

CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IN TURKEY

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IN looking back over the five historic years since the reinstating of Constitutional Government in the Ottoman Empire, the question rises in the minds of many: Has the new régime been a success, or a failure? Has it made good? Has the *coup d'état* of July 23rd, 1908, proved worth the struggle of the following April? The answer will only be reached after a review of the history of many disorders, involving the overthrow of ten Cabinets in five years; of uprisings of Arabs, Druses, Albanians and Kourds; of two foreign wars; of many political murders; and of several cholera epidemics.

Glance at the state of the people under the Hamidian régime. There is no denying the fact that the hand of the "Red Sultan" was a strong one, and that when used in behalf of the proverbial "peace and tranquillity in the provinces," it could keep order where it chose. People did not then speak lightly of the Government; and any revolt against its power was pretty sure to bring dire vengeance. Everything that occurred in the farthest province was heard instantaneously at the capital, and vengeance on evil-doers (against the Government) was swift and sure.

We cannot claim that as powerful an authority has been wielded by any cabinet, or group, or individual under the constitutional régime. Things have been more at a loose end than they used to be. There has not been the same respect for authority, nor has the government carried out its purposes as it should have done. Moreover, the early promise of "liberty, equality, justice and brotherhood," has been sadly wanting in fulfilment:

large numbers of innocent people have languished in prison as heretofore ; the press has been under severe martial restrictions, and many papers have fallen under the censorial axe. The policy of the Committee of Union and Progress has been Turkification rather than Ottomanisation. Arabs have not been treated as equal with Turks ; Albanians have received worse usage than Arabs ; and the Greeks and Bulgarians were finally rescued from Unionist misrule by Greece and Bulgaria ; while the Armenians still suffer under unequal treatment as between them and their Kourdish neighbours. In the late Parliament, the million and a half Armenians had only ten Deputies ; the four or five million Greeks had but twenty-six ; the four million or more Arabs only about thirty, while the Turks with their eleven million population had one hundred and seventy-five. And this was called equality. There has never yet been an Armenian Vali over a single province, and only one or two Greeks. Moslems have every advantage over non-Moslems, both in the courts and as regards taxation. As for justice, one has but to recall the murders of Sami Bey, Zeki Bey, General Nazim Pasha, Lieutenant Niazi Bey, and Mahmoud Shevket Pasha, and to remember that no one was punished for any one of these crimes except the last, and that only because Shevket Pasha was a Unionist. The Government hanged twelve men for this one murder, one of them being an Imperial son-in-law. When an Armenian village in the eastern provinces is attacked and the sheep carried off, if the owner of the sheep tries to rescue them from their Kourdish captors, the government investigators arrest the Armenians and let the Kourds go free. This is Committee justice. As for brotherhood, the " brothers," who in Salonica and Monastir plotted for the overthrow of tyranny, have during the past twelve months been cutting each others' throats in and near those same cities, which are the bones of contention to-day for the dogs of war. Since the dethronement of Hamid, the Ottoman Empire has lost Bosnia, Herzegovina and Bulgaria, all then vassal provinces ; and also Tripoli, Benghazi, Crete, Albania, Macedonia, most if not all of the Ægean Archipelago, and a large part of

Thrace. Worse still, she has lost on the battlefield the life-blood of hundreds of thousands of her young men, to say nothing of the thousands more who have fled the country to avoid a like fate. Can that régime be called a success, under which the Empire has been reduced to about half its former size, and has suffered so terribly in human lives ?

Yet this is but one side of the picture. Abdul Hamid has been kept under very strict surveillance by the Government for the past four years and a half ; and there is not a thinking patriot to-day who would favour his return to power. With all their faults, the Constitutionalists have the mass of the people behind them as Hamid and the Yildiz camarilla never had. True, the liberty of to-day is not what it should be ; but what a contrast to what used to be ! If the prisons to-day contain righteous men, they at least do not bulge with the crowd of them. If papers are suppressed in these days, they at least can and do say thousands of things that they never dared to say ten years ago. They talk of decentralisation, of the rights of the Armenians, of the need of governmental reforms, of the just causes of foreign distrust, and kindred topics, any one of which in Hamidian days would have sent the editor into exile, if not into the Bosphorus. Dailies, weeklies, monthlies, comic papers, literary periodicals, etc., have sprung up like mushrooms. There are presses in every town of any size in the country. Many of our American colleges have their own papers, printed and circulated unhindered, whereas they used to be prevented from even seeing foreign periodicals. There is freedom of assembly ; why, it used to be imprudent for three men to be seen talking together at a street corner in Constantinople, for fear of being arrested for conspiracy. Prayer meetings in private houses were prohibited ; no meetings of any Christian sort were allowed where the Government had not already recognised the existence of an organised Christian congregation. And as for a political gathering, the very name was scarcely known. Now, all these are common occurrences.

There is still much to be desired in the equality line ;

yet Moslems have learned that crimes cannot be as freely committed against Christians as they were previously. And a beginning has been made in recognising equality in the Government service. Justice, too, is more of a fact than it used to be. There are officials who cannot be bribed ; faithfulness has been known to find its legitimate reward. Men have more hope of being justly treated than they ever had before.

Of material improvements there are many, and they are far-reaching. One whose effects are increasingly apparent is the adoption of the European system of time, whereby twelve o'clock is mid-day. Naturally this has been followed by a general toning up of the work of all departments ; trains and steamers run more regularly than was ever possible when the variable hour of sunset regulated everything ; clerks have to be more prompt at the Government offices, and even in the mosques the *à la Franga* clocks hang by the side of the *à la Turka*. The imperial navy has been reorganised. No one can fully realise what this means, unless he saw the Hamidian navy. For twenty years, from 1878 to 1897, the fleet lay safely at anchor on the inside of two bridges in the Golden Horn, while the engines rusted away and tons of barnacles rested quietly on the hulls. The crazy joint of an old stovepipe, stuck out of the porthole of a man-of-war, with an old tin can tied under it to catch the sooty drippings, was the fit symbol of the whole management. But under the energetic lead of Rear-Admiral Gamble, Rear-Admiral Lympus and their corps of aides, the Ottoman fleet has taken voyages even in the Mediterranean ; and the name of the " Hamidieh " struck such dismay to the hearts of the Greeks in the late war that they had to mine the entrance to Piræus harbour to protect their capital. Forty or so old hulks have been sold for scrap iron, and in their stead the new " Reshadieh " will soon grace the fleet,—the most powerful battleship afloat. Large and commodious steamers have been purchased for use as transports, among them the old White Star Liner " Germanic." Perhaps one had better not speak too much of the reorganised army, after the late disastrous campaign ; but it remains true that the

soldiers are now better clothed, better housed, and in general better paid than they used to be.

There has also been more railroad building than in any corresponding period of Ottoman history. Much has been done on the Baghdad railway ; new roads have been constructed from Tripoli to Homs in Syria, from Bandurma to Soma in Asia Minor, and from Baba Eski to Kirk Kilise in Thrace ; and all this in spite of war and rebellion and cholera. The irrigation works near Konia have opened thousands of acres to cultivation ; the new nickel coinage is a vast improvement over any previous one ; the Government has begun to send students in considerable numbers to European and American Universities for special study ; and thousands of useless clerks have been eliminated from the Government offices and their salaries saved. Ambulances, motor-cars and real fire engines are becoming common sights in Constantinople, and there are electric trolleys in Salonica and Damascus. The famous and infamous street dogs of Constantinople have been removed, albeit by a none too merciful process ; the new Galata Bridge is a joy to behold ; and, Oh, wonder of wonders ! Shakespeare's Hamlet, long forbidden entrance into the country because it spoke of killing a king, has been translated into Turkish by a Turk, and given in the capital by an Ottoman company.

Too much should not be made of the material side of the development, important and far-reaching as that is. But there has been an even more striking psychological development. Contrast the *spirit* and *feelings* of the people then and now. Where is that cringing fear, that abject grovelling in official presence that characterised absolutist times ? Men hardly dared call their souls their own, then ; for any high official could make away with them on the slightest pretext, or on none, and there would generally be no investigation. Where is the servile fawning of the press, and the fulsome praise of the Sultan on every accession day ? Where are the endless and irritating hindrances to travel, both foreign and domestic, the utter blocking of all efforts at improvement, the impediments to commerce ? Where is the army of

spies, more numerous at one time than the regular army, that grew fat off the most nefarious of trades ? Why, even foreign clergymen were most carefully watched by Hamid's minions, as were practically all foreigners. At the establishment of the Constitution, the chief of the bureau of spies, the notorious Fehim Pasha, was lynched by the people who had suffered so terribly at his hands. Men may be hopeless now also about improvement in the governmental system ; but they are not so paralyzed in their efforts to find a way out. Reforms in the official world have actually taken place ; and more are openly suggested. An Englishman is in charge of the customs administration ; a Frenchman has done much to introduce order into the financial bureau ; an Englishman is reorganising the navy ; and the advice of foreigners is not infrequently asked. The Opposition in Parliament may be weak, but it is a real Opposition, and freely criticises Government measures. The Department of Public Instruction may be poor, but it is more active than it ever was under Hamid. And, moreover, Moslem children and youths are now allowed freely to go to foreign and even missionary schools.

And despite all testimony to the contrary, even in war times the prospects for trade are bright to a surprising degree. Consular reports published this year show that the year 1912 was in many respects a record year in exports and imports ; and everything points to an immediate and very large increase in business activity just as soon as war conditions cease. Another noteworthy fact is that standards of living all through the country are higher than ever before, and people have begun to put into practice more civilised and more hygienic ways of life. There is less actual misery, and more organised local charity and philanthropy ; and the general intelligence of all classes has risen far more in the past five years than probably in the previous twenty-five. While this progress may not be attributable to the activities of the new régime, the absence,—nay, the impossibility,—of such progress in the past was directly attributable to the stifling and deadening influence of absolutism.

Poor and incomplete as is its record, constitutional government has been at least a partial success, and not a total failure. In the opinion of the writer, it has been more of a success than of a failure, and the future is not all gloom. Only a fool or a knave would desire the return of Hamidianism. Let all get together and strive together to make the new system still more of a success, and to lift the country morally and spiritually to a higher plane.

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