

THE GREEK QUESTION

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649515929

The Greek Question by Auguste Gauvain & Carroll N. Brown

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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AUGUSTE GAUVAIN & CARROLL N. BROWN

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PUBLISHED FOR THE

AMERICAN-HELLENIC SOCIETY

106 WEST 40TH STREET (TILDEN BUILDING), NEW YORK, N. Y.

BY

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS AMERICAN BRANCH

25 WEST 52ND STREET, NEW YORK

1918

PREFACE

It is not altogether easy, when the whole world is making such sacrifice and enduring such suffering in the cause of liberty, to dwell upon some of the happier accomplishments of the war for a new world. It is beyond question, however, that the pressure of military necessity has brought the people of the Allied nations into much closer and more intimate relationship than ever before and has forged new bonds of mutual confidence and understanding between them. Such a bond is the American Hellenic Society, recently founded, which aims to do for the people of the United States and those of Greece what similar societies, earlier established, have done for the people of Great Britain, of France and of Japan.

Greece is a name to conjure with. No man or woman who knows the history of Western civilization can fail to respond with a thrill of interest and appreciation when the name of Greece is heard. The place of Ancient Greece is secure. Her achievements in art, in letters and in science will never be seriously challenged. Modern Greece, however, is not alone the descendant of the Greece of ancient days, but also in no small part the product of forces and conditions which have influenced it, and before which it has sometimes been almost helpless. It appears that a happier day for Greece is about to dawn. Under the inspiring leadership of M. Venizelos, whose statesmanlike qualities are one of the ornaments of our generation, Greece has taken its natural place with the friends and defenders of liberty and in opposition to the forces of autocratic power and the rule of military might. The stimulus of this conflict and the satisfaction of these associations bid fair to

unite the whole Greek people through a new spirit of patriotic fervor and devotion. Modern Greece will then come to occupy the place in the world of to-day which is due to a people of its traditions and its characteristics.

The American Hellenic Society will constantly aim to make known the position, the interests and the ambitions of Greece, and to promote sympathy with them. It will aim to make the people of Greece and those of the United States more intimately acquainted one with the other by promoting in America the study of the ancient and modern language and literature of Greece and by promoting in Greece the study of the English language and of American history, literature and institutions.

Surely this aim is a noble one and one that will call forth and receive widespread sympathy and support. To this cause the series of publications, of which the present volume is the first, is dedicated.

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,
December 1, 1917.

INTRODUCTION

THE series of articles on the Greek question by M. Auguste Gauvain well deserves to be made accessible to all thoughtful Americans who are interested in the problems connected with the great European war. Its author, because of his extensive political and journalistic experience, is splendidly qualified to treat of this extremely complex question. With a clearness and frankness which does M. Gauvain the greatest credit he casts light upon the responsibility which rests on the different nations, and upon the errors committed by them.

The essay reveals facts as yet unknown to the general public, facts that are incontestably true in that they are authenticated by documents the publication of which has been rendered possible only by the recent solution of the Greek crisis. It permits the reader, as he follows the startling events that succeeded one another in this crisis from which Greece has happily emerged, to understand the attitude taken by the Greek people. Because of their inactivity and their nonresistant attitude the Greeks were credited, in the judgment of many foreigners, with approving the pro-German policy of their king and with condoning all those abuses of power by which Constantine sought to impose his will upon the people.

M. Gauvain at the very beginning shows the fundamental error which characterized the policy of the Entente toward the Balkan powers. The sentiments of the Greek people and of the Greek government were at the beginning of the war decidedly friendly toward the Allied powers, while the attitude of Bulgaria on the other hand was, to say the least, doubtful. In the vain hope of drawing Bulgaria to their side the

Allies conceived the idea of the cession of Greek and Serbian territories to Bulgaria. Such a ceding of national domain is repugnant to any people, but it was even tragical in this case, for it was a question of surrendering territories which were inhabited by more than a million Greeks and Serbs, who had just gained their freedom as a result of the victorious wars of 1912-18.

The attitude of Bulgaria did not disabuse the Allies of their false point of view. Even the loan negotiated by her in Germany did not serve to dissipate their illusions. They obstinately insisted on demanding sacrifices on the part of Greece.

The masses in a country never make any effort to understand the psychological basis of actions; they prefer to pin their attention to the brute facts. Greek public opinion was therefore deeply stirred upon learning that the friends and protectors of Greece wished to lessen her territories and her influence, and at once the feeling was aroused in the national consciousness that Greece was being cruelly wronged. This bitter feeling was all the more increased and intensified by the fact that these sacrifices were demanded for the benefit and advantage of a people who were obsessed, as the Greeks had come to know by centuries of fighting with them for their own freedom, by the wild desire to dominate the near East.

It is easy to understand how Constantine and the agents of the German propaganda could profit by this error so as to present Germany as the defender of the territorial integrity of Greece. An attempt was thus made to create an anti-Ally sentiment in the minds of the Greeks.

M. Gauvain next examines the attitude of these same powers toward Constantine after he had dismissed Mr. Venizelos in October, 1915, and had begun, through the agency of ministers subservient to the royal will, his

provocations of the Allies and his machinations against their military forces at Saloniki, as well as those acts of espionage practiced against these same troops by his personal agents.

The Entente powers continued to preserve the same friendly attitude toward Constantine as in the past. Conference succeeded conference; the representatives of the Allies came forth from these interviews completely charmed, and their impressions were purposely spread abroad so as to hoodwink the people and hinder them from seeing whither they were being led.

Constantine was, moreover, at that time extremely popular in Greece. As a result of the victories of 1912-18, which had been cleverly exploited so as to give him the whole credit for the success of the Greek arms, the people had come to regard the king as that Constantine XII of Greek legend who was destined to liberate Constantinople, the city of the Byzantine emperors, thus restoring to Christendom the national Greek sanctuary, Saint Sophia, and to unite under his scepter all the Greeks, whether subject to Bulgar or Turk. It was, then, not to be wondered at that the people should have implicit confidence in their king.

This confidence of theirs was naturally strengthened by the attitude of the Allies toward him, for their friendliness was set before the people as a convincing proof of the sincerity of the king's declarations.

Some of his acts, however, which were not fully in accord with his words, finally began to provoke a certain restlessness in the minds of the people and to arouse in them a feeling of distrust. Constantine became aware of this, and foresaw the possibility of resistance. He instigated a reign of terror in order to prevent criticism of his acts. By virtue of a law passed by the Venizelist government, which prescribed the surrender of all arms in the possession of private citizens, the government, as the servile tool of the king, disarmed all citizens of whose

object submission it was not sure. The last step in this policy of intimidation was the organizing of the League of Reservists, who were immediately equipped with regular army rifles.

The result was that nobody dared to utter a word of criticism. Enlightenment finally came, however, through the fight begun by the liberal party, for, as soon as the liberals felt themselves protected by the Allied fleet which anchored off Salamis in June, 1916, they hastened to make their will known. The people of Athens in a huge mass-meeting with one accord declared that Greece proposed to fulfill her duty as an ally toward Serbia and demanded that the king respect the oath that he had taken to support the Constitution.

The people of Athens presented their resolutions in a respectful form, for they hoped that Constantine would be induced to think and act as a Greek and would follow the decision of the people. But the Entente powers, far from supporting the stand taken by the people, continued through their official and obliging representatives in Athens to overwhelm Constantine with civilities and to treat him as a sincere friend who was anxious for one thing alone—the strict preservation of Greece's neutrality.

We are now in a position to understand fully how this whole attitude of the Allies was exploited, and thus to appreciate what anxiety and perplexity it must have produced in the minds of the Greek people, who were utterly misled by these strange contradictions.

The time finally came when Mr. Venizelos, despairing of his ability to bring Constantine to a full realization of his duties toward Greece and the Constitution, determined to have recourse to a revolutionary movement in order to save his country. The effect on the people of Mr. Venizelos' departure for Saloniki was enormous. If the Allied powers had at that time recognized the government of Saloniki as the only legal government