

Kutchuk Huseyin.

William R. Cramer (ca. 1925)

The hot wind blowing from the North East had died away with the fall of evening. The musical tinkle of the ore laden buckets travelling along the aerial ropeway cable, followed by the clatter of their entry into the terminal station and the rumble of the ore discharging through the chutes had been stilled. Men and women workers drawing water from the single deep well for their ablutions before the evening prayer had retired to their quarters to cook the evening meal. Over the village, brooding in the sweltering heat of approaching night, a great stillness prevailed, now broken by the chirping and whirring of countless insects.

I had just lighted the oil lamp in the little office giving on to the garden when the door opened and a short, stockily built man in his thirties, clothed in the grey and black gaiters, short trunks and waistcoat peculiar to the peasant of the locality, walked into the room. After the prescribed greeting of Aksham Sherifler Hayir Olsun (may the sacredness of the evening be beneficial to you) had been exchanged and the ceremonial cup of coffee had been drunk to the accompaniment of an exchange of news on such banalities as the state of the crops and the weather, the visitor straightened up and said: "I bring you the compliments of Kutchuk Huseyin".

Some years after the first world war, having graduated in Civil Engineering in London, I had accepted an offer of employment by a firm holding concessions for the extraction and transport of emery ore in South Western Turkey in Asia. An aerial ropeway, 12 kilometres in length and linking the nearest mineral deposits to the terminal station at the little village of Dip Sahrinj, near the small town of Milas, already existed. Small residential and office buildings together with stores, stables and outhouses were located at this point and since payments to personnel and workers were effected here, moderately large sums of money were usually available. It was my first job and I had gone to some pains to study the Turkish language.

The end of the decade preceding the year 1930 found the country not yet settled down completely after the bitter struggle of the War of Independence. Widely spaced villages served by narrow and precipitous tracks, arid limestone peaks, rugged gorges and dense pine forests where the wolf, the panther and the wild boar still roamed unmolested presented opportunities for the practice of outlawry and brigandage.

Warned, shortly after my arrival, that a brigand band, captained by one Kutchuk Huseyin (little Huseyin) by name, was operating in the neighbourhood I had decided to engage two night watchmen whose services in the event of a raid would be limited to giving timely warning. It was with a feeling of apprehension therefore that I heard my visitor say: "I bring you the compliments of Kutchuk Huseyin". "Return my compliments and convey my thanks to Kutchuk Huseyin, what are his wishes?" I asked. "Kutchuk Huseyin has heard that you have engaged two night watchmen and that you have done this thing for fear that he might molest you. Does he not often see you riding alone on horse back along the lonely forest paths and could he not capture you and hold you to ransom if his intentions were evil? But he hears nothing but good of your Company, how that the workers are well and regularly paid, are provided with comfortable lodgings and are treated with justice and kindness. He has sent me to ask you to dismiss the night watchmen and to assure you that you and yours are under his protection and when this has been made known (here he leaned forward and his black eyes flashed) none will dare to trouble you." He left as unobtrusively as he had come. Enquiries carried out later convinced me that my guest had been none other than Kutchuk Huseyin himself.

Many years have elapsed since occurred the incident related above and during this period of over thirty years, lived mostly in the less developed parts of the country, I have been a witness to countless examples of the kindness, the loyalty and the hospitality of its people. But, clear and unforgettable through the fog of the years, stands out in my memory this act of generosity of Kutchuk Huseyin, one of the last of the Turkish brigands with honour.