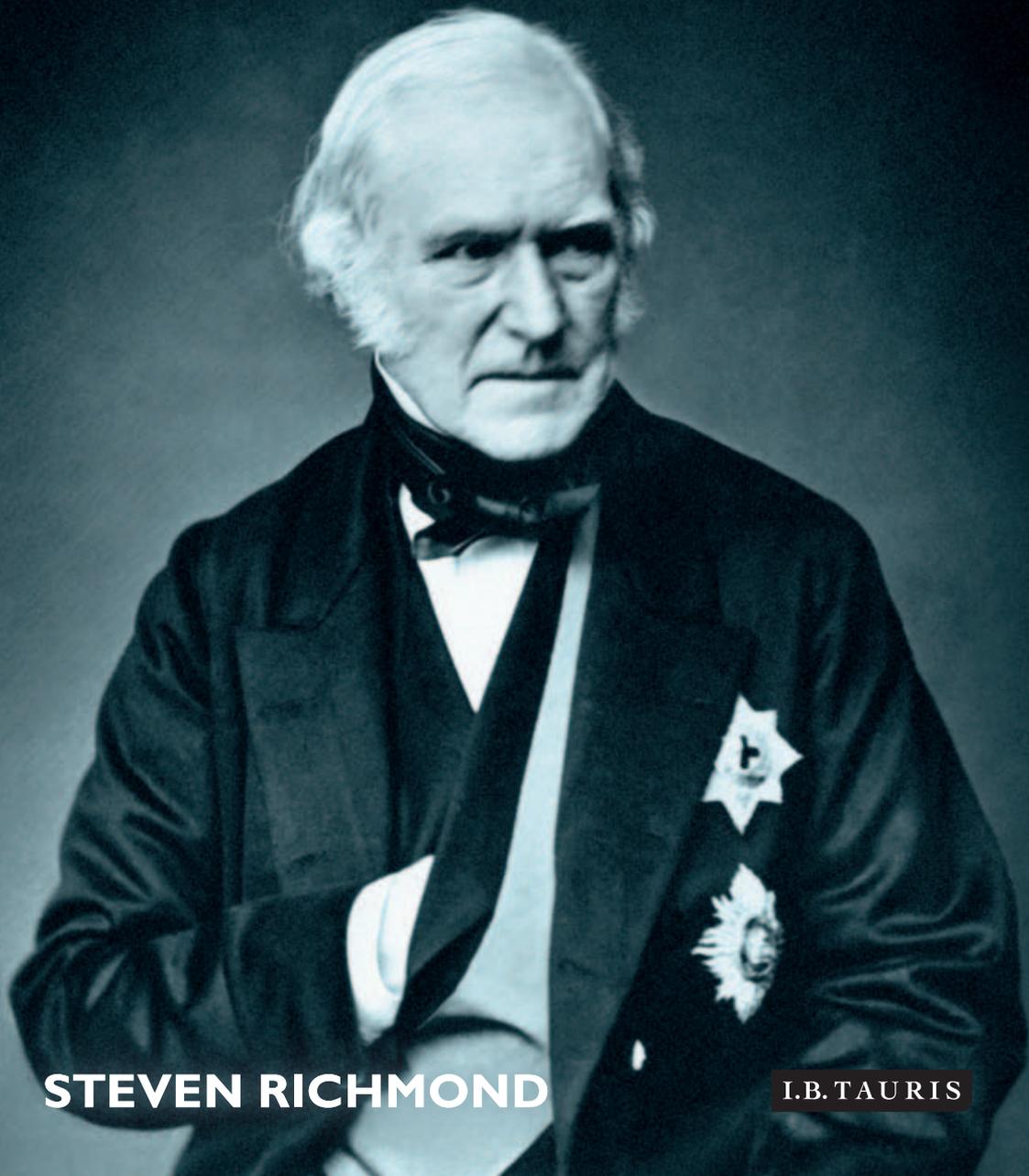


# THE VOICE OF ENGLAND IN THE EAST

**STRATFORD CANNING**

and Diplomacy with the Ottoman Empire



**STEVEN RICHMOND**

**I.B. TAURIS**

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Stratford and Eliza Canning and their daughters Louisa, Catherine and Mary, in the ballroom of the British Embassy at Constantinople, 15 December 1854.

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*To my parents*



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# MAPS

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‘The Ottoman Empire in 1801’

from William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire, 1801–1913*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913.

The Bosphorus

from J. G. Bartholomew, ed. *Handy Reference Atlas of the World*.

Seventh Edition. London: John Walker Co. Ltd., 1904.

Constantinople, Galata, Pera, Scutari

A detail from *The Dardanelles and the Troad. The Bosphorus and Constantinople*, map by Stanford’s Geog. Establishment. [Early 1920s].

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## *Frontispiece*

Stratford and Eliza Canning and their daughters Louisa, Catherine and Mary, in the ballroom of the British Embassy at Constantinople, 15 December 1854.

From a drawing, *The Illustrated London News*, 13 January 1855, page 33.

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*Yedi Kule*, the Ottoman fortress of Seven Towers.

From a drawing, *The Illustrated London News*, 24 September 1853, page 272.

## *Page 132*

*Bâb-ı Hümayûn*, the Imperial Gate of Topkapi Saray.

From a drawing, *The Illustrated London News*, 3 August 1850, page 105.

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Photograph of the ruins of Sebastopol in the Crimean War, late 1855.

From *Getty Images*.

# INTRODUCTION

## ‘THE STRATFORD LEGEND’

### 1

Stratford Canning’s journey to the Ottoman Empire is a story of his time, a representation of the increased mixing of distant peoples which emerged over the first half of the nineteenth century. The advent of steam travel in the 1820s and 1830s and of the telegraph in the 1850s radically affected communication in both voyage and post. These and other innovations transformed many fields of human relations, and Canning’s long career spanned fundamental changes in the practice of diplomacy<sup>1</sup> and the mechanics of empire. But his journey to the Ottoman Empire is also a timeless story, a tale of a young and narrow individual sent far from home against his will ‘to live in a very wide world’ and eventually ‘to fashion a large life.’<sup>2</sup>

For 50 years Stratford Canning kept returning to Constantinople<sup>3</sup> despite the hardships of the post and his deep desire to settle at home. His first diplomatic mission to the Ottoman capital began in 1808–09 at the height of the Napoleonic Wars, and his last was undertaken in autumn 1858, over two years after the conclusion of hostilities in the Crimean War. He was fascinated by the life and beauty of the city, as is vividly demonstrated in the paintings of characters and scenes that he commissioned from a local artist in 1809–10.<sup>4</sup> But Canning was drawn to Constantinople primarily because it was the diplomatic city *par excellence*. Here at the geographical mixing point of lands, waters and peoples, and the

political focal point of European international relations, diplomacy had real meaning and was played out for the highest stakes. While ambassador at Bern, Switzerland between his first two missions to Constantinople, he lamented, 'I have nothing on earth to do . . . I become daily more expert in the lordly arts of twaddledom, politeness and gaiety.'<sup>5</sup> A return to the Ottoman capital for a new posting there meant that 'I was now on the scene of the action'.<sup>6</sup>

This study of Stratford Canning and diplomacy with the Ottoman Empire is designed to convey both what and '*how* things happened – what diplomacy was like at that time, how things occurred, what the atmosphere was like, and what the people were like,' as George F. Kennan, the diplomat-scholar, described the ambition of his own books.<sup>7</sup> It is also a consideration of empire, of imperial interaction and imperial thinking, at the dawn of the industrial era. And it is intended to portray the old capital of empires, Constantinople, to evoke, in the words of Gibbon, 'the genius of the place'.<sup>8</sup>

## 2

When Sultan Abdülmecit issued significant reforms concerning religious tolerance on 21 March 1844, Stratford Canning was extolled in British newspapers as 'the Reformer of Turkey' and even credited with 'the most remarkable diplomatic achievement in the annals of Turkey'.<sup>9</sup> And as recently as 2010, in a history of the Crimean War published in the United Kingdom and the United States, Canning was identified as 'directly guiding the reform programme of the young Sultan Abdülmecid and his main reformist minister Mustafa Reshid Pasha.'<sup>10</sup>

But Stratford Canning certainly did not reform the Ottoman Empire. No foreign representative could ever do anything like this for the state to which he was accredited. The reform movement of the Ottoman Empire was home-grown and comprehensive. It was indigenous to Ottoman history. It was conceived and enacted by Ottoman statesmen. And it began to take course before Stratford was even born. His career happened by chance to coincide with the rise of this movement and 'Stratford Canning supported the reform

party with characteristic energy and vigour,' according to his protégé and long-time associate, Austen Henry Layard, the excavator of Nineveh.<sup>11</sup>

Canning's support for Ottoman domestic reform, as well as for Ottoman international peace, was not inspired by sentiment for the country or its peoples (although he was on many occasions throughout his career motivated by genuine humanitarian concern, and he did after a certain point see his relationship to the Ottoman Empire in something of a missionary light). Rather, it was purely a calculation of British foreign policy relating to the so-called Eastern Question.<sup>12</sup> This policy was intended to promote the stabilisation of the Ottoman Empire in the hope of creating a strategic balance between it and the Russian Empire which would prevent war between the two powers. 'War, once begun, would spread throughout Europe...' as George Canning, then British foreign secretary, older first-cousin and mentor to Stratford, wrote in his instructions for Stratford's mission to Constantinople which began in October 1825.<sup>13</sup>

The other goal of this policy was to check Russian expansion in order to maintain the British imperial route to India, which ran through Ottoman Anatolia and Egypt. This was the main cause of Stratford's career and perhaps of his life, and he was still espousing it at age 90 in the year 1877: 'We are dependent on the Porte for our most direct and speediest communication with India. In proportion as Her Majesty's territories in that country become more identified with the Government at home, it is desirable that the established means of intercourse between both should be, as much as possible, rapid and sure.'<sup>14</sup>

The actual achievement of Stratford Canning in his diplomacy with the Ottoman Empire was to negotiate realistically and resourcefully and to communicate with conviction. For A. J. P. Taylor he was 'an outstanding British diplomat' and 'the man who presented the issues clearly and without pretence.'<sup>15</sup> The accurate title for Stratford Canning is not 'the Reformer of Turkey' but rather the conclusion of the epitaph (composed by Alfred Tennyson) that still adorns his statue in Westminster Abbey: 'the Voice of England in the East'.

## 3

Stratford Canning's image as an imperial peacemaker underwent a sudden transformation during the bloody course of the Crimean War. Especially after the death of Lord Raglan in the Crimea on 28 June 1855, and the Russian capture of the British fortress at Kars in eastern Anatolia on 23 November of the same year, Stratford was widely blamed for the war, both its unexpected outbreak and its tragic course; and he came to be portrayed as nothing short of an imperial warmonger, thus satisfying the desire of the weary British public and many politicians to have a scapegoat for the whole tragedy.

Canning was in some ways a natural candidate for this scapegoat role. There was an imperious aspect to his character and appearance which easily lent itself to a reputation for bellicosity.<sup>16</sup> He had long been involved with the Ottoman Empire. He was a prominent figure in the final diplomatic episodes before the outbreak of the Crimean War. And in general during serious breakdowns of international relations, the first targets of public opinion are often the process and providers of diplomacy.

The warmonger image of Stratford Canning has been generally accepted by historians, with a few prominent exceptions, notably Harold Temperley. 'That Stratford de Redcliffe was the human agency which caused the Crimean War has long been a popular belief,' declared Temperley in 1933.<sup>17</sup> 'It has often been asserted that he wanted war between Turkey and Russia and ultimately got it,' Temperley added in 1936, referring to this idea as 'The Stratford legend'.<sup>18</sup>

'The Stratford legend' was partly due to a customary disdain for diplomats among a certain part of the British public and press. This sentiment was seized upon and inflated during and after the Crimean War but existed earlier.<sup>19</sup> Contempt for Stratford himself as a seeming paragon of diplomatic privilege was evident in a Manchester newspaper on 6 June 1836, in a fictional vignette between 'John – A genuine Manchester man'; 'Sandy, one who has been amongst prints and fustians all his life-time, and yet how immeasurably he outstrips Stratford Canning in his knowledge of the real interests, and his conceptions of the real dignity of the

nation'; and Jonathan, an egalitarian-minded American who was apparently meant to represent New World resentment of European aristocratism and intrigue, when he declared: 'Stratford Canning is of the diplomatic tribe, the smallest fry of which receives more from your nation than we pay to our President. Such men have an interest in promoting wars, just as spies have an interest in promoting sedition.'<sup>20</sup>

The great public disdain for the profession of diplomacy during and after the Crimean War was expressed starkly by the satirical journal *Punch* on 24 April 1858, in its 'A Specimen of Mr. Punch's Dictionary of Diplomatic Definitions'. This included:

AMBASSADOR. Should be written *Embassador*, *quasi*, '*en bas-odeur*,' – from the French, *en bas*, 'below' – one who is below – either the demands of his office, or the dignity of the nation he represents. The essence of the ambassadorial mission, etymologically as well as practically, is therefore *submission*.

DIPLOMACY. From the Greek δῖπλος, meaning double; the science of duplicity.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. The very poorest relations, to judge by recently published correspondence, that ever disgraced the family of nations.<sup>21</sup>

Stratford did retain respect among the public and press during and immediately after the Crimean War. On 2 January 1858 one British newspaper predicted that 'Future historians will dwell upon the career of Lord Stratford, as offering one of the most salient features of our times.'<sup>22</sup> But since then most historians have dismissed him one way or another according to the premises of 'The Stratford legend'.

#### 4

The legend was also due to the uninspired national assessment of Stratford's career that took place upon his death at the age of 93 on 14

August 1880. His heyday and achievements had fallen far into the past and were obscured by British public outrage against Ottoman policies in Bulgaria in 1878.<sup>23</sup> Another factor was 'the fashion in these days to disparage diplomacy . . . . Diplomacy is supposed by many to lead to crooked ways and even to dishonesty,' as the *Glasgow Herald* noted in its obituary of Stratford.<sup>24</sup> *The Times* obituary declared him to have been a 'diplomatic autocrat at Constantinople'.<sup>25</sup>

A few weeks after his death, a pension of £500 per annum 'with the benefit of survivorship' was granted by the Queen from the Civil List, on the initiative of Gladstone as prime minister, to Stratford's widow and three unmarried daughters.<sup>26</sup> The radical *Reynolds's Newspaper* declared the grant an act of 'Aristocratic Pauperism' and accused Stratford of having been the 'prototype' of a special set of ambassadors who were both 'imperious' and bellicose: 'Whilst ambassador at the Porte, his hasty, harsh, overbearing manners and deportment kept him perpetually in hot water both there and in other countries. He had a personal quarrel with the late Emperor Nicholas of Russia. It was this which led to the war with that country, and brought about the enormous loss of men and money attendant thereupon.' This suggestion, that Stratford had a personal rivalry with Tsar Nicholas, which was the cause of the Crimean War, is a particularly ridiculous aspect of 'The Stratford legend'.<sup>27</sup>

'Lord Stratford de Redcliffe,' the newspaper continued, 'was the prototype of Sir Bartle Frere,'<sup>28</sup> both being obstinate to pig-headedness, pertinacious, precipitate, arrogant, and imperious. The former hurried us into the Crimean War with the same headstrong recklessness as the latter did into hostilities with the Zulus. Now, we ask why and wherefore are the tremendously burthened taxpayers of England to support in ease and comfort for the rest of their lives the family of this deceased nobleman? We believe he did not die in actual poverty, but in comfortable circumstances.'<sup>29</sup>

Stratford's finances were in fact always a concern. He was born a product of the professional class and lost his father when he was six months old. His mother, Mehitabel, maintained the family trading house with some success at first, but a relative was later required to

help pay for Stratford's education. Early in his career he managed to earn a lifetime retainer from the Foreign Office, but this was suspended for the years he served in Parliament, which provided no salary. As Gladstone later defended the pension for Stratford's survivors, speaking to the House of Commons on 23 March 1888: 'He had never been a wealthy man. All his life he had devoted himself to the Public Service, and the services which he rendered in Constantinople were undoubtedly of the highest order . . . Lord Stratford, as I have said, was not a wealthy man, and I believe it is a well-known fact – there is no disgrace in it – that his private means and economies disappeared in consequence of the repudiation by the Turkish Empire of its debts.'<sup>30</sup> At death Stratford's net wealth equalled £62 3s 2d (sixty-two pounds, three shillings and twopence).<sup>31</sup>

'The Stratford legend' is also a product of the nature and trends of historical consideration. Jules Cambon observed in his 1926 study of diplomatic practice that 'In general, diplomats are not, as military men are, the spoilt children of historians. The latter hardly mention their names, and the secrecy of negotiations, which was so often disputed by their contemporaries, is dispensed to them generously by the silence of posterity.'<sup>32</sup> And Bernadotte E. Schmitt noted that, 'Even with full documentation and reliable memoirs or biographies, it is seldom easy to write satisfactory diplomatic history.'<sup>33</sup>

A. J. P. Taylor suggested in his 1956 essay, 'The Rise and Fall of Diplomatic History', that the subject was in decline, with students moving away from analysis of diplomatic records 'for the study of public opinion'. He attributed this phenomenon to the opening of 'what is called the age of the masses' and to the suspicion of diplomacy that traditionally occurs during and after the outbreak of wars. 'Wars are the eclipse of diplomacy, and therefore of diplomatic history . . . we continue to live in a war atmosphere in the immediate present – first the Second World War against Germany, then the more insidious "Cold War", which seems equally impervious to diplomacy.' This all led, according to Taylor, to 'The Depreciation of diplomacy',<sup>34</sup> and it included a depreciation of Stratford's career.

## 5

The real Stratford Canning was by nature tenacious, intense and independent-minded. Throughout his life he exhibited 'boundless industry',<sup>35</sup> and even his appearance suggested severity. At age 17 he was struck by a 'sharp illness' which 'left traces in my constitution', as he later noted, and this may have affected the development of his personality.<sup>36</sup> A few years later his own mother expressed concern about his 'impetuosity' and implored him to 'moderate' it.<sup>37</sup> But he was not without a sensitive side, and as he outgrew his narrowness and parochialism, he came to appreciate and even defend people and ways foreign to him. He was of course highly self-confident and greatly ambitious; and yet for decades he was unsure about his career path and it was only at age 55 that he fully accepted diplomacy as his profession (after having left it for almost ten years in a misplaced attempt to become a parliamentary statesman). He was well-educated, fond of letters and expression, versed in the use and meaning of texts, and a prominent force behind the creation of the influential *Quarterly Review* (1809–1967).<sup>38</sup> His qualities were recorded in many first-hand accounts by acquaintances and colleagues. A. H. Layard detailed his first encounter with Stratford Canning, which occurred in July 1842:

Sir Stratford received me immediately. I was greatly struck by his appearance. His hair was already white. His tall and spare form was not altogether erect, as he had the habit of stooping. There was, perhaps, a somewhat too evident assumption of dignity and reserve in his manner, which was intended to impress people with the utmost respect for the Queen's Ambassador, and if the occasion required it, with awe. His earnest grey eyes seemed to penetrate into one's very thoughts. His thin, compressed lips denoted a violent and passionate temper. His complexion was so transparent that the least emotion, whether of pleasure or anger, was at once shown by its varying tints. A broad and massive overhanging brow gave him the air of profound wisdom and sagacity. He was altogether a very formidable-looking personage, and he made upon me the

impression which he no doubt intended to produce. His manner towards me was, however, kind and considerate . . . I received the utmost kindness from Sir Stratford and Lady Canning – a kindness of which I was most sensible and for which I have ever been the more grateful, as it was shown to one who was a stranger, and who had, at that time, no claims whatever to it.<sup>39</sup>

Another valuable portrait of Stratford but from 15 years later, after the conclusion of the Crimean War, was provided by the great Edward Lear, father of Nonsense Literature. He had stayed with the Cannings at the British embassy residence in Therapia on the Bosphorus for two weeks in August 1848 while recovering from malaria, which he had contracted on travels in Greece. Years later, on 15 December 1857 at Corfu, Lear again encountered Stratford and he noted his impressions in a letter to a friend:

He is a remarkable old gentleman, & I was surprised to see him so unbroken & with his eagle eye still so clear . . . nothing can be more regal and sostenuto than his manners, and one can only believe in his temper by observation of his brow and eye . . . Just as he went off in the steamer there was an Earthquake, big enough to send people out of their houses & the bells ringing, but whether the coincidental concussion was caused by, or for, Lord S. de Redcliffe, I leave you as a more educated man than myself to determine.<sup>40</sup>

And from the same period there is the portrait of Stratford Canning by Edmund Hornby, who had been sent by the Foreign Office to Constantinople during the Crimean War in order to administer British and French interests concerning the Ottoman debt. Hornby wrote of Stratford in his *Autobiography* that:

No doubt he had a temper which was really too easily roused and over which he had but little control, but a more noble and affectionate nature no man, nay, no woman, ever possessed. He was *gentilhomme* from the crown of his white head to the soles of

his feet . . . . He had a fine head, distinguished features, white hair, and a good clear complexion. He was a good horseman and was extremely fond of horses . . . . To meet him going to the Porte was a sight worth seeing – two mounted Cavasses in front, himself, then the secretaries, then two grooms, and finally two other Cavasses – all splendidly mounted, the people all bowing and showing him the profoundest respect.<sup>41</sup>

Quite similar to Hornby's opinion of Stratford's character is the observation of J. H. Skene, a second vice-consul and one of Stratford's embassy staff assistants during the Crimean War, who noted in his memoir:

With all his stern gravity and occasional outbursts of violent anger, however, Lord Stratford was one of the kindest of men. Indeed, he was of so notably humane a disposition that his witty attaché, the late Lord Strangford, used to call him 'Old Humanity.' . . . It was a singular feature in Lord Stratford's hasty disposition, that his anger would suddenly be appeased by anything which seemed to him ludicrous.<sup>42</sup>

The last introductory word here among those who knew Stratford Canning well belongs to his old family acquaintance. Charles Ellis served George Canning in the 1820s as an Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and he knew Stratford from even before that time. Ellis's father had been one of George Canning's closest friends and political allies: they were two of the founders of the Tory satirical journal *The Anti-Jacobin* (1797–98), and the elder Ellis served as George's second at his duel with Castlereagh on 21 September 1809 on Putney Heath. On 31 January 1858, the younger Ellis wrote to Lord Clarendon concerning Stratford:

He [Stratford] is an odd fish and perhaps no one living knows so much of his character as yours aff[ectionate]ly. For in old times I was the constant peacemaker between him and his lamented cousin [George] and was often put forward to stand the brunt of

his first explosions, but He is an honourable and good man and much more open to reason than is generally supposed.<sup>43</sup>

All of these personal portraits of Stratford refer to his temper but also suggest that this was mitigated by his softer quality. Layard's and Lear's accounts both remarked on his brow, his eye<sup>44</sup> and 'manner'. In the latter, Layard sensed something assumed but Lear (who was observing Stratford at a later stage of life and after the great trial of the Crimean War) identified something superlative. Perhaps both observations were valid. It would have been reasonable for Stratford to cultivate a persona of 'dignity and reserve' as a part of his diplomatic *modus operandi* at the great seat of empires, where for many centuries supreme importance has been placed on the customs of ceremony and appearance. And after all public officials, and perhaps especially foreign representatives, are effective sometimes more for what they appear to be than for what they are. But it seems that Stratford's 'very formidable-looking personage' and 'regal and sostenuto' manner were in large part also natural to him.

These qualities were captured also in artistic depictions of Stratford, especially in George Richmond's chalk portrait of 1853<sup>45</sup> and in George Frederic Watts's oil portrait of 1856–57,<sup>46</sup> both of which repose in the National Portrait Gallery UK and the latter being still on display in Room 23 (along with a portrait of Canning's polar opposite in the British Empire, the orientalist and explorer, Richard Burton – Canning was as strait-laced as Burton was unbound). The Gallery's caption of Watts's portrait refers to Canning's 'exercising great influence over the Sultan and his advisors in the diplomatic events leading up to the Crimean War'.<sup>47</sup> This idea, that he held special power at the Ottoman capital, remains the most persistent part of his legend.

## 6

The real career of Stratford Canning at Constantinople is a study in diplomatic communication. His interaction with the Ottoman government was conducted almost entirely through dragomans,

professional interpreters who were drawn from Ottoman Levantine families. The relationship between an ambassador and his dragoman was always complex, especially because it involved sharing an embassy's sensitive papers and tasks with a subject of the host government. Stratford was at first too immature (arriving at Constantinople at age 22) and too provincial to understand the abilities and sophistication of the dragomans, but he soon came to appreciate and respect them. Nevertheless, the notion of 'Stratford's longstanding dislike of the embassy dragomans,' as was asserted in an academic article from 1979,<sup>48</sup> has been another component of 'The Stratford legend'.

In 1896 Stratford's vast personal archive – consisting of drafts and copies of official dispatches, notes to and from embassy colleagues, and correspondence with family and friends – was repositied by his surviving children, Louisa and Mary Canning, at the Public Record Office at Chancery Lane, London (today comprising collection FO 352 of The National Archives United Kingdom). The event was deemed worthy of reporting in *The Times* of 4 April 1896, and this even included an analysis of the archive's documents: 'The collection is unique both in its wide range and in its comprehensive character . . . . It is not, however, merely the range in point of time or geographical distance that gives these papers their unique importance. They also excel probably all similar collections in their exhaustive comprehension of all classes of diplomatic information.' As Stratford's personal archive included a detailed correspondence on the leading international questions of the day, it comprised, according to *The Times*, 'really a sort of history of European politics in epistolary form.' The archive also provided special perspectives on foreign circumstances: 'For the internal history of the countries to which he was accredited, and, of course, especially in Turkey, a prodigious series of Consular reports, interpreters' minutes of interviews, and other local information will some day prove of inestimable value.'<sup>49</sup> Out of these different forms of communication emerges a fascinating literature of diplomacy in which characters strive to express themselves across cultural and physical distance while they simultaneously attempt to maintain, as Harold Nicolson

formulated in his 1939 study of diplomatic method, 'that guarded under-statement which enables diplomatists and ministers to say sharp things to each other without becoming provocative or impolite.'<sup>50</sup>

*The Times* report on the archive also noted, 'The truth is that Lord Stratford de Redcliffe preserved almost every written thing, and his collection has consequently attained such proportions that his biographer estimated the total number of documents at a round million.'<sup>51</sup> This assessment related only to Stratford's personal archive and did not include the holdings of public archives, including the massive Foreign Office collection for correspondence with the Ottoman Empire (today designated as FO 78, also located at The National Archives UK). *The Times* observed upon his death in August 1880 that, 'To the last he was a prolific writer.'<sup>52</sup>

Stratford's tremendous written output was one of his means for establishing the text or terms of diplomatic issues. But probably more than anything it represented his fondness for composition as well as the intense aspect of his personality. It was also due to the literary practice of the day in which he was trained. 'The style of Lord Stratford, formed early in the century, is very different from the lighter and less pedantic style which writers of the present day affect; its complete and rolling sentences we should perhaps irreverently consider somewhat long-winded,' as was observed in 1889.<sup>53</sup> Stratford's style was perceived to be thus already in his own day, and on occasion it unnecessarily burdened his counterparts. It was probably a significant motivation in the Russians' refusal to accredit him as ambassador to their court in 1832 because of their experiences with him at Petersburg in 1825.<sup>54</sup> It also sometimes overtaxed his own compatriots, and one may sympathise with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert for that day in August 1843 at Windsor Castle when they sat down to tackle Stratford's dispatches, as witnessed by Charlotte Canning, a lady of the bedchamber who happened to be the wife of Stratford's cousin, Charles Canning: 'The Queen & Prince set to work to read the contents of 3 red boxes, a large packet of Stratford's of whose voluminous writings Her Majesty complained, saying he has always so much to say it is sometimes quite alarming.'<sup>55</sup>

Stratford's massive production of historical material and his demanding compositional style have exasperated many students of his career and probably comprise another factor that has contributed to the persistence of 'The Stratford legend'. Yet another challenge in studying his career is to examine primary materials composed in Ottoman Turkish. The following work includes discovery and analysis of such documents which were translated into English by Canning's dragomans and repose at The National Archives UK. Ottoman primary documents from Istanbul archives, which were discovered and analysed by the Turkish researchers Y. Hakan Erdem (2005, 2011), F. Ismail (1979) and Turgut Subaşı (2002), are also cited here.<sup>56</sup>

## 7

Stratford himself undertook an examination of his personal archive. After retiring from diplomacy in late 1858, he worked for years on a substantial memoir that consisted of an explication of the archive's materials plus a commentary on his career. Completing this in 1874, he provided the archive and memoir to his chosen biographer, the orientalist Stanley Lane-Poole. This memoir and many private letters from the archive were subsequently lost at some point and have never been found. Therefore the sole source for them is the Lane-Poole biography.

Lane-Poole's two-volume work was published in 1888, eight years after Stratford's death. Lane-Poole employed the memoir thoughtfully but followed its conclusions closely and incorporated 'copious extracts' from it, as one contemporary reviewer noted.<sup>57</sup> Another found that Stratford's memoir had influenced Lane-Poole's biography so much that 'A rather large part of the work is autobiographical'.<sup>58</sup> And one reviewer declared Lane-Poole to be not the author but 'rather the editor' of the biography.<sup>59</sup> Among later historians, Roderick Davison called Lane-Poole's biography 'Somewhat eulogistic',<sup>60</sup> V. J. Puryear dismissed it harshly as 'The standard apology',<sup>61</sup> and R. W. Seton-Watson found it to be a 'classic Victorian biography'.<sup>62</sup>

Lane-Poole noted in his introduction that 'The proof sheets of the work have been submitted both to Lord Stratford's immediate

representatives, and to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.<sup>63</sup> The equivalent of such a work today would likely be labelled 'authorised' or 'official'.

Lane-Poole's biography was infused with a fundamental Occidental stereotype about 'Turkish character'<sup>64</sup> and 'the Turkish mind',<sup>65</sup> including cryptic statements such as: 'The Oriental takes you as you would be taken and to acquire his respect you must *impose* yourself upon him; and it is impossible even now (and how much more forty years ago) to compel the Turkish mind to action without the aid of such outward machinery.'<sup>66</sup> One prominent component of this stereotype was the belief that Stratford intellectually and professionally towered over his hosts at Constantinople. In Lane-Poole's words, Stratford held 'high-handed authority'<sup>67</sup> and 'transcendent authority over the Turks';<sup>68</sup> 'it needed all of Canning's influence to soothe the irritation of the Porte';<sup>69</sup> 'under the protecting influence which now emanated from the British Palace [embassy], the Turkish ministers revealed the full details';<sup>70</sup> when located at Constantinople he was 'the guide of the faltering Turks',<sup>71</sup> but when he was not then 'Lord Stratford's absence freed the Turkish ministers for the moment from the dominating influence of his will.'<sup>72</sup>

There is not one piece of historical evidence that Stratford wielded authority over the Ottomans, that he inspired fear or calm in them, that he intimidated or dominated them in any way. As Harold Temperley declared in his thorough examination of Stratford's role in the outbreak of the Crimean War, published in *The English Historical Review* in two parts in 1933 and 1934: 'Stratford did not enjoy complete authority at Constantinople, in spite of testimony of so many to the fact. The descriptions of him as "the real Sultan" or the "Padishah", though amusing enough, are, in fact, misleading.' And concerning the Ottomans, Temperley found that 'Their policy was their own...'<sup>73</sup> It was indeed.

Ottoman statesmen did in fact have significant respect for Stratford Canning. At the beginning of his career, during a moment of complicated diplomacy at a pivotal point of the Napoleonic Wars in the spring of 1812, Sultan Mahmut II pronounced him the sole diplomat at his court whom he found 'reliable'.<sup>74</sup> And at the end of

Stratford's career, during the Crimean War in the 1850s, the great Ottoman statesman Mustafa Reşit Paşa said of him that 'He is often overbearing' but also 'has more pluck in his little finger than the whole Divan put together.'<sup>75</sup> The Ottomans had significant respect also, as will be seen in the story that follows, for the methods of Stratford's diplomacy, for his austere manner and appearance, for the power of the empire which he represented, and eventually for his long and substantial tenure at their capital (although they naturally also grew tired of him for this). But that was all: significant respect, no more and no less. Despite Lane-Poole's claims, Stratford never held over the Ottomans 'high-handed authority', 'transcendent authority' (whatever that means), 'immense influence', 'influence to soothe', 'protecting influence' or 'dominating influence'. Furthermore, Stratford himself disregarded such claims in his own day, referring to them in 1858 as 'braying panegyrics'.<sup>76</sup> His recognition of the limits of his influence was actually one of his strengths in dealing with the Ottomans. Even when he sometimes saw his role with them in a somewhat missionary light, he still maintained a realistic sense of what was diplomatically possible. For just as the Ottomans held significant respect for him, he held the same for them for their own qualities and for the power of their vast empire.

Lane-Poole wrote the biography under the influence of Alexander Kinglake's account of the Crimean War, *Invasion of the Crimea*, the first volumes of which were published in 1863.<sup>77</sup> This was long hailed in Britain as a masterpiece of history and the definitive word on the Crimean War; and Kinglake was one of the notables who attended the unveiling of Stratford Canning's statue in Westminster Abbey on 23 May 1884.<sup>78</sup> Whereas Lane-Poole deified Stratford as benevolently leading the Ottomans, Kinglake demonised him as maliciously dominating them and pushing them into the Crimean War. 'Him they feared, him they trusted, him they obeyed' and 'Lord Stratford had power over the minds of Turkish Statesmen . . . To his will they bent,' Kinglake wrote.<sup>79</sup> But deification and demonisation are the same operation of extremism and melodramaticism, and the works of Lane-Poole and Kinglake were equivalent in professing the fiction that Stratford reigned supreme at Constantinople.

In Kinglake's history Stratford is depicted 'as a kind of magician who is always mentioned as the "great Elchi" and who influences the fate of nations by mystic spells cast on pallid sultans,' as was observed in the entry for Stratford in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1911.<sup>80</sup> Kinglake did indeed assert in his work that the Ottoman leaders referred to Stratford as 'the great Ambassador' in the sense of signifying his superiority. But this assertion by Kinglake was pure fabrication on his part, a misinterpretation of the title that the Ottomans employed for all ambassadors, *Büyük Elçi*. The title probably originated as a Turkish translation of the European rank of Minister or Ambassador (*elçi*) Extraordinary (*büyük*), but it certainly had nothing to do with perceptions about anyone's individual greatness. The designation of *Büyük Elçi* for all ambassadors was maintained in the Turkish Republic and is still in use today.

Lane-Poole clearly understood Kinglake's misuse of 'Great Elchi' and he specifically remarked on it that 'Every Turkish scholar knows that the title is founded on a misconception. It is only in England that the words bear the special signification which Mr. Kinglake has made immortal. In Turkey every full ambassador is styled *Buyuk Elchi* or "Great Envoy," to distinguish him from the mere *Elchi*, which is the term applied to an ordinary minister plenipotentiary. The ambassadors of France and Russia were as much Great Elchis at Constantinople as Canning himself.'<sup>81</sup>

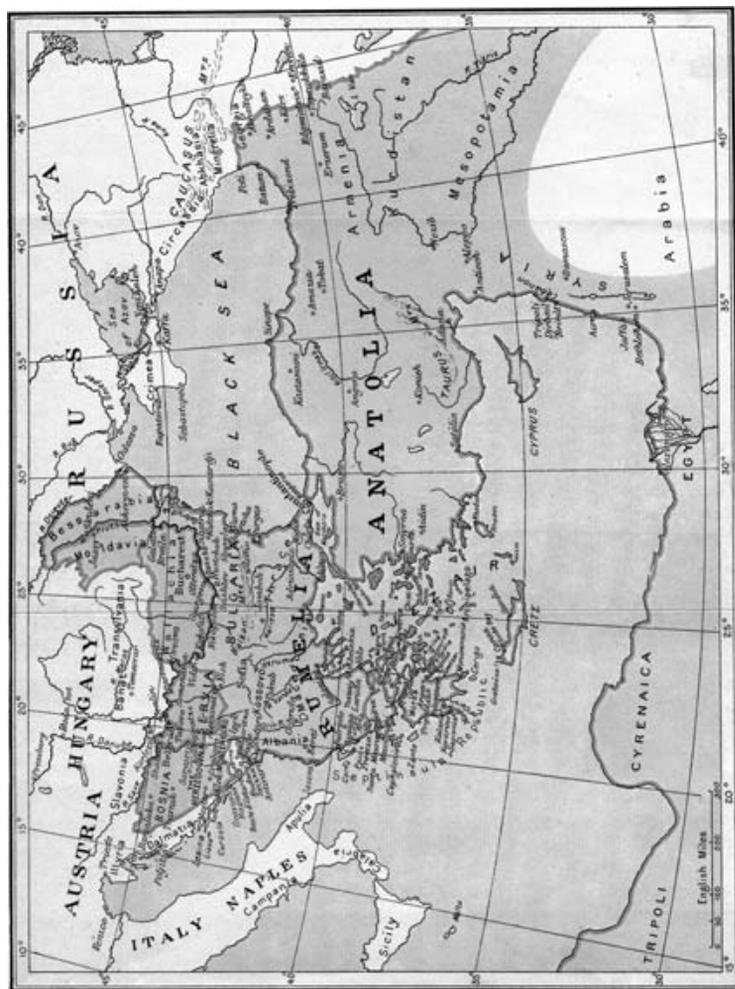
Nevertheless, Lane-Poole willfully adopted Kinglake's term and likewise exploited it. Over and over in his biography, 128 times, Lane-Poole referred to Stratford Canning as either 'the Great Elchi' or 'the Elchi'.<sup>82</sup> In English it has the sound of an ogre's or wizard's title; and Lane-Poole's incantation of it was a method for conjuring Kinglake's image of Canning as an imperial supernatural at Constantinople.

The term and image have themselves proven remarkably powerful and long-lasting. 'Elchi' entered English vocabulary and still remains a part of it today, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>83</sup> And the 'Great Elchi' image of Stratford Canning has been invoked in many studies<sup>84</sup> and is still prevalent today. A history of the Crimean War, published in the United Kingdom in 2004, includes the

assertion: 'Known to the Turks as "the Great Elchi", Redcliffe was an experienced diplomat and a man with enormous influence within the Porte.'<sup>85</sup> From the same year, the entry for Stratford Canning in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* includes the statement that he 'was to dominate the politics of Constantinople for a generation as the "Great Ambassador"...'<sup>86</sup> The entry for him in a volume of *The History of Parliament* series, published in 2009, contains the claim: 'From the immense influence he wielded over the sultan, and the impetus he gave to internal reforms in Turkey, he made his reputation, and gained the nickname of "The Great Elchi" [ambassador].'<sup>87</sup> And a history of the Crimean War published in the United Kingdom and the United States in 2010 includes the claim: 'The "Great Elchi", or Great Ambassador, as he was known in Constantinople, had a direct influence on the policies of the Turkish government.'<sup>88</sup>

But, again, Stratford did not possess any special power or any special nickname at Constantinople. His actual influence with the Ottomans was based on his skills in diplomacy and on the convergence of strategic interests which existed at that time between the Ottoman and British empires. Sometimes this led to achievement on his part, but at other times it resulted in futility, with the Ottomans being unmoved.

More than any other works, Kinglake's history and Lane-Poole's biography have been responsible for the persistence of 'The Stratford legend' and its notion of his dominance over the Ottomans. The legend, however, came into existence before the appearance of these two works, arising both as a political idea and as a cultural or religious belief. As the American Protestant missionaries of Constantinople put it in their farewell address to Stratford on 12 October 1858: 'we love to consider Your Lordship's influence as one of the important providential means, by which God has been pleased to carry on his work, aside from direct Missionary instrumentalities.'<sup>89</sup> The legend therefore holds political, sociological and psychological significance when it is viewed as a symbol. But more meaningful than the legend is the genuine story of Stratford Canning and his journey to a distant people, a fabled metropolis and the making of peace and war.



'The Ottoman Empire in 1811'.





Constantinople, Galata, Pera, Scutari.



PART I

BRITISH-OTTOMAN PEACE,  
1808–10