

# An Englishwoman in Angora

## CHAPTER I

### ON BOARD THE "PIERRE LOTI"—TURKEY'S DEBT TO LOTI'S MAGIC PEN

OVER a sea as smooth as ice, the sun shining brightly most of the way, the Messageries Maritimes steamer *Pierre Loti* is carrying us to Smyrna. Ten years ago, to a beaten Turkey (unable, it was supposed, to face an enemy for years to come), I had taken the same trip. And now, despite the prophets, I am returning to a victorious people; doubly victorious, since all the odds were against them.

"That is the kind of story I love," I remarked to the sympathetic captain and his daughter, with whom I generally lunched as guest in their own cabin. They, indeed, were particularly interested in my adventure, for they knew the Near East well, and this was to be their last visit. Because he had just reached the age limit of those who 'go down to the sea in ships,' though it was only when you caught the word 'papa' upon his daughter's lips that anyone would suspect the fact.

So they are blessed who marry young!

"It seems strange," I told him one morning, "to be here—on board the *Pierre Loti*, and surely a presage of good luck, since his books have done so much to increase and widen my inborn sympathies with the East."

Still more strange it proved; since the captain himself had named the ship for his admiration of the great French writer and in memory of personal friendship between them. A rare literary association for

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a steamer once in the service of the Czars. Wherefore, also, I found the master's works in the ship's library, and could renew acquaintance with many an old favourite: "Ramuntcho," "Matelot," "Ispahan," "Les Pêcheurs d'Islande" and the "Désenchantées."

The captain told me of his visit to Rochefort, and I told *him* how Antoine went to the same house for final instructions upon the staging of "Ramuntcho," which, however, did not prove a success. How, indeed, could anyone think of dramatising Pierre Loti, whether in prose or verse? He gives us neither psychology nor dramatic incident. I can only suppose that Antoine permitted them to be produced—to show once for all that the thing could not be done; a hard lesson for the master!

"Among Loti's collection of priceless treasures, rifled from every corner of the East, Antoine sought in vain for somewhere to place his hat! Finally, he hooked it on to an Eastern idol, and their talk began. In a few moments, however, there was a pause, for the astonished dramatist caught sight of the offending headgear suspended, as he supposed, in mid-air. However, a closer look revealed that it was resting upon a thin stream of water. The Eastern idol was a fountain!"

The captain expressed his surprise that I should not only be so familiar with Loti's work, but that I could really know anything intimately of his private life, "seeing how the Frenchman disliked my own country."

"My dear sir," I replied, "if we are to find our friends to-day only among those who love England, we should be limited indeed. You and your charming daughter, *par exemple*, are you precisely admirers of the British Government? . . ."

"To me, Art is first, and the rest—nowhere! I care not whether the genius first saw daylight in Paris, in New York, or in Timbuctoo. I have more friends out of England than in England. Like Kipling's cat, 'all places are alike to me.' I only ask that your land be warm; and with all peoples who do not rob me I am ready and eager to be good friends. To

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‘guard the frontiers’ in Art would be to bring back the Dark Ages. The most sincere love of one’s own country should never teach one to be disdainful of *les autres*.”

“You are going to Nationalist Turkey,” he replied, “you will find yourself right up against Chauvinism all the time.”

“I don’t believe it. Forgive me, I really think you exaggerate. And besides—with my strong sympathies for the Turks!—I have always found Orientals the most broad-minded men.”

Then I brought back the talk to Pierre Loti. “Why do you say that he dislikes England so much?” I asked. “He *does* object to golf near the Pyramids; he is a little sarcastic about ‘Messrs. Thos. Cook & Co., Egypt, Ltd.’ forgetting what it means to travel without them; he dislikes our Government for its pro-Greek policy and its injustice towards the Turks. As an Englishwoman I agree. And, like him, too, I regard New York as the nearest earthly approach to hell! We certainly do not hate America; only its noise, its materialism, and its advertising.

“I knew Pierre Loti best, perhaps, at his charming Basque home in Hendaye—thanks to my friendship with his heroines, Melek and Zeyneb. I know, at one time, he resented what seemed to him our Edward VII.’s ‘interference’ in French affairs. But that master of diplomats never gave his advice unasked; and, when he was told of the great Frenchman’s hostility, Pierre Loti was promptly invited to Windsor, and they became the best of friends. Would he were with us now, that he might but talk with the Ministers of both nations!

“After Windsor, Loti, I’m sure, would have spared his sarcasm. ‘There is one thing left now,’ he once declared. ‘We must appeal to H.M. Edward VII. *He* only can do what he likes in France!’ The French Admiralty had just refused him permission to carry away from one of their ships the table on which he had written the ‘*Désenchantées*.’”

The captain, it seemed, was ready to waive this point.

“But I do not consider,” he resumed, “that Loti’s books are a true picture of Turkey as she is.”

“They would not, indeed, suit his arch-enemy Messrs. Cook,” I replied; “as Turner painted, he wrote, for those who have eyes to see. Tell him you never saw *his* Turkey, and he would reply: ‘Don’t you wish you could?’ . . .

“Had Loti himself been English, he would, naturally, have reached a larger public among us. The warmth of his colouring is too often lost in translation. As a schoolgirl I learnt by heart the wonderful Preface to his “Ispahan”: ‘*Qui veut venir avec moi voir les roses d’Ispahan,*’ and I have dreamt of those roses ever since.”

The captain then spoke of the avenue at Constantinople which bears his name.

“A charming remembrance,” I replied, “but he needs no such ‘rosemary.’ Do we realise, I wonder, what French influence in the Near East owes to his supreme art. In England, except for a small minority, the word Turkey only means a vision of fair houris, veiled in the mysteries of the past, the great ‘Red’ Sultan, and massacres in Armenia. To France it means Aziadé, the Green Mosque at Brousse, Djénane, and the Fantômes d’Orient. Public opinion, to-day, can be ‘manufactured’ as easily as butter and cheese; but the imaginations once stirred by the magician’s pen will not yield so easily to the last Brew of Hate. France is not going to lose her dream of the East woven from Loti’s pen. A debt of gratitude neither she, nor Turkey itself, can ever pay.”

To travel by this steamer, bearing the name of a writer one loves so well, brings unceasing delight. Your menu-card, the life-belts on deck, even the towels, all bear a name to fill the mind with memory of beautiful things. As my eyes fell on the *Pierre Loti’s* lifeboat, swinging on its davits, I recalled the “*Pêcheurs d’Islande,*” with its tragic close: “and he never returned!” All the sorrow, the suffering, and the heart-ache; the useless watching, waiting, and longing—this, for the women, is War!

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Are we, indeed, to begin *that* all over again? For a "Greater Greece" than the Greeks themselves can sustain?

If *all* women who have suffered (and who has not?) would march to Westminster to protest, would any hear and pause? Can we fight a Press in the service of profiteers, bolstering up the Government, blocking the public view?

Are we not, after all, mere "pawns" of a Destiny that none can avert?

. . . . .

Pierre Loti's long and interesting life is now very quickly drawing to its close. He has written his last words—a defence of his beloved Turks.

## CHAPTER II

### TURKEY AND TOLERANCE—A FRIENDSHIP WASTED

MY supreme interest in Turkey among the Moslem nations, arose from influences, or instincts, I cannot now with any certainty determine. I suspect, however, it was in part reaction against the injustice of Gladstone—the idol of my father's youth, until the betrayal of his hero Gordon—and in part indignation with those who called the Koran an "accursed book." My religion is the universal tolerance I expect for my own, and I can feel only the most profound admiration for the Great Prophet of Islam, whose fine personality has left so benign an influence throughout the East, and for his "Bible," with its noble study of our own Christ. Carlyle, you will remember, pays glowing tribute to this "Prophet Hero!"

So I devoured every book that I could lay hands on about these interesting peoples; fought for introductions to anyone who could talk of them, from book-knowledge or personal acquaintance; studied medicine—that their women might suffer less.

It was in 1906 that I first met Pierre Loti's "disenchanted" heroines, Zeyneb and Melek; and we soon became the closest friends. The tale of their daring, but unpractical, flight had stirred my imagination. Their father was one of Abdul Hamid's Ministers, and two or three times during my visit they were almost kidnapped by order of the Sultan. On one occasion it was, indeed, only a miracle which disclosed the plot that was to have carried them off (by motor from Nice to Marseilles, thence back by boat to Constantinople) to the punishment awaiting them.

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For hours they held me spellbound by their vivid descriptions of harem life, particularly the Sultan's, and of the "Terror" under Abdul Hamid. With this clever monster at the helm, the Turks suffered a hundred times more than the Christians. Whole regiments of Albanians ceased to exist; whole companies went off to Yemen and were forgotten; Ministers died suddenly, and private families disappeared wholesale. Yet they must be thrown out of Europe, "bag and baggage," because, in a minor degree, Christian Armenians, too, bled under Abdul Hamid!

After the departure of the two Hanoums (Turkish ladies), their father died suddenly. And though, when in Constantinople, I did my best to see and console their widowed mother, she persisted in regarding me as one of those *giaours* who had stolen away her daughters! And would listen to no defence or explanation.

It was then that I heard much of the coming Revolution: when and where "meetings" had taken place, who were members of the "secret societies," which of their friends in prison would be liberated. In 1908, the Day of Deliverance suddenly came, to the astonishment of the whole world, and I, too, rejoiced, as though my own country were now set free!

I was, luckily, again in Constantinople for those great days. I saw the hideous tyrant of a few years ago driven through the streets of Pera; I was present at the opening of Parliament; introduced to the Sultan Abdul Hamid and his Grand Vizier Kiamil Pasha.

It was the Vizier's charming daughter who soon became my dearest friend, and hostess for two subsequent visits. Once she spoke of me to Abdul Hamid's successor, Mohammed V., as her "English sister" (her favourite term of endearment), and the Sultan replied: "I did not know Kiamil Pasha had any English children." Poor man, he had a Turkish family of a score!

It was Hamid's fall that first revealed to me how much Turkey loved England, what she was ready to

give for British friendship. I had witnessed the arrival of our Ambassador, the late Sir G. Lowther, and his triumphant entry to Constantinople, when the horses were taken out of his carriage and he was drawn by Turks to the Embassy. As Abdul Hamid had compromised the nation by friendship with Germans, young Turkey threw herself at the feet of Great Britain.

Why could we not respond? Alas, our Ambassador and his French colleague, M. Constant, would openly express their preference for the despotic Abdul Hamid. And what was said, no doubt with no serious thought of offence, reached the ears of the young Turks and stung their pride: "People who visit Constantinople may be divided into two classes: those who like dirt and squalor" (of whom I was one), "and those who do not!"

It was inevitable that the Germans should make *their* profit from *our* discourtesy and blind contempt. We ought, from the first, to have known that she would send, as indeed she did, one of her finest diplomats to Constantinople. Marshall von Bieberstein, and his "retriever," Dr. W—— of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* lost no opportunity of conciliating the young Turks, to what end we might, surely, have foreseen!

After the Balkan war, I paid a visit to vanquished Turkey; this time as a guest of my "Turkish sister" in Stamboul, whose father had been, meanwhile, banished to Cyprus, where he died. Under the circumstances I could not (for fear of further compromising my friends with the Government) see much of our Ambassador, Sir Louis Mallet, though I met him twice, and found him a charming man.

To all my appeals, at the Embassy and elsewhere, for British friendship and help to put Turkey on her feet again, I met the same foolish, "parrot" reply: "We cannot sacrifice Russia!" Nevertheless, when I returned to London, and published "An Englishwoman in a Turkish Harem" (the diary record of private friendships, widely circulated in the East), we, the friends of Turkey, determined to defy the Government, and formed an Ottoman Society for that purpose.



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When the war broke out I had just reached Berlin, once more *en route* for Turkey, Asia Minor, and afterwards Persia and India.

It is obvious that the world-tragedy had even a sharper sting for those of us who were bidden to hate our life-long "best friends" among the enemy peoples. Often enough, moreover, the individual "foe" (as was the case with my Turkish "sister") could not throw off the heart's allegiance to England merely because "it was war."

Can we, indeed, honestly blame the young Turks? In the first place, they did not choose their own path. One man, Enver Pasha, joined Germany *against* the wishes of a whole nation. As *one* man, Mr. Lloyd George, would once have drawn the most constitutional of all peoples to fight the Turks, had not General Harington, luckily for them and us, disobeyed his command!

Besides, we did *nothing* to preserve our friendship with Turkey. Years of indifference, and most impolitic scoffings at real reforming enthusiasm, were followed, at the eleventh hour, by total neglect of *any* conciliating diplomacy, which could even then have kept Turkey out of the war, and shortened it by two years.

For instance, on the outbreak of war with Germany, "without notice, without the most banal of the forms of courtesy, on the very day when the Turkish flag should have been hoisted over the ships handed over to the Ottoman Commission, which had come to England to take charge of them, the dreadnoughts were seized by Great Britain and no offer was made by the British Government to refund, at least, the price of the two ships . . ." So wrote the late Grand Vizier Hakki Pasha; and one could mention many other, similar, senseless pin-pricks, which may inflame such people almost more than insults of greater import.

During the war my friendship for Turkey proved a serious handicap in hospital work. Anyone jealous of what privileges were by chance accorded to me would hand over a few choice tit-bits—that grew in passing—to the secret police. The French, unless in a fit of

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really inevitable war-depression, paid scant heed to such reports. The Americans, however, easily took alarm. One, I remember, actually spoke to me about the matter with a terror only equalled, in my experience, by that of the Cabinet Minister's brother who once asked me: "How I could do anything so foolish as to live in a harem?"

It was a poor compliment to one of Turkey's greatest statesmen, and to my hostess, his distinguished daughter.

But when I found that Roget's "Thesaurus" gives as synonym for a harem, "a house of ill fame," I understood!

Turkey, however, was crushed, defeated and, at Sèvres, humiliated. Were we not courting disaster by such unjust terms? If we remove the foot holding them down—but ever so slightly—will they rebound and strike?

"I cannot understand," I said to one of their delegates, "how a Turk could be found to sign such a Treaty." For always, with all their faults, I had known them proud.

"Had we not signed," he answered, "the Greeks would have entered Constantinople, and God knows when we could have driven them out. What does it matter, the Treaty will not be ratified."

To keep out the Greeks, to save bloodshed! Maybe he was right.

"At least, we are set free from Germany," they said; and there is little we could not have asked then for such security.

They would have allowed Great Britain any privileges, any concessions, all sovereign rights, if only we had not permitted the occupation of Smyrna! When the Dutch *pasteur*, M. Lebouvier, sent the *Times* a full description of all the hideous bloodshed, the saturnalian orgies, and the riot with which the Greeks celebrated their triumphal entry, it was *suppressed*—and Englishmen do not know!

Consternation, despair, and anger were the order