

GIBRALTAR AND CEUTA

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THE attitude maintained by Spain during the world war has hardly been of a character to rouse Entente peoples to enthusiasm. Whatever has been the reason for it, King Alphonso's subjects, his Government, and his army have appeared on the whole to be in sympathy with Germany rather than with the Allied States. Madrid has on occasion displayed a tenderness towards Hun pirates which to us seems difficult to account for. That small neutral nations which have been to some extent at the mercy of the Great General Staff of Berlin, such as the Dutch, the Danes, and the Norwegians, should have felt themselves obliged to tolerate the outrages committed upon their shipping and their sailors by the U-boats, is intelligible enough. But that Spain, situated geographically at so great a distance from the Central Powers, far beyond the range of Teutonic Zeppelins and aviators, and absolutely secure from military invasion, should have taken such insults lying down either argues pro-Germanism or else connotes a singular decay in spirit on the part of what used to be regarded as a proud and honor loving nation.

It is the latter point — the question whether Spanish patriotism is what it was — that especially interests us when we come to investigate the project, vaguely mooted from time to time of late years, of effecting an exchange of the European for the African Pillar of Hercules. Do the Spaniards of to-day, as Spaniards undoubtedly did in the past, bitterly resent British

presence on the Rock of Gibraltar? Or do they acquiesce in an arrangement of somewhat long standing with merely a mild protest, as they have for all practical purposes been acquiescing for the last year or two in the sinking of their vessels and the murder of their seamen by the crews of submarines belonging to an ostensibly friendly State?

There was a period in the early days of the present war when the accession of Spain to the cause of the Allies would have been extremely welcome and when such an alliance would have been worth purchasing at a considerable price. Leaving the fighting forces of the land of the Dons ashore and afloat entirely out of account, the unchallenged claim upon the industrial capabilities, upon the mineral wealth, and upon the animal resources of the Iberian Peninsula which such a political transformation would have conferred on our side, would have been an asset of the utmost value to the Entente. A full and free use of the numerous ports and harbors and inlets on the coast of the Spanish mainland, of the Balearic Islands, and of the Canaries and Azores, would have been of no little assistance to the naval forces that were engaged in combating the under-water craft of the Central Powers. Nor would the moral effect of one more important nation, a nation possessing widespread influence in South America, declaring itself to be at one with us have been a factor to be disregarded. We have got on pretty well without Spain as it has turned out; but one does wonder whether she

could have been 'brought in,' let us say in 1915, by an undertaking given by His Majesty's Government that Gibraltar would be ceded on the conclusion of hostilities, in exchange for Ceuta.

To the British public, to a large proportion of the people of this country at all events, a proposal to give up Gibraltar would come as a tremendous shock. There is a glamour about that razor-edged, limestone mountain jutting out from Spanish territory, such as invests no other portion of the King's dominions beyond the seas. In the part that it has played in building up the Empire it has rivaled Quebec. The sight of the Rock standing sentinel over the Straits impresses the traveler from the United Kingdom, as even the first glimpse of the flat-topped heights overshadowing Table Bay will not affect him. We have been brought up to believe the stronghold to be impregnable and to call it the Key of the Mediterranean. We have all of us heard of its hidden galleries, hewn in the precipices of the northern face. We revel in the story of the two years' siege, of the successive reliefs of the stricken garrison, of the great bombardment, and of the red-hot shot. Deliver it up? That would be much to ask.

Still, we live in a prosaic age, and Gibraltar does mean a good deal more to us than a mere monument to eighteenth-century achievements on the part of fighters under Rooke and Rodney, under Elliott and Lord Howe. It ranks as a first-class naval station. It possesses an extensive artificial harbor capable of sheltering numbers of warships against their worst enemy when at rest — the hostile torpedo craft and submarines. It is fitted out with repairing appliances on an elaborate scale for succoring damaged vessels in time of war. It is furnished

with generous store buildings, it has appropriate accommodation for masses of coal, and it includes three extensive dry docks constructed at great expense. And yet the fact remains that this haven and its naval establishments nestling under the shadow of the Rock are singularly badly placed in a tactical sense under the fighting conditions of to-day. Whether the lessons taught by the experiences of the great war will modify the views of experts as to our need for maintaining a secure place of rest, refreshment, and repair for the fleet at the mouth of the Mediterranean, remains to be seen. But, assuming the strategical situation in those waters to be regarded as virtually unaltered, then the question of Gibraltar is one that is entitled to serious consideration.

Little had been done previous to 1895 to make the Rock of real value to our naval forces, although such harbor works and establishments as existed were useful enough in time of peace. But in that year a programme of development, conceived on ambitious lines, was taken in hand, it having been decided to create the enclosed port and the dockyard very much as these are to be seen to-day; and with a singular lack of foresight the western, and not the eastern, side of Gibraltar was chosen as the site. Naval officers and artillery officers were fully prepared for increase in the power of ordnance as technical science progressed, and the sinking of great sums of money in fashioning a first-class naval station, which would assuredly before long be within range of guns and howitzers planted round the two sides of the bay that are not in British hands, appeared to many even then to be an ill-judged proceeding — an analogous harbor constructed on the eastern side of the Rock would obviously be incomparably better protected against

bombardment from the land, even if not wholly immune from such fire. Still it must be admitted that there was excuse for emplacing the works on the wrong side of the great promontory. The town lies on the western side and there is far more elbow room at the base of the mountain, the eastern slopes being very abrupt. The torpedo was regarded with well-justified apprehension, it was desirable to secure protection for the fleet against this threat as soon as possible, and the 'New Mole,' a quarter of a mile long, already provided a good start for the longest of the three arms that were contemplated as framework of the harbor. Works on the eastern side were bound to present greater technical difficulty and therefore to be more expensive than works within Gibraltar Bay, owing to a greater exposure to heavy seas. All these points were undoubtedly entitled to consideration; but in 1901, when the undertaking was far from completed although the moles were in a very forward state, representations made by Mr. T. G. Bowles and the experiences of the South African war caused a committee to be assembled to examine into the question afresh. The late Admiral Sir F. Richards was chairman, and he was assisted on the military side by Sir W. Nicholson, Mr. Bowles also taking part in the proceedings.

This committee recognized the value of the works on the western side of the Rock (on which about 1,700,000*l.* out of the 4,700,000*l.* that they ultimately cost had already been expended) as providing protection as they stood against torpedo craft. But they recommended that an enclosed harbor with dockyard establishments, estimated to cost 4,800,000*l.*, should be taken in hand on the eastern side which would be 'fourteen times' as secure against land bombardment.

This project was, however, rejected, the works on the western side were completed, and, given a chart or map of the Straits of Gibraltar and a pair of compasses, anybody can judge for himself whether our great naval station at the mouth of the Mediterranean is satisfactorily placed or not in view of conceivable contingencies and developments. It will be found that an arc of a circle of 10,000 yards radius, struck from the centre of the harbor and extending for about 130 degrees from near Cernero Point at the southwestern extremity of Gibraltar Bay to the high ground near the Mediterranean shore a little east of north of the Rock, traverses almost continuously high ground that looks down upon the harbor. Assume, for the sake of argument, the fortress to be besieged by land some day, and port, docks, and storehouses become a veritable shell trap. The enemy observers will enjoy unwonted privileges in respect to direct view and ideal cross bearings. From high ground to the north even field guns and howitzers will be able to plant their projectiles in the dry docks at the southern, and therefore the most distant, end of the harbor. A fleet will have to be in evil case before seeking refuge in so hot a corner.

A very few years before the new harbor works were started, the writer had occasion to make a tour of the ports and coast line of Morocco, which was in those days a sovereign empire of somewhat old-fashioned ways and one with which there was always an off-chance of coming to blows; and on his way home he paid a first visit to Gibraltar. Even then he was impressed with the cramped character of the position in which the famous place of arms was planted down, and with the extent to which its business side was dominated by rising ground in alien

keeping. There was already talk of developing the existing harbor works for naval purposes, and it occurred to him forcibly that, rather than commit the country to so doubtful an undertaking, it might be desirable to abandon the place altogether if Spain would hand over Ceuta in exchange. He made representations to that effect — familiarity with the boundless agricultural and commercial resources of Mauretania and a remembrance of the mass of seaweed-grown boulders marking the site of the mole we built when we held the gates of this land of promise, perhaps made him a not impartial judge. The matter received some little consideration at the time, as indeed it had before. It has been occasionally considered since.

The pear-shaped peninsula with narrow neck known as Ceuta projects eastwards in extension of the southern shore of the Gut of Gibraltar. On its land side it is only commanded within an arc of 90 degrees, and that only from its immediate vicinity. The frontier between Spanish and Moorish territory ran at a distance of between 4,000 and 5,000 yards from the harbor (which is on the northern side and within the bight created by the isthmus joining the peninsula to the mainland) in the early 'nineties; but since those days all this part of Morocco has become a Spanish protectorate. Were an exchange to be effected under existing conditions we should naturally insist upon the cession of an adequate sector of hinterland, one with a radius, say, of a dozen miles, struck from the isthmus and the harbor. This would secure for us that elbow room which is so lacking at Gibraltar, would provide us with sites in healthy upland for barracks and habitations, would place ample training areas at the disposal of the garrison, and would add to the King's dominions beyond

the seas a health resort to which the leisured classes from the Old Country would flock in crowds in winter time. We had designs on this Spanish outpost in 1704, it may be remarked, when Sir G. Rooke and the Duke of Hesse captured Gibraltar; but the project was abandoned. The place was occupied by British troops on behalf of Spain from 1810 to 1814 during the peninsular war. It is interesting to note that the chronicler of its seizure by the Portuguese in 1410 wrote, 'Of a surety no one can deny that Ceuta is the very key of all the Mediterranean Sea.'

The area of the peninsula in itself is less than two thirds that of the Crown Colony of Gibraltar, and its culminating point, about 650 feet above sea level, is only about half the altitude of the Rock. But there is plenty of high ground in the hinterland close at hand, and, while much better placed in every way to resist attack by land than the fortress across the Straits, its surroundings are equally favorable for the setting up of elevated batteries bearing seawards. An enclosed harbor is under construction, protected by two lengthy moles, offering ample depth of water, and having an area about two thirds of that shut in by the Gibraltar breakwaters.

The truth is that, were we starting afresh with Gibraltar and Ceuta to choose from just as nature made them, nobody in this country would dream of selecting the former as an outpost of Empire — the objections to it are manifest and manifold. Restricted area, lack of training ground, water problems overcome only by much ingenuity and labor, a congested township incapable of expansion, and a climate apt to be oppressive in the autumn months, combine to make the Rock an unsatisfactory military station, quite apart from its topographical disabili-

ties as a fortress. Furthermore, it is part and parcel of Spain even if the British flag floats from the battlements, just as much as the Isle of Wight is part and parcel of England; and that in itself is objectionable. But when we come to consider the question of exchange, we are dealing with Gibraltar and Ceuta not as nature made them but as they stand to-day.

In addition to the harbor at Gibraltar being completed and being more spacious than that at Ceuta, there is the dockyard with its dry docks and establishments; they cost very nearly 3,000,000*l.* to construct between 1895 and 1905. The defense works are more complete and appropriate, and the barracks better, than those on the far side of the water. To bring Ceuta up to the Gibraltar standard as naval station and base, in respect to efficacy of coast defenses and as regards buildings to be occupied by troops, would probably involve an expenditure of quite 5,000,000*l.* Would Spain, for the sake of getting rid of us off the Rock, of acquiring a valuable port asking for the construction of only some six miles of branch line to link it up with the general railway system of the country, and of gaining possession of the excellent docks and dockyard buildings, be prepared to pay so large a sum as this, as well as to cede 100 square miles or so of Moorish territory? The point suggests itself that, we might, in place of demanding money down, arrive at some agreement granting us concession rights in respect to railway communications leading from Ceuta to Tetuan and Tangier, communications designed to tap the resources of the northwestern extremity of Morocco and to draw these to the British wharves. The difficulties in the way of creating a satisfactory commercial harbor at Tangier are great, whereas a good harbor is in course of

construction at Ceuta and should be capable of much improvement.* Given steam communication with the interior without vexatious restrictions, the haven overlooked by the southern Pillar of Hercules might come to be the busiest port on the African coast between Cape Town and Algiers.

Putting our national susceptibilities and our affection for the Rock on one side, there is something to be said for the deal proposed above — but they are more easily put on one side on paper than in practice. When the writer one day in 1915 discussed this question with Lord Kitchener, who had never heard of the project before, the great war Minister remarked, 'Yes, yes, I see all that — and I would give a good deal to have Spain in on our side. But how about the British public and British sentiment? Have n't you rather overlooked them?' The leading points of the case have been set out in the foregoing paragraphs, and no opinion is expressed whether or not an effort ought to be made on the part of His Majesty's Government to effect the exchange that has been debated. But there is one aspect of the strategical and political problems that are involved which ought not to be overlooked. Were Spain to recover possession of Gibraltar she would never yield up that Rock to a foreign State except under *duress*. But it is quite conceivable that she might some day hand over Ceuta to a Power whose presence in that part of the world we did not hanker after.

The end of the great war is now in sight, and its termination is accepted on most hands as a fitting opportunity for a general settlement of national claims, as a juncture when it may be feasible to satisfy a number of racial aspirations on the principle of give and

* According to the latest supplement of the *Mediterranean Pilot*, 1100 yards out of a total of 2600 yards of mole were completed in 1915.

take and thanks to mutual good will, and as the date from which territory that ought to be in the keeping of some particular people but is in the hands of others shall revert to its rightful owners. There also exists the idea of establishing a League of Nations, an idea entertained by numbers of persons of light and leading in this and other countries. Some of us — maybe of the baser sort — remain unimpressed and even regard the whole nebulous and idealistic project with

profound suspicion. Still, if there is to be a League of Nations, of what profit is the Rock to us? Naval stations with their appurtenances can only be regarded as an anachronism when the reign of universal peace sets in; our famous fastness on the Andalusian littoral then ceases to be more than a port of remarkable possibilities but condemned to virtual idleness for lack of communications with the interior and as a result of an impenetrable customs' barrier.

The Nineteenth Century and After

INTERNED IN BULGARIA

A LIEUTENANT of the Royal Air Force who has just reached England after a long internment in Bulgaria writes the following account of his experiences:

'My stay in a prisoners-of-war camp in Bulgaria was the direct outcome of a little affair with German airmen. Early on a morn'ng in June, 1917, we started on a long reconnaissance flight. I had the extreme good fortune to have as my pilot one of the very first men released from the navy to take up flying on behalf of the senior service. For a time all went well, but when about to alter course for home a tremendous anti-aircraft barrage was put up, and in a few moments we were engaging the first of three enemy machines. We were successful in driving him down, but suffered somewhat severe damage ourselves, and the pilot was badly wounded. The remaining Huns now took up the running, and after having damaged one of them we were forced to descend, our machine being quite

out of control and the engine out of action. It was a remarkable feat on the part of the pilot to land the machine with as little damage to ourselves as he did.

'Within ten minutes of landing we were seized upon by Turkish soldiery, who were in the act of handing over their section of the line to Bulgars. After a short stay in a field dressing station we were moved to Drama Hospital, and our wounds attended to with all possible care. Our spirits rose very considerably when we contemplated our happy fate. We were, as we were constantly reminded, bound for Philippopolis, a city of a thousand delights. Here British officers dwelt in the acme of luxury and comfort, the honored guests of a magnanimous foe. Visions of beautifully furnished apartments, with every modern convenience, rose before our eyes. Imagine our disgust and dejection, when, after 36 hours in a verminous railway compartment, the true picture revealed itself. The