

The Terrible Turk an Amusing Sailor

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THE Turk as a seaman is as amusing as he is terrible as a soldier. For every story of Macedonia outrage by a Bashi-Bazouk one about the funny antics of his seafaring brother in Islam can be told. Little wonder that the Turkish sailor is held in utter contempt by the world afloat.

A story that has become a classic among Mediterranean sailors aptly illustrates the Turk's inability as a navigator.

A Turkish steamer with a native captain put out of the Dardanelles, bound for Trieste Austria. As soon as he lost sight of land the Turkish skipper likewise lost his head. Just then another steamer came up from astern and the Turk made signals that he wished to speak with the stranger. The latter, on approaching, proved to be a French tramp. Fortunately one of the Turkish officers spoke French.

"Where are you bound for?" asked the Turk.

"Brest," returned the Frenchman.

The Turk asked no more questions and allowed the Frenchman to go ahead. Next morning the French captain noticed that the Turk was still astern, and was following most conscientiously in his wake. When next morning he still found the Turk in his wake his surprise grew. On the third day it was the same, and so on the fourth—the French captain always made out that Turkish steamer coming up astern. On the fifth day his astonishment was so great that he determined to let the Turk overhaul him and ask for an explanation. By this time they were well down the Mediterranean toward the French coast.

"Why do you keep so close astern of me?" roared the French captain through a megaphone.

"I am following you to Trieste," answered the Turk.

Whereupon the kindly French captain sent a boat aboard the steamer flying the Crescent to explain to its commander that he was about 500 miles off his course and to instruct him how to regain it.

Wonderful to a seaman's ears are the stories told of the small Turkish schooners that navigate the Black sea, the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmora. In the first place, it is said that no watches are kept and that all hands, including the man at the wheel, not infrequently sleep at once. There is no discipline. The sailors never clean ship or wash down decks. This is easy to believe. If you ever sail close to windward of a Turkish craft one whiff from its decks will convince you that cleaning is not the Turk's strongest point in seamanship. It is further averred that these schooners never carry compasses and care not lose sight of land. They have captains, but the rest of the crew are all equals. They eat, sleep and quarrel together and are at liberty to call themselves the mates or the sailors as they choose.

Once went aboard one of these craft. I shall never do it again. All hands were on deck, dressed most picturesquely in tees and loose, colored jackets and trousers. Every mother's son of them was hideously dirty. We asked for the captain and he turned from coiling up a rope to answer our call. It is all right for a captain to be democratic enough to coil up a rope, but not when a big loafer of a sailor is stretched full length on the main hatch watching the horizon over his big toe. But this Turkish skipper seemed too benevolent to mind that.

As we were talking a sheep came up from the cabin and was followed by a big cat, which rubbed against the sheep in a most friendly and purring manner. No doubt it was indicative of general good will and feeling among all aboard, but it was not the kind of discipline with which to sail a ship.

Chickens were perched about on any place that offered a roost. A goat, which had rubbed his whiskers into the universal dirt until they were fringed black and white at the roots, ambled about the decks. On one of his horns was stuck a piece of paper as though it had been filed away for future reference.

Perhaps this was only a first impression. At any rate, I did not stay long enough to get a more thorough one. The stench forbade.

A visit to a Turkish man-o-war was scarcely more profitable. I believe that at the time it just about constituted the entire Moslem navy. It was a big, wooden box-shaped craft, with a high, old-fashioned poop that probably would have seemed modern to Sir Francis Drake, but in the nineteenth century was hopelessly out of date. It was anchored in the Dardanelles doing temporary custom house duty, so we had to board it on business.

The deck seemed to have had trouble with a cyclone, but that may have been due to the fact that the sailors were evidently trying to build what seemed to be a big coop for chickens. An elderly gentleman with white whiskers, a red fez and gold-trimmed spectacles, was superintending the work in his shirt sleeves. He looked more like a Swede than a Turk. I remember principally his broad, benevolent smile; it took us strangers in as well as the crew; but beyond an intense desire to be pleasant the old gentleman did not seem to know much about the work he was superintending. Several sailors stood



QUAY GALATA ON THE BOSPHORUS, WHERE THE SEAFARING PEOPLE OF ALL NATIONS MEET.



TYPICAL TURKISH SKIPPAN.

about in pensive attitudes, contemplating what was to be done, but not doing it. The benevolent gentleman in shirt sleeves was the bos'n, we were told.

The captain, trimmed up in much gold lace, smoked a hookah on the poop and seemed to find the mess amidships ample food for contemplation. His lieutenant, who was fishing over the rail, pulled up a fish about three inches long with a merry whoop, just as we stepped up on the cabin deck. After he had baited his hook again he turned to attend to our business.

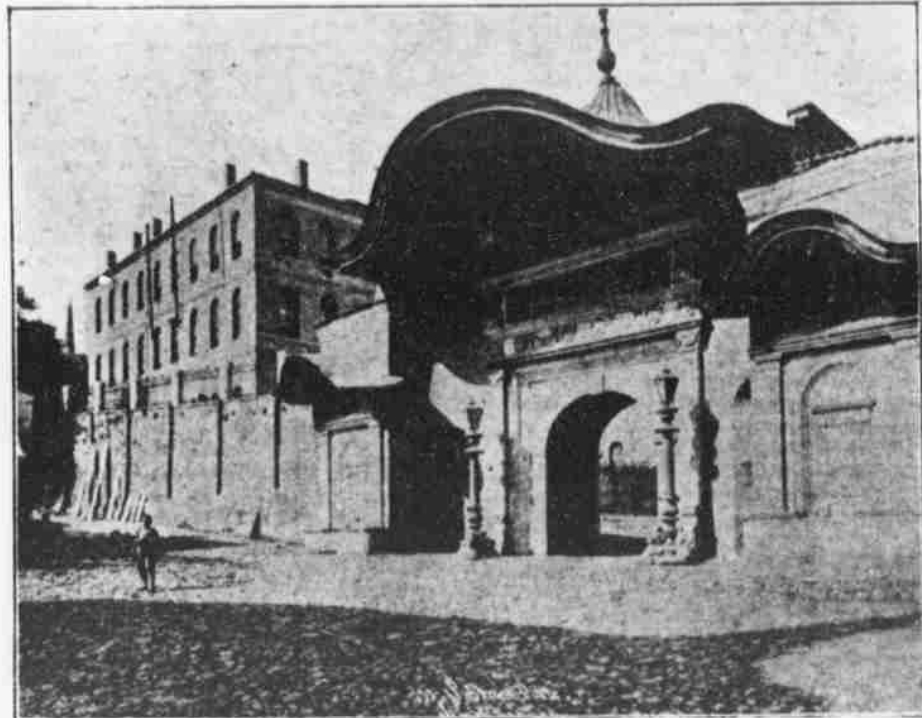
When they are well officered, Turks are not bad sailors.

But a Turk cannot command a Turk on the water. As a result, almost all of the few steamers that form the Turkish merchant marine are commanded by Austrian officers, while only the petty officers and sailors are children of Islam. The engineers are usually Scotchmen. When so officered the sailors are not so likely to lose their presence of mind in moments of danger, as are some of the Latin sailors of the Mediterranean. I have this from Austrian skippers of Turkish steamers, and my own experience backs up their statements. I have been shipmate of several on Christian ships, and all were invariably well skilled in seamanship. Discipline seems to take them out of the realm of the ridiculous.

I recall an incident in the harbor of Trieste, Austria, which shows how much an efficient officer means to Turkish sailors. We were anchored out in the middle of the bay. A Turkish steamer lay within hailing distance. Its captain, an Austrian, had come aboard to visit our captain, who was also an Austrian. It was about 11 o'clock at night, and the captain of the Turk was still down in our cabin being entertained by our skipper.

Suddenly we heard a tremendous row aboard the Turkish steamer. Men were running to and fro on deck and shouting like mad. Pretty soon we saw a dart of flame leap out of a porthole of a midship house.

The captain of the Turk came running out of our cabin and sprang into one of our boats. We immediately pulled for his ship as hard as we could work our oars. Mean-



THE SUBLIME PORTE AT THE YILDIZ PALACE, WHERE THE SULTAN USED TO SIT IN JUDGMENT.

while, the noise of the confusion increased. A few minutes later, as we clambered up the Turkish steamer's gangway after its skipper, we saw what the trouble was. A lamp had just been upset in the petty officers' quarters and set fire to some cloth trimmings or curtains, and put all hands into a panic. No rational attempt was being made to extinguish the fire. The bos'n trotted up and down, calling on Allah. One quartermaster was making an heroic attempt to check the flames by throwing water on the outside of the deck house with a glass. Another man had taken refuge in the main shrouds, where he was bawling forth unintelligible advice to those below. Still another sailor had thrust his head through a hawse pipe and was stuck there, unable to get either out or in, while two others were undoing a boat lashing with frantic haste, forgetful of the fact that a boat, attached only by a painter, floated alongside.

But the coming of the Austrian skipper made an instantaneous change. As he landed on deck he let out a fearful roar. Instantly the panic abated. Each man stood quiet. Then in a calmer voice the Austrian gave out a succession of orders and in five minutes all hands had formed into a well organized bucket brigade and were passing water to the burning house. The fire by this time had gained some headway, but in half an hour it was under control and before midnight all was quiet again and order restored.

It was a Turkish sailor in colloquy with some Turkish soldiers that gave me the impression that the Turk has an undercurrent of undemonstrative humor which enables him to see the funny side of things without a smile. The incident occurred at the mouth of the Bosphorus opening into the Black sea.

We had attempted to enter the Bosphorus after sunset. This was at the time of the Greco-Turkish war, when unusual precautions were being taken. As we approached



CONSTANTINOPLE PEDDLER.

shore the land batteries opened fire with solid shot at us, obliging us to anchor.

Next morning our skipper was summoned ashore. We went along in a boat and as we waited at the quay Turkish soldiers came down from the garrison and subjected us to a lot of raillery. One of our men was a Turk himself and interpreted their remarks.

"Your captain will be hanged as a Greek filibuster," announced one soldier solemnly. "Perhaps," suggested another, "he will only be made to pay the expense of being shot at. We charge 1,000 piastres for each shot, which is cheap when you consider that it is war times."

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