

## CHAPTER VIII

### PROGRESS IN SMYRNA, KONIA, ADANA, TARSUS AND MERSINA

**I**F anyone wants to see what personality can do in Turkey, let him go to Smyrna. In 1922 the able Vali, Abdul Halik Bey, now Minister of Finance, presided over a city in ruins. To-day it is practically rebuilt, the new streets are wide and clean, and the people hold their heads high, proud to be Turks.

Smyrna has caught Angora's feverish impatience to get along more and more quickly, to build, improve and clean. Aziz Bey, who is the creator of Smyrna, brings forward all kinds of schemes for reforms, and is constantly amongst the people, to see his reforms are carried out. He has made a careful study in English, French and German of town planning and all the latest sanitary improvements and used his study to good purpose. In Smyrna to-day one looks in vain for the old sweet and cake merchant with the thick layer of flies sitting comfortably on his wares ; all is now under glass cover, and sandwiches and eatables kept wrapped in tissue-paper, as in America. The barber and the baker are under strict supervision ; everything must be antiseptic ; and a whole code of taxi drivers' laws has been arranged, to limit the speed, regulate the traffic, avoid accidents and contribute to the well-being of the city.

Aziz Bey has two helpers, a man and a woman, who have both been students of Columbia University, and they both second him in his many social reforms, such as night schools, hospital reforms, the betterment of children's

welfare centres and playgrounds, and there is no useful reform suggested that is not quickly executed.

Smyrna, now it has once more hotels and comfortable houses, is a delightful resting-place. The climate is mild, the sun shines all the year round, and now the abolition of the Capitulations has ended the Powers' right to interfere with the Concessions, the town at last has electric light, decent trams and an improved harbour.

When the history of Turkey comes to be written, and one sees what Smyrna was like when the foreigner held sway, and how it has improved since the Turks themselves took over the administration; when one remembers the miserable little pony trams, divided into men and women's quarters by a none too clean sheet, and compares them with what the city trams now are; there will be little glory attached to the good name of the foreigner. And even today the concession hunter has not improved. Instead of showing, when he asks for concessions, his best and cheapest, he shows his worst and dearest, and then wonders why the Turk, who is now wide awake, distrusts him! The old "Backshish" days are over. That is to say, what was formerly the custom, is now an illegal proceeding, and is mercilessly punished by the Government, as the recent Turkish naval scandal will show. The fact that the Turkish Government should have ordered a public investigation into the conduct of Ihsan Bey, a man who until recently was a member of the Cabinet, is sufficient to show that the Ghazi and Ismet Pasha will not tolerate abuse and corruption. Ministers, députés, political groups, are all watched with the "hawk" eye of the Government and no pity is shown to the offender, however highly placed he be. So the "get rich quickly" days of Turkish public officials are over, and the reign of honest administration has come.

The beauty of the neighbourhood of Smyrna has never

had its just tribute ; its historical ruins are marvellous, and well worth careful study. Next time I visit Turkey I shall pay a long visit to Smyrna ; for Aziz Bey is a gracious host, and Smyrna possesses a Hadgi Bekir.<sup>1</sup>

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The journey between Angora and Konia—only six hours by car—takes over thirty-six by train. One starts early in the morning and literally crawls to Eski Chéir, where a sleeping car from Smyrna joins the train. The train is warm, though slow, my guard spoke German, and sent the “ water ” merchant at different stations to offer me his wares. But I am not a good water customer. . . . Long, long expanses of uncultured land, a few cattle, few men and still fewer women ! What a work Turkey has before her to people and cultivate this neglected, almost waste land ! If only one could have gone by car. But the roads are impossible during the winter mud.

At Eski Chéir, as there was no restaurant on the train, one went to the little “ buvette ” to get refreshment. Not being able to ask for, or “ to act,” cheese, I pushed my way into the kitchen and helped myself. For payment, I opened my purse, and let the man help himself, as I did everywhere in Anatolia (not Constantinople), and never once did they take too much.

What kind, courteous men these peasants are. They did not mind my helping myself, nor taking what they perhaps needed. How one hopes these honest Anatolians will never learn the trickery of the West, and that they will hold fast to their delightful Eastern hospitality and honesty.

I enjoyed my visit to Konia better than anything else in Turkey. In the family of my dear friend Makboulé, I lived in an atmosphere of real sincerity, and with the rare

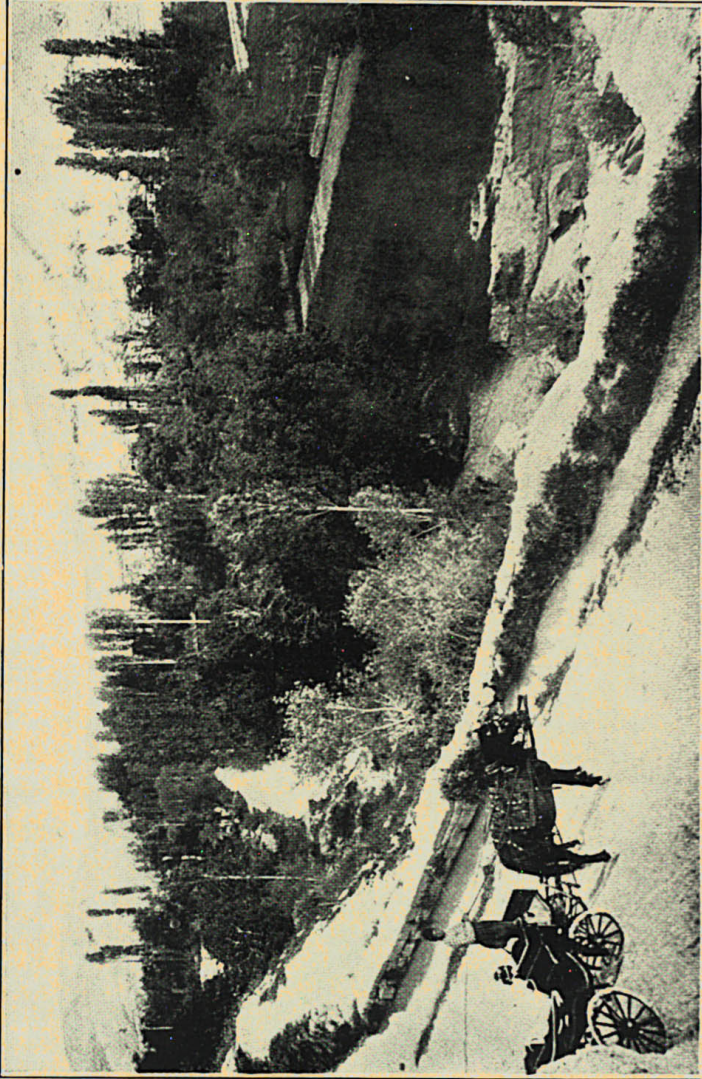
<sup>1</sup> Hadgi Bekir is the well-known Constantinople confectioner, famous for his Turkish delight.

and deep affection she can give. There I saw, what she had told me I would see reflected all over Turkey, women who now have the right to take part in the great life going on around them. And I did not only see this as a tourist. I felt it, for I lived it. I had stayed with this same friend in the harem, and now I shared her freedom. We so often talked of the past, and compared it with "this wonderful, wonderful new existence," and she would say, "In exchange for what the Ghazi has done for us, we women must all help." The days and weeks slipped by, we talked, we laughed. We had the rare treat of visiting those priceless historical treasures of the Seljoucide period, which archæologists come from all over the world to visit; now an order from the Ghazi, who visited them, has started a very careful and historical restoration.

In Konia, as in Broussa, Smyrna and Adana, the Ghazi has his own house, a gift from the municipality. A simple villa it is, but he would not accept more. "We would have built him a palace," said Nadgi Pasha. "We would like to give him a well-laid-out garden, but he would not have it. 'A simple villa with a fine view,' he said, 'What more can I need?'"

We went shopping in the old bazaar. There were quaint booths covered with the good old produce of Turkey—helva, cakes, nuts, and dried fruits; veiled women watched over the many-coloured vegetables, comfortably placed on the cobble-stoned pavement at the mercy of the wind, sun and dust, not very hygienic certainly, but very picturesque.

Konia with its narrow, winding alleys, and badly paved streets; with its primitive women, still clad from top to toe in brown, black or purple—with only one eye visible; with its quaint market-place, where the coffee seller advertises his wares by a skilful rattling of his cups; and the helva merchant carries his wares on a tray or a donkey,



**MEHRAME NEAR KONIA, WHERE THE RESIDENTS OF KONIA SPEND THE SUMMER**  
Hungarian engineers are taking the water from the well-watered Mehrame to the parched city of Konia ; they are also installing gas and electricity, and building new roads and houses.

“struck” a unique Eastern picture, and amongst it all are motor-cars, military uniforms and hats of the West!

Konia is the ancient Seljoucide capital Iconyium; it is an oasis in the large desert, and looks like a gigantic basin with no water. In the summer the sun scorches down on it, drying the earth as well as the trees and the inhabitants to cinders. Up till now, there was no water; water for drinking, sanitary and household purposes being brought round to the houses in large tins. This lack of water makes housekeeping complicated indeed. Those who can, escape in summer to Mehram, about twenty miles away—it is well-watered, green and mild. The idea of transferring the water from Mehram to Konia, as the engineers are now doing, never entered the heads of the last generation of Turk, any more than the idea of utilizing stone from the mountains for the construction of the houses. But what a different town Konia will be, with water and electricity!

We went for many excursions. One day we drove to the village of Sillé. We had a delightful view of the picturesque country all around. How I would love some coloured sketches of Konia and the neighbourhood before the change into Western garments.

Sillé was a prosperous part of Konia inhabited almost entirely by Greeks, and since their departure, the houses are empty and tumbling down. The Greeks have taken their trade with them, whatever it is; an exchange of populations is the refinement of cruelty. The desolation everywhere looked worse than ruins. There is a quaint old church, shorn of its gilded splendours, and in the Holy of Holies, with the altar as a table, sits an Austrian, manufacturing limbs. What an irony of fate! I saw no signs of any other industry and not one shop.

Our arrival in the village was strange indeed. Rows of empty, dilapidated houses on either side of the river; a muddy, neglected, badly cobbled path on either bank was

all we saw of the village of Sillé, which greeted us from a muddy river stream full of stones, up which we sailed, using our "Ford" car as a gondola. When the water of the stream reached the door of our car we had to disembark.

In some of the tumbledown houses, pious Moslems were sitting patiently waiting for the cannon, which was to give them permission to eat. One man was wearing a fez, and so anxious was he to offer food and hospitality to strangers, that forgetting he was wearing a fez, he popped his head out of the window, and invited us to come in. Thanking the old gentleman graciously for his kind offer, all the more gracious as he himself was fasting, my friend excused us, as we had to return before dark.

We met the village schoolmaster, a young man of about twenty-three, who graciously returned to show us the school-house, of which he was so proud. Nothing more primitive in the way of a building could possibly have been found. That there was a school at all in this deserted village was something of a miracle. But the schoolmaster had the real nationalist zeal. "Better be without houses than education," he said as he took us over the dilapidated building. Flags of Turkey hid up a multitude of holes in the wall; there was a portrait of the Ghazi, which looks down on the quaintest of schools, and a most primitive museum of work, made by the boys. Perhaps this little village school was the most interesting I had seen. Though its walls were crumbling, it had a fine dose of the spirit of courage, effort and determination to overcome all difficulty, and succeed: the schoolmaster was indeed to be congratulated.

We climbed down into our motor-car, waiting for us in the middle of the stream, and "sailed" our way back to a river bank, over which we successfully jumped and landed in a ploughed field. Konia, as the sun is setting, is indeed a picture. The dark stone mountains, capped by snow, become dark blue, against the setting sun. The

tumbledown mud huts, with their grass roofs, which are to be swept away by the incoming tide of modern houses ; the wealth of almond blossom, such a lovely pink against the mud background, and the herds of oxen, free citizens of a free Republic left to find their way home by themselves and never making a mistake, are all figures of a landscape I watched, as one watches by the death-bed of a person one loves ; for alas, the narrow, winding streets, the picturesque alleys and people themselves are all to be sacrificed on the altar of progress. When next I come to Konia, Konia will be clad in a German dress. It is now in the hands of German builders, German engineers and German technical instructors.<sup>1</sup>

I was fortunate in being at Konia for Ramazan and Baïram—the Moslem's fast and the Moslem's feast, and taking part in the ceremonies connected with both. We had such jolly Iftar parties (parties during Ramazan) when after a day of fasting—though we did not fast—we feasted on all the good things one's friends prepared. Such Song of Solomon repasts they were—spices, helva, almonds, sweetmeats and pomegranates, added to the bridge, music, dancing and supper parties ; each friend in turn gave a party. And what a difference it meant to have men at those gatherings. Both sexes can well appreciate the change. There is no need to mention what all felt. Then there was the laughter. It is true Turkey is set in the minor key ; the dominating note is a note of sadness, yet, paradox of paradoxes, who in the world knows how to laugh like a Turk ? . Laughter is good for all and during the period of fasting we took our fill of merriment.

After our parties, bumping our way home over the cobbled stones, sometimes in an open car, the slate grey

<sup>1</sup> Most of the concessions now in the hands of the Germans could have been British for the asking. I agree with a British diplomat who qualifies the British capitalists' prudence as nothing more than a lack of patriotism.—G. E.



sky of dawn would be lit up by the tiny lights round the top of the minarets. As one could see no structure, the rings appeared to be embedded in the sky, and indeed the mixture of stars and rings in the heavens around, made a curious combination. All the primitive Moslem population had been for hours asleep ; the night watchman's drum was to waken them. We of the new generation were waiting for this same drum to send us to sleep at the break of day. What a gulf there still is between the East and West !

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We had to go to the Turkish bath to be specially purified for Ramazan. Although we had a reserved enclosure, it possessed neither door nor window. So we made an interesting spectacle for all those who came to stare at the " foreigner " bathing. A Turkish bath is never very fragrant, nor are the forms that flit around as graceful as the nudes one sees in a Paris studio. The attendants with their voluminous pants and vivid, henna-dyed hair are curious-looking beings, but they are excellent at their work and careful how they wash you.

There were many brides being prepared for their weddings. One mother washed her daughter's hair a dozen times, and then before it was dry, it was plaited into innumerable little plaits, some of which were intertwined with strings of gold coins. Surely such a coiffure must last for days after the ceremony.

All of a sudden we are reminded the sun is setting, for the muezzin from the neighbouring minaret calls the faithful to prayer. Immediately all the attendants perform their ablutions, hitch up their voluminous pants, and prostrate themselves on the hot, wet stones. Unclothed as I was, I stood wrapt in admiration before this sight. How really beautiful this unself-conscious worship is !

After Ramazan comes Baïram—the fast and the feast.

The exchange of visits from morning till night ; the distribution of presents, the negress with her heavy silver tray full of sweetmeats, jam and coffee, offers them to the guests all day long. All sorts and conditions of men and women arrive to pay their respects ; the butcher, the dairyman, the fortune-teller, the governor, the general and the officers of the garrison all meet ; some sit on the floor as their rank demands ; some keep their veils well over their faces ; some wear hats ; all are united on the common ground of wishing one another health, happiness and prosperity. Baïram indeed is a time of rejoicing.

General Nadgi Pasha, my friend's husband, is the most polite man I ever met and one of the kindest. It seems to me were he ordered to bombard a town, even then he would couch his order in his own gracious formula : " Would you very kindly allow me to have the great honour of bombarding the town ? " His colleague, General Fahreddine Pasha, is a huge man and quite a different type from Nadgi Pasha. His defence of Jerusalem reads like an epic. When Fahreddine Pasha comes to see Nadgi Pasha, it reminds one of the mountain coming to Mahomet. Both these generals contributed to make my stay in Konia as happy as possible.

Once I had left Konia, I had a hundred and one examples of the kind courtesy of Nadgi Pasha and his wife. I remember when laid up in Constantinople with a badly injured knee, as neither the Pasha nor his wife could leave home, they sent the kindly negress Miriam all the long way from Konia to express their sympathy. " What a pretty name ! " I exclaimed when she first told me her name. " Miriam is the Mother of our prophet Jesus," she answered promptly.

Miriam was shown up into my room at the hotel, and I

called the waiter to interpret. She stood against the bed, her arms folded, and, laughing with nervousness, refused coffee or anything to eat, refused to be seated and was quite overcome by the importance of the waiter. When he left, she understood my acting better than his Turkish, but she was not her old self in the strange surroundings. Then, all of a sudden, she discovered her mistress's earrings in my ears, and all her shyness vanished. It was as though she had met an old friend, and after that, she chatted to me as she did at Konia.

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The great event of my stay at Konia was the public ball organized by my friend for the funds of the Red Crescent. In Konia up till then no public ball had taken place. Konia had not followed the lead of Angora and Constantinople, where balls are more frequently given than with us in the West. Konia is still a city where there is much fanaticism. From the beginning of my stay, the ball was the chief topic of conversation and all the arrangements were difficult to make. Everything connected with the ball, from the dressmaker and coiffeur to the music and fancy bread, are only procurable at Constantinople. Turks, however, are not only learning to help themselves in a surprising manner, but they have acquired the difficult art of making bricks without straw, and can do wonders without what we call the necessities of life.

And so, after all the difficulties were overcome, thanks to a generous response to an appeal for cushions, carpets, flags and almond blossom, an ugly suite of rooms in a primitive hotel had been converted into an Oriental garden; the lights were brilliant; the army supplied the band; Femina suggested many of the dresses which the ladies made themselves, and those who were skilful enough offered their services as hair cutters.

The question of all questions, however, and one which needed the most careful handling, lest it should ruin the whole ball, was the question of sleeves. "Sleeves or no sleeves?" asked the dancers; it was a question for my friend's husband to decide, and he at first set his teeth firmly against his wife's wearing a sleeveless dress. To unveiled hair and low necks he had grown accustomed, but sleeveless or short-sleeved dresses he disliked, and so his final decision of "No sleeves" was something of a triumph. What my friend did the other ladies would do.

Yet on the day of the ball, many had not the courage to show themselves except with high necks, sleeves, and turbans. Others dared not separate themselves from their fur coats, and still others refused to dance except with their husbands. How interesting it was to see these women arrive with their big bundle of prejudices, which before the evening was over vanished for ever. *C'est le premier pas qui compte* is a wise saw.

But of all the ball arrangements which most interested me was the Government official, who cross-examined all those husbands who came without their wives. To me, accustomed to seeing dancing men attached, unattached or semi-detached, welcomed to most balls open-armed, this curious idea of dismissing dancers was indeed strange. "Where is your wife?" the official would ask. "She is tired." "I saw her with you this afternoon." The young officer would have been dismissed, had not my friend known the wife stayed away because she had no evening-dress.

The explanation of the official's presence was this. A public ball being such a new experiment, many men were quite willing to take part in the frivolous proceedings by themselves and leave their wives at home. Supposing a man, therefore, had these ideas, he must be denied admission. The mere buying of a ticket for a charity ball was not

enough. The official was to decide whether he could use his ticket.

When my friend and I arrived at the ball the women were all in one room, the harem, and the men in another, the selamlık. They had taken their places guided by the customs of the past. They spoke in whispers, if they spoke at all, and looked uncomfortable and timid. The military band began to play and the couples began slowly to dance, and then chilliness, shyness, self-consciousness, all vanished, there was only one desire, to shut out the daylight, which was the signal for the ball to finish.

Once the ball was over, once its success secured, how heartily we laughed over the "sleeves or no sleeves" episode which had been the vexed question for over a month and which was settled without the least difficulty.

I left Konia with the deepest regret. If the affection of the people for me can be measured by the number who came to see me off, Konia has almost as great an affection for me as I for them. That last meeting proved what I have never failed to feel, the Turks' great qualities are hospitality and a real kindness of heart.

#### ADANA, TARSUS AND MERSINA

The few days I spent at Adana and Mersina were a round of gaiety. I saw every school and every place of interest, visited every person of importance and they visited me. There was the weekly dance at the military club organized by the colonel; the theatre party; the long drive along the orange-laden groves; and the visits to the cotton manufactories, a reception at the Oujak, and last, but not least, a wedding.

All weddings now take place at the town hall, both bride and bridegroom having to be there to sign their own

fate. I had hardly taken my seat, when the wedding was over. The mayor, after reading the marriage law, asks the bride and bridegroom whether they consent to be man and wife. They sign certain documents and the ceremony is over. When I remarked about the brevity of the ceremony—far shorter than the French civil wedding—my friend asked what more I needed, the marriage was legal. After that a reception takes place at the bride's house, and she can have the Imam to bless her, if she wants; but as in France, the town hall ceremony is all that counts legally.

In Adana, there are great cotton possibilities. Provided capital can be found for experts, new machinery and more steady labour, they can do great things; they could even grow Egyptian cotton.

Both Adana and Tarsus have American schools doing good work, but one fears for them that their days are numbered.

Tarsus, on the way to Mersina, possesses nothing whatsoever to commemorate St. Paul but the honour of being his birthplace. Indeed the people seemed much more interested in the historical visit of Antony and Cleopatra than anything connected with St. Paul. In summer the climate is not bearable, so one retires to the mountains to stay amongst the gypsy mountaineers. As long as you are the stranger within their camp, they make it a sacred duty to look after you, watching that no scorpion or other beast harms you when you sleep, and grateful for the privilege of being allowed to do so.

Clean, honest and with delightful manners, these simple mountaineers of Tarsus are amongst the nicest of Turkey's rustic populations. Let us hope that Western civilization with its virtues and its vices will not spoil their delightful Eastern personality.

Mersina, where a gracious reception was waiting me at the Oujak, reminds one of an Italian port. It might be a

humble edition of any of them. All kinds of local improvements such as roads, trams, electricity, etc., are being made—in a few years this port, like so many other ports, will be unrecognizable.

The Mayor of Adana and Naid Djémal Bey graciously accompanied me as far as the Beyrout steamer. As we sailed in a boat with an obstinate sail alongside the steamer, they saw Syrians on board wearing a fez. How well I remember the look of pride the two Turks exchanged as they exclaimed, “That is what we were, but never again!”