

The Requisition of the Turkish Battleships.

August 2. The mobilization of the Turkish Army was ordered on July 31.

But now came a surprise. England suddenly assumed an attitude of definite resistance to Germany. The British fleets had put to sea in battle order. On July 28 I requisitioned both the Turkish dreadnoughts for the Royal Navy. A Turkish transport with five hundred Turkish sailors on board lay in the Tyne ready to take over the first. The Turkish Captain demanded delivery of the vessel, and threatened to board her and hoist the Turkish flag. In these tremendous days (July 31) I gave orders on my own responsibility that this was to be prevented, and that any attempt at seizure by the Turks should be resisted if necessary by armed force. I took this action solely for British naval purposes. The addition of the two Turkish dreadnoughts to the British Fleet seemed vital to national safety. No one in the Admiralty, nor so far as I know in England, had any knowledge of the Turkish designs or of the part these ships were to play in them. We builded better than we knew. I was later in the year criticized in some quarters for having requisitioned the Turkish ships. The rage and disappointment excited thereby throughout Turkey was said to have turned the scale and provoked Turkey into war against us. We now know the inner explanation of this disappointment. The requisitioning of these ships, so far from making Turkey an enemy, nearly made her an Ally.

But there still remained to the Turks one hope: the *Goeben*. This fast German battle cruiser was in the western Mediterranean under peace time orders to refit at Pola in the Adriatic. She was in herself sufficient to dominate the Russian squadron in the Black Sea. Would the Germans send the *Goeben* back to Constantinople? Would she get there? It was at this moment that the news of the British ultimatum to Germany, carrying with it the certainty of a British declaration of war, reached Constantinople. The Turkish realists had never counted on such an event. It transformed the naval situation in the Mediterranean. Could the *Goeben* escape the numerous British flotillas and cruiser squadrons and the three more powerful though less

speedy British battle cruisers which lay between her and the sea? When on the night of August 3 Enver learned that the *Goeben* was under orders to escape up the Adriatic to Pola, his anxiety knew no bounds. He immediately sought the Russian military attaché, General Leontev, and casting all previous schemes to the wind, including the agreement he had signed with Germany the day before, proposed to this astonished officer an alliance between Turkey and Russia on various conditions including Turkish compensations in Western Thrace. Whether the Germans realized that they would never be forgiven by the Pan-Turks unless the *Goeben* made an effort to reach Constantinople, or whether it was already part of their war plan, fresh orders to go to Constantinople were at this moment (August 3) being sent by Admiral Tirpitz to the *Goeben* then about to coal at Messina; and after events which are well known she reached the Dardanelles on the 10th and was after some parley admitted to the Sea of Marmora.

Enver's confidence was now restored, for the command of the Black Sea rested potentially with the Turks. But the certain hostility of Great Britain was serious, in view of her naval supremacy and the undefended condition of the Dardanelles. Moreover Italy had unexpectedly separated herself from the Triple Alliance. It might therefore perhaps be prudent for Turkey to see how the impending great battles on land, and especially those upon the Russian front, were decided. Meanwhile the mobilization of the Turkish Army could proceed unostentatiously and be justified as a precautionary measure. Thus there followed a period lasting for about three months of Turkish hesitation and delay, having the effect of consummate duplicity. I can recall no great sphere of policy about which the British Government was less completely informed than the Turkish. It is strange to read the telegrams we received through all channels from Constantinople during this period in the light of our present knowledge. But all the Allies, now encouraged by the friendly assurances of the Grand Vizier and the respectable-effete section of the Cabinet, now indignant at the refusal to intern and disarm the *Goeben* and generally mystified by many

The *Goeben*.

contradictory voices, believed that Turkey had no policy and might still be won or lost. This period was ended when Enver in November, acting as the agent of all the Pan-Turk forces, delivered the unprovoked attack by the *Goeben* and the Turkish Fleet upon the Russian Black Sea ports, and thus plunged Turkey brutally into the war.

What followed has been to some extent recounted in these volumes.

Turkey was animated, guided, and upheld during the struggle for four years by the German military and intellectual power. She contended with varying success against Russia in the Caucasus, but the British Empire became her greatest foe. The main strength of the Turkish Army was broken on the Gallipoli Peninsula by British and Australasian forces. The British invasion of Mesopotamia, though marked by notable Turkish victories, advanced remorselessly up the Tigris. Lawrence raised and led the Arab revolt in the desert. Allenby, with an Anglo-Indian Army of a quarter of a million, conquered Palestine and entered Syria. Although the French had commanded on the Salonikan Front, and a French General presided over the advance upon Constantinople from the west, the conviction of the Turks at the Armistice was that they had been destroyed by England. Certainly three-quarters of the Turks killed in the Great War had fallen to the bullets and bayonets of the British Empire, and well they knew the slaughter they had inflicted upon this old friend and misjudged antagonist without mitigating his hostile energy.

When the Hindenburg Line and Germany broke, all Turkish resistance fell flat on the ground. Turkey, prostrate, looked up and saw with relief that her conquerors were British. 'We have made a great mistake; we have chosen the wrong side; we were forced into it by Enver and Talaat, but they have now fled. We sincerely regret what has occurred. How could we tell that the United States would go to war with Germany; or that Great Britain would become a first-class military Power? Such prodigies are beyond human foresight. No one ought to

blame us for being so misled. Of course we must be punished, but let us be chastised by our old friend, England.' Such was the mood of Turkey for two or three months after the armistice of Mudros on October 30, which ended the Great War in the East.

In Lord Curzon's words:—

'At the time the Peace Conference assembled, the Allied Powers were in possession of Constantinople, where the Turkish Government, if not cowed, was subservient. Our military power in the occupied Turkish regions of Asia was sufficient to enable us to enforce not merely the agreed terms of the Armistice but also any supplementary terms that were found necessary. The British were in secure possession of Mesopotamia up to and including Mosul. . . . The British position in Persia was, both in a military and political sense, extraordinarily strong. We were still in Trans-Caspia, but were contemplating an immediate retirement, since accomplished. The Caspian was in our hands and was being made the base of naval action against Bolshevik forces. British divisions occupied the entire Caucasus, from the Black Sea to the Caspian, and provided the only guarantees for peace . . . between the rival peoples: Georgians, Armenians, Tartars, Daghanis, and Russians. . . . In Asia Minor (outside the region of British military occupation) no Allied forces had appeared. The fate of Armenia was undecided, the bulk of the Armenians being fugitives from their country. Apart from Armenia, and possibly Cilicia, the partition of Asia Minor was not even contemplated. In Syria a more critical condition existed, owing to the difficulty of reconciling the aspirations of the French with the hard facts of the Arab situation and the insistence of the French on the letter of the unfortunate Sykes-Picot Agreement. In Palestine the interests of the Arab population and the Zionist immigrants appeared to be capable of reconciliation and everything pointed to an early mandate for Great Britain with the consent of both. Egypt was still quiet.'