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### 'The Future of Constantinople'

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#### About this record

The file contains the observations of Edwin Samuel Montagu (Secretary of State for India) on a previous memorandum by Lord Curzon on the future of Constantinople. It covers the question of Indian Mohammedan opinion, and the lack of Muslim representation of India in the Councils of the Empire; and argues against turning the Turks out of Constantinople as it would cause resentment in India and be viewed as an anti-Muslim action.

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Circulated by the Secretary of State for India.

SECRET.

The Future of Constantinople.

I have read Lord Curzon's Memorandum on this subject and would offer a few observations.

(1) I think that Indian Mohammedan opinion is entitled to greater consideration. The very fact that the misfortunes of Turkey during the war have been borne by them without excitement is only a testimony of their loyalty to the British Throne and does not mean in the least that there has not been a conflict between their temporal and spiritual allegiance which has placed upon them a severe strain. They are entitled to recognition of their demeanour under this strain, and it would surely be an act of ingratitude and of cynicism to say to them: "Because you were so loyal, because you did not show more excitement, because you have helped us in our war, because you have actually provided soldiers to fight against the Turkish arms, we are going now to expel your fellow Mohammedans from Europe." I would argue directly in the opposite direction. I would say that in making peace with Turkey we have got to teach the Turk that he is beaten, we have got to deal with him firmly, we have not got to allow him to regard himself as in any way triumphant, and it was for that reason that I have always been anxious to sever his connection with Mesopotamia and Arabia, and that I am so anxious that he should be compelled to obey completely the terms imposed upon him in the armistice concluded with him. But we are not turning the Austrians or the Germans out of their capital. I do not see why we should for these purposes turn the Turk out of his capital. It is not that the Indian Mohammedan has sanctity or reverence for Constantinople; it is that we ought not to deal this blow to a Muslim Power when we have achieved victory over it with the assistance of Muslim arms, and I would remind the Cabinet that the Prime Minister himself said: "We are not fighting to deprive Turkey of its capital," and again, "Great Britain did not challenge the maintenance of Turkey, or of the Turks in the homeland of the Turkish race with its capital of Constantinople."

I would add that notwithstanding the self-restraint of our Muslim fellow-subjects during the war, notwithstanding the active participation of Muslim troops in many theatres, it has been impossible to include a Muslim representative of India in participation in the Councils of the Empire. This point has been constantly brought to my notice in many communications from India, and now that we are dealing with something of such great interest to Islam, it would seem to me to behove us to consider Islamic interests all the more because the Muslims are not directly represented in our Councils.

2. I would next point out that if we are to turn the Turk out of Constantinople despite these arguments, let us be sure that we have some satisfactory alternative. Lord Curzon has stated so fairly the arguments for and against any solution of this difficult question that I would venture to say that we had better leave the Turk there simply because we can find no satisfactory alternative. I do not mean by this that I do not regard it as vital that the navigation of the Straits, including the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmora and the Bosphorus, should in future be open in peace and war to the ships of all nations, nor do I mean that the Turks should be left any of the territory that they now occupy in Europe. But I would point out that Lord Curzon argues that America is unlikely to accept the charge. He shows clearly the objections to any other great Power and to a small neutral State, and he has to fall back upon an international Commission, but he suggests that it is impossible to conceive of this with the Turks still in Constantinople. I agree with Lord Curzon that if the remedy which he suggests were adopted, it would probably entail the return of San Sophia to Christianity. Now to my mind it is not a question of history; it is a question of the actual condition of affairs, and it seems to me inevitable that to interfere with the Mosque of San Sophia or any other mosque must be regarded as a deliberate anti-Muslim act. I am perfectly certain that whatever might be thought of turning the Turk out of Constantinople, this action would be very much resented in India, and I therefore ask whether it is worth while to remove the Turk from Constantinople to embark on new anti-Muslim action which will be resented by those who have stood by us loyally in India, however patiently they may bear it, in order to adopt any of the solutions which have been suggested by Lord Curzon and others who have written on the subject.

8th January 1919.

E. S. M.

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