

## CHAPTER XVI

### WHY THE WAR CAME WHEN IT DID

The Morocco incident of 1911, the partition of Persia in 1912, and the conventions of the Powers over the Bagdad Railway in 1914 were the closing acts in the long struggle for the Mediterranean which had been going on for a century. Under the several agreements of the Powers, reviewed in a previous chapter, Germany recognized British rights on the Persian Gulf, and Great Britain recognized German rights in Mesopotamia. Egypt was secure and Germany had acquired ascendancy in Turkey and Asia Minor. Germany seemed to have achieved the ends for which she had been striving for more than thirty years, while Great Britain controlled the sea route to the Orient and the means of protection to her Far-Eastern empire.

Such was the status of the long struggle for the control of the Mediterranean at the outbreak of the war. Possibly the settlement

was merely a blind for the war; possibly it was the immediate cause of the war, for the German route to the East was still far from free from interruptions. German dominion of western Asia and Mesopotamia was still shared with England and France. The route to India and the approaches to Egypt and the Suez Canal were still blocked by British control of the Persian Gulf on the one hand, and the land approaches, by way of Palestine, on the other. And Egypt was a frankly expressed German objective. To the Pan-Germans Egypt is the "spinal cord," the connecting link of the British Empire. With it in German hands the British Empire would be split asunder, while the whole of East Africa and the Cape-to-Cairo connections would be German menaced. Persia would be open to easy conquest, and the rich oil-lands of Persia and Mesopotamia would fall into German hands. Thirty years of industrious penetration by scientists, traders, financiers, and military experts had failed in its object. For the Berlin-Bagdad project was still forty miles from the head of the Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For terms of agreement as to Mesopotamia, see Chapter XIV.

Far more important, Serbia still lay athwart the railway from Austria-Hungary to Turkey, and Serbia had greatly increased her power as a result of the second Balkan War of 1912. She had added to her territories, and was reaching out for Jugo-Slav connections which would form the basis of a still greater state. Serbia was supported by Russia, and Russia was as eager as ever for the control of Constantinople and the Dardanelles. This ambition would be ended if Germany solidified her position in Turkey and secured a "corridor" of her own through the Balkan states. Serbia was the immediate barrier to German plans, and Serbia was unwilling to submit to Austrian demands. Therefore, Serbia must be crushed in order that the Oriental Railway from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf might pass through German territory.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Any lingering doubts as to Germany's responsibility for the war or the willingness of her rulers to see it widen into a European conflagration have been swept away by the publication of the letter of Prince Lichnowsky, the German imperial ambassador at London, and the memorandum of Doctor Wilhelm Muehlon, one of the directors of the Krupp Company to the Main Committee of the Reichstag. These communications, whose genuineness has not been questioned by the German press, show that the Kaiser either initiated or approved of the Austrian ultima-

It is safe to say, from what we know of the ambitions of the Pan-German groups, that they felt they had been deprived of a coveted prize, which was undisputed control of the railway from Hamburg to the Indian Ocean. To be forced to pass through foreign territory, to give up the eastern terminus and with it a great base for commercial and possible naval operations on the Persian Gulf, was a recognition of a failure. England and Serbia, supported by Russia, still stood athwart the German pathway. Germany still enjoyed access to the eastern seas by permission of other nations. She was still far from that self-contained, freely developing empire which

tum to Serbia; that its recognized effect was the probable immediate mobilization of forces by Russia, France, and possibly Great Britain; that the ultimatum was issued with a full realization of its consequences and a willingness to convulse the world over demands so monstrous that they could not possibly be accepted by Serbia. The letter of Prince Lichnowsky exonerates Great Britain from any warlike animosity toward Germany while the memorandum of Doctor Muehlon discloses that the Kaiser and his ministers were making all arrangements and organizing the resources of the empire for war in the summer of 1914 and that the Kaiser's tour in Scandinavian waters was, as stated by one of his ministers, merely a "blind." See the *New York Times* of Sunday, April 21, 1918, for text of the letter and memorandum referred to.

had been the dream of the imperialistic classes for a quarter of a century. Turkey, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, the east coast of Africa, India, and Australia were still shielded by British command of the Mediterranean, and the water routes from the English Channel to the Far East. The pent-up jealousy of England, of her commercial and financial supremacy, of her far-flung empire, gained during the years when Germany was still a group of warring states, rankled in the mind of the military and the commercial classes, who were unable to see the British Empire in any other terms than subject states ready at the slightest opportunity to rise in insurrection against British rule. Russia, too, was economically free to trade where she willed; she was free to pursue her ambitions toward the Dardanelles and in the Balkans.

Such was the psychology of the military and Pan-German classes. It was the psychology of balked ambitions. And balked ambitions always rankle.

To Great Britain, on the other hand, the menace was almost as imminent as ever. A railway to Basra near the Persian Gulf, the

possibility of a railroad down through Syria and Palestine to the lower end of the Mediterranean, was still a threat to Egypt and the Suez Canal, while control of Mesopotamia was but a little short of control of the Persian Gulf and southern Persia. The British Empire was still threatened by the conventions with Germany made in 1914, for Germany was now free to develop her plans with that thoroughness which characterizes her colonial policy. In a few years' time she might be ready for a new drive to the East backed by a great railroad system, with an abundance of food and supplies, and with the Turkish army as an aid to her military operations. In such a struggle, with the necessity of bringing troops, munitions, and supplies by water, the disadvantages to Great Britain were apparent. No longer would she be an island empire, almost impregnable from attack by reason of her position. She would have to defend by water, not a nation of 67,000,000 people 3,000 miles away from Egypt, but an empire grown to a hundred million, with a Turkish army of possibly 2,000,000 men trained by German methods on the ground.

The world is still in the dark as to the reasons for the German-Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. Germany was fast conquering the world by peaceful economic penetration. Why did she abandon the counting-room for the sword? Why did she make war for that which she was rapidly acquiring by peaceful means? Is not the explanation to be found in the fact that Serbia and Great Britain lay across the pathway of her coveted empire, extending from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf, an empire to be built and consolidated about a great trans-continental railway system which was to be the foundation of economic and political power?

Desperate wars are only undertaken for great stakes. The stakes of German success was an empire of 200,000,000 people. But when war is determined on, a pretext can always be found. The pretext for the German assault on the world was the assassination of Grand Duke Ferdinand; the cause was ambition for empire, an empire coveted by ambitious conquerors from the dawn of history down to the present day. Here was the birthplace of European peoples; here was the centre of a civilization that had endured for thousands of years;

here were the traditions of the glories of Greece, of Rome, of the mediæval Italian cities; here was means for control of the wealth of Persia and India, of the Mediterranean and the greatest trade route of the world. Other conquerors had failed because of failure of transport. This had been provided by German engineers who were fast tunnelling the mountains and crossing the rivers of western Asia. The Oriental Railway was the means of conquest. It would unite Berlin with Bagdad. But little Serbia blocked the pathway. She was the Belgium of the Mediterranean and of Egypt, India, and Asia and, in a sense, of the world as well.