GLIMPSES OF WORLD HISTORY

BEING FURTHER LETTERS TO HIS DAUGHTER
WRITTEN IN PRISON, AND CONTAINING
A RAMBLING ACCOUNT OF HISTORY
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

With 50 maps by
J. F. HORRABIN

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African route is meant to go right across the African continent from Cairo to Cape Town in the far south. The all-red Cape-to-Cairo line has long been the dream of British imperialists, and it is well on the way to realization now—"all-red" means that it should pass British territory along the whole route, as red is the colour on the map monopolized by the British Empire.

But these developments may or may not take place in the future, for the railway has got serious rivals now in the motor-car and the aeroplane. Meanwhile it is worth remembering that both these two new railways in western Asia, the Baghdad and the Hejaz, are largely controlled by the British, and serve British policy in opening up a new and shorter route, under their control, to India. Part of the Baghdad Railway passes through Syria, which is under French control. Not liking this dependence on the French, the British intend building a new line through Palestine to take its place. Another little railway is being built in Arabia between Jedda, the port in the Red Sea, and Mecca. This will be a great convenience to the tens of thousands of pilgrims who go to Mecca every year.

So much for the railway system which is opening out these countries of western Asia to the world. And yet even before it has done its job it is losing some of its importance, and is being pushed aside by the motor-car and the aeroplane. The motor-car has taken very readily to the desert, and rushes along the same old caravan routes along which trudged for thousands of years the patient camel. A railway is very costly, and it takes time to build. The motor is cheap and can function immediately whenever required. But motor-cars and lorries do not usually serve long distances; they go backwards and forwards in comparatively small areas of 100 miles at most.

For the great distances there is, of course, the aeroplane, which is both cheaper than the railway and far swifter. There can be no doubt that the use of aircraft will go on increasing rapidly for purposes of transport. Already great progress has been made, and huge air-liners go regularly from continent to continent. Western Asia again becomes a meeting-place of these great air routes, and Baghdad is especially the centre of them. The British Imperial Airways line from London to India and Australia passes Baghdad; also the K.L.M. Dutch line from Amsterdam to Baghavia, and the French line—Air France—from Paris to Indo-China. Moscow and Iran are also connected with Baghdad by air. A passenger to China and the Far East by air has to pass Baghdad. From Baghdad also aeroplanes go to Cairo, connecting with the African service to Cape Town.

Most of these air lines do not pay and are heavily subsidized by their governments, for air-power is all-important to empire to-day. With the development of air-power, the importance of sea-power has diminished greatly. England, which was so proud of its navy, and considered itself secure from attack, has ceased to be an island from the point of view of defence. It is as vulnerable from the air as France or any other country. And so all the great Powers are keen on becoming strong in the air, and the old rivalry on the sea has given place to air rivalry. Passenger traffic by air is encouraged and subsidized by each country in peace-time, as this builds up a service of trained pilots who can be used in time of war. Civil aviation helps the development of military aviation. A rapid development in civil aviation is therefore taking place, and there are hundreds of air services in Europe and America. The progress made is probably greatest in the United States of America; in the Soviet Union also great progress has been made and many air-services run across its vast territories.

In this age of air-power, western Asia attains a new importance because of the many long-distance lines that cross there. It re-enters again world politics and becomes a pivot of inter-continental affairs. This means also that it becomes the scene of friction and conflict between the great Powers, for their ambitions clash, and each tries to overreach the other. If we keep this in mind, we can understand the policy which has shaped British and other activities in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Mosul, besides being situated on this new high road to India, possesses oil, and oil is even more important in the age of air-power than it was before. Iraq possesses important oilfields and, as we have seen, is the very heart of the inter-continental air-system. Hence the great importance for the British of controlling Iraq. Persia has vast oilfields which have long been exploited by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which is partly owned by the British Government. The importance of oil and petrol grows and affects imperialist policies. Indeed modern imperialism has sometimes been called "oil imperialism".

We have considered in this letter some of the factors which have given a new prominence to the Middle East and brought it back into the whirlpool of world politics. But behind all this is the awakening of the whole of the Asiatic East.

THE ARAB COUNTRIES—SYRIA

May 28, 1933

We have seen what a powerful force nationalism has been in binding together and strengthening groups of people living in countries usually with a common language and traditions. While this nationalism binds together one such group, it marks it off and separates it still further from other groups. Thus nationalism makes of France a strong, solid national unit, closely bound together and looking on the rest of the world as something different; so also it makes the different German peoples into one powerful German nation. But this very drawing together separately of France and Germany cuts them off from each other still more.
In a country which has several distinct national groups, nationalism is often a disruptive force which, instead of strengthening and binding together the country, actually weakens it and tends to break it up. The Austro-Hungarian Empire before the World War was such a country with many nationalities, of which two, the German-Austrians and the Hungarians, were the dominant ones, and the others were dependent. The growth of nationalism therefore weakened Austria-Hungary, as it infused fresh life into each of these nationalities separately, and with this came the desire for freedom. The war made matters worse, and the country broke up into little bits when defeat followed the war, each national area forming a separate State. (The division was not a very happy or logical one, but we need not go into that here.) Germany, on the other hand, in spite of a severe defeat, did not break up into bits. It held together even in disaster under the powerful stress of nationalism.

The Turkish Empire before the World War was, like Austria-Hungary, a collection of many nationalities. Apart from the Balkan races, there were the Arabs and the Armenians and others. Nationalism, therefore, proved a disruptive force in this Empire also. The Balkans were first affected by it and, right through the nineteenth century, Turkey had to struggle with the Balkan races, one after the other, beginning with Greece. The great Powers, and especially Tsarist Russia, tried to profit by this awakening nationalism and intrigued with it. They also used the Armenians as a tool to hammer and weaken the Ottoman Empire, and hence the repeated conflicts between the Turkish Government and the Armenians, resulting in bloody massacres. These Armenians were exploited and used for propaganda purposes by the great Powers, but after the World War, when there was no further use for them, they were left to their own fate. Later, Armenia, which lies to the east of Turkey, touching the Black Sea, became a Soviet republic and joined the Russian Soviet Union.

The Arab parts of the Turkish dominions took more time to wake up, although there was little love lost between the Arabs and the Turks. At first there was a cultural awakening and a renaissance of the Arabic language and literature. This began in Syria, as early as the sixties of the nineteenth century, and spread to Egypt and other Arabic-speaking countries. Political movements grew up after the Young Turk revolution in Turkey in 1908 and the fall of Sultan Abdul Hamid. Nationalist ideas spread among the Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, and the idea of freeing the Arab countries from Turkish rule and uniting them in one State took shape. Egypt, though an Arabic-speaking country, was more or less apart politically, and was not expected to join this proposed Arab State, which was meant to include Arabia, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. The Arabs also wanted to get back the religious leadership of Islam by getting the Caliphate transferred from the Ottoman Sultan to an Arab dynasty. Even this was looked upon more as a national move, as redounding to the greater importance and glory
of the Arabs, than as a religious one, and even the Syrian Christian Arabs were favourable to it.

Britain began intriguing with this Arab nationalist movement even before the World War. During the war all manner of promises were made about a great Arab kingdom, and the Sherif Hussein of Mecca, with the hope of becoming a great ruler and the Caliph dangling before him, joined the British and raised an Arab rebellion against the Turks. Syrian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, supported Hussein in his rebellion, and many of their leaders paid for this with their lives, for the Turks sent them to the gallows. May 6 was the day of their execution in Damascus and Beirut, and this day is still observed in Syria in memory of the national martyrs.

The Arab revolt, subsidized by the British, and helped especially by a genius, the British mystery man and secret service agent, Colonel Lawrence, succeeded. By the time the war ended, almost all the Arab dominions of the Turks were under British control. The Turkish Empire had gone to pieces. I have told you that Mustafa Kemal, in his fight for Turkey's independence, never aimed at the conquest of non-Turkish areas (except a part of Kurdistan). Very wisely he stuck to Turkey proper.

So after the war the future of these Arab countries had to be decided. The victorious Allies, or rather the British and the French Governments, piously declared about these countries that their aim was "the complete and definite emancipation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks, and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations". These two governments proceeded to realize this noble aim by sharing among them the greater part of these Arab areas. Mandates, the new way of acquiring territory by the imperialist Powers, with the blessing of the League of Nations, were issued to France and England. France got Syria; England got Palestine and Iraq. The Hejaz, the most important part of Arabia, was put under Britain's protégé, the Sherif Hussein of Mecca. Thus, in spite of the promises made to create a single Arab State, these Arab territories were split up into separate areas under different mandates, with one State, the Hejaz, outwardly independent, but really under the British. The Arabs were greatly disappointed at these partitions, and they refused to accept them as final. But more surprises and disappointments were in store for them, for the old imperialist policy of division, in order to rule the more easily, was practised even within the limits of each mandate. It will be easier to consider each of these countries separately now. So I shall deal with the French mandate, Syria, first.

Early in 1920 an Arab government under the Emir Feisal (son of King Hussein of the Hejaz) was set up in Syria with the help of the British. A Syrian National Congress met and adopted a democratic constitution for a united Syria. But all this was a few months' show only, and in the summer of 1920, the French, with the League of Nations mandate for Syria in their pocket, came and drove out Feisal and took forcible possession of the country. Syria, even taken as a whole, is a small country with a population of less than 3,000,000. But it proved to be a hornets' nest for the French, for the Syrian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, now that they had resolved on independence, refused to submit easily to the domination of another Power. There was continuous trouble, and local insurrections took place, and a huge French army was required in Syria to carry on French rule. The French Government then tried the usual tactics of imperialism and sought to weaken Syrian nationalism by dividing up the country into even smaller States and giving importance to religious and minority differences. It was a deliberate policy, almost proclaimed officially, "to divide in order to rule".

Syria, small as it was, was now split up into five separate States. On the western sea coast and near the Lebanon mountains, the State of Lebanon was created. The majority of the population here consisted of a sect of Christians called the Maronites, and the French gave them a special status to win them over against the Syrian Arabs.

North of Lebanon, also along the coast, another little State was created in the mountains where some Muslim people, called the Alawis, lived. Further north still, a third State, Alexandretta, was established; this adjoined Turkey and was largely inhabited by Turkish-speaking people.

Thus Syria proper, as it now remained, was deprived of some of its most fertile districts and, what was much worse, completely cut off from the sea. For thousands of years Syria had been one of the great Mediterranean countries, and now this ancient alliance was broken up and it had to face the inhospitable desert. Even from this Syria another mountainous bit was cut off and made into a separate State, the Jebel ed Druz, where a tribal people, the Druzes, lived.

From the very beginning the Syrians had not taken kindly to the French mandate. There had been conflicts and big demonstrations, in which Arab women had taken part, and the French had repressed these with a heavy hand. The division of the country, and the deliberate attempt to raise religious and minority problems, made matters worse, and dissatisfaction grew. To put this right, the French, like the British in India, suppressed personal and political liberties and covered the country with their spies and secret service men. They appointed as their officials "loyal" Syrians who had no influence whatever with the people and who were generally regarded as renegades by their own countrymen. All this was done, of course, with the most patriotic motives, and the French proclaimed that they considered it "their duty to educate the Syrians to political maturity and independence"—the phrase has a familiar ring in India!

Matters were coming to a head, especially among the fighting and somewhat primitive people of the Jebel ed Druz (who are not unlike the tribes of our north-west frontier). The French Governor
played a dirty trick on the leaders of these Druzes. He invited them and then made them prisoners and kept them as hostages. This was in the summer of 1925, and immediately an insurrection broke out in the Jebel ed Druz. This local revolt spread all over the country, and became a general rising for Syrian freedom and unity.

This war of Syrian independence was a remarkable affair. A small country, about the size of two or three districts in India, stood up to fight France, which was then the greatest military Power in the world. Of course the Syrians could not fight pitched battles with the huge and well-equipped French armies, but they made it difficult for them to hold the rural areas. Only the large towns were in French possession, and even these were often raided by the Syrians. The French tried their utmost to terrorize the people by shooting down large numbers and burning down numerous villages. The famous old city of Damascus itself was bombarded and largely destroyed in October 1925. The whole of Syria was a military camp. In spite of all this the rising was not put down for two years. It was crushed at last by the mighty French military machine, but the great sacrifices of the Syrians had not been in vain. They had established their right to freedom, and the world knew what stuff they were made of.

It is interesting to notice that while the French tried to give a religious colouring to the rising and tried to use the Christians against the Druzes, the Syrians made it quite clear that they fought for national freedom, and not for a religious objective. Right at the beginning of the insurrection a provisional government was established in the Druze country, and this government issued a proclamation appealing to the people to join the war of independence and win "the complete independence of Syria, one and indivisible . . . the free election of a Constituent Assembly to draft the constitution, the withdrawal of the foreign army of occupation, and the creation of a national army to guarantee security and apply the principles of the French Revolution and the Rights of Man". So the French Government and the French army tried to put down a people who were standing up for the principles of the French Revolution and the rights which it had proclaimed.

Early in 1928 martial law was ended in Syria; also the censorship of the Press. Many political prisoners were released. In accordance with the demand of the nationalists, a Constituent Assembly was convened in order to draw up the constitution. But the French sowed the seeds of trouble by arranging for separate religious electorates (in India now). Separate compartments were created for Muslims, Greek Catholics, Greek Orthodox Church, and Jews, and each voter was compelled to vote for one of his own religious group. A curious and revealing situation arose in Damascus. The leader of the nationalists was a Protestant Christian. Being a Protestant, he did not fall into any of the special electorates, and could not therefore be elected, although he was one of the most popular men in Damascus. The Muslims, who had ten seats, offered to give up one seat, so that it might be given to the Protestants, but the French Government would not agree.

In spite of all these attempts of the French, the nationalists controlled the Constituent Assembly, and they drafted a constitution for an independent and sovereign State. Syria was to be a republic in which all authority was derived from the people. There was no reference in this draft constitution to the French or their mandate. The French protested at this, but the Assembly would not budge an inch, and a truce was signed for many months. At last the French High Commissioner suggested that the draft constitution should be adopted with just one transitional clause to the effect that during the continuance of the mandate no article in the constitution should be applied so as to conflict with France's obligations under the mandate. This was rather vague, but still it was a great climb down for the French. The Constituent Assembly, however, would not agree even to this. The French Government thereupon, in May 1930, dissolved this Assembly and at the same time proclaimed the constitution drafted by it, with the addition of their transitional clause.

So Syria proper had succeeded in obtaining much that it wanted, and yet it had not compromised or given up a single one of its demands. Two things remained: the ending of the mandate, with which would go the transitional clause, and the larger question of Syrian unity. Otherwise the constitution itself is a progressive one, and designed for a perfectly free country. The Syrians showed themselves brave and determined fighters during the great insurrection, and afterwards as equally determined and persistent negotiators, refusing to modify or qualify in any way their demand for full freedom.

In November 1933 France offered a treaty to the Syrian Chamber of Deputies. This Chamber had been packed and consisted of a majority of moderates favourable to the French Government. In spite of this, the treaty was rejected by the Chamber. This was due to France insisting on continuing the existing partition of Syria into five States, and on maintaining camps, barracks, aerodromes, and military forces in Syria.

Note (October) 1938:
The Nazi triumph in Czechoslovakia, and the increasing domination of Europe by Germany and her demand for colonies, have brought about a new situation all over the world. France has sunk back into the second rank of Powers and can hardly maintain for long a vast overseas empire. The difficult situation in Palestine has led to suggestions that Syria and Palestine and Trans-Jordan might be united together in an Arab federation.
ADJOINING Syria is Palestine, for which the British Government holds a mandate from the League of Nations. This is an even smaller country, with a total population of less than a million, but it attracts a great deal of attention because of its old history and associations. For it is a holy land for the Jews as well as Christians and, to some extent, even the Muslims. The people inhabiting it are predominantly Muslim Arabs, and they demand freedom and unity with their fellow-Arabs of Syria. But British policy has created a special minority problem here—that of the Jews—and the Jews side with the British and oppose the freedom of Palestine, as they fear that this would mean Arab rule. The two pull different ways, and conflicts necessarily occur. On the Arab side are numbers, on the other side great financial resources and the world-wide organization of Jewry. So England pits Jewish religious nationalism against Arab nationalism, and makes it appear that her presence is necessary to act as an arbitrator and to keep the peace between the two. It is the same old game which we have seen in other countries under imperialist domination; it is curious how often it is repeated.

The Jews are a very remarkable people. Originally they were a small tribe, or several tribes, in Palestine, and their early story is told in the Old Testament of the Bible. Rather conceived were they, thinking themselves the Chosen People. But this is a concept in which nearly all peoples have indulged. They were repeatedly conquered and suppressed and enslaved, and some of the most beautiful and moving poems in English are the songs and laments of these Jews as given in the authorized translation of the Bible. I suppose in the original Hebrew they are equally, or even more, beautiful. I shall give you just a few lines from one of the Psalms:

"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept: when we remembered thee, O Zion.
As for our harps we hanged them up: upon the trees that are therein.
For they that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody, in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song: in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem: let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem in my heart."

These Jews were finally dispersed all over the world. They had no home or nation, and everywhere they went they were treated as unwelcome and undesirable strangers. They were made to live in special areas of cities, apart from the others—"ghettos"—these areas were called—so that they might not pollute others. Sometimes they were made to put on a special dress. They were humiliated, reviled, tortured, and massacred; the very word "Jew" became a word of abuse, a synonym for a miser and a grasping money-lender. And yet these amazing people not only survived all this, but managed to keep their racial and cultural characteristics, and prospered and produced a host of great men. To-day they hold leading positions as scientists, statesmen, literary men, financiers, business men, and even the greatest socialists and communists have been Jews. Most of them, of course, are far from prosperous; they crowd in the cities of eastern Europe and, from time to time, suffer pogroms or massacres. These people without home or country, and especially the poor among them, have never ceased to dream of old Jerusalem, which appears to their imaginations greater and more magnificent than it ever was in fact. Zion they call Jerusalem, a kind of promised land, and Zionism is this call of the past which pulls them to Jerusalem and Palestine.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century this Zionist movement took gradual shape as a colonizing movement, and many Jews went to settle in Palestine. There was also a renaissance of the Hebrew language. During the World War the British armies invaded Palestine and, as they were marching on Jerusalem, the British Government made a declaration in November 1917, called the Balfour Declaration. They declared that it was their intention to establish a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine. This declaration was made to win the good will of international Jewry, and this was important from the money point of view. It was welcomed by Jews. But there was one little drawback, one not unimportant fact seems to have been overlooked. Palestine was not a wilderness, or an empty, uninhabited place. It was already somebody's home. So that this generous gesture of the British Government was really at the expense of the people who already lived in Palestine, and these people, including Arabs, non-Arabs, Muslims, Christians, and, in fact, everybody who was not a Jew, protested vigorously at the declaration. It was really an economic question. These people felt that the Jews would compete with them in all activities and, with the great wealth behind them, would become the economic masters of the country; they were afraid that the Jews would take the bread out of their mouths and the land from the peasantry.

The story of Palestine ever since has been one of conflict between Arabs and Jews, with the British Government siding with one or the other as occasion demanded, but generally supporting the Jews. The country has been treated as a British colony with no self-government. The Arabs, supported by the Christians and other non-Jewish peoples, have demanded self-determination and complete freedom. They have taken strong objection to the mandate and to fresh immigrants on the ground that there is no room for more. As Jewish immigrants have poured in, their fear and anger have increased. They (the Arabs) have declared that "Zionism had been an accomplice of British imperialism; responsible Zionist leaders had constantly urged what an advantage a strong Jewish National Home would be to the English in guarding the road to India, just
because it was a counteracting force to Arab national aspirations. How India crops up in odd places!

The Arab Congress decided to non-co-operate with the British Government and to boycott the elections to a Legislative Council which the British were forming. This boycott was very successful, and the Council could not be formed. The policy of non-co-operation of a kind lasted for several years; then it weakened to some extent and some groups gave partial co-operation to the British. Even so, the British could not get an elective council, and the High Commissioner governed as an all-powerful sultan.

In 1928 the different Arab groups again united in the Arab Congress and demanded a democratic parliamentary system of government "as of right." They further very bravely stated that "the people of Palestine cannot and will not tolerate the present absolute colonial system of government." An interesting feature of this new wave of Arab nationalism was the stress laid on economic questions. This is always a sign of a growing appreciation of the realities of the situation.

In August 1929 there were big Arab-Jew riots. The real cause was Arab bitterness and fear due to the growing wealth and numbers of the Jews, as well as the Jewish opposition to Arab demands for freedom. The immediate cause, however, was a dispute about the "Wailing Wall", as it is called. This is part of the wall which surrounded Herod's temple in old times, and is thus sacred to the Jews, who look upon it as a monument of the days when they were a great people. Subsequently a mosque was built there, and this wall was made part of the structure. The Jews say their prayers near this wall and, especially, recite their lamentations in a loud voice—hence the name the "Wailing Wall." The Muslims object to this practice near a part of one of their most famous mosques.

After the riots were put down, the struggle continued in other ways, and the curious part of it is that the Arabs had the full support of all Christian churches in Palestine. Both Muslims and Christians thus joined together in great strikes and demonstrations. Even women took a prominent part. This shows that the real trouble was not religious, but economic conflict between the newcomers and the old residents. The League of Nations strongly criticized the British administration for its failure to fulfill its mandatory duties, and especially for having failed to prevent the riots of 1929.

So Palestine continues to be practically a British colony, and in some ways worse than a full-fringed colony, and the British are dominating this state of affairs by playing the Jew against the Arab. It is full of British officials, and all the high posts are occupied by them. As usual with British dependencies, very little has been done for education, in spite of the strong desire of the Arabs for it. The Jews, with their great financial resources, have fine schools and colleges. The Jewish population is already nearly a quarter of the Muslim population, and their economic power is far greater. They seem to look forward to the day when they will be the dominant community in Palestine. The Arabs tried to gain their co-operation in the struggle for national freedom and democratic government, but they rejected these advances. They may have to take sides with the foreign ruling Power, and have thus helped it to keep back freedom from the majority of the people. It is not surprising that this majority, comprising the Arabs chiefly and also the Christians, bitterly resents this attitude of the Jews.

TRANS-JORDAN

Adjoining Palestine, across the river Jordan, is yet another little State, a pre-war creation of the British. This is called Trans-Jordan. It is a tiny area, bordering on the desert and lying between Syria and Arabia. The total population of the State is about 300,000, barely equal to a moderate-sized city! The British Government could have easily joined it on to Palestine, but imperial policy always prefers division to consolidation. This State plays an important part as a step in the overland and air route to India. It is also a useful border State between the desert and the fertile lands leading to the sea on the west. Small as the State is, the same succession of events takes place there as in the larger adjoining countries. There is the popular demand for a democratic parliament which is not agreed to, demonstrations suppressed, censorship, deportations of leaders, boycotts of government measures, and so on. The British cleverly made the Emir Abdullah (another son of King Hussein of the Hejaz and brother of Feisal) the ruler of Trans-Jordan, a puppet ruler entirely under their control. But he is useful in screening the British from the people. He gets the blame for much that happens, and he is very unpopular. Trans-Jordan under Abdullah is in fact something like the many small Indian States we have.

In theory the State is independent, but by a treaty which Abdullah signed with the British in 1928, all manner of military and other privileges are given to Britain. Trans-Jordan, in fact, becomes part of the British Empire. This is another instance, on a small scale, of the new type of independence which flourishes under the British. This treaty and generally this state of affairs is bitterly resented by the people, both Muslim and Christian. The agitation against the treaty was suppressed, even the newspapers supporting it being forbidden, and, as I have mentioned above, the leaders being deported. Thereupon opposition increased, and a National Congress met and adopted a National Pact and denounced the treaty. When the electoral roll for the new elections was being prepared, it was boycotted by the overwhelming majority of the people. Abdullah and the British, however, managed to gather together a few supporters to make a show ratification of the treaty.

During the troubles in Palestine in 1929 there were great demonstrations in Trans-Jordan against the British and the Balfour Declaration.

I go on writing to you, at great length, of happenings in different countries, and they seem to be the same tale repeated again and
again. I do so to make you realize that we have not to deal so much with national peculiarities, as all of us are apt to imagine in our respective countries, as with world forces, with an awakening nationalism all over the East, and with the same technique of imperialism to combat it. As nationalism grows and advances, the tactics of imperialism change slightly; there is no outward attempt to appease and give in so far as forms are concerned. Meanwhile, as this national struggle progresses in the different countries, the social struggle, the class conflict between different classes in each country, also grows more obvious, and the feudal, and to some extent the possessive, classes side more and more with the imperialist Power.

Note (October 1938):
The triangular conflict in Palestine between Arab Nationalism, Jewish Zionism, and British Imperialism has continued and grown more and more desperate. The triumph of the Nazis in Germany drove out vast numbers of Jews from Central Europe, and the Jewish pressure on Palestine increased. This intensified the apprehensions of the Arabs that they would be submerged in a flood of Jewish immigration and that Palestine would be dominated by the Jews. The Arabs fought against this, and some of them took to terrorist activities. Later some of the extremest Zionists retaliated in kind.

In April 1936 the Palestine Arabs declared a general strike which lasted for nearly six months, in spite of every attempt by the British authorities, through military force and reprisals, to crush it. Huge concentration camps grew up after the well-known Nazi pattern. Failing in this endeavour, the government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into Palestine affairs. This Commission reported that the mandate had been a failure and should be surrendered, and suggested a partition of the country into three areas—a large area under Arab control, a small one near the sea under Jewish control, and a third area, including Jerusalem, under direct British control. This scheme of partition was objected to by almost everybody, Arab and Jew, but many of the Jews were prepared to work it. The Arabs, however, would have nothing to do with it, and their national resistance grew. During the last few months this has taken the form of a vast national movement, aggressively hostile to British rule, and gradually displacing it in large areas of Palestine, which passed under the control of the Arab Nationals. The British Government has sent fresh armies for the re-conquest of the country, and a state of terror and frightfulness exists there.

The Arabs unfortunately indulged in a great deal of terrorism. To some extent the Jews did likewise against the Arabs. The British Government has pursued and is pursuing a ruthless policy of destruction and killing, thereby seeking to crush the national struggle for freedom. Methods which are even worse than those employed in the Black and Tan era in Ireland are being practised in Palestine, and a heavy censorship hides them from the rest of the world. Yet what comes through is bad enough. I have just read of Arab

ARABIA—A JUMP FROM THE MIDDLE AGES

"suspects" being herded together by the British military forces in huge barbed-wire enclosures called iron cages, each of these "cages" holding 50 to 400 prisoners, who are fed by their relations, literally like animals in a cage.

Meanwhile the whole Arab world is a flame with indignation, and the East, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, has been deeply affected by this brutal effort to crush a people struggling for their freedom. These people have committed many wrong and terrorist deeds, but it must be remembered that they are essentially fighting for national freedom and have been cruelly suppressed by the forces of British imperialism.

It is a tragedy that two oppressed peoples—the Arabs and the Jews—should come into conflict with each other. Every one must have sympathy for the Jews in the terrible trials they are passing through in Europe, where vast numbers of them have become homeless wanderers, unwanted in any country. One can understand them being attracted to Palestine. And it is a fact that the Jewish immigrants there have improved the country, introduced industries, and raised standards of living. But we must remember that Palestine is essentially an Arab country, and must remain so, and the Arabs must not be crushed and suppressed in their own homelands. The two peoples could well co-operate together in a free Palestine, without encroaching on each other's legitimate interests, and help in building up a progressive country.

Unfortunately Palestine, being on the sea and air route to India and the East, is a vital factor in the British imperial scheme, and Jews and Arabs have both been exploited to further this scheme. The future is uncertain. The old scheme of partition is likely to fall through and a larger Arab federation with a Jewish autonomous enclaves is in the air. It is certain, however, that Arab nationalism in Palestine will not be crushed, and the future of the country can only be built up on the stable foundation of Arab-Jew co-operation and the elimination of imperialism.

168

ARABIA—A JUMP FROM THE MIDDLE AGES

June 3, 1933.

I have been writing to you about the Arab countries, but I have not so far dealt with the fountain-head of the Arabic language and culture and the birthplace of Islam, Arabia itself. The source of Arab civilization though it was, it has remained backward and medieval, and has been far outstripped, according to the tests of our modern civilization, by the neighbouring Arab countries—Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Arabia is an enormous country; in size and area it is about two-thirds as big as India. And yet the population of the whole country is estimated to be 4,000,000 or 5,000,000 only—that is, about one-seventieth or one-eighthieth of the
population of India. It is obvious from this that it is very thinly populated; most of it is indeed a desert, and it was because of this that it escaped the attentions of greedy adventurers in the past, and remained a relic of mediaevalism, without railways or telegraphs or telephones or the like, in the midst of a changing world. It was largely inhabited by wandering nomad tribes—the Bedouins who are called—and they travelled across the desert sands on their swift camels, the "ships of the desert," and on the backs of their beautiful Arab horses, known the world over. They lived a patriarchal life which had changed little in 1000 years. The World War changed all this, as it changed many other things.

If you will look at the map you will find that the great Arabian peninsula lies between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. To the south of it lies the Arabian Sea, to the north lie Palestine and Trans-Jordan and the Syrian desert, and to the north-east the green and fertile valleys of Iraq. Along the west coast, bordering the Red Sea, lies the land of Hejaz, which is the cradle of Islam, containing the holy cities Mecca and Medina and the port, Jeddah, where thousands of pilgrims land every year on their way to Mecca. In the centre of Arabia and towards the east up to the Persian Gulf lies Nejd. The Hejaz and Nejd are the two main divisions of Arabia. In the south-west lies Yemen, known from the old Roman times as Arabia Felix, Arabia the Fortunate, the Happy, because it was fertile and fruitful, in contrast with the rest, which was largely barren and desert. This part is, as one would expect, thinly populated. Almost at the south-western tip of Arabia lies Aden, a British possession and a port of call for ships passing between East and West.

Before the World War nearly the whole country was under Turkish control or acknowledged Turkish lordship. But in Nejd the Emir Ibn Saud was gradually emerging as an independent ruler and was spreading out by conquest to the Persian Gulf. This was in the years preceding the war. Ibn Saud was the head of a particular community or sect of Muslims known as Wahabis, which was founded in the eighteenth century by Abdul Wahab. This was really a reform movement in Islam, something like the Puritans in Christianity. The Wahabis were against many ceremonies and the saint-worship that had become so popular with the Muslim masses, in the form of worship of tombs and what were supposed to be the relics of holy men. The Wahabis called this idolatry, just as the Puritans of Europe had called the Roman Catholics, who worshipped the images and relics of saints, idolaters. Thus, even apart from political rivalry, there was a religious feud between the Wahabis and the other Muslim sects in Arabia.

During the World War Arabia became a hotbed of British intrigue, and British and Indian money was lavishly spent in subsidizing and bribing the various Arab chiefs. All manner of promises were made to them, and they were encouraged to revolt against Turkey. Sometimes two rival chiefs, who were fighting each other, were both receiving British subsidies! The British succeeded in getting the
Sherif Hussein of Mecca to raise the Arab standard of revolt. Hussein's importance consisted in the fact that he was a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, and was therefore greatly respected. Hussein was promised by the British the kingdom of a united Arabia. He was cleverer. He got himself recognized as an independent sovereign by the British, accepted a tidy little sum of £3000 or about Rs. 70,000 per month from them, and promised to remain neutral. So, while others were fighting, he consolidated his position and strengthened it to some extent with the help of British gold. The Sherif Hussein was becoming unpopular in Islamic countries, including India, because of his rebellion against the Sultan of Turkey, who was also then the Caliph. Ibn Saud, by quietly remaining neutral, took full advantage of changing conditions and slowly built up a reputation for himself of being the strong man of Islam.

In the south was Yemen. The Imam, or ruler, of Yemen remained loyal to the Turks right through the war. But he was cut off from the scene of operations and could not do much. After Turkey's defeat he became independent. Yemen is still an independent State. The end of the war found England dominating Arabia and trying to use both Hussein and Ibn Saud as her tools. Ibn Saud was too clever to allow himself to be exploited. The Sherif Hussein's family, however, suddenly blossomed out in full glory, backed as it was by British force. Hussein himself became King of the Hejaz; one of his sons, Feisal, became ruler of Syria; and another son, Abdullah, was made by the British the ruler of the small new state Trans-Jordan. The glory was short-lived, for, as we have seen, Feisal was driven out of Syria by the French, and Hussein's kingship vanished away before the advancing Wahabis of Ibn Saud. Feisal, having joined the unemployed again, was provided by the British with the rulership of Iraq, reigning there by the grace of his patron.

During the brief period of Hussein's kingship of the Hejaz, the Turkish Parliament at Angora abolished the Caliphate in 1924. There was no Caliph, and Hussein, greatly daring, jumped on to the empty throne and proclaimed himself the Caliph of Islam. Ibn Saud saw that his time had come, and he appealed both to Arab nationalism and to Muslim internationalism against Hussein. He stood out as the champion of Islam against an ambitious usurper, and with the help of careful propaganda managed to gain the good will of Muslims in other countries. The Khalifat Committee in India sent him their good wishes. Seeing which way the wind was blowing, and realizing that the horse they had so far backed was not likely to win, the British quietly withdrew their support of Hussein. Their subsidies were stopped, and poor Hussein, who had been promised so much, was left almost friendless and helpless before a powerful and advancing enemy.

Within a few months, in October 1924, the Wahabis entered Mecca and, in accordance with their puritan faith, destroyed some tombs. There was a good deal of consternation in Muslim countries at this destruction; even in India much feeling was aroused. Next year Medina and Jeddah fell to Ibn Saud, and Hussein and his family were driven away from the Hejaz. Early in 1926 Ibn Saud proclaimed himself King of the Hejaz. In order to consolidate his new position and to keep the good will of Muslims abroad, he held an Islamic World Congress at Mecca in June 1926, to which he invited representatives of Muslims from other countries. Apparently he had a desire to become Caliph, and in any event he was not likely to be accepted as such by large numbers of Muslims because of his Wahabisim. King Fuad of Egypt, whose anti-national and despotic record we have already examined, was keen on becoming the Caliph, but nobody would have him, not even his own people of Egypt. Hussein, after his defeat, had abdicated from the Caliphate he had assumed.

The Islamic Congress held at Mecca did not come to any important decision, and it was perhaps not meant to do so. It was a device adopted by Ibn Saud to strengthen his position, especially before foreign Powers. Indian representatives of the Khalifat Committee, and I think Maulana Mohammad Ali was one of them, returned disappointed and angry with Ibn Saud. But this did not make much difference to him. He had exploited the Indian Khalifat Committee when he wanted its help, and now he could well do without its good will.

Ibn Saud was soon master of nearly the whole country with the exception of Yemen, which continued as an independent State under its old Imam. But for this corner in the south-west, he was lord of Arabia and he took the title of King of Nejd, thus becoming a double king, King of Hejaz and King of Nejd. Foreign Powers recognized his independence, and foreigners were not allowed any special privileges, as they are in Egypt still. Indeed, they could not even take wines and other alcoholic drinks.

Ibn Saud had succeeded as a soldier and a fighter. He now set himself the much harder task of adapting his State to modern conditions. From the patriarchal stage it was to jump into the modern world. It appears that Ibn Saud has met with considerable success in this task also, and has thus shown to the world that he is a far-seeing statesman.

His first success was in the putting down of internal disorder. Within a very short time the great caravan and pilgrim routes were perfectly safe. This was a great triumph, and was naturally welcomed by the large numbers of pilgrims who had so far often had to face robbery on the highways.

An even more striking success was the settling of the nomad Bedouins. He started these settlements even before his conquest of the Hejaz, and in this way he laid the foundations of a modern State. It was not easy to settle the restless and wandering and freedom-loving Bedouins, but Ibn Saud has largely succeeded. The administration of the State has been improved in many ways, and aeroplanes and motors and telephones and many other symbols of modern civilization have appeared. Slowly but surely the Hejaz is becoming modernized. But it is not an easy matter to jump
from the Middle Ages to the present day, and the greatest difficulty lies in changing people's ideas. This new progress and change were not to the liking of many of the Arabs; the new-fangled machinery of the West, their engines and motors and aeroplanes, struck them as the inventions of the evil one. They protested against these innovations, and they even rose against Ibn Saud in 1929. Ibn Saud tried to win them over by tact and argument, and succeeded with many. Some continued in their revolt, and were defeated by Ibn Saud.

Another difficulty then faced Ibn Saud, but this was a difficulty which all the world had to face. From 1930 onwards there has been a tremendous slump in trade everywhere. The great industrial countries of the West have felt this most, and are still struggling in its ever-tightening grip. Arabia has little to do with world trade, but the slump made itself felt in another way. The chief source of revenue of Ibn Saud has been the income derived from the great annual pilgrimage to Mecca. About 100,000 pilgrims from foreign countries used to visit Mecca every year. In 1930 there was a sudden drop to 40,000 and the fall continued in subsequent years. This resulted in a complete upsetting of the economic structure of the State, and there was great misery in many parts of Arabia. The lack of money has handicapped Ibn Saud in many ways and put a stop to many of his schemes of reform. He would not give concessions to foreigners, for he rightly feared that foreign exploitation of the country's resources would lead to an increase of foreign influence. And this would mean foreign interference and a lessening of independence. His fears were perfectly justified, for most of the oil from which colonial dependent countries have suffered have arisen from this foreign exploitation. Ibn Saud preferred poverty and freedom to a measure of progress and riches minus freedom.

The pressure due to the trade slump, however, led Ibn Saud to revise his policy a little, and he began to give some concessions to foreigners. But even so he was careful to safeguard his independence, and conditions were laid down for this. For the present concessions are only to be given to foreign Muslim groups. Thus one of the first concessions to be given was to an Indian Muslim group of capitalists for the building of a railway between the port, Jeddah, and Mecca. This railway is a tremendous thing in Arabia, for it revolutionizes the annual pilgrimage. It not only benefits the pilgrims, but also helps greatly in modernizing the Arabs' outlook.

I have already told you in a previous letter of the one railway which exists in present Arabia—the Hejaz Railway, which connects Medina to the Baghdad Railway in Aleppo in Syria.

I have mentioned in the early part of this letter that Yemen in the south-west was known as Arabia Felix. As a matter of fact this name was also applied to a great part of Southern Arabia, stretching almost to the Persian Gulf. But the name is most inappropriate for this area, as it is an inhospitable desert. Perhaps it was not known sufficiently in the past, and thus a mistake was made. Till recently it was unknown territory, one of the few places on the earth's surface which had not been charted and mapped out.

IRAQ AND THE VIRTUES OF AERIAL BOMBING

June 13, 1933

One Arab country remains for us to consider. This is Iraq or Mesopotamia, the rich and fertile land between the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, the land of old Assyry, of Baghdad and Haroun-Al-Rashid and the Arabian Nights. It lies between Persia and the Arabian desert; to the south is its principal port Basra, a little way up the river from the Persian Gulf; in the north it touches Turkey. Iraq and Turkey meet in Kurdistan, the area inhabited by the Kurds. Most of these Kurds are in Turkey now, and I have told you of their struggle for freedom against the Turks. But many Kurds are in Iraq also, and they form an important minority there. Mosul, which was long a bone of contention between Turkey and England, now lies in this northern Kurdish area of Iraq, which means that it is under British control. Near Mosul lie the ruins of ancient Nineveh of the Assyrians.

Iraq was one of the countries for which England received a "mandate" from the League of Nations, a "mandate" being, in the pious language of the League, a "sacred trust" of civilization on behalf of the League of Nations. The idea was that the inhabitants of the mandated territory were not advanced enough or capable of looking after their own interests, and were therefore to be helped in going so by the great Powers. A comparable procedure perhaps would be to appoint a tiger to look after the interests of a number of cows or deer. These mandates were supposed to be given at the desire of the people concerned. The mandates of the countries freed from Turkish rule in western Asia fell to the lot of England and France. The governments of these two countries declared, as I have already told you, that their sole aim was "the complete and definite emancipation of the peoples... and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the various peoples..." What steps have been taken to realize this noble aim during the last dozen years, we have briefly seen so far in Syria, Palestine and Trans-Jordan, where there were repeated disturbances and non-co-operation and boycott. The "initiative and free choice" of the people were then encouraged by shooting them down, deporting and exiling their leaders, suppressing their newspapers, destroying their cities and villages, and often proclaiming martial law. There is nothing novel in such happenings. Imperialist Powers have indulged in violence and destruction and terrorism from the earliest days of historic record. The novel feature of the modern type of imperialism is its attempt to hide its terrorism and exploitation behind pious phrases about "trusteeship" and the "good of the masses" and the "training of backward peoples in self-government" and the like. They shoot and kill and destroy only for the good of the people shot down. This hypocrisy may be perhaps a sign of