GLIMPSES OF
WORLD HISTORY

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

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With 50 maps by
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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 trade 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 at present in 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 7, 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 Harounal-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 the 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 doing 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 indigenous populations.

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 happening. 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
advance, for hypocrisy is a tribute to virtue, and it shows that the truth is not liked, and is therefore wrapped up in these comforting and deluding phrases, and thus hidden away. But somehow this sanctimonious hypocrisy seems far worse than the brutal truth.

Let us now see how the wishes of the inhabitants were given effect to in Iraq, and how this country has marched to freedom under the British flag. During the World War the British, as a matter of policy, annexed Iraq, or Mesopotamia as it was used to be called then, their base for operations against Turkey. They flooded the country with British and Indian troops. They suffered one big defeat in April 1916, when a British army under General Townshend had to surrender to the Turks at Kutal-Amara. There was terrible waste and mismanagement in the whole of the Mesopotamian campaign, and as the Indian Government was largely responsible for this, it came in for a great deal of stinging criticism for its inefficiency and stupidity. However, the great resources of the British told in the long run, and they drove the Turks north and captured Baghdad and later almost reached Mosul. At the end of the war the whole of Iraq was under British military occupation.

The first reaction of the grant of the Iraq mandate to England was seen early in 1920. There were strong protests against this, and the protests soon developed into disturbances, and the disturbances into a rebellion, which spread to the whole country. It is a curious and interesting fact that this first half of 1920 saw more or less simultaneous disturbances in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Persia. Even in India in those days non-co-operation was in the air. The rebellion in Iraq was ultimately crushed, largely with the help of troops from India. It has long been the function of the Indian Army to do the dirty work of British imperialism, and because of this, our country has been made sufficiently unpopular in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The Iraq rebellion was put down by the British, partly by force and partly by assurances of future independence. They established a provisional government with Arab ministers, but behind each minister was a British adviser, who was the real power. Even these tame and nominated ministers proved to be too aggressive for British liking. British plans demanded a complete subservience of Iraq, and some of the ministers refused to be parties to this. Therefore, in April 1921 the British arrested and exiled the leading minister, Sayyid Talib Shah, who was the ablest of the lot, and another step was thus taken in preparing the country for independence. In the summer of 1921, Feisal, the son of Hussein of the Hejaz, was brought over by the British and presented to the Iraqis as their future king. Feisal, you will remember, was just then unemployed, as his Syrian venture had collapsed before the French attack. He was a good friend of the British, and had taken a leading part in the Arab revolt against Turkey during the World War. He was thus likely to be more amenable to British plans than the local ministers had so far been. The "notables", the rich middle class and other leading personalities, agreed to have Feisal as king on condition that the government was a constitutional one with a democratic parliament. They had little choice in the matter. What they wanted was a real parliament, and as Feisal was likely to be king anyhow, they made this parliament a condition. The people generally were not consulted. So Feisal became king in August 1921.

But this was no solution of the problem, for the Iraqi people were very much opposed to the British mandate and wanted complete independence and then unity with the other Arab countries. Agitation and demonstrations continued, and matters came to a head a year later, in August 1922. The British authorities then gave a further lesson in independence to the Iraqis. The British High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, put an end to the power of the King (who was ill then) as well as that of the ministry and of the council which Iraq had been given, and took full charge of the government himself. In fact he became the absolute dictator, and he enforced his will and suppressed disturbances with the help of British forces, and especially the British Air Force. The old story, which we find everywhere with variations—India, Egypt, Syria, etc.—was repeated. Nationalist newspapers were suspended, the parties were dissolved, leaders were exiled, and British aeroplanes with their bombs established the might of the British Empire.

Again this was no solution of the problem. After a few months Sir Percy Cox permitted the King and the ministry to function outwardly, and got them to agree to a treaty with Britain. Assurances were again given that England would help Iraq to independence, and even make her a member of the League of Nations. Behind these beautiful and comforting promises lay the solid fact that the Iraq Government was made to agree to run the administration with the help of British officers, or those approved by Britain. This treaty of October 1922 was made over the heads of the people, and was condemned by them. It was pointed out that the Arab Government was a sham and that the real power continued to be the British authority. The leaders decided to boycott the elections to the National Constituent Assembly, which was called to draw up the future constitution. This non-co-operation was successful and the Assembly could not meet. There were also disturbances and difficulties in collecting taxes.

For over a year, right through 1923, these troubles continued. At length some changes, favourable to Iraq, were made in the treaty, and some of the leading agitators were exiled. The agitation lessened, and early in 1924 elections for the Constituent Assembly could be held. This Assembly also opposed the British treaty. Strong pressure was brought to bear upon it by the British, and at last the treaty was ratified by a little over a third of the members, a large number of the deputies not even attending this session.

The Constituent Assembly drafted a new constitution for Iraq, and on paper it seemed a fair one, laying down that Iraq was a sovereign and independent free State with a constitutional hereditary monarchy and a parliamentary form of government. But of the two houses of parliament one, the Senate, was to be nominated by
the King. Thus the King had great power, and behind the King were the British officials who occupied the key positions. This constitution came into force in March 1925, and for some years the new Parliament functioned, but the protest against the mandate continued. A great deal of attention was concentrated on the dispute between England and Turkey about Mosul, for Iraq was also a claimant of this area. This dispute was finally settled in June 1929, by a joint treaty between England, Iraq, and Turkey. Mosul went to Iraq, and as Iraq itself lies in the shadow of British imperial power, British interests were thus safeguarded.

In June 1930 there was a fresh treaty of alliance between Britain and Iraq. Again Iraq's full independence, both in home and foreign affairs, was recognized. But the safeguards and the exceptions were such as to convert this independence into a veiled protectorate. In order to safeguard the route to India, Britain's "essential communications", as the treaty says, Iraq provides England with sites for air bases. Britain also maintains troops in Mosul and elsewhere. Iraq is only to have British military instructors, and British officers are to serve in an advisory capacity with the Iraq forces. Arms, ammunitions, aircraft, etc., are to be obtained from Britain. In case of war Britain is to have all facilities in the country in order to carry on warlike operations against the enemy. Thus from the strategic area round Mosul England can strike easily at Turkey, Persia, or at the Soviets in Azerbaijan.

This treaty was followed by 1931 by a Judicial Agreement between Britain and Iraq, in which Iraq undertakes to employ a British Judicial Adviser, a British President of the Court of Appeal, and British presidents at Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and other places.

Besides these provisions it appears that British officials occupy many high offices. In effect, therefore, this "independent" country is practically a protectorate of England, and the treaty of alliance of 1930, which ensures this, is for twenty-five years.

Although the new Parliament functioned after the adoption of the new constitution in 1925, the people were far from satisfied, and in the outlying areas disturbances sometimes took place. This was especially the case in the Kurdish areas, where there were repeated outbreaks, which were suppressed by the British Air Force by the gentle practice of bombing and destroying whole villages. After the treaty of 1930 the question arose of Iraq being made a member of the League of Nations under British auspices. But the country was not at peace, and disturbances continued. This was neither to the credit of the mandatory Power, England, nor to that of the existing government of King Feisal, for these results were proof enough that the people were not satisfied with the government that had been thrust upon them by the British. It was considered very undesirable that these matters should come up before the League, and so a special effort was made to put an end to these disturbances by force and terrorism. The British Air Force was used for this purpose, and the result of its attempts to bring peace and order may be appreciated to some extent from the description of an eminent

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English officer. Lt.-Col. Sir Arnold Wilson, in the course of the anniversary lecture to the Royal Asiatic Society in London on June 8, 1932, referred to "the pertinacity with which (notwithstanding declarations at Geneva) the R.A.F. has been bombing the Kurdish population for the last ten years, and in particular the last six months. Devastated villages, slaughtered cattle, maligned women and children bear witness to the spread, in the words of the special correspondent to The Times, of a uniform pattern of civilization."

Finding that the people of the villages often ran away and hid themselves on the approach of an aeroplane, and were not sporting enough to wait for the bombs to kill them, a new type of bomb—the time-delayed bomb—was used. This did not burst on falling, but was so wound up as to burst some time afterwards. This devilish ruse was meant to mislead the villagers into returning to their huts after the aeroplanes had gone and then being hit by the bursting of the bomb. Those who died were the comparatively fortunate ones. Those who were maligned, whose limbs were torn away sometimes, or who had other serious injuries, were far more unfortunate, for there was no medical aid available in those distant villages.

So peace and order were restored, and the Government of Iraq presented itself under British auspices before the League of Nations and was admitted as a member. It has been said, truly enough, that Iraq was "bombed" into the League. Iraq having become a member State of the League, the British mandate is over. It has been replaced by the treaty of 1930, which ensures effective British control of the State. Dissatisfaction at this state of affairs continues, for the people of Iraq want complete freedom and the unity of Arab nations. Membership of the League of Nations does not interest them much, for as most other oppressed people in the East, that the League is just an instrument in the hands of the great European Powers to further their own colonial and other ends.1

We have now finished our survey of the Arab nations. You will have noticed how all of them, in common with India and other Eastern countries, were powerfully moved by waves of nationalism after the World War. It was like an electric current passing through them all at the same time. Another remarkable feature was the similarity of methods adopted. There were insurrections and violent rebellions in many of these countries, but gradually they came to rely more and more on a policy of non-co-operation and boycott. There is no doubt that the fashion in this new method of resistance was set by India in 1920, when the Congress followed Mahatma Gandhi's lead. The idea of non-co-operation and the boycott of legislatures has spread from India to other countries of the East, and become one of the well-recognized and frequently practised methods of the struggle for national freedom.

1 King Feisal died in September 1933 and was succeeded by his son Ghazi I, who was killed in an accident in 1939, and who was succeeded by his baby son.
I should like to draw your attention to an interesting contrast between English and French methods of imperialist control. England, in all her colonial countries, tried to form an alliance with the feudal, the landowning, and the most conservative and backward classes. We have seen this in India, in Egypt, and elsewhere. She created shaky thrones in her colonial countries and put reactionary rulers on them, well knowing that they would support her. Thus she put Faud in Egypt, Feisal in Iraq, Abdullah in Trans-Jordan, and she tried to put Hussein in the Hejaz. France, on the other hand, being herself a typical bourgeois country, tries to find support in some parts of the bourgeoisie of the colonial countries, the rising middle classes. In Syria, for instance, she looked to the Christian middle classes for support. Both England and France in all the colonial countries under them rely principally on the policy of weakening the nationalism opposed to them by dividing it and creating minority, racial, and religious problems. Nationalism is, however, gradually surmounting these divisions all over the East, and nowhere more so perhaps than in the Arab countries of the Middle East, where religious groups are becoming weaker before the ideal of a common nationality.

I have told you above about the activities of the British R.A.F. (Royal Air Force) in Iraq. For the last dozen years or so it has become the definite policy of the British Government to use aeroplanes to do "police work", as it is called, in their semi-colonial countries. This is done especially where a measure of self-government is given and the administration is largely indigenous. Armies of occupation are not kept now in these countries, or are reduced greatly. This has many advantages. A great deal of money is saved, and the military occupation of a country is less in evidence. At the same time aeroplanes and bombs give them complete control over the situation. In this way the use of bombing from aeroplanes has increased greatly in independent areas, and the British probably use this method far more than any other Power. I have told you about Iraq. The same story can be repeated for the North-West Frontier of India, where this kind of bombing is a regular and frequent occurrence.

This method may be cheaper and more expeditious than the old one of sending an army. But it is a terribly cruel and ghastly method. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine anything more disgustingly barbarous than to throw bombs, and especially time-delayed bombs, on whole villages, and destroy innocent and guilty alike. This method also makes an invasion of another country very easy. So an outcry has arisen against it, and eloquent speeches are delivered at Geneva at the League of Nations against the barbarity of attacking civilian populations by air. All the nations, including the United States, were in favour of the total abolition of aerial bombardment. But the British insisted on reserving the right to use aircraft for "police purposes" in the colonies, and this prevented agreement in the League as well as at the Disarmament Conference held in 1933.

AFGHANISTAN AND SOME OTHER COUNTRIES OF ASIA

June 8, 1933

AFGHANISTAN AND COUNTRIES OF ASIA

To the east of Iraq lies Iran or Persia, and to the east of Persia lies Afghanistan. Both Persia and Afghanistan are India's neighbours, for the Persian frontier touches India (in Baluchistan) for several hundred miles, and Afghanistan and India lie side by side for about 1000 miles from the extreme western tip of Baluchistan to the northern mountains of the Hindu Kush, where India rests her snowy head on the heart of Central Asia, and looks down upon the territories of the Soviets. Not only are these three countries neighbours, but racially they are akin, for the old Aryan stock dominates in all of them. Culturally, as we have seen, they have had much in common in the past. Till recently, Persian was the language of the learned in northern India, and even now it is popular, especially among the Muslims. In Afghanistan Persian is still the Court language, the popular language of the Afghans being Pashto.

About Persia I do not wish to add to what I have already told you in previous letters. But recent events in Afghanistan deserve a brief mention. Afghan history is almost a part of Indian history; indeed, for long Afghanistan was part of India. Since its separation, and especially during the last 100 years or more, it has been a buffer State between the two great empires of Russia and England. The Russian Empire has gone and given place to the Soviet Union, but Afghanistan still plays its old part of buffer, where Englishmen and Russians intrigue and try to gain the mastery. The nineteenth century saw these intrigues develop into wars between England and Afghanistan, which resulted in many British disasters but the ultimate supremacy of England. Many Afghan detenus, members of the Afghan royal family, are still scattered about northern India, and remind us of England's interventions in Afghanistan. Amir friendly to the British came to rule, and Afghanistan's foreign policy was definitely put under British control. But, however friendly these Amirs were, they could not be wholly relied upon, and subsidies of large sums of money were given to them annually by the British. Such was the Amir Abdur Rahman, who had a long reign, ending in 1901. He was followed by the Amir Habibullah, who was also well inclined towards the British.

One of the reasons for Afghanistan's dependence on the British in India was the position of the country. You will see in the map that it is cut off from the sea by Baluchistan. It was thus a house with no means of reaching the highway except through someone else's grounds, and this is a troublesome affair. Its easiest way of