

# WHEN GREEK MEETS TURK

## How the Conflict in Asia Minor Is Regarded on the Spot—King Constantine's View

By T. WALTER WILLIAMS.

THE situation of the Greek Army in Asia Minor does not come as a surprise to the diplomatic representatives of the foreign powers in Athens and Constantinople, who expected it to arise as soon as Mustapha Kemal Pasha obtained the military equipment that he needed before starting his march to the sea.

When I was in Smyrna at the beginning of June the Greek troops numbered 250,000 and were spread out from the port across the mountains to the front lines, a distance of about 400 kilometers and about 50 miles from Angora. For weeks no fighting had taken place beyond a little skirmishing. Kemal Pasha had about 150,000 troops, who were poorly armed, were ill supplied with artillery or ammunition, and had no airplanes for scouting purposes. The Turkish soldiers lived on the land with their families and received very little pay, but as they were used to that kind of treatment it did not matter much.

The Greek Army was badly clothed and its soldiers were hundreds of miles away from their own country. They had no heart in the business of occupying Asia Minor or fighting the Turk for the sake of protecting the minorities, mostly Armenians, Jews and Christians.

### The Patience of Kemal.

Kemal waited patiently in Angora. He had one small, well-equipped army of 25,000 troops, composed of veterans from the Gallipoli campaign, which he kept stationed at Kars on the eastern frontier watching the movements of the Soviet forces. Although Kemal traded cereals, flour, rice and all kinds of food products with the Russian Government in exchange for arms, cannon and ammunition of all kinds, he did not trust them. His small army, with its German and Hungarian officers and non-commissioned officers in the artillery, still stands guard at Kars.

The military equipment which has enabled him to start his present march against the Greek Army and push it back to Smyrna, has been furnished to him by the Soviet Government from Moscow in exchange for foodstuffs, horses, sheep and goats, which the Russian officials needed badly. The ordnance furnished to Kemal was the first batch of cannon, big shells and rifles turned out in the Russian arsenals under the direction of the German technical experts who went there in April from Essen, Solingen and other manufacturing centres in Germany.

Six airplanes for scouting purposes were included in the agreement made by Kemal, according to a Polish Minister whom I met in Constantinople, and who had just arrived at that place after spending three weeks at Angora as the guest of the Nationalist leader. This man served in the old Turkish Army under the late Abdul Hamid with Mustapha Kemal, whom he described as a full-blooded Macedonian Turk, well educated and shrewd, both as a statesman and an organizer, as well as an able general in the field. The Minister told me that it was remarkable to see how Kemal had gone up to an out of the way place like Angora, and by his personality and organizing genius had made it an important centre in the Near East. He accompanied Kemal Pasha to Kars, saw the army watching over the Soviet powers, and was impressed by its military bearing and hardness. The soldiers slept on the ground and had very little in the way of rations, the Polish Minister said.

### Ground of the Greek Retreat.

The ground over which the Greeks have been retreating does not offer much shelter to an army, as the villages have mostly been burned and the inhabitants have either been killed or had fled in the early days of the Spring campaign in 1920, when the Greeks invaded Asia Minor. When I was in Smyrna the country surrounding the port, mostly steep, rugged hills, blazed bare by the scorching sun, was infested by bandits, and people were captured and held for ransom within a few miles of the city itself.

The Greek Commander-in-Chief did all he could to clean up Smyrna and rid it of fever, smallpox and many other diseases which flourished under the old Turkish régime. It was a much better looking city in every way, but the Greeks placed so many restrictions on the imports and exports that the business of the port, which had been one of the most flourishing in the Levant for centuries, dwindled away until it almost reached zero. The inhabitants, and I include Americans, British and other foreigners, told me they would prefer to have the Turks, with their bribery and slothful methods of doing business, to the efficiency introduced by the Greek officials.

There were altogether about 50,000 troops in and around Smyrna, which included the 3,000 men formed into a military police, who had charge of the local police, made up of the various races among the population. All the provisions for the Greek Army had to be brought from Piræus or Patras, as the fields which formerly teemed with crops of all kinds were lying fallow because there was no one left to cultivate them.

### Cruelties on Both Sides.

One of the strange things noticeable in Smyrna and Constantinople was the apathy of the American and British officials toward the massacres that were daily taking place in Asia Minor. Turks were killing Greeks, burning men, women and children in their villages, and the Greeks were retaliating in like manner.

The deportation of the aged men, women and children by the Turks in Pontus, in which thousands of these unfortunate Armenians died by the way-side, had seemingly only this result, that the foreign officials and civilians who had formerly been pro-Turk had become neutral in their sympathies. None of them appeared to me to be on the side of the Greeks.

The reason given everywhere, from Alexandria round the Levant to Cyprus, by American, British, Italian and other residents was that for centuries the Greeks had cheated and lied and generally succeeded in taking the shekels away from all who had traded with them, including the Armenians, the Maltese and the Spanish Jews at Salonica, all the people of the Near East, in fact, with the exception of the Copts in Egypt, who call anything under 60 per cent. charity.

Things are altogether different in Greece. When Greek meets Greek both have to work, and, taken as a race, they are an industrious people. They want

to be left alone to till their land, grow their currants, olive trees and the grapes from which they make their wines.

The chief topic of conversation in Athens when I was there at the end of May was the evacuation of Asia Minor. People of all political parties realized that it was impossible to keep a force of 250,000 men continuously eating their heads off at a cost to the Government of \$8,000,000 a month in American currency. In April the financial situation had become so desperate that the Financial Minister decided that the only way to raise money to pay the soldiers and give relief to their families left behind in Greece was to cut the currency in half.

### Forced Loan of April.

After the notices had been issued for forty-eight hours, the Greek people woke up on the morning of April 7 to find that they were worth just half the amount they had when they went to sleep the night before. A 1,000-drachma note was cut in two and became worth just 500, for which it was circulated in business. The other half could be turned into the banks to be invested in the 7 per cent. forced loan, which the Government guaranteed would be repaid in twenty years. By this means the Financial Minister obtained 1,550,000,000 drachmas to carry on the campaign in Asia Minor, and also to pay the 50,000 troops in Thrace. If it had been possible then to have withdrawn the troops from Asia Minor with a guarantee that the minorities would be protected against attack by the Turks it would have been done. I was informed of this by officials of high rank and the King himself. The Greek Minister with whom I talked

in Athens said that the task of occupying Asia Minor had been thrust upon them by the Entente Allies, chiefly the British, French and Italians, and they had accepted the arduous duty with the expectation that they would receive support from the European powers. Instead, the Greek Army had been left to bear the brunt of the whole campaign and on the Government had fallen the heavy strain of providing the finances to keep the armies in the field.

### Interview With Constantine.

In a private audience he accorded to me in the royal palace in Athens, King Constantine appeared very much distressed over the situation in Asia Minor and the hardships the Greek soldiers were undergoing. The King said:

"Asia Minor presents the most pressing problem for Greece now. The strain upon her finances of keeping 250,000 soldiers there is hampering her commerce and industries. Many of the soldiers have been fighting for twelve years, and have been kept away from their families that long. Greece could not, however, evacuate Asia Minor and leave the Christians at the mercy of the Turks without guaranteeing them protection. If the Turks were left in possession, it is certain, from what has occurred in the past, that they would drive out all the other races, and thousands of men, women and children would die of starvation in deportations that would repeat the recent horrors of Anatolia.

"The Greeks wish to have the war with the Turks over, so that they can return to their peaceful pursuits and cultivate the land and develop the new territories in Thrace and Macedonia. Every one is tired of war. The Greeks are a strong, intelligent and industrious people, and wish to live at peace with their neighbors."

King Constantine did not appear to entertain much hope that the Allies would do anything to help Greece out of the tangle in Asia Minor. He said that he was confident something would be accomplished if the United States intervened. The majority of the Athenians were in favor of the King, as they realized that he had been forced

to abdicate his throne by the Allies because he refused to drag Greece into the war. As he remarked in the conversation I had with him, it was too small a country to stand the strain of such a campaign. If he had gone into the World War at the time it was suggested by the Allies, the Germans would have smashed his small army completely. Venizelos agreed to occupy Asia Minor and then had to leave Greece because the people were so angry with him for what he had done.

In Constantinople I discussed the situation in the Near East with American, British and Turkish officials, and they all seemed to be pessimistic. France and Italy, they believed, had made their own agreements with Kemal Pasha, the only leader who is considered capable of protecting the minorities in Asia Minor if the country should be returned to the Turks. He is recognized as a good administrator, and any one disobeying his orders would be promptly shot. His methods are well known, and this saves a good deal of trouble.

Even the mild-mannered British Ambassador, Sir Horace Rumbold, appeared pessimistic of any action being taken by the Allied Council in Paris to relieve the situation in the Near East. Both Kemal Pasha and the Turkish Government in Constantinople had asked for a conference with the Entente Allies early in April, but no answer had been received by the beginning of June. At the same time articles appeared in the Continental newspapers of a meeting of the Allied Council which had been held to protest to the Government of Bolivia against the employment of six former German Army officers as drill instructors.

### Greek Soldiers at Pera.

The Greek Government tried to get a small number of troops into Constantinople, with the object of joining the British, French and Italian forces in holding the city against the Turks. Their hope was that there might be a chance to get the Allies interested in

the Asia Minor problem, with special reference to Smyrna. While I was there a platoon of Greek soldiers arrived and took up quarters in Pera under the pretext of guarding the consulate, but could get no further.

The allied representatives, including those of the United States, were anti-Greek, if not pro-Turk, with the exception of the British Ambassador. All this time, while the various foreign representatives were declaring in the clubs and restaurants in Constantinople that the Turk was such a gentleman and the only one of his kind in the Near East, reports were reaching the capital daily from Anatolia of thousands of Armenians that were dying daily either from starvation or the thrust of a Turkish bayonet. The Turkish way of settling the Armenian problem evidently was to remove its cause.

Lloyd George talked of a commission to inquire into the massacres and deportations in Anatolia, but up to the present nothing has been done.

If the Greeks are driven from Asia Minor, the next problem to be solved will be the evacuation of Constantinople by the Entente Allies—Great Britain, France and Italy. As they have accomplished to give snug jobs to former army officers in the various bureaus which have been created in the Turkish capital at the expense of the taxpayers at home, it is considered likely by those in a position to know that Mustapha Kemal Pasha will enter the city and be the Sultan of a once more united Turkey. The present holder of the title is regarded as a joke in Constantinople by the Turks and as a prisoner of war in the hands of the British by the Nationalists. The Foreign Minister, Izzet Pasha, is regarded by them in the same light, and the Allies hold communication with him through the Swedish Minister.

Rear Admiral Bristol, the United States High Commissioner, who has shown himself to be a skillful and tactful diplomat in a difficult position, is firmly convinced that the problem of what is to be done about Turkey and Asia Minor would settle itself if the Allies were to withdraw their troops and go away.