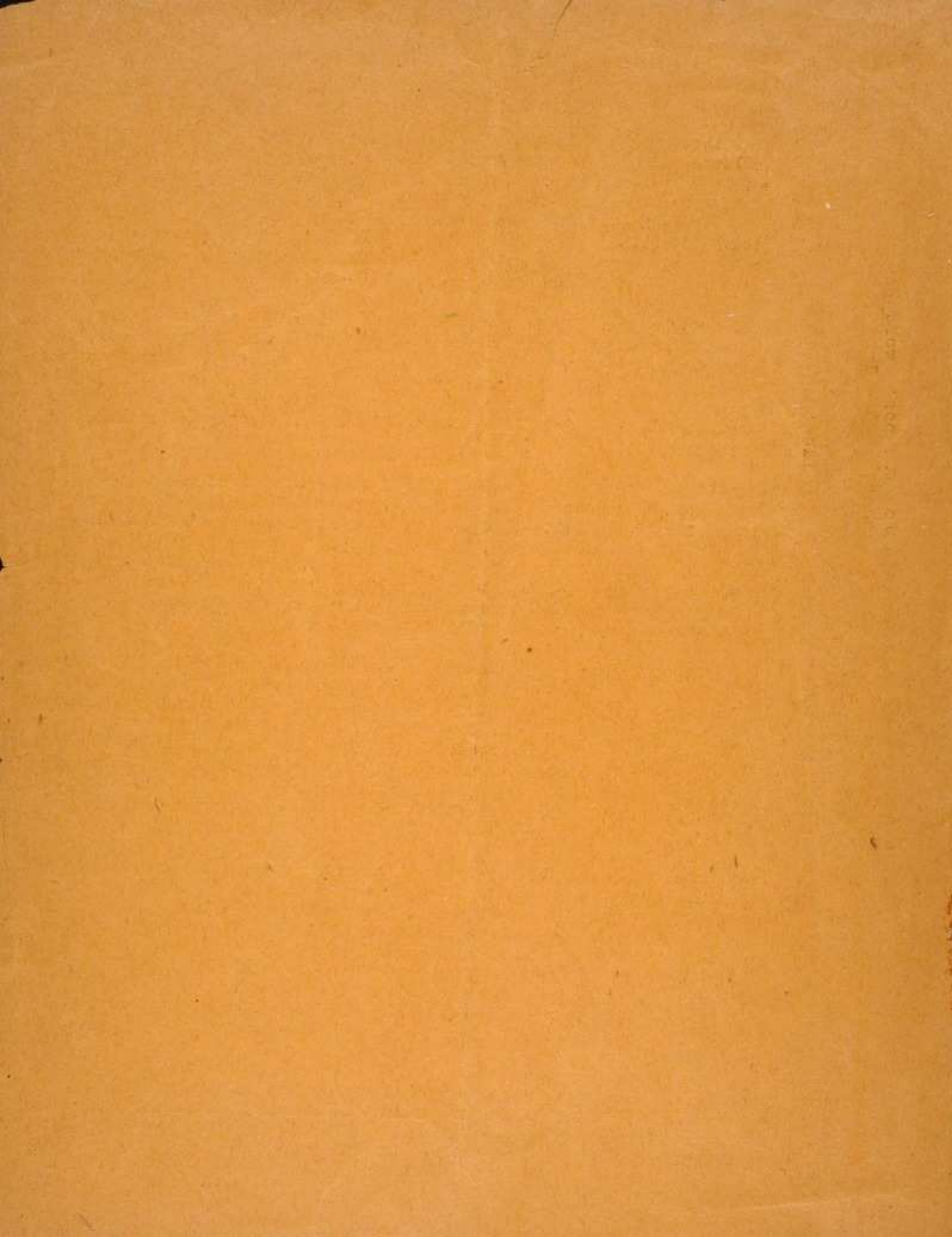


The Influence of Modern
Turkish Literature
upon the
Turkish Revolution

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THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN TURKISH LITERATURE UPON THE TURKISH REVOLUTION.

One of the things which lies behind the present amazing Turkish revolution is the influence of her literary group. When any large mass of population makes as fundamental a change as Turkey has made these last decades, the movement must have been grounded in a great deal of educational work. To the casual outsider it may seem as though the Turkish Revolution burst suddenly with no preparation. Such, however, was not the case. There are a number of sources which have fed this ferment of new ideas. Of these, perhaps the most important has been the influence of Turkish literary leadership.

The classical Turkish literature was based on Persian models and was oriental and Islamic in thought and form; it was artificial, it was alien, it did not even follow the native Turkish rhythms. It was composed almost entirely of poetry and made no use of the play or novel. This type of literature held complete sway over the Turkish mind until approximately 1960. Aside from this Persian form, there was a folk literature which was almost purely Turkish, but even it was oriental in concept.

The first man to turn to the West and to bring in some of the strange new ideas of the French revolution was Shinasi Effendi (1826-1871). Associated with him were Ziya Pasha (1829-1880), and the great figure Namuk Kemal (1840-1888). These men all knew French, visited Europe, and discovered European literature. They found it much better adapted to the Turkish point of view than were the classical forms of the past and they entirely abandoned the older forms. They began to imitate European literature, and introduced the novel and the play, but more important still, European ideas.

The old literature was so full of Arabic and Persian words that the average man could not read it. These writers discovered that European writers wrote the same language that they talked, and so applying the same principle to Turkish, they began the movement to abolish the Arabic and Persian elements. This movement has not yet reached its completion, but it has resulted in making Turkish much simpler for the common people and for foreigners and it has succeeded in reducing the Persian and Arabic influence to a minimum. The "Tasviri Efkiar," published by Shinasi Effendi was the first real newspaper and was most influential in advancing the new movement.

These Turkish literary leaders also discovered in Europe the ideas of nationalism and Namuk Kemal Bey was the first great prophet of nationalism as well as the prophet of freedom. He was much persecuted by Abdul Hamid, and died in exile because of his efforts on behalf of freedom. His paper "Hurriyet," (Liberty) was the first exponent of democratic ideas. After his time, the name of Ziya Gök Alp (d 1925) ranks first among men behind the nationalist movement. He not only discovered nationalism and made it his creed, but he also discovered the French sociologist Durkheim, and gave the Turkish educational leaders Durkheim's materialistic sociological theory, and which Turkey is today endeavoring to set up a new state.

Ziya Gök Alp published various books, including "Turk Medeniyeti Tarihi" (History of Turkish Civilization), and "Turkçülük Esasları" (Fundamentals of Turkism) but also wrote stories carrying his ideas and published magazines. He was in the forefront for purifying the Turkish language. The result of all this

has been that the language has changed so rapidly that Turks only read present-day writers, and writers who were contemporary with Shakespeare are never read. For that matter, neither are writers who were contemporary with John Stuart Mill or Emerson. For example, Halid Ziya Bey (1866-), considered the father of Turkish fiction is still living but his language and his style are so different from that used today that very few people ever read his books. The consequence is, of course, that the minds of Turkish youth are fed entirely upon their modern literature, and they are entirely cut off from their conservative heritage of the past. For that reason, the authors whom we shall now survey have a greater importance than they would have in a country whose language had been changing very slowly.

Although fiction was an unknown form of Turkish writing until the time of Namık Kemal, at the present time it is the chief form used. The most famous novelists are Huseyin Rahmi, Halide Edip, Yakup Kadri, and Reshat Nuri. Of these the most read is Huseyin Rahmi since he is essentially a writer for the common people. He is a realist and gives vivid descriptions of life among the lower classes, showing their vices as well as their virtues. He has written more than twenty five volumes, and though an old man, is still writing at the present time.

Halide Edip, the only woman novelist, is the most powerful writer of the group and she is still writing. She is the only Turkish writer known to the English reading public. She has four or five volumes in English, of which her latest, "Turkey Faces West" gives an excellent summary of present day Turkey. Halide Edip is a graduate of the American College for Girls in Constantinople known as Constantinople Woman's College; in fact she was its first Turkish graduate. Her contact with the West was Anglo-Saxon rather than French, and her writing shows this influence. Probably because she was educated so largely in the English language, she is reputed to make many grammatical mistakes in her Turkish works, but she is able to put a great deal of passion into her writing in a way that appeals to the Turkish taste. An interesting thing about her writing is that her stories are generally built around women rather than men. Her best Turkish works are considered to be "Kalp Ağrısı" (Heart Ache) and "Zeynelin Oğlu" (Zenc's Son).

Yakup Kadri is the outstanding master of Turkish prose. It is interesting that Yakup Kadri claims to have developed his style from reading the Bible, and he has written on a number of biblical themes such as "Sodom ve Gomore" (Sodom and Gomorrah) and "Rahmet" (Compassion). He has also drawn from old Turkish legend and loves the symbolic and mystical type of expression. Yakup Kadri is still in the prime of life and is now a member of the Grand National Assembly.

Reshat Nuri, another contemporary, is considered by the Turks to be their most famous writer. None of his material has ever been put into English but it is to be hoped someday some of his work will be translated. Everyone reads his works, and he has had a tremendous influence in present day Turkey. His greatest novel, which is also considered the greatest modern Turkish novel, "Chali Kuşu" is the story of a Turkish girl who was educated in a French mission school. She is appointed as a teacher to a conservative Anatolian village, and the story is a tale of her adventures in that village and in other places where she taught, bringing out vividly the contrast between her very modern point of view and that of the conservative folk among whom she finds herself. The book also incidentally pays a high tribute to the teaching profession and says a good word for the French sisters who educated Chali Kuşu. Reshat Nuri has a vivid power of description and his works

carry action on every page. He does not stop to ~~stop~~ philosophize to get his ideas across but rather propagates his ideas by the vivid action of his characters. He has written a number of short stories, as well as being prolific in novel writing.

Modern Turkish literature is poor in dramatics. There are but few works and they not important. This is due to the fact that it takes large and prosperous cities to support the theatrical world, and though Turkey has a number of medium sized cities, the poverty of the country has made it impossible for her dramatic life to flourish. At present the vaudeville and comedy are the chief forms. A number of writers previously mentioned have attempted a number of plays, but none of them has had any great influence in the country at large. The man who has been the most successful with this form of writing is Abdulhak Hamid Bey (1851-).

The short story, however, has been very popular in Turkey with her host of magazines, most of which run for a time and then pass away during some period of war or other emergency. These magazines have, however, played a great part in bringing in new ideas, and at a period when the censorship made impossible the direct discussion of social problems, the short story was a great medium for evading the censor. Omer Seyfettin (1864-1919) is considered to be the founder of the modern short story in pure Turkish. He was among the group who fought for a purified Turkish language. His writings are almost devoid of the Persian and Arabic elements, so that his style is simple and clear. Unfortunately he died when he was only thirty five years old.

There is one other outstanding personality among the short story writers, Refik Halit. His special strength lies in his ability to make vivid descriptions of Anatolian life and in his book of short stories, "Memleket Hikâyleri" (Stories of the Country) one gets a very vivid picture of every day village life in Asia Minor. His language and his style follow that of the simple village people from whom he draws his inspiration. Refik Halit is quite a humorist and loved to depict the odd characters of small town or city life. Unfortunately he became entangled in Turkish politics on the losing side and is now a political refugee who may not be able to return. This is unfortunate because he made a real contribution by describing the every-day life of the average Turk, and it is to be hoped that a number of his works will be put into English. Of course there are hundreds of other short story writers. Nearly every Turkish writer has used the short story on occasion, and this is still an effective way of spreading new ideas.

The old classic Turkish literature was almost entirely poetic in form so the Turks have almost as strong a poetical tradition as have the Japanese. The average Turkish boy or girl is much more interested in poetry than is the average American student, and sooner or later every student aspires to produce a collection of poems. This has resulted in a great wealth of Turkish poetry of the new school, and one could mention a host of rising young poets who have played their part in the stirring events of recent years. However, it will suffice to mention only a few. Tevfik Fikret (1870-1910) was the outstanding poet of the generation just past, and his works were read by every educated person in the country. For many years he was the head of the Turkish Department of Robert College, the American institution occupying a commanding site on the hills above the Bosphorus so well known to every tourist who has visited Constantinople. He expressed in poetry the ideals he got partly from his own national background and partly from his American mission associates. However, so rapidly is the language being modified that although in his day he was an advocate of purified Turkish, in the few decades that have passed since he was writing, the vocabulary has changed to such an extent that Tevfik Fikret's poems are difficult to follow, and tomorrow he will be forgotten.

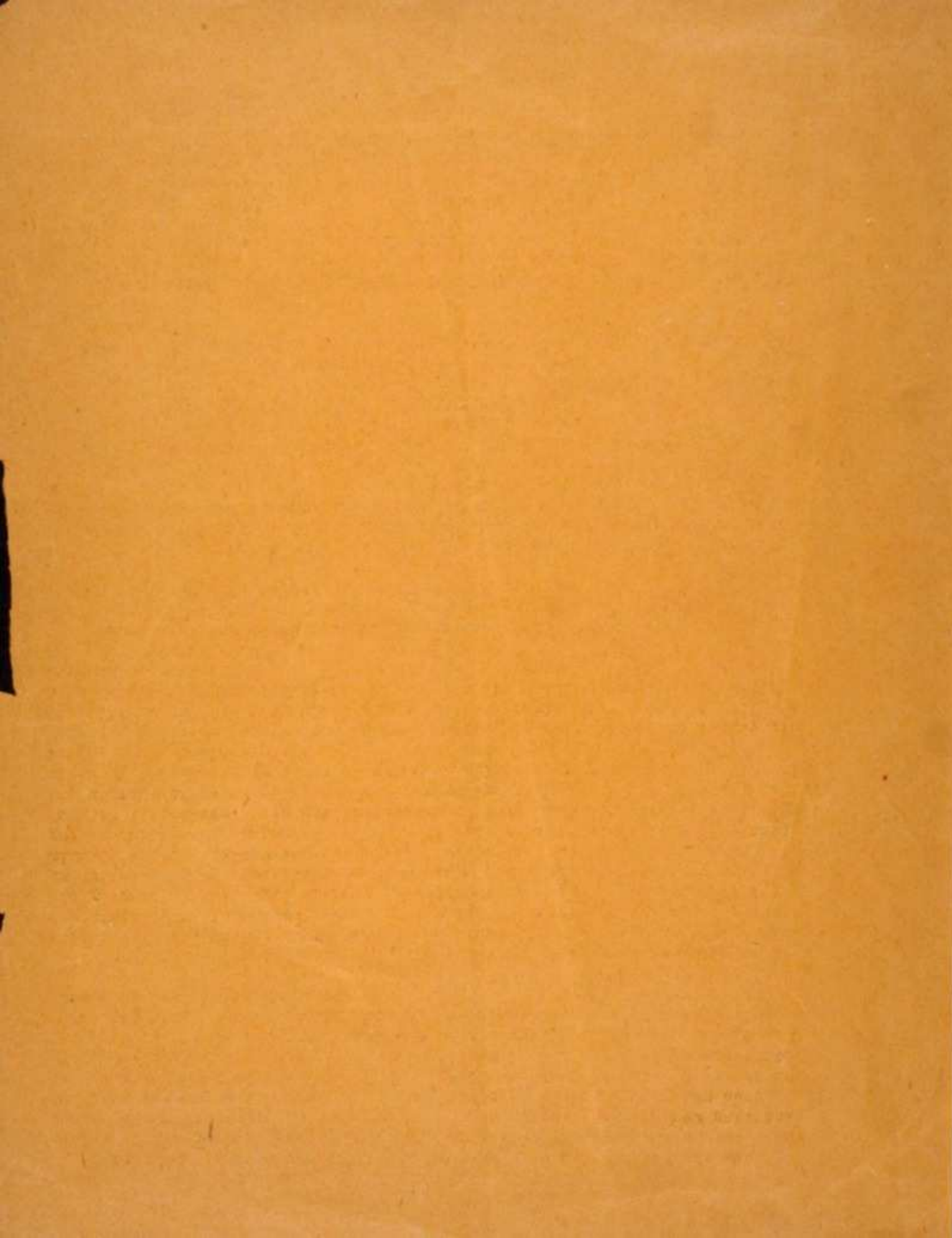
Among the present day writers Mehmet Akif is interesting in that he is author of the present National Anthem of Turkey, the İstiklal March. One would gather from that that he was an ardent advocate of the new nationalism; on the contrary he was an İslamite and was opposed to nationalism because he saw that nationalism was destroying the old unity of İslam. However in spite of his loyalty to İslam he was stirred by the new Turkish movements, and from that came the poem which has been adopted as the national hymn. His other poems are mostly on the life of the common people or descriptions of places in and around İstanbul.

Another interesting man, who is now living outside the country as a political refugee, is Rıza Tevfik. He is primarily a philosopher and linguist, speaking eight languages. He has recently been in America lecturing, and was given a warm reception in several universities. Rıza Tevfik is really an outstanding man who gives everyone that meets him the impression of a great mind. He has revived the old folk literature of Turkey which had been forgotten during the dominance of the Persianized artificial forms of classical Turkish literature. In his imitations of this folk literature, he has written a group of poems which have been read by the common village folk, and admired by them. In this way he has been able to carry his message directly to the peasant classes who are generally untouched by other writers. He happened to be one of the men who signed the unfortunate Sevres treaty with the allies, and for this has been expelled from the country. It would have been much better for Turkey had he stuck to his philosophy and his poetry and eschewed politics.

There are various schools of poetry today and a group of followers for each outstanding poet. The free verse movement has also invaded Turkey, coming in by way of Moscow.

However, we need mention only two from among all the host of present day writers, Faruk Nafiz and Yaha Kemal. Faruk Nafiz has been most prolific in his writing and gives every promise of producing many new volumes in the future. His best known works are "Suda Halkaler" (Rings on water) and "Çoban Çesmesi" (The Shepherd's Fountain). One of his chief themes is the natural beauty of the hills and valleys of Anatolia. Other subjects of which he writes much are love and the joys, sorrows, and misfortunes of his people. He has a very individual style and is loved by everyone, old and young. He is now teaching literature in Ankara, the new capital. Yaha Kemal has not written much, but his quality is considered to be very superior. He has not only written for the revolution but has taken an active part in it, and now holds a political post.

We have said enough to bring out the fact that Turkey has a very active literary leadership, and anyone who has studied the events leading up to the Kemalist revolution realizes that these literary leaders were the real revolutionists, and the political leaders have been the men who have crystallized into action the ideals expressed by these poets and novelists. Since the influence of the present day writers is all thrown on the side of adopting Western methods, one can feel sure that the movement towards westernization and Europeanization will go forward in Turkey to complete realization.



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