

MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT

OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, XXI

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Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *Iraq. "A Going Concern" – with a Proviso*, in «The Manchester Guardian», Tuesday, October 15, 1929, p. 9. Dated «Bushire, September 16th». Special Article. Reprinted in A.J. Toynbee, *A Journey to China; or, Things which are seen*, London, Constable, 1931, pp. 110-115. See also https://www.academia.edu/106058322/Arnold_Joseph_Toynebee_Iraq_1929_

NOTES

Toynbee's article was introduced by the English newspaper with the following words: «Professor Toynbee is contributing a series of articles to the "Manchester Guardian" while travelling to China and Japan by way of the Near and Middle East. He describes in the following article the success of the British as mandatories for Iraq and the one condition of its completion».

Toynbee's article had been advertised in «The Manchester Guardian», Monday, October 14, 1929, p. 8: «An article by Arnold Toynbee who is travelling to the Far East and writing to the "Manchester Guardian" as he goes, will be published in to-morrow's paper. Mr. Toynbee contrasts Syria, where the French hold the Mandate, with Iraq, where Britain is the Mandatory, and discusses interestingly the people of Iraq and their future».

For the liberal imperialist attitude of the «Guardian» towards the 'Iraqi question see *A New State*, in «The Manchester Guardian», Saturday, September 21, 1929, p. 12 (leading article): «Great Britain has offered to support Iraq's claim to membership of the League of Nations in 1932. At present the relations of the two countries are regulated both by treaty and by the terms of the mandate. That is an anomalous situation which has never satisfied the Irani and which the British taxpayer has found expensive. The new decision amounts to an avowal that our task as a Mandatory Power is over. A Class A mandate is by definition temporary; it is a trust which ends when the inhabitants of the mandated territory are held to be ready to stand on their own feet. The Iraqi, of course, have long considered themselves ready for complete self-government. Their claim is known to have been supported by Sir Gilbert Clayton, who died when the success of the policy he had sponsored was almost in sight. The renunciation of our mandate, however, does not mean that Great Britain will altogether withdraw from Iraq. The difficulty is, of course, the turbulent Arabian frontier, and the new treaty which will adjust our relationship with Iraq before we support her entrance into the League is likely to follow the pattern of the new Anglo-Egyptian settlement. Iraq has so far been associated in the minds of the British public with inexhaustible oil wells that have proved exhaustible, with archaeological excavations in places with familiar names like Ur of the Chaldees, and with wild

tribesmen and bombing aeroplanes. To-day it gains for itself a new distinction as the first place in which the white man has voluntarily laid down at least a part of his self-imposed burden».

IRAQ: "A GOING CONCERN" – WITH A PROVISIO

by Arnold Joseph Toynbee

I cannot write of Iraq without writing first of Sir Gilbert Clayton. I was his guest at the moment of his sudden and utterly unexpected death; and during the last few days of his life I had some opportunity of seeing how he dealt with the crisis (now, I hope, past) which arose in Iraq, as in Syria, when the bad news came from Palestine. It would be impertinence in me to attempt to appraise his work. I will only say that, after following it at second hand with admiration for a number of years, I admired it even more when I saw it at close quarters. The late British High Commissioner in Iraq combined, I imagine, all the varied and difficult qualification that his office demanded. He had performed distinguished public service in all the neighbouring Arab countries: the Sudan and Egypt, Syria and Palestine, the Hedjaz and Najd, and the Yaman. And his experience had made him a practised diplomatist as well as a practised administrator. But the essential point was his personality, in which (if a comparative stranger may venture to judge) the decisiveness of the man of action went hand in hand with a spontaneous kindness towards his fellow-men – of whatever race and whatever station. He died at fifty-four – an age at which successful men of action are often just becoming ripe to do their best work. Had he lived, he would assuredly have been remembered as the man who consummated Great Britain's task in Iraq by securing the admission of Iraq to membership in the League of Nations. This was the work immediately ahead of him. That work must now be undertaken by other hands; but it will not be easy to find hands so apt as Sir Gilbert Clayton's for carrying it out.

The Syrian Torso

When one enters Iraq from Syria one's spirits rise, for Syria to-day is a sad country. «You should have seen our city before the present regime», they say to you at Aleppo; and at Damascus they say the same. The mischief was done by the political map-makers at the Peace Conference of Paris – or, rather, by the authors of “the secret agreements” that were negotiated between the principal Allied Powers during the war; for the new map of the Middle East was virtually settled before the Peace Conference began. The territory mandated to France is a torso without the limbs. Aleppo, whose merchants once traded as far as the Black Sea, is now cut off on the north by the new Syro-Turkish frontier, which runs east and west at hardly more than thirty miles' distance from the city. Damascus, which used to be the mart for the whole of Central Arabia, is similarly cut off on the south – little more than sixty miles away – by the new frontier between the territories mandated respectively to France and Great Britain. Syria is being strangled. «Fate has been cruel to us», the Syrians lament; and so they are living in the past. But Iraq is a “going concern” and the Iraqis are living in the future. The difference of atmosphere is very striking.

No doubt this general atmosphere of optimism has helped the English and the Iraqis to establish the remarkably good relations on which they are now living with one another. They meet at play as well as at work, and this social intercourse is not clumsy or frigid, as it would tend to be if it were a plant that had been artificially fostered for reasons of State. At Bagdad, when the Prime Minister dines with the High Commissioner, everybody seems to be at ease; and it is the same in a provincial town when the local Iraqi governor dines with the local British doctor and administrative inspector and police mufettish. On the polo-field, again, you find Englishmen and Iraqis playing together. On the afternoon on which I went to watch the game one of the Iraqi players was a police-trooper whom the English inspector had picked out as a fine rider. He rode a police pony. Both snobberv and race feeling were conspicuous by their absence.

British-Iraqi Relations

This social amity is creditable to both nations particularly when one takes account of the political background. For the footing on which Iraqis and British have been co-operating in the government of Iraq for the last eight years is not at all easy for either party to maintain with a good grace. The executive authority is all in Iraqi hands; the British officials, from the High Commissioner downwards and whether they are in the British or in the Iraqi service, are advisors. There is plenty of opportunity for misunderstanding here. The Iraqi official might easily persuade himself that, under the Englishman's tutelage, he was reigning without being allowed to govern; the British adviser might persuade himself that his suggestions were being wantonly ignored with the object of diminishing his prestige and influence. In fact, both parties will tell you frankly that, when the present regime was introduced in 1921, they never expected that it would work; and they will go on to tell you, equally frankly, that their expectations have been agreeably falsified.

The success of the present regime is the more remarkable when one remembers that it was a second thought, suggested by trial and error. From the beginning of the British military occupation of Iraq, during the Great War, until after the end of the Iraqi Insurrection of 1920 Iraq was under direct British administration, like some Indian province in the days before the Parliament at Westminster started to implement the Act of 1917. Many of the British advisers of to-day were the administrators of yesterday, and many of the Iraqi administrators of to-day were yesterday up in arms against the British because they found it intolerable to be treated as "natives".

A Word of Warning

In retrospect it is possible to see that, in Iraq, direct British administration could not work as a permanent regime. The reason was that Iraq had formerly belonged to the Ottoman Empire; and in the Ottoman Empire – in those pre-war days before Turkish national Chauvinism had got the bit between its teeth – there was no impassable barrier, either political or social, between the Turks and any of their Sunni Moslem fellow-subjects, whether these were Albanians or Bosniaks or Pomaks or Cretans or Kurds or Lazes or Circassians or

Arabs. Careers were open to all; and though the non-Turkish Sunni might not rise to the highest positions in the Empire so easily as his Turkish coreligionist – or at any rate not in his home province – he did not feel himself to be a member of a subject race. Accordingly, the British attitude towards “natives” came to him as a shock. In 1921, at Constantinople, I saw how Turks reacted to the attitude of British officers in the Indian units of the Allied Army of Occupation. By analogy, I can picture how, in Iraq, the bitterness mounted up until it came to a violent head in 1920. It is amazing that, after that tragic denouement, both Englishman and Iraqi should have succeeded in forgetting the past and placing their relations on an entirely new basis.

But here I must say a word of warning. The present equilibrium between Englishman and Iraqi is wonderful, but it is not stable. It depends on the existence of a sincere conviction – and this on both sides – that the present regime is transitional, and that the complete sovereign independence of Iraq is the goal that lies within a measurable distance ahead. The symbol that Iraq has come of age will be her admission to membership in the League of Nations; for this is apparently the only legal method of extinguishing a mandate (and, from the standpoint of the League, Iraq is still a territory mandated to Great Britain, though Great Britain and Iraq, according to the understanding that exists between them, are already a pair of sovereign independent States in treaty relations with one another). The question of Iraq being admitted to the League is due to come up next in 1932; Great Britain is pledged to do her utmost to obtain a favourable verdict (unless, in the interval, some unforeseen obstacle arises, and there is no reason to expect that this will happen); and if Great Britain sponsors Iraq what State member of the League will have the effrontery to oppose her candidature? There seems no reason why the date of application should not be advanced so as to coincide with the session of the Assembly in the autumn of 1931. On the other hand, if the date were to be deferred for any reason – good or bad – I feel certain that the consequences would be very serious. The mutual confidence on which the present good relations between the Iraq Government and its British advisers entirely depend might break down with a crash. In a moment all the work of eight years might be undone. We might find ourselves back in 1920 – with the unpleasant difference that, on the strength of the present understanding, the British forces in Iraq have been rightly reduced to a detachment of the Air Force and a

handful of Assyrian levies. This is eminently a situation in which excessive caution may be still more dangerous than rashness. It is to be hoped that the Colonial Office realises this truth now, and that Parliament will realise it when the time for Parliamentary action arrives.

Iraqi and Iraqi

Meanwhile, the good relations between Englishmen and Iraqis happily endure; and one of the main functions of the British advisers is to mitigate the divisions between Iraqi and Iraqi. These cleavages run along several different lines: between Sunni and Shi'i; between town and country; and between tribe and tribe. In order to govern their own country quite independently the Iraqis must learn how to keep these various feuds within safe bounds. The tension between Sunni and Shi'i ought to diminish as the Shi'is become accustomed to take that share in the public life of Iraq which their numbers warrant and indeed demand, instead of living rather sullenly aloof as the minority that they were when Iraq belonged to the Ottoman Empire. The tension between town and country ought to diminish as the spread of education assists the landowners and peasants to hold their own, in business as well as in politics, against the "efendis". The tension between tribe and tribe ought to diminish as the tribesmen acquire other interests in life besides the blood-feud – for instance, an interest in motor cars.

The use of cars in Iran is increasing rapidly – and this not only in the towns but right out in the countryside. The Iraqis evidently possess a hitherto unexercised talent for mechanics. They can make a car that no English chauffeur would touch run on roads that no English chauffeur would look at. And this rapid spread of a rough-and-ready knowledge of mechanics is of capital importance for the future of the country. The Iraqis who driving Ford cars over their roads to-day will be using tractors on their fields to-morrow – for this great plain of Babylonia is designed by Nature for cultivation by machinery. Machines will supply the place of human hands – for, at present, scarcity of labour is the limiting factor in the extension of cultivation – and when the country is fully cultivated it will fill up with population

in due time. Yes. Iraq is a “going concern”. All will be well, so long as politics do not interfere with the economic progress that the country is visibly making.