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ASIA MINOR AND THE WAR

By W. J. CHILDS

At a meeting of the Society on April 12, 1916, Mr. W. J. Childs read a paper on "Asia Minor and the War," illustrated by lantern views. Colonel Sir THOMAS HOLDICH was in the chair, and said that Mr. Childs had travelled extensively in Asia Minor, and was sure to give them an interesting description of the country and people he had been amongst.

Mr. Childs' address was as follows:

Sir Thomas Holdich, Ladies and Gentlemen,—In looking at the long history of Asia Minor, one fact stands out which may arrest attention at the present time.

It is that, with only one or two exceptions, every really great Power which has ever arisen in the Old World has sooner or later figured in war in this western region of Asia. We find also that no portion of the earth's surface has attracted so many invaders or seen so many conquerors; and that they have come from three continents and in all ages. Looking at these persistent facts, we may almost say that so surely as a State of the Old World attains a certain relative degree of power, so surely does aggression or defence at last bring it in hostilities to Asia Minor and the territories immediately adjoining.

It is common knowledge that the position of the country has largely made its history, and that as a three-way bridge between Europe, Asia, and Africa, across it passed all the old roads by which three continents exchanged commodities.

Turkey-in-Asia has seen wars for land passage, and wars for control of its straits and gulfs; it is a fertile land, and has therefore seen wars prompted by land-hunger. It is now seeing hostilities which have all these causes at bottom; nor can we well suppose the present war to be the last.

In speaking of Asia Minor and the war, I will confine myself to two districts that I know fairly well. They are Northern Anatolia, especially the Sivas Vilayet, and the country round the Gulf of Alexandretta. In these two districts I have spent more than fifteen months, and travelled on foot at least 1,500 miles.

Before going on to speak of the war in Asia Minor, I should like to say a few words on the man-power available for the Ottoman armies. On this point there is uncertainty everywhere, even as to the total of the Ottoman population. Figures usually given for the population are not based on any census, but on the returns of police and tax-farmers, and on the number of dwellings. I have heard the population placed as high as thirty millions, and as low as twenty. If we call it twenty-two for the present Ottoman Empire, I do not think we shall be far out. Of this total perhaps two millions are in Europe.

Now, these twenty-two million people comprise a variety of races, some of which hate each other with more than common hatred. Some of them are few in numbers and may be ignored; or may be included among the other races. We may say roughly that there are more than five million Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, three or four million Arabs, one and a half million Kurds, and that the remainder are Turkish and Circassian Moslems, numbering perhaps eleven million. Of these people, Kurds do not serve in the Ottoman regular army, for the adequate reason that the State has never been able to compel them to serve. It is not a matter of cost at all. The Turkish War Office would be glad enough to incorporate Kurds in the regular army; but to do so would involve civil war. There are Kurdish portions of Eastern Anatolia where the Sultan's writ does not run, and where you had much better travel alone than with a Turkish official or servant. It used to be said by Turkish officials, when disarming of the Kurds was proposed, that a force of 50,000 men would be required to disarm the three or four hundred thousand Dersim Kurds alone, to say nothing of the others. Kurds, therefore, have never been compelled to serve as regulars. The State has been content to call them out under their own chiefs as irregular cavalry; a degree of service not always given readily, and, when given, not of much value. A large portion of the Arab population is in a similar position of semi-independence, and for the same reasons has never contributed to the regular army.

Greek and Armenian elements of the population are liable for military service, and find evasion difficult. But what value is to be attached to Armenian troops in the regular army at this time? Something less than nothing, one supposes; though the Armenian is not at all the harmless, peace-loving individual that he is painted in England. The Armenian peasant with his heart in the work of fighting would be, I fancy, second only to the Turk and Circassian, and from some Armenian districts would be second to none.

Of Ottoman Greeks it may be said that they have no sympathy with anything Turkish. Their aims and ambitions are quite apart. They detest the Turk and the Turk detests them. They may add

numbers to the Ottoman armies, but add little in strength, for they cannot be trusted, and merely dilute the ranks of the real fighters.

There remains the real fighting population of the Empire, the ten or eleven million Turkish and Circassian Moslems. Of these perhaps eight millions are the Turkish Moslem peasantry of Anatolia, the heart and backbone and everything else of the Ottoman Empire. In the long-run everything hangs by them. They it is who keep the other races in subjection. They are a sort of tribe, with one purpose and one faith, and have the consciousness that they are conquerors. They do not as a class provide brains—the brains of the Ottoman Army used to come chiefly from Albania—but they are natural fighting men of the first order. I always found them courteous, honest, simple folk, fearing no man, and as likeable as any people that can be named. This Moslem peasantry of Anatolia contains, I believe, fewer males of military age than any other population of equal numbers in the world. On their manhood military service has borne heavily. Besides three great recent wars, they have fought in many insurrections. For many years also they have undergone the annual drain of service in the Arabian peninsula. Only Moslems may serve in Arabia, and the death-rate among them there, chiefly by disease, but also by warfare, has always been appalling. Service in the Yemen is regarded by Moslems as being almost equivalent to a death-sentence.

In the present war, the Ottoman armies have never attained the strength hoped for in Germany, not only for the reason that the men are not available, but that the men do not exist in the numbers supposed.

With this subject out of the way, I will speak now of two parts of the country which are of special interest in the present war. Except Constantinople and the Straits, these are the only two regions which can be called the real vitals of Asia Minor. One of them I should like to designate as the vital part of Anatolia; the other as the vital part of Turkey-in-Asia, for it has a wider importance. The Russian advance due westward from Erzerum is directed against the vital part of Anatolia.

The physical characteristics of Eastern Anatolia make it a territory which contributes little to the general resources of the Ottoman Empire. Regarded as a whole, it is a barren land of lofty mountains and highland valleys which lie some 6,000 feet above sea-level. Sometimes these valleys open out into plains a few hundred square miles in extent, but in all they occupy only a small portion of the country's surface and their winter is long and severe. It is a country sparsely peopled, with little commerce and small revenues, and the comparatively small population that it carries is of little value from the Turkish point of view. Many of its inhabitants are Armenians,

many others are Kurds. So far as the human and material resources of the Empire would be affected, Russia might occupy the country up to Erzingan and Trebizond and the Ottoman State be little the poorer, little less capable of placing armies in the field.

This inhospitable district, however, is counted as the eastern bulwark of Anatolia. To Russian invasion it offers every imaginable difficulty. Invading armies must traverse high passes, where for six months in the year they may encounter snow. Of roads leading towards the heart of Anatolia there is not one worth the name. Nor is it a land in which invading armies can find sustenance; it has difficulty enough to feed itself in times of peace, and often has to draw on more fertile regions. An army invading Anatolia from this side must be fed from the rear along lengthening lines of communication on which conveyance will always be difficult. On the eastern edge of this wide border province, the fortress of Erzerum stands across the natural route of invasion; and to enable the fortress and the armies based upon it to be readily supplied, the only good road in this part of the country was constructed to the port of Trebizond. Turkish control of the Black Sea was an essential factor in this scheme of defence; but retaining that control little fear was felt for the rest. And even if Erzerum should fall, and Turkish armies retreat somewhat, matters would not be desperate. Still holding the sea, the Turks would transfer their lines of supply to roads from Black Sea ports farther west, particularly to the great road from Samsoun to Sivas. Metalled all the way, easily graded, passably well bridged, and capable of carrying heavy traffic, it would be an adequate line of communications. In possession of Erzerum, the Russians would still have Turkish armies before them, and the rugged border province to cross before reaching the heart of Anatolia. The war would show nothing decisive so far; would still remain to be won or lost.

So Turks argued who possessed some knowledge of their country's military affairs. But with control of the Black Sea gone, and Erzerum with it, this scheme of defence falls to the ground.

The road from Samsoun to Sivas is now as little available as that from Trebizond to Erzerum. Turkish armies of the East are faced with the same difficulties of transport that it was hoped to impose upon their enemies. The advantage in this matter, indeed, may even have passed to the enemy. So far, however, the rugged border province still protects Anatolia, still has to be crossed by the invader, and so gains time for the Turks to reorganize their beaten armies, bring up reinforcements, and prepare a fresh defensive with Sivas as the new base, even though men and material have to come five hundred miles by road to reach it. As yet no pressure by invaders has reached the heart of Anatolia.

It may be asked now, Where is this heart or vital part of Anatolia,

pressure on which will be disastrous for the Ottoman State? Speaking broadly, I would say that it is the fertile country inhabited largely or wholly by that Turkish Moslem peasantry of Anatolia, that peasantry which I have described as the mainstay of Turkish dominion. The two go nearly always together—the Turkish saying runs: “To the Osmanli the rich lands, to others the mountains.” These fertile districts of Anatolia begin somewhere west of Erzingan, corresponding roughly with the valleys of the Kelkit Irmak or Lycus, and the Kizil Irmak or Halys. The plateau of Asia Minor may be regarded as falling gradually from Erzerum to the west. Erzerum plain is 6,000 feet above sea-level; Sivas and Shabin Kara Hissar, in the valleys of the Kizil Irmak and Kelkit Irmak respectively, are 1,500 feet lower. West of Erzingan, the country becomes more open; the valleys are wider; the mountains lower; the climate less rigorous. By the time Sivas is reached you are well in the fertile country, and have the heart of Anatolia around and before you. Between Sivas and Angora lie wheat lands of a quality not excelled in the world.

Erzingan, on the great northern branch of the Euphrates, is a place where many roads meet. Thence go roads to Baiburt and Trebizond in the north, to Kharput, Malatia, Marash, and Diarbekr in the south—all of them important cities judged by Turkish standards—and from Marash an easy road goes on to Aleppo and Alexandretta. But of much greater importance than any of these is the road westward from Erzingan which climbs out of the Euphrates valley and in some fifty miles reaches the valley of the Kizil Irmak, and has upon its right the valley of the Kelkit Irmak and the town of Shabin Kara Hissar. This western road—it is a road only by courtesy, and better imagined as a natural route—is the only pathway for armies invading Anatolia from the east. It has seen many. This way came Timur on his fourth campaign, when he entered Anatolia and reached Angora.

It has been reported that the Turks are preparing a new line of defence, from Kerasund on the Black Sea through Shabin Kara Hissar to Sivas. More correctly, no doubt, its right flank rests on the northern end of Karabel Dag, or Terja Dag as it is sometimes called, some forty miles east of Sivas. From the sea at Kerasund to this point is a distance of only a hundred miles; and Karabel Dag, which bounds the south-eastern side of the wide valley in which Sivas stands, is a great natural barrier crossed by only three roads in sixty or seventy miles. The part which has often been foretold for Sivas now seems about to be played. Sooner or later, in the conflict known to be inevitable, it was to see a last Turkish stand against a Russian army. For by some general perception of what the city means to Anatolia, it is recognized as a centre possession of which by Russia would carry with it the end of Turkish dominion in this region. There

is no other place of equal importance in the interior of Anatolia. It is in effect the inland capital, if there can be one, and, with its population of about 70,000, is the largest city in the heart of the country. Here, also, more than elsewhere, meet those great highways by which troops are moved and the internal commerce of Asia Minor is carried on.

It may be of interest to look at these roads for a few moments, for much is likely to be heard about them in the immediate future. For one, there is the great highway of invaders from the east, the road from Erzingan and Erzerum, which has been already mentioned. It comes down the valley, winding between the bleak treeless uplands, a road of destiny for Sivas and the Turk. From the west comes in the road from railhead at Angora, two hundred and seventy miles away, which now is the chief route for Turkish reinforcements. There are, indeed, at least two other routes by which Sivas may be reached from Angora. They are longer than this road through Yuzgat, but no doubt they, also, are being used at this time to prevent congestion on the main highway. From the north-west comes the great road from Samsoun, called the Bagdad Road, the greatest road in Asia Minor, said also to be the busiest road of its kind in the world. It passes through Sivas, crosses the Kizil Irmak by the famous old "Crooked Bridge," and after climbing Terja Dagh, goes on to Malatia and Kharput and Diarbekr and Bagdad. By this road, too, is reached Nisibin, which is railhead on the Bagdad Railway. From the south-west another very important road enters Sivas. It comes from Eregli, a town and station on the Bagdad Railway, upon the northern slope of the Taurus Mountains, and passes through Kaisariyeh. This is a route as much used for troops as the road from Angora to Sivas. I have passed large bodies of troops on this road in time of peace, and have seen them detraining at Eregli to begin the march. The road has the advantage of very easy gradients all the way till it makes a steep descent of more than 2,000 feet into the valley at Sivas. It is undoubtedly the easiest way to Sivas in all seasons excepting winter and early spring. In winter it is closed by snow between Sivas and Kaisariyeh; in spring it is sometimes a bog between Eregli and Nigdeh. In addition to these main roads are routes of less importance which go northward to small ports on the Black Sea coast, and southward to Aleppo and Alexandretta and the Cilician plain.

And here, perhaps, I may be allowed another short digression, this time on the subject of motor transport on Turkish roads, particularly those coming into Sivas. I have no doubt that motor transport will be used for military purposes between Angora and Sivas and Eregli and Sivas. The snow has melted by this time between Angora and Sivas, the roads and country are drying, and even the season of mud may be over if the summer is early. In dry weather

it will be possible to use motor transport over wide stretches of country westward of Sivas. There is, indeed, a second road between Angora and Sivas which would suit mechanical transport well. It goes from Angora to Chorum, and thence to Amasia, where the Bagdad Road is reached; a route perhaps forty miles longer than the direct road between Angora and Sivas, but one that allows of the Bagdad Road being used for a hundred and fifty miles. From Samsoun to Sivas the Bagdad Road is quite possible for motor vehicles, and with little labour and time might be made a road on which they could average ten miles an hour. Motor-cars travelled from Samsoun to Sivas several years ago; and except for frightening caravans, and danger from enraged camel-men, found no difficulty in making the journey. Mechanical transportation is also quite feasible on the road from Eregli to Sivas. It is all a question of dry weather coupled with intelligent road maintenance from day to day.

A few words may now be given to Sivas, as an old city about to add another chapter to its history. It is built in the valley of the Kizil Irmak, which hereabouts forms a level plain five or six miles in width and 4,500 feet above sea-level. On the south-eastern side the valley is bounded by rugged treeless mountains rising 2,000 to 3,000 feet, or more, above the valley. On the opposite side are bold downs which in a few miles ascend to the much higher ground of Melekum Dag.

Ten or twelve centuries ago, in the days of Byzantine prosperity, Sivas is said to have had 300,000 inhabitants, and was the second city in Asia Minor. By a very curious transaction it became Armenian in a way. An Armenian King who reigned beside Lake Van in the 11th century found his neighbours too powerful and troublesome. He coveted ease and freedom from strife. He therefore exchanged his realm for the province and city now called Sivas, where he became a Byzantine Viceroy, but also remained an Armenian King. With him, and afterwards, came many Armenians; and from that day to the present Sivas has had a considerable Armenian population.

It is now a squalid, ill-built town in a country devoid of trees, without gardens or orchards, or any of the features which generally give grace to a Turkish city. Its streets are crossed by lines of raised stepping-stones—testimony to their condition in wet weather. You may look Sivas over and find nothing in it of interest except its old Seljukian colleges and mosques and minarets. There are seven or eight of these in all, built in the 13th century, as fine as any in the country, but now partly in ruin. Two miles outside the city is the old Armenian monastery of St. Nishan, the residence of the Bishop of Sivas, who is reported to have been tortured last year by having his feet shod like a horse. When I saw him at the monastery he was looking forward to better times for himself and people under the Ottoman Government.

The foundation of all the prosperity Sivas enjoys now, and has enjoyed in the past, lies in the rich agricultural and pastoral country around it. It is a country of wheat and herds and flocks. From Sivas Turkish armies on this frontier have always drawn their supplies of food. It is an old tradition in Sivas, and over large portions of Anatolia, that when Sivas bakers are ordered to bake and fill the mosques with hard bread, war with Russia follows. So it was in 1829, in 1853, in 1877; so no doubt in 1914.

Sivas is—or was—quite unfortified. Nor can one think that any attempt would be made to hold it now against a siege by Russians. Its position is so commanded by heights—from Terja Dag to Melekum Dag across the valley must be a distance of nearly twenty miles—that an immense perimeter would be required for its lines. The defence of Sivas will be conducted on the position already mentioned thirty or forty miles to the east; and when that goes, Sivas and much besides will go with it.

I now go on to speak of the yet more important district which I have called the vital point of Turkey-in-Asia. Everyone recognizes its present importance; but not so many realize that this little-known spot is a position with a future before it altogether exceptional, and fraught with immense possibilities. This vital part of Turkey-in-Asia is the few miles of coast around the Gulf of Alexandretta. It is not only the vital part of Turkey-in-Asia, but may be called the centre of the whole German scheme in Asiatic Turkey. Here, for a distance of fifty miles, the Bagdad Railway is never more than twenty-five miles from the sea. Here was to have been a great German port.

The Gulf of Alexandretta is about twenty miles in width and fifty in length to its head. Along the eastern side of the gulf, separated from the sea by a mile-wide strip of plain which sometimes breaks up into undulations and sometimes has marshes, runs the Amanus range. It is bold and abrupt; it rises to a height of five to six thousand feet at its highest points; and shows beech and oak woods in its ravines. Low, bare hills extend across the northern end of the gulf. They continue along the western side for part of its length, increasing in height somewhat as they pass south, but never reaching fifteen hundred feet. At the southern extremity of these hills is Ayas Bay, a harbour with the little town of Ayas upon its northern shore; and opposite to it, across the bay, is the mouth of the Jihur, one of the chief rivers of Asia Minor. Within twenty-five miles of Ayas Bay, across the Cilician Plain, is the town of Adana, a place of 100,000 inhabitants, the capital of the Plain, and an important station on the Bagdad Railway. But the Bagdad Railway comes even closer to the sea than it does at Adana. If you were to go ashore at the head of the gulf and walk due north for less than four hours

you would then cross the railway. From this point a branch line has been laid down to the gulf and along its eastern shore, crossing on the way the plain of Issus and Alexander's battlefield, to the port of Alexandretta. This outline topography of the district around the head of the gulf is all that I need give now. The inner purpose of the Bagdad Railway is known to everyone in this room; so also is the importance of the railway at this present time. I may now go on and speak of Alexandretta, and the part it was to fill in a Germanized Turkey-in-Asia.

It has been said sometimes that one of the aims of the Bagdad Railway scheme was to restore the old trade route between Europe and Asia which passed through Constantinople. That by the Bagdad Railway goods were to be hauled overland between Bagdad and Central Europe. As a war route, no doubt this was the purpose, but only as a temporary measure; there was a much wider aim and appreciation of possibilities. Asiatic Turkey, when fully developed by German railways and capital, would require more than the Bagdad Railway to convey its products to Europe. It needed ports, ports in the right place, ports served by railways. Instead of goods being hauled to Europe they were to be shipped, and Alexandretta was to have been the Mediterranean port of the Bagdad Railway system, and a port of the first order.

To understand what Alexandretta was intended to be, and its enormous importance, you need to look thirty years ahead and consider Turkey-in-Asia as a whole—as the Germans have done. Consider it well supplied with railways; various ports to have been made, and joined by railway lines with the districts which they naturally serve. So doing, you find that about two-thirds of Asia Minor proper will be served by eight or ten chief ports—Trebizond, Samsoun, Constantinople, Ismid, Aivali, Smyrna, Adalia, and possibly Selefke. Mersina may be left out of this count, for it is a somewhat artificial creation. It is an open roadstead in shallow water where vessels have to lie two or three miles out. Its present importance is largely due to old caravan routes, and the limitations of road traffic. Railways, and the other port which must be constructed on the Gulf of Alexandretta, will eventually diminish its value. But for the wide territory of South-Eastern Anatolia, Northern Syria, and Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf, there are, owing to the configuration of land and sea, only two conceivable outlets. One of these is on the Persian Gulf, the other either on or close to the Gulf of Alexandretta. By reason of water traffic on the Tigris and Euphrates no doubt the Persian Gulf outlet will serve the greater area. But when allowance is made for this advantage, there remains a territory of more than 100,000 square miles, much of it among the richest in the Turkish Empire, for which a port on the Gulf of Alexandretta will be the

outlet and have no possible rival, unless you imagine ports within a few miles of each other. This area will begin west of the Taurus Mountains; it will extend north of Kaisariyeh; it will include all the Cilician Plain; it will pass east through Kharput to Lake Van; include the Diarbekr region, take in a large portion of Mesopotamia, and extend south of Aleppo. And it must be borne in mind that in reaching European ports the Gulf of Alexandretta gives a shorter voyage than from the Persian Gulf by nearly 4,000 miles, and also saves the Canal dues.

You see something of the importance of the Alexandretta Gulf port on the map, but you do not see nearly all of it so. You need to be familiar with the country to understand the future of this north-eastern angle of the Mediterranean. You need to have seen the agricultural possibilities of the Cilician Plain; of the central parts of Anatolia; to have travelled in Northern Syria and seen wheat extending to the horizon like prairie grass. You also need to realize what mineral riches are awaiting scientific mining and means of conveyance. There are copper deposits near Kharput and Diarbekr to equal any in the world. In the mountains of Albistan, peasants bring lumps of lead ore and magnetic iron, and tell what masses these samples have come from. The mines now worked in the Taurus are said to produce more silver than any in Europe. From a mineralogist's point of view, Asia Minor is almost an unknown region.

Knowing the country well, fully appreciating its possibilities, and looking far ahead, Germans realized what was to be done in the Gulf of Alexandretta. They aimed to make there the centre of the whole future economic development of Asiatic Turkey. There was to be the Hamburg and Trieste of Turkey-in-Asia. The Bagdad Railway was the first step in the process—a military railway at this stage to make the rest possible. The political and military side of the matter settled, the port on the Gulf of Alexandretta would then be developed to the full. Between the future Alexandretta, and Trieste and Fiume a great trade was expected by the Austrian partner in the scheme; between Alexandretta and North Sea ports a greater by the German partner.

In the past there has been debate where the port on the Gulf of Alexandretta should be. Some considered the Bay of Ayas, on the western side of the gulf, as the best and most natural site. The Bay of Ayas is a natural harbour, but it also requires artificial protection by harbour works, and is also on the wrong side of the gulf, for the greater extent of territory to be served lies to the east. The Germans investigated the claims of Ayas and of Alexandretta, and decided for the latter, and one supposes that the choice is now definitely settled for all time. The bay was surveyed and plans made for the new harbour by German engineers. Then a concession was obtained

by a German syndicate enabling it to construct and work the port; and construction had been in progress a year when war broke out, and presumably stopped operations.

Alexandretta, as I have said, was the German choice for the future great port in these regions, and their choice, I believe, is a wise one. It has the immense advantage that no other port hereabouts will serve so great a territory. You may have ports which will serve Mesopotamia equally well, and others Asia Minor, but none which will so well serve both regions. Suedia—the so-called port of Antioch—Beyrut, Haifa, all will do for Mesopotamia; but they will draw nothing from Asia Minor, particularly from the region west of the Gulf of Alexandretta. In looking to Syrian ports as the future chief outlets of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor is ignored; and it is by no means certain that, in the long-run, a developed Asia Minor will not prove of greater importance than a developed Mesopotamia. If Haifa or Beyrut, for instance, be made the chief port, there will certainly have to be another for Asia Minor on the Gulf of Alexandretta. In deciding upon Alexandretta, the Germans chose the one central spot.

Let us now take a glance at this little place which seems destined for future greatness. The town is called unhealthy, a place of mosquitoes and malaria, owing to marshes between it and the mountains. But when Ibrahim Pasha, at the time of the Egyptian occupation of Northern Syria, made it his chief port, he cut a canal, drained the swamps, and mosquitoes and malaria disappeared. The canal has not been maintained and fever has returned. But there is no other reason why the town should not be as healthy as any. It has a good situation and abundance of excellent water, which breaks out in springs at the foot of the mountains.

Although Nature has not made a harbour here, she has gone a good way towards doing so. For just at Alexandretta the coast-line coming down from the north turns sharply to the west for two or three miles, and encloses a bay, sheltered from any direct swell from the Mediterranean, but, to a certain extent, affected by the range of such seas. The bay is also open to any sea which rises in the thirty-mile extent of the gulf itself. The building of a breakwater, however, presents no difficulty. It would have to resist no great weight of wave; shingle and rock for concrete are in abundance; and there is deep water—yet not too deep—close inshore. All that is needed is to construct a snug harbour within a gulf which is too large to be a snug harbour itself. This work, as I have said, has already been begun.

At present the town is the terminus of the short branch line which comes from the Bagdad Railway at the head of the gulf. For the time being, until the military and political side of the German Asiatic scheme had been cleared up, Alexandretta was to have no more than a branch railway, more not being advisable or even possible.

"In time to come," said a German official in Cilicia to the writer, "no doubt we shall take the railway under the Beilan Pass to Aleppo." Beilan Pass is eight or ten miles south of the town, and that way is the direct route to Aleppo and Syria and Mesopotamia. The official spoke without boasting—he was looking far ahead, to the time when Germany would have a free hand; when there would be a network of railways, and when the shortest routes would be followed. This official had no doubts about the future of Alexandretta—it was to be a very great port indeed; to be, among other things, the western port of Mesopotamia.

We may recall that a generation ago Alexandretta was proposed as the western end of a British railway to India. No doubt we may look forward now to seeing that railway constructed sooner or later. We may be able to travel by rail from Charing Cross to Calcutta, and Cairo, and Cape Town. Whenever that comes about, the route will be past the head of the Gulf of Alexandretta. The gulf will have as much to do with railway communication between London and Africa as between London and India. To this extent, and for whatever value this through railway communication may have, the Power which holds the gulf and port of Alexandretta will control railway communication between Europe and India and Africa, and largely to Persia. There is no other spot of equal importance in all Asiatic Turkey.

If, at the present time, the Gulf of Alexandretta is the most vital point in the Turkish Empire outside the capital, not less, but more so will it be a vital point in any conceivable order of things which may follow the present war. Its importance will increase with every year. You cannot well overestimate what that importance will become, if you consider the commercial and other developments likely to take place in the future between the Ægean and the Persian Gulf. Call Alexandretta of the future one of the greatest, perhaps the very greatest seaport on the Mediterranean, and you will not have overestimated its full possibilities. You may, at all events, be glad that Cyprus, covering this great position, remains a British possession.

Let me now show you a short selection of slides from photographs I have taken in many parts of Asia Minor.

The CHAIRMAN said that out of the instructive and interesting lecture they had heard an immense number of problems, both political and military, emerged, and some of them, no doubt, would exercise our own administrators considerably. He did not himself feel competent to touch upon such problems, and would confine his remarks to two points in the lecture which interested him particularly.

He was exceedingly glad to hear Mr. Childs speak well of his old friends the Turks. When he was in Mesopotamia, he was frequently

entertained by Turkish gentlemen and officers of the Turkish Army who were there keeping the country against the Arabs. He always found them most courteous, most obliging, most hospitable, friendly, and well-mannered, and kindly to men and even to animals. He could not imagine any people further removed from what would be classed in these days as the barbarian or the Hun. He could not bring himself to believe all the stories that were told of the terrible atrocities with which they were sometimes credited, though they had been partly subscribed to even by so experienced and distinguished a diplomat as Lord Bryce. If they looked into the details given, they would see that in many cases, at any rate, the numbers suffering from the atrocities alleged were impossibly large. For instance, it was quite impossible for 10,000 Armenians to have been conveyed away in small boats into the middle of the sea and there dropped into the water. It was equally inconceivable that 800,000 Armenians should have been massacred in Bitlis. Such stories went about, and the Turks, in accordance with their fatalistic policy, did not care to contradict them. There was room for suspicion that, on the other hand, the Armenians found it useful financially to boom atrocities. He would, therefore, ask them most earnestly to take stories of Turkish atrocities with considerable grains of salt. They should remember how public opinion was stirred in the days of the Bulgarian atrocities, but in the fiercer light of subsequent history it was found that they gradually dwindled down to about one-tenth of their original supposed dimensions.

With reference to the extraordinary potential wealth of Mesopotamia, they knew of the plans prepared by Sir William Willcocks for irrigation both north and south of Bagdad. Mr. Childs considered that there were only two outlets for the trade of Central Mesopotamia, one north to Alexandretta and the other south to the Persian Gulf. He would ask him why he overlooked the possibilities of produce being eventually carried by rail westward from Bagdad through Palmyra to Damascus, which was already connected with Beyrut. It seemed to him that that would eventually be the most important line of communication.

Colonel Sir HENRY TROTTER said that his travels in Asia Minor were in parts other than those described by the lecturer. He knew the Aleppo district, but was more particularly acquainted with the Erzerum frontier region. The recent Russian capture of that city he regarded as one of the most wonderful military feats in history. No one knowing the rough mountainous country over which the Russian guns had to be taken could doubt this. It was snow-covered in winter, subject to terrible blizzards, and presented awful difficulties to an advancing army. He was at Erzerum when it was attacked by the Russians in 1877. The Russians won a big victory

at the Deve Boyur Pass, about five miles east of Erzerum, and if they had followed it up the same night, he believed they would have got into the fortress. But they halted and hesitated, and when some days later on they made the final assault they were beaten. They invested, but never entered Erzerum during the war, and while they were besieging it during the winter they lost some 20,000 men from typhoid fever.* Many of his own prophecies respecting the present war had come true; but two days before the capture of Erzerum he maintained that it was absolutely impossible for the Russians to take it. He was gratified to find his beliefs in this respect falsified. (Cheers.)

Colonel A. C. YATE said he was interested to hear that the influence of the architecture of the Knights of Rhodes had extended so far into the centre of Asia Minor as the lecturer had shown—viz., to the neighbourhood of Kaisariyeh. He had been a student for the past fifteen years or more of the history of the Knights of St. John, and had not heard before of such extension. The history of the tenure of Rhodes by the Knights was well known. "The Street of the Knights" in Rhodes was famous. On the Asia Minor coast they held Smyrna, until the hordes of Timur the Lame drove them from it. The fortress of Budrum, built up by the Knights on the site and from the ancient masonry of Halicarnassus, was the refuge of escaped Christian slaves during the 14th and 15th centuries. The Order of St. John of Jerusalem in this country took a keen interest in its own antiquarian history, and would be glad to have further information on the subject of this recrudescence of Hospitaller architecture in Asia Minor.

The account which the lecturer had given of the future great importance of the port of Alexandretta recalled to his mind the fact that Lord Beaconsfield, prior to the Berlin Conference of 1878, had decided to make Alexandretta the Mediterranean terminus of an Euphrates Valley or Bagdad Railway. To that end he occupied Cyprus. That Disraeli and Salisbury blundered at Berlin in 1878, when they let in the thin end of the Austro-German wedge, we all now know. But had not the Liberal tide floated Gladstone into power in 1881, Disraeli would have squared matters with the Central Powers by forestalling Berlin at Bagdad.

Mr. A. L. P. TUCKER said that many would like to know what was the degree of popularity enjoyed by the Young Turk Party Government among the Turkish soldiery of Anatolia. How was the new Turkish Government—Hariyeh as it was called—regarded by these millions of peasants and brave soldiers? In reference to the remarks that had fallen from the Chairman as to the probable guiltlessness of the Turkish Government in the matter of the reported

* Under the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, Erzerum was temporarily handed over to the Russians.

recent Armenian and other older massacres, he would like to mention one thing. A member of the Society whose lot was cast for some time at Bagdad in an official capacity told him that he thought the Turkish officials with whom he there came in contact were the worst, and indeed the vilest, class with which he had ever had dealings.

Mr. CHILDS, in reply to the observations of the Chairman, said that of course a railway could be made to Beyrut, and the traffic diverted thither, if that was the object aimed at by the authorities concerned. But provided a good harbour was made at Alexandretta, it would be very difficult to get the traffic away therefrom. The distance between the two ports was only about 120 miles, and he did not think there was anything in favour of Beyrut in point of distance. And further, Alexandretta would be the port for a large part of Anatolia, which Beyrut could never hope to be. It was no good hoping for Beyrut to have the supremacy if a start was made at Alexandretta, and it was turned into a good port, and provided with railways.

With regard to the traces of the architecture of the Knights of Rhodes in Central Asia Minor, it was generally believed that the Greek builders themselves came from Rhodes 200 or 300 years ago; it was at least clear that the work was done by Greek masons, who were said to have come from the southern coast.

As to the sentiments of the Turkish peasantry towards the Government, it was to be remembered that the cultivators believed whatever they were told by the priests and teachers. They had no newspapers enabling them to learn what was going on in the outer world. They had been told that the English were endeavouring to destroy the Mohammedan religion; and of course they were ready to fight to the last for their faith. The majority of the Turkish peasantry, in so far as they had any opinions on the subject, had no great partiality for the present form of government. In their sympathies they were supporters of Abdul Hamid rather than of the present régime. They were told of the evil things that were going to happen to Islam if the Turkish cause was defeated; and they were prepared to do anything the authorities demanded to save their religion and their country from the dangers they believed were threatening them.