MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT

OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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BETTER OMENS IN THE NEAR EAST (1933)

by Arnold J. Toynbee

Nowadays, in the hope of discovering a gleam of light here and there to relieve the general gloom, one comparatively bright streak that catches a western eye is the apparent trend of international politics in the Near and Middle East. In this part of the world, a number of signs have been pointing, for the past few years, to an abatement in the fury of the local epidemic of nationalism. The sensational event in this field has been the burying of the hatchet between Turkey and Greece – a reconciliation which was inaugurated by Mr. Venizelos's visit to President Mustafa Kemal at Ankara in the fall of 1930, and which has been sealed since then by a return visit of Ismet Pasha to Athens. This Græco-Turkish *rapprochement* is only the most signal example of a tendency which has latterly been wide-spread throughout this great region of the world. Another symptom has been the organization of an annual Balkan Conference with a permanent secretariat – a platform on which the Bulgarians found it possible to meet not only the Turks and Greeks and Rumanians but even the Serbs – in spite of the still running sore of Macedonia. Three meetings of this Balkan Conference have been held. At the third, which took place in October at Bucharest, all the countries excepting Bulgaria tentatively favored a compact which included a nonaggression agreement, an agreement to settle all disputes by mediation and arbitration and a proposal to appoint a commission for investigating «the difficult problem of minorities». Rather farther eastward, we see an instance of the same conciliatory tendency in the official recognition of the new postwar kingdom of Iraq by Persia in 1929 – an event of the same kind, in a smaller way, as the reconciliation between Turkey and Greece a year later. Our list of good omens in the Near and Middle East will be completed by a mention of the network of amity and arbitration treaties which Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan have been

concluding during these postwar years, both with the Soviet Union and with one another. Originally, this treaty-making was started on the Soviet government's initiative; but latterly the three independent Mohammedan countries have favored the movement on their own account and have taken pains to cement the new bonds between them, in forgetfulness of the rivalries and enmities that used to divide them.

The more closely one looks into it, the more remarkable this spirit of reconciliation in the Near and Middle East appears. Take the outstanding case of the *détente*, which has been followed by an *entente*, between Turkey and Greece. In the fall of 1922 any observer who had ventured to prophesy that, not more than eight years later, Mr. Venizelos would be visiting President Mustafa Kemal at Ankara, as a highly honored and warmly welcomed guest, in order to put his signature to a set of treaties which would include a protocol providing for parity in Greek and Turkish naval armaments – any one who had foretold this event eight years before it happened (or eighteen months before, for the matter of that) would have been laughed out of court as a lunatic.

In the fall of 1922 the Greeks had just been beaten in a Græco-Turkish war in which the existence of Turkey and the survival of the Greek minority in Asia Minor had been the stakes. Both peoples had put their last ounce of strength into this supreme struggle between them. At the critical moment of the campaign the Greek army had come within an ace of capturing Ankara (then written "Angora"), the new capital of Turkey which Mr. Venizelos was to visit eight years afterward in peace. As a result of the final Greek *débâcl*e, more than a million Asiatic Greeks had to leave the homes which had been inhabited by their ancestors before them, without a break in continuity, for some two or three thousand years; and this unprecedented number of refugees had since been compelled to find new homes under the Greek flag in Europe. Here, alone, was cause for bitterness enough; and this Græco-Turkish war of 1919-1922 was merely the culmination of a series of Græco-Turkish wars which had gone on intermittently since the outbreak of the War of Greek Independence in 1821. Mr. Venizelos himself, the Greek national leader, had been born an Ottoman subject in the island of Crete and had begun his career by taking part in an insurrection which had secured the island its autonomy. Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the Turkish national leader, had been born at

Salonika, once the second city of the Ottoman Empire, next to Constantinople (Istanbul) itself. And in the Balkan War of 1912 Salonika had passed from Turkish sovereignty to Greek. For these men, with these memories, how has it proved possible to forget and forgive?

Compared with the Near East, our Western World, we thought, was assuredly civilized! And now these Orientals have stolen a march upon us. The deliberate and thoroughgoing reconciliation between Turkey and Greece, or between Persia and Iraq, has set a new example in the settlement of national feuds which the West does not yet seem quite able or willing to follow.

The Græco-Turkish settlement is genuine beyond all doubt. It is not just a deal in high politics which has been made by the governments over the peoples' heads. It represents the peoples' own feelings as was shown by the special applause with which the athletes of the Turkish contingent were greeted by the Greek public as they stepped into the arena of the stadium at Athens during the international games held there while the First Balkan Conference was in session. The Greeks and Turks have really succeeded in making a new start in their relations with each other. Yet, in our Western World, the historic feuds between French and Germans and between Germans and Poles go merrily on. The feud between French and Italians actually becomes more embittered. And even on the American side of the Atlantic a simultaneously rising national consciousness seems to be putting an unprecedented asperity into the relations between the United States and Canada. For the moment, apparently, the traditional rôles of East and West are reversed; and our curiosity is aroused to discover the explanation of the puzzle.

The explanation, when we run it to earth, turns out to be not very flattering to our western selves. The truth is that this malady of nationalism – from which the Near East is now perhaps emerging, while the West remains fast bound in misery and iron – is in the last analysis a disease of western origin. The Near Eastern peoples caught it, by contagion from the West, a century or so ago; and it is just because it is an exotic disease for them that they have taken it in so violent a form. They have taken nationalism hard, as South Sea Islanders take chicken pox or German measles.

The worst atrocities of nationalism in the Near East have no parallels in our modern western history on the point of sheer scale; but, on the other hand, every one of them has some western precedent. The Armenian massacres in Turkey at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were a bigger affair than the massacres of the French Revolution or the Massacre of St. Bartholomew – yet these are their true antecedents in the history of political ideas and of the actions in which the ideas bear fruit. The Greeks who were evicted from Asia Minor in 1922 far exceeded in numbers the Empire Loyalists who were evicted from the former Thirteen Colonies after the American Revolution or the Acadians who were evicted from Nova Scotia in 1755 or even the Jews who were evicted from Spain at the close of the fifteenth century. But those evicted Spanish Jews received asylum, at the time, in the Turkish dominion as is testified by the Castilian that is the mother tongue of the Jewish community in Constantinople and Salonika and Smyrna down to the present day. And in the age when those Jews had to migrate from Spain to Turkey, this whole business of eviction and massacre was the peculiar practice of western Christendom.

When the Christians made themselves masters of the Spanish Peninsula, they gave the conquered native Moslems and Jews a choice between conversion and expulsion. When the Turks made themselves masters of the Near East at the same moment, they followed the precepts laid down by Mohammed eight hundred years before and gave the conquered native Christians the kindlier choice between conversion and supertax. The Turkish conquerors allowed the conquered Christians to keep their religion without losing their homes; and these Near Eastern Christians duly remained in the places where they had lived before the Turkish conquest. They remained, without being uprooted, till the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the western notion, and the western spirit, of nationalism began to invade the Near East and to set all the Near Eastern peoples – Christian and Moslem – by the ears.

The notion underlying our western nationalism is that the various peoples of the world ought to be segregated from one another into homogeneous blocks, neatly disposed in well-defined national territories. Every country ought to be the home of a particular nationality; and each nationality ought to have its own country where it can be completely

master in its own house. The ideal of this western nationalism is the sovereign national state; and this ideal is affronted by the existence, within a nation's national frontiers, of any kind of alien minority. If a minority is allowed to remain on sufferance, it should consider itself lucky; and it ought to show its gratitude by giving up its own identity and assimilating itself to the ruling majority in every way, and this as quickly as possible. If a minority is ungrateful and stiff-necked, then it is fair game for coercion; and, if it rebels against coercion, why, then it loses all moral rights; and the majority on whose national domain the minority is committing a trespass becomes entitled to defend its national integrity by main force – which means eviction or massacre in the last resort. This is the naked reality of our western nationalism, when we strip it bare of all the fine phrases under which its nakedness is commonly hidden. It is really a rather barbaric political philosophy.

Now this mania of nationalism and its fruits were quite foreign to the Near Eastern World until the Near East caught the infection from the West. In fact, the Near Eastern peoples did not originally correspond at all to the nations of our Western World. They corresponded rather to our religious sects or social classes or trades and professions. They lived cheek by jowl, territorially intermingled with one another, and inhabiting alternate villages of the same district and alternate quarters of the same town. And they lived so, not because they were too inept to sort themselves out if they chose, but because they were socially and economically interdependent, so that their living together was a social convenience and even an economic necessity.

This situation was provided for in the indigenous institutions of the Near East – the institutions which the Near Eastern peoples had evolved for themselves before the whole native fabric of their social life was broken up and swept away by the impact of our western techniques and institutions and ideas. In the old Ottoman Empire, as it was organized before that great catastrophe happened, the several religious communities – Moslems and Jews and Orthodox Christians and Armenian Christians and Catholics – were organized in bodies called *millets*, each of which exercised jurisdiction over its own people through the whole extent of the Ottoman territories. Although these *millets* were under the government of the respective ecclesiastical authorities, their field of social action was much wider than what we

should regard nowadays, in the West, as the limits of the ecclesiastical sphere. The *millet-bashis*, or ecclesiastical community leaders, had jurisdiction over their respective peoples not only in matters of religious ritual and dogma but also in matters of marriage and inheritance and even in the domain of commercial law and litigation. This institution of *millets*, which were geographically conterminous yet mutually autonomous organizations of nonterritorial communities, was admirably adapted to the needs of the mixed population of the Near Eastern World. It was also singularly different – as different as could be – from the institution of nationalism which our Western World had been evolving for itself in another social environment. In the Near East the trouble began when, about a century ago, our exotic western notion of nationalism began to invade Near Eastern minds and to supplant the political ideas with which these Near Eastern minds were familiar. This mental revolution in the Near East was perhaps inevitable. For by that time the West had already established its ascendancy over the Near East in warfare and commerce, and this gave everything western an irresistible prestige. The prestige of western weapons and western goods was shared by western ideas and institutions, and thus our western nationalism made its rough entry into the relatively tranquil field of oriental life. When once it had got to work in this way on oriental soil, our western nationalism began to produce a revolutionary effect; and this effect has taken rather more than a century to work itself out by brute force. Brute force was really the only method possible, since the old and new dispensations which were here in conflict were too deeply opposed to each other to allow of any genuine or permanent compromise between them.

Consider, in concrete terms, the necessary reaction of Greek or Turkish or Bulgar or Arab minds to the new western political doctrine when first it captivated them. Convinced, as they were, that nationhood was a political talisman of inestimable value, how were the Near Eastern peoples to acquire it? As each of them looked around and eyed its neighbors, it perceived that in the Near Eastern World as it was at the time there was hardly one patch of territory in which the conditions for nationhood as prescribed in the West were actually to be found in existence. Throughout the Near East the peoples were intermingled. There were majorities and minorities but no homogeneous blocks. In these tragic circumstances our

Near Eastern converts to nationalism had only one course open to them. Desperately they have taken it and, with the zeal of converts, have actually sorted themselves out into the segregated homogeneous blocks which the alien western system of nationalism demands.

The distribution of population on the old map of the Near East was like some gorgeous oriental robe of shot silk, in which the threads of half a dozen different colors are harmoniously blended with one another. In the course of a century the Near Eastern peoples have unpicked these threads – destroying half of them in the clumsy process and have woven the remnant into half a dozen pieces of coarse cloth, each composed of one single crude color. The map of the Near East as we see it today, at the end of a century of revolutionary changes, is a kind of patchwork in which these ugly new pieces of stuff have been roughly stitched together. The result is something like Joseph's coat of many colors and the resemblance even extends to the sinister bloodstains with which Joseph's coat was defaced. This cruel ordeal, which the Near Eastern peoples have been undergoing for a century past, as a result of borrowing exotic notions from us, is now at last complete. As between the Turks and the Greeks, for instance, the process of sorting out by brute force, which began in 1821, did actually come to an end in 1922. At least, by the time when the Græco-Turkish armistice signed at Mudania in the fall of that year brought hostilities in Asia Minor to an end, the forcible segregation of Greeks and Turks had gone as far as it could be carried. By that time it had become clear that the Greek national state, which had been growing for a century at Turkey's expense, had at last reached the limits of its possible expansion. Greece could not make any permanent conquest of territory on the Asiatic mainland; and, conversely, Turkey could not reconquer from Greece a single Ægean island or any territory on the European mainland outside Eastern Thrace. The long drawn out struggle for the partition of the old Ottoman Empire was over, as far as the Greek and Turkish combatants were concerned. The frontier between these two nationalities, so long a cause of the most violent contention, had settled down into equilibrium at last.

This fact evidently goes far to explain the mystery which we set ourselves to solve at the beginning of this inquiry. How account for the rapid and extreme change for the better in Græco-Turkish relations between 1922 and 1930? At the close of 1922 these relations were

worse, if possible, than they had ever been. Both nations were obsessed by bitter memories of the past, and this state of mind persisted for a time on both sides by sheer momentum. In fact, however, the chapter of history that was reflected in all this bitterness had just been closed; and on the morrow of the Mudania Armistice and the Treaty of Lausanne, when the feelings of the late combatants began to cool down, the logic of the new facts began to assert itself. «What», it began to be asked on both sides, «does it profit us to keep up this quarrel? It is clearly beyond our strength to shift the frontier that has been established at Lausanne. The game is not worth the candle. We might as well make friends». This common-sense trend of popular feeling has been discerned and translated into political action by able and large-minded statesmanship on both sides; and thus the miracle of Græco-Turkish reconciliation has been accomplished. What may be its lessons for the rest of us?

The first lesson is that the most ruthless application of the processes of massacre and eviction is not sufficient in itself to provide a solution for a nationality problem. These methods of segregation have been applied, as between the Greeks and the Turks, on an unprecedented scale; and one of the most notorious features of the Lausanne peace settlement of 1923-1924 was the Græco-Turkish convention for the compulsory intermigration of the respective minorities that were left on the wrong sides of the new frontier. This convention was the most thoroughgoing instrument of forcible segregation on a vast scale that has ever been devised; and yet even this instrument fell short of making a clean sweep. It still left a Greek minority under Turkish rule in Constantinople and a Turkish minority under Greek rule in Western Thrace; and one of the essential elements in the recent Græco-Turkish reconciliation has been a genuine determination, genuinely put into practice, on both sides to treat these residual minorities with justice and humanity. This change of heart and change of policy toward residual minorities is a point of supreme importance because, in a world mapped out on the nationality basis, there are sure to be residual minorities on the wrong sides of almost every national frontier, however justly and however skillfully the line may have been drawn and however far the policy of compulsory or voluntary migration may be carried. Consider, for example, in this light, the two sorest spots on the postwar political map of Europe: the area transferred in the Treaty of Versailles from

Germany to Poland and the areas transferred from Hungary to Rumania and to Czechoslovakia in the Treaty of the Trianon. It is perhaps conceivable (though this is not yet in sight in this fourteenth year after the peace settlement) that with the passage of time all the parties here concerned may come to recognize that the new frontiers are hopelessly beyond their power to alter and so may come to think of them as virtually permanent. It is perhaps conceivable, again, that they may take steps to make the nationality map conform to the new political map, more closely than it did conform when the map was originally drawn, by some scheme of compulsory or voluntary intermigration on the Græco-Turkish or the Græco-Bulgarian precedent As a matter of fact, something like three quarters of a million of Germans have already migrated by a voluntary movement which is distinguished from eviction by a rather fine shade to the German side of the postwar frontier between Germany and Poland. The same solution might perhaps be found for the enclave of Magyar population in the southeastern corner of Transylvania, which now lies in the heart of postwar Greater Rumania. To transplant these Magyars from their Transylvanian homes and replant them within the postwar frontiers of Hungary would hardly be a larger or more difficult task than the transplantation of the Asiatic Greeks from Asia to Europe, which has actually been carried out with remarkable success.

But the real moral of the Graeco-Turkish precedent for these two European cases is that the acceptance of the new frontiers and the transplantation of the minorities from the wrong side of them to the right side would not be enough in itself to produce the reconciliation for which Europe is crying out and for which the whole world stands in desperate need. However far this mechanical kind of solution may be carried, there will remain certain residual minorities. And, unless and until there is a change of heart among the majorities in whose domain, and at whose mercy, these residual minorities must go on living, and, unless this change of heart leads to a change of behavior in the way in which the minorities are treated, then the prospect of a genuine reconciliation between the nations concerned will remain as remote as ever.

Moreover, there are other great and populous and civilized regions of the world in which the problems created by the advent of nationalism cannot be solved at all either by

redrawing frontiers or by redistributing. If we extend our survey to India from Europe and the Near East, upon which we have concentrated our attention so far, we shall find ourselves confronted with a signal case in point. In India, the native organization of society has been, and still is today, of the same pattern as the native organization in the Near East, which we have described above in preface to the story of how the impact of our western nationalism has destroyed this native Near Eastern organization. Now the best way to grasp the nature of Indian society as it still is today is to recall the now obsolete picture of Near Eastern society as it was in the prenationalist age and then to magnify all the proportions and heighten all the colors. In the old Ottoman Empire the number of communities which were geographically intermingled on a single territory was hardly more than half a dozen, all told. In the present Indian empire there is not only the geographical intermixture of Hindus with Moslems and Sikhs and Parsis and Christians but there is also the almost infinitesimal subdivision of the great Hindu community itself into castes which are likewise geographically intermingled and likewise poles apart in sentiment. Indeed, there is a greater social gulf fixed between the Hindu depressed classes, or Untouchables, and the caste Hindus than between these caste Hindus and the non-Hindu Indian communities.

What is more, the social cleavage between one community and another goes far deeper in India than it ever went in the Near East. In the Near East, as we have seen, the several *millets* were divided from one another by differences of religion and occupation, and their members did not intermarry; but no taboo interdicted them from eating in the same restaurant or traveling on the same railroad, car or steamer or sleeping in the same hotel. In India, however, the communities are divided by formidable barriers similar to those which divide white from black in the United States or in the Union of South Africa. I remember a curious little incident which reveals the impression that this Indian caste system makes upon Near Eastern minds. I happened to be in Constantinople in 1921 when the city was under the military occupation of the Allied Powers; and the largest contingent in the occupying army consisted of Indian regiments under their British officers. These British officers of the Indian army, having breathed in the sense of caste with the Indian air, were outraged to find themselves expected to travel cheek by jowl with the "natives" on board the ferryboats which,

at Constantinople, are the principal means of local transportation. So they arranged to have a space roped off on the choicest part of the deck and to have this space labeled "For Allied Officers Only". Probably an American citizen from South Carolina or Alabama would have felt as these British Indian officers felt and would have acted in the same circumstances in the same way. But the Near Eastern natives of Constantinople felt and reacted very differently. Turks, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, they were at daggers drawn about everything else (at that very moment the Græco-Turkish War in Asia Minor was at its height), but, when the Indian army roped them off from the best seats on their own ferryboats in their own city, they forgot their family quarrels and lifted up their voices with one accord in a unanimous shout of indignant protest.

This trivial incident indicates that the cleavage between the intermingled communities of India, while similar in kind to the cleavage in the Near East, is vastly greater in degree. And it is evident that the problem of adjustment to the requirements of the new nationalism will be more difficult in India proportionately. Any one who travels through the Near East today and observes the havoc which the reorganization of Near Eastern society has wrought, will experience a strange sensation (I have been through the experience) if he travels on from the Near East to India and imagines to himself what it would mean if India, in the twentieth century, were put through the same ordeal that the Near East went through in the nineteenth century. Think of trying to carve up the map of the present Indian empire, not into the half a dozen "successor states" which have taken the place of the old Ottoman Empire, but into the fifty or a hundred states which the corresponding Indian conditions would require. Think of trying to segregate the Sikhs and the Moslems from the Hindus or the different kinds of Hindus from one another: Rajputs from Mahrattas; Brahmans from non-Brahmans; caste Hindus from Untouchables. Remember that in India you would be dealing with some three hundred and fifty millions of people – about three times the present population of the United States – instead of the paltry thirty millions or so which was probably the sum total of the population of the old Ottoman Empire before it was carved up. And then remind yourself that these millions in India are alienated from one another by deeper prejudices and stronger passions than those passions and prejudices that produced the notorious atrocities of the

nineteenth century in the Near East. When you think of all these things, your mind will recoil in horror from the vastness of the human catastrophe which would be precipitated if India in our time were to go the way which the Near East actually went in that epoch of Near Eastern history which has now just come to an end. You will say to yourself that, by hook or by crook, this catastrophe simply must be averted.

But how avert this catastrophe, which menaces the people of India today? For the epidemic of nationalism is no respecter of circumstances. Nationalism has of course infected India, as it has infected every other part of the world, and it is producing its well-known results in the minds of the various Indian communities. Every one of them is now animated by the ideal which nationalism always brings with it. Every Indian community, great and small, is now demanding its own national home. It is demanding to have an area assigned to it – a state or a province or a district – in which it will find itself in the majority and will be able to treat the local minority as majorities do treat minorities under our western democratic system of majority rule. Obviously, these conflicting demands cannot all be satisfied simultaneously; and, more than that, the satisfaction of any single one of them on the ordinary terms of majority rule would simply be opening the door to a merciless intercommunal conflict.

What is the solution? There is a vociferous, though uninfluential, "die-hard" element in British public opinion which declares that the only solution is the maintenance in India in perpetuity of a bureaucratic British administration. Nothing, these die-hards declare, can prevent the Indians from springing at one another's throats except the presence of some alien, neutral, impartial and all-powerful authority ruling the roost. This thesis has the attraction of simplicity; but it implies that the rise of nationalism in India can be either arrested or ignored; and this, of course, is non-sense. You might as well set out to build a harbor on the Indian coast on the basis of arresting or ignoring the tides of the Indian Ocean. In India, as elsewhere, nationalism – for good or evil – has come to stay; and it has come as a mighty and indeed an irresistible force. The innumerable communities into which the Indian is divided are all agreed on one thing. They want British rule to come to an end in order that Indians may be masters in their own house. But here their agreement stops; for

they are still, despite certain recent settlements, in the throes of working out a plan for saving their house from being divided against itself. In this business, the Indian peoples and the British authorities in India are confronted by a fundamental difficulty. It has been agreed on all hands that India is to be equipped with the democratic institutions of the West; and then it becomes manifest that these institutions, which were originally evolved in a non-Indian environment, are really incapable of working, as they stand, under Indian conditions. The crux of the problem is the principle of majority rule. In our western system of democracy, the voice of the majority prevails, and the voice of the minority counts for nothing in the election of legislatures by electorates and in the decisions which the legislatures take when they come into session. In our Western World, this system works because a western nation is usually a more or less homogeneous community in which the majorities and minorities are perpetually breaking up and recombining as political interests and circumstances change. The system breaks down in a society where the majorities and minorities are themselves organized communities and permanent entities. Accordingly, to make democracy work in such a situation, some alternative device has to be found.

How to work democracy without majority rule? That is the fundamental question at issue now in India; and India is not the only country concerned in this great new experiment in democratic government. The same question arises in Palestine, as between the Arabs and the Jews; and possibly it may also arise in Belgium between the Flemings and Walloons or in Canada between the French and English speaking Canadians or in South Africa between the Dutch and the English and the Bantus. Here we seem to see looming up one of the great political problems of the twentieth century; and an apparatus for solving this problem is not to be found in the armory of our own western political tradition. Whether or not the ancient Near Eastern tradition can supply the thing that is needed, it is clear, at any rate, that the Near East – both past and present – has important political lessons to teach us. *Ex oriente lux*; and the state of world politics is not so grand today that we can afford to turn a blind eye to any ray of political light that may be offered to us from any quarter of the compass.