

The Bagdad Railway

Turkey, the Great Powers, and the Bagdad Railway, a Study in Imperialism, by Edward Mead Earle. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.25.

ALTHOUGH the main title of this book adequately describes the dish served to the reader, the subtitle—a study in imperialism—more truly indicates the special flavor which makes it memorable. For while there have been other valuable works dealing with the Bagdad Railway, not one of them has thrown the facts of this amazing venture against the background of a similarly comprehensive social-economic philosophy. The result is that though we do indeed trace with all necessary detail the inception, development, shifts, and chances of a particular enterprise—an enterprise moreover that has been steeped for two decades in the heated atmosphere of a cause célèbre—we feel that we are at the same time carried to a higher, impersonal plane of thought where we are made acquainted with the intricate modalities elaborated by our modern occidental civilization in respect of a so-called backward area.

While following the fascinating exposition the reviewer was suddenly arrested by the resurrection of a war memory. A famous professor held the platform on this very subject of Mr. Earle's, the Bagdad Railway, and after a withering introductory sneer at the ninety-three German intellectuals, signers of the hapless manifesto in defence of Germany, he sailed in to show what, by way of contrast, a truth-loving American could do with a burning issue. He then proceeded to rest his case on three axioms which, he declared, were beyond discussion, to wit, that the Bagdad project was different from any capitalist enterprise the world had ever seen, that it was a Potsdam plot to wreck the British empire, and that it was hatched in the criminal brain of the Kaiser. The weird edifice which he erected on these foundations may be left to the imagination. Likely enough, even for this agitated patriot it has long since proved itself of a piece with the stuff that dreams are made of, but, if it has not, let us hope that a kind friend will present him with a copy of Mr. Earle's book. Here he will find the authentic tale abundantly documented and carried from the first discussions among the promoters down through the year 1923. By utilizing, in addition to the printed material, important evidence drawn in personal interviews from individuals connected with the enterprise, he has been able to put together a history apparently complete in every link. More clearly than ever before we are now in a position to see that the German promoters had no sooner obtained the Bagdad charter of 1903 than with unusual tact they set about organizing an international banking syndicate and that this happy distributive project was frustrated neither by the financiers nor by the governments of the other national groups but by the yelpings of the yellow press of London, Petrograd, and Paris, which, like its kindred everywhere, made its living by blowing on the patriotic passions of the general public. The tragic failure of internationalization in connection with an enterprise which, because of its possible returns in money and power, greatly excited nationalist jealousies supplies a valuable hint as to where are to be found the real obstructionists of that better understanding among peoples which is the only hope of the future.

The author removes all remaining doubt from another matter which looms large in the dispassionate retrospect, for he shows that, under the softening influence of time,

Russia, France, and Great Britain gradually adjusted themselves to the Bagdad idea. Between 1911 and 1914 and in the order named they signed agreements with Germany of which, in return for certain securities and favors, they put their approval on the project. It cannot be too often repeated that just before the outbreak of the Great War the particular disturbance caused by the German capitalist invasion of the Near East seemed to have been effectively quieted by a series of special treaties between Germany and her three leading rivals. Why then the war? Or since the war took place, can the Bagdad Railway be said to have been a factor in the outbreak? Alas, a weighty factor, since together with a score of similar imperialist enterprises it created a state of mind in Europe which threatened war at any moment and made its adjournment to 1914 look almost like a miracle.

But, after all, what gives this book its broadest usefulness and will make it particularly welcome among the philosophically minded is that it treats the Bagdad Railway as an example in imperialism whereby we are enabled to become acquainted not only with the forces in society pushing our business leaders along the path of conquest but also with the elaborate present-day technique for such ventures involving a vast coöperative action among bankers, shippers, engineers, and manufacturers. All the more advanced nations are necessarily in the game and Germany's conspicuous failure was largely due to the fact that, a late-comer and amateur among professionals, she was not abreast of the occasion. An ironical comment on the moral indignation that used to be showered on the whole Bagdad plan, particularly in England, is that as the smoke of battle and discussion lifts, the coveted prize is discovered nestling snugly in the gigantic hand of the leading imperialist professional, Great Britain. What else would one expect?

Mr. Earle closes by showing how the recent advent of the United States upon the scene, in the form of the Chester concessions, is the unescapable consequence of our economic evolution. Many of us will share with him the tenderly expressed hope that our business buccaneers may prove a more genial lot than their German, French, and British contemporaries. And yet if everything that he says and implies about the necessary processes of our occidental civilization is true, why should one fool oneself with such a purely sentimental delusion?

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