MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT

OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

by Teodoro Tagliaferri (University of Naples Federico II)

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TURKISH NATIONALISTS AND THE KHALIFATE

by Arnold J. Toynbee

For years past Christendom has been watching its ancient rival sicken, and we were just preparing to announce (with rather perfunctory sorrow) that death had supervened, when, lo and behold, the corpse turns at to be a chrysalis from which a disconcertingly lively creature threatens to emerge. What has happened? The Western Christian and the Indian Moslem public appear to be equally taken by surprise, yet the thing is as plain as daylight to anyone who has been in personal contact with the Turks within the last few years. The Turk has merely undergone the metamorphosis which overtook the other subjects of the Sultan-Khalif – Bulgars, Rumanians, Serbs, and Greeks – a generation or two before him, and which is manifesting itself among different Moslem peoples – Egyptians, Syrians, Iraquis, Persians, Afghans – at this very-time. All alike have been inoculated with Western culture, and it has worked upon them as a microbe-culture works upon a physical organism. They have "taken" Western nationalism, and while we may leave it an open question whether in their case it is poison or antitoxin, there is no doubt whatever that they have taken it strong. The Turk has made up his mind to have a sovereign national State, like the Frenchman or the Englishman, just as, rather earlier, he decided to wear French boots and English waistcoats. Having formed this resolve and fought for three years (in addition to the Great War!) in order to achieve it, and having performed the major part of his programme, which was to clear his national territory of the Greeks, he is now turning his attention to the Union pact which is to brush away the cobwebs of his own past history. The two most obstructive of these webs are the Khalifate and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman, Empire is no more compatible with a Turkish national State in 1922 than it was with a Greek national State in 1821, and the Turk is taking violent measures now, as the Greeks did then, to get rid of it. As for the Khalifate, remember how the national development of Germany was thwarted and delayed by the fact that the leading German dynasty had inherited the title of the Holy Roman Empire, and you will understand what a drag the Ottoman Khalifate has been upon the resurrection of Turkey.

The Khalif's Spiritual Power a Myth

The Holy Roman Empire, not the Papacy, is the true Western parallel. The prophet Mohammed was the founder of a State as well as the preacher of a creed, and the functionary technically styled his "successor" or "Khalif" was essentially his successor in his political capacity. Indeed, the Khalif is definitely not the functionary who settles so-called "spiritual" matters. He has never been reputed theologically infallible, and questions of doctrine are answered, not by him but by the judgment of high religious authorities, with an appeal in case of doubt or complaint to the general consensus of the doctors of the law. Thus the proposal of the Turkish Nationalist Government that the Khalif, deprived of his temporal functions, shall be suffered to console himself with the exercise of "his spiritual power" is in the nature of a practical joke, for his temporal power is everything and his spiritual power just nothing at all. It in improbable, however, that the men of Angora, composed their formula in a spirit of ribaldry. Paris is their Mecca, and it is much more likely that they were picturing the Khalif as a Pope and hungering and thirsting after the French laic State – falling, in fact, into errors in regard to Islamic institutions so gross that they would shock any European Orientalist.

Yet why should the Turks have, studied the history of the Khalifate? Or, even if they had, why should they have cared about it? The Khalifate has meant something for the last quarter of a century to the Moslem communities dispersed among the Gentiles – the vast but scattered aggregates of Moslems in India, China, and Russia.

For these Islamic minorities union is strength, and the late Sultan-Khalif Abdul Hamid was clever enough to make it a reality by using the printing press, cable, railroad, steamer and other instruments of mass-propaganda which we indefatigable Westerners had put into his hands. The mainspring of Pan-Islamism was fear, its bogey was the entente between England and Russia, and had the war gone differently and the Tsardom emerged from it victorious Pan-Islamism might have become the only defence of an Islam threatened with extinction. But the war, by destroying some European Powers and exhausting all the others, relieved the pressure upon the Moslem world, and immediately the latter followed its latest bent –

that is, away from its own anachronisms and towards all the Western novelties. Throughout Islam Western nationalism became the order of the day. First we encouraged it among the Arabs, and then the French, Italians, and Russians encouraged it among the Turks. In almost every country where there is a compact Moslem population the movement is now triumphant.

Paying Off Old Scores

Why should the Turkish Nationalists respect the Khalifate? On the contrary, they have every reason for bearing it a grudge. In 1920 when Kemal was a struggling outlaw in the extremity of Anatolia, attacked by the Greeks and condemned by the Allies, the Sultan-Khalif (it is whispered at British instigation) made a rash excursion into the spiritual sphere. He caused the Sheik-ul-Islam to issue a *fetwa* condemning the national movement as impiety. The anathema fell flat, but the Nationalists never forgave it, and eighteenth month ago they used to tell me quite frankly that when they got into power (as they never doubted that they would do) they would take the action that have now done.

After all, the Ottoman Khalifate (notwithstanding the capital which Abdul Hamid contrived to make out of it) has never been much more than an historical curiosity. Sultan Selim picked it up as recently as A.D. 1517 from a scion of the Abbasids and handed it on to his successors as part of their style and title like the kingships of Cyrus and Jerusalem, which till lately adorned the names of certain European dynasties. The Moslem world did not bother about this Ottoman arrogation of the title in the sixteenth century, and it may be prophesied that it will bother still less now if the title passes away. If Moslem nations desire to take common action there are more effective means to their hand that the laborious maintenance of an anachronism.