

## The Abolition of the Khalifat.

By M. N. Roy.

The news of the abolition of the Khalifat by the Turkish National Assembly has burst upon the world as a bomb-shell. Ample space has been devoted to this topic in the bourgeois press of Europe. Although the opinion as to the wisdom and result of this momentous step is not unanimous, its gravity is commonly recognized. Countries like Great Britain and France with large stakes in Turkey, are naturally very much concerned with the possible outcome of this event. The *Times*, for example, laments over "the abolition of an institution so closely interwoven with the bygone greatness of Turkey". It forgets that a nation may not always remain content with the memory of bygone greatness, and a glorious past may not be a guarantee against a brighter future. The *Temps*, on the other hand, cannot very well disapprove of the measure without turning traitor to the traditions of France which, it claims, have inspired the Turks in this historic action of theirs. But it rebukes the French Government by pointing out that when Turkey is following the foot-prints of France, "French moral influence and material interests are on the decline in the Near East". Every imperialist country is weighing the event in the scale of its own interest. All are visibly disturbed, because it looks as if the days when they all considered Turkey as legitimate prey, are over. Nationalist Turkey has plunged herself into a Revolution which will transform her so as to make European Imperialism, which never gave up the hope of keeping her under perpetual domination, very uncomfortable.

It need not be said that the resolution of the Turkish National Assembly is a great revolutionary step. It becomes more so, in view of the fact that it is so precipitated. Besides, it is extremely radical. The boldness of the step becomes evident when it is remembered that the position of Turkey has been morally fortified by the fact that 240 millions of Moslems in the surrounding countries owed her allegiance as the custodian of the Holy See. She has been looked upon as the leader of the Moslem world because of this fact. Her latest struggle for national liberation was interpreted by the Moslems in other lands as the struggle for the defence of the Faith. Turkey was supposed to be defending the Khalifat. So, it can be easily imagined what a tremendous shock the news that the Turks have abolished the Khalifat, will be to the Moslem world. Not only the present Khalif, who was divested of temporal power only a few months ago, is deposed, but the time-honoured institution itself is abolished. It is going farther than any other people has gone before. Neither the Papacy of the Roman Church, nor the Patriarchate of the Greek Church was ever abolished by any bourgeois Revolution. They were only deprived of all influence over the State. Turkey passed through this stage of revolution only a few months ago, when the Khalif was divested of the Sultanate, whose authority was invested in the people represented in the National Assembly. Consequently the Theo-monarchist State was replaced by a Republic. Even this proved to be rather too drastic a measure for a considerable section of the orthodox, both inside and outside Turkey. Troubles began to brew on all sides, and the revolutionary "Tribunal of Independence" was created to cope with the situation. The tribunal wielded its powers drastically, though the guillotine did not appear as yet.

At least superficially, the Moslem world reconciled itself to Republican Turkey. The Khalifat was still in existence, and the National Assembly declared its determination to defend its integrity. So Turkey still continued to be the defender of Islam. Some complications arose about the personality of the Khalif; suggestions were made that a delegation from other Moslem lands should be invited to decide the question of the election of future Khalifs; but the Turks would not countenance any such suggestion. It was declared authoritatively that no intervention in the matter would be tolerated. Then two alternatives loomed up: the Khalifat to be vested either in the National Assembly or in the President of the Republic. Of course, had not the eventual removal of Abdul Mujid generally been taken for granted, these various suggestions and alternatives would not at all admit themselves. But the possibility of the abolition of the institution itself was hardly conceived of, outside the circle

which is guiding the destinies of Turkey. Then all on a sudden the Angora Government came out with the momentous decision, which not only surprised the Western countries, but is sure to have incalculable effects upon the Moslem world. At first it looks as if the Turkish Government has acted rashly, — as if its action has been ill-advised. Will not the repudiation of the Khalifat alienate the moral sympathy of the Moslem world from Turkey?

But looked at closely, a different picture is revealed. The Angora Government has not acted thus by choice. The situation was forced upon it. It had to take a bold stand or run the risk of being swallowed up by the intrigues of reaction which was rearing its portentous head all around, — not only in Turkey, but in the surrounding Moslem lands also. If the abolition of the Khalifat threatens to create difficulties for Turkey, its retention was no less dangerous, if not more so. Firstly, a large body of Moslems still adhere to theocratic principles, and as such, were hostile to the separation of the State from the Church. Inside Turkey, these reactionary elements could be suppressed; but the adjoining Moslem countries provided a fertile field for the growth of a movement against Republican Turkey. The reactionary elements of the Moslem world were fast crystallizing into a dangerous form, under the patronage of British Imperialism. The movement for the creation of a new Khalifat with one of the British protégés at its head was becoming ripe. From some quarters even, the cry was raised that the Turks have usurped the Khalifat. So, the Turkish Nationalists saw that if their struggle against Imperialism would be based upon the slogan of the Khalifat, they must eventually accept the supremacy of the counter-revolutionary court-clique and the reactionary clergy, behind whom stood the foreign powers. A crystallization of the reactionary opinion abroad would strengthen the enemies of revolution at home, and the victories of the last five years would be forfeited. It would be a stupid policy to subordinate one's actions to opinion which cannot be controlled. It would be more advisable to take up the challenge of reaction, both national and international, and face the Moslem world with an accomplished fact. So far, the Moslem opinion behind Nationalist Turkey has been of an ambiguous character. It was not always dependable. For example, an army of moral force, which included such divergent elements as the Indian Ali Brothers, on the one hand, and the pillars of British Imperialism, the Aga Khan and Ameer Ali, on the other, is hardly dependable. The Nationalist leaders of Turkey have never counted much upon this extra-territorial army. Now they propose to put this army to an acid test of Revolution. In addition to its great significance at home, the action of the Angora Assembly will clarify the entire anti-British movement in other Moslem countries, particularly of the Indian Moslems. It will split the entire Moslem world into two parts. The sheep will be separated from the goats.

Turkey today sends a new message to the Moslems of other countries. Her message is, that the struggle for national liberation cannot be fought within the bounds of theocratic tradition and the social institutions that accompany it: that Nationalism cannot be circumscribed by religion. The revolutionary significance of this message is incalculable. This message has been given a graphic form in these words of Ismet Pasha: "If Constantinople is today in our hand, it is because we have fought to the death the Greeks and the Khalif. If other Moslems have shown sympathy for us, this was not because we had the Khalif, but because we have been strong". The implication of these words is clear. Turkey now bids for the leadership of the Moslem world, not on the ground of a religious mission, but as a secularized State which has not only warded off foreign attack, but has successfully grappled with reaction at home. She faces the Islamic world, not in the supposed role of the defender of the Khalifat, but as the grave-digger of that antiquated institution which for a long time has become the instrument of foreign Imperialism.

As a matter of fact, the so-called Khalifat Movement, which has been more evident in India than in any other country, becomes an anomaly in consequence of the action of Nationalist Turkey. Although they somehow managed to reconcile themselves with a Republican Turkey liberated from theocratic control, the Indian Khalifatists will find it hard to swallow the wholesome words of Ismet Pasha. How can a movement, whose expressed purpose is the vindication of the Khalifat, owe allegiance to a power which frankly admits that its object was

the destruction of the Khalifat and that it has now realized its object? A deputation of Indian Moslems is expected to visit Turkey soon, with the object of assisting in the discussion concerning the future of the Khalifat. Will not the deputation find itself in a queer position? Therefore, the revolutionary action of the Turkish Nationalists is sure to rebound upon the Indian political horizon. There must be much searching of hearts among the Indian Moslems. There too, the days of religious nationalism and extra-territorial patriotism must come to an end.

If the Indian Moslems still persist in their notion of a religious confederation, they will surely land in the camp of reaction and all their anti-British talk will ridicule them in the face. But the real grievance of the Moslem masses of India was not concerning the Khalifat, it was not of a religious character. The grievance lies much nearer home and is essentially mundane by nature. Therefore, the only way to prevent the Indian Moslems from falling into the snares of scheming reaction, will be to abandon the treacherous ground of extra-territorial religious patriotism, in favour of a healthy nationalism more concerned with material wellbeing than the spiritual salvation of the people.

It will not be long before the Islamic world will be provided with a Khalif. Forces are already moving in that direction. Since the separation of the Sultanate from the Khalifat of Constantinople, the candidature of King Hussein of Hejaz has been advanced under British patronage. Now the matter can be expedited. A Khalifat installed at the Holy Place of Mecca will command all theological authority and will prove to be a suitable rallying ground of all the reactionary elements in the Moslem world. A new claim has come from rather unexpected quarters. It is reported that Egypt wants to receive the Khalifat back. Zaghulist organs have begun the agitation. It is demanded that the King of Egypt should be the Khalif. In the Egyptian government and clerical circles, the necessity of maintaining the Khalifat is generally recognized. So, "Independent Egypt" may be pitted against Nationalist Turkey. The scheme is to isolate the young Republic by providing a shepherd to the faithful.

This situation would have arisen anyhow. Therefore, the Turkish leaders thought it wise to take the offensive. The very drastic nature of the action proves that the situation was becoming very acute. A fatal blow has been dealt at the roots of all religious institutions. The protestations of the Nationalist leaders preclude any charge of intellectual atheism on their part. In practice, it has been found out that theological institutions and religious bodies not only constitute a passive obstacle to progress, but in critical moments become an active danger by rallying around them all the black forces of reaction. Since Turkey, as well as other Oriental countries has been held back in a social condition wherein religion predominates, the liberating movements there will be naturally more drastic; because the time lost has to be made up. The social policy adopted, together with the abolition of the Khalifat, is so revolutionary and so far-reaching, that it is hard to believe that it will be earnestly carried out. But when the circumstances which forced that policy upon the Turkish Nationalists are remembered and properly understood, it becomes clear that the policy must be resolutely put into action, if the Republic is to be saved. And the Turkish leaders have spoken in no equivocal language.

The liberation of the premier Moslem country from the age-long traditions of religion, opens up a new era in the history of the entire East as far as the Indian Archipelago; this concerns particularly the Islamic people. The fond belief of the orthodox Indian Nationalists, both Hindu and Musalman, that their country is immune from the so-called Western civilization, is going to be shattered. In the course of normal progress, the social and political institutions of every human community must be secularized. Civilization is a stage of human progress which makes for the dissipation of ignorance upon which religion is based. It does not assume a different form at different points of the compass. The epoc-making character of the event with which the Turkish National Assembly entered upon its fifth year of existence, is graphically brought home by an editorial article in the official organ "Ileri". The article, published the day after the memorable resolution was taken, was entitled, "Good bye, Orient".