

OBSTACLES TO REFORM IN TURKEY.

BY CHARLES MORAWITZ.

THE obstacles which, in the Ottoman Empire, oppose the execution of those reforms that are so desirable and are so constantly demanded, are of three kinds: they arise, firstly, from the extraordinary and curious variety of the peoples classed together pell-mell under the name of Ottoman; secondly, from the character of the Turkish race; and, lastly, from the attitude of foreign Powers.

I.

No exact or even approximate census has ever been taken of the peoples who, with or against their will, recognize the Sultan of Constantinople as their sovereign. These statistics would, however, possess only a relative value. Moreover, such a census would be impossible in a country like Turkey, where an important part of the population leads a nomadic life, and where the civil organization exists only in a rudimentary form, or is even totally lacking. But so much is certain, that the territory from Novi-Bazar to the Persian Gulf, and from the frontier of Russian Armenia to the Red Sea, respectively, contains the most varied and in-harmonious collection of human elements conceivable.

In European Turkey alone, there are no fewer than eleven races, and the number of churches is greater still. This extraordinary diversity, together with the rivalry existing between the various Christian races and sects, would be in itself a great impediment to the introduction of administrative and judicial reforms; but it is further aggravated by the fact that certain tribes, such as the Albanians, for example, are partly Christians and partly Mohammedans, and that each of the various religious communities possesses a certain degree of autonomy.

The sense of uniformity has always been singularly wanting

in the Turkish race. Terrible and often cruel conquerors as they have been, they have never asked more of those subjected by them than to remain quiet and pay the taxes levied upon them. They have left them not only their religion, their clergy, their language, but even their civil organization, and, in all matters of domestic jurisprudence, their own tribunal.

The part played by standing armies in certain countries in forming a bond of union between the various nationalities of the state has never been accomplished by the Turkish army. Greeks, Armenians and Turks have not the opportunity of uniting and fraternizing under the national flag. In a great measure from contempt, but in some degree from distrust, the Mussulman Turks have reserved to themselves the exclusive privilege of military service; they have excluded from it all the non-Mohammedan subjects of the Sultan, and they content themselves with imposing upon these a small tax for their exemption from military service, which is, as a rule, very willingly paid. Thus there is nothing to unite the different races. The Turks avoid anything likely to bring about a *rapprochement*, and carefully endeavor to maintain the existing antagonism, which they regard as a pledge of their own security. "*Divide et impera*" has been the rule observed for centuries by the Turks both towards their own subjects and towards the Great Powers.

A uniform legislation, a common administration, making no discrimination between people of different religion and origin, would be far from welcome to the races living side by side in the valleys of the Vardar or the Euphrates, on the slopes of the Balkans or Ararat,—races always jealous of each other, and sometimes at open war. Too heterogeneous to submit to unity of law and government, too far reduced by centuries of migrations, troubles and wars to gather together in provinces according to their various nationalities, these peoples offer to the reformer the most stubborn and recalcitrant material imaginable.

II.

Originally a nomadic and military race, established in the midst of subjugated populations, and become sedentary only at a comparatively recent period, the Turks have retained to this day a number of their former habits and instincts. In order to be convinced of this it is sufficient to visit one of their private houses or

Government offices. In the former, there is no permanently fitted up bedroom or dining-room; in the evening, a few rugs, thrown upon a divan, suffice for a couch, and all meals are served upon a tray and eaten with the fingers. In public offices, there are none of those imposing portfolios and vast cupboards which are the obligatory accompaniments of our Government routine; the documents are carried about in sacks, and kept in sacks, if they are kept at all. In Constantinople, in the palaces of high functionaries and in the business of Government departments, certain Western practices have filtered in; but they are very far from having entirely banished the old national customs, and in the provinces these customs have maintained their sway almost intact.

As modern civilization develops in a nation, so much the more does existence there become intense and feverish and every minute have its value. The Mussulman is never in a hurry. Even in war, where the Ottoman soldier has recently shown himself to be worthy of his glorious traditions, he is distinguished by tenacity rather than by the power of rapid attack. In civil affairs, and especially in Government business, the Turkish official does not know what it means to hurry himself, and, exceedingly patient himself, he does not understand impatience in others. He is quite surprised to hear a Westerner, after waiting for several hours, which he has passed in smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee, complain that the person with whom he had an appointment at noon only appears at two or three o'clock!

To the Turk of the present day, as to his ancestor of the time of the Mustaphas and Selims, time has no value, and the notion of an exact due date does not exist. When he has signed a contract or promise to pay at a specified date, or when he has undertaken to carry out some obligation or other in a given time, the date or the term has not the same meaning to his mind as it has to ours. It still remains for him something indefinite. It is not bad faith on his part; it is simply want of power to connect, as we are accustomed to do, the idea of an engagement with that of a strictly limited period of time.

Another extremely serious difficulty lies in the fact that the social and political condition of Turkey has not yet passed a stage which the other nations of Europe have left behind them long since, and of which the last trace disappeared from the West about thirty years ago with the temporal power of the Popes. The man-

agement of public business is not yet entirely secularized in the Ottoman Empire. It is not only that the Sultan unites in his person the double quality of lay sovereign and religious chief. But below him, even in the judicial organization indispensable to national existence, the line is not clearly defined between what concerns the State and what lies within the domain of the Church. Although a certain number of codes dictated by modern intelligence have been promulgated, the Koran still remains the text of the law, as well as the Sacred Book. The Sheik-ul-Islam is invested with a kind of veto upon matters connected with legislation. The body of the Ulémas, placed under his orders, are at the same time clergy and magistrates.

A society thus organized, partly theocratic, partly military, furnished with a somewhat rudimentary and far from perfect administrative organization, has existed during hundreds of years almost without contact with the Western World. Then, almost suddenly, during the second half of the last century, the barrier was lowered. Turkey borrowed money from the Great Powers of Europe and threw open her gates to them. She received from them military instructors, high functionaries, and engineers who constructed railways and harbors for her. The still primitive régime of the Ottoman Empire found itself suddenly face to face with the most advanced civilization. The monarchy of the Sultans felt the requirements of a modern state, while possessing only the machinery of a mediæval administration. Can one wonder that her institutions are ill adapted to such an evolution?

There is, however, one institution imported from abroad which has taken root without much trouble in Turkish soil. This is bureaucracy, with its necessary complement of multitudinous documents. The employees of the state are badly paid: often, indeed, they are not paid at all, and live as best they can, rather ill than well, at the expense of those under their administration; but their name is legion. Commerce and industry, those factors of the wealth and power of a nation, are but little practised by the Turks, who show a marked preference for Government posts.

The Effendi knows scarcely any other career than that of theologian, soldier or civil servant. If he has no patron, he chooses an ecclesiastic career, being drawn towards it by that religious spirit which characterizes the Mussulman population. But, if he

has a few connections, he enters the army, or demands a post in the administration. The idea of aristocracy is unknown to the Mussulman; this is clearly shown by the fact that family names do not exist. In a country where there are no privileged classes, where everybody may aspire to the highest posts, it is only too natural that the Effendi, accustomed to see people attain honor and fortune who had no other claim but that of having managed to get into the good graces of some ephemeral potentate, should choose in preference a career which opens the same prospect to himself. To please his superiors is in his eyes the sole means of insuring success.

Commerce, despised by the Effendi, is almost entirely in the hands of Armenian, Greek, Jewish and foreign merchants. Manufactures are but little developed. It was not always thus; and, in this respect, but little regard is shown to the maxims of the Koran, which orders every Mussulman to work, after the example of the patriarchs. The early Sultans all had a profession, and certain of them pushed respect for the Koran to such a point as to wish to live only by the products of their manual labor, which the courtiers were eager to purchase,—most probably without beating down the price! There exist in the country numerous traces of a very advanced civilization. Are not the names of Damascus, Mosul and Pergamos the proof of the existence of former flourishing industries, of damasquined arms, muslin and parchment? The manufacture of pottery and leather was also formerly very highly developed. These ancient industries are for the most part extinct or in decay; with the exception of carpets, agricultural products form Turkey's sole export to foreign countries at the present day. And although agriculture is the principal branch of national activity, it is far from attracting as much attention from Government as it deserves.

The fact that the Minister presiding over this department has no voice in the Council of Ministers, and the other fact that the budget provides for no expenditure on the part of this department, are in themselves sufficiently characteristic.

All travellers coming from Western and Central Europe to Constantinople by rail can appreciate this melancholy situation by comparing it with the prosperous condition of the soil in Eastern Roumelia. Hardly have they crossed the frontier when they are painfully impressed, first in the territory of Mustapha Pacha,

and especially in the long stretch from Adrianople to the capital, by the low standard of cultivation, which is on the contrary so flourishing round Philippopolis.

Among the numerous causes of this condition we may mention the want of means of communication, which renders the sale of surplus production so difficult; the imperfect knowledge of scientific agriculture, which causes the Turkish peasant of to-day to plough, sow, and reap his crops after the manner of his forefathers; and the very arbitrary assessment of taxes, still more aggravated by the abuses of collection. If, moreover, we take into consideration the unlucky system of *vakoufs* or mortmain property, which comprises three-quarters of the country, we can only wonder that Turkey is still counted among European states having the largest export of agricultural products, and this fact permits us to imagine what brilliant results might be obtained in other conditions.

Let us now put together the different features of the sketch which has been given above. We see a military people established by conquest in the midst of races which they have not attempted to assimilate, retaining, as they do, a very exalted sentiment of superiority over the vanquished, not attempting to vie with them in commercial and industrial occupations; some applying themselves to a rudimentary form of agriculture, or to public offices which are as uninteresting as they are badly paid; others embracing the military profession, in which the repression of internal insurrections represents the only form of active service: a people honest at bottom with the exception of a very small minority which has learned nothing from European civilization but its vices, together with that class of employees reduced by poverty to live on *bakshish*: a people devoid of all spirit of initiative, reduced to inertia by Mussulman fatalism and the most primitive kind of public instruction. Let us imagine this people as governed by sovereigns who are occasionally animated by excellent intentions, but who have been brought up in private and under suspicion, guarded from all contact with outside life by an absurd system of succession,—sovereigns whose power is theoretically absolute, but who in any desire for reform would immediately find themselves in conflict with the narrow-mindedness of a powerful clergy which is dominated by custom. On thinking of all this, one cannot be surprised that a great reformer has not yet gone forth from the

palaces of Dolma-Bagtché, Tscheragan or Yildiz. It is true that the Russia of the seventeenth century presented conditions not much more favorable than these, that the education of Peter the Great had not prepared him any better for the part that he played in later life; and that, nevertheless, he succeeded in liberating Russia from a political and social condition which was far more Asiatic than is that of Turkey at the present day. In history everything is possible, even the appearance of a Peter the Great on the shores of the Bosphorus!

III.

A third factor still remains to be mentioned, the cooperation of which might be very efficacious and the zeal of which has often been manifested. I speak of the foreign Powers; but it must be frankly admitted that hitherto they have accomplished their mission of counsellors and guardians only in a very intermittent and imperfect fashion. It is true that they have on several occasions demanded reforms, notably in the Treaties of Paris and Berlin, but all the arrangements relative to these have remained a dead letter, and it could hardly be denied that the Powers have done nothing to encourage Turkey to continue the work of reform once commenced. A single one of the European provinces of Turkey, Eastern Roumelia, had received a definite organization. The commission formed in virtue of the Treaty of Berlin had elaborated for this province an organic statute, a regular administrative charter. After a few years of working, this statute was forcibly destroyed. Eastern Roumelia has become, in fact, a Bulgarian province. Diplomacy has looked on impassively at this flagrant violation of a treaty when the ink of its signatures was hardly dry. This precedent has clearly done not a little to diminish the authority of diplomacy in demanding the "organization" of Macedonia or Thrace, and was not likely to stimulate the zeal of the Sultan to create other "Eastern Roumelias."

It must also be recognized that the system of "capitulations," as it is practised, does not testify to the disinterestedness necessary to gain that influence over Turkish governmental circles which is desirable for the realization of the reforms demanded. Capitulations — diplomatic treaties concluded during past centuries — offered to foreigners who had settled in Turkey, among other advantages, notably that of having their legal actions judged

by their own consulates, and not by the tribunals of the country. These arrangements had their *raison d'être*, and they have it still. Even to-day it would be imprudent to subject foreigners settled in Turkey to Ottoman jurisdiction; but these old conventions, and especially the customary rights which have become established in their train and which are found in no legal document, maintain certain other privileges which it would be difficult to justify.

Perhaps I may be permitted to quote a few examples in support of this assertion. On the basis of a right drawn by interpretation from the obscure text of the capitulations, there still exist the post-offices established by the Powers in the large cities and the majority of the ports, offices of which the first was opened by Austria at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Many circumstances—such as, for instance, the excessive activity developed by the "*Cabinet Noir*,"* and the fact, characteristic of the existing state of affairs, that a local postal service does not exist in the capital, for fear that it might be favorable to conspiracies—justify the maintenance of these foreign post-offices. But would it be more than the most elementary justice to abandon to the Turkish state a part of the profits which the Powers derive from them, and to recognize its right of suzerainty, either by the settlement of a percentage upon the profits or by the arrangement that letters are not to be forwarded unless, in addition to the foreign stamp, they also bear a Turkish stamp?

The majority of the nations of the Continent of Europe are endeavoring to protect their industries and agriculture against foreign competition, and even England, the bulwark of Free Trade, is considering whether she should not follow this example. Disciples of Colbert and Chamberlain when it is a question of closing their own frontiers, they suddenly become followers of Cobden in order not to allow any customs barriers worth mentioning at the entrance to the Ottoman Empire. The tariff voted by their parliaments abounds in taxes of 15, 20 and 25 per cent. on the value of goods imported by them. But the Turks are not allowed to exceed 8 per cent., and a thousand difficulties are raised when they ask permission to impose an additional three or four per cent.

* The term applied on the Continent of Europe to the department in Government Post-offices which violates the secrecy of private correspondence.

The Powers show no more signs of a spirit of equity when they exact quite exceptional fiscal immunities for their subjects established in Turkey. One can understand that they wish to protect their subjects against exactions such as were often committed formerly, as might still be committed if no control were exercised; but this is no reason why foreigners settled in Turkey should be exempt from personal and direct taxes which are very reasonable, very moderate, and are imposed on Turkish subjects—for instance, the tax upon commercial and industrial incomes. The history of the attempts made for many years by the Porte to remedy inequality of treatment, as regards this last tax, is sufficiently characteristic to deserve to be given in some detail.

The Ottoman Empire is still subject, in certain points, to those corporate institutions which all Europe was familiar with in the Middle Ages, and which had almost entirely disappeared by the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century. There still exist there a large number of professional associations of skilled and unskilled laborers, strongly organized, invested with monopolies sanctioned by long tradition and of which they are extremely jealous, and ready to use violence, if need be, to defend their privileges. All travellers who have visited Constantinople, or any other great port of the Empire, have seen one of these trades-unions at work, the "*hamals*" or porters, syndicated in every important locality under the orders of leaders to whom they render implicit obedience. These "*hamals*," who have secured by financial means powerful supporters even in the immediate entourage of the Sultan, fix their own tariffs and impose their assistance upon both private individuals and transport companies, driving away in the most effectual manner, with fist and knife, all who attempt to compete with them. The police dare not oppose their extortions. The merchants suffer from their tyranny; every one complains of them; but the complaints of the public and of the Embassies against the monopoly of the *hamals* attached to the administration of the custom-house at Constantinople, and the claims put forward by foreign merchants to have their goods transported by their own employees, remain without the slightest effect. All have to pass under the caudine forks of the *hamals*.

In the same way, another corporation of the capital, as mischievous as it is picturesque, the *Tolumbadjis* or voluntary firemen, has resisted all efforts to abolish it. As soon as the cannon

sounds the alarm of fire, one sees wild and noisy hordes rushing up, carrying their primitive hand-pumps, and terrifying the inhabitants by their cries. They take up their position round the burning house, bargain for the rate of salvage before beginning the work of extinguishing the flames, and more often than not steal more than they save. They are more to be feared than the fire itself. They have not the slightest *raison d'être* since the organization of an excellent body of firemen after the European pattern by the administration, with the intelligent cooperation of Count Szechenyi. No matter! The *Tolumbadjî*, privileged like the *hamal*, continues to exist. It is asserted that the actual number of members of the two bodies, together with the persons dependent upon them, reaches the figure of 30,000 in Constantinople alone. The Sultan, who is anxious for peace and quiet, shrinks from causing annoyance to such turbulent elements of the population. In such matters, contrary to received opinion, the most absolute Governments are sometimes the most timid.

Not alone upon the shores of the Bosphorus, but in a great many other parts of Turkey, the old system of "wardenships" and "freedoms" still exists, just as it did in past centuries all over Europe. It is necessary to be thoroughly acquainted with them to understand what seems at first sight one of the most singular anomalies of the system of "capitulations." These venerable conventions applied the principles of free trade between Turkey and several of the states of Central and Western Europe, and that, too, at a period when political economy was still ignorant of them theoretically and they were quite unknown in practice. "In order to bring about that activity in trade and that safety to travellers coming and going which naturally result in friendly relations," they guaranteed the greatest facilities in the exchange of goods, and, to the subjects of the countries which were parties to them, the almost unlimited right of settling in Turkey for the purposes of trade. But the application of liberal ideas stops there. As soon as we pass from the sphere of trade, properly so called, to that of manufacture, as soon as it becomes a question, not of the power of trafficking, buying or selling, but of producing or manufacturing, the principles are entirely changed: the narrowest form of protection and nationalism takes the place of free trade. The exercise of the trades reserved to the corporations is forbidden to foreigners. Nor can foreigners join the corporations.

As a matter of fact, this ancient Chinese wall of rights and privileges has not failed to suffer a few breaches here and there. Foreign workmen and manufacturers have established themselves in Turkey. Nothing, even in the text of the capitulations, prevents their working in those cities where trades-unions for such and such professions do not exist. Furthermore, a certain number of individuals who are not subjects of the Sultan have opened workshops or accepted employment in the European quarters of the majority of the great cities, thanks to the more or less interested tolerance of the authorities. But, none the less, the rule exists; in more than one case, the corporations have insured respect for it by rendering a prolonged residence in the locality intolerable to the intruder who is sufficiently audacious to compete with them, and by employing to this end either incessant small vexations or more energetic means of persuasion.

When, after the war of 1876-77, Turkey conceived the notion of replacing her ancient tax of "*temettu*" by something more conformable to modern ideas, when she desired to establish a rational tax upon the produce of commerce and industry, she naturally intended that this tax should also be levied upon the subjects of other states, who were until that time exempt from all contributions in virtue of the capitulations. This was a legitimate desire enough. But, in order to realize it, the consent of the Powers was indispensable. Recognizing that there would be an injustice in establishing an equal rate of fiscal dues for all the inhabitants of the Empire without regard to nationality, at the same time that the restrictions imposed upon freedom of manufacture were still being maintained to the disadvantage of foreigners, the Government inserted in the bill imposing a tax upon patents an article by the terms of which "all the inhabitants of the Empire, without any reservation, are granted the free exercise of industries of all kinds, of trades carried on by corporations and of all professions whatever in general." It might have been thought that, upon this basis, an agreement between Turkey and the Powers would be established without much difficulty. Such a supposition would imply ignorance of the usual course of events at Constantinople. Negotiations began, as slowly as usual. They were following their ordinary course, when Russia condemned them to certain failure by declaring that she would make her adhesion dependent upon the suppression of trades-unions.

There were certainly in theory some good reasons for this demand. As long as the corporations exist, it will be difficult to consider industrial liberty as absolutely guaranteed, at any rate for the small producer and the workingman. The entire abolition of the corporations is, however, almost impossible for reasons given above. Rather than run the risk of provoking demonstrations, perhaps riots, and in any case discontent, the Sultan prefers to follow that course which is the easiest in every country, and towards which the Oriental in particular is naturally inclined, the course of doing nothing; and thus the bill of patents continues to moulder in the archives.

In the mean time, the situation of the foreigner engaged in trade in Turkey is in reality highly enviable, at least from a fiscal point of view. This lucky individual has the privilege of belonging to a state which protects him, but to which he does not pay taxes because he does not live in it; and of residing in another state to which he does not pay taxes either, because he is not a subject of it, and because century-old conventions confer upon him an almost complete immunity from taxation. He is only subject to the land-tax if he is an owner of house property. The other direct taxes do not concern him.

If he lived in his native country, in France or Austria, for example, Government officials would treat him with the majestic contempt which all administrators are in the habit of displaying towards the vulgar herd. Established at Constantinople, or in some other seaport of the East, he becomes a unit of a Great Power. A series of officials, encompassed by the immense prestige which these posts confer, ambassadors, secretaries of all ranks, attachés, dragomans, consuls-general, consuls and clerks, watch over the least of his rights with a jealous care, ready to interfere if he has the slightest dispute with the local authorities.

Certainly this system has had its *raison d'être*, and has it still. Ottoman administration and justice are not as yet, nor will be for a long time, sufficiently worthy of confidence for the stranger established in Turkey to be altogether subjected to them. Granted: but still those excesses might be avoided which may have had their reason in former times but are no longer justified to-day. There is no serious reason in favor of excepting from the payment of all direct taxes, with the exception of the land-tax, a Frenchman, German, Austrian or Englishman who has his home

and business in the Ottoman Empire: of leaving indefinitely foreigners who are the permanent guests of Turkey in the enjoyment of a system which confers upon them all rights without laying upon them any burdens: of preventing the Turkish Government from realizing an important and legitimate step in financial progress, because this progress would impose expenditure upon the local protégés of the Powers. This is to take up an attitude which is unworthy of European diplomacy, and is of a nature to give the Turks a strange idea of the Western spirit of justice.

These explanations show that, whether internally or externally, an attempt at reform in Turkey is beset with great difficulties.

It would be unjust, however, for this account of the situation to produce too pessimistic an impression, and so prevent justice being done to the progress realized during the last fifty years. On the eve of the Crimean War, the country was as firmly closed to the rest of Europe as are Persia and Afghanistan to-day. It is only since that time that Turkey has begun to open her doors to modern culture. Railways have placed her in communication with her neighbors: Salonica and Constantinople are less than three days' journey from Paris; a long line connects the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus with the heart of Anatolia. The great fiscal reform inaugurated in 1881 by the decree of Mouharrem, by insuring the punctual payment of interest upon the National Debt, has created a powerful and regular financial administration, extending the network of its agencies over the whole country, and giving an excellent example of order, regularity and good management to the other public institutions.

On examining what, in spite of all difficulties, has been accomplished in Turkey during the last half-century, we have no right to believe that she is irretrievably condemned to immobility, or to contest the possibility of a march of progress beyond the limits already attained, or to maintain that the sole means of insuring her progress is to expel the dominant race to Asia, where it originated—at the cost of a war which might set the Old World in a blaze.

The peaceful transformation of the Sultan's Empire is a question of time and of patience; it depends above all on the goodwill, firmness and union of the Powers.

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