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Excerpt

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HISTORY

OF THE

GREEK REVOLUTION.

BOOK THIRD.

THE SUCCESSES OF THE GREEKS.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONDITION OF GREECE AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE.

“Τοιγαροῦν χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων, οἱ τὰ κοινὰ χειρίζοντες παρὰ μὲν τοῖς Ἑλλησιν, ἂν τάλαντον μόνον πιστευθῶσιν, ἀντιγραφεῖς ἔχοντες δέκα, καὶ σφραγίδες τοσούτας καὶ μάρτυρας διπλασίου οὐ δύνανται τηρεῖν τὴν πίστιν.”—POLYBIUS, vi. 56, 13.

Not to mention other defects, no Greek who is intrusted with public money can refrain from peculation, even if ten commissioners be appointed to watch over the expenditure, and though ten bonds be signed with twice as many witnesses as a security for his honesty.

FIRMNESS OF SULTAN MAHMUD—HE ADOPTS A CONCILIATORY POLICY—A GREAT FIRE AT CONSTANTINOPLE DESTROYS HIS ARMAMENTS IN 1823—PLAN OF CAMPAIGN FOR 1823—NEGLIGENCE OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT—OLYMPIAN ARMATOLI PLUNDER SKIATHOS AND SKOPELOS—OPERATIONS OF THE TURKS—DEATH OF MARCO BOTZARES—ADVANCE OF THE TURKISH ARMY—SIEGE OF ANATOLIKON—OPERATIONS OF THE GREEK AND TURKISH FLEETS—ESCAPE OF EIGHT PSARIAN SAILORS—VIOLATION OF IONIAN NEUTRALITY—MISCONDUCT OF THE SAILORS ON BOARD THE GREEK FLEET—SURRENDER OF THE TURKS IN THE ACROCORINTH—LORD BYRON IN GREECE—FIRST GREEK LOAN CONTRACTED IN ENGLAND—FIRST CIVIL WAR—MOHAMMED ALI ENGAGES TO ASSIST THE SULTAN—THE POLITICAL STATE OF GREECE IN 1824—POSITION OF KOLETTES—OF MAVROCORDATOS—SECOND CIVIL WAR—EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF THE TWO CIVIL WARS—WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE OF THE TWO LOANS—ANECDOTES—MILITARY EXPENDITURE—NAVAL EXPENDITURE.

The successes of the Greeks during the year 1822 established Greece as an independent state, and forced

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even those who were hostile to the Revolution to acknowledge that the war was no longer a struggle of the Porte with a few rebellious rayahs. The importance of the Greek nation could no longer be denied, whatever might be the failings of the Greek government. The war was now the battle of an oppressed people against a powerful sovereign. The inhabitants of Greece, whether of the Hellenic or the Albanian race, fought to secure their religious liberty and the independence of their country. Sultan Mahmud fought to maintain Othoman supremacy and the divine right of tyranny. Both were supported by strong feelings of religious and national antipathy ; but the strength of the Greek cause lay in the hearts of the people, and that of the Turkish in the energy of the sovereign. Between such enemies there could neither be peace nor truce.

To the friends of civil and religious liberty the cause of Greece seemed sure of victory. A nation in arms is not easily conquered. Holland established her independence, under greater difficulties, against a far greater power than the Othoman empire in the present time. Switzerland was another example of the success of patriotism when the people are determined to be free. The people in Greece had adopted that determination, and they neither counted the cost of their struggle, nor shrank from encountering any hardships to gain their end.

The noble resolution of the Greeks and of the Christian Albanians in Greece to live or die free, encountered a firm determination on the part of Sultan Mahmud to re-establish his authority even by the extermination of the inhabitants of liberated Greece. When his fleets were defeated and his armies destroyed ; when Russia threatened his northern frontier, and Persia invaded his eastern provinces ; when, to

meet his expenditure, he was cheating his subjects by debasing his coinage ; when the janissaries revolted in his capital, and the timariots and spahis refused to march against the rebellious infidels ; when rival pashas fought with one another instead of marching against the Greeks ; and when all Turkey appeared to be a scene of anarchy, the inflexible sultan pursued steadily his great object of preserving the integrity of the Othoman empire. When European statesmen treated him as a frantic tyrant, he was revealing to Lord Stratford de Redcliffe the sagacious policy which raised that skilful diplomatist to his profound mastery of Eastern questions. The shattered fabric of the falling empire was for some years upheld by the profound administrative views, the unwearied perseverance, and the iron character of Sultan Mahmud. He was an energetic, if not a great man, and his calm melancholy look was an index to his sagacious and saturnine intellect.

The spectacle of a duel between such a sovereign and the resuscitated Demos of Greece, was a spectacle that deservedly excited the attention of civilised nations. Mohammedanism and Christianity, tyranny and liberty, despotism and law, were all deeply compromised in the result. The massacres at Chios and the defeat of Dramali were considered proofs that the sultan could not reconquer the Greeks, and Christendom could not allow him to exterminate a Christian people. Public opinion—the watch-dog whose bark sounds as an evil omen in the ear of monarchs—began to growl a warning to Christian kings not longer to neglect the rights of Christian nations, and statesmen began to feel that the sympathies of the people in Western Europe were at last fairly interested in the cause of Greece. But the friends of the holy alliance still argued that anarchy was inflicting hourly more

A. D. 1823.

misery in Greece than the sultan's government inflicted annually on the Greeks in Turkey; that the extortions of Kolokotrones and Odysseus, and the misgovernment of Mavrocordatos, produced greater evils than the faults of pashas and the errors of Sultan Mahmud; and that the power and resources of the Othoman empire rendered the success of the Greek Revolution hopeless. The friends of Greece, on the other hand, replied, that if the Greek chiefs were worthless, and the Greek government weak, the will of the people was strong, and the nation would prove unconquerable. The Greeks, they said, might yet find a government worthy of their cause, and the liberties of Greece might find a champion like William of Orange or Washington; or, if liberty produced no champion, war might give the nation a chief like Cromwell or Napoleon.

The animosity of the belligerents was never more violent than at the commencement of 1823, but the resources of both were for the time exhausted. The sultan, finding that his indiscriminate cruelty had only strengthened the Greeks in their determination to oppose his power, changed his policy, and began to treat them with mildness. Many who had been thrown into prison merely as hostages, were released, and the Greek communities generally were allowed to enjoy their old municipal privileges, and manage their own financial affairs. Strict orders were transmitted to all pashas to act equitably to the Greek subjects of the Porte. Some slight concessions were also made in order to conciliate Russia, and negotiations were opened with Persia, which eventually terminated the war with that power.¹ Even the sympathy of Western nations in the Greek cause was not overlooked. Sultan

¹ The treaty of peace between Turkey and Persia was signed on the 28th July 1823, but it was not published at Constantinople until the month of October, and not ratified by the Shah of Persia until January 1824.

Mahmud knew little of public opinion, but he was not ignorant of the power of popular feeling. The early events of his life, and the state of his capital, had taught him to fear insurrections. He was persuaded by his own judgment, as well as by foreign ambassadors and his own ministers, that Christian nations might force kings and emperors to defend the Greeks, and that it would be wise to avert a combination of the Christian powers for such a purpose. He therefore ordered the new capitan - pasha, Khosref Mehemet, called Topal, to assure the English ambassador and the Austrian internuncio, that the Othoman fleet would not lay waste the defenceless islands of the Archipelago, and that terms of submission would be offered to all Christians who had taken up arms. A. D. 1823.

The sultan's preparations for the campaign of 1823 were suddenly paralysed by a great disaster. The arsenal and cannon foundry at Tophana were destroyed by fire. An immense train of artillery had been prepared for the army of Thessaly ; twelve hundred brass guns were ready to arm new ships in the port ; an extraordinary supply of ammunition and military stores was packed up for service : all these materials were destroyed by one of the most terrible conflagrations ever witnessed, even by the inhabitants of Constantinople. Besides the artillery arsenal, fifty mosques and about six thousand houses were destroyed. A large part of Pera was reduced to ashes.

This fire was attributed by public rumour to the malevolence of the janissaries, and that rumour was believed by Sultan Mahmud. Fifteen ortas were under orders to march against the Greeks. They dared not refuse marching against infidels, but without the materials of war, destroyed by this conflagration, their departure was useless. They had now gained time to organise an insurrection, and their discontent alarmed

the sultan to such a degree that, contrary to the established usage of the empire, he did not appear in public on several occasions. But neither his personal danger, nor the destruction of his artillery, abated his energy. A small fleet was fitted out, and, instead of making a decisive attack on the Greeks, it was resolved to harass them with desultory operations. The capitan-pasha hoisted his flag in a frigate, and his fleet was unencumbered by a single line-of-battle ship. The financial difficulties of the Turkish government were met by a new issue of debased money, which was at that time the substitute for a loan. By the old plan of debasing the coinage, the loss fell on the sultan's own subjects; by the new plan of borrowing money, it is sure to fall on strangers, and in all probability on the subjects of Queen Victoria.

The sultan's plan of campaign was as usual well devised. An army was destined to invade the Morea. Instead of entering the peninsula by the Isthmus of Corinth, it was to cross the gulf at Lepanto, and establish its headquarters at Patras. The garrison of Corinth was to be provisioned and strengthened by the Othoman fleet. Elis and Messenia offered facilities for the employment of the Turkish cavalry. Abundant supplies of all kinds might be obtained from the Ionian Islands to fill the magazines of the army at Patras, Modon, and Ceron.

Yussuf Berkofztalee, who was well known to the Greeks by his exploits in Moldavia, was ordered to advance from Thessaly through Eastern Greece, with a strong body of cavalry. The main army, consisting of Guegs under Mustai Pasha of Scodra, and Tosks under Omer Vrioni, pasha of Joannina, was ordered to advance through Western Greece. A junction was to be effected either at Lepanto or at Patras, where the Othoman fleet was to meet the army.

Mavrocordatos had been driven from office by his own mismanagement. His successors at the head of the Greek government were too ignorant to adopt measures for retarding the advance of the Turks, and too selfish to think of anything but their personal interests. The people stood ready to do their duty, but the popular energy was left without guidance. The captains and best soldiers were far from the frontier; collecting and consuming the national revenues. The Morea was filled with well-paid troops; but few were disposed to quit the flesh-pots of the districts in which they had taken up their quarters; so that, when the campaign opened, Greece had no army in the field. A. D. 1823.

Reshid Pasha (Kiutayhé) commenced the military operations of the year 1823, by treading out the ashes of the Revolution that still smouldered on Mount Pelion. He subdued Trikheri in conjunction with the capitan-pasha, and drove the Olympian armatoli from their last retreat in Thessaly.¹

The Olympian armatoli escaped to Skiathos and Skopelos, where they maintained themselves by plundering the inhabitants, while Yussuf Berkofzalee was laying waste Eastern Greece. In the month of July, the inhabitants of Skiathos were driven from their houses by these Greek troops, who took possession of the town, and consumed the grain, oil, and wine which they found stored up in the magazines. Parties of soldiers scoured the island, and seized the sheep and goats as if they had been in an enemy's country. The inhabitants fled to an ancient castle about five miles from the town, with as much of their property as they could save, and defended this strong position against their intrusive countrymen. The armatoli were so much pleased with their idle life, varied with goat hunts and skirmishes with the natives, that they re-

¹ See vol. i. p. 246.

fused to obey the orders they received from the Greek government, to join a body of troops in Eubœa. Admiral Miaoulis visited Skiathos on the 11th of October, and found the inhabitants in a state of destitution and distress. They were shut up in the castle, and their supplies were exhausted, while the soldiers were consuming the last remains of their property in the town. The authority, the solicitations, and the reproaches of Miaoulis, were employed in vain to expel the armatoli from the island, and the lawless soldiery did not quit Skiathos until they had consumed everything on which they could lay their hands.

While the Olympian armatoli were ruining Skiathos and plundering Skopelos, Yussuf Berkofzalee was laying waste Phocis and Bœotia. Many villages, and several monasteries on Parnassus and Helicon, which had hitherto escaped devastation, were plundered and burned. Kastri, the village which occupies the site of Delphi, was pillaged; but instead of establishing himself at Salona, opening communications with Lepanto, and co-operating with the army of Mustai Pasha, Berkofzalee fixed his headquarters at Thebes, sent his infantry to Negrepont, and pushed forward his foraging parties into the plain of Athens.

Kolettes, like Mavrocordatos, was eager for military glory, and even more unfit for military command. He now persuaded the other members of the government to appoint him commander-in-chief of a Greek army which he was to assemble in Eubœa. He had no military qualifications but a portly frame and the Albanian dress; but these physical and artificial advantages induced the stout Zinzar Vallachian to despise the moral courage and the patriotic disinterestedness of his phanariot rival, whose frame, though smaller, was far more active. When the Turks appeared, Kolettes fled and abandoned Eubœa to its fate.

Odysseus, however, who commanded the Greek force A. D. 1823. in the southern part of the island, defeated the Mussulmans in a skirmish near Kanystos. As a trophy of his victory, he sent fifty heads and three living Turks to Athens. The modern Athenians deliberately stoned these three unfortunate prisoners to death.

Mustai Pasha assembled his army at Ochrida. It consisted of five thousand Mohammedan Guegs, and three thousand Catholic Miridits. These Catholics, who speak the Guegh dialect of the Albanian language, boast of their descent from the Christians who fought against the Turks under their national hero Skanderbeg, or George Castriot. But their hatred of the orthodox Greeks has long since bound them in a closer alliance with the Mussulman tribes in their neighbourhood, than with any body of Christians. On the present occasion, the Miridits formed the advanced guard of Mustai's army. They upheld the military glory of their race, and ridiculed the vanity of the Greeks, who attempted to filch from them the glory of Skanderbeg.

The Greeks made no preparations to oppose Mustai. Mavrocordatos had quitted Mesolonghi. While he remained there, he concentrated in his own person the three offices of President of Greece, Governor-General of the Western Provinces, and Commander-in-Chief of the Etolian army; but when he departed he left three persons to execute the duties of commander-in-chief. This absurd arrangement would doubtless have created anarchy had it not already existed, and it tended to increase the disorders that already prevailed. Almost every chief, both in Etolia and Acarnania, engaged in quarrels with his neighbours. Sometimes they fought in order to decide who should march to encounter Mustai's army, and the prize of victory was liberty to stay at home and plunder the peasantry. In most

cases their proceedings were an inexplicable enigma; and their most intelligent countrymen could only tell strangers, what indeed was very evident without their communication, that the conduct of the captains and primates was ruining the people.

The advance of Mustai's army was signalised by one of the most brilliant exploits of the war. The first division of the Othoman force consisted of four thousand men, Catholics and Mussulmans, under the command of Djelaleddin Bey. It encamped in the valley of Karpenisi, near an abundant fountain of pure water, which forms a brook as it flows from its basin, shaded by a fine old willow-tree.

At midnight on the 21st of August 1823 the orthodox Tosks surprised the camp of the Catholic and Mussulman Guegs. Marco Botzares, at the head of three hundred and fifty Suliots, broke into the midst of their enemies and rushed forward to slay the bey. The Othoman troops, roused from sleep, fled with precipitation, leaving their arms behind. Had the Greek captains descended with the *armatoli* of Etolia and Acarnania from the villages in which they were idly watching the flashes of the Suliot arms, they might have annihilated the Turkish force. But Greek envy sacrificed the Albanian hero. The bey of Ochrida had pitched his tent in a *mandra* or walled enclosure, built to protect beehives or young lambs from badgers and foxes. Botzares reached this wall, and, not finding the entrance, raised his head to look over it, in order to discover a means of entering it with his followers. The alarm had now roused Djelaleddin's veterans, who were familiar with nocturnal surprises. Several were on the watch when the head of Botzares rose above the wall, and showed itself marked on the grey sky; a ball immediately pierced his brain, and the Suliots took up his body. Even then a few hand-grenades