

# THE LITERARY DIGEST

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## BRITAIN'S MESOPOTAMIAN BURDEN AND OIL

**T**URKISH DEMANDS at Lausanne that the Mosul oil area be returned to Turkey because it is Turkish in population, have impelled the British to bring King Feisal of Irak to the seat of the Near East Peace Conference, say press dispatches, to prove that the territory in which Mosul lies is Arab, altho the town of Mosul itself may be Turkish. The Russians, it appears, have notified the Turks that Turkish insistence upon Mosul is the touchstone of Turkish good faith with the Russians. Some correspondents at Lausanne tell us that one project being considered is that Britain retain the Mosul territory, the price being a percentage of the oil to be awarded to Turkey and possibly also a loan based on it. This would mean, they aver, that the monopoly concessions the British claim to have obtained in the Mosul region would be recognized by the Angora Government, which in the past has maintained that no such concessions ever were granted. Yet it is also said that Angora will not consent to such an arrangement unless in the belief that British control of Mosul is doomed to end soon anyway, or by an exchange for great British recessions on the Straits and elsewhere. Meanwhile the British are described as showing a keener desire for Mosul territory than at first appeared, for they are now apparently extremely anxious to protect their prestige in this part of the world. But predictions are made that the strong opposition in the British Parliament to the whole course of what has been sarcastically called "the Mesopotamian adventure," because of its great expense to British taxpayers, will have to be reckoned as a factor in the negotiations of the British and Turkish delegations at Lausanne. Fear is expressed by certain American correspondents that in the oil negotiations the aim is to "settle secretly outside of a conference and without American participation one of the questions chiefly interesting to America and which may bring action from the American observers."

London newspapers remind us that a Treaty between Great Britain and Mesopotamia, or the Kingdom of Irak, was signed on October 10th at Bagdad, by which, according to the melencholy view of *The Times*, "the Government have linked up the fortunes of the British Empire with all the uncertainties of Mesopotamia for twenty years to come," and it recalls that:

"In the vicissitudes of the war it so happened that British arms detached this territory from Turkey. Thousands of British lives were lost in the effort and British treasure was freely spent in those deserts for a purpose that the

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struggle in Gallipoli failed to achieve. At the end of the war we found Irak upon our hands, and our Government agreed to accept a mandate for the administration of this inhospitable territory. What relation Irak has to British Imperial interests, whether strategic or economic, no statesman has yet made plain. The strongest argument used for all the continuance of our connection with the country is that, since we have expended such energy in the effort to wrest the country from the Turk and to retain our control, it would be a confession of weakness if we were to relax the strain. The task since the Armistice has been wholly ungrateful. The population rebelled and the rebellion was crushed at great cost. More recently our Government have tried to act on the assumption that the people of Mesopotamia were, or could be made, a definite and coherent nationality. Since their speech is Arabic, they were given an Arab King from the family of the Sherif of Mecca, and the person of the King has been regarded as a possible nucleus of stable government. The King was provided with a Cabinet, and Mesopotamia, with its vague frontiers and mixed population, was treated as a nation, as an embryo State, to be ranked with the modern democracies included under the League of Nations."

This "abstraction having been set up," *The Times* goes on to say, the British Government made a treaty with it, providing for the adoption of an Organic Law by a Constituent Assembly, for the admission of Irak to the League of Nations, and for financial and military aid from Great Britain to the King of Irak. The whole proceeding is

"thoroughly artificial" according to this London daily, which adds:

"The Treaty is an evasion of the facts. The reason for the conclusion of a Treaty was that the politicians of Bagdad objected to the idea of a mandate, and traded on popular ignorance by objecting to a novel Arabic term. Our Government, therefore, considered themselves obliged to incorporate the normal provisions of a mandate in a Treaty recognizing the independence of Irak. By this Treaty, however, the British Empire undertakes many and serious obligations toward Mesopotamia, besides considerable obligations toward the League of Nations. The obligations of financial and military aid are on our side; on the side of King Feisal there is little more than an obligation to accept our advice and to refrain from accepting foreign advisers without our consent. The Treaty is unfair to the British Empire, which has always willingly undertaken an intelligible task, but shrinks from undefinable commitments. It is unfair to the League of Nations, which, in its present experimental stage should not be saddled with a burden that the British Empire can hardly bear."

Much less pessimistic is the attitude of the *London Economist* toward Irak and the Treaty, altho this financial weekly is not without its worries on the subject. It feels that the British