

MEHMET AKİF ERSOY (1873-1936)

A BIOGRAPHY

FAHİR İZ *

(On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his death)

The Turkish poet and patriot Mehmet Akif Ersoy was born in the Sarıgüzel district near Fatih, in Istanbul. His father Mehmet Tahir Efendi, the son of Nureddin Ağa, an illiterate peasant, was born in the village of Shushisa near İpek, in northern Albania (Pec in present day Yugoslavia), chief town of the *sancak* of the same name in the Ottoman *vilayet* of Kosova.

According to biographical notes left by the poet to a friend (see bibl.), Tahir Efendi started his education in İpek, but came to Istanbul at an early age, had a sound Islamic classical education and became a *müderris* in the Fatih *Medrese*, a public lecturer (*ders-i âm*) in the Conqueror's mosque. Akif's mother Emine Sherife Hanım was born and brought up in Tokat, in Northern Central Anatolia, but both her parents originated from Bokhara. She married Tahir Efendi in a second marriage, on her husband's death.

Akif attended local primary schools and the Fatih central *rüşdiye* (secondary school). Among his teachers, he was particularly impressed and influenced by the liberal Hoca Kadri (1860-1918), his Turkish teacher, a well-known Young Turk who fled to Egypt (to escape Abdülhamid II's despotic rule) where he published the newspaper *Kanun-i Esasi* (the Constitution), later living several years in Paris, in Young Turk circles.

Akif continued to learn more Arabic from his father and improved his Persian by attending, in the afternoons, public courses in mosques on Sa'di's *Gholistan*, Rumi's *Mesnevi* and the *divan* of Hafız. He was first of his class in Turkish, Arabic, Persian and French.

When he was graduated from the *rüşdiye*, he registered in the lycée section (*i'dadi*) at the School of Political Science (*Mekteb-i Mülkiye*). On completion of the 3-year first section, he moved to the first year of the 2-year final course, in 1889 when his father died. That same year the

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family house in Sarıgözel was burnt down. He left the School for Political Science, there being no opening at that juncture for its graduates, he registered at the newly created 4-year Civilian Veterinary School (*Mülkiye Baytar Mektebi*), being a boarder during the last two years. Akif graduated first from the Veterinary School. He and the second of the class, an Armenian youth, were appointed, by the Ministry of Agriculture to the Department of Veterinary Affairs as deputy inspectors in 1893 (Biographical notes left by Akif, *see* Bibl.). The same year while on duty in the Balkans he went to his parental village and to İpek and visited his uncles. He married in 1894 İsmet Hanım, the daughter of a minor civil servant, who bore him three daughters and two sons. Akif served as a veterinary surgeon in the Ministry of Agriculture for twenty years, five in the provinces. He travelled extensively in Anatolia and Arabia, spending long periods in Adana and Edirne, in connection with his duties, obtaining first hand knowledge on the life of peasants and ordinary people in the towns. He combined at times his professional duties with teaching in various schools including a lecturership in literature at Istanbul University.

Early in January 1913, on leave of absence from his office, he spent two months in Egypt, in high Egypt and Medina. In May 1913 he resigned from his office to protest the unfair dismissal of the Director of Veterinary affairs of whom he was the deputy. But he continued to teach in schools and to preach in the main mosques of Istanbul. He also privately tutored the children of dignitaries in their houses.

In September 1914, the pro-German Unionist leader and War Minister Enver Pasha together with the German Ambassador Baron von Wangenheim and Admiral Souchon prepared the *fait accompli* which plunged Turkey into the First World War on the side of the Central Powers (Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Enver Pasha*, vol. II, Istanbul 1971, pp. 549-559).

After 1910, The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the party in power, had been flirting with the ideology of Pan-Turanism and had asked the sociologist Ziya Gökalp for his advice and contribution. Now it was thought that Pan-Islamist activity might be handy in the circumstances. The CUP government through the "Special Organization" (*Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*) attached to the Ministry of War, approached Mehmet Akif whose Pan-Islamist tendencies had been known since the Constitution of 1908 and particularly since the Balkan War of 1912. In June 1915 an invitation was issued by the German government to Mehmet Akif to visit

Germany and to study and report on the state of Muslim prisoners of War in that country. Thus he came for the first time in direct contact with the West. He was able to observe social and economic conditions and everyday life of the West and compare them with those in the East (see below).

After the outbreak of Sherif Husayin of Mecca's revolt, the CUP sent him, in 1917, on a special mission, to visit the pro-Turkish Al Rashid of Halil in Najd. He reached there through the desert route stopping at Medina. This trip inspired him a famous poem (see below). While he was in Najd, he was appointed secretary general of the newly created office of *Darü'l Hikmet-i Islamiye* attached to the *Sheyhü'l-Islam's* office. On the return journey Akif visited Lebanon and spent a month in Aliyya as the guest of the Sherif Haydar Pasha.

In the Autumn of 1918 the war was over. The armistice of Mudros had sealed the fate of the Ottoman Empire. Enver Pasha and other prominent leaders of the CUP fled the country. The Allies occupied Istanbul. Italian troops occupied Antalya and the Greeks, supported by the Allies, landed in Izmir (15 May, 1919).

Akif, an exuberant idealist by nature and a profoundly religious man, had never been pessimistic. But now everything seemed to be lost. No spark of hope was seen anywhere. But towards the end of May, 1919, the news of the first armed resistance against the invading Greek army in Ayvalık in the Aegean, galvanized him. He immediately left for Balıkesir the chief town of the hinterland, where he preached in mosques and contacted many people and urged the population to rise and resist. He repeatedly stated in his sermons that it was against Islam to capitulate. On his return to Istanbul he published his impressions in several articles in *Sebilü'r-Reşad* (see below) in June 1919, whereupon he was dismissed from *Dârü'l-Hikmet* by the Sultan's government which had taken on by now an openly anti-Natioanalist attitude. Although under strict surveillance by the government and the occupation authorities, he immediately established contact with the Nationalists in Anatolia and sent them secretly printed literature on colonialist plans. In the meantime Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) the leader of the resistance movement, had arrived in Ankara from Sivas (27 December, 1919). The Ottoman Parliament had prorogued itself on 18 March 1920, being dissolved by the Sultan on April 11. In Ankara preparations were afoot for the formation of a new Parliament.

The Grand National Assembly (GNA) composed of a body of delegates sent from the provinces, was opened on 23 April 1920 (Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd edition, Oxford 1968, p.251). Akif left the same week for Ankara. He joined the new Parliament as deputy for Burdur. The GNA sent him on a mission to Konya to pacify a movement against the Nationalists. From Konya he went to Kastamonu to meet his intimate friend Eşref Edib, the co-editor of *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, the periodical to which Akif had contributed for years. In November 1920 they again began to publish it in Kastamonu. Akif, supported by the Nationalist government, continued his preaching there and in neighboring towns. These stirring sermons in mosques, which were published in the *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, were printed by the government in booklets and distributed to provinces and to war fronts.

In January 1921, after two months absence, Akif returned to Ankara and settled in the Taceddin convent (*dergâh*), which is now the Mehmet Akif museum. In the meantime the *Sebilü'r-Reşad* office had moved to Ankara.

The new Nationalist Turkey needed a national anthem. In November 1920, a competition was opened by the Ministry of Education, some 724 poems were sent in. Akif did not participate as a monetary reward was attached to it. As none of the poems were found satisfactory by the committee Hamdullah Subhi (Tanrıöver, 1886-1966, a well known orator) then Minister of Education, persuaded Akif to participate. He wrote the now famous, stirring Independence March (*İstiklal Marşı*) which was read in the GNA by the Minister himself (1 March, 1921) and unanimously accepted as the Turkish National Anthem (12 March, 1921). In the Summer of 1921, a sudden Greek offensive threatened Ankara. There was panic and a defeatist atmosphere. Many people began to migrate eastwards. However Mustafa Kemal Pasha calmed the agitated atmosphere before he left for the front following his re-election as Commander-in-Chief by the GNA. Akif did not leave Ankara and fought against wild rumors. But the office of the *Sebilü'r-Reşad* was moved to Kayseri until after the battle of Sakarya (September 1921) which turned the tide against the Greeks in Anatolia.

In 1922 Akif was appointed a member of an Islamic research committee (*Tedkikat ve te'lifat-ı İslamiye Encümeni*) in the Ministry of Shari'a (Umur-i Şer'iye ve Evkaf Vekâleti). He continued his regular contribution of poems, articles and translations to *Sebilü'r-Reşad*.

The great Turkish offensive was launched on 26 August 1922 which culminated on August 30 with the decisive victory of the Nationalist armies in the battle of Dumlupınar, near Afyon. Izmir was recaptured on September 9. Within two weeks the Turkish ordeal of nearly three and a half years was brought to an end. There was complete disarray in occupied Istanbul. The Sultan-Caliph's collaborationist government and its vitriolic press were stunned (see Fahir İz, *Ali Kemal*, E.I. 2nd edit.). In November 1st 1922 the GNA abolished the sultanate while separating the Caliphate from it. A suitable member of the Ottoman House would be elected caliph by the GNA. Thereupon the Sultan Mehmet IV fled to Malta on a British warship (17 November) and his cousin Abdülmecit was elected caliph. Turkey became a republic the following year with Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha as its first president (29 October 1923).

On 9 March 1924 however, Abdülmecit was deposed, the caliphate abolished and the following day he and all the members of the Ottoman House were exiled from Turkey. The office of the Sheyhü'l-Islam, the Ministry of Shari'a (Şer'îye Vekâleti), Shari'a courts were also abolished within a month. All religious schools (*medreses*) had already been closed following the Law on the Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) of 3 March 1924. Following a counter-revolutionary insurrection in the spring of 1925, in the South Eastern provinces, led mainly by *nakshbendi sheyhs* was swiftly quelled, all *derwish* orders were abolished and their convents closed (Bernard Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 259).

Mehmet Akif, who was a devout Moslem and a convinced panislamist, was greatly disturbed by the course of these events. Unlike the ideologist of Pan Turkism Ziya Gökalp, who, during and after the First World War, was able to adjust his ideas in the face of political developments and then eventually completely adopt Mustafa Kemal Pasha's nationalism based on the National Pact (*Misâk-ı Milli*), Mehmet Akif was unable to adjust his ideas to the new secularist nationalist Turkey. Although he had witnessed the defeat of the Empire and the collapse of the Pan-Islamic policy of the CUP, he had still hoped that the new Turkey could be the focus of Pan-Islamic aspirations.

In the Summer of the 1923 the elections for the GNA were renewed and Akif was not re-elected. At fifty he had practically no job. He had no pension as he had applied too late, after his resignation in 1913. In October of the same year he went to Egypt, with his old friend, the Eryp-

tian Prince Abbas Halim (d.1934) as his guest and spent the winter there where he wrote *Fir'avunla yüz yüze* (Face to face with Pharaoh). In 1924 he again went to Egypt to spend the winter at Hilwan, in Abbas Halim Pasha's residence. In the Winter of 1925 he went to Egypt again and settled with his family, living in a small house at Hilwan. He became a lecturer in the Turkish language and literature at the University of Cairo where he taught for ten years. He lived a secluded life at Hilwan going twice a week to Cairo to teach. He did not like Cairo which he found too cosmopolitan for his taste (M.C. Kuntay, p.145) Mehmet Akif, Istanbul 1939. In Cairo he also saw Turkish teachers and students in *Al-Azhar*. Occasionally he saw visitors from Istanbul (including Eşref Edib). A disappointed and broken man, he produced very little, during his self-imposed exile. He concentrated on the revision of his Qur'an translation (see below).

In 1934 he lost his great friend and benefactor Abbas Halim Pasha. This was a great shock for the ageing poet, although Abbas Halim's daughter, Princess Emine continued to support him (M.C. Kuntay, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86). The same year his health began to deteriorate. In 1935 he spent part of the summer in Aliyya in Lebanon and in Antioch as guest of friends. He was consumed with cirrhosis and malaria. A friend of his, Hüseyin Suat (a minor poet) of passage in Egypt, recommended him to go to Istanbul. But it was too late. After eleven years of absence he arrived in Istanbul, a sick man. He was taken to Princess Emine's house, later to a private hospital where he spent a month. A host of visitors and friends, poets, writers, journalists and old wrestlers (see below) came to see him. He managed to go to Abbas Halim's farm outside Istanbul a few times. But he never recovered. He died on the 27 December 1936 in Istanbul. His funeral was attended by his close friends and many young admirers, mostly University students.

Already as a student, Akif read voraciously all the Turkish, Arabic and Persian literary classics. His favourites in these three languages were Fuzuli, Ibn Farid and Sa'di respectively. He was particularly an admirer of Sa'di whom he considered the quintessence of the "wisdom of the East" and whose influence on himself he always admitted. From 1898 onwards he serialized the translation of selected texts from the Persian classics in the Periodical *Servet-i Fünun*. From Western literature he read, in French, together with one of his close friends and future biographer M.C. Kuntay (1882-1956), the works of Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Al-

phonse Daudet, Emile Zola, Ernest Renan, Alexandre Dumas Fils, Anatole France, Sienkiewicz and many others, his favourites being Lamartine and Dumas Fils.

Akif began to write conventional poetry, in the secondary school, as a teenager, and continued to write, inspired by the great masters, classical or modern. He continued to imitate these masters while attending the veterinary school and after graduation. Although he destroyed many, some of these early experiments were published, from February 1896 onwards in the conservative *Resimli Gazete* and some were found, after Akif's death and published (F.A. Tansel, *Mehmet Akif, Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 2nd. ed., Istanbul 1973, pp. 11-12, and Kaya Bilgegil, Atatürk Üniversitesi, *Edebiyat Fakültesi Araştırma Dergisi*, No.3, Erzurum 1972, pp. 1-33). The influence of Abdülhak Hâmit is obvious in some of his early poems (Tansel, *op. cit.* pp. 23-29). But he was inspired, in the early years particularly by Mualim Naci, his teacher at the Mülkiye.

About 1904 Akif seems to have found his own personality. He began to write poems on social themes, on the poor, the sick, the unemployed, the oppressed, the orphan, the alcoholic, the underdog, always based on personal experience or observation, or autobiographic poems about his father, his family or his own childhood. He read these poems to friends or to limited audiences in private houses but he could not publish them because of Abdülhamit II's strict censorship. He had to wait until the Restoration of the Constitution. When it came on 23 July 1908 and the censorship was abolished, dozens of newspapers and periodicals flooded the market. Mehmet Akif and his life-long friend Eşref Edib began to publish the *Sırat-i Müstakim* (The Straight Path) a conservative periodical with an emphasis on religious and social topics (14 August 1324 rumi/27 August 1908). Akif's poem *Fatih Camii* (The Conqueror's mosque) was published in the first issue. The periodical was an immense success, the first issue being reprinted several times. Then all Akif's pre-1908 poems which had awaited publication for several years and which included some of the best and most popular works followed in succeeding issues. He also wrote poems inspired by episodes from Islamic history with a morale for the present. Then followed poems which were commentaries on selected verses of the Qur'an and articles on the relationship of Islam to questions of positive science, work, fate, women, and essays on subjects such as Islam and Christianity, the reasons of the decline of Muslims, etc. In some of the articles he used the pen-name Sa'di (The name of his favorite

author). He also wrote many articles on Eastern and Western authors and the problems of literature in general.

In the same periodical he translated selected articles of the Egyptian modernist Muhammad Abduh and Farid Wajdi displaying a modern approach to Islam. His name and contribution were the most important factors of the wide circulation of the *Sırat-i Müstakim* outside Turkey, particularly among Turkish speaking Muslims of Russia who liked the simple, lucid prose which Akif had developed in his writings.

During the reactionary mutiny of 31 March 1325 rumi/13 April 1909, the printing house of the *Sırat-i Müstakim* was raided and sacked and the periodical ceased publication, but started up again soon after the mutiny was quelled. Many Muslim intellectuals and writers, refugees from Russia, came to visit Mehmet Akif in the office of the periodical and this resulted eventually in an approachment of Islamist and Turkist factions. Akif became chairman of the editorial board of the *Sırat-i Müstakim* and recruited, for the periodical, leading conservative writers of the time.

With the beginning of the 8th volume, the *Sırat-i Müstakim* changed its name and became *Sebilü'r-Reşad* (the way of orthodoxy). In the meantime Akif collected all his poems, written between 1905-1911 and mostly published in the *Sırat-i Müstakim*, in one volume, under the title of *Safahat* ("Phases") in 1329 A.H./1911. It was well received, even by Westernists. Its sincerity and indigenous realism were praised (see *Servet-i Fünun*, No. 1050, July 1911 and 1054, August 1911 also *Sebilü'r-Reşad* No. 256-276, 1911). But Akif's popular, straightforward language, was criticized by some snobbish purists (*Servet-i Fünun* No. 1052, August 1911). A devout Muslim well versed in the history and civilization of Islam, Mehmet Akif was well aware of the contemporary state of the Muslim peoples the majority of whom were under the domination of colonial powers at the time. He was conscious of the potential power of Islam and was far from despair at its decline. He was in search of an ideal from 1890's onwards and with the coming of freedom in 1908 he avidly read the sermons and the articles of Muslim modernists, Cemaleddin Afghani and the books and articles of his discipline Muhammed Abduh and others, and developed, towards 1912, the idea of a commonwealth of Muslim peoples, a kind of Panislamism, which would be a blend of liberalism, nationalism and Westernism and which aimed at a compromise between Islam and modern science. During the first phase of the Balkan Wars in 1912, the

anti-Turkish (read anti-Muslim) attitude of the great powers who proclaimed that the *status quo* would be kept, whatever the outcome of the war, but ignored this afterwards, strengthened his Panislamist convictions.

In the years immediately preceding the First World War, rival ideologies such as Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism, Ottomanism and Westernism forced Akif to rethink and clarify his ideas and principles. The origins of these ideologies went back to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th among Turkists intellectuals (see Akçuraoğlu Yusuf, *Üç tarz-ı siyaset*, in Turkish, Cairo 1904). A compromise attempt with the Turkists remained fruitless, but caused a split among Islamists. Akif remained adamant as he firmly believed that sheer nationalism would jeopardize the Panislamic ideal (A. Adnan Adıvar, *Tarih Boyunca İlim ve Din II*, Istanbul 1944, p. 149 ff.). This idea he developed in the *Safahat II, Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde* ("From the pulpit of the Süleymaniye") published in 1330 A.H./1912, after being serialized in the *Sırat-ı Müstakim*. This is a sermon in the form of a long poem. The preacher is the famous Turkish traveler and writer Abdü'r-Reşid İbrahim (1851-1944) from Khokand in Central Asia, with strong panislamist tendencies who spent many years in Istanbul and travelled extensively in Islamic lands. In this work Akif makes the preacher talk to elaborate his own ideas (Eşref Edib, *op.cit.*, 1, p. 236 ff.). After describing at length the sorry plight of Muslims in Central Asia, India and China at the beginning of this century he concludes that westernization without assimilation is necessary for all Muslims and that an independent Muslim country like Turkey should lead the World of Islam towards the ideal of unity. The work ends with a description of the horrors of the Balkan war of 1912 in which Turkey lost almost the whole of European Turkey and which was a shock and disillusion for Akif.

Safahat III, Hakkın Sesleri ("The Voices of the Right i.e. God"), serialized first in the *Sebilü'r-Reşad* and published in book form in 1913. In this work Akif displays a fundamentalist approach to Islam. Like most Muslim modernists, Akif wants to go to the original sources, cutting out the accumulated padding of later centuries. Consequently the *Safahat III* is mainly dedicated to poems which are mostly commentaries on many verses of the *Qur'an* and of the a few *Hadiths*. In these poems Akif exhorts his fellow co-religionists to unity, to ignore ethnic differences and warn them against the danger, for Islam, of separatism and over-westernization which leads to assimilation, particularly emphasizing the necessity of a cooperation between Turks and Arabs.

Safahat IV, Fatih Kürsüsünde ("From the Pulpit of Fatih"). After a descriptive introduction we find again, as in *Safahat II*, the preacher addressing the audience. This time he exhorts them to work hard, comparing East and West in this regard, warns them against an idle and aimless life of so called intellectuals. The sermon ends with the description of tragic episodes of the Balkan war as a warning to heedless youth.

Safahat V, Hatıralar ("Memories"). Published in Istanbul in 1335 H./1917, this volume contains poems of different subject and length. The poem *El-Uksur'da* ("in al-Uksur"), written after his two months' trip to Egypt and dedicated to Abbas Halim Pasha is a long description of that old Egyptian temple and his meditations, of a pessimistic tone, on the state and future destiny of the Muslim World. Seven poems included in this book are commentaries on various verses of the Qur'an. They are untitled and the original text with the Turkish translation of the verses are given at the beginning. These are poems of encouragement and hope for the world of Islam. But the most interesting and longest poem of the volume is *Berlin Hatıraları* ("Memories of Berlin") mentioned above. Discussing the state of Turkish intellectuals of his time, who, according to him, "imitate only everything bad" from the West, he singles out Tefvik Fikret (q.v.) whose famous atheistic poem *Tarih-i Kadim* ("Ancient History"), according to Akif, poisoned Turkish youth. The ninety eight lines, a vitriolic attack on Fikret, included in the original version of *Safahat V* (serialized irregularly in the *Sebilü'r-Reşad* during 1915-1918) are omitted in all the editions (early or posthumous) of the *Safahat V*, except the 10th (edited by Ertuğrul Düzdağ, Istanbul 1975). The futile but violent controversy started after Fikret's death (1915), between "conservative" and "progressive" circles who claimed (not altogether correctly) that these two poets are representatives of their convictions, continues still (For a bibliography of this controversy and for various editions of *Tarih-i Kadim*, see Tansel, *op. cit.*, pp.77-78 and for a fair comparison between the two poets ideas see Kenan Akyüz, *Batı Te'sirinde Türk Şiiri Antolojisi* 3, Ankara 1970, pp. 545-547). From the second edition onwards, Akif added another poem to *Safahat V*: "*Necid çöllerinden Medine'ye*" ("From the desert of Najd to Medina"). After an impressive description of the desert Akif narrates the excitement of a sudanese pilgrim who dies of ecstasy and exhaustion upon arrival at Muhammad's Mausoleum. This poem is an apotheosis of religious lyricism.

Safahat VI, Asım, consists of a single long poem, written in 1919, serialized in the *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, at irregular times between 1919-1924 and pu-

blished in book form in 1924. It is written in narrative form, interspersed with anecdotes with a moral and with conversations between protagonists which consists of Hocazade (the poet), Köse İmam (Ali Şevki Hoca, a student of the poet's father) Asım (his son). The conversations take place during the First World War, in Akif's house. It is written in simple conversational Turkish and the conversation is used as a means to describe the social evils in Turkey, both during and at the end of the war, to criticize (a pet theme in Akif) Snobism, imitation and blind admiration of the West and various political currents not approved in the poem. Asım, Köse İmam's son is the prototype of the future generation which will lift the country up, the generation which accomplished the miracle of the Dardanelles. Towards the end there is the famous passage which the poet dedicated to those who died against all odds, defending the Dardanelles. The young man finds this strength from his past, his religion and his history, but realizes that positive science of the West must be taken as a model. Asım must be sent to Berlin to study. The poem finishes on this note.

Safahat VII Gölgeler ("Shadows"). This last volume of the *Safahat* contains most of his work between the years 1918-1933, of unequal length and value, written in Istanbul, Ankara and Hilwan. The majority of these poems are not particularly typical of Akif but some like *Leyla*, *Hicran*, *Secde*, *Bir Gece*, etc. are examples of high religious lyricism and *Bülbül* which he wrote on hearing of the fall of Bursa is among his best patriotic poems.

The 10th (revised) edition of the *Safahat* mentioned above includes some of the poems of Akif not published in the seven volumes, the most important being the complete text of the *İstiklal Marşı*.

The Qur'an translation is and remains a very controversial episode in Akif's life. The directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA, *Diyanet İşleri Riyaseti*, later *Başkanlığı*) which was created after the abolition of the Ministry of Shari'a, decided to have a new official translation and commentary of the Qur'an made. It was considered that the person indicated for the translation was Akif and for the commentary the noted *alim* Ahmed Hamdi (Yazır, 1877-1942). After long hesitation, Akif accepted the proposal on condition that his translation would be published together with the commentary as he belonged to that category of Muslims who believed that the Qur'an is really untranslatable. Both authors signed the contract in Ankara and received an advance sum just before Akif left for Egypte for good,

in the Winter of 1925. He worked on it for several years and sent specimen chapters to his close friends. A punctilious and conscientious man likewise a perfectionist he was never completely satisfied with the result and kept on revising and recopying the text. Eventually he sent some 50 pages of the final draft to DRA.

In those years, the Ghazi (Atatürk, as he was called in the late 1920's) was experimenting with the turkification of Islam (as hoped for by Gökalp) as a corollary to secularization. Already a committee founded in the Faculty of Theology, under the chairmanship of Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad (M. Fuad Köprülü) had published their report on religious reform (*Dini islah projesi ve beyannamesi*, see *Vakit* of 28 June 1928, reproduced in the Roman script in Osman Ergin, *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi*, vol. 5, Istanbul 1943, pp. 1639-1641). Some *Khodjas* were asked to read the Turkish translation of the Qur'an in certain mosques and to use Turkish for the prayer (*namaz*).

On reading of this, which was later confirmed by friends, Mehmet Akif was alarmed and feared that his translation might be used for this purpose and perhaps eventually replace the original text of the Qur'an. He immediately wrote DRA and asked them to return the 50 pages he had sent, saying that he would like to alter certain passages and then annulled the contract, sending the advance he had received to Ahmet Hamdi (Yazır, who later published his own translation with commentary *Hak Dini, Kur'an Dili*, 9 volumes, Istanbul 1936-1960). According to rumours, before returning to Istanbul, at the end of his life, Akif confided the completed manuscript to a Turkish *müderris* in Al-Azhar, a certain İhsan Efendi from Yozgat with the request to return it to him if he came back or to burn it if he died. The mystery of the manuscript continues to this day (see Eşref Edib, *op. cit. passim*; and Mahir İz, *Yılların İzi*, Istanbul, 1975, pp. 144, 145).

Mehmet Akif was a robust man of middle height. An amateur of sport, a wrestler of professional standard, a first class swimmer and a great walker. He was an extremely modest, retiring person, very shy who talked little in small circles of friends. But he was an exuberant and stirring orator when he addressed an audience.

Extremely devout but far from being a fanatic, he was conservative in politics but very different from the norm; he would not accept in *toto* ideas and principles which go usually with conservative outlooks in Tur-

key. He expressed several times, in writing and orally, his hatred of Abdülhamit II and Mehmet VI (Vahidettin) and he did not hesitate in joining the rebellious Nationalists against the Sultan-caliph's collaborationist government. Lastly his conservative outlook did not prevent him from appreciating, even admiring Western classical music and Western Literature (see *Safahat*, *passim*. Kuntay, *op. cit.*, *passim*).

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