



MUSEUM AND STATUE OF MUSTAPHA KEMAL

FACTORS IN TURKEY'S CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

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WHEN Mustapha Kemal and the Grand National Assembly at Ankara began their sweeping reform program in Turkey less than ten years ago, many observers expected failure for what they saw as dictatorial imposition on a sullen and conservative populace. Historians recalled that Peter the Great had barely scratched the surface in his attempt to Europeanize Russia; that most of the paternalistic innovations of Joseph II in Austria had died with him; that Japan had "westernized" more gradually, less comprehensively, and under quite favorable circumstances; and finally, that Turkey had long since been given up as hopeless. A French writer, André Servier, had summed up the opinions of many Christians when he wrote, "The Musulman, bound by his religion, cannot accept Western progress; the two civilizations are too different, too much opposed, ever to admit mutual interpenetration."

But to the confusion of such doubters the Kemalists reforms have taken root, and the world has witnessed the unprecedented phenomenon of a state which had long stood proudly as a proponent of Islam abandoning many of the most characteristic features of that civilization and espousing in their place elements of an alien civilization which it had for centuries viewed with hostility and contempt. Turkey, geographically the westernmost country of Asia, has cut the ties which have bound her so intimately to the East and seeks

to become, outwardly at least, connected with Europe, the West.

Some one may now properly raise the question whether the term "Islamic" is still applicable to modern Turkey. If Turkey has gone over so precipitately into the camp of the West, might the conclusion not be justifiable that there had been a complete substitution of one civilization for another, thus bearing out the exclusivists' essential concept of incompatibility, the impossibility of blending Islam and Western progress? The answer to this question will gradually appear as we examine the history of the reform processes. But first for the sake of clarity let us see what the words "Islamic" and "Western" include when they refer to civilizations.

As most commonly interpreted, the term "Islamic" refers to the whole complex of practices, beliefs and attitudes which have grown up around the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. In a narrower sense, however, "Islamic" may be considered to apply specifically only to the nucleus of religious beliefs and doctrines which gives to the Moslem his characteristic world-view. In the West we are accustomed to differentiate the broader and narrower corresponding meanings by the terms "Christendom" and "Christianity."

Now where does the term "Western" fit in with the other concepts we have been discussing? The Turk would probably consider it the balance remaining if one were to subtract from the totality of "Christendom" one part called "Christianity"—the beliefs and doctrines of the Christian religion; in other words, the materials and techniques of our civilization.

Two formulas might be invented to make plain the relationship between the parts and wholes of the two civilizations: 1) Christianity plus Western ideas and practices equals Christendom; 2) Islamic religion plus Arab ideas and practices equals Islamic civilization. This distinction which Turkey chooses to make between a religion and other parts of a civilization is important to understand before one reads the story of Turkey's Westernization. Turkey apparently feels no qualms over the substitution of Western ideas and practices for her inherited ideas and practices, since she considers the latter a bequest from nomadic Arabia, which she professes to despise as less civilized than Europe. Toward religion, however, there is a different attitude, for she has failed to perceive during centuries of rivalry and conflict any superiority of Christianity over her own religious forms and doctrines. To change religions would needlessly arouse a fanatical opposition, and be-

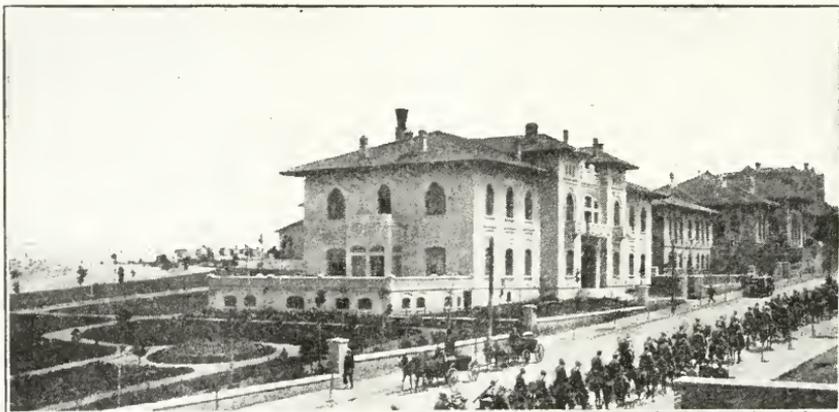
sides, the Turkish leaders have felt that their traditional religious organizations and beliefs might be purged of undesirable qualities and reshaped so as to contribute distinctively to the new Turkish nation. The formula as conceived by Turkey's republican leaders might then read: Purified Islamic religion plus Western ideas and practices plus a newly awakened nationalism equals modern Turkey.

Although we have spoken casually of Turkey's willingness to abandon ideas and practices which she considered of alien Arab origin and supplant them with Western counterparts, let no one suppose that the change occurred rapidly or painlessly. Had it not been for the constant erosion of Turkish society over many years by powerful forces, had not Turkey been made acutely conscious of her own shortcomings, had not the Great War and its aftermath thrown Turkish society into a suitable state of flux, and had there not been aggressive and inspiring leadership by bold patriots, Turkey might still be floundering about uncertainly as are many other parts of Asia. The point is, however, that all these conditions did occur and that the radical reconstruction of Turkish society did take place. Our task now is to consider in some detail the factors and processes which contributed to the change.

Mention has been made of a long continued erosion of Turkish society. Let us study this as the first of the important factors leading up to the adoption of Western ways. Any one acquainted even superficially with Turkey's history over the past hundred and fifty years knows that interplay was taking place between Turkey and the nations of Europe. Outside forces were pressing in on "the sick man" with stringent diplomatic demands and strange new practices. Here the process seems to be that of an external insistent force battering with its novelties against a surly, resisting mass. But the process had another aspect, for individuals within that resisting mass were reaching out to master for themselves certain features of the alien civilization, thereby acting as conductors in the transmission of Western ways into Turkish society. Both aspects of the process, the battering and the conducting, are important.

The battering impact of the West may be illustrated concisely, bearing in mind the fact that Turkey's geographical position as the westernmost country of Asia and in a direct line between Europe and important regions of the Near and Middle East made it inevitable that she should be struck early and severely by Europe's eastward-looking imperialist expansion. Aggressive warfare car-

ried on by nations which sought to appropriate Turkish territory caused Turkey to realize the superiority of Western war materials and methods. Diplomatic interference in the governmental affairs of the Sublime Porte kept officials unpleasantly conscious of the assertive West. Industrialists and engineers skillfully exploiting Turkish railways and natural resources impressed the Turks with the value of Western technique. The system of capitulations, which permitted foreigners to live in the country subject to their own laws, kept constantly under Turkey's eyes communities with customs differing from her own. Partly as a result of the capitulations, mis-



MEDJLIS OR PARLIAMENT HOUSE AT ANKARA

sionary and other philanthropic enterprises were given considerable freedom in Turkish domain. Manned by devoted and able workers, foreign schools, hospitals, and publication societies were powerful agencies in the onslaught of the West.

The insistent impact of these Western thrusts might not alone have been able to effect the erosion in the Turkish mass. Had the ranks of Turko-Islamic society held firm, a stubborn and fanatical resistance might have been offered which would have delayed indefinitely the adoption of Western ways. But this was not to be, for certain individuals and groups within the ranks manifested receptive inclinations toward the West, and the channels were opened for the infiltration of new notions. These channels were provided by two types of Turks: 1) those who remained at home but became interested in Western ideas through reading or through contact with the Westerners in their midst; and 2) those who left home

to visit Europe, voluntarily or as exiles. It is true that both the stay-at-homes and the travelers were chiefly of the aristocracy and upper strata of society, the official and military classes. They were important, however, in performing the function described by E. A. Ross as that of the "social stand-pipe" for the diffusion of advanced ideas.

With this brief presentation of the double-action process of erosion as it affected Turkey's Islamic civilization, we must turn next to the second important factor which made reform a possibility: a tendency toward bitter self-criticism resulting from a consciousness of the shortcomings of her inherited civilization. This sense of inadequacy which grew up in the nineteenth century under the shadow of the insistent West was aggravated by the abortive attempt of Abdul Hamid II to stir up a Panislamic movement. Far from settling the problems of Turkey and the rest of the Islamic world, this futile flurry of fanaticism served only to intensify Turkey's distress when she finally came to admit the inferiority of her Oriental ways to those of the Occident. The last twenty-five years have accordingly given rise to strident arraignments of all things Islamic, particularly of the theologians and rulers, who have been branded corrupt, and also of the governmental system which would permit so much influence to reactionary religious bigotry. While at first the critics leveled their attacks indiscriminately against the whole complex of Islamic civilization, a tendency is gradually noticeable to make a differentiation between the religious nucleus and its secular appurtenances.

Of the numerous denunciations of the Islamic system, none has had more influence than the poetic diatribe by Tewfik Fikret called *Tarihi Kadim* (Ancient History). Though the poem was not formally published until 1927, it had for many years circulated from person to person and enjoyed great popularity among students and others impatient with the vicious system to which they were bound. Tewfik Fikret portrays the glorious victories of his ancestors as actual savagery, and the heroes of the faith are shown to have been killers, devastators of land and destroyers of homes. What kind of God can it be, he asks, who permits such cruelty in the name of religion? Does God hear or pay any attention to the prayers or the blasphemies which drift upward to heaven? Everywhere doubt is assailing the strongholds of religion; stratagems and deviltry are removing God from his throne and blowing out the torches in his

temples. God has fallen from his throne, but no cries of pain are heard. Instead one hears everywhere derisive laughter. Only the stupid would bemoan the passing of such a gross deception.

A large share of indignant vituperation has been directed against the Moslem theologians and doctors, whose ignorance, laziness, and dishonesty are blamed for the dominance of tradition, form, and superstition in a religious system which had once been progressive and vital. Hans Kohn, in his masterly *History of Nationalism in the East*, quotes the expression of a typical critical Moslem attitude: "The Ulemas of to-day occupy themselves with outward forms alone; they do not understand the philosophic spirit of Islam, and cannot therefore apply their religion advantageously in practice. Our ignorant clergy expound Islam according to their own ideas, and instead of benefiting, they injure us." A scathing denunciation of the corruption, worldliness, and ignorance of the theological teachers and students who posed as leaders of Islam is contained in a strong novel published three or four years ago in Istanbul from the pen of Rechad Nuri Bey. The book, entitled *Green Night*, centers around the sacrificial devotion of a young teacher to the cause of his nation and his people. The hero, Shahin Effendi, enthusiastically enters a *medresseh* or theological school only to suffer painful disillusionment when he perceives the knavery and incompetence of his theological professors.

Along with the holy men, the Sultans of Turkey are subjected to criticism for their subservience to the forces of religious bigotry. The unholy alliance of secular despotism and religious obscurantism is frequently and bitterly denounced. As an example we may quote from a textbook which is used in the schools of the Turkish Republic. From a Fifth Grade text in Civics, written by Mitat Sadullah, and approved by the Department of Public Instruction, comes the following selection:

The Padishahs ruled in Turkey for many years. These men thought only of their own amusement and considered the nation as a group of slaves. In Europe there had been founded well-organized states according to new principles. On the other hand, when a movement toward modern ideas started in Turkey, the conservatives, the fanatical people would step in and say, "This modernization is un-religious, and it is sinful." With such trifling talk they would prevent modernization. And already all the laws of the Padishah's Government were based on the principles of religion.

So it was impossible to separate worldly and religious problems. As you know, religion teaches man more about heavenly things, although it teaches at the same time truth and goodness. One must not confound heavenly things with problems of the world. As if it were not enough to crush the people under the title of Padishah, the old Padishahs took the title of Caliph also, in order to give themselves importance in the public eye. These men who used to live in palaces with all kinds of amusements and pleasures were supposed to be representatives of the Prophet. They never thought that religion is a concept of the conscience and that nobody has the right to interfere with people's religious problems. The reason why men have organized states is not to deal with heavenly problems, but it is only to assure the living of a comfortable and joyous life in the world.

Similar sentiments from numerous other sources might be cited if space were available. Let us, however, limit ourselves to one more extensive quotation, this one condemning a governmental system which permitted the dominance of religious laws. In an explanatory introduction to the new civil code which Turkey adapted from that of Switzerland in 1924, the Minister of Justice, Mahmud Esad Bey, laid the blame for Turkey's backwardness directly on the deadening influence of the Islamic laws which for centuries had formed the basis of Turkey's government and society. He writes:

...the need for religions to be nothing more than a simple affair of the conscience has become one of the principles of modern civilization and one of the characteristic differences between the old civilization and the new.

Laws which derive their inspiration from religions fetter the societies in which they are applied to the primitive epochs in which they arose, and they constitute invincible factors which prevent progress. It is indubitable that our laws, which came out of the changeless precepts of religion, and which ensured a permanent place to divine elements, have been the most powerful and the most effective factor which, in modern times, has enslaved the destinies of the Turkish nation to the mentalities and institutions of the Middle Ages...

In the march of our evolution one notices that all progressive steps which have been attempted in the interest of the masses have been thwarted by a class of men whose interests were compromised by the projected innovations. These men have always sought to turn people aside from the path of progress in preserving among them, in the name of religion, obscure superstitions and false beliefs. Let us not forget that the

Turkish people have resolved to accept without any reservation the principles of modern civilization. The most striking proof of this appears in the Revolution itself. If in certain quarters the civilization of to-day appears irreconcilable with the needs of Turkish society, that does not indicate an aptitude lacking in the people, but in the superannuated traditions and religious institutions which have hindered their development. . . .

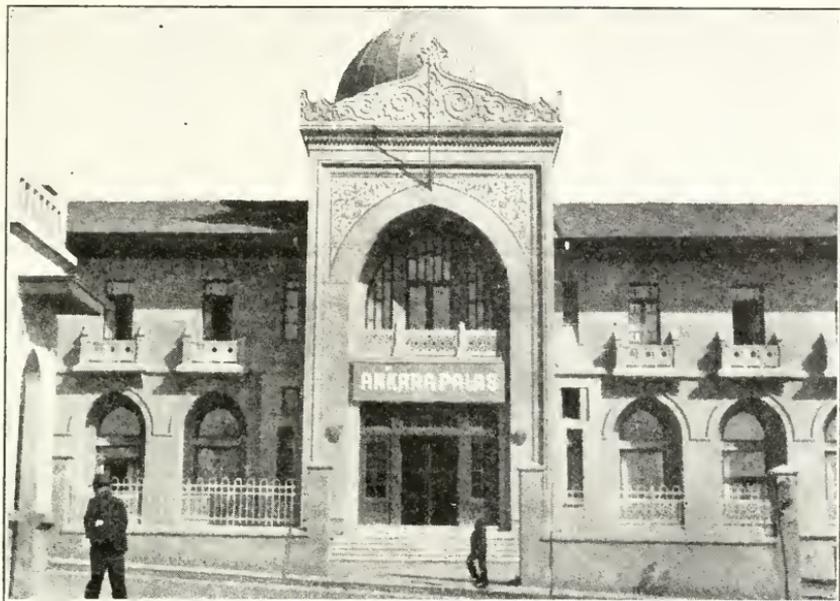
When religion has sought to rule human societies, it has been the arbitrary instrument of sovereigns, despots, and strong men. In separating the temporal and the spiritual, modern civilization has saved the world from numerous calamities and has given to religion an imperishable throne in the consciences of believers.

From what we have seen thus far, two important factors in Turkey's change process are plainly apparent: 1) the penetration—by battering and conducting agencies—of Western notions into Turkish society; and 2) the consequent agitated dissatisfaction with the traditional Islamic heritage, gradually developing into a conviction that religion's influence must be allowed no specific control over public affairs.

Although these factors of Western penetration and internal dissatisfaction had been evident in Turkey during the last half of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth, up to the close of the World War in 1918 little had actually been done, even by the Young Turks, to incorporate Western ways into the life of the Turkish mass. Europeans had brought their new techniques into Turkey, and a relatively small number of Turkish individuals had taken over Western customs to an extent which varied from superficiality on the one hand to extremity and consequent excommunication from their own society on the other. Turkey had begun to sense more and more the strength and vitality of the West, and had begun to find fault with some of her own weaknesses, but on the whole her Orient-sprung social forms had undergone but slight changes. What innovations had been introduced were really only modifications of existing forms, not radical alterations or substitutions of Western practices in place of the venerable customs of the Orient.

During the World War, however, and particularly in the years immediately following it, a number of cataclysmic events occurred which threw Turkish society into a state of flux. This stirring of the Turkish population into a condition of fluidity stands as the

third important factor which made possible the transformation of civilizations. On each of the cataclysmic events one might write a volume. We must here content ourselves, however, with a mere listing of them. First might be mentioned the Arab revolt which broke out in the later years of the Great War and opened the Turkish Empire to attack from the Allies. Rebellions by subject Christian groups were no doubt taken as a matter of course, but it was a great disil-



ENTRANCE TO MODERN HOTEL AT ANKARA

lusionment to Turkey to be betrayed by co-religionists. The fact that Moslem Arabs should have been disloyal made the Turks more than ever hostile to the Islamic features of their civilization, which they associated with Arabia. A second cataclysmic event was Turkey's collapse at the end of the Great War and the subsequent series of humiliations which her foes sought to impose upon her as provided in the Treaty of Sèvres. Third must be noted the downfall of the last Sultan-Caliph, Vahid-ud-din, whose compliance with Allied demands and hostility to the Nationalist movement was regarded by his subjects as treachery. Fourth was the ill-fated invasion of Anatolia by the Greeks. Fifth might be the aid and encouragement offered by Soviet Russia to the budding Nationalist

movement as a blow at France and England. Sixth and last, the division of counsels which ended the coöperation of France and England in enforcing the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres.

In the course of this extraordinary sequence of events Turkey was grievously shaken; in her Anatolian homeland she stood alone facing a hostile world; she realized that her very existence depended on heroic devotion and sacrifice. A new spirit of patriotic dedication thrilled every loyal Turkish heart. Men were ready to go to any extreme to insure the continuance and welfare of the new-born nation. Turkish society had been melted into a malleability which it had never experienced before. In those trying days, fired by the new spirit of nationalism, Turkey was ready to be molded by wise and courageous leadership.

The opportune appearance of capable leadership comprises the fourth and final factor, which with the three already noticed, assured the Westernization of Turkey. Outstanding figures such as Mustapha Kemal, Ismet, Kiazim, Raouf, Adnan, and Halidé Edib, all admirers of the West, at first worked together to bring about the new era of progress after the War of Independence had been won. It so happened as a result of personal and political disagreements that active leadership came into the hands of Mustapha Kemal, whose generalship in the war against the Greeks had made him the great national hero, and his efficient comrade, Ismet. The grateful and admiring Turkish nation, new-born from the turbulence and turmoil of the post-war years, was theirs to do with it what they willed. And their will was sweeping reform.

Kemal's policy, as he presented it in his classic *Six-Day Speech* in the fall of 1927, was "to raise the nation to that position to which she is entitled to aspire in the civilized world," which being interpreted, means the Western world. Any feature of her civilization which might be construed as archaic, as smacking of the primitive Orient, was to be eliminated. Thus using his enormous prestige and his efficient, Fascist-like political machine, the National People's Party, change after change was effected in Turkey's social and political structure. The venerable Sharia Law was replaced by a legal system modeled on those of Western states. The Caliphate, reminder of a day when Islam played too large a part in the administration of government, was abolished. Men were ordered to adopt the Western mode of dress. A thoroughly modern system of education, using Western techniques and admitting the radical princi-

ple of coeducation, was established. The Arabic alphabet was abandoned as not fitted to the Turkish language, and Latinized letters were substituted. The study of the Arabic and Persian languages in the schools was given up in favor of English and German, French being already in the curriculum. Adult education on an ambitious scale was instituted. In the new enthusiasm of national pride, the studies of history and literature were purged of Oriental Islamic features as much as possible, and new stress was laid on the achievements of men distinctively Turkish. Marriage reforms were instituted to enforce monogamy. In private houses and public buildings Western architecture was employed. In Ankara a school of music now introduces Turks to the instruments and compositions of the European masters. Students in all lines of endeavor regularly are selected and sent to Europe for study under government supervision. In commerce, industry, and agriculture, energetic attempts are under way to master the techniques and methods of the West, for no longer are there large populations of Greeks and Armenians to carry on Turkey's business. One might go on to enumerate dozens of important examples of the way Turkey's life is being reshaped in an effort to bring her thoroughly up-to-date. While many of them are still far from achieving the efficacy and completeness which are visualized, the point is that the reforms have been undertaken and are being pursued with great perseverance. And firmly behind each progressive innovation stands the stern and visionary figure of Mustapha Kemal Pasha.

In the realm of customs, practices, and ideas not regarded as religious, there has been, as we have seen, a wholesale substitution of Western ways for those inherited from Arabia and Islam. In the midst of all this readjustment, what has been the fate of those institutions, rituals, and beliefs which are classified as religion? There has, of course, been no tendency to replace this kernel of Islam by a general conversion to Christianity, the religion of the West. The new Government, having eliminated religious influences from its political and social institutions, and having driven out of the country the Dervish Orders and other elements regarded as reactionary, has adopted an opportunist attitude toward religion. On large segments of the population religion had a powerful hold. To have attempted to disestablish the Islamic faith altogether would have provoked a hostility which might have hindered the prompt achievement of other reforms. The policy, therefore, has been to

tolerate its continuance, eliminating such features as may not be in harmony with the general policy of reform, and encouraging any developments or modifications which might strengthen the spirit of national progress. Control of religious affairs has been kept in government hands through the constitution of a Committee on Religious Affairs, which functions as a sub-department under the Prime Minister. Among the interesting and important modifications which have taken place are the replacement of the old *medresschs* by schools which equip the modern *hodja* to serve both as religious leader and primary school teacher in his community; the preparation of sermons on national issues to be preached in the mosques during holy festivals; and the translation of the Koran into Turkish, thus making it generally intelligible.

In bringing to a close this brief study of Turkey's cultural transformation, it is to be hoped that these points have been brought out: that the successful implantation of Western reforms is no mere vagary of chance—there are reasons for their success in Turkey where other countries have met with failure; that André Servier's certainty regarding the incompatibility of Islam and the West is open to question; and that the following formula may be taken as descriptive of the present situation: Purified Islamic religion plus Western ideas and practices plus a newly awakened nationalism equals modern Turkey.