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The Women of Turkey As Affected By the Revolution

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The wonderful awakening which has taken place in the Turkish Empire promises as much blessing to the women of the nation as to its men. Women had a share in bringing about that revolution. The world thinks of it as brought about by the political activities of the young Turk party, and yet women contributed greatly to the success of the movement. The young Turks were compelled to carry on their operations with the utmost secrecy. For a generation an army of spies has watched them with murderous hate. It was not safe for any member of the Society to know too many of his fellow members, or to communicate with more than a very few. Small groups of four or five formed the "stations" in a great "underground railway." Each member of such a group of conspirators was in connection with some other group also, and brought news from one to the other. Meanwhile he kept as a secret from his fellows in each group the names of those with whom he associated elsewhere. Thus each man bore the burden of as few secrets as possible. These secrets, were, however, shared to a great extent by the wives and sisters of the revolutionists. These women often acted as messen-

gers between the groups, finding in the seclusion of the harem and the concealment of the veil an immunity from search which was denied their male relatives. Thus women played an important part in the long preparation for the moment when the blow should be struck.

Not only were the secrets, in many cases, shared by women, but even more widely were the sufferings of the young Turk party shared by loved ones in the harem. Through more than thirty years men were imprisoned, assassinated, or banished by the Government because they were found to be associated with the secret Reform Movement. In each case women were left to mourn the loss of husband, brother, or son. Thousands of patriotic men fled for their lives when they found suspicion was resting upon them. Rarely were they able to visit their homes again until the revolution came. The women who thus remained at home, to suffer in secret, numbered many thousands. Through this baptism of suffering, for men and women alike, the Turkish Revolution came to be a moral movement. This is illustrated by the story of Midhat Pasha. Early in the reign of Abd-ul-Hamid, the scholarly patriot, Midhat, was

asked to draw up a Constitution. The provisions of that document were put in operation for a few months, but the Sultan never meant to submit to constitutional control, except for a period long enough to deceive the reformers. As soon as he had opportunity to gather the reins of power into his own hands, that cruel autocrat suspended the Constitution, and later imprisoned its author in a lonely fortress in southern Arabia. But Abd-ul-Hamid did not feel secure on his throne as long as such an able reformer as Midhat was still alive. A trusted henchman was sent from the palace, down the Red Sea, to strangle Midhat and bring his head to Constantinople, that his imperial master might be certain that he had been put out of the way. When Midhat was told that he must die, he asked for a few hours in order that he might write to friends and loved ones. The letter he then penned to his wife has since the Revolution been published. It is regarded by competent judges as one of the gems of literature. Midhat wrote to his wife that he knew he must die, but that he believed his death would serve the cause he loved, and he called upon her to bring up their son so that he should take a leading part in the great

reform that was certain to come. Well has Midhat Pasha been called the John the Baptist of the Revolution.

As multitudes of Turkish women had shared so nobly in the costly work of preparation for the Revolution it was only right that they, and thousands more of their sisters, should share in the blessings of the new regime. With the return of the political exiles, many and touching were the reunions of loved ones long separated. The fact that the revolution was so nearly bloodless, meant a great deal to the women of the Empire. The new movement was from the first wisely directed. It was initiated and controlled by men of high ideals. These leaders were young Muhammedans of some education who had begun to read European literature. From their study of history and science, sociology and ethics, they had imbibed noble ideals which were in effect the result of Christianity. The conception of human brotherhood which they grasped, and which they have ardently preached to the nation, was brought to the world by the Gospel and not by the Koran. The true source of their patriotic principles is only dimly realized by them, and they still believe that there

is room for these principles within Islam. We have heard of the effect of new wine on old bottles and can afford to wait for the truth to work. Meanwhile the women of the Empire give thanks for a bloodless revolution which they had feared would cost them the lives of many loved ones.

The reformers have from the first aimed to raise the status of women. Rarely has a "Young Turk" been other than a monogamist. They have always sought to educate their women and girls. In many of their homes the husband and the wife are seeking to reach the European standard of sympathy and cooperation. One symptom of the new spirit that has begun to prevail is seen in a touching story from Damascus. The Governor General there, though not a member of the young Turk organization, has always been in sympathy with them. His first wife had no children and she, like Sarah, urged him to take another wife. He accordingly bought a beautiful Circassian girl and educated her until she was able to be a companion to him. Her children were brought up by the two wives together. A surprising degree of harmony prevailed in the home, according to the testimony of the European ladies who

visited them. After a few years of such life together, the second wife fell ill and died. Before her death she asked her husband to bury her body in a coffin, as was done by European Christians. Every Muhammedan body is laid in the grave on its right side, so that the face looks toward the holy shrine of Mecca. The grave is then arched over with stones, before the earth is thrown in, so that there is room for the dead to rise up on to their knees, in order to reply to the two examining angels who are believed to visit the grave a few hours after burial. The service at the graveside consists of directions to the dead as to the replies to be made to these angels. When the Governor announced his purpose to carry out his wife's wishes and bury her body in a coffin, all the religious leaders in the city rose in protest. To them it meant that the burial service would be a mockery and that the dead would be prevented from doing honor to the angels, and thus her hope of heaven would be lost. The discussion shook the city, but the Governor was firm, and the poor wife's last request was honored. Events like these are breaking up the ecclesiastical shell of old Islam.

When the constitution of Midhat

Pasha was once more proclaimed in Constantinople, in July, 1908, women of the new school attended public assemblies unveiled. When this fact was published over the Empire, the confidence of the Moslem masses in the new regime was greatly shaken. The devout majority feared that the young Turk movement was tending toward irreligion and that the votes of the populace were being given to establish in power a party whose principles were anti-Islamic. So serious was the crisis that the liberals voluntarily consented to go back to the use of the veil rather than imperil the cause which would ultimately bring true liberty. A fundamental principle of the young Turk party has been that the Empire can only be reformed from within, and that new and higher ideals must rule the life of the nation. This theory is born of Christian influences and forms a new point of contact with the Gospel. Never before has the Empire presented such opportunities to the heralds of God's Saving Power, and never before have its men and women been in such need of a personal Saviour who shall be the incarnation of their new ideals.