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## Bonneval Pasha

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## BONNEVAL PASHA

When, a few months ago, the Turks crumpled up helplessly before the fierce onslaught of their hereditary foes, there must have been some among them well enough acquainted with the history of their country to wish for at least one hour of the brilliant Frenchman who, almost two centuries earlier, came to place his sword at their disposal and ended his life as a Pasha of three tails in Constantinople. His strange career was then the talk of an amazed and fascinated Europe; now, there will probably be few of those who chance upon these pages to whom it will be familiar. And yet his adventures merit recital. Un-heroic in many ways as was the eighteenth century, the "Age of Reason," yet in its chronicles one comes continually upon the stories of adventurers as picturesque as any mediæval knight who rode out to the slaying of giants, robbers, and Saracens.

Claude-Alexandre, Comte de Bonneval, was no adventurer in the ordinary sense of the word—no impudent Casanova or charlatan Cagliostro. He traced his descent from one of the oldest and proudest families of the Limousin, allied by marriage with all the high nobility of that and neighbouring provinces, and even, through the house of Foix, with most of the royal families of Europe; Henry IV, firmly seated on the throne of France, had not forgotten that they were his "cousins." The future Pasha was born on July 14, 1675, at the manor-house of Coussac-Bonneval near Limoges, which is still in the possession of a branch of the family. When he reached the age of twelve, Tourville, the great admiral, a connection, put him into the *gardes-marines*, which served as a training-school for the officers of the two regiments specially charged with sea-fighting. The first personal anecdote recorded of him is in delightful harmony with his whole future life. When the war-clouds, rising from the Palatinate, gathered thick over Europe in 1688, Seignelay passed the naval strength of France in review. As the *gardes-marines* defiled before him, he singled out Bonneval as too young and small for his place, and was minded to send him home. His head well up, the lad flung back at the powerful minister "*Monsieur, on ne casse pas un homme de mon nom!*" Seignelay was shrewd

enough to see the spirit which lay behind the defiance, and answered him with "*Monsieur, le roi*"—note the fine distinction: Not I, but the King, to whom even a Bonneval must bow—"le roi casse le garde-marine . . . mais le fait enseigne de vaisseau!" Thus promoted, the boy served with distinction in the engagements of Dieppe, of La Hogue, and of Cadiz.

In 1698 he bought a lieutenant's commission in the Guards, with whom he served until the outbreak of the war of the Spanish Succession in 1701. Then he was sent to Italy, as colonel in command of the Labour regiment of infantry, and in more than one sharp encounter earned the name of a daring and resourceful soldier. The principal exploit which he achieved on his own responsibility, the conquest and pacification of the Biella district in Piedmont (of vital importance to the communications of the French army), was destined to lead to the abrupt termination of his service under the fleurs-de-lys. He ruled his little province with statesmanlike capacity (you may read in the archives of the French War Office the testimony of the grateful inhabitants); but his careless expenditure of money brought him into conflict with the *bourgeois* book-keeping habits of Chamillart, the War Minister, who wrote with condensed offensiveness to ask for an accounting.

The fiery "colonel of the school of Vendôme" failed to realise how times had changed. The League and the Fronde, the days when his haughty ancestors did what seemed good in their own eyes, lay far in the past; it sufficed no longer to have birth and courage—now the old Roman maxim was in force, and they who would rule must first learn how to obey. But all his life he was incapable of learning this hard lesson. Without taking a moment for reflection, he wrote back in terms as "lofty, passionate, and insolent" as any of Sir Walter Raleigh's own:

"I have received the letter you were good enough to write me, in which you suggest that I fear to reckon with clerks because they know too well how to reckon. I am compelled to inform you that the great nobles of the kingdom willingly sacrifice their lives and their property in the King's service, but that we do not owe him anything contrary to our honour. If, therefore, within the space of three months I have not received reasonable satisfaction for the insult you have offered me, I shall pass to the service of the Emperor, whose ministers are all gentlemen, and know how to deal with men of their own class."

This was to throw down the gauntlet with a vengeance. A brief period of reflection must have convinced him that he

could hardly hope to allow himself with absolute impunity the luxury of telling the Minister of War what he thought of him. The army being in winter quarters, he went to Venice—a charming place in which to pass the idle days, but a dangerous one for a man in his state of mind. It was a “free port,” offering unquestioning hospitality to people of the most diverse character; and not a few officers of the imperial army were whiling away their leisure in its seductive atmosphere. Here for a time he floated up and down the canals, nursing his wrath and looking vainly, not perhaps for an apology in terms, but for some diplomatic overtures which would enable him to resume his service without too great a sacrifice of his pride. None came; and in March, 1706, he definitely accepted the flattering proposals which were made to him by his imperialist acquaintances—no doubt with the full sanction of Prince Eugene, who had had opportunity to be well aware of his worth as a soldier, and whose own entrance into the Emperor’s service was not without resemblance to Bonneval’s. With two other titled deserters, he was condemned by the Parliament of Paris to be hanged in effigy in the Place de Grève, and remained legally dead in France for twelve years.

Outside his native country he was very much alive. Holding now a general’s commission, he served with vigour under Prince Eugene in the two following campaigns, and played an important part in the relief of Turin in 1706—where his oldest brother the Marquis, serving on the other side, was taken prisoner and suffered the humiliation of being rescued from rough treatment at the hands of his captors by his scapegrace junior. In 1708 he commanded a corps intended to act against the States of the Church and dissuade Clement XI from supporting the French claimant of the Spanish throne. He occupied and governed Comacchio in the Emperor’s name: the Gualterio manuscripts in the British Museum contain some extremely interesting correspondence from this period—in fact, whether in London, Paris, Vienna, Brussels, or Venice, one is almost discouraged by the wealth of material for his biography which the official archives of the first half of the eighteenth century contain. Even if one read Turkish, however, it would be of little avail to add Constantinople to the places I have named; I am told that the classification of the vast undigested mass of records there is among the reforms which are still waiting for accomplishment.

While the war lasted, there was always work for him. At Malplaquet he was posted opposite to the French Guards, whom he charged (says the Prince de Ligne) with an impetuous daring that he had learned in the days when he was their comrade. Yet it would be a great mistake to figure him as a mere swashbuckling soldier. Accomplished, witty, well-read, he was a welcome addition to any company of gentlefolk. There is one long letter extant from the Duchess of Marlborough to him, inviting him to England in the most flattering terms; and in the same year (1714) Leibnitz was writing to him repeatedly as one scholar to another. Passing through Vienna in the winter of 1716-17, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu found him in the intimate *entourage* of Prince Eugene. She writes to Lady Mar:

"Prince Eugene was so polite as to show me his library yesterday; we found him attended by Rousseau, and his favourite Count Bonneval, who is a man of wit, and is here thought to be a very bold and enterprising spirit. . . . The books are pompously bound in Turkey leather, and two of the most famous bookbinders in Paris were expressly sent for to do this work. Bonneval pleasantly told me that there were several quartos on the art of war, that were bound with the skins of spahis and janissaries; and this jest, which was indeed elegant, raised a smile of pleasure on the grave countenance of the famous warrior."

In the following spring, now that Louis XIV's implacable resentment was buried with him, Bonneval's friends achieved the result for which they had been so long and pertinaciously working, by obtaining from the more tolerant Regent the annulment of the sentence against him, and thus allowing him to revisit his native land. He came back to Paris in the spring of 1717, not merely no longer under a cloud, but with a fresh halo about his head from the battle of Peterwardein the year before, in which he had contributed not a little to Eugene's victory over the Turks and had been severely wounded. The Rousseau just mentioned, Jean-Baptiste, the courtly poet, consecrated a glowing ode to the exploits of the "nouvel Alcide," and he was the lion of the hour in the French capital. Saint-Simon, who had never forgiven his change of allegiance and had voted to the last in the Council against his restoration, was yet at home to him when he came to call, and drily records the impression of his habitual manner in a single phrase—"I have never seen a man less embarrassed."

Now that he was thus rehabilitated, his mother conceived the

notion of marrying him—perhaps hoping that (at forty-two) he would “range himself,” as the French say, and settle down to a sober, conventional existence. Apparently he gave her fair warning not to set her hopes too high. “My mother,” he said to his brother, “has a mad idea of marrying me. If she persists, I will not answer for it that I shall not spare them the grief of lengthened farewells by leaving for Germany the next day.”

But the dowager did persist; and on May 7 he was married to Judith-Charlotte de Biron, daughter of the marquis of that name—later first gentleman in waiting to the Regent, duke and peer and marshal of France, but in 1717 distinguished largely for the size of his family and the anxieties of his pocket. There were twenty-six children in all, of whom half were now dead; it was only by the exercise of infinite prudence and tact that he succeeded in finding suitable partners for all but one of the seven girls who survived. Saint-Simon, always cynical and ready to believe what his prejudices dictate, suggests that the whole thing was a bargain of the most unblushing sort—Bonneval marrying one of the daughters without a dowry in return for Biron’s influence with the Regent to obtain the “letters of abolition.”

But all the evidence is against this; and there is room for a romantically modern theory that the girl’s own charms may have had much to do with determining the reluctant bridegroom’s submission, or even his mother’s choice out of the tolerably wide range that must have been open to her. I have been able to find neither a portrait of Judith-Charlotte nor a contemporary description of her appearance; but the picture which, all unconsciously, she draws of her mind and heart in the dozen or so of letters which we have from her pen is so gracious and attractive that it is easy to understand how, even without a penny, she might have been welcomed into a proud and ambitious family. The letters were published first by the Prince de Ligne in 1802, in his memoir of her husband; fifty years later, Sainte-Beuve revived their memory, calling them “delicate, discreet, tender, perfect at every point”; and, after another half-century they have been edited with devotion, though not with infallible knowledge, by M. Gustave Michaut. One need not claim for them the brilliancy of Mme. de Sévigné; but they are full of an exquisite charm all her own, and nothing could be more touching

than the love which, years after the marriage, she displays for the husband of a fortnight whom she was never to see again.

In that May the trumpets were blowing on the Turkish frontier; Prince Eugene was leaving Vienna for the front as Bonneval left Paris, and in August they were fighting furiously side by side at Belgrade in the memorable conflict in which the imperial army defeated a Turkish host of nearly twice its numbers and delivered Europe from the fear that had hung over it for generations.

After the peace of Passarowitz, the next important military employment found for the hard-hitting Frenchman was the command of an army corps in Sicily against the Spaniards. Here too his irrepressible temper broke out in a quarrel with the old field-marshal Mercy which brought down on both the disputants a rebuke from the Council of War in Vienna. When the King of Spain had withdrawn his forces from Sicily, Eugene, who was sincerely attached to his protégé, kept him for some time in Vienna, and finally, when his high spirits had made him a somewhat troublesome neighbour there, allowed him to go to Brussels—where, in the summer of 1724, he was destined to cause the noisiest explosion of his whole tumultuous career.

Eugene himself was nominal governor of the Austrian Netherlands; but his functions were discharged by deputy—and the deputy happened to be a certain Marquis de Prié, a Piedmontese and from Bonneval's standpoint an upstart, in any case the sort of person with whom he was not likely to keep long on civil terms. The excuse for the outbreak was the circulation by Prié's wife and daughter, with lifted eyebrows, of derogatory rumours about the young Queen of Spain, who was that summer getting herself talked about in various parts of Europe.

Whoever has the curiosity to search for the real facts of the case will be rewarded by some very diverting "scandals about Queen Elizabeth," though a very different Elizabeth from the tawny old lioness who had "the stomach of a king—aye, and of a king of England." This Queen was but a poor, pathetic, ill-governed child, not yet fifteen. The third daughter of the Regent, as Mademoiselle de Montpensier she had been brought up in the Palais Royal, where a girl's education was not conducted precisely on the lines of a convent school. Married while only a tiny thing to the Infante Don Luis, son of Philip V, she had but newly, by the old king's abdication, found herself raised to the

giddy height of a throne—and a throne which, in the eyes of Spaniards, differed as much from other thrones as to Elizabeth Tudor a king of England was more than the other kings of the earth. The really interesting thing is that in all the *chronique scandaleuse* of the time one finds no well-attested grounds for suspecting her of anything more than a light-hearted indifference to Spanish ideas of decorum. The recurrent charge against her centres around her unwillingness, on the ground of a climate so much warmer than that of Paris, to wear in her unceremonious moments the usual complement of petticoats and stockings. It was an ancient and consecrated tradition that “the Queen of Spain has no legs”; and in the face of the spoiled child’s refusal to fetter her movements by stiff and cumbrous attire the convention could no longer be maintained. Her solemn old father-in-law was obliged to leave his devotions long enough to administer a severe reproof to her; and when that did no good, her husband’s royal authority confined her for a fortnight to her own apartments in the palace.

By the time the story reached Brussels, and in the mouths of people bitterly hostile to the French royal family, it had grown into a melodramatic assassination, by the King’s order, of a French or Flemish gentleman discovered in the Queen’s chamber. Such was the form in which Bonneval heard it; and he lost no time in entering the lists on behalf of the young Queen, with whose family, he remarked gravely, he had the honour to be connected. At an assembly in his own house, he said with precision that those who spread such fables against the reputation of so great a princess were blackguards if men—if women, the feminine of blackguard, no matter who they might be. Not content with this, he was at pains to circulate the same challenging definition, in writing and in print, far and wide; and a tremendous hubbub arose. All the diplomatic corps in Brussels were busy sending almost daily reports to their governments of the progress of the quarrel, and there were those who would not have been surprised to see it end in a rekindling of the flames of war between France and the Empire.

Prié took summary measures to suppress his enemy. Stretching his authority to the utmost, he ordered the arrest of Bonneval and his transportation to the citadel of Antwerp under the escort of a captain and fifty dragoons—a precaution abundantly necessary, for the governor was anything but beloved by his subjects.



The case was tried by the council of war in Vienna, and the final sentence was one of confinement for a year in the Spielberg, the great fortress which dominates from its hill the town of Brünn in Moravia. Bonneval took his leisure-way thither, stopping for some time at The Hague and elsewhere to write voluminous appeals and countercharges addressed to the Emperor, to Prince Eugene, and to the Council of War, with a pen that had lost none of its mordant vigour since it wrote to Chamillart twenty years before. Charles VI wavered for a time, and seemed to seek a way of keeping for his service a general of whose capacity he had ample evidence. But Eugene, now at the end of his patience, spoke the decisive word: "Your Majesty is, of course, the master; but if M. de Bonneval enters Vienna by one gate, I shall leave it by another." When all hope failed, an utterly impenitent offender, Bonneval surrendered himself to the governor of the Spielberg, and began his imprisonment in a cell which is still pointed out to the visitor, with an alleged portrait of its famous tenant.

Released in the spring of 1726 (by a curious coincidence, on the very day of Prié's death), conducted to the frontier, and forbidden ever to set foot again within the hereditary dominions of the House of Austria, he took up his abode once more in Venice. No city in Europe could have afforded more amusing material for his lively and satiric humour; Beckford, a couple of generations later, goes so far as to call it "the city in the universe best calculated for giving scope to the observations of a devil upon two sticks." Here, for nearly two years, he led an easy, idle life, associating upon equal terms with the most distinguished citizens and foreigners. He could not, of course, leave affairs of state alone; and his relations with the Spanish Ambassador attracted the attention of Vienna. He began to look about for a safer asylum. Tentative approaches to France, Spain, Poland, and Russia came to nothing. For the moment, he thought only of a place where he might live in security—although remunerative employment must have been a thing much to be desired. Fifteen years later he said to young Casanova in Constantinople: "When I left Venice, the soup had devoured the dishes; and if the Jewish people had offered me the command of fifty thousand men, I would have gone to lay siege to Jerusalem."

Finally he turned his eyes to the East. In the summer of

1729 he chartered a small vessel, taking with him some ten companions, partly old servants who had remained faithful to his fortunes, partly adventurers disposed to follow his star, and set sail for Ragusa, then a free city whose territory marched with the Turkish dominions. Thence he made the toilsome journey northward through the mountains to Bosna-Serai, the modern Serajevo. Here he was recognised by a major of the imperial army who was passing through; word was swiftly sent to Vienna, and Talmann, the Emperor's Ambassador in Constantinople, succeeded in arresting his approach to the Porte.

The delay was annoying in the extreme to his ardent temperament; but it was probably the means of saving his life. The recent researches of a Frenchman, an Englishman, and a Russian in the archives of Venice have furnished material for an extended treatment of the systematic use of poison by the rulers of the Republic to rid themselves of troublesome persons. In the eighteenth century the pretty custom had begun to lose its popularity; but they had not forgotten what could be done in an emergency, and when they realised that Bonneval, whose stirring disposition and masterly abilities they knew well, had departed to their most hated enemies, they lost no time in attempting to deal with him in the ancient manner. If only as almost the last notable case of the sort in Venetian history, the letter of the Inquisitors of State to their *bailo* or envoy in Constantinople makes interesting reading.

“ In our preceding letter, of which you will receive with this a duplicate, the reasons are sufficiently expressed for thinking that this person may prove fatal to the Republic and to Christendom, and your well-known ability will require no further explanations. It is now fitting that we should add a word on the indispensable necessity of grasping at any decisive means for ridding ourselves of a firebrand which cannot help being ruinous and ill-omened. It is also the desire of the Senate, and your Excellency has sufficient prudence, to try every way to accomplish this result, if it is at all possible, but to attempt it with such secrecy, attention, and caution as may hold harmless your person, your office, and consequently the Republic from any danger of being involved in the matter.”

The whole situation was so precarious that Bonneval finally decided to take the only step which would insure him against being delivered up to the Emperor and provide him with the standing he hoped to gain in Turkey for the furtherance of his far-reaching plans of vengeance. He who had never been a very

fervent Catholic, whose youth had been passed in the company of the Regent, of the Dukes of Vendôme, of the Marquis de La Fare, and the rest of that witty and freethinking crew, found no particular difficulty in making a formal profession of Mohammedanism and assuming the turban. "None of the saints before my time had ever been delivered over to the tender mercies of Prince Eugene," he wrote afterwards to Voltaire in a characteristic letter giving the history of his conversion. It seemed the only way to insure his safety at the moment and the realisation of the dream which was the ruling motive of the rest of his life, the abasement of the House of Austria.

The necessary ceremonies accomplished, there was no longer any question of surrendering him to the Emperor; but a whole year passed before he seemed to have gained anything more than mere comparative safety. The Turkish Government kept him in Bosnia; they treated him with somewhat greater consideration and increased his allowance, but apparently thought no more of employing his services than if it had been a question "of a sub-lieutenant of infantry." As late as September, 1730, Lord Kinnoull, the British Ambassador, was writing home to the Duke of Newcastle:

"Mon. Bonneval has been a long time in Bosnia upon a very uncertain foot with a small pension from the Port. He sent an officer here some time ago to make terms with the Court. . . . They have since made him a Pasha à deux queues and he has taken the name of Achmet Pasha. . . . It is thought they will give him some employment of consequence. But it is everybody's opinion that he has brought inevitable ruin upon his own head. If he's of no use to them they'll allow him just bread to live; if they trust him and put him in any great employment, the great men of this country will lay a noose for him and procure him a bowstring."

Finally, however, he was summoned to Constantinople by a new grand vizier, who assigned him to the command of the corps of bombardiers, as part of a movement for reorganising the Turkish army and profiting by western military science. In the symbolism of his rank he rose from two tails to three; and—with the exception of a few months' banishment to Kastamuni in Asia Minor (1738)—he spent the remaining sixteen years of his life in the Turkish capital as the trusted adviser of the Porte in all matters relating to international politics, while in the later years he was in not infrequent correspondence with the ministers of Louis XV for the general purpose of bringing about an alliance

between France and the Turks which should enable them to dictate terms to the rest of Europe. Especially during the war of the Polish Succession, his advice, if it had been followed, might well have changed the course of history.

But the reader who has no special interest in diplomatic intrigues will find more to detain him in the personal descriptions of the old age of a man who seems to have exercised such a strange personal charm on all who came in contact with him—"people forgave him everything," so Voltaire sums him up, "because he was such a lovable fellow." His house continued to be the meeting-place of men of wit and intellect, Turks or Franks. A part of it was furnished in European fashion; and to this he liked to retire at times and lay aside his turban and flowing robes to dress himself once more from head to foot as a French nobleman. His busy brain was never idle for a moment. Now he was amusing himself by designing flat-bottomed boats which should facilitate a French invasion of England; now he was proposing to plant a Swiss agricultural colony in Roumelia, or working to provide Turkey with a body of European engineers; while one of his memorials to the Porte contains a project which in so many words directly anticipates the construction of the Suez Canal.

A pleasant picture of him at the age of sixty-six has been left us by a young naval officer, the Chevalier de Baufremont, serving on one of the vessels which conveyed the Marquis de Castellane, the new French Ambassador, to Constantinople in 1741. His manuscript narrative of the entire voyage, some eighty folio pages, is in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, and would be well worth publishing in full.

"I had occasion there," he says, "to make the acquaintance of the Count de Bonneval, for whom I was charged with a letter from his brother. I found him a delightful man, and the best company in the world. No one has more wit than he, to say nothing of his talents for war, which ought to have brought him to the greatest fortune. He possesses all the sciences, and has a lively and accurate understanding which makes him seize the meaning of things at the first word. . . . He enjoys an income of forty thousand livres, and has a very good house and a well-served table, at which I found myself as often as I could, for it is impossible to be dull in the company of this amiable Pasha."

But the engaging host himself, as the years went on, began to tire of the life, and had more than one half-formed plan for returning to spend his last days amidst the surroundings of his

youth. The closing scene of his adventurous career is by no means the least full of dramatic suggestion. He had been for some time in treaty with d'Argenson for a return to France, the correspondence being conducted in a cipher of which the Ambassador himself had no key. On March 20, 1747, a letter arrived from Versailles for him, containing the definite permission to return to his native country and indicating the best means to arrange his departure from Constantinople. Castellane carried it at once to him, and found him ill. "It is in cipher—I will read it to-morrow," said the weary old man, and put it under his pillow. But before the morrow his eyes were closed forever; and soon he was carried to his last resting-place in a green, garden-like cemetery in the outskirts of the city, where a half-effaced Turkish inscription still piously prays that his soul may repose in Paradise on a pillow of roses.

A strange story, the whole of it—

"pure crude fact

Secreted from men's lives when hearts beat hard

And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries hence":

the story of a man of dazzling talents, whose career was again and again broken, just when it seemed most promising, by some subtle defect, some invisible flaw in the temper of his steel. A little less pride of birth and hot-headed impatience, and he might have been a great personage of history, not a hero of romance. Yet, for romance, what a hero—how inexhaustibly colourful and picturesque his story! "Why shouldn't civil-service reform," says Bromfield Corey in Mr. Howells's best novel, "and the resumption of specie payment, and a tariff for revenue only, inspire heroes?" Well, they may; but the pictures that they make seem strangely pale by the side of Bonneval picking his way at midnight with his men along the ice-covered mountain paths of Piedmont, or holding his little court in Brussels, or lying down to rest in his palace at Pera, with eleven scars of old battle-wounds in his body and the French minister's undeciphered letter beneath his pillow.

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