

## A PALACE BIG AND ENORMOUS... DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... JULY 2016

Watching television the other night, we took a break from the latest ISIS inspired carnage in Nice, France and switched channels to news of an attempted military putsch in Turkey. Almost a relief after the other story, the best part was a glimpse of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's huge palace viewed from the air. To contemplate a building of this size is to wonder about the ego of the man to whom it belongs. Bigger than Versailles and the Vatican combined—with the Noah's Ark Kentucky Theme Park thrown in. One would never suspect a man to whom all this belonged wore skin so easily bruised, but it is illegal in Turkey to insult the leader. To call him a goat-fornicator, for example, will land you in trouble. Should Donald Trump become President of the United States, he will likely meet with Erdogan. To discuss palace architecture, perhaps goats, and whether pigs have wings.

Speaking of insult, I learned I had accidentally offended a writer friend by saying I enjoyed a piece he had sent. Took umbrella, he did; implied I was casting asparagus. Expressing mere enjoyment was dissing him, damning with faint praise. Now I'm wondering if there are other friends I may have likewise insulted. What's wrong with enjoying something? Enjoyment is a considered, pleasurable response to something we behold or experience. An aesthetic experience, if you will. We don't say that much in Texas, but we know what it means.

I suppose it's normal to think we deserve something a little better: More applause, more money, better gigs—more hair on top, younger body beneath. More praise. I recall Jim Justice, our fiddle player from State of the Heart. When someone said "You guys are pretty good," Jim would reply "Thanks pretty much." You see, we felt entitled to more....

By Monday the news from Turkey reported 9,000 police officers had been sacked. Following the arrests of 6,000 military personnel, 103 generals and admirals, and the suspension of 3,000 judges. It turned out the government already had lists of people suspected of conspiring to stage a coup, especially the followers of Fetullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric living in exile in Pennsylvania who Erdogan says is the mastermind behind the whole enchilada. Fetullah says Erdogan himself is the mastermind, that it was a theatrical putsch. It wasn't theater for the 250 who died, but aside from that, the move from putsch to purge was so seamless, inquiring minds have since begun to wonder. I've found more of this speculation on the Internet than in the New York Times, where Roger Cohen wrote that the coup effort was a badly planned attempt by factions in the military. Conspiracy theories abound, and Erdogan has demanded Gulen's extradition.

The death penalty in Turkey is forbidden in the constitution. Erdogan wants to change this so he can execute the enemies he has rounded up. That will fix things. A fascinating story, and worth a search. Right; and the palace was built on protected land. Forbidden by the courts to go ahead, Erdogan had it built anyway. I am several days getting back to this story. Edith tells me the Turkish ambassador to Switzerland has held a press conference in Bern threatening Turks living in Switzerland suspected to be followers of Gulen, or perhaps—back to the goat business—secretly Googling the President Erdogan Offensive Poetry Competition.\*

Istanbul, where Erdogan used to be mayor, was once called Constantinople, named after the Roman emperor Constantine, the first to be converted to Christianity. Konstanz, just upstream from here, is named after him. Time went on, cathedral became mosque, and the Ottoman Empire ruled a few centuries. Normally this stuff excites me; sometimes I sink into a hopeless funk of misanthropy and exhaustion. Lucky it's summer, and time for swimming on a hot July afternoon. A chilling plunge and swim down the old River Rhine: This is real. The rest is huff and bluster, the howls and demands of posturing apes. My palace is bigger than yours.

\*A contest sponsored by Spectator Magazine (UK). The winner turned out to be none other than Boris Johnson, controversial ex-mayor of London, and a prime mover in the Brexit campaign. Now the new Foreign Secretary, he will likely meet with Erdogan. Oh Boy.

\*

\*

\*

\*

I try and get my bike rides in early now, and stop by and check the garden before it gets too hot. The sunflowers are up showing their smiley faces. The farmers have begun harvesting oats. Going behind, they bale the tawny stalks into big rolls. Swallows swoop dart around the rooftops. I open the umbrellas out on the balcony. We have no AC here, so it is better to close the windows in the afternoons and keep the fan running. A good time for siesta, before we go down to the river. It's high summer and better days are here.

Richard J. Dobson

Diessenhofen am Rhein, 22 July 2016

[www.richard-j-dobson.ch](http://www.richard-j-dobson.ch)