Paradise Lost

Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of Islam's City of Tolerance

GILES MILTON

SCEPTRE

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Endpapers: View of Smyrna before 1922 (Getty Images/Hulton Archive).
Smyrna on Fire, September 1922 (Corbis).

Maps by Martin Collins

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For Guy

Ex Oriente Lux (Out of the Orient, light)

The motto of Smyrna's Ionian University, due to open its doors to all – irrespective of race or religion – in September 1922

The strange thing was, he said, how they screamed every night at midnight . . . We were in the harbour and they were on the pier and at midnight they started screaming. We used to turn the searchlight on them to quiet them. That always did the trick.

Ernest Hemingway, *On the Quai at Smyrna*

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List of Characters

British

David Lloyd George	Britain's pro-Greek Prime Minister
Arnold Toynbee	Historian; war reporter for the Manchester Guardian
Sir Harry Lamb	British consul-general in Smyrna, 1922
Reverend Charles Dobson	Anglican vicar in Smyrna, 1922
Grace Williamson	Nurse at Smyrna's English Nursing Home

Levantine

Magdalen Whittall	Fearsome matriarch of the Whittall dynasty
Herbert Octavius Whittall	Magdalen's eleventh child
Edward Whittall	Herbert's genial older brother
Edmund Giraud	Yachtsman and one of Magdalen's 91 grandchildren
Hortense Wood	Spinster and diarist; eyewitness to the events of 1922
Fernand de Cramer	Hortense's young nephew

American

Dr Alexander Maclachlan	President of American International College in Paradise
George Horton	American consul in Smyrna
Mark Bristol	American High Commissioner in Constantinople
Minnie Mills	Director of Smyrna's American Collegiate Institute for Girls

Asa Jennings	Employee of Smyrna's YMCA and director of rescue operation
Esther Lovejoy	Doctor who played leading role in humanitarian rescue

Greek

Eleftherios Venizelos	Greek Prime Minister and architect of the 'Big Idea'
Aristeidis Stergiadis	Greek governor of Smyrna, 1919–1922
Metropolitan Chrysostom	Greek religious hierarch and staunch nationalist

Turkish

Rahmi Bey	Pro-Allied Ottoman governor of Smyrna during the First World War
Enver Pasha	One of triumvirate ruling Turkey since 1908 Young Turk revolution
Mehmet Talaat Be,	Second member of triumvirate
Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk)	Leader of nationalist movement; creator of modern Turkey
Halide Edib	Prominent nationalist and close colleague of Kemal

Armenian

Dr Garabed Harcherian	Senior physician at Armenian National Hospital
Rose Berberian	Young Armenian eyewitness to the violence
Hovakim Uregian	Armenian eyewitness to outbreak of fire

Acknowledgements

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In Turkey, I owe a debt of gratitude to Brian Giraud, whose helpfulness, knowledge and network of friends and acquaintances opened many doors during my time in Izmir. He introduced me to Renée Steinbuchel, to whom I am most grateful for allowing me to photocopy the treasured last diary of her great aunt, Hortense Wood. Renée also supplied me with many of her family's letters, as well as the graphic despatches written by Fernand de Cramer. As far as I am aware, none of this important material has been used in any book previously written about the events of 1922.

Thank you to Daphne Aliberti for sharing her reminiscences about her Smyrniot forebears over a pleasurable coffee morning; to Willy Buttigieg, the British consul in Izmir, whose family have lived in the city for generations and who proved a fount of knowledge. He set up an interview with the nonagenarian Alfred Simes, for which I am most grateful.

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working in the fig trade; and to local journalist, Melih Gursoy.

In Greece, I am indebted to Michalis Varlas, Manager of the Genealogy project at the Foundation of the Hellenic World. He shared with me his research into Greece's venture into Asia Minor and introduced me to Petros Brussalis and other elderly survivors from the events of 1922. I am also most grateful to Stavros Anestides and the staff and librarians of the excellent Centre for Asia Minor Studies. Thank you to Daphne Kapsali for accompanying me to Athens and acting as interpreter and translator. All of the eyewitness accounts contained in the important Greek anthologies, *Exodos* and *Martyries* (full references can be found in the Notes and Sources) were translated by her. I also wish to thank the staff of the Gennadius Library in Athens, where many rare pamphlets (both Greek and Turkish) are held.

In North America, I wish to thank Marjorie Housepain Dobkin, who shared her Smyrna researches with me and whose excellent *Smyrna, 1922*, remains required reading. Thank you to Barbara Jackson for supplying me with Ian Wallace's reminiscences; and to John Hobbins of McGill University, Quebec, for his help and advice.

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In England, I wish to thank Yolande Whittall for her help and enthusiasm for my project. She put me in touch with many descendants of her extended family, including Betty McKernan, Maya Donelan and Brian Giraud.

I am most grateful to Victoria Solomonides of the Greek

Consulate in London for sharing her views on Aristeidis Stergiadis. Her PhD thesis on Smyrna – still, alas, unpublished – is required reading for anyone who wants to understand why the Greek invasion of Asia Minor was doomed to failure.

Thank you to Bruce Clark of *The Economist* for sharing his far-reaching network of contacts. His recently published book on the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, *Twice a Stranger*, is an invaluable study of the population exchange.

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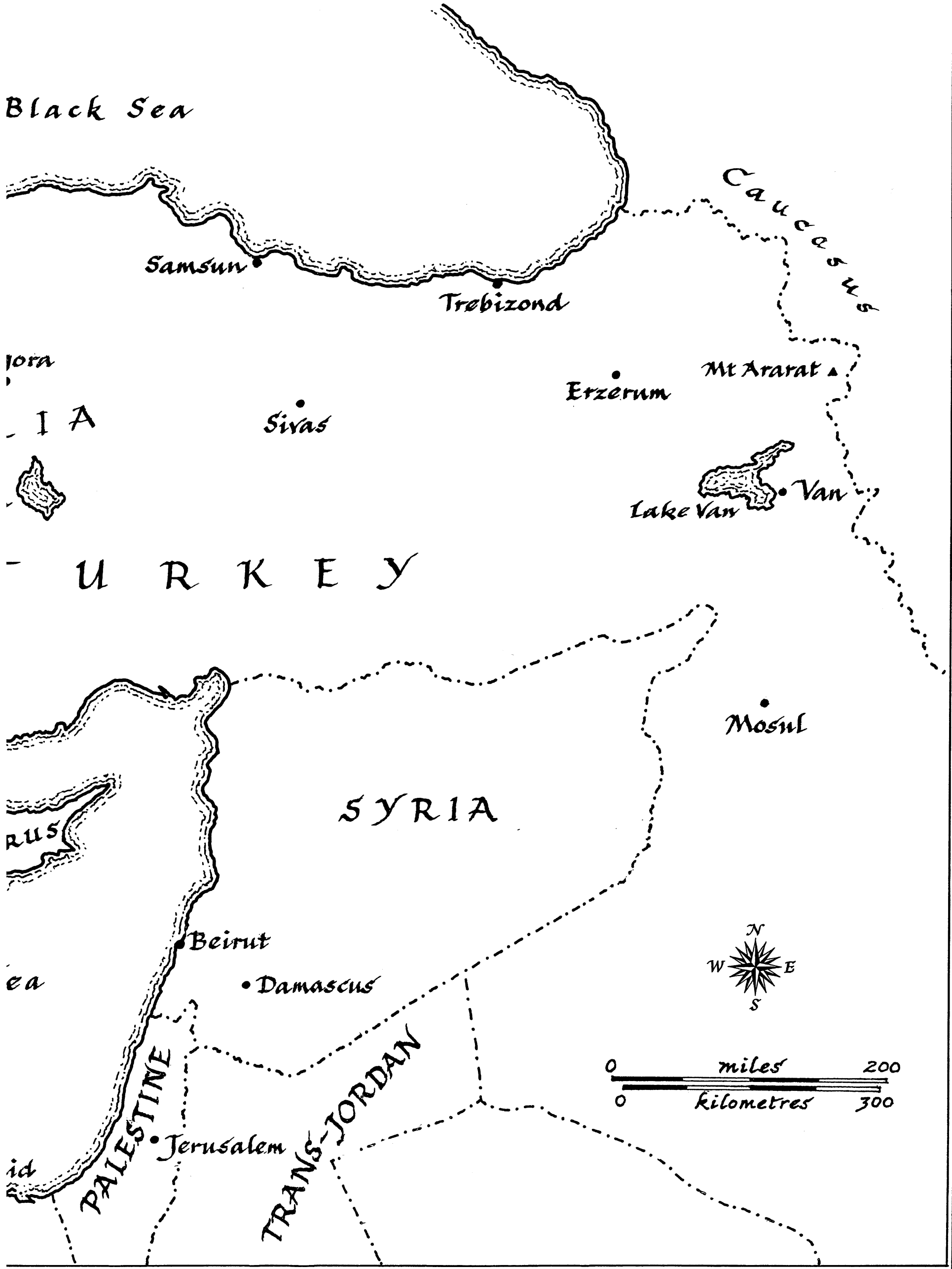
Also, to the staff at the Institute of Historical Research; Colingdale Newspaper Library; the Imperial War Museum; the librarians at St Anthony's College, Oxford, and to the ever helpful staff at the National Archives in Kew, where much of the research for this book was undertaken; to the staff of the British Library and London Library, where a special mention must be made for Christopher Phipps, who produced the index for this book.

I wish to record my thanks to my late literary agent, Maggie Noach, who represented me for more than a decade and became a good friend in the process. She died suddenly in 2006, when the book was still in its early stages. Thank you, also, to my editor, Roland Philipps, who displayed such enthusiasm for the project, and to Lisa Highton, Heather Rainbow and Juliet Brightmore. I am most grateful to Paul Whyles for once again reading the manuscript and suggesting much needed changes.

Lastly, a huge thank you to my three girls, Madeleine, Héloïse and Aurélia; and to my wife, Alexandra, *pour tout*.

Magny, November, 2007

TURKEY AND


GREECE : 1922
Black Sea
Caucasus
Samsun
Trebizond
Erzerum
Mt Ararat
Sivas
Van
Lake Van
SYRIA
Mosul
Beirut
Damascus
PALESTINE
Jerusalem
TRANS-JORDAN
N
W
E
S
0
miles
200
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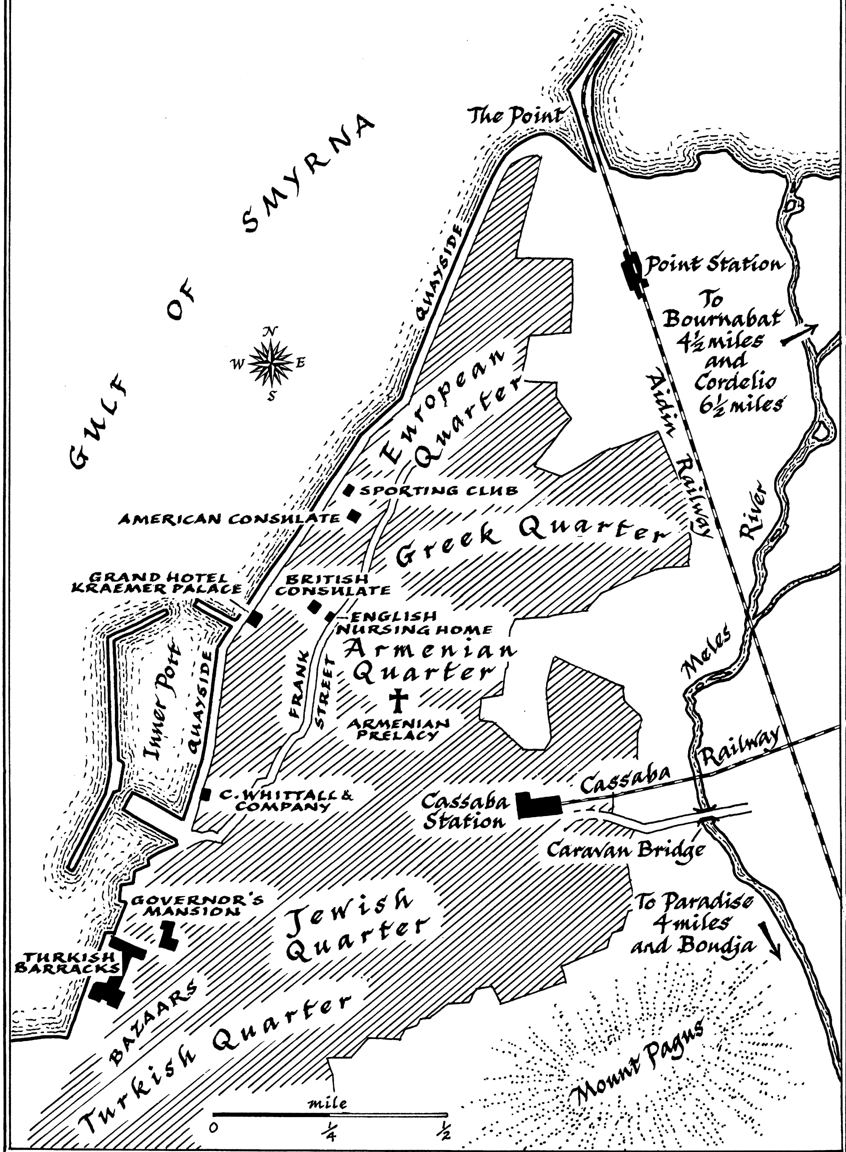
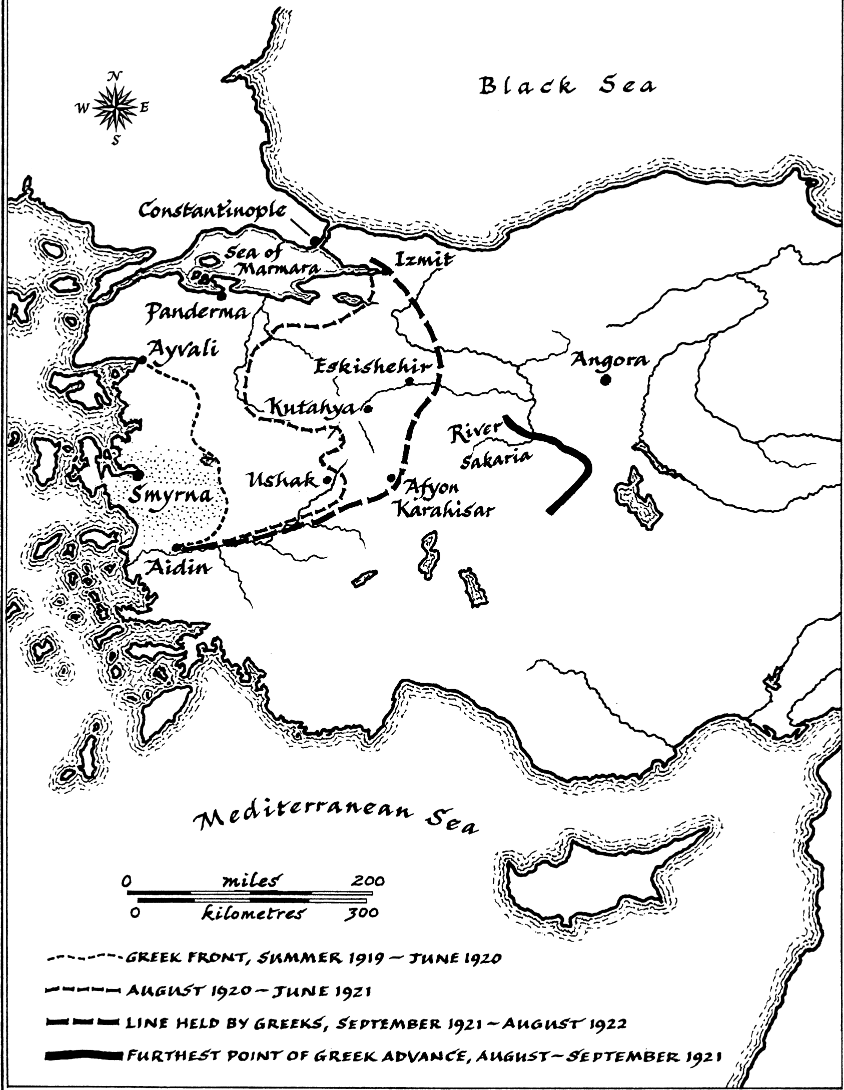
kilometres
300



SMYRNA : 1922
GULF OF SMYRNA
The Point
QUAYSIDE
Point Station
To Bournabat 4½ miles and Cordelio 6½ miles
N
W
E
S
European Quarter
Aidin Railway
River
SPORTING CLUB
AMERICAN CONSULATE
Greek Quarter
GRAND HOTEL KRAEMER PALACE
BRITISH CONSULATE
ENGLISH NURSING HOME
Armenian Quarter
Inner Port
QUAYSIDE
FRANK STREET
ARMENIAN PRELACY
Meles
Railway
Cassaba
Cassaba Station
C. WHITTALL & COMPANY
Caravan Bridge
GOVERNOR'S MANSION
Jewish Quarter
To Paradise 4 miles and Bondja
TURKISH BARRACKS
BAZAARS
Turkish Quarter
Mount Pagus
mile
0
¼
½

THE GREEK MILITARY ADVANCE



A Note on Sources

The source material for *Paradise Lost* has been gathered largely from unpublished letters and diaries written by the great Levantine dynasties who had made Smyrna their home. These writings, which were never intended for publication, were often written at speed and in the most desperate circumstances.

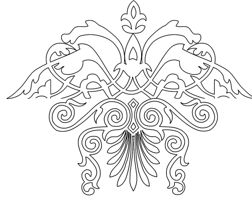
Although many of the Levantine authors held British nationality, they had never lived in Britain and often spoke six or seven languages. This gave rise to a delightfully quirky and eccentric style in their private musings. I decided against correcting their numerous grammatical errors. But I have standardised spelling, provided translations for Turkish words and phrases and supplied full names whenever the author uses initials.

There is currently no archive of the Smyrniot Levantine families and their heritage is in danger of being lost. It is the author's intention to deposit all the documents collected during his researches in Exeter University Library, which already houses a portion of the Whittall family records.

PART ONE

Paradise

Wheel of Fortune



The Turkish cavalry presented a magnificent spectacle as it cantered along the waterfront. The horsemen sat high in their saddles, their scimitars unsheathed and glinting in the sun. On their heads they wore black Circassian fezzes adorned with the crescent and star. As they rode, they cried out, '*Korkma! Korkma!*' 'Fear not! Fear not!'

Their entry into the city of Smyrna on 9 September 1922 was watched by thousands of anxious inhabitants. On the terrace of the famous Sporting Club, a group of British businessmen rose to their feet in order to catch a better view of the historic scene. From the nearby Greek warehouses, the packers and stevedores spilled out onto the quayside. 'Long Live Kemal,' they cried nervously, praising the man who would soon acquire the sobriquet Ataturk.

News of the troops' arrival quickly spread to the American colony of Paradise, where Dr Alexander MacLachlan, director of the American International College, was keeping a watchful eye for signs of trouble. He ran up the Stars and Stripes over the college building as a precaution and jotted down some contingency plans. Yet he remained sanguine in the face of the day's events. When the British consul, Sir Harry Lamb, had offered to help with the evacuation of American citizens, MacLachlan politely declined. 'I felt we were not

taking any risk by remaining at our post,' he later wrote.

Throughout the course of the day, Smyrna held its breath. The Turkish cavalry's triumphant entry came at the end of a brutal, three-year war with Greece – a war fought on Turkish territory in which Britain, and other Western powers, had aided and armed the Greeks.

Now, it was feared that there would be a backlash. Smyrna was known throughout the world of Islam for having a majority Christian population and there were concerns that the newly victorious Turkish army would sweep into the city to unleash a terrible fury on the infidel inhabitants. This, after all, was a city whose gaze had long been turned westwards towards Greece and the warm waters of the Aegean. Smyrna had little in common with the barren hinterlands of central Anatolia from whence the Turkish cavalry had come. She had a Greek population that was at least twice that of Athens and the reminders of her great Byzantine heritage were to be found scattered throughout the city. In the candlelit gloom of her cuspidated churches, Orthodox priests chanted dirges for the soul of St Polycarp, martyred here in the second century. Even at that early date, Smyrna had an impeccable Christian pedigree. St John the Divine had named the city one of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor.

By 1922, its Christian population included Greeks, Armenians, Levantines, Europeans and Americans. Many feared that St John's apocalyptic vision of doom was about to come to pass. There were dark predictions of a return to the days of old, when conquering Islamic armies were sanctioned three days of pillage, following the capture of a resisting town.

Yet there had been no resistance to the Turkish army and few inhabitants could really believe that their city would meet with such a fate. Smyrna had long been celebrated as a beacon of tolerance – home to scores of nationalities with a shared outlook and intertwined lives. It was little wonder that the

Americans living in the metropolis had named their colony Paradise; life here was remarkably free from prejudice and many found it ironic that they had to come to the Islamic world to find a place that had none of the bigotry so omnipresent at home.

There was another reason why Smyrna's inhabitants were confident that the city would be spared. In the harbour there was the reassuring presence of no fewer than twenty-one battleships, including eleven British, five French and several Italian. There were also three large American destroyers, among them the newly arrived USS *Litchfield*. Everyone believed that these ships would deter the Turkish army from committing any excesses.

By mid-afternoon of that day, the population breathed a collective sigh of relief. It was clear that the doom-laden predictions were wrong. Smyrna had been spared. In the tranquil suburb of Bournabat, where the great Levantine dynasties had their mansions, there were many who felt that the sense of panic had been overblown from the start. Hortense Wood had spent much of the morning peering out of her drawing-room window at the passing cavalry. Now, she felt that the danger had passed. 'Perfect discipline and perfect quiet,' she noted in her diary. 'Not a shot was fired. And thus came the change from Greek to Turkish administration, in perfect tranquillity and against all expectations and apprehensions.'

She also felt vindicated. She had confidently predicted to her family that people were making a fuss about nothing and had insisted all along that Smyrna would fall peacefully into Turkish hands.

Others actually welcomed the arrival of the Turkish army after long days of uncertainty. Grace Williamson, an English nurse living in the city, was relieved and happy that it was all over. 'What a week we have spent!!' she wrote. 'There was hardly a bit of trouble . . . No shooting on the streets! Thank God.

Such a relief, everyone is inwardly delighted to have the Turks back again.'

What happened over the two weeks that followed must surely rank as one of the most compelling human dramas of the twentieth century. Innocent civilians – men, women and children from scores of different nationalities – were caught in a humanitarian disaster on a scale that the world had never before seen. The entire population of the city became the victim of a reckless foreign policy that had gone hopelessly, disastrously wrong.

The American consul, George Horton, witnessed scenes of such horror that he would carry them with him to the grave. 'One of the keenest impressions which I brought away from Smyrna,' he wrote, 'was a feeling of shame that I belonged to the human race.'

The *New York Times* put it even more succinctly. 'Smyrna Wiped Out', was its headline. It was not hyperbole; it was a bold statement of fact.

Smyrna's hundreds of thousands of refugees clung to the hope that the Western governments who had done so much to precipitate the crisis would now come to their rescue. But those governments displayed a shocking callousness towards their own nationals, choosing to abandon the refugees to their fate in order not to jeopardise the chance of striking rich deals with the newly victorious Turkish regime.

Amidst the suffering there were to be acts of supreme heroism – men and women who risked their lives to save those caught up in a nightmare beyond their control. One of these individuals would launch what was to prove the most extraordinary rescue operation of the modern age, even though it seemed as if a miracle would be needed to save the vast crowds before they were consumed by the unfolding cataclysm.

No individual was able to avert the even greater crisis that occurred in the aftermath of Smyrna's destruction. Almost two

million people were to find themselves caught up in a catastrophe on a truly epic scale, one that sent shock waves across Europe and America and was to cause the downfall of two governments. As families were forcibly evicted from their ancestral homes – and 2,000 years of Christian civilisation in Asia Minor came to an abrupt end – a vibrant new country came into being. Ataturk's modern Turkish republic arose from the ashes of Smyrna.

The events of September 1922 are fast becoming just another chapter of history. Yet to a handful of people – all in their nineties – the destruction of Smyrna continues to haunt them every day of their lives.

'Now, how would you like to converse?' asks Petros Brussalis, ninety-three years of age when I visit him at his home in Athens. He speaks with an accent as crisp and old-fashioned as a Huntley and Palmer biscuit. 'Greek? French? English? My English is a trifle rusty these days.'

His enunciation is that of his Edwardian governess; his sentiments are those of a man who has never quite recovered from the loss of his childhood. 'Forget Constantinople, Alexandria and Beirut,' he says. 'Smyrna before the *katastrophi* was the most cosmopolitan place on earth.'

The city into which Petros was born was one in which fig-laden camels nudged their way past the latest Newton Bennett motor car; in which the strange new vogue of the cinema was embraced as early as 1908. There were seventeen companies dealing exclusively in imported Parisian luxuries. And if Petros's father cared to read a daily newspaper, he had quite a choice: eleven Greek, seven Turkish, five Armenian, four French and five Hebrew, not to mention the ones shipped in from every capital city in Europe.

The Brussalis family were well-to-do merchants whose offices stood in the heart of Smyrna. In the late afternoon, when the

infamous *imbat* or west wind blew in off the sea, Petros's father and mother would dress up in their finery and join the evening *passeggiata* along the Aegean waterfront. The imposing banks and clubhouses that lined the quayside were tangible symbols of Smyrna's prosperity. The Sporting Club, Grand Hotel Kraemer Palace and Théâtre de Smyrne were built on such a grand scale that their whitewashed walls, glimmering in the sunshine, were visible for miles out to sea.

Amidst the grandeur there was intense human activity. Hawkers and street traders peddled their wares along the mile-long quayside. Water sellers jangled their brass bowls; *hodjas* – Muslim holy men – mumbled prayers in the hope of earning a copper or two. And impecunious legal clerks, often Italian, would proffer language lessons at knock-down prices.

'You saw all sorts . . .' recalled the French journalist, Gaston Deschamps. 'Swiss hoteliers, German traders, Austrian tailors, English mill owners, Dutch fig merchants, Italian brokers, Hungarian bureaucrats, Armenian agents and Greek bankers.'

The waterfront was lined with lively bars, brasseries and shaded café gardens, each of which tempted the palate with a series of enticing scents. The odour of roasted cinnamon would herald an Armenian patisserie; apple smoke spilled forth from hookahs in the Turkish cafés. Coffee and olives, crushed mint and armagnac: each smell was distinctive and revealed the presence of more than three dozen culinary traditions. Caucasian pastries, *boeuf à la mode*, Greek game pies and Yorkshire pudding could all be found in the quayside restaurants of Smyrna.

It was not just the Brussalises' noses that enjoyed the evening promenade. The arias of frivolous Italian operettas drifted out from the open-air bandstands while the honky-tonk of ragtime conveyed a message of fun from the more outré establishments. Consul George Horton, a contemporary of Petros's parents, recalled that each café 'had its favourite *politakia* or orchestra of

guitars, mandolins and zithers and the entertainers grew increasingly animated as more and more wine was consumed'.

Horton had lived in many places in the world, but nowhere caught his imagination like Smyrna. It had the climate of southern California, the architecture of the Côte d'Azur and the allure of nowhere else on earth. 'In no city in the world did East and West mingle physically in so spectacular a manner,' he wrote.

The city was dominated by the Greeks. They numbered 320,000 and had a virtual monopoly on the trade in the sticky figs, sultanas and apricots for which Smyrna was so famous. They also owned many of the city's flagship businesses, including the two largest department stores, Xenopoulo and Orisdiback, which sold imported goods from across the globe.

It was in this first emporium, more than eight decades ago, that the young Petros Brussalis got his first taste of luxury. He remembers accompanying his mother and three haughty aunts on extravagant shopping expeditions that included obligatory pit-stops at these two stores. The Brussalis family lived in Cordelio on the far side of the bay. From here, a short ferry ride brought them to the city centre – an exciting adventure for a five-year-old boy, although Petros disliked being dragged from store to store by four chattering women, who insisted on dressing in fancy hats for their shopping outings. 'I didn't like it at all,' he recalls with half a smile. 'Even as a very young boy I thought it was beneath my dignity. Worse still, my aunts would give me their packages to carry.'

But young Petros's eyes would widen when his female entourage swept into Xenopoulo on Frank Street. '*Everything* was imported from overseas,' he recalls. 'Biscuits, big tins, chocolates, lemon drops. To this day I can remember the names of them all.'

The Greeks had left their mark on every walk of life. Smyrna

boasted scores of Orthodox churches and almost as many schools. The young Aristotle Onassis was one of the many local Greeks who attended the famous Aronis School.

Many of the city's best hotels, brasseries and cafés were also run by Greeks, establishments like the Acropoli, Luxembourg and North Pole. Yet Greek ownership did not lead to an exclusively Greek clientele. The Frenchman, Louis de Launay, passed one café and recalled seeing 'green turbans, red fezzes, embroidered Armenian hats, pink on a black backing, and the gleaming glass of the hookah pipes'.

The centre of Greek business was on the waterfront, where the wealthiest merchants had their trading houses. One of these was Petros's godfather, a fig exporter who sold his fruit to merchants from far and wide.

'You'd hear every language under the sun on the quayside,' recalls Petros, 'and see ships from everywhere in the world. There were so many of them that they'd have to moor with their sterns to the quay.'

The harbour was indeed one of the great sights of Smyrna. There were thirty-three steamboat companies catering for passenger liners arriving almost daily from London, Liverpool, Marseilles, Genoa, Brindisi, Trieste and Constantinople, as well as all the principal ports of the Levant.

As merchandise and fruit was loaded onto the merchant ships, Petros's godfather would select the ripest and stickiest figs and present them to his young charge. 'I also remember him choosing one special crate which he presented each year to the King and Queen of England.'

Greeks could be found living right across the city; the European community congregated in their own quarter just behind the quayside. Alfred Simes, a sprightly ninety-seven when I met him, recalls street festivities taking place almost every night of the week. 'In the evenings, the maids would sweep the dust

from the street and place armchairs outside the houses,' he says. 'Of course there were very few cars in those days. Everyone came out into the street after their supper and offered cakes and sweets to their neighbours and friends. At Christmas, we'd all sing carols in French, Greek, English and Italian.'

Frank Street was the principal artery that ran through the European quarter. It had been laid out long before the advent of the motor car and was very narrow – too narrow, even, to cope with the human traffic. Yet in spite of the bustle, heat, noise and collisions with donkeys and camels, it remained the city's most popular street for shopping. When Marcel Mirtil came here on his world tour in 1909, it was the hair salons that caught his attention. 'In sheer size, they were reminiscent of ballrooms.'

Here, too, were the city's principal banks – the Imperial Ottoman, Credit Lyonnais, the British Oriental and the Bank of Vienna. No fewer than seven countries had their own postal systems that worked alongside the Ottoman system. And there were several dozen maritime insurance companies.

One of Alfred Simes's earliest memories is standing on tiptoes at his bedroom window and watching a daily procession of bowlers, fezzes and homburgs passing along Boulevard Aliotti, the street where his family lived. 'The gentlemen of business were always so impeccably smart,' he recalls. 'They wore the finest tailored suits and hats.'

The European quarter's most ostentatious building was the Grand Hotel Kraemer Palace, with its gigantic foyer and capacious dining rooms.

> In the first salon, [wrote one French hotel guest] there was a group of English visitors, crimson with sunburn (it was a Thomas Cook tour, just returned from Jerusalem) . . . There were Young Turks from an operetta, fezzes on their heads; an open bed spread out in a corner; exotic rugs

> from Turkestan and Persia hanging on the walls; on a small table inlaid with mother-of-pearl were placed dirty plates, and one could hear constantly one of the waiters saying, '*Oui, Monsieur le Prince . . .*'

Baedeker's guidebook particularly recommended the hotel for its ice-cold pilsen beer imported from Munich. The Kraemer Palace also offered German newspapers and had the city's finest brasserie, serving such specialities as *sauerbraden* and *blanquette d'agneau* to a bustling international clientele.

> English, Greeks and Germans coming and going; some [guests] wearing Hindu headgear, others in the latest fashions from London. The Thomas Cook tour was at the table; its guide at the head, making a little speech between each course. They were quite charming, these English, as pink as cooked lobsters with their straw sunhats, veils attached, and a vacant expression that is so characteristic of the English young things, who are always in the habit of going, 'Ooh!'

Adjacent to the European area of Smyrna was the vibrant Armenian quarter, home to another of Smyrna's wealthy communities. The Armenians, who numbered around 10,000, had a reputation for being diligent and conscientious. One of those who lived here – a doctor named Garabed Hatcherian – would later write a chronicle of his life in the city. 'After three years of hard work in Smyrna I had achieved a measure of success,' he recorded on the opening page of his notebook. 'I was doing well, having become the physician of a great number of wealthy families.' Similar sentiments are echoed time and again in the jottings of Smyrna's Armenians. They were indeed 'doing well' and they had learned to enjoy their bourgeois creature comforts.

The nearby Jewish quarter had traditionally been one of the

most squalid, but by 1909, when Marcel Mirtil visited, it had been modernised and given sanitation. It nevertheless retained the same picturesque quality that had charmed the travellers of the previous century. The women still wore traditional Oriental costumes and had a reputation for beauty, although to Mirtil's critical eye their girth was rather 'too opulent'. The Jews were equally at home doing business with Greeks or Turks. 'Extremely polyglot,' wrote Gaston Deschamps, 'they're able to speak Turkish with the Turks and Greek with the Greeks.' He was interested to note that among themselves they still spoke a dialect of Spanish, a legacy of their expulsion from Spain in 1492.

The Americans were rather more recent arrivals. They started to pour into Smyrna in the late nineteenth century and soon became one of the city's distinct communities. They lived for the most part in Paradise – a large colony on the fringes of the city – and founded important educational and humanitarian institutions, including the American International College, an Intercollegiate Institute, a YMCA and a YWCA. They also owned the Standard Oil Company, whose big steel drum could be seen at the far end of the quayside. The Americans employed many thousands of workers – especially the MacAndrews and Forbes liquorice firm – and were respected for their charitable endeavours.

They were ably represented by their gregarious consul, George Horton, who was at the centre of every social activity. 'Teas, dances, musical afternoons and evenings were given in the luxurious salons of the rich Armenians and Greeks,' he wrote. 'There were four large clubs: the *Cercle de Smyrne*, frequented mostly by British, French and Americans; the "Sporting" with a fine building and garden on the quay; the Greek Club and a Country Club near the American college with excellent golf links and a race course.'

Horton's easygoing nature and determination to enjoy himself

earned him and his fellow Americans much popularity among the Smyrniots.

Foreign tourists arriving on the daily passenger liners were always taken to the picturesque Turkish quarter of the city, which sprawled up the rocky flanks of Mount Pagus. This area was the most overcrowded and dilapidated, a maze of makeshift houses, cafés, little stores and Muslim shrines.

The majority of the 140,000 people who lived here were artisans and craftsmen '[employed] in the manufacture of copper utensils, camel bells, horseshoes, locks, chains [and] drums for packing figs'. So wrote Sir Charles Wilson, author of *Murray's Handbook*, who added that these were the only Turks who still dressed in traditional costume. Visitors flocked to the souk in search of the fabled Orient, but even in the poorest part of town, they would find the same imported items that were on sale elsewhere in the city. Louis de Launay noticed 'all sorts of bits and bobs from Europe. Here, a stall resembling the Louvre, there, one that's more like Bon Marché. Boots that are "ready to wear"; Indian cottons from Manchester, elasticated bowties, Swiss watches; stall holders in frock coats and fezzes; buyers in Western dress.'

Although the Turks played a marginal role in the commerce of Smyrna, they dominated the politics of the city. The Ottoman governor of Smyrna was traditionally always a Turkish national and his primary task was to represent the interests of all the different nationalities who had made the city their home. A glance at the 1913 census reveals why his job was not easy. Smyrna's Christians outnumbered the Muslims by more than two to one; his was a majority Christian city in a resolutely Muslim world. To many Turks – and especially to government ministers in Constantinople – Smyrna had forever been the city of the infidel.

'*Vous êtes interessé par Rahmi Bey?*' said a clipped voice on the

end of the telephone. 'You must visit me. Today. At four o'clock.'

I had come on the trail of the affable, irascible and benignly despotic Rahmi Bey, governor of Smyrna at the time when Petros Brussalis and Alfred Simes were still young boys. Rahmi's elderly daughter-in-law, the tantalisingly worldly Esma Dino Deyer, still lives in the Ottoman mansion that was for a brief period the governor's private residence. From the outside, it presented a picture of sorry decline. Newspaper-sized sheets of paintwork had detached themselves from the rendering and the latticed shutters were veiled in dust. But inside, its elegant marble atrium was redolent of a more refined epoch.

I was ushered into the principal drawing room, where an imposing portrait of Rahmi Bey hung above the fireplace. We sat in near-darkness, for the shutters were kept closed and showed no signs of having been opened for half a century or more. On the floor there were richly coloured carpets from Persia and Turkmenistan. On the settle there was a pistol and a scimitar.

'He was rich, extremely cultivated and spoke impeccable French,' said Esma, as she slotted a Balkan cigarette into an ivory holder. 'And his wife came from an old and distinguished Ottoman family.'

Rahmi was to prove a benevolently devious governor. His machiavellian politicking during the First World War ought to have cost him his life, yet once-secret papers in the National Archives in Kew reveal that Rahmi was always one step ahead of his masters in Constantinople.

Rahmi Bey, in common with many of the city's elite, lived in one of the elegant suburbs that formed a ring around the metropolis. These leafy districts, which had begun life as country villages, were popular with Smyrna's Levantine bourgeoisie.

The Levantines were by far the richest community in the area. Of European descent, but thoroughly versed in the ways of the Orient, they had lived in Turkey since the reign of King

George III. They, more than any other community, had helped to shape Smyrna in their own image – rich, cosmopolitan and of mixed blood and heritage. Their factories and mines employed all, regardless of race or nationality. And they had a concern for their workforce that was patrician in sentiment and philanthropic in outlook. In the dark days of the First World War, many of Smyrna's families would owe their continued existence to the Levantine magnates.

They had the largest financial stake in every commercial activity in the city. They controlled Smyrna's shipping companies, insurance agencies, mines, banks and all of the most profitable import-export businesses. Cotton textiles and carpets were two of the most important exports and had provided the foundations of their vast fortunes. Dried fruit, too, was hugely lucrative. The Levantines also imported many goods to Turkey, including coffee, sugar and furs.

Their businesses were on a truly grand scale. One of the Giraud family's trading wings, the Oriental Carpet Manufacturing Company, employed 150,000 people, many of them inhabitants of Smyrna. The Whittalls' business empire – which included a massive fruit-exporting enterprise – was even larger.

The majority of Levantines lived in Cordelio, Boudja or Paradise, three of the more expensive and sought-after garden suburbs. They were places of excitement in the early years of the twentieth century, for there was a frisson of danger that was not present in the city itself. When Petros was a young boy, brigands still haunted the snow-dusted peaks of Nymph Dagh that formed the backdrop to the port. And picnic excursions to Lake Tantalus, undertaken in a barouche with Greek bazouki players, could quite easily end in a shoot-out. Gwynneth Giraud, elderly matriarch of the Giraud clan, can still remember her grandmother recounting stories of a running gun battle in the grounds of their suburban mansion. As I sipped Earl Grey tea

in the shade of a chestnut tree, she showed me where brigands had fired pot-shots at her grandfather more than 120 years earlier.

The Girauds lived in the spectacular Levantine colony of Bournabat, where all the most exclusive addresses were to be found. Lying some six miles from the city centre – and dominated by rambling villas and pleasure gardens – Bournabat was home to many of the great dynasties that had done so much to shape Smyrna.

The Giraud family, the Woods and the Patersons, along with many others, all lived in palatial mansions. All, too, commanded vast fortunes. But even among the very rich there was a strict hierarchy of power. There was one family in Bournabat that wielded more influence – and had done more to engender Smyrna's unique spirit – than their surrounding neighbours put together.

Tuesday, 11 March 1902

Dearest Mother,

These are most delightful people. Helen Whittall . . . came to fetch me at 11 and we journeyed up here together . . . Mr Whittall joined us and there were also troops of cousins, for they all live out here. The house is a great big place with high enormous rooms, set in a garden 200 years old, across which a line of splended cypresses runs. The old mother of the tribe, Mr Whittall's mother, lives here, a very old woman who kissed me when I came in. We lunched, after which we walked about in the garden gathering bunches of roses and violets. Mrs Herbert Whittall is a very nice sweet woman, and the girl Helen a dear. It was a stormy day with sudden bursts of rain and bright sun between, so we did nothing more until we had had a cheerful schoolroom tea, after which Mr and Mrs Whittall and I

> went to see a brother of his, Mr Edward Whittall, who is a great botanist and has a most lovely garden. He collects bulbs and sends new varieties to Kew and is well known among gardeners – an interesting man, too, for he is the Vali's [the city governor's] right hand and is consulted by him on all matters, a thing unbeknown before, they say. But these people get on with the Turks. The old sultan, uncle of Abdul Hamed, stayed in this house; it is the only private house which has received a sultan.

When Gertrude Bell visited the Whittalls of Smyrna in the spring of 1902, she caught a tantalising glimpse of a private world. The Whittall family had amassed a spectacular fortune over the previous five decades. By the time King Edward VII came to the throne in distant England, they wielded more influence than at any previous point during their long years in the Orient. Sultan Abdul Aziz had indeed beaten a path to their door, an extraordinary acknowledgement that such trading dynasties were helping to prop up the ailing Ottoman empire. He arrived early and spent the entire day with the Whittalls, inviting local notables to an audience in the large garden marquee. The sultan showed particular interest in the family's private botanical garden and, 'at his own request, was ushered into the Protestant Church at Bournabat, built by Mr Whittall some years previously'. Upon his return to Constantinople, he sent his Minister of Foreign Affairs back to Smyrna with brooches for two of the Whittall ladies: 'a costly souvenir . . . set with large brilliants and pearls'.

Almost forty years had passed since the sultan's 1863 visit and the intervening time had only served to increase the family's fortune. C. Whittall and Company had expanded to become the largest Levantine-owned business in Smyrna. 'My Whittall friends . . . have the bulk of the English trade in their hands,'

noted Bell, 'branch offices all down the southern coast, mines and shooting boxes and properties scattered up and down the S. W. coast of Asia Minor and yachts on the sea.'

Their principal residences were in Bournabat, which was connected by railway to the city. Each member of the family had his or her designated seat on the steam train. Such privileges seemed a part of the natural order of life. After all, the British owned and managed the railway.

Complex marriage alliances had enabled the family to strengthen still further their commercial grip on the metropolis. The Whittalls, Girauds, La Fontaines, Charnauds, Alibertis, Williamsons, Patersons and Reeses (among many others) were all intermarried and all had hundreds of cousins in common. Procreation came about as naturally and annually as the company profits. A brief glance at their family trees reveals extraordinary fecundity and an alarming cocktail of mixed blood. If a Whittall boy married a Giraud girl one year, then it could be expected that a Giraud boy would reciprocate in the year that followed.

The family also had a singular attachment to names, rendering their genealogy well-nigh unintelligible to outsiders. Take the two Whittall brothers, Charlton and James. Charlton's sons were named Charlton and James. And James's sons were named James and Charlton. When one of these Jameses had sons of his own, he named two of them Charlton and one of them James. In time, there were dozens of Jameses and Charltons, all of whom could claim descent from Charlton and James. A family tree recently compiled by a surviving Whittall runs to more than seventy pages and reveals the complexities of Smyrna's intermarried families. '[We] called everyone aunt or uncle to be on the safe side,' recalled one of the Whittall grandchildren in her memoirs.

Matriarch of them all was the formidable Magdalen Whittall, descendant of a pirate-prince, who ruled her family fiefdom with all the swagger of an Oriental despot. She was destined

to remain as head of the family for fully twenty-nine years after the death of her husband. It was she who had welcomed Gertrude Bell to Bournabat; Bell described her as 'mother of the tribe'.

As indeed she was. Magdalen produced thirteen children, ninety-one grandchildren and 256 great-grandchildren – offspring who would together help to shape the character and prosperity of Smyrna. Magdalen, meanwhile, was doing her utmost to shape them. She imposed her will on them with a severity that continued to terrify them long after she had died. Brooking neither dissent nor disobedience, she abhorred any of her children who might dare to call into question her pronouncements on matters concerning the family. 'She ruled over them till the end,' recalled one of her great-granddaughters, 'and during most of her lifetime, her word was law.'

With her imposing manner and unshakeable belief in her own importance, she seemed to embody all the qualities and weaknesses of the Levantines of Smyrna. She expected daily visits from her offspring – for which she would sit in state in the garden of the Big House, awaiting their arrival – and she tolerated no excuse for non-attendance. They called her Old Dudu, a Turkish term of endearment that meant something akin to 'old parrot'.

Magdalen was accustomed to being accompanied by her personal *kavass* or bodyguard, a fearsome bandit who wore 'a scarlet sash-like belt wound three times round his waist and stuck with daggers and pistols and other fierce paraphernalia'. He was always dressed in an embroidered jacket 'over which silver chains hung in tiers round his neck, flashing in the sun with each movement he took as he guided the old lady to her deck chair'.

Magdalen's favourite party of the winter season was the Whittalls' annual Christmas dinner, held in the gilded ballroom of the Big House. It was attended by at least a hundred adult members of the close family and scores of children, all of whom

could claim their bloodline from Magdalen. 'Her Christmas dinner was one of the events of the year,' wrote one of those children, 'and, surrounded by a court of her grown-up children, she received her guests with all the dignity of an Eastern potentate.'

Gertrude Bell was entranced by the formidable Magdalen and her extended family. Industrious yet carefree, their lives seemed a heady blend of patrician duty and footloose frivolity. 'The sons [are] young men now in various Whittall businesses,' she wrote. 'The daughters very charming, very gay. The big gardens touch on one another and they walk in and out of one another's houses all day long, gossiping and laughing. I should think life presents itself nowhere under such easy and pleasant conditions.'

At the time of Bell's visit, the elderly Magdalen's authority was approaching its apogee, yet her power was totemic rather than real. The day-to-day running of the Whittall business empire was in the hands of three of her eight sons: Richard, Edward and Herbert Octavius. Of these, it was Herbert who inherited all the spunk and ebullience of his mother.

He was 'stern and uncompromising' according to one member of the family; 'hard and uncompromising' according to another. Patrician in sentiment, with a strict sense of duty, he remained in Smyrna right up to the terrible events of 1922 and became an important source of information for the British government. His grandchildren joshed among themselves that the initials of his name spelled the word 'HOW', 'but no one added a question mark', recalled one, '[and] no one would have dared to make a joke of it, for he was a formidable man'. A photograph of him taken in about 1910 reveals his sang-froid. Unlike his brothers, smiling and genial, his piercing eyes stare directly and chillingly into the camera.

Herbert was the eleventh of thirteen children and in any other family might have contented himself with a modest career

in the Church. Yet it was he, not his elders, who became the effective head of the company and he who inherited the Big House. It was a perfect reflection of his personality – grand, chilly and austere.

The house had first been acquired by old James Whittall in 1820. Since that time it had been greatly enlarged and embellished so that it now included scores of reception rooms as well as a gilded ballroom, vast dining room, drawing room and library. From these rooms, visitors had a spectacular view of the Magnesia mountains, the cone-shaped Bel Khave and the snow-capped Nymph Dagh, home to ibex and wild boar. Herbert Octavius, a voracious hunter, had the great entrance hall mounted with scores of trophies and stuffed animals. His grandchildren were particularly terrified of an adult black bear that stood guard by the front door, its front paws outstretched and its bare teeth exposed in a snarl.

They were equally scared of their great-aunts. Three of them – Jane, Blanche and Mary – always used to take their afternoon promenade together. 'They were all three widowed at that time,' wrote one of the grandchildren, 'and were dressed in black from head to foot. It was a strange procession. They walked in single file, hardly speaking to each other, having perhaps little in common except a united desire for exercise.' No less frightening was Aunt Coralie. 'Who she was I never knew, but once a year we had to parade in front of her. She had a famous talking parrot and she was reputed not to have washed her hair for years, but always to clean it with eau-de-cologne.'

Not every member of the family chilled the blood quite as much as Herbert Octavius and his widowed sisters. His brother Richard, a partner in the business, was 'open handed [and] of a genial gay disposition'. He was rarely parted from his beloved hookah pipe, which he smoked with as much enthusiasm as the native Turks.

Another of the brothers was Edward, a firm favourite with

the Whittall youngsters. His branch of the family lived in their own vast mansion, which stood just a few minutes' walk from the Big House. Yet there was a world of difference in the feel of the two places. 'It was a most lovable house,' recalled Edward's niece. 'It had the unstudied charm and graciousness which comes from the daily use of beautiful things, and it was alive and without pomp. It rambled all over the place and was madly inconvenient, needing a regiment of servants to keep it going.'

The drawing room and dining room opened onto the winter garden, making them rather dark, and the deep-red velvet curtains added to the impression of twilight, but there were ample treasures to brighten the gloom. 'The dining room shone with silver, and the old-fashioned pergne in the centre was filled with flowers which cascaded down on all sides.' For the children, the only person to be avoided was Marco the head chef, who presided over the kitchen like an autocrat. 'The only time I can remember him being really pleasant was one April Fool's Day,' wrote one of those children many years later, 'when he condescended to fry some cotton-wool in batter and serve it instead of brains to one of our uncles at breakfast.'

Edward Whittall's passion was gardening and he devoted long hours to his spectacular botanical garden that climbed up the hillsides in sweeping terraces. There were Judas trees and ginkgo trees, giant cypresses and cream-flowered magnolias. Giant chestnuts kept the great lawns in shadow during the hottest hours of the day, while turpentine trees added a spicy scent to the air. Swings were attached to the rose arbour. It was a paradise for the numerous young cousins who played here together, refreshing themselves on the juicy oranges and limes that fell from the trees.

Edward Whittall had many glasshouses in which he propagated rare and exotic specimens. He also had a large mountain garden on the slopes of Nymph Dagh, where he grew bulbs, as well as an orchard in the village. He sent tens of thousands

of specimens to the director of Kew Gardens and had a tulip and fritillary named after him. 'Whittall is smiling all over the place,' reads one letter written by Kew's head gardener.

Such frivolous pursuits never took place in the neighbouring Big House, whose garden was formal and filled with 'rather dull shrubs'. Its most distinguishing feature was a long avenue of cypress trees that led to the wrought-iron entrance gates. These gates opened out onto the principal square in Bournabat – the meeting point of five roads, including the main thoroughfare into Smyrna.

Each of the Levantine houses had a Florentine-style loggia situated just outside the gates. This was where the elderly members of the family would gather in late afternoon in order to share gossip and pass on news. All would defer to the elderly Magdalen, who would be flanked by her bodyguard, 'staff in hand, [who] stood by her side like a guard of honour. The leaders of all the caravans passing through the village had to get off their donkeys and bow to her,' recalled one. 'If they neglected to do so, the *kavass* quickly taught them manners.'

The mansion that stood next to the Big House was owned by the Wood family, another formidable dynasty that lived under the patrician care of Mr Ernest. He was a starched and steely individual who, even by Edwardian standards, seemed to belong to another era. He saw it as his duty to take the ladies of the family for rides in his carriage and was punctilious in his observance of correct etiquette. 'No one quite equalled the flourish of these expeditions,' recalled one. 'The handling of the ladies, the correct disposal of their trailing skirts, the arrangements for the comfort of the pugs and the last-minute alterations of these all took time.' The pugs were a source of constant annoyance, as was Yanko, the stone-deaf coachman. 'Whenever Aunt Luisa wanted him to stop, she would batter him with the handle of her umbrella.'

There were many other eccentrics who had made Bournabat

their home. 'Uncle Frank' used to walk around the village with two loaded revolvers, which he would fire into the bushes whenever he was angry. Wallace Turrell was similarly explosive. '[He] was a lawyer by profession,' recalled Eldon Giraud, 'but never won a case as he always came to blows with the judge and would often be put in the same cells as the person he was defending.'

Although the Levantines were the most visible inhabitants of Bournabat, the village was also home to a large number of wealthy Greeks and Armenians – families like the Gasparians and Elmassians – who had elected to build their villas alongside those of the Levantines. The Whittall children mixed freely with the offspring of these families and often accompanied them to services at the local Orthodox church. Years later, one of those children could still recall the Greek priest 'with his long black robes, his stove-pipe hat and his long hair done up in a bun . . . [He] was an awe-inspiring figure'. She added that 'you could imagine him determinedly going up to heaven in a chariot of fire, whereas our quiet, sober little parson would have hesitated to summon a cab'.

The Greek priest was a close friend of the Whittalls and a regular visitor to the Big House. '[He] came to visit the servants and to bless the house at certain times of the year.' So, too, did the local Catholic priest, Père Innocent. '[He] was nothing if not worldly [and] came to breakfast with my uncle and to have long, philosophical discussions with him.'

The patrician families of Bournabat felt at ease in any society, whether Levantine, Greek, Armenian or Turkish. One of the Whittalls remembers her father undertaking winter business expeditions into the heart of Anatolia, dressed in a cloak and astrakhan hat, and looking much like a Turk. 'When he stayed in the houses of his Turkish colleagues, he merged into the surroundings and was perfectly at home. He was used to their

ways and their conversations and was always treated as if he were one of themselves. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, he would eat from the communal dish.'

The working lives of the Levantines were punctuated by long hours of leisure and play. Boating was one of the most popular activities in Edwardian Smyrna and many families owned at least one yacht or yawl. The largest of these was a veritable leviathan, the 160-ton *Abafna* owned by Albert Aliotti, a descendant of one of Smyrna's richest families. The La Fontaines possessed three motor cruisers, as did the Whittalls, while the Giraud family owned a yacht and a motor cruiser. This latter craft was called the *Helen May* and was the plaything of Edmund Giraud, who was married to one of Magdalen Whittall's numerous grandchildren.

Edmund wrote a book entitled *Days off with Rod and Gun*; given that he spent nine months of the year pottering about on the *Helen May*, the days off must have occurred with considerable frequency. 'It was between 1908 and 1914 that Smyrna saw its happiest and most prosperous days,' he wrote, 'and during these few years of prosperity, yachting around Smyrna was at its best.' The yachtsmen would set off on Fridays and arrange an anchorage somewhere off the Turkish coast in order 'to shoot ashore, or to go fishing, or else simply to pass the time pleasantly in each other's company'. A photograph published in Edmund's book depicts them happily at leisure, decked in white flannels and boaters, and sniffing the stiff sea breeze.

Edmund and his friends often sailed to Long Island, which was situated in the middle of the bay. He so enjoyed these outings that in 1913 he conceived of a plan to buy land on the island and build himself a summer house. 'This, however, I found to be a difficult thing to do,' he wrote. 'In that small, isolated community, land was held as a family possession and rarely, if ever, sold. Selling land to an outsider was quite unprecedented.'

But like so many of the Levantines, Edmund was not really

an outsider. He spoke fluent Greek and had excellent contacts in the Greek community. After friendly negotiations, he acquired the land and constructed a cliff-top house with spectacular views across the bay. Henceforth, Long Island became a regular meeting point for all the Levantine yachtsmen of Smyrna.

Edmund's fortune brought many benefits to the village: he wired electricity to the fishermen's cottages and gave money to the community. In return, the villagers brought him gifts of fruit and vegetables. In the dark years that were to follow, they would have even greater reason to be grateful. Edmund's patrician sense of duty would help save the lives of many inhabitants on Long Island.

Boating was just one of many social activities enjoyed by the Levantines. The Whittalls, Girauds and their neighbours also enjoyed spectacular balls and parties in the early years of the twentieth century. In the spring of 1907, for example, Herbert Octavius's favourite club, the 'Sporting', hosted a gala-extravaganza with all-night dancing, music and theatrical interludes. It raised an enormous sum of money for the city's Israelite Orphanage and guaranteed the continued welfare of many homeless boys and girls. The charity gala's organising committee was typically Levantine in its composition: it comprised three Turks, one Greek, one Jew and one Armenian, along with representatives of all the European nationals of Smyrna.

Charitable evenings such as this were by no means unusual; Herbert Octavius was forever receiving letters of appreciation for his charitable work. And he, like all his business associates, poured his fortune into hospitals, nursing homes and orphanages.

Edwardian visitors to Smyrna remained puzzled by these Levantine dynasties, whose origins were as hybrid as the hyacinths that Edward Whittall cultivated in his glasshouses. One British vice-consul described them as 'more exuberantly patriotic than we allow ourselves to appear at home'. Yet they rarely visited

their mother countries and, although the Whittalls chose resolutely English names for their sons, one side of their family was in fact Venetian in origin, descendants of the great Cortazzi dynasty. Other families in Smyrna were more open about their mixed origins. Many families had sons and daughters whose names – Polycarp, Hortense and Francesci – betrayed their convoluted bloodlines.

With their fluency in five or six languages and their extraordinary wealth to boot, the lives of these dynasties seemed untouched by the cares of the world. But unbeknown to Herbert Octavius or any of his neighbours in Bournabat, the Levantines were rapidly entering the twilight of their charmed existence. It fell to an outsider, an eccentric Englishman named William Childs, to warn them – and all the rest of Smyrna's non-Turkish communities – that they were living on borrowed time.