

CHAPTER XXVIII

ENVER AGAIN MOVES FOR PEACE FAREWELL TO THE SULTAN AND TO TURKEY

My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians had made Turkey for me a place of horror, and I found intolerable my further daily association. with men who, however gracious and accommodating and good-natured they might have been to the American Ambassador, were still reeking with the blood of nearly a million human beings. Could I have done anything more, either for Americans, enemy aliens, or the persecuted peoples of the empire, I would willingly have stayed. The position of Americans and Europeans, however, had now become secure and, so far as the subject peoples were concerned, I had reached the end of my resources. Moreover, an event was approaching in the United States which, I believed, would inevitably have the greatest influence upon the future of the world and of democracy---the presidential campaign. I felt that there was nothing so important in international politics as the reelection of President Wilson. I could imagine no greater calamity, for the United States and the world, than that the American nation should fail to indorse heartily this great statesman. If I could substantially assist in Mr. Wilson's reelection, I concluded that I could better serve my country at home at this juncture.

I had another practical reason for returning home, and that was to give the President and the State Department, by word of mouth, such first-hand information as I possessed on the European situation. It was especially important to give them the latest side lights on the subject of peace. In the latter part of 1915 and the early part of 1916 this was the uppermost topic in Constantinople. Enver Pasha was constantly asking me to intercede with the President to end the war. Several times he intimated that Turkey was war-weary and that its salvation depended on getting an early peace. I have already described the conditions that prevailed a few months after the outbreak of the war, but, by the end of 1915, they were infinitely worse. When Turkey decided on the deportation and massacre of her subject peoples, especially the Armenians and Greeks, she had signed her own economic death warrant. These were the people, as I have already said, who controlled her industries and her finances and developed her agriculture, and the material consequences of this great national crime now began to be everywhere apparent. The farms were lying uncultivated and daily thousands of peasants were dying of starvation. As the Armenians and Greeks were the largest taxpayers, their annihilation greatly reduced the state revenues, and the fact that practically all Turkish ports were blockaded had shut off customs collections. The mere statement that Turkey was barely taking in money enough to pay the interest on her debt, to say nothing of ordinary expenses and war expenses, gives a fair idea of her advanced degree of exhaustion. In these facts Turkey had abundant reasons for desiring a speedy peace.

Besides this, Enver and the ruling party feared a revolution, unless the war quickly came to an end. As I wrote the State Department about this time, "These men are willing to do almost anything to retain their power."

Still I did not take Enver's importunities for peace any too seriously. "Are you speaking for yourself and your party in this matter," I asked him, "or do you really speak for Germany also? I cannot submit a proposition from you unless the Germans are back of you. Have you consulted them about this?"

"No," Enver replied, "but I know how they feel."

"That is not sufficient," I answered. "You had better communicate with them directly through the German Embassy. I would not be willing to submit a proposition that was not indorsed by all the Teutonic Allies."

Enver thought that it would be almost useless to discuss the matter with the German Ambassador.

He said, however, that he was just leaving for Orsova, a town on the Hungarian and Rumanian frontier, where he was to have a conference with Falkenhayn, at that time the German Chief-of-Staff . Falkenhayn, said Enver, was the important man; he would take up the question of peace with him.

"Why do you think that it is a good time to discuss peace now?" I asked.

"Because in two weeks we shall have completely annihilated Serbia. We think that should put the Allies in a frame of mind to discuss peace. My visit to Falkenhayn is to complete arrangements for the invasion of Egypt. In a very few days we expect Greece to join us. We are already preparing tons of provisions and fodder to send to Greece. And when we get Greece, of course, Rumania will come in. When the Greeks and Rumanians join us, we shall have a million fresh troops. We shall get all the guns and ammunition we need from Germany as soon as the direct railroad is opened. All these things make it an excellent time for us to take up the matter of peace."

I asked the Minister of War to talk the matter over with Falkenhayn at his proposed interview, and report to me when he returned. In some way this conversation came to the ears of the new German Ambassador, Graf Wolf-Metternich, who immediately called to discuss the subject. He apparently wished to impress upon me two things: that Germany would never surrender Alsace-Lorraine, and that she would insist on the return of all her colonies. I replied that it was apparently useless to discuss peace until England first had won some great military victory.

"That may be so," replied the Graf, "but you can hardly expect that Germany shall let England win such a victory merely to put her in a frame of mind to consider peace. But I think that you are wrong. It is a mistake to say that Great Britain has not already won great victories. I think that she has several very substantial ones to her credit. Just consider what she has done. She has established her unquestioned supremacy of the seas and driven off all German commerce. She has not only not lost a foot of her own territory, but she has gained enormous new domains. She has annexed Cyprus and Egypt and has conquered all the German colonies. She is in possession of a considerable part of Mesopotamia. How absurd .to say that England has gained nothing by the war!"

On December 1st, Enver came to the American Embassy and reported the results of his interview with Falkenhayn. The German Chief-of-Staff had said that Germany would very much like to discuss peace but that Germany could not state her terms in advance, as such an action would be generally interpreted as a sign of weakness. But one thing could be depended on; the Allies could obtain far more favourable terms at that moment than at any future time. Enver told me that the Germans would be willing to surrender all the territory they had taken from the French and practically all of Belgium. But the one thing on which they had definitely settled was the permanent dismemberment of Serbia. Not an acre of Macedonia would be returned to Serbia and even parts of old Serbia would be retained; that is, Serbia would become a much smaller country than she had been before the Balkan wars, and, in fact, she would practically disappear as an independent state. The meaning of all this was apparent, even then. Germany had won the object for which she had really gone to war; a complete route from Berlin to Constantinople and the East; part, and a good part, of the Pan-German "Mittel Europa" had thus become an accomplished military fact. Apparently Germany was willing to give up the overrun provinces of northern France and Belgium, provided that the Entente would consent to her retention of these conquests. The proposal which Falkenhayn made then did not materially differ from that which Germany had put forward in the latter part of 1914. This Enver-Falkenhayn interview, as reported to me, shows that it was no suddenly conceived German plan, but that it has been Germany's scheme from the first.

In all this I saw no particular promise of an early peace. Yet I thought that I should lay these facts before the President. I therefore applied to Washington for a leave of absence, which was granted.

I had my farewell interview with Enver and Talaat on the thirteenth of January. Both men were in their most delightful mood. Evidently both were turning over in their minds, as was I, all the momentous events that had taken place in Turkey, and in the world, since my first meeting with them two years before. Then Talaat and Enver were merely desperate adventurers who had reached high position by assassination and intrigue; their position was insecure, for at any moment another revolution might plunge them into the obscurity from which they had sprung. But now they were the unquestioned despots of the Ottoman Empire, the allies of the then strongest military power in the world, the conquerors---absurdly enough they so regarded themselves---of the British navy. At this moment of their great triumph---the Allied expedition to the Dardanelles had evacuated its positions only two weeks before---both Talaat and Enver regarded their country again as a world power.

"I hear you are going home to spend a lot of money and reelect your President," said Talaat---this being a jocular reference to the fact that I was the Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Democratic National

Committee. "That's very foolish; why don't you stay here and give it to Turkey? We need it more than your people do."

"But we hope you are coming back soon," he added, in the polite (and insincere) manner of the oriental. You and we have really grown up together; you came here about the same time that we took office and we don't know how we could ever get so well acquainted with another man. We have grown fond of you, too. We have had our differences, and pretty lively ones at times, but we have always found you fair, and we respect American policy in Turkey as you have represented it. We don't like to see you go, even for a few months."

I expressed my pleasure at these words.

"It's very nice to hear you talk that way," I answered. "Since you flatter me so much, I know that you will be willing to promise me certain things. Since I have you both here together this is my chance to put you on record. Will you treat the people in my charge considerately, just the same as though I were here?"

"As to the American missionaries and colleges and schools," said Talaat---and Enver assented----"we give you an absolute promise. They will not be molested in the slightest degree, but can go on doing their work just the same as before. Your mind can rest easy on that score."

"How about the British and French?" I asked.

"Oh, well," said Talaat, smiling, "we may have to have a little fun with them now and then, but don't worry. We'll take good care of them."

And now for the last time I spoke on the subject that had rested so heavily on my mind for many months. I feared that another appeal would be useless, but I decided to make it.

"How about the Armenians?"

Talaat's geniality disappeared in an instant. His face hardened and the fire of the beast lighted up his eyes once more.

What's the use of speaking about them?" he said, waving his hand. "We are through with them. That's all over."

Such was my farewell with Talaat. "That's all over" were his last words to me.

The next day I had my farewell audience with the Sultan. He was the same gracious, kindly old gentleman whom I had first met two years before. He received me informally, in civilian European clothes, and asked me to sit down with him. We talked for twenty minutes, and discussed among other things the pleasant relations that prevailed between America and Turkey. He thanked me for the interest which I had taken in his country and hoped that I would soon return. Then he took up the question of war and peace.

"Every monarch naturally desires peace," he said. "None of us approves the shedding of blood. But there are times when war seems unavoidable. We may wish to settle our disputes amicably, but we cannot always do it. This seems to be one of them. I told the British Ambassador that we did not wish to go to war with his country. I tell you the same thing now. But Turkey had to defend her rights. Russia attacked us; and naturally we had to defend ourselves. Thus the war was not the result of any planning on our part; it was an act of Allah---it was fate."

I expressed the hope that it might soon be over.

"Yes, we wish peace also," replied His Majesty. "But it must be a peace that will guarantee the rights of our empire. I am sure that a civilized and flourishing country like America wants peace, and she should exert all her efforts to bring about a peace that shall be permanent."

One of the Sultan's statements at this interview left a lasting impression. This was his assertion that "Russia attacked us." That the simple-minded old gentleman believed this was apparent; it was also clear that he knew nothing of the real facts---that Turkish warships, under German officers, had plunged Turkey into the war by bombarding Russian seaports. Instead of telling him the truth, the Young Turk leaders had foisted upon the Sultan this fiction of Russia as the aggressor. The interview showed precisely to what extent the ostensible ruler of Turkey was acquainted with the crucial facts in the government of his own empire.

In our interview Talaat and Enver had not said their final farewells, telling me that they would meet me at the station. A few minutes before the train started Bedri came up, rather pale-faced and excited, and brought me their apologies.

"They cannot come," he said, "the Crown Prince has just committed suicide."

I knew the Crown Prince well and I had expected to have him as a fellow passenger to Berlin; he had been about to make a trip to Germany, and his special car was attached to this train. I had seen much of Youssouf Izzeddin; he had several times invited me to call upon him, and we had spent many hours talking over the United States and American institutions, in which subject he had always displayed the keenest interest. Many times had he told me that he would like to introduce certain American governmental ideas in Turkey. This morning, when we were leaving for Berlin, the Crown Prince was found lying on the floor in his villa, bathed in a pool of blood, with his arteries cut. Youssouf was the son of Abdul-Aziz, Sultan from 1861 to 1876, who, gruesomely enough, had ended his days by opening his arteries forty years before. The circumstances surrounding the death of father and son were thus precisely the same. The fact that Youssouf was strongly pro-Ally, that he had opposed Turkey's participation in the war on Germany's side, and that he was extremely antagonistic to the Committee of Union and Progress gave rise to many suspicions. I know nothing about the stories that now went from mouth to mouth, and merely record that the official report on the death was that it was a case of "suicide."

" On l'a suicidé!" (they have suicided him!), remarked a witty Frenchman, when this verdict was reported.

This tragic announcement naturally cast a gloom over our party, as our train pulled out of Constantinople, but the journey proved to be full of interest. I was now on the famous Balkanzug, and this was only the second trip which it had made to Berlin. My room was No. 13; several people came to look at it, telling me that, on the outward trip, the train had been shot at, and a window of my compartment broken.

Soon after we started I discovered that Admiral Usedom was one of my fellow passengers. Usedom had had a distinguished career in the navy; among other things he had been captain of the *Hohenzollern*, the Kaiser's yacht, and thus was upon friendly terms with His Majesty. The last time I had seen Usedom was on my visit to the Dardanelles, where he had been Inspector General of the Ottoman defenses. As soon as we met again, the admiral began to talk about the abortive Allied attack. He again made no secret of the fears which he had then entertained that this attack would succeed.

"Several times," he said, " we thought that they were on the verge of getting through. All of us down there were very much distressed and depressed over the prospect. We owed much to the heroism of the Turks and their willingness to sacrifice an unlimited number of human lives. It is all over now---that part of our task is finished."

The Admiral thought that the British landing party had been badly prepared, though he spoke admiringly of the skill with which the Allies had managed their retreat. I also obtained further light on the German attitude toward the Armenian massacres. Usedom made no attempt to justify them; neither did he blame the Turks. He discussed the whole thing calmly, dispassionately, merely as a military problem, and one would never have guessed from his remarks that the lives of a million human beings had been involved. He simply said that the Armenians were in the way, that they were an obstacle to German success, and that it had therefore been necessary to remove them, just like so much useless lumber. He spoke about them as detachedly as one would speak about removing a row of houses in order to bombard a city.

Poor Serbia! As our train sped through her devastated districts I had a picture of what the war had meant to this brave little country. In the last two years this nation had stood alone, practically unassisted by her allies, attempting to stem the rush of Pan-German conquest, just as, for several centuries, she had stood as a bulwark against the onslaughts of the Turks. And she had paid the penalty. Many farms we passed were abandoned, overgrown with weeds and neglected, and the buildings were frequently roofless and sometimes razed to the ground. Whenever we crossed a stream we saw the remains of a dynamited bridge; in all cases the Germans had built new ones to replace those which had been destroyed. We saw many women and children, looking ragged and half starved, but significantly we saw very few men, for all had either been killed or they were in the ranks of Serbia's still existing and valiant little army. All this time trains full of German soldiers were passing us or standing on the switches at the stations where we slowed up, a sufficient explanation for all the misery and devastation we saw on our way.