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# JOURNEY THROUGH

By M. PHILIPS PRICE, M.P.

A meeting of the Society was held at The Royal Society's Hall, Burlington House, Piccadilly, W.1, on Wednesday, January 30, 1957, at 1.30 p.m., when Mr. M. Philips Price, M.P., gave an illustrated address on his recent "Journey Through Turkey." Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, G.B.E., K.C.B., Chairman of Council, presided.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Philips Price is well known to nearly every one of you here as a traveller of great experience, a journalist, a writer and a Member of Parliament. I will not waste any more time and I will ask him to give his talk, which today is on his recent journey through Turkey.

LAST autumn I made a journey in Turkey with a view to seeing the changes that had gone on in the country since I had been there three years before. I visited towns of the West, the Centre, the South-east and East. I went to Istanbul, Ankara, Diabekr, Van, Bitlis and Mardin, and the agricultural and livestock areas of the East. Three of these areas I had seen in the previous five years, but others I had not seen at all before and some I had seen forty-one years ago when, during the First World War, I had been as *Manchester Guardian* correspondent with the Russian Caucasus Army invading Eastern Turkey. Thus I was able to get an impression not only of what progress had been made in Turkey over forty-one years since the days of the Ottoman Empire but also what had been happening over the last few years. I am bound to say that what has happened recently is as impressive as the contrast between what Turkey was in the days of the Sultan's Empire and what it is today after over thirty years of the Republic. In fact, the recent changes are in some respects the more spectacular.

My impression of the towns that I had seen three and five years ago and again now was that they had become like towns of the American Middle West in the period of the great booms of last century. Factories were rising, roads being struck out, houses being run up like mushrooms overnight, silos being built, drilling for oil going on and hydro-electric works being constructed. It is hoped to save large quantities of raw material imports like cement, coal, steel and oil and thereby reduce Turkey's dependance on other countries for the basis of her economy.

There were, of course, obvious signs of maladjustment and things not fitting in quite right. Thus, in spite of the impressive growth of the capital, Ankara, and everything modern from technical colleges to opera houses, we only had water in our basins for three or four hours a day. Ankara seems to have outgrown its water supplies. In another little town in the East I found a magnificent hospital with X-ray departments and ultra-modern apparatus of modern therapy but no doctors, and also, as far as I could see, no patients except three peasants with minor complaints. It seems sometimes that Ankara's enthusiasm for modernism outstrips the framework of Turkish society, as it still is over a large part of the country. Still, that is a mistake in the right direction.



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The peasants are better off than ever before and still receive 30 per cent. above the world market prices for their wheat and pay next to nothing in taxes. Taxation falls heavily on the professional and middle class, and there is a steady inflation going on which is only partly controlled by stringent fixation of prices of certain articles of general consumption. Small traders are liable to get arrested for selling vegetables at above the fixed price.

In other words there is a reverse side to the medal of prosperity, and the question that one may well ask is—how is this tremendous capital development being financed? The economic programme of the Menderes Government will, if it is realized, make Turkey a state which, though still basically agricultural, will have a strong industrial section to the economy with rising standards of living. And Turkey is better equipped to do this than any other Middle Eastern state. Today she is, thanks to her past history and traditions, a country that understands self-discipline—something that the Greeks have never learnt. She is also content to concentrate on her own development, leave her neighbours alone and eschew fantastic dreams of throttling world trade by wrecking a great waterway and blowing up oil pipe lines in order to show their self-importance to the world, like some Arab states have done. In other words, the Turks are people of mature judgment in international affairs, and with her powerful army and old military traditions the only stable country in the Middle East. This is a matter of extreme significance in view of the crisis created there by the rise of unbridled Arab nationalism.

Yet one cannot avoid certain misgivings about the internal state of Turkey, and candid friends who want to see her really strong must point out where it seems there are signs of weakness without in any way wanting to interfere in the internal affairs of Turkey. Again, one must ask where is Turkey finding the resources for her tremendous development. Unfortunately as yet little oil has been found, unlike Iraq and Persia. She has some valuable chrome and a fertile soil which grows good exportable wheat, but the rainfall in Anatolia is fitful and is only enough for wheat export once in three years on an average. Turkey has wonderful dried fruit and tobacco for export, but it is not enough to finance the breakneck development that she is undertaking. I do not think she can build all these factories and hydro-electric works without extensive long-term credits. The U.S. has helped a lot, particularly in military and defence equipment. But a large part of the capital development programme is being paid by foreign firms who have supplied goods and capital works to Turkey and are having to forego payment of their debts except over a term of years. In other words, they are having to lock their capital up in Turkey for a long time. One firm I found had to accept bills on London maturing at six months, which would involve waiting three years for full payment. Foreign firms are now fighting shy of contracts in Turkey, and everything points to the need for a long-term loan which only the U.S. can give or a slowing down of the programme, which I understand is contemplated. The matter is complicated by the enormous spending power of the peasants, whose standard of living is shooting up—a very desirable thing in normal circumstances. But Turkey cannot eat her cake and have it. A large capital de-

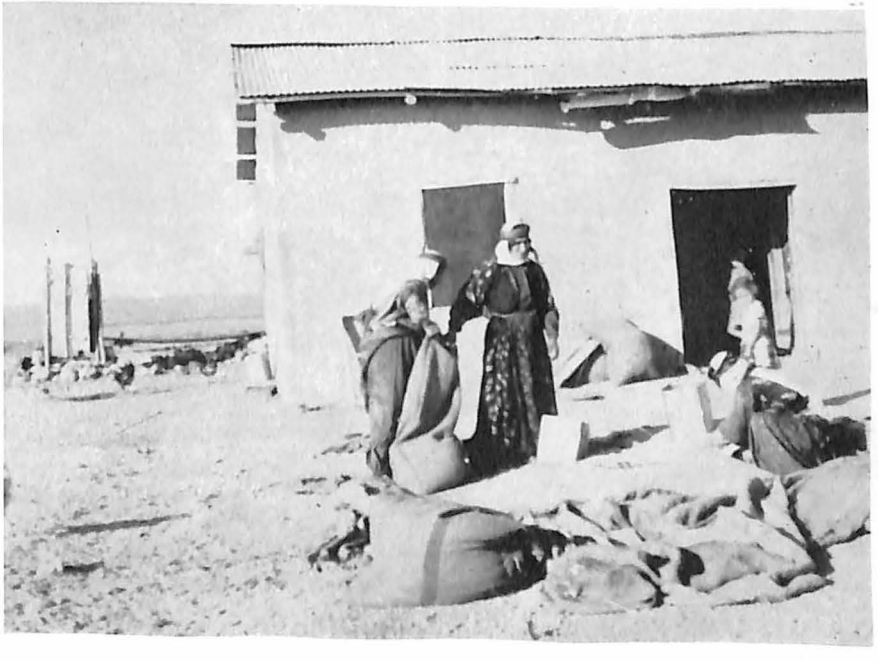
velopment programme involves, as we know in this country, a cutting down of internal spending power. Hence, our credit squeeze. The Turks will not put any credit squeeze on their peasants. Hence, the impasse. And this has had certain internal stresses and strains with political repercussions.

There has, in fact, recently been a marked rise in political tension inside Turkey, and controversy between Government and Opposition has become increasingly bitter. In foreign affairs the unity of the country is most impressive. Everyone is a keen supporter of N.A.T.O. and the Bagdad Pact, and is determined that, whatever else happens, politically minded Greek priests shall not be allowed to build up a new Byzantine Empire based on Cyprus. The Turks have not forgotten the battle of Sakaria, and are determined that the soldiers of the young Republic who died there fighting Greek imperialism did not die in vain. I met an opposition leader waiting to serve a prison sentence, and he said he supported the Turkish Government on Cyprus.

On the other hand, on home affairs feeling runs very high. To an Englishman it is natural that an Opposition should criticize the Government, and it seems that the Populist Opposition could very well make a point of saying that the pace of capital development is too fast and that muddles and mistakes are being made. Unfortunately, some sections of the Opposition have gone much further than this and have accused the members of the Government of wholesale bribery and corruption—the sort of thing which, if said in this country, would land the person who said it in a libel action. But Turkey has no libel law, so the Government, to protect itself, has introduced a Press Law which gives very wide powers to the Public Prosecutor and to the judges to sentence persons abusing the rights of free speech. In so far as the Press Law is a substitute for a libel law there is nothing to worry about, but the law goes further and has now forbidden all public meetings except at a general election. This is something which all well-wishers of Turkey must be anxious about. Turkey is not of course a fully mature democracy as yet, but she has done so well up to now in working her way through revolution and dictatorship towards a parliamentary democracy that this backsliding is a cause for regret. She is in striking contrast to Russia, which has also passed through revolution but stayed in dictatorship. On the other hand, I do not think the Press Law is causing much anxiety inside Turkey except among the professional and middle class, who are trained in the ideas of the free West. Nearly all the Istanbul press is against the government. But the circulation of the whole Turkish press is not more than half a million in a population of 25 million. For the rest the 18 million peasants are happy and well off and do not worry about Press Laws. But the present situation is not healthy and one must hope that tension will die down. There is no doubt that this internal dispute is the result of the economic difficulties that I have described.

Now about my journey. I first visited Istanbul and Ankara, and here are some coloured slides of famous monuments that once were the pride of Constantinople—namely, St. Sophia, the cathedral of the Eastern Christian Empire and the Ahmed or " Blue " mosque, the symbol of Ottoman power that arose on its ashes. Next is the imposing mosque of Sultan Suleiman,

LARGE TURKISH FARM, SHEDS AND COMBINE. MARDIN VILAYET



KHURDISH WOMEN WORKING ON TURKISH FARM. MARDIN VILAYET

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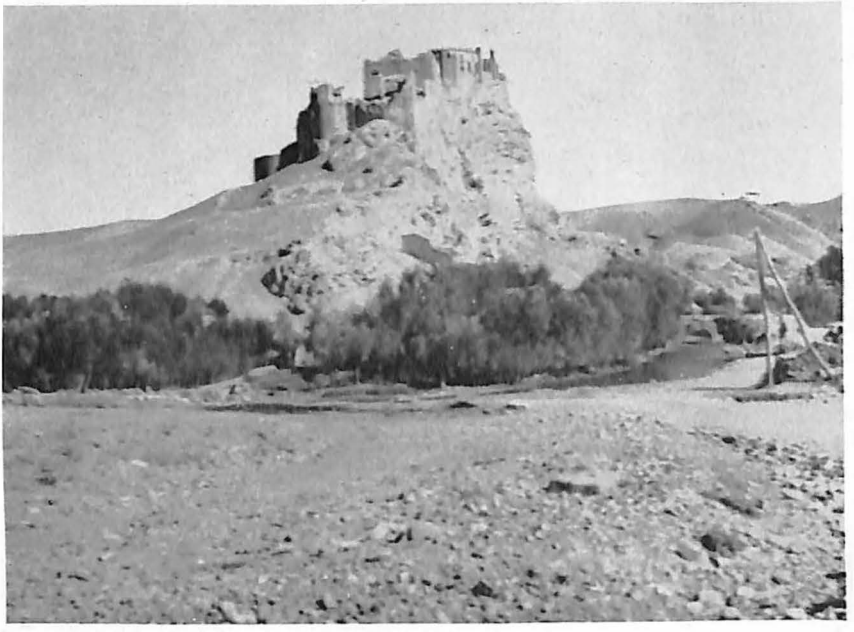
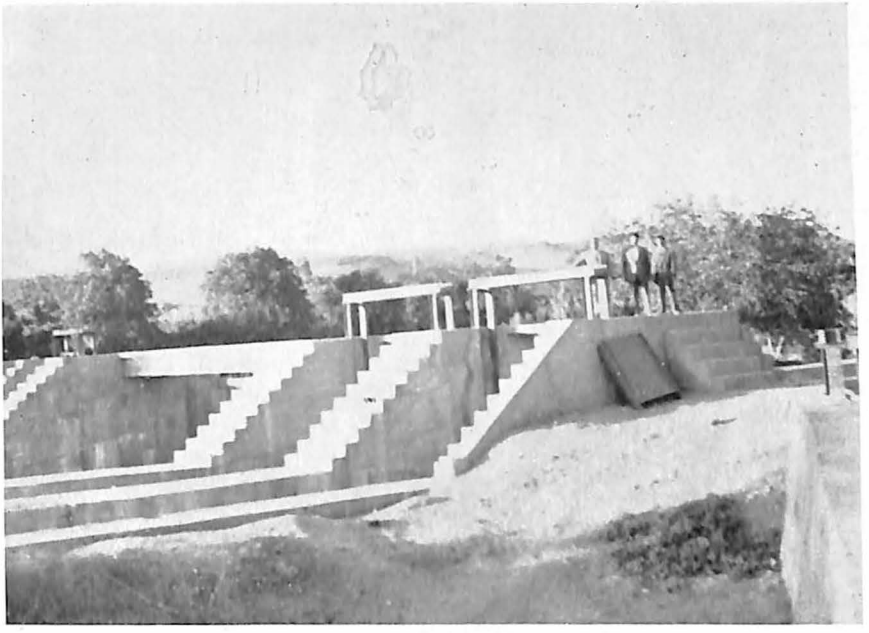


CASTLE AT HOSHAB VAN VILAYET

ARAB AND SELJUK WALL OF DIABEKR



NEW IRRIGATION DAM FOR VILLAGES IN MARDIN VILAYET

VIEW FROM ROCK OF VAN SHOWING CULTIVATED LAND TOWARDS LUKE

INTERIOR OF JACOBITE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AT MONASTERY OF DEIR ZARIFUR, MARDIN VILAYET. NOTE BYZANTINE ARCH AND ANOTHER SHOWING ARAB INFLUENCE

CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTION ON ROCK AT VAN AND ENTRANCE TO ROCK DWELLING, 600 B.C. URARTU KINGDOM

the Magnificent, taken from the north side of the Golden Horn by the Ataturk bridge. It is from the exterior the grandest of the Istanbul mosques, standing there silhouetted against the skyline.

After a week in Ankara I took the Eastern Express to Diabekr, the chief town in South-east Turkey. One passes for a day and a night through the upland plateaus of Central Anatolia, the homeland of the Turkish peasant, the backbone of the old Ottoman Empire and now of the Republic. After crossing the north end of the Taurus mountains one enters the watershed of the Tigris and Euphrates, here very small streams. The land falls to a plain which finally merges into the lowlands of Mesopotamia and the Arab countries of Syria and Iraq.

Approaching Diabekr one notices a new element in the population. One sees encampments of nomads, at wayside stations one hears Khurdish spoken, a different language to Turkish, and one sees women with tall headdresses and brightly coloured shawls and skirts. I got one photo of Khurdish women, but they are difficult to photo because they think the camera is the evil eye. At Diabekr one enters a country where some 2 million Khurds live scattered about among the Turks and now hardly distinguished except for their language and the women's dresses. The Khurds are in a slow process of becoming Turks, though I think that they will long keep their distinctive language among themselves. When I first went to Turkey forty-five years ago the Khurds were a powerful and quite separate community and the Sultan used them to bully another community, the Christian Armenians, also resident in Eastern Turkey. But the Armenians are now gone and the Khurds are being absorbed. All Khurds have the same citizen's rights as Turks, but no separate national or cultural entity is recognized. Indeed, no higher Turkish official will admit that Khurds exist at all, although the lower officials do. The Khurds got themselves into trouble because they rejected the Revolution and stood by the Sultan. In 1925 they revolted and besieged the Turkish garrison of Diabekr. The revolt was suppressed and the ringleaders hanged and some Khurds were deported to Central Anatolia. The Khurdish chiefs or Agas were deprived of their rights. I was anxious to see what had happened to the Khurds in this Eastern part of Turkey since I had been there forty-five years ago. I found that now that they have accepted the revolution and the reforms that have come with it, the Khurds have settled down and the Turkish Government have quite good relations with them. Thus I found in one place east of Diabekr that the local Khurdish Aga or chief and landowner was still in possession of much of his estate and had been elected to the Turkish parliament for his district, having become a convinced upholder of the Republic. Turkey has in fact become now a united state. When I first saw it in the days of the Empire, the old "millet" system prevailed. "Millet" is Turkish for "people," but in this sense it means a religious and linguistic community within the larger political system of the Ottoman Empire. These "millets" had no territorial basis but were scattered over the country. They had special religious and cultural rights, and the heads of their churches were also the political leaders and responsible for the political behaviour of their flocks to the Sultan. All went well in the quiet medieval days, but then the Christians began to go ahead more

rapidly than the Moslem " millet " and developed political claims which were sponsored by foreign powers, especially Russia. Then the trouble started which finally brought the Empire down and was only finally cleared up by the Republic. The new regime abandoned all claims to non-Turkish territory, and finally agreed for Greeks in Anatolia to exchange with Turks in northern Greece.

On arrival in Diabekr I spent a few days seeing the sights, visiting schools, horticultural institutes, farm machinery stations and Khurdish nomad encampments. I was particularly impressed by the walls of Diabekr, originally Roman and Byzantine, later Arab and Seljuk. One great bastion had the two-headed eagle, which appears to have been originally a Hittite emblem, then taken over by the Seljuks and passed on to the Byzantines, from whence it became the emblem of the more recent Austrian and Russian Empires.

I then went north to Bitlis, the capital of a neighbouring province in a narrow valley and a centre for the wool and skin trade, for here the big livestock region of Turkey begins. Here is a bazaar, an old Seljuk bridge and on the rock above an old castle, once sometimes Seljuk and sometimes the seat of Armenian kings. I had travelled up here with the Vali or governor of Diabekr in his car. He was going on a visit to the Vali of Bitlis. I found the Governors most helpful and all energetic young men who knew their provinces and travelled about. It seems to be the deliberate policy of the Government to promote such people.

I was then taken further up the valley from Bitlis by the Vali. The road rose to a high plateau of 5,000 ft. Here before me stretched the beautiful mountain lake of Van, deep blue and so large that you cannot see across. The lake seems to have been formed by volcanic eruptions blocking river systems in fairly late geological times. One old volcano is Mount Zipander with a crater lake at the top. The air on this plateau is most invigorating. There is fine grazing for stock in the short summer and much snow and cold in the winter. The waters of the lake are alkaline and there is one small fish like a herring in it.

There is a fleet of steamers on the lake, most of them built on the Clyde. I travelled with one across the lake to the town of Van on the eastern shore, the capital of the province of Van. The journey took rather over half a day. On the lake shore were peasants with their ox carts and primitive transport. Things have not changed much here from what they were like when I was there forty-five years ago in the country slightly to the north. The Turkish peasants were in European dress. There were also Khurdish peasants among them, but one could not tell them by the dress. One could hear Khurdish spoken, however. The old picturesque dresses that I remembered have all gone in the drab uniformity of the modern world. I spoke with Turkish soldiers coming back from leave to serve their time in these remote parts of the frontiers. In the bays and on the hillsides round the lake is scrub forest. The goat is still here the great enemy of the forest and not much is done to control it, as is the case in other parts of Turkey.

We passed the island of Akhtamar, where there are the remains of an old Armenian monastery and church, for the Armenians were once a large

community here. For a long time the bitter memories of the past caused the Turkish authorities to deny that the Armenians ever existed. They are getting more sensible now and it is possible to visit the island, though I did not, because it would have taken time to get a boat from Van and I had many other things I wanted to do.

The steamer arrived at Van and on approaching one sees the rock of Van, a basalt intrusion coming up out of plain round the lake. The old town of Van round the rock which I remembered forty-one years ago is now a ruin. The new town has been built further inland from the lake where once were villages and open land. It is quite a modern town, about thirty years old with public buildings, primary and secondary schools, a veterinary station for livestock improvement and for combating disease. Accomodation is moderate, but they are building a modern type of hotel. I stayed in the veterinary establishment and was quite comfortable. The province stretches eastwards to the Persian frontier and south-east to Iraq and includes the mountainous territory of Hakkiari where the Tigris rises. Here the peasants from the plateau plains send their flocks in the summer to the "yaila" or summer grazings, which last for about three months. The sheep and cattle grow phenomenally on the rich grass up there, and the sheep put fat on their tails that lasts them all winter. The authorities are doing something to improve the breeds by crossing, but progress is slow. The Van vilayet had in 1955 770,000 sheep and 150,000 cattle. The annual export of meat to Western Turkey is 100,000 sheep, 10,000 cattle and 300,000 kilos of wool. Sheep pay 80 kurush a head a year (about 2s.) to the Government. There is no tax on horses or cattle.

I visited villages round Van and found that with the aid of irrigation good crops of wheat and barley were grown, but also they were grown with aid of rain and snow, though with lower yields. Some villages took their flocks to the mountains in the summer while others concentrated more on cereal cultivation.

There were no tractors and cultivations were still done in the primitive old way with needle ploughs and oxen. The Government are concentrating rightly on improvement of livestock, since this is the great meat area of Turkey and arable cultivation is of second importance. Visits to the south-east of the Lake at a place called Gevash brought me to the scenes where in 1915 I had been with the Russian Cossacks and two infantry batallions which were invading this part of Turkey from the Caucasus in the First World War. I thought I found the place where I had camped with the Kuban Cossacks by the shores of the lake. And further on I saw the foothills where I witnessed the bombardment of Turkish positions by Cossack mountain artillery and an infantry action by the lake shore. I tried to find the place where I had spent a night huddled up under a wall of a ruined peasant's house while the snow fell, for it was late in November and the winter was coming down. But everything was now changed. The ruin and desolation that I had seen had given place to new villages, orchards and cultivated fields. The Russian wave of 1915 had retired. I saw some refugees from Russia, apparently Khurds from the Caucasus who had been given refuge in Turkey from the collectivization of their flocks and herds during the Stalin regime in the Caucasus.

I was taken further east in a car by the deputy Vali of Van to a place called Hoshab, where there is an imposing castle, built originally by a Khurdish Aga and added to by Sultan Suleiman. Not far away is the frontier with Persia, and I had come this way when I was visiting the Russian army of occupation round Lake Van in 1915. I had not been able to go then and look at the castle because I had been warned by Cossacks that Khurdish cavalry was about and I had better push on to the Russian post further to the west. The local police officer at Hoshab took me over the castle which had a fine bastion with lions over the door and Persian inscriptions commemorating the campaigns of Sultan Suleiman. The local police officer knew Persian and translated it for me. Persian seems to have been the language spoken at that time in that part of Turkey. The village of Hoshab is Turkish, though there were Khurdish encampments on the hillsides. The peasants live as I saw them forty-one years ago, store their seasons harvest on their roofs and make "tezek" or dried animal dung for fuel.

In Van itself I went to see the rock which is full of interesting history. The Urartu dynasty ruled there 600 years B.C. over a people contemporary with the Hittites. I climbed down narrow paths with yawning cliffs below to caves in the rock where the Urartu kings resided. On the rock face were numerous cuneiform inscriptions. In one place was a huge tablet carved out of the rock face by order of Xerxes, King of Persia, in three languages. Van has seen the passing of invading armies for 2,500 years and perhaps for longer. Urartu, Persian, Armenian, Khurdish, Seljuk and Osmanli dynasties have all ruled there at various times. The Russians have come and gone and it is now part of the Turkish Republic.

I returned from Van to Diabekr by the same way that I came, but this time I travelled rough with the people and not in Valis cars. I travelled by steamer and local bus and spent the nights in the local caravanserais sleeping on the floor. I learnt quite a lot about the way people live there and what they are thinking about.

From Diabekr I was driven by the Vali to Mardin the last Turkish province on the borders of Syria. The town of Mardin is built on a hill overlooking the plains of the Tigris and Euphrates. Nearby will go, if it is built, the new pipeline from the Iraq oilfields through Turkey to the port of Iskanderun. This would obviate having to pump Iraq oil across hostile Syrian territory. Shortly before I reached Mardin a party of engineers had been out there surveying the land. The Vali of Mardin was an energetic young man who arranged for me to see farms and villages. I went over one large farm near Nisyabin of 3,000 acres where everything was supposed to be modern. Certainly some good crops were being grown there. But there was a lot of Khurdish labour being employed and, although there were tractors and combines, I found that many of them did not work because they had not been properly serviced.

It is interesting to note that in this part of Turkey is a small Christian community which lives peacefully engaged partly in trade and partly in agriculture. They are the Jacobites, the followers of St. Jacobus, who in the early days of the Christian era led a community out of the Orthodox Church and held Monophysite doctrines, the same as the Armenians and

Copts. There are some 18,000 of them in this part of Turkey, and the Government gives them every facility to practise their religion. I visited near Mardin the interesting monastery of Deir Zafiran with sixth-century Byzantine columns and arches showing Arab and possibly Persian influence over the altar. Much prized is a gospel 800 years old with hand-painted pictures of eleventh century.

My visit to Turkey ended at Nisyabin, the frontier town, where the Vali of Mardin and his staff saw me off in the Baghdad express which runs twice a week. In it I rolled away across the small strip of Syria into Iraq.

Throughout this journey I received the utmost help from the Turkish authorities. I was much impressed by the material progress in the towns and centres of Anatolia, tempered by the fears that I have expressed earlier in this lecture about the effect of over-rapid development. In the more primitive east of Turkey I was impressed in another way—at the consolidation, politically and socially, of the Republic and at the gradual overcoming of the effects of the old " millet " system and the relics of the archaic society of the old Empire. Turkey remains the most stable and socially and politically sound part of the Middle East. In the new era of the Middle East, where this country has virtually no friends left, we can feel that we have at least one friend left there who will try to understand us.

The CHAIRMAN: I am afraid we have gone beyond our time. I know there are a lot of people who would like to ask Mr. Philips Price questions, but they will have to do it after we have dispersed. It remains for me to thank him very much indeed for an astonishingly interesting, very thoughtful and very forthright description of modern Turkey and what is going on there, which is most cheering, and also for his delightful photographs of those very ancient and historic lands. We are very grateful to him for all the trouble he has taken in preparing this lecture and coming to talk to us and giving it in such an interesting way. Thank you very much.

*The vote of thanks was accorded unanimously by acclamation.*

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