



IRAQ

The boundaries of Iraq still lack definition. It was formed from the Turkish districts of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, and is of strategic importance, being bounded by Turkey, Syria, Trans-Jordan, Arabia and Persia.

About 140,000 square miles in area, it has a population of 3,000,000 of whom 2,500,000 are Muhammedans, divided into two sects of almost equal size: the Sunni and the Shi'ah. There are also 87,000 Jews and 79,000 Christians.

The capital is Baghdad (145,000 inhabitants). Basra is the chief

port (50,000 inhabitants), situated about 70 miles up the Shatt-el-Arab formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, as they flow into the Persian Gulf.

The country incorporates the valley of Mesopotamia, and commands an important corridor across the Syrian desert to Trans-Jordan.

Iraq was mandated to the British Empire, after the war of 1914-1918, later becoming a limited monarchy under King Feisul, who was elected by a 96 per cent. vote.

Prior to the last war Iraq was dominated by Turkey, whose influence weakened rapidly in 1914. When Turkey entered the war against the Allies, the effect was offset by an announcement that Turkey had only entered under German pressure. Turkish rule shortly ceased to function, and British interests and installations were protected by British troops.

Turkish attempts to raise a 'holy war' were frustrated, and the British, who announced their sympathy with Arab aspirations, were welcomed.

Religious intrigues still continued, however, and strong measures had to be taken. In 1917 the Turks were compelled to withdraw, and in 1918 the freedom of the people was proclaimed.

The climate of Iraq is not excessively burdensome to Europeans, particularly since the improvement in medical attention, but the temperature can reach 125 degrees by day and 90 degrees by night, and is over 100 degrees for more than a third of the year. Summer is trying; Europeans find it debilitating.

The towns are fairly comfortable, and medical services originally instituted by the British have done much to reduce the incidence of disease. Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, for example, have piped chlorinated water.

Outside the chief settlements, conditions are not so good, and even in the cities the rain plays havoc with the streets.

Iraq was formerly subject to serious epidemics, encouraged by the dirt prevalent among the poorer classes, sandstorms, heavy winter rains and unpaved and undrained streets.

The swamps of the Euphrates, muddy, humid, thick with flies

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and other insects were the breeding ground of many diseases, the natives relying on amateur healers who batted on charges levied for quack treatment of venereal disease and eye trouble.

Plague was widespread. Baghdad itself has been nearly freed of plague, and Basra is even better off; but cholera and dysentery are still dangers. It is therefore essential, everywhere, to pay strict attention to health. Inoculation and vaccination are on no account to be neglected.

Malaria and bilharzia are prevalent. Preventive measures must be taken. Take quinine, or whatever the M.O. orders, and avoid washing or bathing in unclean water.

The people of Iraq are fortunately becoming medicine minded, and hospitals are increasing in number. In-patients in hospitals have risen to over 20,000 yearly, and whereas there were only 714,000 people treated at the dispensaries in 1921, the attendance is now over three millions per annum.

Iraq—the reputed site of the Garden of Eden—is likely to assume considerable importance commercially, as improvements are carried out. Cotton is already a commercial crop, due to irrigation works, and there are rich agricultural lands to be developed.

Oil is very important. Pipe lines were laid down from the oil fields to Haifa and to Tripoli.

There is a strong nationalist movement, but its manifestations are complex. Religious fanaticism is never far from the surface, and the people still remember the grandeur of their former power.

Although there was for a long time a strong feeling in favour of the British, that cannot now always be taken for granted. Sentiments are mixed. They are complicated by commercial and religious interests, by the nationalist movement and by tribal loyalties.

The people are proud and independent of outlook. Like all peoples of the Middle East they are instinctively good bargainers. In dealing with them, and in any contact, remember that they are quick to take advantage of any wavering, and that they respect dignity—their own, and other people's.

Kit will be the same as for Egypt.



PERSIA (IRAN)

Persia, or Iran, is a great plateau which stretches from the plain of Tigris in the west, the Caspian Sea and the Turanian Desert in the north, and the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean in the south.

The country is surrounded by high mountain ranges, with a salt desert in the centre.

If you look at a map, the strategic and political importance of the country will be obvious. In the first place, it is the gateway to Russia by way of Turkestan or the Caspian Sea. It equally offers access to

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India by way of the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.

Three principal highways cross the country : (1) from Zahidan on the Baluchistan frontier to Meshed, and so to Turkestan (Russia), (2) the Trans-Iranian Railway from Bandar Gulf (Bandar Shahpur) on the Persian Gulf to Bandar Caspian (Bandar Shah,) on the Caspian Sea, (3) the narrow gauge railway from Basra on the Persian Gulf to Baghdad, with connections to Russia at Tabriz.

Russia is our ally. The importance of the Indian Empire is obvious. Persia is an important strategic link.

Before the development of the aeroplane, Persia was not easy of access, nor would it be easy now, were determined forces holding the passes in the mountain ranges.

Its geographical position, no less than its many natural resources, chief of which is oil, made it a source of competition. The Germans had carefully laid plans. The proposed Berlin-Baghdad railway was a thinly disguised bid for German control of all the country from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, with India, probably, as the ultimate objective.

German plans failed ; other countries were well aware of the importance of Persia. Russia was one interested party, Great Britain had basic interests, and there was considerable Western infiltration. Competition was long continued, with the scales finally tipped in Britain's favour.

Russia and Great Britain have now worked together to conserve this strategic centre, and the elaborate German plans have so far failed to upset the position.

Not only because of her natural resources, and the importance of oil, but also because of the need for general development of communications, Persia increased in importance. The first steps in economic development were taken by those interested in telegraphs and railways. Telegraphic communication with India was made, and the administration of the service was in the hands of the British.

Even as late as 1927, however, very little headway had been made with railway expansion. There were only about 200 miles of railway

in the country. Since then much has been added, but, in harmony with the nationalist movement, the railways were planned from the national, and not the international, point of view. The gauges do not agree with those of India, Russia or Iraq.

The Trans-Iranian railway, already mentioned, is an outstanding feat of railway engineering, financed by domestic taxes and created by European engineers. Work began in 1927 and was completed in eleven years. The total cost was about £30,000,000.

That railway may be taken as an index of the character of the people, who are independent, resilient and nationalist.

The history of the country is illustrative of all these qualities. From the earliest days Persia has been at the centre of many military and religious movements. In the days of the Greek States, it was an aggressive, expanding Power; but it is an interesting commentary, even on the present war, to note that when the Persian forces came up against the loosely connected democratic States of Greece they suffered repulse. Democracy showed an unexpected virility.

Radiating from Persia were intellectual and physical forces that did much to influence the destinies of the then known world. The empire extended, and with that extension men's minds were changed—it is not too much to say that they were enlarged.

The story of Persia has been one of rise and fall and rise again; when the country seemed finally to have been devastated, subjugated, and made impotent, it recovered and again assumed importance.

Its boundaries have changed from time to time; but the character of the people remains strong.

It would be a grave error to consider the people of Persia as ineffectual or basically out of touch with progress. The visible signs of progress, by way of communications, industrial development and advanced medicine may not be so many as could be desired, but much of that is due to the ebb and flow of political affairs during the last century. The last twenty-five years have seen great improvement, which brought Persia back into a central position in European affairs, with reviving rivalries.

In the larger towns, such as Teheran, houses and furnishing are

largely on European lines, and even in the outlying districts, although the rich often adhere to their old mode of living, there are added amenities : radio, telephones and electricity.

Architecture is designed rather to defeat the sun than to give sunlight full play, not unnatural when it is remembered that the temperature frequently rises to 115 degrees in the shade. The people seek relief from the heat, and architecture is designed to afford protection, with windowless outside walls, ventilated underground rooms and screened inside windows.

The life of the poor is cramped. There is an absence of sanitation ; families are crowded into inadequate space.

This crowding is accentuated by the recent State policy of settling nomad tribes into villages, and only the main centres have yet benefited to any great extent by modernisation. Teheran is a metropolis, very cosmopolitan and full of interest. Don't judge the whole country from that example.

European dress is worn by men throughout the country, however, with the exception of a few privileged people and out-of-the-way tribes. The introduction of European dress caused rioting at first ; now the tables are turned, and the unauthorised use of the traditional dress is the source of disturbance.

Slowly, women have been emancipated. The veil has gone and European dress has generally been accepted. In law, women enjoy equality with men in most things. They may even sue for divorce, previously the privilege of the male. So far they have not received the franchise, but they enter into pursuits that were formerly denied to them. Women are to be found in almost every industry, including aviation.

Education is progressing, schools are much more numerous than they were twenty years ago and parallel action is being taken in medicine.

Smallpox, venereal disease and tuberculosis are still widespread, and malaria is common ; but improvement is already to be noted. The average physique is good.

Religious tolerance also expands ; or possibly it would be more

accurate to say that nationalism is receiving more attention than formalised religion.

These developments, while signposts on the way, have tended to increase the reserve and sensitiveness of the people. Care should be taken not to enter into any thoughtless comparisons. The people take their progress with due seriousness and will resent the faintest suggestion of disparagement.

Military occupation by Russia and Great Britain was effective from the military point of view : it called a halt to the designs of the Nazis. It will be the task of those who now find service in Persia to show, by their own example, that that occupation was not only necessary but in the best interests of the country.

Immediate necessities are being accepted by the people ; but, as always happens, there will be a time of questioning, and evidence will not be wanting of the normal human tendency to blame anybody but themselves for restrictions inevitable in war-time.

A great opportunity opens. The downfall of the former régime has increased Britain's responsibility. A realistic but considerate outlook will probably serve best ; sympathy with reasonable aspirations to national development, and a helpful, friendly co-operation based on mutual respect will do much. Each individual has a definite service to render to the Empire, to Democracy, and to the world in general.

Nevertheless, it will not be wise for the uninitiated to try to start political discussion. The tendency towards a confederation of countries of the Middle East, the real pressure towards Pan-Islamism, and the joint ambitions of the Arab peoples are factors to recognise, but their ramifications are too great for individual pronouncement. In fact, untutored discussion of these problems, well-intentioned as it may be, will be more likely to lead to disservice than to any constructive good-will.

Health and Kit. The same rules as for the Middle East generally.

~~... to the Red Sea, Aden is~~