



Bridge and ruined mosque, Dordyol, South-Eastern Turkey



"Istanbul . . . had apparently emptied every pawn-shop in Europe for its clothes"



"Sometimes we followed river-beds or camel tracks"



Market, minaret, and mosque

"It's Hard To Get Into Turkey..."

That seems to be the moral of this story written for "The Listener" by MARJORIE RICHARDS, and illustrated with studies from her own camera. Perhaps the enormous advantages that control of this strategic country would bring to either side explain how Turkey manages to continue as almost the last of the neutrals.

WE bumped into Turkey in August, 1936, in a 20-mile long cloud of dust alongside the Sofia-Istanbul road-in-construction. A soldier rode all the way with us, crammed to the roof, as our baby Ford already was with our two selves, spare tyres, and equipment. Every time the rifle between his knees made gear-changes grate, or looked like ventilating the roof at some extra big bump, he apologised afresh for his presence. So did the five villages en route as each examined our passports. But (they all explained), everything was militarised territory right from the frontier to the Straits. Istanbul's ancient city wall, bathed in the coral and peach of the evening sun, did not look formidable. But when we tried to cross the Bosphorus via the narrow Black Sea end (say, half a mile wide), we were turned back. All that coast to 15 miles' depth was also military reserve.

"Not One Fez"

However, when we took ferry down through the Sea of Marmara to Mudanya, we were at once in most peaceful countryside. Istanbul, that babel of Levantine mixed-breeds, had apparently emptied every pawn shop in Europe for its clothes. But in the mud-brick square box houses (patched by kerosene tins), that were thinly sprinkled in village groups among the waving grass that rolled on and on for 600 miles, we found traces of the "abolished" traditional costume. Yet not one fez did we see in all four weeks. As part of his Westernising policy (Latin alphabet, Bradford suits, Alabama jazz), Kemal Ataturk had decreed their abolition — the more eagerly so since brimless hats are a Moslem religious institution. Most Turks we met wore street-corner-pub cloth caps, whose peaks could be slewed round to the back when they bowed forehead to the ground in the mosque! Women, however, the conservative sex, often modestly showed baggy Turkish trousers under their new-fangled skirts.

Travelling was still hard work. Sometimes we followed river beds or camel tracks or lengths of that single railway that zig-zags across Turkey. The sparse inhabitants were always friendly though usually pro-German, admiring (these few who could converse with us explained), a beaten nation which, like themselves, had had a new birth. Their wolf-like dogs, however, whose spiked collars were to prevent robbers strangling them before they could give the alarm at night, raced beside us at 20 m.p.h. and more, trying to bite our tyres. Often we slept on the dung floors of square earth-walled, only partly roofed-in courtyards built to shield camel caravans from the keen night winds. Once, having travelled on after dusk

and then camped, we awoke in an ancient cemetery leagues from nowhere. And once—our last such after-dark journey, as you will guess—we heard in this land of many wells but rarely a stream, the murmur of falling water all the night. Dawn showed us a cloud-burst washout, 100 yards in front, 15 feet deep, and requiring a four-mile detour!

The Cilician Gates

Later, a white line showed up ahead, and for two days we sweltered across a sun-dazzled dusty expanse with cool, snow-capped peaks always in view. In late afternoon the whole surrounding plain would be aglow with colour—peach, lemon, purple, cerise, apricot, changing to rich velvety purple in the foothills, and fading into sage and amber, tipped off by grey-white against a turquoise sky. Then we climbed through scenery like the Dolomites, though on a larger scale. And then suddenly we came out of half light on to a sunlit slope above a great plain and wide sea far, far below. That cleft in the Taurus mountain-wall had been the "Cilician Gates," the traditional Conqueror's Road from Asia to Europe and still the only pass into Turkey from the south.

Down below there was a little subtropical extension of Turkey proper, a shelf-garden along the Levant, where cotton-factory smoke-stacks unexpectedly rose among palms. No more sand. No more gorge "gate," unrepaired (apparently), since Alexander. But—mud. In Adana (where Mr. Churchill the other day met the Turkish President), we saw behind a caravan of cotton-laden mules, a bullock waggon "making way" for the first V8 since Istanbul.

Passports, Please!

Passport inspection had been insisted on in every village we had touched, even if hyenas formed the main population (they ringed our primus stove night by night with a circle of yellow eyes and ghoulish laughter), or bearded officials had to call in youngsters off the cobbles to read the Latin script of our visas. In Tarsus—a "mean city" indeed now that the harbour of Paul's day is silted up and folk wander among past ruins with that typically Turkish aimlessness that complements so strangely their equally typical vigour and independence—in Tarsus the officials sat us out with Turkish coffee and cigarettes under a velvet star-flecked sky in a lovely old paved courtyard with fountain, pond and banana trees. But in Adana, as befitted the final frontier town, our waiting-room was a locked cell with iron-barred window. And inspection (with verifications), lasted just exactly eleven and one-half hours. Benzine at 4/7 a gallon (1/5 in London), is the least item that makes it hard to get into Turkey.



"Dawn showed us a cloud-burst wash-out just in front"



Git along, little dogie, git along!



A bridge near Adana, "the final frontier town"



What's a kiss between friends?