

Cradle of Religion

Nor is it only traders and warriors who have marked the Middle East, for out of its lonely deserts and crowded cities have come three of the world's great religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In a world where Moslem brotherhood, Zionist dream, and Christian survival are everyday vital issues, this must not be forgotten.

Nationalism and Oil

The Middle East is a region where the hand of history lies heavy upon the land. And yesterday's history is today's politics in such a land. Today, to historic conflict two new ingredients have been added: nationalism, that bitter consciousness of self and stranger; and oil, the lubricant of twentieth-century industry and war machines. As a focus of world strife, oil today plays the role that spices did four hundred years ago. With such a mixture of geography and history, of past and present frictions, the Middle East is as explosive an area as is to be found anywhere in the world.

Turkish Nationalism

Among the Middle Eastern states Turkey is one of the strongest, most dependable and stable. Likewise it is one of the most valued and sincere associates of the Western democratic powers. To anyone who is acquainted with present-day world affairs these may seem commonplace truisms. Yet to have asked any Westerner living in the land of the Turks so short a time ago as the first years of this century to look forward one generation to a period when such assertions would be manifestly true would have been to court mocking laughter at one's absurdity. None the less in just that brief span of years the rotten, old, ramshackle Ottoman Empire, known to the statesmen of the Great Powers in 1910 as the "Sick Man of Europe", has been metamorphosed into the vigorous, healthy, liberal-minded, modern Turkey.

What a change! For, from the days when Peter the Great and Catherine II of Russia cast covetous eyes upon the Black Sea possessions of the Ottoman Empire and sent their armies marching against the Sultans until the eve of the First World War, the ageing Turkish Empire was increasingly the sport of rival imperial powers, of Russia, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, and Germany.

Revolution

The first intimation of an effective protest against the old sad state of affairs to appear amongst the Turks came in 1908-09 when a group of young men, mostly army officers and students, rose in revolt and forced the Sultan to agree to make reforms. These Young Turks, from whose ranks came Mustafa Kemal and Ismet, had either studied in Europe or were close observers of the European scene. They dreamed a dream of converting the moribund Ottoman Empire into a new modern European state. Before their plans could properly be launched the cataclysm of the First World War broke upon them. Their tottering Empire crashed in ruins about their heads. In 1919 there was only rubble and ashes.

Kemal Ataturk

Then Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish hero of the defence of Gallipoli, rallied his countrymen when the Greeks, with Allied backing, launched an attack upon Asia Minor in 1920. The threat from the once subject people of the Ottoman Empire was all that was needed to spark the Turkish nation into renewed vitality.

When the Greeks were hurled back and the Allies forced to recognize that, though the Ottoman Empire might be gone, the Turks were far from crushed, Kemal embarked upon his great life work, the Turkish Revolution.