

CHAPTER VIII

THE ORIENTAL RAILWAY AND THE ROYAL ROAD TO THE ORIENT

The Bagdad Railway route was not discovered by German engineers. It is the oldest trade route of the world. It was the "Royal Road" from India to Europe. The ancient kingdoms of Persia, Babylonia, Assyria, Parthia, and Media were enriched by Oriental trade much as is England to-day.

This "Royal Road" of the ancient and mediæval world is a natural highway between Asia and Europe. It was the only avenue from the Orient prior to the development of navigation. Into Mesopotamia the mountain ranges of Persia and Asia Minor open their gateways. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers intersect the Mesopotamia valleys. They are navigable to the Persian Gulf. On the north is Asia Minor, a region as large as France, bounded on the south by the Taurus and Armanus Mountains, which open to the plains below through the

Cilician gates. These gates guard the highway to Constantinople and Europe, as they do the valleys of Mesopotamia from incursions from the north.

Through these mountain passes the trade and commerce of Asia found its way to Europe for thousands of years. This, too, was the great battle-ground of antiquity. It was the prize of countless wars. The greatest events of ancient and mediæval history centre about this region. Even the Crusades were primarily for the control of these strategic routes of the East, which must be held in European hands to prevent the Christian Church from being broken asunder by the Ottoman hordes.

For thousands of years rulers have coveted Mesopotamia and built their empires about its rivers because of the fertility of the country and the wealth which came from the trade with the East. The "road" went overland from India through Persia to Mesopotamia. It came up from the Persian Gulf. It followed the Tigris and Euphrates valleys to the north. It passed through Babylon and Bagdad. It crossed over Asia Minor to Constantinople. It touched the cities of Syria and Palestine.

It crossed the deserts to Egypt. The trade of the Orient made Mesopotamia the centre of the ancient and mediæval world much as it has made London the centre of the world to-day.

With the rise of Rome civilization shifted from Mesopotamia to the West. But trade still followed the old channels. Roman legions controlled the land routes in the East, and Roman galleys policed the waterways of the West. Rome levied tribute upon the Orient. Her proconsuls brought back slaves and Oriental luxuries from the Indies. For centuries Rome was mistress of the Mediterranean and of the "Royal Road" from India and Persia.

In the sixth and seventh centuries A. D. the barbarians swarmed over Italy from the north. The old civilization of Rome was eclipsed. These were the Dark Ages. The trade of the East and the wealth which came with it was deposited at Constantinople. Then the Renaissance came. The Italian cities rose to power. Trade with the Orient revived. Banking developed. Italian traders met in the cities of Asia Minor, Syria, and at Constantinople. During the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries Venice, Genoa, Florence,

Padua, were rich and powerful city states. Their princes were traders. They fought for power on land and on sea. The wealth of Italy again came from Oriental trade. The cities grew in splendor. They controlled eastern colonies. They commanded the Mediterranean and warred for its trade as had the conquerors of ancient times.

The Renaissance penetrated to Europe, especially to France and South Germany, from Vienna to the Netherlands. Handicrafts appeared. Industry developed. Towns sprang up about the castles of the barons and the cathedrals. This was the period of the guild merchants. Europe was dotted with towns from the Black Sea to the mouth of the Rhine. Gradually the burghers shook themselves free from the feudal lords. The cities acquired charters. They became rich and powerful. The trade from the Orient ventured into new channels. It crept up the Black Sea. It followed the Danube and the Rhine. Vienna, Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfort, Cologne, Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Bremen owed their wealth to the trade and commerce with the East. They developed

credit facilities. Frankfort, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Antwerp became financial centres. We get some suggestion of the wealth of mediæval Europe from the wonderful town-halls, the guild-houses, the cathedrals, and the fortifications erected during this time.

The trade of the Orient had found new routes to the West. It came by caravan and boat across Asia and Europe, enriching cities and peoples on the way. For centuries the trade of Europe passed through southern Germany and Austria. The Mediterranean decayed in consequence. It lost its pre-eminence as the Danube and the Rhine became the carriers of commerce. Central Europe, *Mittleuropa*, was the centre of the European world.

In the fifteenth century the Ottoman Empire extended its dominion over the East and penetrated west almost to the gates of Vienna. Western Asia was infested with brigands. The trade routes were no longer guarded. The caravan routes were interrupted. The East no longer communicated freely with the West through its accustomed channels. Constantinople was taken by the Turks in the fifteenth century, and the order maintained for centuries

ceased to protect the traders. The Turks overran Asia Minor, the Balkans, Greece, and practically all of Hungary. Even Vienna was threatened. The whole territory from Persia to Hungary was in Ottoman hands. The traders of Italy and Portugal began to search for another route to India, and America was discovered in the quest, as was the route around the lower end of Africa. Columbus ventured into the unknown seas to find a way to India free from the robber-infested regions of Mesopotamia and discovered a new continent.

With the discovery of the sea route to India, and the increase in shipping, trade again abandoned the old routes. It forsook the Mediterranean.

It took to the seas. It left the Danube and the Rhine. Within a short time the economic life of Europe was revolutionized. Spain and Portugal rose to power. The Netherland cities took tribute from the seas as well as from the land. England, an island kingdom, began to be a carrier. She defeated Spain, Holland, and the Hanseatic League. Her ships penetrated to the Mediterranean. London traded with Constantinople and distant India. Her mari-

ners ventured to the Far East by the Cape of Good Hope.

The sea assumed its ancient place. Caravans no longer crossed from Persia and Constantinople to the Danube and the Rhine to the North Sea. No longer did the commerce of the world pass through German lands and leave its golden harvest in the hands of German traders. The cities of South Germany lost their pre-eminence. They lost their wealth as well.

The Napoleonic wars left continental Europe prostrate. But England rose to industrial power. She became a great banking centre as had the Lombard cities, as had Frankfort, Amsterdam, and Brussels. And for nearly a hundred years no other nation challenged her position. The French built the Suez Canal, which was opened to traffic in 1869. This threatened England's control of the seas. It disturbed the traffic to the East about the Cape of Good Hope. Trade which had gone about the southern end of Africa for centuries now passed through the Mediterranean, which assumed its former importance. Just as the caravans in the time of the Pharaohs and the Cæsars passed through Persia, Mesopotamia,

Asia Minor, and Constantinople, so the commerce of the nineteenth century passed through this same territory.

Great Britain acquired control of the Suez Canal in 1875. It became the connecting link of her empire. It solidified her sea power. British ships now followed the short route to India.

To-day British traders and British bankers draw profits from the Orient just as did the burghers of central Europe, just as did the merchants of Italy, just as did Rome, just as did the cities of Mesopotamia in ancient times. British commerce through the Suez Canal amounted to 12,910,278 net tons in 1914. It is carried by British ships. It is paid for through British banks. The goods are manufactured in British factories. The economic power of Great Britain, like the economic power of ancient states, like the economic power of Italy and mediæval Europe, is traceable largely to the seas and especially to the Mediterranean and the control of the great trade route of the world. The Mediterranean is again the "Royal Road" to the Orient, as it was for thousands of years.

With the rise of German industry, German finance, and German ambitions, German historians have drawn attention to the wealth and power once enjoyed by Germany from the trade of the Orient. They point to the river highways of southern Germany, and say: "Here the trade of the Orient once passed by our doors. It enriched our cities. It built up our industries. The traditions of Germany are identified with the years when the Danube and the Rhine formed the trade routes of Europe. England has taken this pre-eminence from us. But we will recall it to Germany. The Danube and the Rhine shall be restored to their ancient position. Our old cities shall again become the world's trading-centres, with Constantinople at one end and Hamburg at the other. We will deepen our rivers, we will build canals, we will construct railroads. With the aid of science we will overcome the advantages which England enjoys and recapture the trade of the world by reopening the 'Royal Road' from Bagdad to Hamburg."

And during the years that preceded the war the mind of Germany was definitely working toward this project. The Rhine had become a

great waterway. It had been deepened almost to Switzerland. It was to be united by canal with the Danube. The North Sea and the Baltic were to be joined to the Black Sea, while the Rhine itself was to find an outlet to the ocean by means of a canal through German territory.

There were to be direct water communications from Hamburg, Berlin, and the industrial regions of west Germany to the Black Sea and Constantinople. The rivers were to be the main arteries of traffic, while the country was to be networked with a system of canals all feeding into a general system of water transportation.¹

¹The following are the main links in the internal system of waterways of central Europe either completed or projected at the outbreak of the war:

(1) Union of the Rhine and Danube by the adaptation of the Main to canal navigation and by the canal from the Main to the Danube; (2) completion of the central canal between the Vistula and Rhine; (3) Canal from the Oder to the Danube, uniting the Baltic and the Black Sea; (4) adaptation of the Rhine as far as Basle; (5) union of the Weser and Main by means of the Fulda-Werra Rivers; (6) union of the Elbe and Danube by the Moldau; (7) union by means of canals of the Oder to the Danube and Vistula; (8) union of the Danube and the Dniester by the Vistula; (9) canalization of the Save; (10) canalization of the Morava and the Vardar as far as Salonika. (From *The United States and Pangermania* by André Chéradame, p. 51.)

All of the industrial centres of Germany were to be reached by water communications. These waterways were for heavy bulk freight which now goes by sea.¹ And with the rivers and canals were railroads forming part of the German Oriental system. They were to follow the ancient caravan routes along the Rhine and the Danube. These were the German connections of the Bagdad route. From Constantinople the Bagdad Railway was to traverse Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, following the old river routes to the Persian Gulf. It was to connect with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which were again to assume their ancient importance. Hamburg and the Rhine were to be joined with the far-distant Persian Gulf.²

Constantinople was to become a great Ger-

¹ As indicative of German river and canal development, over 70,000,000 tons were carried on her inland waterways in 1912.

² The London *Times* correspondent, writing from Constantinople on the occasion of the Kaiser's visit in 1898, said: "It is daily becoming more evident that with the development of railway connections the great overland highways to the East will gradually supplant the maritime routes of the land of Nineveh and Babylon, of Tyre and Palmyra, which forms the meeting-point of East and West, the link between three continents will regain much of its ancient importance. It is in accordance with the far-seeing character of German policy to have recognized this truth."
—*The Times*, October 18, 1898.

man terminal, receiving and discharging cargoes not only from the Mediterranean, but from the Black Sea, the Danube, and the Rhine, and the Oriental Railway from Hamburg and Berlin. It might easily become one of the three or four great harbors of the world. It would be the centre of the trade and commerce of Russia and the eastern Mediterranean, of the Balkan states, and in a measure of the entire Oriental and east African trade.

Constantinople in turn would contribute to Germany and central Europe. It would be in direct water and rail communication with all of the great industrial cities, even with the ports on the North Sea. The Rhine and the Danube might recapture some of their former eminence; while the old mediæval cities—Munich, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Düsseldorf, Cologne—and the modern city of Essen, would again become great cities, as they were for centuries when southern Germany and the Netherlands were the centres of the wealth and civilization of Europe.

It may seem an exaggeration to trace the power of states to the control of trade and commerce. Yet history discloses that practically every great nation reached its eminence by rea-

son of such control. All of the great nations of antiquity, as well as of mediæval and modern times, with the possible exception of France, attained the zenith of their power through the control of the waterways and caravan routes of the Mediterranean. The source of England's power is her command of the seas, and especially of the "Royal Road" which connects the Orient with the Occident by way of the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal.

Upon this project German engineers had been working for years. Science was to overcome the advantage which England enjoyed on the seas. German perseverance and German thoroughness were to conquer Asia Minor, overcome the obstacles of nature, and compel India and the Far East again to send their wealth to the heart of Germany, as they did in mediæval times. Control of the Mediterranean basin, of the trade routes of the world, of the commerce of Europe and western Asia, was one of the German objectives of the war. And along with this was the control of ancient Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean, for thousands of years the centre of the civilization of the world.