CHAPTER LVI

THE PRANCING PASHA

WHAT Europe had to face (August 24, 1840) was "the Eastern Question." Greece had broken away from Turkey. But Egypt was to break into her. Mehemet Ali, Pasha of Egypt, was marching on Constantinople. And not less formidable was his adopted son, Ibrahim. When (June 14, 1846) Greville "won the cup" at Ascot, Ibrahim Pasha turned up and "desired to shake hands." Greville thought him "a coarse-looking ruffian, and his character is said not to belie his countenance."

Who, then, would stop the redoubtable Mehemet and his ruffian Ibrahim? There was a man who knew exactly how to do it:

January 30, 1833: . . . I was much amused with a piece of vanity of Ellenborough's. We were talking of the war between the Turks and the Egyptians, and the resources of Egypt, &c., when he said, "If I had continued at the Board of Control I would have had Egypt, got at it from the Red Sea; I had already ordered the formation of *a corps* of *Arab guides!*"

Unfortunately, the Turks did not share this confidence in Arab guides. And, according to Mme. de Lieven (February 1, 1833), "the Sultan had applied to the Emperor [of Russia] for assistence." Indeed, "*le Sultan n'avait pas un meilleur ami que lui.*"

By the "political innocence" of Russia, suspicions were aroused:

February 1, 1833: . . . In the evening I told all this to Mellish of the Foreign Office, who knows everything about foreign affairs, and he said it was all a lie, that Russia had offered her assistance, which the Sultan had refused, and she was, in fact, intriguing and making mischief in every Court in Europe.

March 30, 1833: Saw Madame de Lieven yesterday, who told me the story of the late business at St. Petersburg. The Sultan,

after the battle of Koniah [in which the Turks were beaten], applied to the Emperor of Russia for succour, who ordered twelve sail of the line and 30,000 men to go to the protection of Constantinople. At the same time General Mouravieff was sent to Constantinople, with orders to proceed to Alexandria and inform the Pasha that the Emperor could only look upon him as a rebel, that he would not suffer the Ottoman Empire to be overturned, and that if Ibrahim advanced "*il aurait affaire à l'Empereur de Russie.*" Orders were accordingly sent to Ibrahim to suspend his operations, and Mouravieff returned to Constantinople. Upon the demand for succour by the Sultan, and the Emperor's compliance with it, notification was made to all the Courts, and instructions were given to the Russian commanders to retire as soon as the Sultan should have no further occasion for their aid. So satisfactory was this that Lord Grey expressed the greatest anxiety that the Russian armament should arrive in time to arrest the progress of the Egyptians. They did arrive—at least the fleet did—and dropped anchor under the Seraglio. At this juncture arrived Admiral Roussin in a ship of war, and as Ambassador of France. He immediately informed the Sultan that the interposition of Russia was superfluous, that he would undertake to conclude a treaty, and to answer for the acquiescence of the Pasha, and he sent a project one article of which was that the Russian fleet should instantly withdraw. To this proposition the Sultan acceded, and without waiting for the Pasha's confirmation he notified to the Russian Ambassador that he had no longer any wish for the presence of the Russian fleet, and they accordingly weighed anchor and sailed away. This is all that is known of the transaction, but Madame de Lieven was loud and vehement about the insolence of Roussin; she said the Emperor would demand "*une satisfaction éclatante*"—"*le rappel et le désaveu de l'amiral Roussin,*" and that if this should be refused the Russian Ambassador would be ordered to quit Paris. She waits with great anxiety to see the end of the business, for on it appears to depend the question of peace or war with France. She said that the day before Namik went away, intelligence of this event arrived, which Palmerston communicated to him. The Turk heard it very quietly, and then only said, "*Et où était l'Angleterre dans tout ceci ?*"

Where was England? Her Ambassador was Lord Ponsonby:

October 5, 1842: . . . Lord Ponsonby is a most remarkable-looking man for his age, which is seventy-two or seventy-three. He exhibits no signs of old age, and is extremely agreeable. His account of Turkey was very different from my ideas about the state of the country, but I fancy all he says is *sujet à caution*. He describes the Sultan to be intelligent, liberal, and independent, that is, really master, and not in the hands of any party; the Turkish public men as very able, the country improving in its internal condition, especially its agriculture, and its revenue flourishing—five millions a year regularly collected, not a farthing of debt, and the whole military and civil service of the State punctually paid.

His career in the diplomatic service had been adroitly accelerated by blackmail:

July 31, 1831: . . . Not very long after, Canning got into favour, and in this way: Harriet Wilson, at the time of her connection with Lord Ponsonby, got hold of some of Lady Conyngham's letters to him, and she wrote to Ponsonby, threatening, unless he gave her a large sum, to come to England and publish everything she could. This produced dismay among all the parties, and they wanted to get Ponsonby away and to silence the woman. In this dilemma Knighton advised the King [George IV] to have recourse to Canning, who saw the opening to favour, jumped at it, and instantly offered to provide for Ponsonby and do anything which could relieve the King from trouble. Ponsonby was sent to Buenos Ayres forthwith, and the letters were bought up. From this time Canning grew in favour, which he took every means to improve, and shortly gained complete ascendancy over the King.

Ponsonby was wafted on to Constantinople:

May 16, 1833: . . . While France has been vapouring, and we have been doing nothing at all, Russia has established her own influence in Turkey, and made herself virtually mistress of the Ottoman Empire. At a time when our interests required that we should be well represented, and powerfully supported, we had neither an Ambassador nor a fleet in the Mediterranean; and because Lord Ponsonby is Lord Grey's brother-in-law he

has been able with impunity to dawdle on months after months at Naples for his pleasure, and leave affairs at Constantinople to be managed or mismanaged by a *chargé d'affaires* who is altogether incompetent.

June 18, 1837: . . . The whole history of Lord Ponsonby is a remarkable example of what a man in favour or with powerful protection may do with impunity, and it is the more striking because Palmerston is the most imperious of official despots, and yet has invariably truckled to Lord Grey's brother-in-law. When Ponsonby was appointed Ambassador at Constantinople, the affairs of the East were in a most critical state, notwithstanding which nothing would induce him to repair to his post, and he loitered away several months at Naples, while Russia was maturing her designs upon Turkey, and when the presence of an English Ambassador was of vital importance. This was overlooked, because to Lord Grey's brother-in-law everything was permitted. The appointment of Mr. Urquhart as Secretary of the Embassy at Constantinople greatly displeased Lord Ponsonby, who resolved to hold no communication with him, and accordingly the Chancellerie at Constantinople has presented the amusing spectacle of an Ambassador and Secretary of Embassy who do not speak to each other, and the latter of whom has had no functions whatever to discharge. A short time ago Lord Ponsonby applied for leave of absence, which was given to him, and the Government here hoped that when he came home he would not think of returning, and secretly resolved that, if they could help it, he should not. But as Mr. Urquhart had been placed in this strange position by Lord Ponsonby, and besides, since his appointment, they had found reason to doubt whether he was altogether fit for such a trust, it was impossible to leave him at Constantinople as *chargé d'affaires* during his chief's absence, so they got Sir Charles Vaughan to go out on what was called a special mission, though there was nothing more in it than to meet this difficulty. Sir Charles was directed to proceed to Malta, and from thence to send a steamer to Constantinople, which was to announce his arrival and bring back Lord Ponsonby. Sir Charles, accordingly, sent his Secretary of Embassy to announce him, who, when he arrived off Constantinople, was met by an absolute prohibition from Ponsonby to land at all, and a flat refusal on his part to

stir. The Secretary had nothing to do but to return to his principal and report his reception, and he in his turn had nothing to do but report his ridiculous position to his employers at home, and await their orders. The result has been that Sir Charles is ordered home, and Lord Ponsonby remains, so that Palmerston has knocked under. Ponsonby has carried his point, and Vaughan has had a *giro* to Malta and back, for which the public has to pay.

At the suggestion that Russia might occupy Constantinople, Great Britain began to manifest symptoms of Russophobia:

February 1, 1833: . . . Saw Madame de Lieven the day before yesterday, who fired a tirade against Govermnent; she vowed that nobody ever had been treated with such personal incivility as Lieven, "*des injures, des reproches*," that Cobbett, Hunt, and all the blackguards in England could not use more offensive language; whatever event was coming was imputed to Russia —Belgium, Portugal, Turkey, "*tout était la Russie et les intrigues de la Russie*"; that she foresaw they should be driven away from England.

A policy developed:

December 28, 1834: . . . The great object of the late Government was (and that of this Government must be the same) to get the Porte out of the clutches of Russia. The Sultan is a mere slave of the Emperor, but throughout his dominions, and the Principalities likewise, a bitter feeling of hatred against Russia prevails. Our policy has been to induce the Sultan to throw off the yoke—by promises of assistance on one hand, and menaces on the other of supporting Mehemet Ali against him. Hitherto, however, the Sultan has never been induced to bestir himself. It is evident that if this matter is taken up seriously, and with a resolution to curb the power of Russia in the East, the greatest diplomatic judgment and firmness will be requisite in our Ambassador at St. Petersburg.

To complete the picture:

December 28, 1834: . . . In all this complication of interests in the East, France is ready to act with us if we will let her, and Austria lies like a great log, favouring Russia and opposing

her inert mass to anything like *mouvement*, no matter with what object or in what quarter.

The Treaty of Unkiar Skelesi was concluded between Turkey and Russia, and it suggested encroachment:

March 14, 1834: There is a fresh *démêlé* with Russia on account of a new treaty concluded by Achmet Pasha at St. Petersburg. By this Russia agrees to remit six millions of the ten which Turkey owes her, and to give up the Principalities, but she keeps the fortress of Silistria and the military road, which gives her complete command over them. The Sultan, "not to be outdone in generosity," in return for so much, kindly cedes to Russia a slip of seacoast on the Black Sea, adjoining another portion already ceded by the Treaty of Adrianople as far south as Poti. This territorial acquisition is not considerable in itself, but it embraces the line of communication with Persia, by which we have a vast traffic, and which Russia will be able at any time to interrupt. This new transaction, so quietly and plausibly effected, has thrown our government into a great rage, and especially his Majesty King William, who insisted upon a dozen ships being sent off forthwith to the Mediterranean. Nothing vigorous, however, has been done, and Palmerston has contented himself with writing to Lord Ponsonby, desiring him to exhort the Sultan not to ratify this treaty, and rather to pay (or more properly, continue to owe) the whole ten millions.

The question became dangerous and there was "great talk of war with Russia" which, wrote Greville, "I don't believe will take place." Still, chatting with Mme. de Lieven, he—

December 21, 1833: . . . was surprised to find her with such a lofty tone about war. She said that it was "*chance égale*"; that they neither desired nor feared it; that our tone had latterly been so insulting that they had no option but that of replying with corresponding hauteur; that if we sent ships to the Mediterranean they would send ships; that if those measures were pursued, and such language held, it was impossible to say that circumstances might not bring about war, though equally against the wishes and interests of all parties. In such a case we might destroy their fleet and burn their harbours, but we

could not exclude them from Turkey, nor once established there get them out again. That we must not fancy we should be able, in conjunction with France, to keep the rest of Europe in check; for it was the opinion of the wisest heads, and of Louis Philippe himself, that a war would infallibly bring about his downfall. . . . She complained bitterly of the language of our newspapers, and of our orators in Parliament, described the indignation of the Russian Court, and the dignified resentment mixed with contempt of the Emperor; in short, talked very big, but still there will be no war.

That storm blew over, but the tempest set in a different direction and raged with ten times the bluster.