

CHAPTER XI

GERMANY FORCES TURKEY INTO THE WAR

But we were all then in a highly nervous state, because we knew that Germany was working hard to produce a *casus belli*. Souchon frequently sent the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* to manoeuvre in the Black Sea, hoping that the Russian fleet would attack. There were several pending situations that might end in war. Turkish and Russian troops were having occasional skirmishes on the Persian and Caucasian frontier. On October 29th, Bedouin troops crossed the Egyptian border and had a little collision with British soldiers. On this same day I had a long talk with Talaat. I called in the interest of the British Ambassador, to tell him about the Bedouins crossing into Egypt. "I suppose," Sir Louis wrote me, "that this means war; you might mention this news to Talaat and impress upon him the possible results of this mad act." Already Sir Louis had had difficulties with Turkey over this matter. When he had protested to the Grand Vizier about the Turkish troops near the Egyptian frontier, the Turkish statesman had pointedly replied that Turkey recognized no such thing as an Egyptian frontier. By this he meant, of course, that Egypt itself was Turkish territory and that the English occupation was a temporary usurpation. When I brought this Egyptian situation to Talaat's attention he said that no Ottoman Bedouins had crossed into Egypt. The Turks had been building wells on the Sinai peninsula to use in case war broke out with England; England was destroying these wells and the Bedouins, said Talaat, had interfered to stop this destruction.

At this meeting Talaat frankly told me that Turkey had decided to side with the Germans and to sink or swim with them. He went again over the familiar grounds, and added that if Germany won---and Talaat said that he was convinced that Germany would win---the Kaiser would get his revenge on Turkey if Turkey had not helped him to obtain this victory. Talaat frankly admitted that fear---the motive, which, as I have said, is the one that chiefly inspires Turkish acts---was driving Turkey into a German alliance. He analyzed the whole situation most dispassionately; he said that nations could not afford such emotions as gratitude, or hate, or affection; the only guide to action should be cold-blooded policy.

"At this moment," said Talaat, "it is for our interest to side with Germany; if, a month from now, it is our interest to embrace France and England we shall do that just as readily."

"Russia is our greatest enemy," he continued; "and we are afraid of her. If now, while Germany is attacking Russia, we can give her a good strong kick, and so make her powerless to injure us for some time, it is Turkey's duty to administer that kick!"

And then turning to me with a half -melancholy, half-defiant smile, he summed up the whole situation.

"*Ich mit die Deutschen*," he said, in his broken German.

Because the Cabinet was so divided, however, the Germans themselves had to push Turkey over the precipice. The evening following my talk with Talaat, most fateful news came from Russia. Three Turkish torpedo boats had entered the harbour of Odessa, had sunk the Russian gunboat *Donetz*, killing a part of the crew, and had damaged two Russian dreadnaughts. They also sank the French ship *Portugal*, killing two of the crew and wounding two others. They then turned their shells on the town and destroyed a sugar factory, with some loss of life. German officers commanded these Turkish vessels; there were very few Turks on board, as the Turkish crews had been given a holiday for the Turkish religious festival of *Bairam*. The act was simply a wanton and unprovoked one; the Germans raided the town deliberately, in order to make war inevitable. The German officers on the *General*, as my friend had told me, were constantly threatening to commit some such act, if Turkey did not do so; well, now they had done it. When this news reached Constantinople, Djemal was playing cards at the Cercle d'Orient. As Djemal was Minister of Marine, this attack, had it been an official act of Turkey, could have been made only on his orders. When someone called him from the card table to tell him the news, Djemal was much excited. "I know nothing about it," he replied. "It has not been done by my orders." On the evening of the 29th I had another talk with Talaat. He told me that he had known nothing of this attack beforehand and that the whole responsibility rested with the German, Admiral Souchon.

Whether Djemal and Talaat were telling the truth in thus pleading ignorance I do not know; my opinion is that they were expecting some such outrage as this. But there is no question that the Grand Vizier, Saïd Halim, was genuinely grieved. When M. Bompard and Sir Louis Mallet called on him and demanded their passports, he burst into tears. He begged them to delay; he was sure that the matter could be adjusted. The Grand Vizier was the only member of the Cabinet whom Enver and Talaat particularly wished to placate. As a prince of the royal house of Egypt and as an extremely rich nobleman, his presence in the Cabinet, as I have already said, gave it a certain standing. This probably explains the message which I now received. Talaat asked me to call upon the Russian Ambassador and ask what amends Turkey could make that would satisfy the Czar. There is little likelihood that Talaat sincerely wished me to patch up the difficulty; his purpose was merely to show the Grand Vizier that he was attempting to meet his wishes, and, in this way, to keep him in the Cabinet. I saw M. Giers, but found him in no submissive mood. He said that Turkey could make amends only by dismissing all the German officers in the Turkish army and navy; he had his instructions to leave at once and he intended to do so. However, he would wait long enough in Bulgaria to receive their reply, and, if they accepted his terms, he would come back.

"Russia, herself, will guarantee that the Turkish fleet does not again come into the Black Sea," said M. Giers, grimly. Talaat called on me in the afternoon, saying that he had just had lunch with Wangenheim. The Cabinet had the Russian reply under consideration, he said; the Grand Vizier wished to have M. Giers's terms put in writing; would I attempt to get it? By this time Garroni, the Italian Ambassador, had taken charge of Russian affairs, and I told Talaat that such negotiations were out of my hands and that any further negotiations must be conducted through him.

"Why don't you drop your mask as messenger boy of the Grand Vizier and talk to me as Talaat?" I asked.

He laughed and said: "Well, Wangenheim, Enver, and I prefer that the war shall come now."

Bustány, Oskan, Mahmoud, and Djavid at once carried out their threats and resigned from the Cabinet, thus leaving the government in the hands of Moslem Turks. The Grand Vizier, although he had threatened to resign, did not do so; he was exceedingly pompous and vain, and enjoyed the dignities of his office so much that, when it came to the final decision, he could not surrender them. Thus the net result of Turkey's entrance into the war, so far as internal politics was concerned, was to put the nation entirely in the hands of the Committee of Union and Progress, which now controlled the Government in practically all its departments. Thus the idealistic organization which had come into existence to give Turkey the blessings of democracy had ended by becoming a tool of Prussian autocracy.

One final picture I have of these exciting days. On the evening of the 30th I called at the British Embassy. British residents were already streaming in large numbers to my office for protection, and fears of ill treatment, even the massacre of foreigners, filled everybody's mind. Amid all this tension I found one imperturbable figure. Sir Louis was sitting in the chancery, before a huge fireplace, with large piles of documents heaped about him in a semi-circle. Secretaries and clerks were constantly entering, their arms full of papers, which they added to the accumulations already surrounding the Ambassador. Sir Louis would take up document after document, glance through it and almost invariably drop it into the fire. These papers contained the embassy records for probably a hundred years. In them were written the great achievements of a long line of distinguished ambassadors. They contained the story of all the diplomatic triumphs in Turkey of Stratford de Redcliffe, the "Great Elchi," as the Turks called him, who, for the greater part of almost fifty years, from 1810 to 1858, practically ruled the Turkish Empire in the interest of England. The records of other great British ambassadors at the Sublime Porte now went, one by one, into Sir Louis Mallet's fire. The long story of British ascendancy in Turkey had reached its close. The twenty-years' campaign of the Kaiser to destroy England's influence and to become England's successor had finally triumphed, and the blaze in Sir Louis's chancery was really the funeral pyre of England's vanished power in Turkey. As I looked upon this dignified and yet somewhat pensive diplomat, sitting there amid all the splendours of the British Embassy, I naturally thought of how once the sultans had bowed with fear and awe before the majesty of England, in the days when Prussia and Germany were little more than names. Yet the British Ambassador, as is usually the case with British diplomatic and military figures, was quiet and self-possessed. We sat there before his fire and discussed the details of his departure. He gave me a list of the English residents who were to leave and those who were to stay, and I made final arrangements with Sir Louis for taking over British interests. Distressing in many ways as

was this collapse of British influence in Turkey, the honour of Great Britain and that of her ambassador was still secure. Sir Louis had not purchased Turkish officials with money, as had Wangenheim; he had not corrupted the Turkish press, trampled on every remaining vestige of international law, fraternized with a gang of political desperadoes, and conducted a ceaseless campaign of misrepresentations and lies against his enemy. The diplomatic game that had ended in England's defeat was one which English statesmen were not qualified to play. It called for talents such as only a Wangenheim possessed---it needed that German statecraft which, in accordance with Bismarck's maxim, was ready to sacrifice for the Fatherland "not only life but honour."