

CHAPTER XX

ANZAC GETS US DOWN

TOWARDS the end of a week with us Zeki Bey raised the question of his return to Constantinople. I would have liked to take him to Cape Helles, where I intended to spend a couple of days after finishing at Anzac, but something caused me to sense that he was wondering why I was keeping him so long under the cross-examination to which he so generously submitted. I could see that he was becoming anxious to return, and accordingly at once asked Major Collis if he would kindly arrange for this.

February 27th, the day on which we visited Gaba Tepe promontory and the old Turkish battery positions at the Olive Grove, was his last full day with us. On the way there we rode over the area immediately south of Anzac, where our Army Corps was intended to land, a plan foiled by the sea current which carried the Navy's boats a mile farther north. The hills were much smoother there, and my diary says:

"Zeki Bey was impressed by the fact that if disciplined regular troops (as he said) had landed there, without the great difficulties of the Anzac country, they might have got far enough ahead, and quickly enough, to get across the Turkish communications to Chunuk Bair. But, even so, to carry out the whole day's plans would have been most difficult for a division even in peacetime, he said."

I well remember the look of wonder and interest, and the thoughtful tone, of Zeki Bey, as he gazed over the sweep of those ridges and gave us this opinion. He himself had broached the subject, and with the second part

of his comment I agree; but the notion that an opposed landing at that place and in the conditions of 1915 could have been carried through within a time barely sufficient for a practice of it in peace, experience of warfare will lead most Anzacs to reject.

During Zeki Bey's visit to us I had been interested to discover his attitude towards the Germans. It was clear that he wished to counter the impression that German leaders were entirely responsible for the planning of Turkish strategy, or for its success, or that German assistance accounted for the strength of the defence. Without criticising Liman von Sanders, he stressed the German leader's delay in realising the import of the landings at Anzac and Helles and his error in suspecting them to be feints after the Turkish leaders on the spot were convinced that they were main operations. Zeki Bey often told us that the German personnel among the forces in Gallipoli were few. But he was a loyal ally; when someone at the mess-table thoughtlessly said something disparaging the German war effort, he flushed and said warmly: "I think this people made a wonderful effort against their many opponents."

This was interesting as reflecting the attitude of the Turkish officer at his best, for there is no doubt that the Germans and Turks constantly grated on one another in both higher and lower ranks; the casualness and backwardness of the Turks irritated the Germans, and all German soldiers in authority were not as wise as Liman von Sanders. We saw some of them once in Constantinople—it was the first time since before the war that we had lived in a community in which Germans had practically the same status as ourselves. We were in the stately High Street of Pera when an unearthly chirruping, like a canary's but fifty times magnified, suddenly filled the whole air, and down the road came a grey foreign staff-car with some German officers, the exhaust whistle (it was the first time any of us had heard one) turned on, scaring

wayfarers off the highway like a present-day fire-engine. The attitude seemed typical. I must add, however, that German officers in Turkey had evidently felt an affinity to our prisoners of war there and in several instances notably befriended them.

At the end of Zeki Bey's stay it happened that our commissariat managed to secure a few bottles of whisky. From my boyhood's days I had understood that strong liquor was forbidden to Mohammedans, and I had, of course, barred from our mess during our friend's stay any ration containing pork in any form; some suggestion among our younger spirits for a practical joke in that connection—possibly not really intended—occasioned the only words I had to speak as a disciplinarian during the Mission. There was, of course, no such objection to having the whisky on the table, though the warning against practical jokes stood. I was much surprised that night when, on a remark from one of our lads, "I suppose you don't take this stuff, Zeki Bey," he asked what it was and then said, "Thank you, I should like to try a little," and let us pour him out a weak glass.

To our surprise, also, as dinner was ending Zeki Bey made us a little speech, in French of course, expressing his appreciation of our countrymen, first as soldiers and now as hosts. We on our side had all come to like and admire him. Strangely enough Lambert, debonair and friendly, had been, I think, the slowest to make a genuine inward accommodation to our one-time opponent. What prevented him was, of course, his memory of the Turkish Government's attempts to exterminate the Armenians. Had he seen what the world has since seen in Germany, Russia, Italy, Poland, Austria, East Asia, Spain and even France, he would probably have drawn from it the same lesson as I—that what separates Australians, English, Americans and the rest of "us" from that life of the wolf-pack and the driven flock is only the chance that we still manage—however precariously—to sustain an inherited

and most stubborn tradition of basic freedom. Zeki Bey's friend and hero, Mustafa Kemal, was destined (and perhaps had already determined) to attempt to establish that tradition in his own people.

Our work kept us at Anzac for ten days after Zeki Bey left. By then, as I noted in my diary of Tuesday, March 4th, "pretty well every question which we came here to solve has been settled". I was anxious to leave for Helles and Constantinople, the more so as, since our day among the dreadful heights littered with the wreck of Baldwin's Brigade, Anzac, as it then was, oppressed us, and Wilkins had not been well. He was at work in his iron tank of a dark-room till far into the nights, which were often bitter. He was a born leader and, together with Hughes, who was another, he had been largely responsible for our success. I used to note with amusement that, as we strode and climbed about the hills, the rest of the party unconsciously followed Wilkins' lead. If he used a certain path, climbed a cliff in a particular way, jumped a trench or even went round left or right of a bush, the rest of us usually did the same.

On our last morning at Anzac I took Wilkins to Essad Pasha's headquarters at Scrubby Knoll so that he could get his record of the panorama on which the Turkish staff had looked out. A little farther south I checked and marked with stakes the positions apparently reached by Loutit, and then, returning to Lone Pine, searched the ground which Zeki Bey had said our men reached at the edge of The Cup, above the Turkish battalion headquarters. The cartridges and kit of our men were there, right on the edge of The Cup. The last afternoon I spent in marking for Hughes a number of points—mainly at Old Anzac—the exact location of which he thought might be useful to him. We put in forty-nine numbered pegs, showing the spot in Monash Valley where General Bridges was mortally hit, Birdwood's headquarters, the farthest points reached on the day of the Landing, and

so on. In all we had noted about 130 points on our maps and marked them on the ground.¹

George Lambert and his voluntary Australian orderly, a trooper named Spruce lent to him by Hughes, had been even busier than usual during the last few days. For one sketch, which specially pleased Lambert, Spruce served as a model, lying on the scrub on the rear slope of Johnston's Jolly, posed as one of the Anzac dead. Lambert's health also gave some reason for anxiety as to whether he would be able to complete his work in Gallipoli and later, according to his plans, in Sinai and Palestine. But before leaving Anzac he insisted on going out in the small hours to The Nek, so as to be there in the dawn light in which the charge was made. "Very cold, bleak and lonely," he noted. "The jackals, damn them, were chorusing their hate, the bones showed up white even in the faint dawn and I felt rotten; but as soon as I got to my spot the colour of the dawn on this scrubby, shrubby hill-land was very beautiful and I did my little sketch quite well before breakfast. Ten-thirty saw Spruce and self struggling with a water-colour of a very impressive subject, impressive both in art and military tradition. The worst feature of this after-battle work is that the silent hills and valleys sit stern and unmoved, callous of the human, and busy only in growing bush and sliding earth to hide the scars left by the war-disease. Perhaps it is as well that we are pulling out tomorrow; this place gives one the blues, though it is very beautiful."²

It was on one of these last nights, after the whole camp had gone to bed, and the door of the marquee had been laced up to keep the jackals from our boots and mess stores, that a stray kitten (from heaven knows where)

¹ The series marked for Hughes (and numbered, on pegs and maps, "A.H.M. 1 to A.H.M. 49") was necessarily separate from the series already marked by the Mission for its own purposes, and numbered 1-75 (and a few odd numbers, AAi and so on), but confusion has been avoided by carefully indexing the Mission's maps and the original diary

² *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, p. 112.

was heard to mew outside the tent fly. It was immediately answered by an exactly similar mew from inside the tent—Lambert, of course. At first he imitated each mew of the kitten, but after a short while it imitated him. He seemed to be able to make it say whatever he wished it to. “Me-eaow,” said Lambert. “Me-eaow,” repeated the kitten. “Me-e-aow” from Lambert. “Me-e-aow” from the kitten. “Mow-ow-aaow” from Lambert. The same from puss. This went on for twenty minutes, the camp stifling its laughter as best it could in order not to spoil the performance. After five minutes’ interval the pair gave another twenty minutes’ show and then Lambert allowed puss to go away disappointed. All the time we could hear our fatigue party in their tents bubbling with amusement. Several of the lads there were Welsh, and Lambert, whose forestry service had been in Wales, afterwards gave us their comments to the life. “Tit you hear what the officer sait, Will-yams?” It was like listening to Fluellen over a Gallipoli camp-fire.