

## THE HISTORY OF CRETAN DISCONTENT

**P**REOCCUPIED as she is with the fortunes of her largest unit, Europe has little attention to spare her smallest ; but one of these is making frantic efforts to arrest her distracted ear. The rebellious plaint of Crete is one which she has heard so often for the space of three generations that it irritates and wearies her, and, grown to a certain degree callous, she treats it, like the idle gods, as a tale of little meaning. None the less it is an "ancient tale of wrong," which does not become any less well founded as it becomes more ancient ; and it has a serious meaning not always understood for lack of acquaintance with the historical background of it.

It is disappointing, to say the very least, to hear in the summer of 1905 that the British troops, which were sent to Crete in 1897 to inaugurate a new era, and remained after 1898 with the enthusiastic approval of the newly liberated islanders to support their first steps in national life, are being employed in repressing something very like a general insurrection. They have had to be reinforced ; there have been conflicts ; and our men have been hit by Cretan bullets. All of which untoward facts are put down by most people to the account of Cretan original sin. As is proverbially said in the Levant, *ἡ Κρήτη κρητίζει*, Crete is behaving after her kind. Five years is her normal interval between revolutions. The islanders, it is said, have been from all time false and graceless. There is no contenting them. They have

been granted all, and more than all, they deserve by the beneficence of the Powers, but it is useless to expect them to say thank you and behave nicely for kindness. Now they need, and are to get, a taste of the rod.

What the Cretans have or have not deserved would be a contentious question, whereon we are not going to enter. What they want is open to no doubt. But the fact that what they want now they have always wanted, and never, in spite of much encouragement, received, is less well understood, and perhaps, if better understood, would modify the general attitude towards their plaint. This is not to say that it would lead to the granting of their request. Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Chanceries must weigh the diplomatic difficulties, insuperable or not, which are raised by their request, and decide the question how far the fate of Crete can be separated from that of the Ottoman Empire as a whole without making international trouble of far more importance than the discontent of one Mediterranean island. Merely observing that the word "impossible," so common on diplomatic lips, is not really found in the diplomatic dictionary any more than in the Napoleonic, we will address ourselves to the task of showing that, from the Cretan side, the present plaint proceeds neither from ingratitude nor unreason. It was inevitable that it should be raised anew after 1898, and inevitable that it should lead to trouble by 1905. The Powers have done much for Crete; but they have always done so much less than they ought, and might reasonably have been expected, to have done, that they cannot be surprised if, human nature in the mass being what it is, they receive less gratitude from the islanders for those things they have done than objurgation for the things they have left undone. They have been concerned in the fate of Crete for the last eighty years. The island's tale of wrong is, indeed, more ancient than that; but up to the opening of the nineteenth century its grievance was solely against its actual invaders. The Concert of Europe did not come into the matter before the war of Greek Independence.

When the Christian population of the Morea rose against the Turks in 1821, the Cretan Christians, being three-fourths of the inhabitants of the island, rose with them. They had precisely the same reasons for rising; they began and carried out their revolt in precisely the same way, in the same spirit, and with the same general idea; they identified their cause completely with that of the mainland, acted in concert with the insurgents of the Morea and Archipelago, and proposed, if successful, to maintain for ever the same community with them, which they had already proclaimed. They quickly made their pretension at least as good as did the Peloponnesians. By the end of the year no Moslems remained in any part of the interior; the fortified coast towns were alone holding out, like Patras and Nauplia in the Morea; and the Christians had established an independent provisional government, which was supreme over nine-tenths of the island. Nor did they, from the beginning to the end of the War of Greek Independence, make a general submission. The Sultan, unable after two years to recover any of his lost ground, called in his Viceroy of Egypt, promising him the Candiotte pashalik *de jure* if by his own efforts he could get possession of it *de facto*. In this Mahmud II. anticipated by just two years the arrangement of despair which he would make with the same Viceroy about the Morea. The history of the Egyptian effort in Crete also anticipated very exactly the history of the Egyptian effort on the mainland. Mehemet Ali's troops overran the island again and again, but it always rose behind them. The insurgent government never abjured its functions, and when Codrington persuaded and Maison forced the Egyptians to leave the Morea in 1828, the interior of Crete was still in full rebellion, and the Viceroy, failing in the following January to revictual the towns, in face of the Greek fleet, offered to return his unacquired acquisition to his suzerain. In 1829, when the Powers, who had long ago recognised the insurgent Greeks as belligerents, occupied themselves with the consummation of Greek hopes, the Cretan Christians were successful belligerents

on precisely the same footing as the Moreotes and with precisely the same object in view. They were one in the tradition of eight years and the hope of all time to come with that new Hellenic nation, whose actual and future existence had been explicitly recognised by the concert of the Greater Powers—Russia, France and Great Britain.

Naturally they expected that in the final settlement there would be but one Hellas containing themselves. The demand made to Europe by the Greek Assembly, over which Capodistria was lately come to preside, included Crete, with the same assurance as the Morea. There were admitted doubts about the northern limit of the free state to be, but none about the southern. Nevertheless, to the surprise of almost every one and the consternation of all Greece, the Protecting Powers barred Crete from the first as they also barred Samos, and resolutely refused to listen to the outcry which was raised on all sides. So loud was that outcry that it affected all the future fortunes of Greece by depriving it of the leadership of the future King of the Belgians. Leopold of Saxe-Coburg was so strongly impressed by the injustice of the exclusion of Crete from the principate offered to him by the Powers, and so convinced that this injustice would sow a seed of bitter trouble, that, in replying to Lord Aberdeen, he made the redressing of the wrong a condition of his acceptance. For which act of presumption, as the British Minister affected to regard it, the prince remained unrepentant enough to insist in a second letter that Greece could not be satisfactorily pacified if Crete were not set free. By strong pressure Leopold was induced presently to give way so far as to stipulate only for the "amelioration" of the lot of the two islands, but he returned finally to his first thoughts, after learning through Capodistria the real state of public opinion in Greece; and, deaf to Lord Aberdeen's protest that he had accepted the Greek throne without Crete, definitely refused it in May 1830, because the Powers were still obdurate on the disputed point. His refusal cost Greece two more years of

internal disturbance, the life of Capodistria, who alone could have guided a young king, and the selection by the Powers of the weak and foolish son of the King of Bavaria to occupy the throne.

Why the Powers, or rather two out of the three "Protectors," with the strong approval of Austria, guided by Metternich, were obdurate on the subject of Crete is well known. The island was sacrificed simply and solely to the Russophobes in the British Cabinet. Ever since Wellington had "gone back on" Navarino, declaring Codrington's victory an "untoward event" and an outrage on our "ancient ally," British policy had been guided by the Austrian Chancellor's fear of Russia, or rather of the reigning Czar. Then and there, our "money was put on the wrong horse" as a Tory Prime Minister would one day confess; and when compelled by the inexorable logic of facts to end the long anarchy of the Levant by creating an autonomous Greek state, the action of the British Cabinet was influenced entirely by two principles. First, the Ottoman Empire must not be diminished by a foot of land that could be saved to it; second, if a new Christian state, Orthodox and therefore presumably of Russian sympathies, must come into being on the flank of Turkey, it should not be increased by a foot of land that could be denied to it. The attitude which Lord Aberdeen took up towards Greece was equally ungenerous and unforeseeing. Believing that a kingdom which included Crete and Samos would threaten danger to Europe, he tried to pare it down to the straitest limits consistent with present peace in the Levant. It is an ignominious story of diplomatic pettifogging. The Russophobes were forced from one point to another. First, they had to give up all idea of an indemnity for the beaten Turk; secondly, the original limitation of the new state to the Morea and the coastal islands was stretched, by the bold action of Church in Central Greece, first to the line from Lamia to the mouth of the Aspro, and finally to that from Arta to Volo; thirdly, and with great difficulty, the provision as to Ottoman suzerainty was with-

drawn. After two years of bartering the Greeks, deprived of Capodistria, were fain to take what they could get, and, alas! threw up the game without stipulating on behalf of their brothers-in-arms of Crete and Samos for more than "political amelioration." So in defiance of all international justice and contrary to obvious political expediency Samos and Crete were left outside the pale.

As soon as the Hellenic kingdom was an established fact a sensible "amelioration" was offered to Samos, and accepted after protest. Samos was then, except for a few officials, almost as purely Greek an island as now. It was, moreover, comparatively small, and closely hemmed in by coast and islands which remained in Ottoman power. There was little risk in granting it a large enough measure of autonomy to satisfy a population not very vigorous or warlike, which had been softened, like the Chiotes, by the privileges the island had long enjoyed as a private fief of the house of Othman. The case of Crete was less easy. There was still a considerable Moslem population in the island, holding the chief towns, and that population, despite its religion, was of Greek origin and speech, and rooted to the soil. The chief difficulty, in fact, which has always complicated any attempt to introduce autonomy into Crete, confronted the Powers in 1832. Moreover there was Mehemet Ali of Cairo to be considered as well as his suzerain in Constantinople; for Crete had once more been offered to the former and partially reoccupied by him in 1830. Lastly, the size of the island and its important geographical position in the Eastern Mediterranean made the Powers unwilling to grant it so complete and final an autonomy as Samos. The result was that nothing was offered to the Cretans after their ten years' struggle but a few minor privileges under an inadequate guarantee—so inadequate that in practice they can hardly be said to have ameliorated the lot of the islanders at all. At best they amounted to little more than an amnesty and a return to the *status quo ante bellum*. The Cretans can hardly be said

to have accepted them, but they acquiesced in them as a condition of continued existence, and never ceased to urge their claim to share in the full freedom of the Hellenic kingdom. Within ten years a part of the population was in arms again, and this time the insurgents refused a further measure of autonomy for fear it might delay indefinitely the realisation of their true desire. They preferred to lay down their arms in 1841 and remain as before.

Those arms rusted for a quarter of a century. Encouraged by the vague promises and assurances of the consuls, the Cretan Christians waited and hoped. They saw at Sebastopol France and Great Britain extinguish their last hope of help from the Czar : and having already watched the failure of an insurrection in Northern Greece, they received with an indifference, which from their point of view was deserved, Abdul Mejid's *firman* of 1856 in favour of his *rayahs* and the famous *Hatti Humayûn*. Finally, they heard that the Seven Islands, which had taken no part in the War of Independence, sacrificed nothing and suffered nothing, had been united to the Hellenic kingdom at their own request, in order to increase the popularity of the new king chosen by the Powers. Then they rose, and began, in 1866, the greatest of all Cretan insurrections. In the course of that three years' war the islanders showed a determination, a devotion and an indifference to suffering and terrorism which redeem many sordid episodes of their modern history ; and not only those qualities, but also an ability in guerilla fighting which at one time brought the Turks so low that the Porte, by the mouth of Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier, offered Samian autonomy to the island if it would abjure its demand for union with Greece. It should not be forgotten now that the Cretans deliberately refused that offer, and declared that, as in 1821, they had risen for Union not for Home Rule. Doubtless they had good reason to suspect the Turk's good faith, knowing well what the devil will promise when sick. But, whether or no, the fact remains that they flatly refused then the concession for which Europe thinks they ought to be humbly grateful now.

The huge armies which the Powers allowed Ali Pasha to throw into Crete, wore down its resistance by 1869, and, to quiet public outcry in Europe, a measure of much modified autonomy was presently promulgated; but, once again, for want of other guarantee than the diplomatic assurances of the Porte, it resulted in no beneficent change. Thereafter, up to their final rising *en masse* in 1897, the islanders never ceased to agitate and disturb the peace. Theirs was always the old cry, Union and nothing less than Union. Discouraged by the Congress of Constantinople, they rose sporadically during the Russo-Turkish War in the hope of being regarded as belligerents at its close: but the Congress of Berlin once more offered them certain domestic privileges only. This time, and for the first time, the Cretans formally accepted the offer without further protest, and expressed their gratitude, the fact being that, in common with the rest of the world, they believed the Sick Man to be nearing his last agony. Like the rest of the world, they had yet to appreciate the vitality of Turkey and the ability and determination of its new ruler. They soon realised their mistake, and, after 1883, repeatedly formulated the old demand for Union; but the mistake was to bear fruit later on. It supplied the representatives of our Foreign Office with one-half their justification when they declared in both Houses that the claim for Union and nothing less made by the leaders of the final revolution was a new demand, inconsistent with formal engagements entered into between the Powers and the Cretans themselves.

This brings us to the last stage—those events in Cretan history which the short memory of the general public alone recalls. The other half of the justification for the statements made by Lord Salisbury and Mr. Curzon in 1897 was supplied by the prelude of the final rising. The agitators and insurgents of 1895 and the following year accepted the internal privileges offered by the Porte and the Powers in what was known as the Pact of Halepa, without any express reservation in favour of union. We know now that their object in signing the Pact at all

was solely to gain time, the better to complete their organisation and to make that arrangement with Greece which would be carried out by Vassos' invasion in the beginning of the following year. The general insurrection of 1897 swept the Pact into oblivion, together with all that led up to and conditioned it. But on what happened when that insurrection had closed in liberation, and the Cretans knew that the Ottoman power had departed never to return, it is necessary to say a few words ; for the fact that the Cretan Christians, in their hour of triumph, accepted Home Rule of the Samian type, accepted, in fact, what they had rejected more than thirty years before, and drew up a Constitution as for an autonomous hereditary principate, has been taken to justify the subsequent attitude of the Powers towards their larger demand, and has done more than anything else to create a general disbelief in the urgency, the unanimity, and even the genuineness of that demand.

First, as to the attitude of the insurgents while still in the field and uncertain of the intentions of the Powers. They made the demand for Union at the very outset, and it was to deprecate that demand that the Secretary and Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs rose, as has been said, in our two Houses. They proceeded to circulate their claim in Europe by means of a manifesto signed by twenty Cretan Deputies, who spoke of Union and nothing short of Union. Early in the summer of 1897 the present writer had an interview with the insurgent leaders on Akrotiri, near Canea, and found them still of one mind on this subject, despite the miserable disasters which had meanwhile befallen the Greek forces on the mainland. "If our Mother," said they, "has fallen into poverty and disrepute, are we to desert her?" Nearly a year later, when autonomy had been decided upon by the Powers, the same language was held at Arkhanes, the headquarters of the insurgent provisional government in the Candia province. There had been, and was to be, some difference of opinion as to the details of the union. Many Cretans looked forward to a sort of insular Home Rule

under the Hellenic crown, and deprecated so unconditional a Union as would involve the island in the European control lately imposed on a part of the Greek finances, and in the financial obligations of Greece. But the warmest partisans of Crete for the Cretans never for a moment confounded municipal with political independence. Crete, however much ruled by herself, was to be an integral part of the Hellenic kingdom.

Now for the ultimate acceptance of the principate at the end of that year, 1898, and for the Constitution of 1899. To understand that neither one nor the other implied in Cretan eyes any retraction of the original demand for Union, but rather that both were believed by all to involve the speedy realisation thereof, it is only necessary to recall who was the Prince designated, and under what circumstances he came to the island. All further declarations for Union seemed superfluous when the second son of the King of Greece landed on the mandate of Europe and with the forced acquiescence of Turkey, to take supreme control of Crete. This could only lead, after the briefest interval, to the establishment of that Home Rule under the Greek crown to which the wisest heads in the island looked forward. For what other conceivable reason, it was asked, did the Powers send to Ottoman soil a Greek Prince, who had lately been a belligerent against Turkey and shared in the ignominious defeat she had inflicted? Thus the Cretans interpreted Prince George's mission; and they saw a confirmation of their belief in the immediate abolition, not only of Ottoman control, but of all outward and visible sign of Ottoman suzerainty. There was no question of tribute, and none of any Ottoman representative resident in the island. The Turkish flag vanished, and the Powers suffered its provisional successor to show, as to three quarters, the Greek colours, and as to one, a star on a red ground, which was promptly and without protest perverted into a star of Bethlehem. They also suffered their High Commissioner to be designated by the first Constituent Assembly, Heredi-

tary Prince of Crete ; and, indeed, it is more than doubtful if the majority of the islanders was aware at that epoch that technically he had ever held any other position since his arrival. Presently the Cretans saw postage stamps and coins appear with his image and superscription, and all seemed well.

That was in 1899. The first disturbance of the dream followed a proposal to effect certain harbour improvements at Retimo and Candia, and pay therefor by a surtax on imports. The Consuls were bidden to remind the Cretans that they were precluded from increasing their port-dues by the general engagements of the Ottoman Empire. The full awakening resulted from Prince George's circular tour of the European Courts. He was told everywhere that no further change would be made in the political status of the island during the term of his commission ; and presently he was constrained to accept a prolongation of that term with no better prospect. From that moment the present trouble began to brew. The grumbling and complaints which reached the ears of Europe during the years 1900 to 1904 were ostensibly directed against internal abuses—first the absorption of public money by officials, the grievance of the Have-nots against the Haves ; then the starving of Public Works ; finally the arbitrary administration of the Prince himself. But what Europe failed or refused to understand was that this grumbling was a symptom of a general discontent, proceeding, not from the particular abuses, but from the discouragement and disappointment of the political hopes formed at the Prince's landing. The mood of Crete was that of a woman crossed. She found one grievance after another, but was not to be comforted by redress : redress made even one grievance more. She wanted Union with the obstinacy and the blind obsession of a lover, and, failing that, was to be contented with nothing else.

This is neither to deny the existence of those particular abuses nor to suggest that there was no real occasion for the particular complaints that were made ; but it is to say that

certain of the abuses, for instance the arbitrary action of the central government, and almost all the disposition of the Cretans to be quick in finding fault, proceeded from the delay in satisfying the hopes which the advent of Prince George had encouraged. Those hopes have been imbibed by two generations with their mother's milk. After immense efforts and sacrifices they seemed on the brink of fulfilment in 1899. Six years later the islanders found Europe not only making no visible effort to realise them, but repudiating their ideal, and continually fixing her attention elsewhere. They are as deaf to argument and reason as any lover, and not less hasty and reckless of consequences. What wonder that the antecedents, character and particular ambitions of the leaders of the present revolt, "men of Therissos," weigh nothing in the balance against the fact that they are in arms for the Union? What wonder no offer of financial and administrative amelioration, made by the Powers, has led to those arms being laid aside?

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