Belles lettres and bellringers

Turkey Faces West. By Halide Edib. New Haven, Yale University Press. 1930. $3.00

The average American’s idea of the Turk is that of a sinister, dark, cunning fellow who would take particular delight in sticking a dagger into the back of any Christian who would not forsake Christ for Mahomet and the Cross for the Crescent. The late M Clemenceau, of France, during the peace conference at Paris, expressed a very prevalent opinion, when he wrote the following characterization:

There is no case to be found either in Europe or Asia or Africa, in which the establishment of Turkish rule in any country has not been followed by a diminution of material prosperity, and a fall in the level of culture: nor is there any case to be found in which the withdrawal of Turkish rule has not been followed by a growth in material prosperity and a rise in the level of culture.

The Turk has been known as a destroyer, a fighter, a barbarian, but never as a builder or a civilized human being. How have such notions as the “terrible Turk” become so current in Western Europe and the United States? Long tradition has had much to do with the spread of these ideas. After all the Turk is an Asiatic—and Asiatics have a habit of being something inferior in both intellect and morals to the rest of the human family—particularly in Europe and America. But there are other reasons why the Turks have never had a fair treatment before the bar of American public opinion. In the first place, pulpits have thundered against the Turks because they do not happen to be Christians, and have raised the hue and cry of religious persecution. Secondly, newspapers have carried page after page of news concerning Armenian atrocities, without either explaining the causes of massacres, or even hinting that Turks have also been massacred. Again, there is a type of historian, not too familiar with conditions in the Near East, who has spread popular legends without taking the trouble to make scientific investigations. Finally, politicians and statesmen of the Gladstone tradition still linger who continue to malign the Turks for political reasons.

From time to time there have been protests against all this unfairness. From time to time certain people have insisted that there might be another side to the story. In this splendid volume under review, based on Madame Edib’s lectures at the Williamstown Institute of Politics, the author presents a Turkish view of the history of her country from its earliest origin to the achievements of the new republic under the guiding genius of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the president of modern Turkey.

Certainly the accomplishments of the Turks in the last decade warrant a re-estimate of their past history. Few will deny either the cruelty or the tyranny of much that took place in the recent history of the late Ottoman Empire. Nor does Mme Edib either attempt to hide or deny the record. She merely attempts to present the historical truth about Turkey—her country—as she sees it and as she has studied it. But the author is different from most writers of Western Europe or America, for she condemns the imperialism and rapacity of her own country (the Ottoman Empire) no less than that of any other. Many of the troubles of the Near East the writer ascribes to the military character of the Turk, the geographical nature of the territory as the gateway of three continents, and to the imperialistic designs of the European Great Powers.

The European Powers, in the opinion of Mme Edib, have bet generally “on the wrong horse,” to use Lord Salisbury’s overworked phrase. “What it means to gamble with human beings is known only to those who have been the pawns in the game.” One can not but feel that Mme Edib has spoken the truth in her condemnation of the policy of “Christian” Europe, no matter how unpleasant the words may be to western ears.

The survey of the westward movement in Turkey—the movement which culminated in the revolution after the world war—is full of intense interest. Those who expect to find only shallow, weak roots for the modern developments in the new Turkish republic are due for severe shocks. Mme Edib traces the origin of present trends far back into the nineteenth century. She believes, therefore, in the ultimate development of the republic of Turkey into a very modern state, though she recognizes that the fate of her country is tied up definitely with that of Europe, and indeed, of the world. The author has seen the spirit travel through more than a decade of constant war and now sees the triumph of the new state. Yet Mme Edib is not without searchings of heart and mind. She is afraid of military dictatorship. She is fearful even that the spirit of nationalism which helped to create the new Turkey may be a destructive force. “Political nationalism is as ugly as any other creed which tends to make men exterminate each other.”

Mme Halide Edib needs no introduction to American readers. She was the first Moslem graduate of the Constantine Women’s college, and has played an important part in Turkish life for more than thirty years. Already she is well known for her Turkish Ordeal and for her memoirs. It is to be hoped that her new book will have a wide circulation among thoughtful people. Whether one agrees with all that is written in the pages of this book is not important, but it is important that we in the west get the Turkish viewpoint, on a problem which is still one of the most important in world politics. No student of the Eastern Question should neglect it.

Harry N. Howard

On Mary Baker Eddy

The long-awaited life of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, written by Fleta Campbell Springer, ex ’11, of Washington, has been announced for publication in October by Coward-McCann of New York City. It is entitled According to the Flesh. The publishers comment: “The controversy around this most enigmatic and invisible of characters here receives new material heretofore unavailable to biographers.”

First Importance

Commenting on Dr Howard O. Eaton’s The Austrian Philosophy of Values issued this spring by the University of Oklahoma Press, The American Mercury declares in its check list of new books:

Until the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century the concept of value was more or less taken for granted among philosophers, particularly those working in the social sciences. In their calculations, at least, they nearly all looked upon value as a purely objective thing. But then came Wundt, Weber, and Fechner, who impressed upon the world, once and for all, the importance of psychology, and the old theory of value was on its last legs. The three philosophers who made the initial readjustments were the Austrians Franz Brentano, Alexius von Meinong, and Christian von Ehrenfels. Their influence on the continent has been tremendous, and of late it has begun to be felt in the United States. Dr Eaton, who is assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Oklahoma, has here made the first extensive study in English of the so-called Second Austrian School. His book is not for the general public, but professional philosophers will find it of the first importance.