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# THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE YOUNG TURK PARTY

BY STANWOOD COBB

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At present it looks as if Turkey were on the eve of being partitioned among the powers of Europe. The Constitution, instead of strengthening the Empire, has seemed to weaken it. In spite of the many reforms introduced by the Young Turks, subject peoples do not want to remain subject peoples if they can help it. Macedonia is crying for release, Albania is in constant revolt, Arabia is disloyal; and on top of all these difficulties Italy precipitates a war in the endeavor to grab a slice of territory.

The difficulties which the Young Turks have to face are many. In the first place, their political power is very precarious. Their only hold upon the government is through the army, which they control. Their rule is one of military despotism. The Committee of Union and Progress, with Chevket as its dominant power, control, not the votes of the country, but the arms, which at present are more effective. The Young Turk party as such is in great minority throughout the Empire. The proportion of Young Turk to Old Turk is hardly one in ten. The Old Turks are waiting like hungry wolves to have their turn of power, and the minute the Committee of Union and Progress loses its hold upon the army, presto!—the government is overturned. If Europe continues to take territory from the Turkish Empire the Young Turks will be obliged to fight in order to retain their popularity with the army. They lost enormously in prestige by the giving up of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the losing of their suzerainty over Rumelia.

Moreover, there is danger of rivalry and quarrels among the Young Turks themselves. At the moment, Chevket seems strong enough to hold the reins, but he makes his will ef-

fective only by the mailed hand; and he has enemies and rivals. Should dissension weaken the Young Turks they are lost.

But even if the Young Turk party holds control of the government, it has enormous difficulties to face by reason of the heterogeneous composition of its Empire. One of the greatest causes of the Turkish conquests and rapid rise in power was in the political and geographical nature of the territory they made war against. Western Asia and eastern Europe were composed of small, weak nations, jealous of one another, which were unable to offer a united resistance to the foe. It remained for them to be united by force from without in the shape of Turkish domination.

While the Turks were possessed of wonderful gifts as conquerors, they are not successful rulers; and the many races they have ruled over they have never been able to assimilate. Unlike Russia, which, in a similar difficulty, has succeeded in forging out a coherent Empire, Turkey has not welded its parts together. Its Empire exists to-day, as it did three hundred years ago, by force of arms alone—in spite of constitutional proclamations.

To all appearances, the late Turkish revolution was an effort to establish a free Turkey with constitutional government. In reality it was merely a substitution of a strong military party for a single absolute ruler. It stands to reason that there can be no constitutional freedom in an Ottoman Empire which is only one-third Ottoman, and of which the remaining two-thirds desire nothing so much as complete separation and autonomy.

Therefore the Young Turks were obliged to have recourse to tricks in order to keep the upper hand. They pretended to give free ballot, but packed their Parliament with Young Turk deputies so as to win a majority when the entire Turkish population of the Ottoman Empire was only one-third of the whole population, and out of this one-third only a small proportion were Young Turks. So it is apparent that the Committee of Union and Progress played tricks with the ballot-boxes which would outdo Tammany itself.

Naturally, such a procedure completely alienated the other elements of the Empire—Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, and Albanians. Furthermore, even after the Parliament came into existence it discovered that it had no real power. Only

those measures could pass which had the sanction of the Committee of Union and Progress which held its seat, not in Constantinople, but in Salonica (for reasons of safety); and from that military throne dictated to the capital city and to the Empire. The cabinet itself is slated by the Committee. The poor ministers have a hard time of it: They have to carry out the dictates of the Committee, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, defend their actions before Parliament and the people. They are puppets, and yet they have an appearance of power. In times of governmental stress they become the scapegoats, while the Committee stays in hiding. It has been difficult for a new Cabinet to form since the dissolution of the old one upon the breaking-out of the war with Italy. No one wants the place. It is a thankless task.

The high-handed measures of the Young Turk party have offended, not only the Christian population of Turkey, but the Turks themselves; even the progressives share in this dissatisfaction. Several Turkish editors who voiced too loudly their opinions in opposition to the actions of the Committee were murdered on their way home from the office. Were these murders mere coincidences or sinister hints that the press speak not too freely?

The platform and policy of the Young Turk party, led by the Committee of Union and Progress, is the Ottomanization of Turkey. Under Abdul Hamid, the provinces were lightly ruled as long as they paid their taxes and behaved themselves properly toward their Sultan. Otherwise they were left pretty much to themselves. It is the aim of the present government to carefully organize the Empire on a basis of centralization, and to enforce the same laws and grant the same privileges to all, whether Christian, Turk, or Arab. In pursuance of this aim Turkish was made the national language—without it there could be no promotion in government service; and it was urged upon the Greeks and the Albanians. The privileges which the Christians enjoyed under the old régime, such as exemption from military service, were removed. This angered the Christians. Taxes and a stronger rule were enforced in Arabia, and this produced a great revolt. The Arabs cannot bear the yoke too close upon their necks, and the suzerainty of Abdul Hamid over them had been merely nominal. The Albanians, enjoying great privileges and exemptions under the arch-

tyrant, who depended upon their valor and loyalty for his power, have been compelled to toe the mark by the Young Turk government. They revolted, and have given stubborn resistance to the best generals of Turkey. In Macedonia the policy of *laissez faire* adopted by Abdul Hamid, with its consequent bloody anarchy, has given place to a more organized rule; but the Macedonians would rather be let alone to kill one another.

The Young Turks are perfectly justified in their endeavor to Ottomanize their Empire. It is what any Empire would seek to do; but it is a question whether they will be able. No rulers ever had a more diverse or more scattered population, unless we except the British rule of India. The Turks, who number only some 8,000,000 out of a population of 30,000,000, have 8,000,000 Greeks, 3,000,000 Armenians, and about 1,000,000 Bulgarians under their rule—a total Christian population outnumbering their own. These Christians are superior in civilization and in general ability to the Turks. How can they be expected to entertain any loyalty to the Ottoman Empire to which they owe only conquest and exploitation? How can they be expected to submit joyously to being ruled over by a people to whom they are in many ways superior, a people whose barbaric rule has held them back for centuries? Can we blame the Bulgarians in Macedonia for wishing to be free when we see what advance their free brothers in Bulgaria have made in civilization in a few decades out from the yoke of the Turk? Can we blame the 8,000,000 Greeks in the Empire, who look back upon such a glorious racial contribution to the world's culture, for disliking the rule of a people who have contributed nothing to civilization? No, the Young Turks will never be able to induce the Christian population of Turkey to become a voluntary and loyal part of their Empire.

Even with the other Moslems in the Empire little success seems to attend the efforts of the Young Turks. Arabia has no love for Turkish rule; it wants to be free. The Arabs are a proud and warlike race, and have been subjected only in the larger centers—certain parts of Arabia are almost unconquerable. The Syrians, a weaker race, still have their dreams of liberty. The Kurds are ripe for revolt, and the Albanians have already indicated their preference for freedom.

Never had rulers a harder task to face. The liberal wing of the Young Turk party offers as a suggestion decentralization and local self-government. Even this is unpractical owing to the peculiar complexity of the Ottoman population. If each race composing the Empire had its clear demarcations of territory, as Albania and Arabia have, for instance, decentralization would be feasible; but in Asia Minor, the very heart of the Empire, the races are all intermingled. Turkish towns, Armenian towns, Greek towns lie side by side. The 8,000,000 Turks, 7,000,000 Greeks, and 3,000,000 Armenians of Asia Minor do not inhabit separate sections of that country, but overflow among one another. It is a worse problem than the Gordian knot, and only an Alexander could solve it.

Added to these internal difficulties which confront the Empire is the menace of European aggression. The seizure of Tripoli reveals the fact that it had been planned for some time and that the Triple Alliance was a party to it. No one knows what other schemes the Triple Alliance has, nor where its lightning will strike next. Doubtless it has all European Turkey divided upon paper and is waiting for the proper occasion to act. To be a Young Turk to-day is worse than having the sword of Damocles hanging over one.

Remember, too, that Turkey is surrounded on every hand with smaller enemies. Greece, though inefficient, is at least a fly in the Macedonian ointment. Bulgaria, young, capable, aggressive, with an army of 300,000 men, one of the best-drilled in Europe, has its plans all laid for a raid into Macedonia or a swift descent upon Constantinople, the key to which by land they hold in the possession of the Balkan passes. Rumania, with a similar army, might lend aid. And in the north, silent and sinister, awaits the great bear, Russia, for its opportunity to seize the Bosphorus. In every chancelry of Europe all eyes are fastened on Turkey. Turkey is about to be carved. Who will get the best slice? That is the question which most interests Europe to-day.

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