

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE INVASION OF NOTRE DAME DE SION

Talaat's statement that the German Chief of Staff, Bronssart, had really held up this train, was a valuable piece of information. I decided to look into the matter further, and, with this idea in my mind, I called next day on Wangenheim. The Turkish authorities, I said, had solemnly promised that they would treat their enemies decently, and certainly I could not tolerate any interference in the matter from the German Chief of Staff. Wangenheim had repeatedly told me that the Germans were looking to President Wilson as the peacemaker and I therefore used the same argument with him that I had urged on Talaat. Proceedings of this sort would not help his country when the day of the final settlement came! Here, I said, we have a strange situation; a so-called barbarous country, like Turkey, attempting to make civilized warfare and treat their Christian enemies with decency and kindness, and, on the other hand, a supposedly cultured and Christian nation, like Germany, which is trying to persuade them to revert to barbarism. "What sort of an impression do you think that will make on the American people?" I asked Wangenheim. He expressed a willingness to help and suggested, as my consideration for such help, that I should try to persuade the United States to insist on free commerce with Germany, so that his country could receive plentiful cargoes of copper, wheat, and cotton. This was a subject to which, as I shall relate, Wangenheim constantly returned.

Despite Wangenheim's promise I had practically no support from the German Embassy in my attempt to protect the foreign residents from Turkish ill treatment. I realized that, owing to my religion, there might be a feeling in certain quarters that I was not exerting all my energies in behalf of these Christian peoples and religious organizations---hospitals, schools, monasteries, and convents---and I naturally thought that it would strengthen my influence with the Turks if I could have the support of my most powerful Christian colleagues. I had a long discussion on this matter with Pallavicini, himself a Catholic and the representative of the greatest Catholic power. Pallavicini frankly told me that Wangenheim would do nothing that would annoy the Turks. There was then a constant fear that the English and French fleets would force the Dardanelles, capture Constantinople, and hand it over to Russia, and only the Turkish forces, said Pallavicini, could prevent such a calamity. The Germans, therefore, believed that they were dependent on the good graces of the Turkish Government, and would do nothing to antagonize them. Evidently Pallavicini wished me to believe that Wangenheim and he really desired to help. Yet this plea was hardly frank, for I knew all the time that Turkey, if the Germans had not constantly interfered, would have behaved decently. I found that the evil spirit was not the Turkish Government, but Von Bronssart, the German Chief of Staff. The fact that certain members of the Turkish Cabinet, who represented European and Christian culture---men like Bustány and Oskan---had resigned as a protest against Turkey's action in entering the war, made the situation of foreigners even more dangerous. There was also much conflict of authority; a policy decided on one day would be reversed the next, the result being, that we never knew where we stood. The mere fact that the Government promised me that foreigners would not be maltreated by no means settled the matter, for some underling, like Bedri Bey, could frequently find an excuse for disregarding instructions. The situation, therefore, was one that called for constant vigilance; I had not only to get pledges from men like Talaat and Enver, but I had personally to see that these pledges were carried into action.

I awoke one November morning at four o'clock; I had been dreaming, or I had had a "presentiment," that all was not going well with the Sion Soeurs, a French sisterhood which had for many years conducted a school for girls in Constantinople. Madame Bompard, the wife of the French Ambassador, and several ladies of the French colony, had particularly requested us to keep a watchful eye on this institution. It was a splendidly conducted school; the daughters of many of the best families of all nationalities attended it, and when these girls were assembled, the Christians wearing silver crosses and the non-Christians silver stars, the sight was particularly beautiful and impressive. Naturally the thought of the brutal Turks breaking into such a community was enough to arouse the wrath of any properly constituted man. Though we had nothing more definite than an uneasy feeling that something might be wrong, Mrs. Morgenthau and I decided to go up immediately after breakfast. As we approached the building we noted nothing particularly suspicious; the place was quiet and the whole atmosphere was one of peace and sanctity. Just as we ascended the steps, however, five Turkish policemen followed on our heels. They crowded after us into the vestibule, much to the consternation of a few of the

sisters, who happened to be in the waiting room. The mere fact that the American Ambassador came with the police in itself increased their alarm, though our arrival together was purely accidental.

"What do you want?" I asked, turning to the men. As they spoke only Turkish, naturally they did not understand me, and they started to push me aside. My own knowledge of Turkish was extremely limited, but I knew that the word "Elchi" meant "Ambassador." So, pointing to Myself, I said, "Elchi American."

This scrap of Turkish worked like magic. In Turkey an ambassador is a much-revered object, and these policemen immediately respected my authority. Meanwhile the sisters had sent for their superior, Mère Elvira. This lady was one of the most distinguished and influential personages in Constantinople. That morning, as she came in quietly and faced these Turkish policemen, showing not a sign of fear, and completely overawing them by the splendour and dignity of her bearing, she represented to my eyes almost a supernatural being. Mère Elvira was a daughter of one of the most aristocratic families of France; she was a woman of perhaps forty years of age, with black hair and shining black eyes, all accentuated by a pale face that radiated culture, character, and intelligence. I could not help thinking, as I looked at her that morning, that there was not a diplomatic circle in the world to which she would not have added grace and dignity. In a few seconds Mère Elvira had this present distracting situation completely under control. She sent for a sister who spoke Turkish and questioned the policemen. They said that they were acting under Bedri's orders. All the foreign schools were to be closed that morning, the Government intending to seize all their buildings. There were about seventy-two teachers and sisters in this convent; the police had orders to shut all these into two rooms, where they were to be held practically as prisoners. There were about two hundred girls; these were to be turned out into the streets, and left to shift for themselves. The fact that it was raining in torrents, and that the weather was extremely cold, accentuated the barbarity of this proceeding. Yet every enemy school and religious institution in Constantinople was undergoing a similar experience at this time. Clearly this was a situation which I could not handle alone, and I at once telephoned my Turkish-speaking legal adviser. Herein is another incident which may have an interest for those who believe in providential intervention. When I arrived in Constantinople telephones had been unknown, but, in the last few months, an English company had been introducing a system. The night before my experience with the Sion Soeurs, my legal adviser had called me up and proudly told me that his telephone had just been installed. I jotted down his number, and this memorandum I now found in my pocket. Without my interpreter I should have been hard pressed, and without this telephone I could not have immediately brought him to the spot.

While waiting for his arrival I delayed the operations of the policemen, and my wife, who fortunately speaks French, was obtaining all the details from the sisters. Mrs. Morgenthau understood the Turks well enough to know that they had other plans than the mere expulsion of the sisters and their charges. The Turks regard these institutions as repositories of treasure; the valuables which they contain are greatly exaggerated in the popular mind; and it was a safe assumption that, among other things, this expulsion was an industrious raiding expedition for tangible evidences of wealth.

"Have you any money and other valuables here?" Mrs. Morgenthau asked one of the sisters.

Yes, they had quite a large amount; it was kept in a safe upstairs. My wife told me to keep the policemen busy and then she and one of the sisters quietly disappeared from the scene. Upstairs the sister disclosed about a hundred square pieces of white flannel into each one of which had been sewed twenty gold coins. In all, the Sion Soeurs had in this liquid form about fifty thousand francs. They had been fearing expulsion for some time and had been getting together their money in this form, so that they could carry it away with them when forced to leave Turkey. Besides this, the sisters had several bundles of securities, and many valuable papers, such as the charter of their school. Certainly here was something that would appeal to Turkish cupidity. Mrs. Morgenthau knew that if the police once obtained control of the building there would be little likelihood that the Sion Soeurs would ever see their money again. With the aid of the sisters, my wife promptly concealed as much as she could on her person, descended the stairs, and marched through the line of gendarmes out into the rain. Mrs. Morgenthau told me afterward that her blood almost ran cold with fright as she passed by these guardians of the law; from all external signs, however, she was absolutely calm and collected. She stepped into the waiting auto, was driven to the American Embassy, placed the money in our vault, and promptly returned to the school. Again Mrs. Morgenthau solemnly ascended the stairs with the sisters. This time they took her to the gallery of the Cathedral, which stood behind the convent, but could be entered through it. One of the sisters

lifted up a tile from a particular spot in the floor, and again disclosed a heap of gold coins. This was secreted on Mrs. Morgenthau's clothes, and once more she walked past the gendarmes, out into the rain, and was driven rapidly to the Embassy. In these two trips my wife succeeded in getting the money of the sisters to a place where it would be safe from the Turks.

Between Mrs. Morgenthau's trips Bedri had arrived. He told me that Talaat had himself given the order for closing all the institutions and that they had intended to have the entire job finished before nine o'clock. I have already said that the Turks have a sense of humour; but to this statement I should add that it sometimes manifests itself in a perverted form. Bedri now seemed to think that locking more than seventy Catholic sisters in two rooms and turning two hundred young and carefully nurtured girls into the streets of Constantinople was a great joke.

"We were going at it early in the morning and have it all over before you heard anything about it," he said with a laugh. "But you seem never to be asleep."

"You are very foolish to try to play such tricks on us," I said. "Don't you know that I am going to write a book? If you go on behaving this way, I shall put you in as the villain."

This remark was an inspiration of the moment; it was then that it first occurred to me that these experiences might prove sufficiently interesting for publication. Bedri took the statement seriously, and it seemed to have a sobering effect.

"Do you really intend to write a book?" he asked, almost anxiously.

"Why not?" I rejoined. "General Lew Wallace was minister here---didn't he write a book? 'Sunset' Cox was also minister here---didn't he write one? Why shouldn't I? And you are such an important character that I shall have to give you a part. Why do you go on acting in a way that will make me describe you as a very bad man? These sisters here have always been your friends. They have never done you anything but good; they have educated many of your daughters; why do you treat them in this shameful fashion?"

This plea produced an effect; Bedri consented to postpone execution of the order until we could get Talaat on the wire. In a few minutes I heard Talaat laughing over the telephone.

"I tried to escape you," he said, "but you have caught me again. Why make such a row about this matter? Didn't the French themselves expel all their nuns and monks? Why shouldn't we do it? "

After I had remonstrated over this indecent haste Talaat told Bedri to suspend the order until we had had a chance to talk the matter over. Naturally this greatly relieved Mere Elvira and the sisters. Just as we were about to leave, Bedri suddenly had a new idea. There was one detail which he had apparently forgotten.

"We'll leave the Sion sisters alone for the present," he said, "but we must get their money."

Reluctantly I acquiesced in his suggestion---knowing that all the valuables were safely reposing in the American Embassy. So I had the pleasure of standing by and watching Bedri and his associates search the whole establishment. All they turned up was a small tin box containing a few copper coins, a prize which was so trifling that the Turks disdained to take it. They were much puzzled and disappointed, and from that day to this they have never known what became of the money. If my Turkish friends do me the honour of reading these pages, they will find that I have explained here for the first time one of the many mysteries of those exciting days.

As some of the windows of the convent opened on the court of the Cathedral, which was Vatican property, we contended that the Turkish Government could not seize it. Such of the sisters as were neutrals were allowed to remain in possession of the part that faced the Vatican land, while the rest of the building was turned into an Engineers' School. We arranged that the French nuns should have ten days to leave for their own country; they all reached their destination safely, and most are at present engaged in charities and war work in France.

My jocular statement that I intended to write a book deeply impressed Bedri, and, in the next few weeks, he repeatedly referred to it. I kept banteringly telling him that, unless his behaviour improved, I should be forced to picture him as the villain. One day he asked me, in all seriousness, whether he could not do something that would justify me in portraying him in a more favourable light. This attitude gave me an opportunity I had been seeking for some time. Constantinople had for many years been a centre for the white-slave trade and a particularly vicious gang was then operating under cover of a fake synagogue. A committee, organized to fight this crew, had made me an honorary chairman. I told Bedri that he now had the chance to secure a reputation; because of the war, his powers as Prefect of Police had been greatly increased and a little vigorous action on his part would permanently rid the city of this disgrace. The enthusiasm with which Bedri adopted my suggestion and the thoroughness and ability with which he did the work entitle him to the gratitude of all decent people. In a few days every white-slave trader in Constantinople was scurrying for safety; most were arrested, a few made their escape; such as were foreigners, after serving terms in jail, were expelled from the country. Bedri furnished me photographs of all the culprits and they are now on file in our State Department. I was not writing a book at that time, but I felt obliged to secure some public recognition for Bedri's work. I therefore sent his photograph, with a few words about his achievement, to the *New York Times*, which published it in a Sunday edition. That a great American newspaper had recognized him in this way delighted Bedri beyond words. For months he carried in his pocket the page of the *Times* containing his picture, showing it to all his friends. This event ended my troubles with the Prefect of Police; for the rest of my stay we had very few serious clashes.