Today's Conflict in Unfortunate Land Is History Repeating Itself

By JOHN A. MENAUGH

In little matters what country holds the Axis side of the Strait of Gibraltar as long as that nation does not challenge the supremacy of Gibraltar. With Italy in possession of Crete, a constant rear for which Mers el Kebir is reported to be defending with the rebel French in Spain, the situation might be changed. As it is today, however, Great Britain remains supreme at the door of the Mediterranean.

With few exceptions the power that has told Gibraltar and the land immediately surrounding it has been the power that has possessed the African coast just across the strait. Most vulnerable of the exceptions has been the present ownership of the grand rock fortress.

Great Britain has changed in Gibraltar since 1906 when Sir George Royle, a British admiral with much of his own responsibility, hit the flag at his country there in 1906.

Gibraltar lies on the shortest route between Africa and Europe. It is only 114 miles from Europe point, the southern tip of the British colony upon which the rock stands, to the African coast. Before the days of history men were plying their fragile craft across the narrow strip of water that separates the two continents.

Early Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, and others of the maritime peoples of the Mediterranean knew Gibraltar and a corresponding commentary on the African coast as Pillars of Hercules.

It was in the early years of the eighteenth century A.D. that an army of Arabs and Berbers swarmed over the rock of Gibraltar in a campaign of death. The leader of the Moorish invaders, the Tahiri bin Zaid, recognized the importance of fortifying the great rocky heights. He began the building of a stone castle which was completed in 702—the first fortress. For nearly 400 years then the Mores held both sides.