

# The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920

BY

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'A BRIGADE OF THE OLD ARMY'

*"'Tis true, they are a lawless brood"*

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## PREFACE.

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WITH the exception of a few additions here and there, most of which are in the final chapter, this account of the 'Insurrection in Mesopotamia' was written at Baghdad between June and September 1921. I take this opportunity of expressing my cordial thanks to Group-Captain A. E. Borton and Flying Officer A. P. Ledger, Royal Air Force; to my Aide-de-Camp, Lieutenant S. Grehan, and others, for the photographs which illustrate the pages that follow.

A. HALDANE.

LONDON, 31st May 1922.

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The  
Insurrection in Mesopotamia,  
1920.

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CHAPTER I.

FROM COLOGNE TO BASRAH.

THE reductions which inevitably follow in the wake of every great war brought to an end my connection with the VIth Corps, which I had commanded in France and Germany for over three years; and, on the 4th November 1919, I regretfully bade adieu to the British Army of the Rhine and took my departure for London.

The prospects of early re-employment for any one of the rank of lieutenant-general seemed remote, as, after the Armistice, all appointments which were vacant or held by temporary commanders had been filled by men chosen from generals whose corps or armies at the front had been abolished; and a term of half-pay was the vista which extended in front of me. However, an inquiry made at the War Office on the subject of future prospects of employment elicited the opinion—for it was nothing else—that something might “turn up,” and a subsequent interview which I had with Mr Churchill, who was then Secretary of State for War, did not tend altogether to dispel that hope.

The term of half-pay proved to be briefer than anticipated, and on the 21st December one of the members of

the Army Council mentioned to me that he believed that I was about to be offered the command in Mesopotamia. Ten days later I sent my acceptance of that appointment to the Military Secretary, from whom in the meantime I had received the customary communication.

Throughout the war my attention, like that of many of us on the Western Front, had been concentrated on the problem which faced us there, to the exclusion of much that was taking place in, what were called colloquially, "side-shows." The occurrences in Mesopotamia, including General Townshend's successful application of the principles of war and the capture of Baghdad by General Maude, were, of course, known to me; but the details of their campaigns, which had absorbed so many troops to the disadvantage of the decisive theatre in which we were engaged, as well the geography and character of the country in which they had been waged, were in no way familiar to me. Indeed I must confess to feeling little interest in either, for the impression that our commitments, there and in other countries far distant from the heart of the great struggle, were unsound and could lead to no decisive result, was predominant in my mind, and only grew stronger with the course of time.

Besides congratulations on my new appointment, I was the recipient of more than an equal number of condolences; and although no official hint was breathed that Mesopotamia might prove to be something other than the proverbial bed of roses, I had many private warnings which induced me to believe that those flowers would not be unaccompanied by their usual crop of thorns. I was resolved, however, that, large and exposed to external attack and internal disturbances as was the area of which I was soon to be the civil and military head, I would leave no stone unturned to hand it over undiminished on the termination of my appointment. Little did I then realise how six months later we should be fighting with our backs to the wall, with insurrection rife throughout the greater, and that the most thickly-populated, part of the country, and face to face with the very problem which had

occupied my thoughts before leaving home. But let me not anticipate!

During the weeks which preceded my departure I endeavoured to acquire some first-hand information regarding the country whither I was shortly to be bound, but the diversity of views which were ungrudgingly poured forth to my expectant ears, some favourable, others the exact reverse, served to exemplify the truth of the adage, "tot homines, quot sententiæ." According to some the synonym for paradise was Mesopotamia, and their one desire seemed to be to return to that land of bliss; while others—the majority—wavered between lukewarmness and execration, with an inclination to the latter, partly repressed no doubt out of consideration for my feelings. Sir John Cowans—alas! no more—who I knew had paid a short visit, as also had Sir John Hewett, to this supposed Garden of Eden, both exceptional men and blessed with powers of observation and deduction far beyond the average, gave me some useful hints; but I think the opinion of the former might best be summed up in an unquotable dictum of the British soldier, which he repeated for my benefit. Finally, I came to the conclusion that the evidence of my own eyes would provide the only satisfactory method of solving the mystery of Mesopotamia, with its climate, insects, and the many peculiarities with which it was credited, and I turned my attention to the usual preparations which one has to make on leaving the United Kingdom for a time.

For perusal on the voyage to Basrah the energetic researches of Messrs Hatchard provided me with quite a respectable number of books, new and second-hand, whose contents covered the period of the late campaigns and the earlier history of the reputed Cradle of Mankind. A revised version of the Bible, with notes, published by the Oxford University Press, was by no means the least valuable of the literary possessions which I took with me.

A few days before the date fixed for my departure I was bidden to report myself at the War Office, where Mr Churchill, with great lucidity and pleasing power of expression, held forth to me for twenty minutes on the necessity for drastic

reductions in the garrison of my future command, the expense of which had become an intolerable burden to the British taxpayer. Being one of that suffering class, I found myself in full sympathy with all he said on the subject, and undertook to do my utmost to carry out the policy which he so clearly enunciated. Until, however, I could examine the problem on the spot, where I suspected it would assume a very different aspect from that presented by the Secretary of State—as he stood with his back to a blazing fire, his hands in the pockets of his trousers and his coat-tails resting on his forearms, while I, all ears, sat facing him in a comfortable arm-chair—I felt that an expression of my views, beyond a general assent, would be of little value, and refrained from uttering it.

Some delay occurred—which I did not regret—in securing passages for myself and my aide-de-camp, Lieutenant S. A. J. Grehan, M.C., Royal Artillery, who had served in the VIth Corps with me, which I understood was due to the lack of restrictions regarding the travel to the East of persons other than those on business bent. Indeed, on reaching India I found that there was considerable feeling on this subject, as many officers and others, who during the war had been forced to remain in the East, now met with great difficulty in transferring themselves, and in many cases their families, to the United Kingdom.

Having a few days to spare I left London on the 9th February to visit some friends near Cannes, and on the 15th sailed from Marseilles, where my aide-de-camp met me, on board the P. & O. *Devanka*. Among the passengers was His Highness the Agha Khan, with whom I had some interesting talks about Mesopotamia. His view was that we would have been wiser not to have occupied the country further inland than the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates at Kurna, and that the Arabs should be interfered with as little as possible, and left to work out their own salvation in what might be described as small republics. The *Pax Britannica*, which we insisted on introducing wherever we went, regardless of local conditions, and which does not wink at lawlessness, would, if enforced by Indian

Civil Service officers, who were accustomed to work in settled districts, assuredly land us sooner or later in trouble. The French, he remarked, in Morocco tolerate a good deal of lawlessness, and affairs there are carried on quite successfully. Our system of government involved a large garrison, and was consequently costly. He considered that the methods followed by Sir Robert Sandeman in Baluchistan were suited to Mesopotamia. He did not like the idea of native levies, and favoured the judicious bestowal of "baksheesh," to which both Arabs and Kurds—and not they alone—are susceptible. At that time I had no conception of the system on which we governed Mesopotamia, for it had not been possible to get much information regarding it, but the wisdom of some of his remarks forcibly recurred to me a few months later.

On reaching Bombay on the 2nd March I found a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Charles Monro, inviting me to stay with him at Delhi so as to have the opportunity of meeting my predecessor in Mesopotamia, Sir George MacMunn—then Quartermaster-General in India—and other officials who were concerned with the administrative arrangements for the Indian troops who were shortly to come under my command.

I had not been in India since the outbreak of the South African War in 1899, when I resigned my appointment as aide-de-camp to the Commander-in-Chief, the late General Sir William Lockhart, in order to accompany my regiment to the scene of operations. During the first tour he made after his appointment we had visited Delhi, and although the place itself had not suffered any notable changes, its inhabitants seemed to be less well disposed than formerly, while a considerable number had adopted as head-dress the fez in place of the pugaree. The brief glimpse which I now had of India made me think that much of the glamour which had formerly pervaded it was gone for ever, and that the time was not far off when it would cease to be a desirable residence for the Sahib. Those of the sepoys across whom I came seemed to be unchanged and loyal as of old, but there was an indefinable something about the Delhi popu-

lace which I did not like, and which pointed to their having laid aside their manners when they changed their head-dress. Besides a brief interview with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, who looked tired and over-worked, and a visit to a sitting of the Legislative Council, I enjoyed the advantage of going with Sir Edwin Lutyens over the ground where New Delhi was just beginning to emerge and rise above the level of the surrounding plain.

But what interested me most of all were the famous Ridge and other spots, reminiscent of Mutiny days and Mutiny heroes. During my visit twenty years earlier my duties as aide-de-camp had naturally restricted my freedom to go wherever I pleased, and I now took full advantage of my leisure, and spent many hours wandering over the historic ground, and picturing to myself the scenes which had been enacted there.

I had purposed remaining at Delhi for two or three days only, but several things combined to prolong my stay. On the 10th March I bade farewell to my kind host and hostess, and reached Bombay on the 12th. Here I and my aide-de-camp were obliged to remain in the second-rate Taj Mahal Hotel, with its first-class prices, until the 14th, when the vessel, a British India ship, the *Chakdina*, of 1580 tons burthen, which was to carry us to Basrah, sailed. On board were drafts for Indian units, and some ten young officers of various branches of the Service and the Royal Air Force.

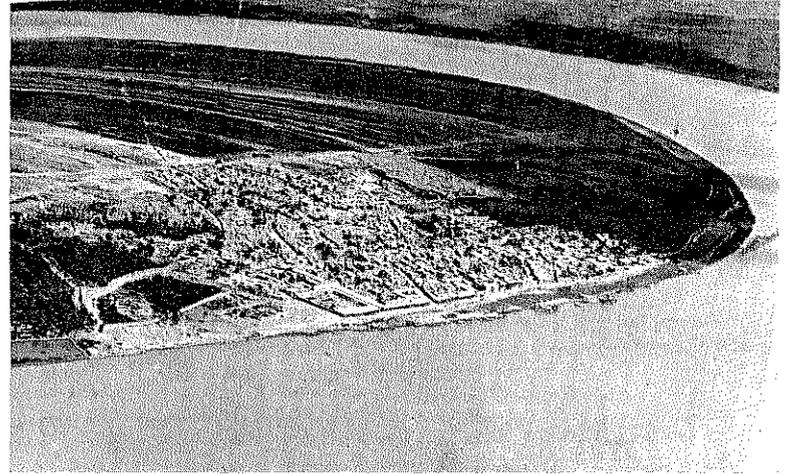
The voyage up the Persian Gulf has so often of late years been described, and is so devoid of interest, that I will spare my readers any mention of the five and a half days which in this case it occupied. On the 20th March we woke to find ourselves at the bar which is formed at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab, the river which conveys the combined waters of the Tigris and Euphrates to the sea. The view of the low-lying coast, with its background of date-palms, and the muddy water all around which soiled the pale green of the sea, inspired no admiration, and was at best a picture such as I had nowhere else encountered. The outlook struck me as particularly dreary, but as we

entered the river, after crossing the bar a few hours later, the dark masses of palm-trees in serried lines, springing from the ground which lay some feet below the level of the river, added some interest to the view. As we steamed up-stream we passed the works of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company at Abadan, near the mouth of the Karun river, and an occasional brick building, of almost palatial dimensions, the dwelling presumably of some local notable; and at 3.30 P.M. reached Basrah, where on landing I was received with the ceremonial customary on the arrival of a new General Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

## CHAPTER II.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

THE first thing which struck me as we approached Basrah from the sea was the size of that place, which exceeded by far anything that I had pictured regarding it. From a broad water-way, bordered by date-palms, surroundings which conveyed nothing to prepare the mind for a total change of scene, one found oneself suddenly steaming up a busy thoroughfare, flanked on one side by what appeared to be miles of wharves and overlooked by buildings, some of which, judging from the flags that floated over them and the blue-garbed figures in their vicinity, were evidently used as hospitals. Indeed, we seemed to have arrived on the outskirts of a miniature Liverpool, the creation of which had not only provided for the necessities of the vast force which overcame the Turks, but had prepared for a development of the country such as might not be attained for half a century. As I drove about Basrah on that afternoon and during part of the following day, I began to realise the Augean task before me of reducing to reasonable dimensions a Base which covered some twenty square miles of ground, and which threatened to lock up far more troops than I had any intention of sparing for its safety. Nor was this all, for some months later it came to my knowledge that twenty-two miles above Basrah at Nahr Umar another port existed which had been developed during the war, in order to relieve the congestion at the former place. Two deep-sea wharves and eighteen large barge jetties, as well as quarters for the Inland Water Transport and other personnel, had been constructed here.



Kut, looking down-stream.



Kut, looking up-stream.

On the 21st, at 4 A.M., accompanied by Brigadier-General P. O. Hambro, my Brigadier-General in charge of Administration, who had joined me at Basrah and was ever ready with an answer to my numerous questions, I proceeded upstream on board a comfortable stern-wheeler, and reached Amarah two days later. The time of year was that of the flood season, and for miles on either side little was to be seen but a vast expanse of water, fringed far away to the east by the mountains of the Pusht-i-Kuh. I pictured with sadness our troops plodding their way along the river bank in the first mad scheme to capture Baghdad. Never could a march have been performed with surroundings less inspiring, for even Xenophon, when he began his long retreat to the shores of the Black Sea, had fortunately arrived at that part of Mesopotamia where the scenery, as one moves northwards, grows daily somewhat more pleasing to the eye. It may, of course, be said that soldiers are not concerned with scenery, and certainly, when engaged in fighting, there is little time to pay attention to the pictorial impressions of nature on the senses whether beautiful or not. When, however, peace replaces war, the effect of one's surroundings undoubtedly adds to or detracts from the popularity of one's quarters, and in respect of external attractions Mesopotamia comes a long last compared to any portion of the globe in which I have so far been.

The next place of note we reached was Kut Cantonment, for the town of Kut-al-Amarah is about two miles up-stream of the military station. Time did not then permit of my visiting that spot of tragic memory, but later on I did so on more than one occasion, and brought back with me for the Imperial War Museum portions of our howitzers which had been destroyed before surrender. Like other scenes of fighting in Mesopotamia, its interest is considerably diminished by the flatness of the country, which allows little to be seen of it from the deck of a river steamer; and I soon came to the conclusion that the best way to gain a bird's-eye view of a Mesopotamian battlefield is from an aeroplane, as the outline of the trenches held by either side can generally be traced.

The remainder of the journey to Baghdad was effected by rail, the distance by land being half of that by water. The engine-driver must have wished to impress me on this my first experience of Mesopotamian railways, for we covered the hundred odd miles in the record time of four and a half hours, during which the irregularities of the road were displayed in the severe jolting to which we were subjected. It was dark when the special train by which I travelled reached Hinaidi station, which lies a few miles south of Baghdad city. On the platform I was met by the senior military officers and several other officers, and also by the Acting Civil Commissioner, Lieut.-Colonel (now Sir Arnold) Wilson; and, after exchanging greetings with them, I proceeded to my house, which had been successively occupied by all British generals in chief command in Mesopotamia, as well as by the German general, Von der Goltz.

I spent the first few days after my arrival in taking stock of the situation, and soon realised that to hold and maintain order in a country which my predecessor had reported to be in a volcanic condition, with the number of troops at my disposal, was not going to prove an easy task.

The area to be secured was considerable. From Basrah to Zakho, my most northern post, the distance as the crow flies is roughly five hundred and fifty miles, or from Fao on the sea, sixty miles more, and is practically the same as that from Albu Kamal on the Upper Euphrates to Enzeli on the Caspian Sea. These distances are, however, very far from representing the actual length of the routes which have to be passed over when moving from north to south or from east to west, by river, road, or rail, and at least one-third must be added to the figures given. But to the Englishman, accustomed to travel at home over perfectly laid railroads, the mention of the total distance would fail to convey any idea of the time required to move troops from one point to another in Mesopotamia or from that country to Persia. From Baghdad to Enzeli not less than six weeks are occupied on the march; while from Basrah to Mosul, owing to indifferent

railway personnel, inefficient rolling-stock, and other causes, happily now in some degree remedied, anything up to a fortnight has to be allowed.

I may mention here that for purposes of command and administration, Mesopotamia, for some time before my arrival, had been divided into three areas, called the River, 17th and 18th Division Areas. The River Area extended roughly as far north as a line from Kut to Nasiriyah, both places inclusive, but later Kut was excluded from this area. Next came the 17th Division Area, which included the Upper Euphrates region, Kirkuk, and South Kurdistan within our borders, and some twenty miles of the railway line towards Mosul. The 18th Division Area comprised the remainder of Mesopotamia, and ran as far north as Zakho.

The infantry units in these areas—whose limits corresponded with those of the three vilayats or administrative districts—were distributed as follows:—

In the River Area: guarding the Base, some Turkish prisoners, the Lower Tigris and the Euphrates valley railway line of communication, were three Indian battalions.

In the 17th Divisional Area: there was a brigade in each of the three sub-areas of Hillah, Kirkuk, and Ramadi.

In the 18th Divisional Area: there was similarly a brigade in each of the three sub-areas of Mosul, Tekrit, and Baiji.<sup>1</sup>

At Baghdad and Mosul were the pioneer battalions of the two divisions, and at the former place for garrison duties were two Indian units.

The above-given distribution is only approximate, since, for instance, in order to assist in guarding Turkish prisoners at Baghdad, a battalion from each of the three sub-areas of Hillah, Tekrit, and Kirkuk had to be maintained at the Capital.

As regards the important but somewhat dry statistical subject of the strength of the troops at my disposal, I shall leave that matter alone until their insufficiency to meet

<sup>1</sup> See Order of Battle, Appendix I.

the situation that arose became more prominent. It will suffice here to say that, on my arrival at Baghdad and after making several extended tours, I found that a large proportion of the British infantry was practically untrained, and that through many men having been withdrawn for temporary duty with departmental services, which were much undermanned, the infantry battalions to which they belonged were in a similar condition. Within a few days of reaching Baghdad I reduced the number of officers and men on guard and other duties there by the equivalent of one battalion, and orders were issued for reductions in the same respect to be made at other stations. This action at once raised an outcry such as usually follows any change, but no attention was paid to it.

The vast amount of stores in the country, ordnance and other, required that British soldiers should be placed in charge, and in spite of all precautions for their safety, the extent to which peculation was carried on almost defies belief. I hesitate to mention the rough figures which were given to me when I inquired into the subject, and which were used as an argument against the diminution of guards and piquets; but better and more effective methods were shortly introduced to replace those which had proved inadequate. From my inquiries I learned that the extensive thefts, which surpassed anything I had met before on active service, mostly occurred during the transit of goods from Basrah to Baghdad and beyond, when exceptionally favourable opportunities presented themselves to the railway robber. The country Arab, who possesses almost no worldly goods, and who in the endeavour to repair that omission was ready to accept considerable risks, was held mainly responsible; but from fuller and later knowledge I have reason to believe that the blame was not always with justice laid at his door, and that the saddle should have been put upon another horse. It is a comparatively simple matter with first-class personnel, ample supervision, and a good detective service to reduce losses to a minimum, though one's experience in France and Belgium after the Armistice showed how difficult it was

to eliminate the railway thief. But in a country where the personnel was by no means the best and was inadequate for the demands made upon it, where no railway police was in existence, and where climate, inclination, and surroundings all tended towards the slack performance of duties, it is not surprising that the total repression of pilfering, both on the lines of communication and at stations where troops were quartered, was impossible of attainment. Ali Baba and the forty thieves had flourished in or near the region where I now found myself, but the summary methods of Morgiana were no longer permissible, or perhaps the light-fingered gentry might have been exterminated.

But I have dilated further than I intended on the practice of thieving in Mesopotamia under the favourable conditions of active service—a subject, however, of great importance to the British taxpayer—and must add a word regarding the fighting troops.

We were at this time engaged in operations on the Upper Euphrates, which had been in progress for some months between Dair-al-Zaur and Ramadi, and which absorbed a mixed brigade, leaving me with no mobile reserve at Baghdad. Between that place and Mosul it is true there was another similar force, which was intended, if required, to proceed to Persia, where the Bolshevik invasion, though threatening, had not yet developed. The transfer of that force, I may mention, would leave indifferently protected the route between Baghdad and Mosul. Disturbances in the neighbourhood of the latter place, where there were already some signs of unrest, and on the borders of Kurdistan, were pointed out to me as likely to occur during the summer or autumn months.

My intention had been as soon as possible to visit every part of Mesopotamia, inspecting the troops there, and later in Persia, so as to see whether any reduction was possible, and satisfy myself that the garrisons, more particularly those which were small and isolated, were secure. On the 27th March, three days after reaching the headquarters of my command, I began my peregrinations,

returning to Baghdad from time to time for a few days to transact such business as had accumulated in my absence. During three months I covered by rail, river, car and air, nearly six thousand miles, and only desisted when I had seen almost every garrison and found that the excessive heat of the summer made travelling for several days in succession, more especially by rail, almost unendurable. Besides visiting the greater part of Mesopotamia, I managed to go as far as Teheran, in order to see the ingoing and outgoing British Ministers, and take part with them in a conference on certain matters.

During my several journeys, which were accomplished without incident, three things struck me more particularly : (a) the distances, not so much measured in miles as by the time taken in moving from place to place ; (b) the absence of any defensive arrangements ; and (c) the insecurity of the troops throughout the country on account of the length and inadequate protection of the lines of communication.

As regards the first of these points, I had early experience of the difficulty of moving at speed from one point to another, or indeed of moving at all in certain conditions. On my way to Sulaimaniyah, in Southern Kurdistan, where, owing to its height, 2825 ft. above sea-level, it was proposed to send some British troops from Kirkuk for the hotter months, heavy rain fell at Bazian Pass, some twenty-five miles short of my destination. Movement forward or backward was impossible, whether by motor-car or horse, and for three days I was forced to remain the guest of the hospitable commander of the little detachment, Major Adler of the 113th Infantry, and only succeeded in getting back to Kirkuk by the aid of coolies using drag-ropes, who hauled us over the more difficult places on the route, for road I cannot call it. This would by no means have been a solitary incident had I not on later occasions been guided by those who, with some reason, posed as weather prophets, and abstained from starting on a journey when the atmospheric phenomena seemed likely to prove unfavourable. Until one has paid

a visit to Mesopotamia and passed a winter and a summer there, one is inclined to treat as travellers' tales the difficulties of getting about the country ; but in no part of the world where I have been can movement become more quickly difficult or indeed impossible for a time than, after a fall of rain, on the slippery argillaceous soil of that country. I had, after my experiences with the Japanese Army in Manchuria in 1904-5, imagined that nothing could exceed the difficulty of transport in summer over its rain-sodden plains, but the ground there was free from the clay which is mixed with the sand of Mesopotamia, and the latter country has not the advantage of being frost-bound for several months each year, when nature makes movement, even across broad rivers, easy. Except a concrete road some six miles long at Basrah, which was constructed during the war, and, though costly, has been invaluable, and a stretch of metalled track which runs for a short distance from Mosul towards Shergat, roads in the European sense do not exist. The alluvial soil of the Tigris delta, which begins some seventy miles north of Baghdad, and the cost of bringing stone from a distance for road construction, will for a long time be an obstacle to movement during the season which is most favourable for military operations. In fact the country is unsuited to mechanical transport of all kinds, except that species which moves after the fashion of the Tank ; and either railways or roads, costly as they are, are essential if movement from place to place and the carriage of stores and merchandise are to be assured. When spring comes floods make their appearance, double the strength of the river current and inundate large areas, thus causing breaches in the railway lines and confining communication in places to boats. Truly the longer one stays in Mesopotamia the more surprises it provides ; and I shall have occasion later to refer to some of these which came when least desired.

As regards the last two points which struck me on my travels—the absence of defensive arrangements and the long unguarded lines of communication—I assumed that the ordinary military precautions had not been considered

necessary owing to the prevalent idea among the British residents that our administration was popular and that internal troubles on a large scale were not to be expected. That I was not altogether correct in my assumption, and that there must, some time earlier, have been anticipations of an outbreak, I learned later, when my staff unearthed a War Office telegram, dated the 4th November 1919, in which was given the strength of the quite considerable force which, in the event of a general rising of the Arabs and Kurds, was regarded as the minimum necessary for the security of the country. I was not content to leave things in the highly unsatisfactory state in which, in the event of a rising, they would be, and on my return on the 7th April to Baghdad from one of my earliest tours, I ordered immediate steps to be taken to defend all isolated localities and provide for the requirements of their garrisons in all respects. I may here mention while on the subject of defence that, finding the aerodrome at Baghdad to be open to access to any one who chose to enter night or day, I made it secure with blockhouses and barbed-wire, a precaution which during the insurrection prevented an attempt to burn down the sheds with their highly-inflammable contents. I viewed the insecurity of the long lines of communication with some apprehension, for it was certain that, should disturbances arise, they would offer an irresistible bait to the Arabs. Indeed, shortly after my arrival in the country, their propensity for railway destruction had been displayed at certain points on the line north of Baghdad. The total length of the communications, along which travelled the supplies and other requirements for the troops in Mesopotamia and Persia, amounted to no less than 2622 miles, of which 910 miles were road, 856 rail, and a similar number river. It was evident that to guard these lines throughout their length would absorb far more than the troops already at my disposal, while even to protect all of the more vital portions was impracticable.

This brings me again to the question of the distribution of the garrison of Mesopotamia, prior to my taking over the command, and the reasons, so far as I could ascertain,

on which that distribution was based. Generally speaking, I should say that the system adopted by the Turks, our predecessors, who governed the country on lines altogether different from ourselves, was followed, and garrisons were placed at the principal towns and in areas where the presence of troops, no matter how small in number, would have the effect of restraining any tendency to disorder. In fact the troops were placed with the object of maintaining peace in the country and allowing such conditions to prevail as would facilitate the payment of revenue, and would insure, as far as possible, the safety from marauding bands of the wayfarer and his goods. The general outlook and my ignorance, for a time, regarding Mesopotamia, its people and administration, did not tempt me to make a radical change in the disposition of the troops. To have done so might in all probability have caused the smouldering fire of rebellion to blaze forth. Here and there I made some small alterations, but at any hint of an intention to remove a detachment, the civil administration, not perhaps unnaturally, were up in arms, and as the necessity for a change, though desirable, was not indeed absolutely urgent, I postponed action in the matter until such time as I should feel surer of my ground, and hoped that the efforts to maintain peace which were being made would not prove unavailing.

One thing which I must mention here, and which came to my notice not long after I landed at Basrah, was the way in which the question of the distribution of water dominated the whole situation in Mesopotamia, and the possibility of utilising that fact for strategic purposes was constantly present in my mind. Besides the system of canals and regulators and the great Hindiyah Barrage, the Arab, as in Egypt and other countries, employs for drawing water for his crops lifts which are worked by animal or manual labour and pumps whose motive power is oil. It struck me that the latter, which without oil would cease to function, might serve as an additional means of securing a hold over rebellious tribesmen, and more especially as a check on damage to the railroads by which much of the material