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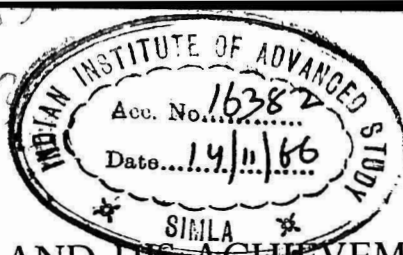
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ATATÜRK AND HIS ACHIEVEMENT

By LORD KINROSS

(Address given to the Royal Central Asian Society on November 12, 1963.)

I FEEL I owe you some explanation for presuming to address so august an assembly as the Royal Central Asian Society today. My excuse is that this is, almost to a day, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of a very great man and it seemed to me to be an occasion which called for some review, if only in my own very modest terms, of his achievement.

My subject is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These three names of his may call for some initial explanation, especially as, in the course of my discourse, I may well find myself shifting, according to period, from one name to another. Mustafa was the name given to him by his parents—a familiar Moslem name; Kemal, a name meaning Perfection, was given him by his mathematics master, who looked upon him as his star pupil—a pupil who took pleasure in setting him problems he could not always solve; the name Atatürk, meaning Father of the Turks, was the name he chose for himself only a few years before his death, when the Turks first adopted surnames in the European fashion. It is the name by which he will be known to history and is known to you all; but it is a name not, perhaps, as familiar as it should be to all the present generation in this country. The other day, when I had written something about Atatürk, I sent the manuscript to a charming young woman to be typed. The typescript came back, neat and accurate in most respects except that—thanks of course to my deplorable handwriting—the name was spelt, on every page, Atatink.

Well, as you all know, Atatürk was very far from being a resounding tinkle. He was a great soldier-statesman—in my view one of the greatest to emerge in the first half of the twentieth century. He was certainly *the* greatest dictator in an age of dictatorships, of old régimes, old empires breaking up, and new régimes, new nations, arising to take their place. Dictator, indeed, is perhaps hardly the right word for him. That is a point I shall hope to discuss in a moment. He was in a totally different class to the other dictators around him, for two very good reasons.

In the first place his policy for his country was based not on territorial expansion, like that of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and the rest, but on territorial retraction. He was trying to turn an empire into a nation, not a nation into an empire. In the second place he was trying to build, within this nation, a system of government deliberately designed to outlive him. Today, twenty-five years after his death, we can I think say with complete confidence that he achieved both these high aims. He achieved them because he was no dreamer but a very great realist, born into a somewhat unrealistic age.

Mustafa Kemal was a Macedonian. He sprang from that former province of Turkey in Europe where all races met and mixed—races from East and West and North and South—in what has been well defined, in another context, as a *macedoine*. He had none of the dark swarthinness of the Asiatic Turk; he was slim and slight and blond, with compelling grey-blue eyes. He was perhaps the most outstanding Macedonian since Alexander the Great, a man whom he greatly admired, but with the important reservation—which he also applied to Napoleon—that he forgot about his own country and went far away. It was a mistake that Kemal himself was never to make.

As a boy the young Mustafa saw the Ottoman Empire disintegrating all around him, as its subject races—Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, egged on by the great powers for their own various purposes—rebelled one after the other and gained their independence. This stirred in him a deep sense of patriotism. But it also sowed in his growing mind the idea that the days of empires were doomed and the days of nations were at hand.

At the same time, growing up in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, among foreigners, he learnt to understand the ways of the West and its values. He began to see that the civilization of the coming century was Western civilization, not the Oriental civilization into which he had been born—that decaying medieval autocracy of the Sultans, based on the Islamic religion, which the Ottoman Empire had become. Turkey, he saw, must become not only a nation but a Western nation.

As a young officer in the Sultan's army he saw the whole of Turkey in Europe fall to the foreigner in the Balkan wars. When he was still in his twenties a group of other young officers, known as the Young Turks, had in 1908 successfully rebelled against the Sultan and installed a would-be democratic régime. This was the prototype of those military coups which have become so familiar in the Middle Eastern countries today. But the Young Turks could not arrest the decline of the Empire, and indeed accelerated its fall by their disastrous decision to enter the first World War on the German side.

Kemal was cold-shouldered by the Young Turks, an attitude which he fiercely resented but which was to stand him and his country in good stead for the future. For when they came to grief, he was not politically compromised. He strongly opposed their alliance with Germany, but as a soldier and a patriot fought brilliantly, under German command, against the British in Gallipoli, winning the only victory for his country in a long line of humiliating defeats. When the war ended he alone, among all the Turkish generals, was left fighting, with a handful of men, in the mountains behind Aleppo on the frontiers of Syria and Turkey.

All the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire had been lost to the foreigner. There was no false pride in Kemal and he did not regret this, any more than he had regretted the loss of Turkey in Europe. It seemed to make possible his dream of a new Turkish nation, surgically freed from the canker of its outlying limbs to regenerate itself as a compact healthy body in the good earth of its forbears. This was the soil of Anatolia, or Asia Minor, the true heart of Turkey in Asia which lay behind those mountains.

But the victorious Allies had ideas of their own for the future of Asia Minor. In their wisdom they proposed, at the Peace Conference, to partition the greater part of it between France, Italy and Greece, leaving the Turks with a mere rump of a state in the centre. They obtained the complaisance of the Sultan, who in a defeatist spirit installed a puppet government ready to do their bidding.

Mustafa Kemal and a small group of officer friends saw that the very existence of their country was at stake. They plotted a National Resistance in Anatolia, based on all that remained, after demobilization, of two Turkish armies, both loyal to the cause. Kemal's problem was to get to Anatolia himself, in any position of authority, since the Sultan's government mistrusted him. Obligingly, the Allies played into his hands. They complained to the Government of disturbances against the Greeks in the Black Sea mountains, and the Government sent Kemal there to investigate, largely with the idea of getting an awkward customer out of the way. The Allies then improved the shining hour by sending a Greek force to occupy Smyrna and its hinterland. This enraged all patriotic Turks. They were resigned to defeat at the hands of the great powers, but they had always looked upon the Greeks with contempt as a dissident minority. Thus Kemal soon won support for his Resistance.

Before anyone in Constantinople quite realized what was happening, he had rallied a movement around him in the interior which was not merely military but political. He summoned two successive congresses, one in the East and one nearer the centre of Anatolia, which agreed upon an instrument of Nationalist policy known as the National Pact. This laid down the principle of self-determination, which was supposed to prevail at the Peace Conference. It laid down that all lands within the present frontiers of Turkey, that is to say all with a Turkish-speaking majority, must remain in Turkish possession, and that any threat to them would be resisted by force. His movement was strong enough to force the resignation of the Constantinople Government and the installation of a new government, of Nationalist sympathies, which accepted and ratified the Pact in Parliament.

The Allies now took alarm. First they marched into the Parliament and dissolved it, arresting and imprisoning most of the Nationalist members. Secondly they authorized a full-scale invasion of Asia Minor by the Greeks. Kemal's reply to this was to establish his own Parliament in Angora, in the centre of the country. He then gathered all his available forces for a war of independence, both against the Greeks and against the Sultan's irregular forces. It was a war which was to rage for two long years.

Overcoming enormous obstacles, Kemal eventually defeated his enemies, dispersing the irregulars, driving the Greeks into the sea, and obliging the Allies, in 1923, to sign a peace treaty at Lausanne which conceded him his National Pact and almost all he had fought for. It was the only freely-negotiated treaty to follow the first World War, and the only one to survive until this day.

Mustafa Kemal, by an extraordinary combination of energy, courage, will-power, political intuition and military skill, had thus achieved his first

objective: that of uniting Turkey and securing her independence within her own compact and wholly national frontiers. His second and even more formidable task was to make a new nation of her, to lead her swiftly and in well-defined stages out of the Middle Ages into the Twentieth Century, and qualify her to rank with the nations of Europe.

His first step was to get rid of the Sultanate. Here he was conveniently helped by the Sultan himself, who chose to leave the country, smuggled out of the back door of his palace in a British ambulance (and in the pouring rain) and thus relieving the Nationalists of the embarrassing necessity of deposing him. This cleared the way for the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, whose fortieth anniversary the Turks and their friends have lately been celebrating. It was based on the parliamentary system, with Kemal himself—or perhaps this is an appropriate moment to start calling him Atatürk—as President.

His Parliament, however, was not to function for long on strictly democratic lines; it very soon became a one-party assembly. This brings me to the question to which I referred earlier: was Atatürk a dictator or wasn't he? Once, when asked this question, he admitted that he might be called a dictator, but added: "Those who study my life will see that I have not had pyramids built in my honour like the Pharaohs of Egypt. Nor did I make the people work for my sake, threatening them with whips. When I wanted an idea to be accepted by my country I first called a congress, debated the situation with the people and carried out my plans only after taking my authority from the people."

This was true enough. From the start of his revolution he had been scrupulous to act within a strictly legal and constitutional framework. He showed deference to his Parliament, which in its early days was an unruly assembly, hard to handle—a motley collection of backwoodsmen and other deputies who spoke their minds freely through a hotch-potch of Opposition groups. Kemal shrewdly learnt to manage and manipulate them, but never muzzled them. At a critical moment of the war he refused to accept the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Armies, with full powers, until they were vested in him by a parliamentary majority; and after that his authority had to be confirmed by Parliament at three-monthly intervals, a procedure which often led to stormy and critical debates.

It was thus a paradox of Atatürk's career that he became a dictator not in order to obtain supreme power but after he had in effect obtained it. Barely a year after he had won his victory and proclaimed the Republic, he put a stop to all opposition in Parliament. He disbanded an Opposition party far more responsible and moderate than the earlier Opposition groups, which was led by the generals and others who had fought at his side from the start. They were men of good will, who genuinely sought to run the country on liberal democratic lines and had no serious intention of challenging his authority.

Soon afterwards, using the pretext of an attempt on his life by a group of extremists, he rounded up all the opposition elements in the country, and after a series of arbitrary trials for treason hanged some twenty of their leaders, imprisoned or exiled fifteen, and released fifty, including the generals, who were thenceforward excluded from political life.

This liquidation of his Opposition was, it must be admitted, a blot on Atatürk's career, though it hardly compared with some of the blood baths of his fellow dictators. From then onwards his rule was, in practice if not in theory, dictatorial. A democratic system had been established for the future. For the present Parliament still functioned as the constitutional authority, and he interfered little with its debates and left his ministers very largely alone. But his own power over Parliament and government, as President of the Republic, was implicit.

All the same he was essentially a civilian, not a military dictator. Mussolini was a civilian who dressed as a soldier. Atatürk was a soldier who dressed as a civilian. He hardly if ever wore uniform after the War of Independence was over. And he was a benevolent dictator, which could hardly be said of most of his fellows. As Professor Bernard Lewis has described it, "His was a dictatorship without the uneasy, over-the-shoulder glance, the terror of the door-bell, the dark menace of the concentration camp". His press was controlled, but speech was reasonably free. Another of his answers, when asked—this time by a group of schoolteachers—whether he was a dictator, was the smiling remark, "If I were, you wouldn't be able to ask me that question."

In so far as he was, it was for the good enough reason that his country, after centuries of autocracy, was not yet ripe for democratic government in the Western sense. The daunting task which confronted him, when peace had been secured, was nothing less than the complete transformation of Turkish society from its very foundations. It was a social task, and could only be achieved, as he saw it, within a framework of complete political security. It was a hazardous task, because it meant striking right at the roots of the Islamic religion.

Islam, in Turkey as in other Moslem countries, was something more than a system of religious belief. The Islamic hierarchy—what we in the West would call the Church—had not only been all-powerful politically, through a Sultan who in his capacity of Caliph was also the vice-regent of God on earth. It was also all-powerful socially, regulating almost every aspect of human behaviour. Islam laid down the laws, the curriculum of education, the pattern of everyday life. It decreed what a man should wear, what he should eat, how he should treat his wife (and how many wives he might have), how he should dispose of his property. The average Turk saw himself primarily as a Moslem and only incidentally as a Turk.

From now onwards, as Atatürk willed it, he must see himself wholly as a Turk. Loyalty to religion must be preceded by loyalty to the nation; to a nation moreover which was to look no longer eastwards but westwards. Thus Atatürk's principal laws, from now onwards, were aimed against the forces of religion. He had little difficulty in abolishing the Caliphate, now that the Sultanate had gone. This meant the final separation of the spiritual from the temporal power—of Church, as we would put it, from State.

At the same time, all religious schools were transferred to the secular authorities. The religious courts were closed and a legal code, on European lines, introduced. Among other provisions it abolished polygamy and gave women their rights.

Finally, Atatürk abolished the Islamic brotherhoods—the dervish monastic orders which served as the principal religious and cultural focus for the mass of the people scattered throughout the villages of Anatolia. These brotherhoods were a counterpoise to the central religious authority. Some of them were fanatical. Others were a broadening and civilizing influence, and might have been exploited as such had Atatürk been the kind of ruler who chose to reform Islam from within. But he was not: he was a militant agnostic; the brotherhoods represented a danger to the central secular authority—so they must go.

All this was done in a mere two years, by those shock tactics at which Atatürk excelled on the battlefield. It was a kind of social and cultural blitzkrieg. In a country as conservative and backward as Turkey was, it could be done in no other way. So, at least, he saw it, and he may well have been right. But it made some trouble for the future, for in the more primitive parts of the country it merely drove the forces of religion underground, to flare up later.

Having rid himself of the substance of Islamic influence Atatürk now turned to its symbols, which to the ordinary individual meant as much if not more. He struck first at what the Turk wore—his old-fashioned Turkish costume, but in particular at what he wore on his head. He decided to abolish the fez, the symbol of Islam, and replace it with the hat—to him the symbol of the civilized Western world, but hitherto to the Turkish peasant the symbol of the infidel.

For this daring gesture Kemal chose one of the most reactionary districts of Turkey—the province of Kastamonu. He picked out a strong point and decided to assail it by shock tactics. He did this by appearing in a panama hat, while the officials accompanying him wore, rather awkwardly, various forms of not very fashionable Western headgear.

The people were stunned into silence, which Kemal broke by a series of forceful speeches denouncing the oriental costumes they were wearing and culminating in a disquisition on the meaning of civilization. It was important not merely to *be* civilized but to look civilized. And this meant, as he put it, “boots and shoes on our feet, trousers on our legs, shirt and tie, jacket and waistcoat—and, of course, to complete these, a cover with a brim on our heads. I want to make this clear. This head-covering is called ‘Hat’.” His speech was distributed by the news agencies and broadcast throughout Turkey. The fez was abolished by a Hat Law causing riots in several places which were suppressed by ruthless police action.

Having dealt with the men of Turkey Kemal must now deal with the women. But it was easier to put a hat on a man than take a veil off a woman. The veil must go, because it was the symbol of woman’s inferior status, but this could only be achieved by a gradual process of persuasion.

Kemal started to make speeches on the topic of women. They must have the same education as men—for were they not destined to become the mothers of men? The two sexes must progress together, on terms of equality. He talked of the women he had seen on his tour to Kastamonu, hiding their faces with cloths, turning their backs and huddling themselves

to the ground when a man passed by. "How", he asked, "can the mothers and daughters of a civilized nation adopt this strange manner, this barbarous posture? It is a spectacle that makes the nation an object of ridicule. It must be remedied at once."

It was remedied over the next decade. Kemal started with the more emancipated women of the towns. He organized dances at which women were more or less commanded to dance with men—an unheard-of intimacy in a Moslem country. He almost forced them into each other's arms. But they soon got to like it. The social ice melted and dances in the Western manner became an accepted feature of Turkish social life. Ten years later women had the vote and were elected to Parliament.

Of all Atatürk's reforms the most far-reaching was that of the alphabet. The Turks used the Arabic script, the alphabet of Islam, which was complex in its characters and hard for an ordinary person to read. Two separate languages thus came to be used—that of the Ottoman mandarin class, which was written but largely unspoken, and that of the people, which was spoken but not written. This created an unhealthy distinction between the classes at a time of social and educational reform. And it cut off the Turks from the Western world. Clearly, they must have an alphabet which all must be able to read. The obvious answer was the introduction of the Latin alphabet.

Kemal ordered a new alphabet to be prepared on these lines. He asked the experts how long it would take to make the change. They said five years, allowing for a period in which both scripts would be printed side by side.

Atatürk would have none of this. It would mean that people would go on reading the old script instead of learning the new. "The change will happen in three months," he decreed, "or it won't happen at all." And so it was. There was chaos for a while in the schools, where the teachers had to teach an alphabet they didn't yet know, with text-books that hadn't yet been printed. But Atatürk himself assisted the change by stumping round the country with a blackboard, teaching the people himself. He had always fancied himself in the role of schoolmaster, and now was his chance.

Such were Atatürk's achievements. When he died, twenty-five years ago at the relatively early age of fifty-seven, he left a country of his own virtual creation which ranked ostensibly, in some respects actually, and in its remaining aspects potentially, as a modern nation in line with the West. Turkey had a Western parliamentary constitution, Western laws, a Western system of education, Western manners and customs, a Western alphabet.

It may be that another generation or more must elapse before the Turks complete this process of internal development which their saviour and leader began. Socially they have to close, largely by increased education, the gap which still exists between an urban élite and a largely illiterate peasantry. Economically they have to develop their agricultural and industrial production, which moved forward only slowly under the Atatürk régime. For Atatürk, it may be said without disrespect, was no great economist; he could hardly be everything. Today, serious efforts are being

made to accelerate the solution of these various problems, with international backing.

Politically the Turks still have internal party problems to solve. But the example of Atatürk remains with them. Atatürk not only left behind him a living and durable political system, based on democracy—an achievement which no other dictator of his period or since can claim—but he left behind him, with the younger generation of Turks, a national ideal which still inspires them. It is no exaggeration to say, twenty-five years after Atatürk's death, that in the minds of the people of Turkey he still lives, as something very much more than a legend. He is still, as he named himself, "Father of the Turks".

Above all, the fruits of his work still live in the international field. It was Atatürk's ambition not merely to westernize Turkey internally but to align her externally with the nations of the Western world. This, with his insight and his gifts as a statesman, he succeeded in doing. Thus we have the happy result that in the shifting sands of the Middle East today Turkey alone can be relied upon as a bulwark of the Western Alliance.

REPORT OF DISCUSSION

During the discussion which followed a member asked if the Turks were now more tolerant to Mohammedans. The lecturer answered that this was the case, that worship was free and that new mosques were being built. The process had gone rather too far at one moment, when the recent Democratic régime started to exploit religion for political purposes.

Another member asked if it were true that Atatürk's mother was a Dönme and his father Albanian—so that he was not, in fact, a Turk. The lecturer said that this was a story invented by Atatürk's enemies. Both his parents were Turks.

Asked if Atatürk had had any leanings towards other religions, the lecturer said that he had had a respect for the Christian religion as a civilizing force. On one occasion he was reported to have remarked, "If only our people could become Christians!"

