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Greece and the Allies 1914-1922

G. F. (George Frederick) Abbott

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PREFACE

The late convulsions in Greece and Turkey, and the consequent revival of all the mis-statements which, during the War, flowed from ignorance or malice, render the publication of this book particularly opportune.

Mr. Abbott deals with his subject in all its aspects, and presents for the first time to the British public a complete and coherent view of the complicated circumstances that made Greece, during the War, the battle-ground of rival interests and intrigues, from which have grown the present troubles.

In this book we get a clear account of the little-understood relations between the Greek and the Serb; of the attitude of Greece towards the Central Powers and the Entente; of the dealings between Greece and the Entente and the complications that ensued therefrom. Mr. Abbott traces the evil to its source—the hidden pull of British versus French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the open antagonism between M. Venizelos and King Constantine.

All these subjects are of acute interest, and not the least interesting is the last.

The persecution of King Constantine by the Press of the Allied countries, with some few good exceptions, has been one of the most tragic affairs since the Dreyfus case. Its effect on the state of Europe during and since the War is remarkable. If King Constantine's advice had been followed, and the Greek plan for the taking of the Dardanelles had been carried out, the war would probably have been shortened by a very considerable period, Bulgaria and Rumania could have been kept out of the War, and probably the Russian Revolution and collapse would not have taken place; for, instead of having Turkey to assist Bulgaria, the Allied forces would have been between and separating these two countries. {vi}

In this case King Constantine would not have been exiled from his country, and consequently he would not have permitted the Greek Army to be sent to Asia Minor, which he always stated would ruin Greece, as the country was not rich enough or strong enough to maintain an overseas colony next to an hereditary enemy like the Turk.

It is illuminating to remember that the Greek King's policy was fully endorsed by the only competent authorities who had a full knowledge of the subject, which was a purely military one. These were the late Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, the British Admiral at the head of the Naval Mission in Greece, and Colonel Sir Thomas Cuninghame, British Military Attaché in Athens; but the advice tendered by these three officers was disregarded in favour of that given by the civilians, M. Venizelos and the Allied Ministers.

Mr. Abbott's book will do much to enlighten a misled public as to the history of Greece during the last nine years, and many documents which have not hitherto been before the public are quoted by him from the official originals, to prove the case.

For the sake of truth and justice, which used to flourish in Great Britain, I hope that this book will be read by everyone who has the welfare of the British Empire at heart.

MARK KERR

4 October, 1922

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

As this work goes to press, the British Empire finds itself forced to vindicate its position in the East: a position purchased at the cost of much blood and treasure during the war, to be jeopardized after the conclusion of peace by the defeat of Greece and the defection of France.

In the following pages the reader will find the sequence of events which have inevitably led up to this crisis: an account of transactions hitherto obscured and distorted by every species of misrepresentation and every known artifice for manipulating public opinion.

The volume is not a hasty essay produced to exploit an ephemeral situation. It embodies the fruit of investigations laboriously carried on through six years. A slight account of the earlier events appeared as far back as the winter of 1916 in a book entitled, *Turkey, Greece, and the Great Powers*: that was my first effort to place the subject in its true perspective. The results were interesting. I was honoured by the reproaches of several private and by the reprobation of several public critics; some correspondents favoured me with their anonymous scurrility, and some bigots relieved me of their acquaintance. On the other hand, there were people who, in the midst of a maelstrom of passion, retained their respect for facts.

I pursued the subject further in a weekly journal. Two of my contributions saw the light; the third was suppressed by the Authorities. Its suppression furnished material for a debate in Parliament: "This is a cleverly written article," said Mr. John Dillon, "and I cannot find in it a single word which justifies suppression. All that one can find in it is that it states certain facts which the Government do not like to be known, not that they injure the military situation in the least, but that they show that the Government, in the opinion of the writer, made certain very bad blunders." The Home Secretary's answer was {viii} typical of departmental dialectics: "It is inconceivable to me," he declared, "that the Government would venture to say to the Press, or indicate to it in any way, 'This is our view. Publish it. If you do not, you will suffer.'" What the Government did, in effect, say to the Editor of the *National Weekly* was: "This is not our view. Publish it not. If you do, you will suffer."

With an innocence perhaps pardonable in one who was too intent on the evolution of the world drama to follow the daily development of war-time prohibitions, I next essayed to present to the public through the medium of a book the truth which had been banned from the columns of a magazine. The manuscript of that work, much fingered by the printer, now lies before me, and together with it a letter from the publisher stating that the Authorities had forbidden its publication on pain of proceedings "under 27 (b) of the Defence of the Realm Regulations."

And so it came about that not until now has it been possible for the voice of facts to refute the fables dictated by interest and accepted by credulity. The delay had its advantages: it gave the story, through the natural progress of events, a completeness which otherwise it would have lacked, and enabled me to test its accuracy on every point by a fresh visit to Greece and by reference to sources previously inaccessible, such as the Greek State Papers and the self-revealing publications of persons directly concerned in the transactions here related.

I venture to hope that so thorough an inquiry will convey some new information respecting these transactions even to those who are best acquainted with their general course. If they find nothing attractive in the style of the book, they may find perhaps something useful, something that will deserve their serious reflection, in the matter of it. For let it not be said that a story starting in 1914 is ancient history. Unless one studies the record of Allied action in Greece from the very beginning, he cannot approach with any clear understanding the present crisis—a struggle between Greeks and Turks on the surface, but at bottom a conflict between French and British policies affecting the vital interests of the British Empire.

G. F. A.

5 October, 1922

Besides information acquired at first hand, my material is mainly drawn from the following sources:

Greek State Papers now utilized for the first time.

White Book, published by the Government of M. Venizelos under the title, "*Diplomatika Engrapha, 1913-1917*," 2nd edition, Athens, 1920.

Orations, delivered in the Greek Chamber in August, 1917, by M. Venizelos, his followers, MM. Repoulis, Politis, and Kafandaris, and his opponents, MM. Stratos and Rallis. The Greek text ("*Agoreuseis, etc.*," Athens, 1917) and the English translation ("*A Report of Speeches, etc.*," London, 1918), give them all, though the speech of M. Stratos only in summary. The French translation ("*Discours, etc., Traduction de M. Léon Maccas, autorisée par le Gouvernement Grec*," Paris, 1917) curiously omits both the Opposition speeches.

Skouloudis's *Apantesis*, 1917; *Apologia*, 1919; *Semeioseis*, 1921. The first of these publications is the ex-Premier's Reply to statements made in the Greek Chamber by M. Venizelos and others in August, 1917; the second is his Defence; the third is a collection of Notes concerning transactions in which he took part. All three are of the highest value for the eventful period of the Skouloudis Administration from November, 1915, to June, 1916.

Journal Officiel, 24-30 October, 1919, containing a full report of the Secret Committee of the French Chamber which sat from 16 June to 22 June, 1916.

Next in importance, though not inferior in historic interest, come some personal narratives, of which I have also availed myself, by leading French actors in the drama:

Du Fournet: "Souvenirs de Guerre d'un Amiral, 1914-1916." By Vice-Admiral Dartige du Fournet, Paris, 1920.

Sarrail: "Mon Commandement en Orient, 1916-1918." By General Sarrail, Paris, 1920.

Regnault: "La Conquête d'Athènes, Juin-Juillet, 1917." By General Regnault, Paris, 1920.

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Deville: "L'Entente, la Grèce et la Bulgarie. Notes d'histoire et souvenirs." By Gabriel Deville, Paris, 1919. The author was French Minister at Athens till August, 1915, and the portions of his work which deal with his own experiences are worth consulting.

Jonnart: "M. Jonnart en Grèce et l'abdication de Constantin." By Raymond Recouly, Paris, 1918. Though not written by the High Commissioner himself, this account may be regarded as a semi-official record of his mission.

The only English publications of equal value, though of much more limited bearing upon the subject of this work, which have appeared so far are:

The *Dardanelles Commission Reports* (Cd. 8490; Cd. 8502; Cmd. 371), and the *Life of Lord Kitchener*, by Sir George Arthur, Vol. III, London, 1920.

Some trustworthy contributions to the study of these events have also been made by several unofficial narratives, to which the reader is referred for details on particular episodes. The absence of reference to certain other narratives is deliberate.

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GREECE AND THE ALLIES

1914-1922

INTRODUCTION

Ingenious scholars, surveying life from afar, are apt to interpret historical events as the outcome of impersonal forces which shape the course of nations unknown to themselves. This is an impressive theory, but it will not bear close scrutiny. Human nature everywhere responds to the influence of personality. In Greece this response is more marked than anywhere else. No people in the world has been so completely dominated by personal figures and suffered so grievously from their feuds, ever since the day when strife first parted Atreides, king of men, and god-like Achilles.

The outbreak of the European War found Greece under the sway of King Constantine and his Premier Eleutherios Venizelos; and her history during that troubled era inevitably centres round these two personalities.

By the triumphant conduct of the campaigns of 1912 and 1913, King Constantine had more than effaced the memory of his defeat in 1897. His victories ministered to the national lust for power and formed an earnest of the glory that was yet to come to Greece. Henceforth a halo of military romance—a thing especially dear to the hearts of men—shone about the head of Constantine; and his grateful country bestowed upon him the title of {2} *Stratelates*. In town mansions and village huts men's mouths were filled with his praise: one dwelt on his dauntless courage, another on his strategic genius, a third on his sympathetic recognition of the claims of the common soldier, whose hardships he shared, and for whose life he evinced a far greater solicitude than for his own.

But it was not only as a leader of armies that King Constantine appealed to the hearts of his countrymen. They loved to explain to strangers the reason of the name *Koumbaros* or "Gossip," by which they commonly called him. It was not so much, they would say, that he had stood godfather to the children born to his soldiers during the campaigns, but rather that his relations with the rank and file of

the people at large were marked by the intimate interest of a personal companion.

In peace, as in war, he seemed a prince born to lead a democratic people. With his tall, virile figure, and a handsome face in which strength and dignity were happily blended with simplicity, he had a manner of address which was very engaging: his words, few, simple, soldier-like, produced a wonderful effect; they were the words of one who meant and felt what he said: they went straight to the hearer's heart because they came straight from the speaker's.

Qualities of a very different sort had enabled M. Venizelos to impose himself upon the mind of the Greek nation, and to make his name current in the Chancelleries of the world.

Having begun life as an obscure lawyer in Crete, he had risen through a series of political convulsions to high notability in his native island; and in 1909 a similar convulsion in Greece—brought about not without his collaboration—opened to him a wider sphere of activity. The moment was singularly opportune.

The discontent of the Greek people at the chronic mismanagement of their affairs had been quickened by the Turkish Revolution into something like despair. Bulgaria had exploited that upheaval by annexing Eastern Rumelia: Greece had failed to annex Crete, and ran the risk, if the Young Turks' experiment succeeded, of seeing the {3} fulfilment of all her national aspirations frustrated for ever. A group of military malcontents in touch with the Cretan leader translated the popular feeling into action: a revolt against the reign of venality and futility which had for so many years paralyzed every effort, which had sometimes sacrificed and always subordinated the interests of the nation to the interests of faction, and now left Greece a prey to Bulgarian and Ottoman ambition. The old politicians who were the cause of the ill obviously could not effect a cure. A new man was needed—a man free from the deadening influences of a corrupt past—a man daring enough to initiate a new course and tenacious enough to push on with inexorable purpose to the goal.

During the first period of his career, M. Venizelos had been a capable organizer of administrative departments no less than a clever manipulator of seditious movements. But he had mainly distinguished himself as a rebel against authority. And it was in the tem-

per of a rebel that he came to Athens. Obstacles, however, external as well as internal, made a subversive enterprise impossible. With the quick adaptability of his nature, he turned into a guardian of established institutions: the foe of revolution and friend of reform. Supported by the Crown, he was able to lift his voice for a "Revisionist" above the angry sea of a multitude clamouring for a "Constituent Assembly."

All that was healthy in the political world rallied to the new man; and the new man did not disappoint the faith placed in him. Through the next two years he stood in every eye as the embodiment of constructive statesmanship. His Government had strength enough in the country to dispense with "graft." The result was a thorough overhauling of the State machinery. Self-distrust founded on past failures vanished. Greece seemed like an invalid healed and ready to face the future. It was a miraculous change for a nation whose political life hitherto had exhibited two traits seldom found combined: the levity of childhood and the indolence of age.

For this miracle the chief credit undoubtedly belonged {4} to M. Venizelos. He had brought to the task a brain better endowed than any associated with it. His initiative was indefatigable; his decision quick. Unlike most of his countrymen, he did not content himself with ideas without works. His subtlety in thinking did not serve him as a substitute for action. To these talents he added an eloquence of the kind which, to a Greek multitude, is irresistible, and a certain gift which does not always go with high intelligence, but, when it does, is worth all the arts of the most profound politician and accomplished orator put together. He understood, as it were instinctively, the character of every man he met, and dealt with him accordingly. This tact, coupled with a smile full of sweetness and apparent frankness, gave to his vivid personality a charm which only those could appraise who experienced it.

Abroad the progress of M. Venizelos excited almost as much interest as it did in Greece. The Greeks are extraordinarily sensitive to foreign opinion: a single good word in a Western newspaper raises a politician in public esteem more than a whole volume of home-made panegyric. M. Venizelos had not neglected this branch of his business; and from the outset every foreign journalist and diploma-

tist who came his way was made to feel his fascination: so that, even before leaving his native shores, the Cretan had become in the European firmament a star of the third or fourth magnitude. Reasons other than personal contributed to enlist Western opinion in his favour. Owing to her geographical situation, Greece depends for the fulfilment of her national aspirations and for her very existence on the Powers which command the Mediterranean. A fact so patent had never escaped the perception of any Greek politician. But no Greek politician had ever kept this fact more steadily in view, or put this obvious truth into more vehement language than M. Venizelos: "To tie Greece to the apron-strings of the Sea Powers," was his maxim. And the times were such that those Powers needed a Greek statesman whom they could trust to apply that maxim unflinchingly.

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With the recovery of Greece synchronized, not by chance, the doom of Turkey: a sentence in which all the members of the Entente, starting from different points and pursuing different objects, concurred. The executioners were, naturally, the Balkan States. Russia began the work by bringing about an agreement between Bulgaria and Servia; England completed it by bringing Greece into the League. There ensued a local, which, in accordance with the old diplomatic prophecy, was soon to lead to the universal conflagration. Organized as she was, Greece succeeded better than anyone expected; and the national gratitude—the exuberant gratitude of a Southern people—went out to the two men directly responsible for that success: to King Constantine, whose brilliant generalship beat the enemy hosts; and to M. Venizelos, whose able statesmanship had prepared the field. Poets and pamphleteers vied with each other in expatiating on the wonders they had performed, to the honour and advantage of their country. In this ecstasy of popular adoration the spirit of the soldier and the spirit of the lawyer seemed to have met.

But the union was illusive and transient. Between these two men, so strangely flung together by destiny, there existed no link of sympathy; and propinquity only forced the growth of their mutual antagonism. The seeds of discord had already borne fruit upon the

common ground of their Balkan exploits. Immediately after the defeat of Turkey a quarrel over the spoils arose among the victors. King Constantine, bearing in mind Bulgaria's long-cherished dream of hegemony, and persuaded that no sacrifices made by Greece and Serbia could do more than defer a rupture, urged a Graeco-Servian alliance against their truculent partner. He looked at the matter from a purely Greek standpoint and was anxious to secure the maximum of profit for his country. M. Venizelos, on the other hand, aware that the Western Powers, and particularly England, wanted a permanent Balkan coalition as a barrier against Germany in the East, and anxious to retain those Powers' favour, was prepared to concede {6} much for the sake of averting a rupture. Not until the Bulgars betrayed their intentions by actual aggressions in Macedonia did he withdraw his opposition to the alliance with Serbia, which ushered in the Second Balkan War and led to the Peace of Bucharest. He yielded to the pressure of the circumstances brought to bear upon him; but the encounter represented no more than the preliminary crossing of swords between two strong antagonists.

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CHAPTER I

From the moment when the rupture between Austria and Serbia, in July, 1914, came to disturb the peace, Greece deliberately adopted an attitude of neutrality, with the proviso that she would go to Serbia's assistance in case of a Bulgarian attack upon the latter. Such an attitude was considered to be in accordance with the Graeco-Servian Alliance. For, although the Military Convention accompanying the Treaty contained a vague stipulation for mutual support in case of war between one of the allied States and "a third Power," the Treaty itself had as its sole object mutual defence against Bulgaria.[1]

In the opinion of M. Venizelos, her pact did not oblige Greece to go to Serbia's assistance against Austria, but at most to mobilize 40,000 men.[2] Treaty obligations apart, neutrality was also imposed

by practical considerations. It was to the interest of Greece—a matter of self-preservation—not to tolerate a Bulgarian attack on Servia calculated to upset the Balkan balance of power established by the Peace of Bucharest, and she was firmly determined, in concert with Rumania, to oppose such an attack with all her might. But as to Austria, M. Venizelos had to consider whether Greece could or could not offer her ally effective aid, and after consideration he decided that she {8} should not proceed even to the mobilization of 40,000 men, for such a measure might provoke a Bulgarian mobilization and precipitate complications. For the rest, the attitude of Greece in face of Servia's war with Austria, M. Venizelos pointed out, corresponded absolutely with the attitude which Servia had taken up in face of Greece's recent crisis with Turkey.[3] On that occasion Greece had obtained from her ally merely moral support, the view taken being that the *casus faederis* would arise only in the event of Bulgarian intervention.[4]

Accordingly, when the Servian Government asked if it could count on armed assistance from Greece, M. Streit, Minister for Foreign Affairs under M. Venizelos, answered that the Greek Government was convinced that it fully performed its duty as a friend and ally by adopting, until Bulgaria moved, a policy of most benevolent neutrality. The co-operation of Greece in the war with Austria, far from helping, would harm Servia; by becoming a belligerent Greece could only offer her ally forces negligible compared with the enemy's, while she would inevitably expose Salonica, the only port through which Servia could obtain war material, to an Austrian attack; and, moreover, she would weaken her army which, in the common interest, ought to be kept intact as a check on Bulgaria.[5]

A similar communication, emphasizing the decision to keep out of the conflict, and to intervene in concert with Rumania only should Bulgaria by intervening against Servia jeopardize the *status quo* established by the Bucharest Treaty—in which case the action of Greece would have a purely Balkan character—was made to the Greek Ministers abroad after a Council held in the Royal Palace under the presidency of the King.[6]

This policy brought King Constantine into sharp collision with one of the Central Powers, whose conceptions in regard to the Bal-