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Allenby in Egypt

BY PROFESSOR J. L. MORISON.*

Mr. President and gentlemen;—It is a great anti-climax to come here expecting to listen to the most brilliant of journalists in Britain and to find that harmless drudge, a University professor. There is only one thing I will say in answer to the president's statement that I had been in the custom of stepping into *breaches*; I would point out that our regimental tradition is that you may wear the kilt, but there must be nothing else beneath.

I need no apology for introducing this subject to you: "Allenby in Egypt—a Phase of the Eastern Question." We have all of us got to think in the Imperial. Imperialism, in the large sense of the word, no longer stands where it did. The Imperial problem presents a dilemma that Canada has to settle in her mind, a dilemma that will dictate her policy for the rest of her national career. Between, there is independence with its apparent security, but implying the renunciation of interest in the rest of the world. The United States, which is faced with the same question, at the present moment has chosen that alternative. But, gentlemen, there is no Munroe Doctrine in the laws of nature. You may abstain and retreat, but as surely as the world is growing, the forces of that world that you are trying to leave will break in on you; and the necessary consequence of your abstention will be that when the enemy acts you must act, but at his dictation and not at yours.

I take it that we of the Canadian nation, and we are a nation, are prepared for co-operation for the good of the rest of the world. There is a shattered civilization to be remade, and only by such solid nations as Canada taking their full share in this great task of the world can it be accomplished.

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Owing to the speaker previously arranged for this meeting not being able to come, on account of the small pox quarantine, Professor Morison advanced the date of his meeting one week.

I would like to see in every center of the Empire a Bureau of World Information. I would like to see the University of Toronto and every other University throughout the Empire equipped with a Bureau of Information and professors of Imperial Policy and Imperial Political Science. Gentlemen, the day of the village patriot is over—except, perhaps, across the border.

Now I must come to the task itself; why were we in Egypt at all? Many may ask that question. I do not wish to go over that long story of misgovernment, bankruptcy, and mismanagement which landed Egypt in the old days in a hopeless condition. There are certain outside critics who question the position of Britain in Egypt. All I can say is that the hands of British statesmen are clean—only too clean, as a matter of fact—and our friends across the border, when they passed criticism on the position of Britain might very well compare the policy which landed Britain in Egypt with the policy which separated the Republic of Panama from the Republic of Colombia and secured an American territory around the Panama Canal. Compare the two transactions: the English transaction stands as clear as day. We had to go into Egypt: Our statesmen wished to get out and they could not.

The moment England went into Egypt the Eastern question took on a new and interesting aspect. There was a day when Constantinople was the center of that question. Constantinople is still a glorious tradition, but it is obsolete now. Statesmen did not understand that it does not matter to Britain what happens in Constantinople; but it matters all over the world what happens at Alexandria, Port Said, and the Suez Canal—that is the very center of British world-power. Whatever touches that touches the heart of the Empire, and it touches you in Canada as much as it touches us in Britain.

When that Eastern question had come to its acutest in Egypt, the Germans—and I am not speaking by report, I am speaking of what I know—had launched their great scheme. Of course, everyone knows that the Germans had intended to organize Turkey as a kind of German India. Why should they not? But the German is never noted for moderation. He is always reaching out to something further. And I can tell you from knowledge that Egypt in times of peace had been honey-combed by German spies.

There are still, I believe, a few individuals who doubt whether Britain was quite justified in taking the action she did in Egypt. In every corner of the British Empire there were enough reasons from German interference to launch a war,

and there never was a better reason for British action than Germany's manipulation in Egypt. The Germans had their hands deep in the life of Egypt. Their secret service was preparing a rising against Great Britain, and the first definite entry of the British army into that scene of action came with an attempted rising on the part of the so-called Nationalist Party. When I hear talk of Egyptian Nationalism I want to know who the Nationalist is, for whom he is speaking, whether it is the peasant, the millions of laborers, or a few disappointed intriguers in the slums of Cairo.

Late in 1914 and early in 1915 the Turk passed down Syria, throwing some troops across the desert, and hoped to find a rebellious Egypt. British action, smart and definite, ended that visit. In the action which followed the Turks admitted one wounded Turk, but the men who fought in that action know something different. Nothing but British readiness foiled that plan.

Well, gentlemen, that is why we entered the great fight in the East. We had to do it for the sake of the British Empire; and we had to fight at that point because the Germans made us fight there; and it was as big an issue we were fighting there as Jellicoe and Beatty were fighting in the North Sea. Breaking the British Empire at that point would be nearly as bad as a defeat for the fleet in the North Sea.

I do not intend to take you into the history of the various stages of the two campaigns, but shall give just one or two points and characteristics. Why could not we stop, say, at the Canal? Or why not stop at the edge of Palestine? Was it unwise for us to push on? No. Lord Kitchener came out; and with that grand strategic view he always had he said, "Why are you allowing the Canal to defend you. You must defend the Canal;" and he passed his men across to the other side.

From the moment Kitchener flung the British troops into the Sinai Peninsula there was no logical stopping place. I remember that we halted at the edge of the desert, and men said, "We are going to stay here." When we got to Gaza we thought we would stop there; and then the capture of Jerusalem seemed to be the end of the campaign. But there was an irresistible force driving on the British to carry their arms straight on to Aleppo.

The prize to be won was one of Germany's chief objectives in this war. I do not know if any of you remember an article in the *London Times*, in which a neutral said there were two things that would end German power; one, a defeat in the

West; the other, the frustration of the German hopes in the East. Allenby was carrying out that neutral's prediction, and he could not stop until he reached Aleppo.

Under the glory of Allenby's work I think the British Empire is forgetting somewhat the valuable, steady and untiring work that was done before he came. I had the pleasure and honor of taking part in that march up the Sinai Peninsula. Our soldiers there fought nobly. From the day Kitchener put his troops across onto the sand until Allenby took things over there was steady and untiring purpose both on the part of the cavalry and infantry. It was in those months that two great engineering exploits were accomplished. A railway and a pipe-line containing drinkable water were flung across the desert. By a curious coincidence one of the oldest trade routes in the world is now marked by a British railway and pipe line, and after trade begins to flow freely once more the work done by the engineers will stand forever. It is a commercial asset.

At this point may I make one or two confessions of the pleasures of those old days. Pleasures in a desert, you say? There are patches of that desert campaign that will live forever in my mind. I can see in my mind's eye now a picture where there was moonlight, and clear bright stars were shining, and in front of me was a great level plain—formerly covered with water, then dry and glistening with salt and gypsum—and one looked away to the east through infinite stretches of shining white, saw the sands of the desert as white as Canadian snow, and one felt this was Life and one never lived it before; and one began to think that a professor's job was a poor thing compared to it.

There was another glorious day. We had been tramping through the desert day after day through the heat; and always sand, and sand, and sand. One day we got on to a sand hill and I climbed to the top. Now, my battalion came from the western coast of Scotland, we had all been born by the sea. From that hill, away on the northern sky line we saw just a little glimpse of Mediterranean blue, and I watched that day Highlander after Highlander climbing that hill and in a kind of shame faced way take a peep at the sea and go back to dream of home beside the western waters.

And there were pleasurable nights in the trenches, because trench life was better and more endurable there than in France—the Turk had certain funny habits of slackening his combative energies at certain periods—and I can think of the song in the night, of the twittering of birds, of the fresh north-winds

blowing in from the Mediterranean. One felt then that after all it was not a bad thing to be alive there. It was really a great pleasure to share in that early campaign.

I am keeping you back from the real subject on which I am to speak; and that is, Allenby and what Allenby did. You need be under no illusions as to that. There have been reputations lost and most grand reputations won in the late war. There are some men writing books now who had very much better be quiet about what they did. But about Allenby, believe me, there is not a single fact on the wrong side. He is a very great and successful soldier. Let me tell you some things he did. I remember, as we lay at Gaza—we had been halted there;—in spite of what the communications said, we had been checked. I do not like lying, and I frankly confess someone lied in the communication. It is not the British way, and we had better check it. They call it propaganda nowadays. The British Empire stands four square on God's truth, and if we tamper with the tricks of lesser breeds, if we lie or misrepresent or try to "educate" public opinion, we will come down. The one policy that Britain must follow is that of absolute truth.

Well, gentlemen, Allenby did not require any lying communications to boom his affair. Many of my men were Gallipoli men. They had been tramping up that desert; it is hard work tramping in dragging sands, and their courage was a bit spent. As we looked on across from our hill away beyond down on the plain we sometimes wondered if we ever could cross another half mile and get through. There was an enervation through every part of that great force which stretched some twenty or thirty miles into the desert. But when Allenby came there was not an officer who did not feel something was different. He organized. Gentlemen, war nowadays is not fought a-long old lines. War is a business, conducted by business men; and you Canadian people produced excellent business men. Allenby was a business man. All up that desert we had been bombed at. We were inferior in the air, and we continued inferior in the air until Allenby arrived.

When Allenby arrived he issued his ultimatum to the British Government. He said, "I will not start my campaign until I have decent planes." The men were sacrificing their lives in old busses and Allenby got planes and made a kind of barrage of planes in the air. One German plane got through and discovered the concentration, and that plane came down. Next day, Allenby's force went forward and there was not a German plane in the air, for practical purposes, for the rest of the campaign.

We are very fond of spectacular military operations, where a small force of British fight desperately against overwhelming masses; but that is not war. Modern war is concentrating on any given point a greater mass of men or masses of men than your opponent. You must always have the stronger force in war. And Allenby succeeded. Before he moved a single man, he succeeded in organizing around that line an overwhelming mass of strength. **That is business.**

There is another thing. People speak of the war as a war that was without cavalry. They forget that in those eastern campaigns some of the most brilliant operations that ever have been indulged in by the cavalry arm took place. Allenby is a great cavalry man, and he had in the desert ample opportunity for the use of that arm. He utilized it with a brilliance that has only been equalled once or twice in history. Allenby used that cavalry to dash the Turkish Army to pieces. It was a great and brilliant cavalry operation.

There is another aspect that many of you perhaps have not thought of. He is a great diplomatist. The French had been a little troublesome in the East. They were always bothering us with their claims, and on the day that Allenby indulged in his proclamation of religious liberty in Jerusalem, there was on his right hand the French commander, symbolical of the French interests in Jerusalem, and on his left hand there was the head of the Italian contingent. Further back there was a gentleman who has been bothering us since the war in Paris. He tried to push in between Allenby and the Italian leader, in other words to claim that Jerusalem was predominantly a French sphere. Allenby, with the politeness and firmness, always characteristic of him said, "Monsieur, back. Your place is there." There was no further argument.

There was another thing he did. He proved to the world what Britain was really doing in the war. I understand there are certain nations that claim to have finished the war. I was on the Western front. I was there at the finish. I saw those hammer strokes of Marshall Foch's. One weapon he used was the Imperial Army of Britain. From August 8, when the Canadians went in, until November 11, there was one force at least that had every man available in the fighting line, and that was Britain. And, mark you, that was not all. In the Balkans there was a British force. British ships were in every sea; and then, just to clinch the argument, to tell people a thousand years hence what the British could do with a sea Empire, Allenby launched that mighty stroke of his and entirely annihilated the ambitions of the Germans for ever and ever. That is what Britain did.

Gentlemen, what are the consequences of Allenby's work? You cannot judge a man simply by what he does. You must try to understand what the consequences of his actions will be. The first thing he did was to firmly establish the British prestige in the East, Near and Far. I used to look at that flag flying from our headquarters at Cairo and pray to God that nothing would ever disgrace it floating there; for it stood, for me at least, for all the good things in the world, honour and truth and righteousness.

There is one peculiarity about the Eastern world: you rule it not merely by force or by ordinary government; you rule it by reputation; and, frankly, our reputation had suffered a little, particularly by the surrender of Townshend and also by those two checks of ours. Allenby once and for all showed the East that Britain was still in the war and that when she speaks all others must be silent. Now, I know that the Eastern question has many difficulties about it, but we never can withdraw from the East, whatever happens, and if we are going to rule in the East we must rule as a great-minded and successful power. General Allenby proved to every power east of the Suez that Britain was competent to rule and that she challenged every rival. That is a great thing for you as well as for the people of the East.

In the second place, and here I get on difficult ground, Allenby gave this Empire leisure of mind and freedom from interference to grapple with its problems in the East, including that great one of the Egyptian question. No good and well intentioned philanthropist can obtain a sudden solution of the Eastern question. Allenby did this. He gave the administrators of Britain a chance of thinking things out quietly. What are you going to do? There is an Egyptian Nationalist Party. Are we going to yield to their request? Well, before we do we must remember this. Egypt is, as I said before, a nation of peasants. Who are the Nationalists? Largely a group of what the Russians call the "intellectuals", of students looking for jobs in Cairo; and these men, if they had the peasants in their hands, would once more turn those peasants into beasts of burden.

Give them their national rights if you can, but also safeguard the peasant. What is more, people say you must allow democratic ideas to have way. Granted! But you cannot square democracy in the East by simply telling them to go to hell—for then what would happen? What happened in Turkey? The Young Turk democratic party arose. The Young Turks got their way. Within a few years the

most hopeless and confirmed autocracy the Turk ever knew was established in the Turkish government. That was the result of a short-cut to democracy.

I say this, then, gentlemen, I am a democrat to my finger tips. I believe the British Empire must put its best judgment to work to give both India and Egypt such rights as they ought to get; but if you act in haste you will repent very rapidly. Since Allenby has given us this great gift there is no enemy around Egypt now that we may fear. We have plenty of time, and I want to say that not only Britain, but Canada is interested in such a question as the future of Egypt. That is what I call true Imperialism. You yourselves have acquired nationhood after long struggles and difficulties and you must turn the lessons you have learned in other directions and see if you, too, as well as Britain, can help Egypt. Allenby has given you the chance.

General Allenby enabled one of the most interesting experiments that the world has seen to be made, the Zionist movement to Palestine. For centuries the Jews have been persecuted and overwhelmed. The scandal of today is that in some of these new nations to whom we have just given liberties, there are still Jewish massacres going on. I want to see some place in the world—and Jerusalem is the place—where there can be a refuge for that nation of the world that has given us most and from which we draw the greatest things we have. I know every Jew welcomed the entrance of Great Britain into the sphere of Eastern politics. I think we are bound as a nation to play fair now and give them every chance. I rejoice and take pride that the nation that through Allenby has given that distressed people the first opportunity, and is now going to set them up with a country, is Great Britain. Long live the Zionist City in the Holy Land!

And with this I have finished. Critics of Britain and friends of Britain sometimes forget that in these long campaigns Britain was pursuing a very great and holy crusade. Perhaps I am using the wrong phrase, for the crusade suggests the cross and the crescent fighting each other. They were not. In that glorious army that carried Allenby to Jerusalem there were Mohammedans as well as Christians. It was a union of the two to overwhelm the most hated tyranny that the world has ever seen.

Some of you here are old enough to remember the days when Mr. Gladstone thundered against the Turks because of the Bulgarian atrocities. From that day there has been atrocity after atrocity. Anyone who has read Lord Bryce's re-

port will realize that no nation has suffered like the Armenian nation has in the late war. The tales told there are incredible in their bestiality and brutality. The Turk may be a gentleman. Sometimes he is, and sometimes he is not. But the Turkish government has earned the condemnation of God and humanity in this world. The selfishness of nations and the folly of politicians too long have stood between Europe and that crushing stroke that was to wipe the cursed thing from the face of the Earth. It was General Allenby that passed in. I might almost see flocks of the avenging angels, sent as Allenby's legions, striking at that ancient instrument of corruption and persecution, tumbling it in fragments to the ground.