first day we managed to get along somehow without food or water; the second day we were beaten or flogged along. They had a ready way when anyone fainted; a Senussi guard would come up and jab him so hard in the ribs with a rifle that the pain was so exquisite that unless the man was at death's door he would stagger on again. At the end of the second evening, when we fell down in the mass, and none could go farther, Achmed let us have some food. We had some water. If you had a bucket of water and washed your potatoes and scrubbed your house out and so on with it, that would be a good bit cleaner than the water we had to drink in the desert. It came out of a stinking mud hole to start with. It was bright green, half salt, and full of hair and dirt. It had been carried about a hundred miles on a camel's back. We had one wineglassful each, but I have never had anything so nice as that water. In the same way with the rice which we had rather despised. We had had nothing for two days, and had been eating snails to keep us alive. At last they gave us a half cupful of rice each. I have had excellent dinners. I once dined with our late friend the Kaiser, but I never had anything so nice as the rice. For the first time for some weeks we sang and were absolutely happy. When you have heard Mrs. Forbes' story you will realize the awful discomfort of living among the Senussi. They are like children in some ways. Children are apt to be cruel at first; you know they cut off caterpillars' and insects' heads. The Senussi are cruel at first, but no one can be kinder to you than they are in their own way after they have got used to you. I had unfortunately got a gold tooth, and they are such a poverty-stricken race that several times they seriously threatened to cut off my head as being the easiest way to get this valuable gold. The only way I could persuade them that it was not worth while doing so was by telling them that it was not gold but brass. They believed that; for

they could not believe that anyone was so wealthy as to have gold in his head. We were marched to an awful place called Bir Hakkim Abbyat. It is in a desert of rock and stone called the Red Desert; there is no sand there at all. For fourteen days we were marched into the interior of this Red Desert; there we were put to a kind of well at a place called Bir Hakkim Abbyat—one of those old Roman wells they have got dug all over the country. There we were under the Egyptian traitor and an old priest in charge of the well called Osman. We knew him as Holy Joe. He had a whip of rhinoceros hide in his hand. We were a kind of slaves, and he used to drive us out to work excavating other wells. That was in 1915, when the Senussi had started to invade Egypt and the country was blockaded.

The Senussi are used to privations; at any time what would starve your cat at home the Beduin would get fat on. Those were the people keeping us, and I am certain we did not get nearly so much food as they—for the first two months a little more than half a pound of rice a day, and nothing else at all. We managed to keep alive to a certain extent because there were a great many snails about. There are snails in the desert who can go a year without water. We used to eat great quantities. In the ordinary way we would throw them into the fire. As soon as the snail got hot enough a steam would escape and it would whistle—it was like a patent egg-boiler. When the whistling stopped the snail was cooked. Later on we got much more epicures and used to boil them. We had an old kind of baking-tin that would accommodate a thousand snails. We used to call them Libyan "Lilywhites" because of their colour. The recipe was—boil brilliantly for twenty minutes, but if hard-boiled snail is preferred a shorter time will suffice. We put the snails in a pan in some water on the fire. The first ten minutes was an anxious time because the snail would spend most of his time trying to walk out; but after the first ten minutes they were very quiet, and after twenty minutes you poured away the water—green and slimy it was then—and you had your 500 or 600 green, horrible, grisly snails lying at the bottom of the pan. That was the dinner we most of us had, and on Christmas Day most of the men had nothing else. Some of the men got quite fond of the snails, and one, who was called the Snail King, was supposed to eat 500 a day. We ate every snail within ten miles of the camp and every root there was. Then I managed to make my escape. I had made a little, rough map of the country, and had to go about a hundred miles across the desert. I got away quite easily from the Senussi—they were not great at guarding us—and got half way to the Egyptian frontier, but ran into a Beduin camp at dawn and was recaptured. Their ways are very drastic—I think Mrs. Forbes told you their punishments are exceedingly drastic. For mere smoking or drinking you get the amputation of the hand. Any casual stranger found in

the country, they usually kill him instantly. They intended to kill me; but there were so many robbers about that they took to fighting among themselves as to who should possess me, until I fell in with two Turkish soldiers. With them I was marched two hundred miles across the desert and taken back once more to our hideous prison camp of Bir Hakkim. We lived in the orthodox Beduin way; we had no food for our two hundred miles journey, but we robbed passing travellers of their sheep. We generally gave them a receipt for the sheep and drove them off with the guns that my two Turkish guards had. I had not had any meat myself at all for three months then; but the Turkish soldiers and myself—there were five of us altogether—ate three complete sheep within thirty-six hours. Anyway, I got back to the camp, and there I was met by Holy Joe, the old black priest, who flogged me into camp on Leap Year's Day, 1916. On that day the last of us gave up our hope of life. We were getting very weak. The last of the rice had run out, the last of the snails had been eaten, and we were living on a quarter-pound of goat's flesh a day. Four men had already died of starvation, and it seemed in two or three weeks more we should all die in the same way as they. If the Senussi had wished to help us, they could not have done it, because we were so weak that we could not cover five miles a day as a body. At that time the British, quite unknown to us, were having a campaign with the Senussi in the west of Egypt, and had two or three hard fought fights. Of these the most dramatic was the Duke of Westminster's action at Azais on March 14. He had only nine armoured cars, with thirty-two officers and men. That was his complete force; but he fell on the whole Turko-Senussi army of five thousand armed with artillery, machine-guns, and everything complete. He took them completely by surprise, wiped them off the face of the desert, scattered them in every direction, and captured the whole of their artillery and everything they had got. (Applause.) That was not helping us really, because nobody at that time knew where the unfortunate *Tara's* crew was. We had disappeared from the face of the earth. But on the way to the battle one of the Duke of Westminster's cars, under Major Amphlett, broke down; and at the very spot where it broke down he found a broken-down Turkish car within twenty yards of him. Major Amphlett took the opportunity to search the Turkish car. At first he could not find anything, but as he was about to start, his repairs having been made good, he saw a bit of paper. He pulled it out, and to his great astonishment found it was a letter written in the French language. It was a letter that I myself had written nearly six weeks before to the Turkish Colonel, and that was the first news the British got that the *Tara's* crew was still alive. But also note a very remarkable thing: that letter was the only one ever written which gave the name of our camp.

The country west of Egypt had, however, not been visited by white men practically since the last Romans were turned out in the year 609. Nobody had any idea where our camp was, it was marked on no map, and none of the seventy or eighty prisoners they had taken had any idea at all; and then luck followed the British once more, because two Senussi came and gave themselves up. One of them was a one-eyed man, and the one-eyed man said that thirty years before, when he was a little boy, he thought he had been to a place called Bir Hakkim, the name of our camp. He did not think that he could remember the way after all those thirty years; he had been there only as a boy. But he volunteered to try and guide the British, and with that guide only the Duke of Westminster took his armoured motor-car and all the other motor vehicles available. They went 120 miles into the trackless desert without sighting a single landmark, and were half-way through the petrol; everybody had given up hope. They could not find the one landmark they were looking for—a fig-tree growing by itself—the only tree for hundreds of miles. They were off the map, absolutely lost, but the Duke of Westminster determined not to give up as long as the guide would give him the least hope of ever getting through. Then, at the critical moment, when they had given up all hope, the guide threw himself off the car—they were going full speed—and rolled in the sand. At first people thought he was a treacherous Senussi who had led them into an ambush, and were going to fire on him; but the guide got up and began to point. With his one eye the guide had seen what no one else had seen, he had sighted the landmark of the fig-tree. He went up to the fig-tree, fell on his knees there, and gave thanks to Allah, the giver of all good. Then he scraped away the sand below the tree where he was kneeling, and exposed the stone coping of one of those ancient Roman wells. That well, he said, was the “well of sweet waters” where he used to water his father’s flocks as a little boy thirty years before. He said, “It is all choked now and useless, but it tells me exactly where we are. We are no longer lost, and are quite close to the prisoners’ camp at Bir Hakkim.” That was St. Patrick’s Day, 1916. We prisoners were crawling about on our hands and knees from weakness, and thought we had at best but three or four days to live, when suddenly one of our men came in and said, “There is a motor-car in sight.” We did not believe him—a motor-car a hundred and thirty miles from anywhere in the Red Desert! We used very unparliamentary language, and were just going to throw stones at him when I looked up, and there was no question about it; there *was* a motor-car. We were all mad. It was a car the Duke had sent ahead; they had sighted our camp and it looked in the mirage like a fortified place. We were very excited, those who could only crawl about before managed to stand up, and we gave the best kind of cheer we could—a

feeble weak thing, but it reached the leading car. Even then we never for a second guessed it was a British car. We all thought it was a Turkish car, but that at any rate it meant good news. When the car heard that cheer, the people in it for the first time realized that we were British. Until then they thought we were Arabs; for we had long hair, black faces, were in rags and covered from head to foot with vermin. Nobody could possibly have recognized us as Englishmen. But they heard the cheer and passed it back to the other cars, and in a few minutes, not one car only but forty-three came rushing forward at the highest speed. (Applause.) We were fed, and were soon very happily on our way back. I do not want to tell you more of my own story, but I want you to realize the terrible times that Mrs. Forbes has gone through. I had five months with the Senussi, and had a hundred men with me who had the same experiences; and I am absolutely positive there is not one of us in our senses who would for one second have attempted to go through and do what Mrs. Forbes did. (Applause.)

The CHAIRMAN: I think, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have had, perhaps, the most enjoyable and instructive afternoon at which it has been my lot to be present at the meetings of this Society. (Applause.) We have had the admirable lecture which Mrs. Rosita Forbes was good enough to give us, which I think from every point of view was worthy of the reputation which she has already achieved, both as a traveller, and I may say also an author, and very nearly, I think, as a statesman too. Captain Gwatkin-Williams has thrilled us, I am quite sure, with that simple graphic narrative which he has given us of those dreadful sufferings which he and his companions passed through when they were captured by the Senussi. I suggest we pass a very warm tribute of thanks to both of them for having given us an opportunity of spending such very interesting and enjoyable hours.