(*May* 3, 1920.)

Major-General Sir Charles Townshend, G.C.B., D.S.O.*

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen;—You will understand it is rather hard for me to express the gratification and pride for the way in which you have received me as your guest to-day. When I got your telegram in New York asking me to come I realized at once that it was not only a pleasure for me to come here; but it was more than that, it was my duty. You will understand that I am delighted to come to-day; I was delighted with my reception by the mayor to-day; and I take it as a compliment, not only to me but to those gallant lads who served under me. As you know, there are very few of them left.

I will make my story as short for you as I can. The President has referred to the battles of Kut, Ctesiphon, my retreat to Kut, and of the defence of Kut. I propose to add what I think will interest you, how I brought the Turk out of the war, because you will see by bringing the Turk out of the war—mind you, as a prisoner of war—I shortened the war, I am glad to say, by several months, and in the words of Mr. Clemenceau, "saved millions of money and thousands of lives." Well, you know, gentlemen, it is a great satisfaction to me as a "prisoner of war diplomatist," if I may use the word, to succeed where I failed with the handful of men given to me for a task so large, as I said at the time, that even Bonaparte would despair, and I know Hannibal would have turned his back.

I was given 13,000 men when I was ordered to the Tigris and to advance towards Bagdad. We drove the Turks out of Kurna, a position of intense difficulties, and where I only succeeded by my opponent being faint-hearted and not continuing the battle. In Kurna, those who read my book will find that owing to the great flood the difficulty of attacking my enemy was great and I had to put my infantry in boats.

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To my astonishment, the Turks began to retreat when had I been in their general's place I would have guaranteed to have wiped out the British forces entirely. Such is the fortune of war, and I think of Sylla's words after his victories when he declared he was lucky rather than a great general. Success, like charity and religion, covers a multitude of sins.

Having taken Kurna and captured Amarah, a town 90 miles to the north, in that pursuit of 90 miles I managed to clean up the country and move on Amarah, the Turks surrendering in large numbers. At daybreak I launched my forces in a small river battle steamer with a few iron plates nailed on it and the Turks at Amarah surrendered to me and my crew, consisting of 25 blue jackets and 6 marines.

After that, gentlemen, I prepared for my advance against Kut, a more important town, strategically speaking, at the junction of the Tigris and the Hai. I went back to India for a month while preparations were made, to see the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Beauchamp Duff. I said to him after dinner in his study in his beautiful house in the hills, "It isn't for me to point out to you, sir, the dangers of taking the offensive in a secondary theatre of war with inadequate forces. It isn't for me to point out to you that a secondary theatre should be held by minimum forces on the defensive, but if you want to send me against Baghdad," (which was what I had in my mind they were going to do as they were so pleased with what I had done already)—"if you intend to send me against Baghdad, I hope you will make me up to 40,000—30,000 or 40,000,—and then I will guarantee not only to take Baghdad, but to hold it against heavy attacks which I know will be delivered against it." He said to me, "You are quite right. Not an inch will you go beyond Kut unless I make you up to 40,000." I told His Majesty that when I came back from captivity a year ago.

With those words I left town; and, travelling night and day, reached my troops, now ready to advance. The climate was deadly. Many of my men were taken to hospital from fever. The climate of Mesopotamia in the winter is like Egypt, but in the summer I have never in all my experience encountered any other climate like Mesopotamia, and my experience embraces the Red Sea and the Punjab in the hot weather; but each of them have to touch their caps to Mesopotamia in the way of mortality of the troops.

I knew that in front of me the Turk was entrenched in very strong positions. Between me and Kut he had approximately the same number of troops as I had. He had all modern guns, wire entanglements in position, stretching in front of six or seven miles of earth works; one flank resting on the river, the other on the desert. According to Moltke, the correct way is to occupy your adversary in the front with minimum forces while you make the principal effort against his flank. I carried that out in the night and rolled up the enemy like we roll up a blanket, and it was a very fine victory. So the road to Baghdad lay open before me.

Having won that battle, I thought "Now I am going to make myself solid in what I have gained." We controlled the whole of the rich territory of Mesopotamia and there we intended to wait until the Allies took a decisive offensive in the Western theatre. We were going to rest there until we got an order to advance with huge forces. I saw myself, in command very likely, with a huge army and I was delighted with the chance of finding myself perhaps a Marshal. I had been soldiering ever since I was a boy of eighteen, in every war, I think, England has had. Well, gentlemen, I was disappointed. I got ordered on in spite of insufficient forces. My orders were to advance and take Baghdad. Having had the assurance from the Commander-in-Chief that I should not go unless I was made up to 30,000 or 40,000 men, I had my forces now reduced to 8,500 men—you who are soldiers amongst you will think what my task was—8,500 men, mind you, and it is on your bayonets you win the battles! You may have all the guns in the world, but the time comes when you have got to go in and the bayonets are going to win.

Well, I had perhaps 12,000 or 13,000, all told, gunners, engineers, and so on, yet the men on whom I had to rely to win the battle were 8,500, the Turks in a position which rather resembled Plevna, of great strength, entrenched on the site of the Ancient city of Ctesiphon. This is the city which came into history by the victories of the Romans under the Emperor Justinian, when he drove the Persians out of Mesopotamia at the time when Mesopotamia was perhaps the most flourishing country in the world; and it was these great wars between the Persians and the Romans which made it desolate as it is to-day.

I pursued the same tactics. I knew in this position I had 24,000 Turks against me. Mind you, there was no retreat

for me! I had to win the battle or we should be wiped out. To win, I know I must come to close quarters, to grips. There was no good trying to play at long bowls. I made a big turning movement around the enemy's flank at night and at daylight fell on them as at Kut, and it was a sight good for your eyes to see, about three hours afterwards, the whole Turkish Army completely routed before me.

I ordered a general advance and thought that fortune was smiling on me then and that I was going into Baghdad with this handful, and I got on my horse and galloped as far as I could. We carried the second position, took all their guns. All of a sudden, a fresh army arrived, adding to the Turkish strength about 24,000 men. This army did what Blucher did to Napoleon at Waterloo. I found after that desperate fighting that I would have to fight the whole battle over again. There was no retreat, and I had the unique experience of seeing what defeat must look like. No man was running away, but they were coming back sullenly in groups. Casualties were very great, and control was lost over the men. I set the staff to work with me in rallying the men, and delivered a second, and even a third, attack, I and my staff going into the fire with the men. There are times when a general must do that, when you must do that. You will find a lot of platitudes in the books that modern commanders must remain miles behind; but, believe me, if you try to dodge with defeat staring you in the face you are jolly well going to be routed. You have got to go into the fire with the men and turn defeat into victory, and that is what I did. When night came I stood victor with the Turks in full retreat. But what a victory! I found, as soon as they could count the ranks, I had 4,000 men left standing up. That will give you the quality of the troops I had with me.

There was no question of going on. The Turkish Army was then, my aeroplanes told me, entrenched behind the river waiting for me to come on. The only thing I could do was to give out that I intended to remain at Ctesiphon, get up supplies and make that our defence position. That was to give confidence, as you can imagine, to my troops. It really meant my first move in retreat. I removed every wounded man I had. I did not leave a gun behind. Four days afterwards we quietly slipped off when the enemy were coming down to envelope my flank. During that retreat I halted during

the night, turned around and succeeded in wiping out the whole of the advance guard of about 4,000. After that I continued my retreat unmolested.

They stopped and left me and I arrived at Kut and there I made my decision to stand at Kut. Mind you, as a student of history I knew what the danger was. I had the example of Metz in my mind, even of Cornwallis at Yorktown. I know that when a force once digs itself in and remains to let the enemy forces flow around and trusts to help—I don't know of two cases in history where that force is ever saved. Ladysmith I knew was relieved after a siege of four months, but then Ladysmith was entirely different, because the Boers were not organized, and you know they never could be got to attack, and their gun power was very weak. But here against me I had an army of civilized troops, at least an army of troops trained on civilized methods, officered almost entirely by Germans.

Well, I took this decision to stand. I said to the government in my message, "I intend to stand at Kut, with your permission, because by standing we shall remedy the great mistake of advancing with inadequate forces. It will give you time to bring reinforcements from overseas, and so restore the situation. Otherwise, if I retreat down the Tigris we shall get kicked out of Mesopotamia and the whole of the Arabs will rise behind us. Von der Goetz will move down the river and so it may be we shall get kicked out of Mesopotamia." That was my telegram to the Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia; and the reply came, "We will relieve you in two months. Stand where you are." I had two months' supplies for all the men I had with me—and I must tell you I found two Indian regiments at Kut. In addition, two-and-a-half battalions and a British cavalry regiment joined me at Kut. The Turks rapidly came up and surrounded me, and sent the bulk of their forces down to prevent any relieving force from reaching me, whilst with their smaller force they surrounded me.

I had the Tigris on two sides of me, a river which at Kut is about 500 yards broad; with, say, a ten to twelve knot current, extremely rapid—I mention this to show you I had only one side on which to break out, and on that side were the Turkish entrenchments quickly thrown up. They were a short rifle-range from me in trenches. I mention that fact to you to show, as you know, that there are no miracles in

war. I have never been criticised officially. Never a word of criticism have I received from any official of the War Office or Government in any measure for any order I have ever given. The only thing was that when my book came out there was criticism in the press,—only one, mind you,—because the review of that book has been wonderful. But there was one paper that criticised unfavorably—of course I need hardly tell you the critic was nameless. He would not come into the open. I can imagine that gentleman would have crossed the Tigris. I remember well the rebuke of the Marshal to the Minister of War. The Minister of War said, "Why didn't you cross right here?" The Marshal said, "Yes, I certainly could have crossed at that spot had your finger been a bridge."

On Christmas Day, the Turks delivered a great assault upon me and forced their way in. Kut nearly fell that night, but by daylight, owing to the folly of the Turkish commander in not reinforcing his storming columns, I was able to throw them out and we once more stood victorious. That prevented the Turks from ever again assaulting. It took the heart out of them. Never again could the Commander-in-Chief get his men to face our fire and bayonets and grenades after that. Although I lost pretty heavily that night in repulsing them, still it was a pretty cheap night altogether for me because it took all the steam out of my adversaries.

We were surrounded rapidly by batteries which fired night and day. The more they fired into me the more I dug down; and our casualties, at first about 200 to 250 per week, dwindled down to 70 and 80, which was an ordinary average. He had German aeroplanes which quickly got the mastery of the air, and they bombed us night and day. Truly, we knew all the joys of life at once. I have seen men shouting with laughter when a German aeroplane came over us, remaining in the open as long as they could, then they ran under some archway to watch it go over, down came his shells, usually killing some donkey or unfortunate Arab woman. But on the whole, I found the aeroplane a very much overrated danger. I know the value of the aeroplane for reconnaissance. But when you get into a hole like that, we found that by digging down we had very few casualties from the aeroplanes.

I was in wireless touch with the commandant of the force trying to relieve me, but he was up against large numbers. And the Turks entrenched in position are the most formidable

fighters I know of. In fact, I know of cases at Gallipoli where the Germans would not remain in trenches under gunfire, and were replaced by the Turks who stuck it out. It will show you the value of the Turkish soldier in defence. In the open, he cannot compare with our men. The Turk is a most stubborn fighter under cover, but get him in the open and it is a different proposition.

I tried to keep the hopes of the men up by issuing communiques and by bulletins, what you call "general orders" of the army. I took the men entirely into my confidence, I threw red tape overboard altogether and I think I succeeded in winning their confidence, which continued as the siege went on. The British troops were composed of the Norfolks, the Dorsets, and the Oxford Light Infantry, names greatly distinguished in history, and the 43rd,—all regiments well connected with the past. I want to tell you that as their hopes went down the British troops got better and better, but not so the Indian troops. That is the worst of the Indian troops. They do splendidly while you are gaining, but when disaster stares you in the face, when you are under great stress, his morale sinks down and the fighting value of these men who had helped me so much on other occasions—well, I don't know what they would have done had I got them in the open.

I had only two months' food supply and two months were quickly up. What I tried to do was to think how to get home with some food. I remembered by being with Lord Kitchener in the Soudan that the Arab invariably hides his food; and I had up all the principal men, I suppose seven or eight representatives from the town of Kut which I enclosed in my position. I told them I knew they had all concealed food and if they didn't produce it by sunset I was extremely sorry to tell them I should have to shoot the lot. There was no Press to report me to the House of Parliament and you will not be surprised to hear I had several tons by sunset. That enabled me to keep the camp going for nearly five months.

I began to think of attempting to cut my way through, but the Commander-in-Chief of Mesopotamia gave me orders to do nothing of the kind. He said, "We will relieve you in the end." (Time is going on and I must just touch on the main events.) At last I got word from the Commander-in-Chief that I could not be relieved, "Make what terms you can." By that time hardly any food was left. We were all on quarter rations. I do not know how the men kept body

and soul together. The men were dying at the rate of 20 and 24 a day, dropping dead in their tracks from starvation. Hundreds were down with dysentery. You know I tried to get vegetables in the seed by getting the seed dropped from aeroplanes, and the vegetables came up, but hardly enough for the hospitals, so my garden business was not a success. The attempt to put food into Kut by aeroplane failed because we had not got command of the air. The German planes spotted them and downed them when they came along. Several times when they got food in it was utterly inadequate to what was required.

Well, gentlemen, as I told you, the end came in five months, when my men could no longer handle arms. Had the Turk assaulted me we must have fallen. The men had no longer strength to fight. If I had had to march two miles I do not think there was a man who could have done it. Hundreds of men lost their teeth. It was a most extraordinary thing. Every kind of ailment sets in as soon as you stop a man's food. From eating horse meat the men rapidly were taken down with dysentery until one was afraid to touch it. I am just trying to give you an idea of what the troops suffered. And on top of that we were digging night and day to keep the water from washing us out like rats. Abnormal floods prevented the relieving forces from reaching us. The Turks cut the canals, entirely flooded us out. I only want you to understand that nothing short of a miracle could have got us out of that place—and there are no miracles in the twentieth century. If there had been I might have got out of Kut,—not otherwise.

I offered to cut my way out if 700 would come with me. That is to say, to run the blockade in a small gun-boat, and to take on board that boat 700 men who might volunteer. It would certainly have been blown out of the water with all the enemy's guns around me, but my idea was, I would rather go out like that—and we might get through, you never know, —and take with me the most useful men. But the Commander-in-Chief wired back to me, I think he was right now, "No, I regret very much, in that case I think your place is to remain in Kut." He was quite right, only the terrible thing that obsessed me was that I should have to put my name to a capitulation; I, who had gone through all these terrible trials, not through my own fault, as everybody knows in this Empire. I had the traditions of the past, also. It is not as if I had served casually in the army. It had been my dream, I don't

mind telling you. I am no stranger to Canada, and I had always held as my model in life my great-grandfather, to whom, as most of you know, Quebec surrendered.

I am no stranger in Canada. Sir George Townshend, second in command to Wolfe at the battle of the Heights of Abraham—you remember that he held the wounded general in his arms—took the surrender and with that surrender you got the whole of North America. That is sufficient tradition for me in the army, and for me of all people to have to sign this dreadful surrender. I often prayed that some friendly shell would finish the thing. But some people say the devil always looks after his own. At Ctesiphon a shell dropped at my feet and covered me with mud and sand and the whole staff thought I had been blown to pieces. I didn't even have a scratch on my finger.

There was no way out but surrender. Directly Kut fell the Turks offered me my liberty. When I offered the Commander-in-Chief my sword he said, "No, take it back. You have worn it with honor. You must always wear it. We will treat you as we were treated after the fall of Plevna. For we compare the defence of Kut with the defence of Plevna." These wonderful words from our enemy the Turk! So they took me away at once, offering me my liberty. They offered me my personal liberty and said I was free to depart to England. But who could have done that and have left those officers and men? No, that was impossible to do. As you can well understand, I never could have gone home that way. I got the Turkish commander to give a written statement that my men should be treated with honor and care. I was taken away to Constantinople.

Now gentlemen, in life people talk about honors and rewards and degrees. There is much heart-burning over that question. Every man feels it deep down in his heart when his friend or his enemy gets something, gets promotion over his head, gets this reward or that. In this way the vanity of man, by Jove, is the same as the vanity of woman, only worse! You will understand that now, after that, why really it has done me great good, for I don't care a damn in life for rewards or decorations or honors when I think of those men, officers and men, gallant comrades, who watched me go away. They cheered me as long as I was in sight. There is confidence, gentlemen! No one can give me any reward adequate to that.

Now, you would think I had been expected at Constantinople. I arrived at the station wearing my sword, with the Minister

of War to meet me, a prisoner of war. They evinced the greatest of respect for me. The only drawback was—there was a Turkish band at the station, and you know a Turkish band! They even gave me choice of houses. If I preferred to live at the British Embassy it was at my disposal. But I thought I had quite enough worries without having a fight with the Foreign Office when I got there. So you can imagine I chose the more modest and humble island of Prinkipo which is the Brighton of Constantinople. Well, in that place in those two years I wondered I did not go mad. You can understand, waking up every morning in a place like that. However well I was treated, I was still a prisoner and out of the war. I heard of other people winning battles. It was enough to make me curse fate. I wrote a book on strategy, which I had always meant to write. Someone gave me—me, a prisoner of war—a forty-ton yawl for cruising. We used to go across and give dinner parties at Constantinople to different people of the embassy, but never would I give my parole, and I was always a prisoner with a couple of Turkish aides; and at times, as you can imagine, the society of those Turkish aides got fairly trying.

They came to me one day—I really must tell you this, it shows you the hospitality of the Turks and that it is not confined to yawls and motor cars, not at all limited to that—when I was working over my books, the Turkish Pasha came across to see me in his launch. He sat down and after our usual coffee—I wondered what the dickens he was going to talk about—he said, "Well, your Excellency, we hear you are fretting." "By Jove! of course I am fretting. What else? Why don't you give me my liberty. You have promised it often and often. Why don't you let me go free. I love the Turks. They treated me like sportsmen. I appreciate fighting brave men. But at the same time I hate the Germans. I pray you to let me go to France now so that I can have a turn against them." He said, "No, your Excellency, one day perhaps we will give you your liberty. In the meantime we don't want to see you fret. Rather would we have you make a marriage." "Well," I said to the Turkish Pasha, "you know I am married already. I married a French lady in Paris; very charming, I assure you." "Oh," he said, "but this is only a temporary marriage. We have some beautiful ladies," and I am not wishing to qualify for a seat in a stained glass window, but I replied, "but we don't do it at home." And when I was getting off in the boat he whispered in my ear, "Whenever your Excellency would like to make marriage I trust you will let me know."

Well, now, how the Turk came out of the war. It was in September 1918. Up to that time I had made three efforts to escape and had just failed in the third. On one—I was never found out—I got a letter to the British by getting a Turkish soldier to desert with my letter sewn in his pocket. How I got out to that rock five miles out, and how an aeroplane missing me as it circled around went over an anti-aircraft battery and got brought down in front of my eyes, my five mile pull back with hopes down again—words fail me now to describe that evening! Well, it was a week after that when suddenly to my surprise I was called upon by the Turkish Minister of Marine. I had begun to see why I had been treated so well. They had been keeping me to help them in the end.

I was invited to go across at once. I went, they taking especial care that I was not to be seen by the Germans. Mind you, the Germans occupied the whole of Constantinople. They kept 20,000 troops there. They had taken possession of the Turkish warships, in fact Constantinople was theirs. Now Izzet Pasha carried out the coup against Enver Bey. Well, this man told me about his country being in a terrible position. He said, "You can imagine what it is for me to come from the Caucasus now and to take command here in Turkey, under the young Turkish party. My people fought in the Crimean with the British. I have always loved the policy of Britain. Will you help us?" I asked him where Allenby was, how far off. He said, "He is approaching Aleppo." "In other words, you are fairly in Queer Street?" He said, "I can go on resisting for five or six months." I replied, "Yes, but it would be better if you tried to get terms now. I will help you. You have treated me nobly. But I will help you only on one condition, that you make me a free man now on the spot. You had better send me to the British to-night." He gave me my liberty with both hands. I said to him, "It is no good approaching the British unless you will authorize me to open the Dardanelles." Mind you, when I got that sentence out I sat there (as you can imagine) very modestly. It is no modest favor to ask a man. Even Napoleon had failed to get the Dardanelles opened.

I must boil it all down. I left that port within half an hour with the opening of the Dardanelles in my pocket. I went off, you can imagine, feeling jubilant. A carriage drove

me down, I ordered lunch, with the claret just nicely warm, some real cigarettes. I felt I was a free man. With my modest cutlet I had a glass of Pilsener beer, although it cost me a fancy sum. I left, gentlemen, that night as fast as steam could take me across to the harbor in the Sea of Marmora feeling perfectly jolly. I was in plain clothes. Of course, they told me, you must not be discovered. I arrived at Panderma and the Governor of Smyrna was waiting for me with a train with restaurant car attached and everything. He said, "If the Germans ask me who you are who shall I say you are? People are asking who is this distinguished-looking stranger." I was so light hearted I told him, "Oh! I'm a Swiss admiral." I simply mention that to show you how simple-minded the Turk is. At Smyrna there was a band at the station, and then a municipal luncheon. I became anxious. I declined the dinner and said I had letters to write. I started off about 3.30 or 4 o'clock; we slipped our cable and set down the Gulf of Smyrna. As night approached a Turkish officer came to me, "Your Excellency, there are five lines of mines we are just coming to. But," he said, "I don't know just where they are placed." I thought he was a supremely useful officer to have with me! I said, "Well, we can see the ripple on the water when we are coming to them." He said, "Oh it isn't that, only I shall be tried by court martial if we touch one of those mines and you get hurt." I said, "Neither you nor I will know much about that mine if we do touch it." So we continued our way through those mines and it was, as far as I could see, rather cleverly done.

I arrived off the island about three in the morning and there found a British monitor. Next morning they sent for a destroyer and I arrived with the British fleet in the afternoon of the next day. The effect of that was that within one week I had a conference with the Admiralty and I had got a conference going with the Turkish delegates. We had that conference within a week; the agreement was signed; the mines were being taken away out of the Dardanelles straits to let the fleet through.

That, gentlemen, is the end of this rather long story. I have tried to keep it down; but it has been a rather difficult task, as you will no doubt appreciate. But I want to tell you how honored I am in coming to your club and in the manner in which you have received me. And I shall look back always to my visit to Toronto with great pride and joy.