

a line down to the Gulf out of a purely philanthropic desire for the well-being of Persia. Russian railways, it must be remembered, are always strategic rather than commercial, and a railway to a port on the Gulf will not be of much use to her unless she controls the outlet and the territory through which it runs. A few years ago the present Minister of War (General Kourapatkine) made a tour in Persia, and his report to the Emperor contains a project for a harbour at Enzeli, and railways from Pir Bazar (the port of the Murghab) *viâ* Resht to the capital, from Kars, which will shortly become the frontier terminus of the Tiflis line, through Erivan and Tabriz to Teheran again, and ultimately to Bushire, and finally for a branch of the Trans-Caspian line to Meshed.

These schemes are not altogether new. Baron Reuter obtained a concession for a line from the Caspian to the Gulf in 1872, but it expired without his making any attempt to fulfil the conditions. The Russian General Falkenhagen then obtained the same concession but lack of funds prevented anything being done until the present concessionaires, a Russian company, took it up, and their term expires, as I said, next year unless a beginning is made in the meantime. My belief is that there will be no Russian railway to the Gulf for some time to come, for the reasons I have mentioned; unless Russia can control the whole line, it would bring her no advantage but rather the reverse, as her commercial and political supremacy in Northern Persia would suffer from the introduction of foreign competition.

The Russian policy will be to obtain a renewal of the concession, and of the power of vetoing foreign projects for rival lines, by making a start with the Caucasus line to Tabriz and Teheran; she will strengthen her hold on Northern Persia by lines from the Caspian to Teheran, and from Askabad, the capital of the Trans-Caspian district,*

* The military districts of Trans-Caspia, Turkestan, and Semiretshinsk have this year been placed under the authority of General Dukhovskoi, the Governor of Turkestan, who thus has the sole control of some 60,000 troops.

to Meshed, all of which would be of the utmost importance to her in case of war.

Such, then, is the Russian mode of attacking the Persian problem, and she is not unsupported in her task, as the Muskat incident shows. It was a singularly instructive episode, owing its existence to reasons far other than the temporary fit of indiscretion of an overzealous French official; and since it is a straw which shows which way the wind has been blowing for some time past its history may be shortly given. It begins with a speech, apropos of the Franco-Russian alliance, made in the Chamber by M. Deloncle as far back as 1892, which is given in full by the *Times of India* in one of the excellent series of articles which it published on the incident. The gist of it was this: the Franco-Russian alliance was offensive and defensive, as far as their Asiatic as well as other interests were concerned. England, since 1856, had constituted herself without a shadow of right the general arbitrator and guardian in the Persian Gulf and had established a "Trucial League" between the various Arab tribes, the Persians, and Turks in those parts. "Je considère," he went on, "qu'il est du devoir et de l'honneur de la France d'avoir là-bas un agent consulaire, *si modeste qu'il soit*" (the italics are mine), "pour ouvrir un registre de nos nationaux protégés de toute la région," and ended up with a burst of eloquence in which he declared that the French aim must be "le renouveau de notre pavillon dans les parages de la mer des Indes, où nous fûmes jadis les maîtres."

M. Deloncle was not in office at that date but his forecast has proved more than correct. The French have no trade worth mentioning in the Persian Gulf; their flag is only seen on slave-dhows, and the number of French merchant steamers visiting the Gulf in 1897 was *one* of 850 tons, which did not go to Muskat, at which port she takes none of the exports, and in 1897 contributed less than one-fiftieth of the imports.* In 1894 therefore, the modest Consul, M. Ottavi,

* In 1898 the value of the French imports in the whole of the Gulf ports was £44,175, and of the exports, £2,537. Not a single French steam-

was unobtrusively installed at Muskat, where up to Seyid Turki's death in 1888 only Great Britain and the United States (which takes nearly all the dates that come from the interior of Oman) had been represented, and subsequently the presence of numerous Russian agents was noted, who made their appearance in the guise of plague doctors and merchants—at first only on the Mekran coast and the Persian littoral, but latterly in Southern Arabia and especially Oman—owing partly to the Russian idea that we were about to declare a protectorate over Southern Arabia.

Several French men-of-war visited Muskat, one coming specially from Brest with presents for the Sultan, while the officers of another gave him a sword of honour. Everything promised well; during the absence of Major Fagan, our Political Officer, M. Ottavi obtained the Sultan's signature to an agreement allowing the French the use of a certain harbour near Muskat, was promptly promoted by his Government, and the French made sure of their port at last.

Unluckily, the news of the agreement leaked out; Admiral Douglas hurried to the spot with the *Eclipse*, *Sphinx*, and *Redbreast*, and the *Assaye* and three torpedo-boats went to Karachi, followed by the *Lapwing*, in order to support him if necessary. The treaty was handed over to the Admiral, in spite of M. Ottavi's opposition, and the Sultan, who was in a destitute and humbled state because his monthly subsidy had immediately been stopped by the Indian Government, publicly proclaimed its revocation. The French protestations were loud; but the fact remains that they could have had a godown for coal similar to our own (which was all that they desired, according to M. Delcassé) at any time since 1862 for the mere asking.

Unfortunately, the *Echo de Paris* was injudicious enough to announce subsequently that "the French Government

ship entered the Gulf, and of the fifteen sailing vessels (with a total tonnage of 950 tons!) flying the French flag, not one visited the chief port, Bushire.

have completely given up the intention of occupying the Bay of Bander-Jisseh, which it was proposed to equip as a powerful naval station and base." The whole thing was a *ballon d'essai*, sent up by the French at Russian instigation, and the comments of the St. Petersburg press showed with what interest they had been following the plot and how great their disappointment was at its ill-success.

The control of the Gulf is the key of our position as regards Persia and we have more right, as well as more reason, than any other Power to maintain it; for apart from the fact that a hostile naval base on the Indian Ocean would seriously menace our line of communication with the East and greatly increase the difficulties against which our fleets would have to contend in time of war, it is owing to our efforts during the past half century that there is any trade whatever with Southern Persia and Oman. Prior to that period, the Gulf was nothing but a nest of pirates—some 50,000 strong—and of slave-traders who between them rendered the Persian coast uninhabitable and peaceable trade out of the question. After years of intermittent warfare, we stamped them out at the cost of many lives—the story may be read in Lieutenant Low's "History of the Indian Navy"—and since that day have continued to protect life and property in the Gulf and to keep in check the slave-trade between the Zanzibar coast and Oman, which is a disgrace to the French flag.

It was well after 1850 that the first merchant steamer entered the Straits of Ormuz, but at the present day Bushire is a large port with regular lines of steamers. Owing to our enforcing peace among the Arab pirates and raiders, the Persian Government has been able to resume control of its own littoral, whither foreign merchants can now venture without fear of being knocked on the head or having their vessels scuttled. The British Resident at Bushire, in addition to controlling British politics in the Gulf, is a sort of arbitrator-in-chief between the various tribes, and between the natives and their rulers; only last

year the whole Persian garrison assembled at the Residency, and begged Colonel Meade to obtain their arrears of pay, which he did. As for our commercial interests, they far outweigh those of any other country.* Over 80 per cent. of the shipping in the Gulf is British, and in 1897 seven-eighths of the Bushire and Muskat imports came from Great Britain and India; Bander Abbas also, where Russian agents are busily intriguing at this moment, is the port through which most of the Indian goods for Eastern Persia enter. Competition, however, is rapidly growing; Belgian and German firms are opening branches at Bushire and other towns and last year Germany gave evidence of her intention to further her trade relations in the country by appointing Dr. Hauck, late of the German Legation at Teheran, to be her Consul-General at Bushire.† This growth of European interests—not only in Persia, but in Asia Minor also—is an important feature of the Near-Eastern question, and a circumstance which may indefinitely modify the development which one is tempted to prophesy for it from the standpoint of to-day. The process of the survival of the fittest is actively going forward among nations as well as among individuals, and the territories of the various “sick men,” the politically degenerate, are being absorbed by their healthier neighbours; and as it has happened in the Khanates, and in China, Cuba, and in the Philippines, so also will it happen in Asia Minor and Arabia, and, sooner or later, in Turkey itself and Persia.

* The figures for 1898 (Foreign Office Report, No. 2,346) show that the total value of the imports into all the Gulf ports was made up of £1,825,220 from Great Britain and India, and £985,464 from the rest of the world. Of the total exports, Great Britain and India took £907,796, and the rest of the world £1,160,674. The British steam-tonnage for the same period was fifty-three times the amount of that of all other countries, the figures being—

Great Britain	356 vessels = 379,724 tons.
Other countries	6 „ 7,092 „

† A curious instance of German “enterprise” lately reached me in the shape of a German translation of “Thomas à Kempis,” published at Leipzig in 1746, and picked up by a friend in the bazaar at Attock for five annas.