

■ Traffic in Manila can be exasperating, and often is, but in Turkey it is simply maddening.

ON THE ROAD TO BYZANTIUM

SIMON RAVEN

'Tomorrow,' said the second-class steward of the SS Mustapha Kemal, 'we come Iskenderu. Iskenderu is first port call in Turkey. There will be the formalities.' He pronounced the word with a heavy, whining accent on the penultimate syllable. 'Turkey formalities,' he said, and giggled rather wildly. 'Turkey formalities take all day, gentlemen, take all night. So long as customs men on ship, they eat ship's food; see? So they stay long time — eat breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, supper. They so stupid with eating, gentlemen, they find nothing.'

He went into cubby hole and came out with an armful of skirts, blouses and assorted lingerie. He spread it all carefully and evenly over the five tables; he then covered it with a layer of newspaper, the newspaper again with tablecloths, and proceeded to lay the break-

fast things for the next morning.

'You see, gentlemen? These things I buy in Cyprus for my wife. Customs men want much money — is no good. So I hide here. Customs men, policemen, always eating. So no one look under tablecloth.'

At first we are sceptical about this strategem, but the morning we saw how sound it was. There were about ten customs officers of varying grades, some fifteen uniformed security men and a fair-sized platoon of hangers-on. From the moment they came aboard, they started eating in relays in the Second-Class Dining Room. At any given moment of the day, half the officials on board would be consuming one meal while the other half was champing for the next. There could be no question of lifting the tablecloths. Our steward, winking and

giggling, hurtled in and out of his cubby hole with unending replacements of crocks and provender, while the officials gorged and belched like happy schoolboys at a picnic, as ignorant as Medea's husband of the enormity which underlay their feast.

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At Mersin, the second port of consequence as one sails up the west coast of Turkey, we disembarked ourselves and our car for the drive to Istanbul.

'Formaleeties,' said a man on the quayside.

'But,' we said, 'we went through all the formalities at Iskenderu.'

'Here,' he said, 'only ver'leettle formaleeties. Now, the secret of Turkish formalities is this. A document, which is regarded as a symbol of enlightenment and progressive administration, is a thing to be revered rather than understood. No one really knows whether it is in order or even what it applies to; but reverence for a certain time it must and will receive, and therefore the fewer documents you produce, the sooner you get away. On the

other hand, if you produce too few you are suspect, not so much as a potential law-breaker, but rather as though you were religious apostate of some kind, lacking in the proper respect for sacred matters. So a nice balance must be struck — enough documents to reassure people, not enough to occasion serious delay. For the 'ver'leettle formaleeties' at Mersin we decided to submit passports, an out-of-date insurance policy for the car (this to test the acumen of our persecutor), and one international driving certificate. The out-of-date insurance policy, being on thin and expensive paper, was a great success. The official hopefully asked for more like it, was denied, took his revenge by charging five Turkish lire (three shillings) to stamp the driving certificate, and waved us (not without courtesy) on our way.

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It would seem from their history that the three basic elements in the Turkish national character are cruelty, courage and inefficiency. This impression is confirmed by the dress and the physical

features of the ubiquitous soldiers. In Konya, a famous inland resort where we spent our first night, the Sunday streets were full of them — little men with trailing khaki great coats, filthy boots, hatchet faces and beady eyes, wandering aimlessly round town without a *kuru* in their pockets, some of them hand in hand. They appear as tough as they do unamiable; and I am told that although they are badly led by corrupt officers, in close combat at least they are very effective.

This was explained to me by a schoolmaster in Dimar (a nasty little town apparently built in a marsh), where we spent the following night. The Turkish landscape, he said, is alternately savage and boring. It does not compromise or apologize; mountains are all sheer, lakes treacherous (and often salt), deserts merciless and plains vast. It follows that the men who come from most of this country must be brave and resourceful; to have survived at all they must have developed a remarkable talent for survival, which stands them well under arms. By

being a harsh and ungenerous parent, the country has endowed her sons with the virtues necessary to defend her. Or so my schoolmaster informant would have had me believe.

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But however brave or cunning they may be, I cannot believe in the Turks' capacity to carry through any enterprise, even that of self-defense, until something is one about the mixture of fatalism and *laissez-faire* which we should call their inefficiency. Yet what can be done about it? Ataturk tried hard enough, Heaven knows; as a result of his efforts, it now takes only an hour and a half to cash a traveller's cheque in a large provincial town, there are only a hundred or so potholes to every hundred yards of road, and even the smallest village seems to have at least one shop devoted solely to the sale of busts and photographs of Ataturk. But for all these blessings, he has really changed nothing fundamental. For the point is, of course, that the Turks are Moslems — unenthusiastic Moslems, for the most part, but Mos-

lems nevertheless — and they are therefore prepared, indeed grateful, to leave the entire direction of affairs to Allah.

Consider the following incident. A small bridge had collapsed on the main — i.e., the only — road between Selcuk and Ismir (Smyrna). On either side of the bridge there were vast queues of traffic. There was not a single policeman in sight, but a gang of lorry-drivers was attempting, in an aimless and amateur manner, to construct a temporary road of stones, shrub and earth down the bank the other side. Plainly only Allah knew what would come of this, so we drove away to camp the night in the nearby ruins of Efes.

In the middle of these ruins was a small restaurant-bar, which although the ruins were seldom visited so early in the year, was luckily open. At the bar were two imposing gentlemen, who greeted us because we were foreigners, allowed us to buy them drinks for the same reason, and announced that they were, respectively the Mayor and

the Chief of Police of Selcuk. They had taken refuge in the ruins, they explained, because otherwise people would come and pester them about the bridge and the traffic. (The disaster had occurred just inside their area.) This kind of thing was always happening after the spring floods; it was doubtless very annoying for a lot of people; but what could they do about it? The traffic police would be angry if called out for extra night duty; the official in charge of repairs had gone to see his brother in Antalya that morning; his men were useless without his direction and almost useless with it. Then when, we asked, did he think we would get to Smyrna? He shrugged his shoulders as if we were talking about Peking. The only thing to do, he said, was to let matters take their ordained course: one day was as good as another for seeing Smyrna, which was a noisy city full of dirty and expensive whores. Yes, another raki would be acceptable

Without much hope, we returned next morning to

the bridge. By some miracle, it seemed, the temporary road was nearing completion, and the yoghurt vendors, who had done a brisk night's business, were already leaving. And indeed, after an hour more, the traffic began to move — only one way at a time, but palpably to move. Then, at the high moment of victory, ten traffic policemen, magnificent in blue uniforms and white caps, appeared to take charge of the situation they had ignored all night; a moment or

two later, the Mayor and the Chief of Police took their stand by the temporary road, bowing and raising their hats to each newly released vehicle as it passed.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' said the Mayor with smiling effrontery when it was our turn. 'It is all as I said, you see. All our arrangements have gone smoothly, and you will be in our beautiful city of Smyrna in good time for your lunch.' — *The Spectator*, May 31, 1963.

SCIENTISM

Scientism is a disservice to science. The rise of science is the most important fact of modern life. No student should be permitted to complete his education without understanding it. Universities should and must support and encourage scientific research. From a scientific education we may expect an understanding of science. From scientific investigation we may expect scientific knowledge. We are confusing the issue and demanding what we have no right to ask if we seek to learn from science the goals of human life and of organized society. — Robert M. Hutchins.