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A RECENT VISIT TO TURKEY

BY MR. M. PHILIPS PRICE, M.A., J.P., F.R.G.S.

Report of a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society, held at the Royal Society's Hall, Burlington House, Piccadilly, W.1, on Wednesday, November 2, 1960. Mr. C. J. Edmonds, C.M.G., C.B.E., was in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Sir Philip Southwell is either just arriving back from his travels or has not yet arrived, and has asked me to deputize for him today. I will not say to introduce the lecturer, because he is well known to us. He has been a member of the Society for twenty years and has been extremely good, after his various travels abroad, in coming to lecture to us. I will content myself, therefore, with recalling briefly one or two points about his career which have made him such an expert on the subject which he will talk about today.

His travels in Central Asia, Siberia, Persia and Turkey started as long ago as 1918. From 1914 to 1918 he was correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian* in Russia. He has written a number of books on Russia and Germany, and the *History of Turkey*, published in 1956. His last lecture was three or four years ago.

He visited Turkey again in September this year, largely to collect material for a third edition of the *History of Turkey*. Also, very fortunately, he was able to see the new conditions in Turkey since the revolution of a few months ago. It has changed, but I find the changes difficult to follow, and I am sure that you will all be interested to hear this latest news.

IT is always a very great pleasure for me to address this Society again, because, as the Chairman has said, I have been for many years a member of it and, secondly, I always know that whenever I am here amongst you, all members are in one way or another experts on some aspects of life and affairs in Central Asia—and Central Asia includes a very large area of country, extending almost into North Africa.

If I appear to hurry, I hope you will forgive me, because I am trying to work to a time-table. I want to get through the lecture in half an hour in order to be able to show you some slides that I have taken recently in Turkey and also some that I took forty-eight years ago, in 1912, when I was there for the first time, in very much the same country as I have visited recently, to show you a certain amount of difference between the Turkey of those days and the Turkey of today, and also, at the same time, some similarities.

I decided to make this journey in order to get a first-hand impression of what has happened in Turkey since last May. I have had some writing to do for *Encyclopædia Britannica* in connection with the history of Turkey since 1908 and I also felt that I must try to bring my own little *History of Turkey* up to date for another edition if one is wanted, as it may be shortly. The present one takes us only up to 1954.

A good deal has happened, of course, since that time, and especially since last May. For some time before that, I had become increasingly uneasy at what had been happening in Turkey and I felt in a sense that my reputation was at stake, because I had for some years been saying that since the National Revolution of the Ataturk, Turkey had definitely taken

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a line in the direction of parliamentary government and Western democracy. What has happened in recent years rather disproves that.

At the same time, I have the excuse that I clearly had misgivings as far back as 1957, because in a lecture which I gave to this Society in January of that year, I said the following:

“One cannot avoid certain misgivings about the internal state of Turkey and candid friends must point out where it seems there are signs of weakness. . . . One must ask where is Turkey finding the resources for her tremendous development. . . . Turkey cannot eat her cake and have it. A large capital development programme involves a cutting down of internal spending power. . . . But the Government will not put any credit squeeze on their peasants. Hence the impasse which has led to certain internal stresses and strains with political repercussions. . . . The Government has introduced a Press Law which gives very wide powers to the Public Prosecutor and to judges and forbids public meetings except at a general election. This is something that all well-wishers of Turkey must be anxious about. . . . The present situation is not healthy.”

I said that to this Society over three years ago, and after that things have got steadily worse. The Democratic Government of Mr. Menderes originally came into power after the general election of 1950, on a wave of dissatisfaction at the rather severe control over the economy of Turkey exercised by the Populist Party. The Democrats were supported by the rising middle class interested in trade and industry, and they wanted more freedom and less of what they called “Etatism,” less State control.

Mr. Menderes was also determined to initiate a policy of economic development. In principle, this was, of course, a very sound thing, but he forced it through at break-neck speed. Roads were built and docks, harbours, hydro-electric plants, irrigation schemes, silos and factories sprang up all over the place; and there is no doubt that Turkey has now great capital assets to her credit which she never had before and which will pay rich dividends to her in future years. It can also be said, however, that for the money which Turkey has borrowed, internally and from abroad, and the money which she has received in grants from the United States of America, there should be far more assets still than actually she has at the moment. In other words, there has been tremendous waste.

There is evidence that cereal silos have been built in places where the peasants grow little cereals except for their own use. Sugar beet factories and refineries have been put up where little, if any, sugar beet is grown. A lot of these things were done in order to satisfy local political interests. That is how a lot of the money went to waste. There have been charges of corruption, which are common enough in countries in the Middle East, as many of us know, but not so frequent in Turkey since the National Revolution. For the traditions of the Ottoman Empire had created in Turkey a degree of self-discipline greater than one finds in the other countries of the Middle East.

All this wild spending on investments, some of which were valuable and some of which were not, brought about a disastrous state of affairs,

and under the former régime Turkey has been running a foreign debt which threatens her with bankruptcy. She is, naturally, not a very rich country. She has no oil like the Arab countries and Persia. She has chrome, which is valuable, and certain minerals, but she has no rivers like the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris for extensive irrigation. She has the Euphrates and the Tigris, but only the upper waters of them.

Consequently, Turkey has to depend a great deal on her agricultural exports. Here she is hindered largely by the absence of rainfall over many areas of the Anatolian plateau, where the rainfall is very fitful. Before the big developments of the last ten years, her trade balance was slightly active, but only very slightly; and with the huge development schemes on hand, with imports of capital goods of all kinds rising heavily, her balance of payments has become increasingly passive. Her trade deficit in 1958-59 was over 100 million dollars in the one year. Her commercial debt has accumulated over the last five years and in 1958 amounted to 420 million dollars, of which 150 million dollars was with this country; and it has since increased. These are not the latest figures.

The prospects were, and still are, that the proceeds of Turkey's exports—at least half of them—will have to go to meet the interest and the sinking fund on her commercial debt alone. This agreement was come to with her creditors in July, 1958, and leaves insufficient for imports of goods without further extensive credits. The position, therefore, was getting desperate at the end of the Menderes régime.

But Mr. Menderes went on merrily borrowing wherever he could, hinting to Britain and America that Turkey must get further help because she was such a bastion in the Middle East against Russian Communism.

Meanwhile, inflation and rising prices have been going on apace and when, under the late régime, the free Press began to criticize this policy, Mr. Menderes increased the persecution of opinion, which he had begun in 1956 and to which I referred in my last lecture here four years ago. Finally, last winter, he pushed a Bill through Parliament setting up a commission and conferring on it power to arrest and imprison members of the Turkish Parliament who criticized the Government or did anything to undermine its prestige in the country. In other words, he started to tamper with the Constitution.

Then, indeed, one could see in Turkish affairs appearing before our eyes the ugly face of Abdul Hamid once more. Turkey was sliding back fast to some of the more sinister features of her past. Soon after this, university students started demonstrating in the streets of Ankara and Istanbul and were joined by the military cadets, which was a quite unprecedented thing to happen. Some students and cadets were killed in the disorder that took place last May. Information then came to the officers of the Army that Menderes planned to arrest some of them. Then, the Army struck and within twelve hours the Government was taken over, a Military Directory was set up and the late Government was put behind lock and key.

In this country, we do not like military chiefs—except retired ones, of course—taking part in politics. We had our experience of this 300 years ago under Cromwell. Turkey, however, has different traditions. You must always judge a country, not by our standards, but by the standards

out of which that country has grown and from its history. In times past, the Turkish Army has often interfered in politics, and generally with beneficial results. It was the Adrianople Army Corps under Mahmud Shevket Pasha which marched on Constantinople in 1908 and deposed a tyrannical Sultan. The great reforms of the Ataturk from 1923 to 1926 were put through only thanks to the backing of the Army.

In far-off days, the Janissaries, with the aid of the Sheikh-ul-Islam and the Ulema, used to intervene to depose corrupt and tyrannical Sultans. When the Janissaries themselves became corrupt, the modern Army in 1826, under Sultan Mahmud II, aided by the religious chiefs, dissolved the Janissaries. Today, we have the same sort of thing in the Turkey of the twentieth century. The present Military Directory is the creation of the modern Army, recruited mainly from small middle-class people and peasants. They are backed by the intellectuals and professional classes. In other words, at one time the intellectuals behind the Army were the mullahs, who wore huge turbans, sat squat-legged on the floor and consulted the Koran. Today, the intellectuals behind the Army wear European clothes, sit on chairs and study the lectures and economic theories emanating from the London School of Economics. It may be different in some ways, but it is the same in others.

This is all much in the tradition of Turkish history. As that fine old Turkish statesman and colleague of the Ataturk, Ismet Inönü, said to me when I visited him six weeks ago on an island in the Sea of Marmora, "What has happened since May is the next stage of the Turkish National Revolution begun by the Ataturk."

I spent some time in Istanbul and Ankara and saw a number of people. Istanbul is the commercial centre of Turkey and the seat of the chief newspapers. One thing struck me very much. In 1956 when I was there, the newspaper editors were all deeply depressed and some were under sentence of imprisonment merely for criticizing the Menderes Government. Today, they show their intense relief at what has happened. They accept the military régime as something temporary and they criticize it on detail and matters of fact and nothing happens to them. In fact, their advice is often taken. They expect an election next year, and I think they will get it.

Some argument, however, has taken place, or is said to have taken place behind the scenes, over whether some of the younger members of the Military Directory with strong views on social and economic reform may not be wanting to keep the Directory in power for a long time in order to give direction to the social evolution of Turkey. Some of the younger officers have studied at the London School of Economics and at the Economic School at Harvard. They have a slight authoritarian and semi-Socialist tinge about them. But it seems that they are being curbed.

For this is what happened to me in Ankara. I was to have had an interview with one of these members of the Directory who was of the Left. On the morning of my appointment, I presented myself but I was told that he was very sorry that, after all, he could not see me. Three days later, I learned that he had resigned from the Military Directory, or had been pushed out—I do not know which. So I got the impression that the older officers are asserting themselves and are sincere about their state-

ment that in the course of the next year they will retire and hand over to whatever party gets power at the general election.

I attended a Press conference addressed by the head of the Directory, General Görsel. He gave me a very good impression. He answered a lot of questions very calmly and with much common sense. The atmosphere of the conference was good. The Press representatives were mainly Turkish, but there were foreigners there, too. They were not really hostile, but they sought information and, I think, they got most of the information they wanted. There were occasional bursts of friendly laughter.

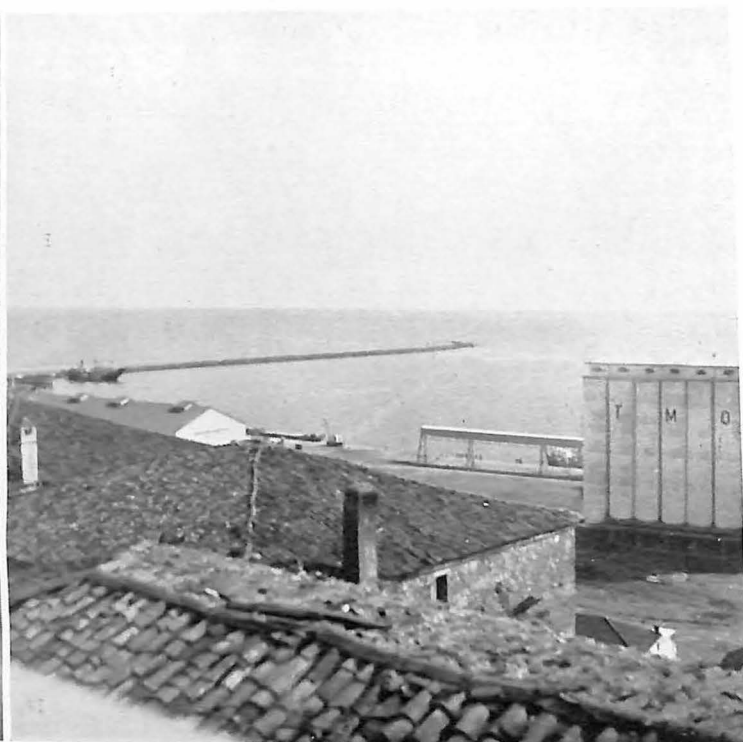
General Görsel seems to me to be a good example of a fine Turkish officer, but not of the old conservative, heavy type. He is modern in his outlook but he is clearly restraining the wilder elements of the Directory. He has much power. The commanders of all the Army groups in the country are directly responsible to him and not to the Directory. He has taken steps to stop some of the wilder economic schemes of the late Government, but is carrying on with others of them. All the same, the economic position of Turkey is catastrophic and rumour was afoot when I was still in Ankara that Turkey was going to ask for a moratorium on her foreign commercial debt. That, however, has not happened, and it may not happen, but it is the kind of thing which is in the air. It may also explain the reasons for some of the economies which are being made, not only in the Army. It has happened since I have left there and it is difficult for me to say what it is that has happened, but that seems to me to be a possible and simple kind of explanation, that they are cutting down.

Why did Mr. Menderes act as he did? I believe that his intention at first was quite sound and that he originally had no intention of adopting tyrannical methods or persecuting critics, but he got so devoted to the idea of developing Turkey's economic resources at all costs and at break-neck speed that he became increasingly intolerant of criticism. He seems to have got himself deeper and deeper into the mud of authoritarianism until, finally, even if he wanted to, he could not get himself out of it. That is the most charitable explanation I can give to it. He may have been the victim, in other words, of his excessive zeal, but the fact that such a thing as his régime was possible shows that Turkey is still politically immature, although much more mature than the other States of the Middle East. We have seen examples of this kind of thing happening some time ago. We have seen what happened in the Arab States, in Pakistan and Burma, where semi-permanent authoritarian régimes have succeeded chaotic attempts to set up parliamentary governments. It seems that Turkey has succumbed in much the same way through internal weaknesses, but I think she will get over it more quickly than the others are likely to do, because the traditions of the old Ottoman Empire and self-discipline are stronger in Turkey than in any of the other countries, except, possibly, Persia. There, of course, conditions are difficult owing to the large tribal areas. Turkey overcame that some time ago.

Mr. Menderes still has supporters in the country. He has a large peasant backing because he gave the peasants all they wanted, even at the expense of imposing increased burdens on the rest of the population. He gave the peasants prices for wheat above the world market prices, which



1. TOMB OF MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATURK AT ANKARA.



2. MODERN HARBOUR AND SILO AT TREBIZOND ON BLACK SEA.



3. DROUGHT-RESISTANT GRASSES GROWN AT EXPERIMENTAL STATION ANKARA.



4. CHURCH OF ST. SOPHIA TREBIZOND, WHERE BYZANTINE FRESCOES HAVE BEEN UNCOVERED.

resulted in higher prices for people in the towns and the taxpayers have had to pay big subsidies to the peasants.

This policy has now been reversed by the Directory, which has not been very popular with sections of the peasants, but it is perfectly right. Mr. Menderes also had some of the business interests, contractors and agents for importers of foreign goods on his side because they profited by the reckless spending of foreign grants and loans.

He had support from other quarters, too. He encouraged the reactionary elements among the mullahs and imans of the Islamic faith. It is said that he encouraged the suppressed Dervishes, but I cannot vouch for that. I saw no evidence. It is true, however, that the opposition has increased against such important reforms for popularizing Islam as the translation of the Koran into Turkish. That has been opposed by some of the mullahs. I had direct evidence when I was in Trebizond that the Iman there is obstructing the work being done on uncovering friezes and wall paintings in some of the former Byzantine churches there which are being undertaken by a group of archæologists from Edinburgh University. Certainly, the reactionary religious influences, which were suppressed by the Ataturk in his day, began to come out of their holes under the Menderes régime. I found the mosques full at prayer time and especially on Fridays. I like to see Turkey hold to Islam, but it is a very different thing if the old religious influences—the influences which kept Turkey backward for the greater part of the last century—are allowed to come back.

One of the difficult problems affecting Turkey's economy is the state of her agriculture. Here balance of payments would improve if she could raise the output from the land and have a steady export to such countries as Egypt and the Mediterranean countries of cereals and livestock produce. Two obstacles lie in the way. The first is that the peasants dry and burn animal dung, or Tezek, instead of using it on the land. The second is that the type of grain and grasses which are grown are poor. I went to see the Minister of Agriculture in Ankara because I wanted to know what was being done in this connection. I found as Minister there a certain Dr. Toshun. I have known Dr. Toshun for many years. I have known him as the chief research officer on the improvement of grasses and grains at the Ziraat Institut or Agricultural Research Station just outside Ankara.

It was encouraging to find that the Military Directory had put a scientist and not a politician in charge of agriculture. He was astonishingly frank with me and hid nothing. As a scientist, he was concerned more with facts than propaganda. He told me that he could not see Turkey's agriculture improving at a very rapid rate. The present yield of cereals in Turkey was an average of one ton per hectare. By the use of fertilizers and improved strains of grasses and cereals, he thought that in five years the yield might be raised to 1.2 tons per hectare—that is all—and that in ten years it might be increased 20 per cent. above the figures that he hopes for in five years' time. The problem is to find the right kind of cereals and grasses for the frequent dry seasons on the Anatolian plateau.

Over 2,000 drought-resistant grasses have been collected from all over the world and tried out on experimental farms. Twenty have been selected and most of these are natives of Anatolia itself; some have come from the

American continent. The problem now is to grow them on a large scale and then induce the peasants to grow them. This would increase the output and reduce the peasants' overhead costs and make them less dependent on subsidies and artificial high prices which Mr. Menderes offered them for political reasons. I went over the experimental stations both in Ankara and in Erzinjan, where I went later to see what was going on. A certain Dr. Omr Tarman, who is in charge of this now since Dr. Toshun is Minister, took me round, and I will show some slides presently.

No one can get a proper impression of Turkey if he goes only to Istanbul and Ankara. Eighty per cent. of the population of Turkey are peasants and I always go to the provinces when I am in Turkey after I have been to the two capitals. This time, I went to Erzinjan and then over the mountains to the Black Sea coast. When going to places like that, one sees that in those places, at least, Turkey has not changed very much.

Forty-eight years ago I did a journey over much the same country on horseback when I was a young man, and I can say that except for better roads, the country is now very much as it was in those days, as will be seen from my photographs. One never sees a woman's face even now. If you walk in the villages, all the women cover their faces at your approach. The methods of farming are as primitive now as they were then. People stare at a stranger from the outer world as if he was a man from Mars. I told that to a Turkish lady in Istanbul. She said, "Do not worry. They do the same to us when we go into that part of the country."

I found that in parts of the country along the Black Sea coast towards the Russian border the Dere Beys, or local chieftains, still have great influence. Not so very long ago, they used to raise private armies for the Sultan, but the National Revolution put an end to that. They cannot do that now, but they can, and do, use great political influence locally, and whole families still largely politically lead the countryside.

At Erzinjan, a town destroyed by an earthquake some twenty years ago and rebuilt, I arrived just as a military review of parts of the Third Army was in progress, and I was invited by the Governor to attend. The Turks have lost none of their efficiency at soldiering, but good military material is not enough without modern weapons. However, I understand that the Americans have done a lot in this respect. I think that anyone who fought the Turkish Third Army would not have a pleasant time.

I crossed three mountain ranges from Erzinjan in a local bus running from there over the mountains to Trebizond, on the Black Sea coast. One range was up to 6,000 ft., the famous Zigana Pass, where the Greeks under Xenophon first saw the sea in their famous expedition. In spite of better roads today, however, travelling is still uncertain, because no one in those parts of Turkey thinks of servicing or repairing a machine, just like in other parts of the East. It simply runs until it collapses. Then, if it is put right, it is the Will of Allah!

That happened three times on my journey in one day across the mountains to Trebizond. Once, the car broke down on one of the 5,000-ft. passes. The gears were taken out and spread on the road. We sat there in desolate surroundings for two hours, having had neither food nor drink that day, wondering whether we should ever get to Trebizond. In the

old days, a good old horse would always get you there, slowly but surely. Today, it is not so certain in these parts of the East. However, over this bus Allah was compassionate and merciful, the gears proved mendable and we got to Trebizond in pouring rain and pitch darkness at about 10 o'clock at night.

From there, after a few days in Trebizond, I went on a Black Sea steamer coasting along the south coast of the Black Sea and the north coast of Anatolia, calling at all the ports on the way back to Istanbul. I saw considerable changes since I was there forty-eight years ago. Every port now has a nice harbour, well laid out. The previous régime, and the one before that, must take credit for that. It started under Inönü's régime of the Populist Party. So you can see modern Turkey again when you get to the Black Sea, but before that it was very much the Turkey I remembered of old.

Then followed some slides.

DISCUSSION

Mr. MILNER BARRY: Is it thought that General Ismet Inönü and the other Opposition leaders had anything to do with the revolution?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: Ex-President Inönü has been very strong in saying that there is absolutely no truth in the rumour, and I think that that can be believed. I have known him as well as any foreigner can know a Turkish statesman of that calibre. I have met him four times and he has always received me. Although he knew that he would benefit enormously by a *coup d'état* of this kind, I think I can believe him. I am sure he has done his best to keep out of it.

A QUESTIONER: I have heard somebody say that Turks can have five wives. Can you tell us about the marriage law in Turkey and whether they can have five wives?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: As far as I am aware, there has not been any alteration in the law. You can say that polygamy is absolutely forbidden—it may go on still in some out-of-the-way parts—and divorce is now regularized. A man cannot divorce his wife as in the old days. In that respect, it can be said that Turkey has come up to the level of Western practices generally. What may go on in many out-of-the-way places, I do not know. Those things may be possible there, but not otherwise.

A QUESTIONER: Except for very rich men, would they not find it expensive to buy five wives?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: Yes. That was true even before the revolution. Polygamy was not very widespread even then for that reason. The prophet Mohammed laid it down that no one wife was allowed to be treated any differently to the others. I do not say that that was always observed, but, anyway, there was a tremendous moral obligation. It was sanctioned by public opinion even in those days.

A QUESTIONER: Do the wives fraternize and get on with each other? Are they friendly to each other if there are five wives in a family?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: I would not like to say. I have no personal knowledge!

Mrs. St. JOHN COOK: Will the opposition of the newer element fade out as the older generation dies?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: Yes, I think so, undoubtedly. What Turkey has to overcome now is the question of how to run her public affairs and to do it by parliamentary methods and public discussion, to which the Government of the day must listen. Mr. Menderes has come a cropper because he did not do that. In other words, Turkey is not yet through her most important stage of becoming a Western democracy. I think that she will get through it.

At the moment, the Democratic Party has been suppressed completely. It was allowed to go on for a long time after May, but it has now been dissolved. The question now is what kind of Opposition there will be. Nobody seems to know. There are rumours. It was said that the Military Directory would try to organize an Opposition. Everybody expects that at the general election ex-President İnönü will come back with a big majority.

There is also the National Democratic Party, which is very much to the Right. Whether they will get much support I do not know. But I do not think so. It is thought that possibly the people of the Military Directory, or some of them, will retire and organize a legal Opposition to the Populist Party. That seems to me to be the next stage in the political development of Turkey.

Major-General BEDDINGTON: What is the basis of land tenure in the agricultural districts of Turkey?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: Private peasant ownership. But the Populist régime, when in office, had a land law limiting the size of the holdings to 500 hectares. It was honoured more in the breach than in the observance. It did happen that there were distributions of land to landless peasants, but mostly from State property. There are some larger estates which have not been touched. It is said that the Military Directory will do that.

In Turkey, there is not the same problem as in Persia or the Arab countries. There are no enormous land-owners owning whole areas or provinces. It never was so. Even in the old régime, the Sultan was the principal land-holder and he did not give away land when he had it in Anatolia. He did not give it to his pashas. It largely went to the peasants. So Turkey's agrarian system is much healthier than that of any of the other Middle Eastern countries.

Major-General BEDDINGTON: What would the peasants burn as an alternative fuel if dung were to be used as a fertiliser?

Mr. PHILIPS PRICE: I asked that very question. I was told that there is now a system, which started in Tunisia and Morocco, of treating dung with a certain chemical which creates methane and carbon dioxide, which can be used for burning and also will leave a portion for manure. I do not think it is anything that can be produced on a big scale as yet. As far as I can see, it is more or less in the experimental stage. The main hope is in drought-resistant grasses and cereals. There is oil, of course, and Turkey has coal. A lot can be done by the development of the use of coal and oil.

The CHAIRMAN: I am afraid that brings us to the end of our time. It only remains for me, on your behalf, to thank Mr. Philips Price for having come to us so soon after his recent journey to Turkey and for the most enthralling lecture he has given us and the wonderful slides he has shown.

The vote of thanks was accorded unanimously by acclamation.

