Şehbenderzâde Ahmed Hilmi (1865–1914)

Chapter 12

Life

Şehbenderzâde Ahmed Hilmi was born in Filibe (today Plovdiv, Bulgaria). His father was Süleyman Bey who was a consul (şehbender) and his mother was Şevkiye Hanım. After completing his primary education in his birthplace, Ahmed Hilmi moved to Istanbul, where he graduated from the Sultanı of Galatasaray. After living in Izmir for a while he returned to Istanbul, and in 1890 began to work at the Düyun-u Umumiye İdaresi (Public Debt Administration). He was later sent to Beirut on a political mission, where he established contact with the Young Turks and then went to Egypt. In Egypt he joined the Terakki-i Osmani Cemiyeti (Ottoman Society of Progress) and started to publish a satirical journal named Çaylak. In 1901, after returning to Istanbul, he was arrested and charged as a political opponent to the regime and was exiled to Fezzan (in today's Libya). In Fezzan he became acquainted with Sufism and joined the Arusi sect. The influence of this religious movement would be seen in his later works. In 1908, after the reestablishment of the Constitution, he returned to Istanbul and began to publish a weekly paper called İttihad-i İslam (Islamic Union). In his newspaper Hilmi wrote numerous articles on the Islamic Union or Pan-Islamism. After the closure of this journal he continue to write on political and philosophical subjects in the newspapers İkbal, Şehbal and Tasvir-i Efkar. In 1910 he established a publishing house, Hikmet Matbaa-i İslamiyesi, and started to publish a new weekly paper of the same name (Hikmet Ceride-i İslamiyesi). In this new publication, Hilmi continued to pursue his Pan-Islamist activities and copies of this paper were sent to various Muslim countries. On 9 September 1911 Hilmi founded another newspaper called Hikmet, in which he began to write articles criticizing the CUP government, as a result of which the newspaper was closed five times by the authorities in a period of just one and half months. In October 1911 he was exiled to Bursa after the closure of Hikmet. In August 1912 Hilmi again began to publish Hikmet, and in his writings he predicted the outbreak of the Balkan Wars and the First World War. During this same period he also launched another satirical magazine called Coşkun Kalender, only one issue of which was published. Later he also published some other papers called Münakaşa, Kanat and Nimet. Besides his publishing career, Hilmi also pursued an academic career, for a while teaching philosophy at Darulfu-
nun [University] in Istanbul. Ahmed Hilmi died suddenly in 1914. According to some rumors, he was poisoned by his political opponents.

Ideas

The following passages are taken from Ahmed Hilmi’s work Yirminci Asırda Alem-i İslam ve Avrupa – Müslümanlara Siyaset Rehberi (The Islamic World and Europe in the Twentieth Century – a Political Guide for Muslims), published in İsmail Kara's Türkiyede İslâmcılık Düşüncesi (Islamist Thought in Turkey), vol 1.

**General European Policy in the Twentieth Century**

Never, in any period of the history of humanity, have science and scholarship reached such a high level. Today politicians are using all the available scientific possibilities to distort reality and to support their false practices. In the past, even during the darkest periods of human history, we encounter the presence of some lofty and noble ideas. In the practices of European politics it is almost impossible to see any trace of humanity. Because the “civilized barbarity” was skillfully planned and designed, we can call it mathematical barbarity. All of the theories on Natural Selection and Survival of the Fittest that Darwin expounded in his works reflect this mentality. In the past the victors showed a kind of mercy and compassion to the defeated and conquered peoples. Tolerance and benevolence towards them was considered a noble and magnanimous quality. According to Darwin, on the contrary, the weak and defeated did not deserve any mercy or compassion; since they had lost they deserved to be annihilated. Those condemned by nature must also be condemned by man. In the past, religion and ethical values had an influence on political decisions and administration. A nation would prefer glory and dignity to its interests, honor and nobleness to material gains. A ruler was obliged to respect his word and keep promises. Today, in Europe such high and noble values have no influence on politics because religion has lost its influence on society. Instead everything is determined by interest and benefit. Therefore we can say with confidence that the current European political system is based on unethical values. Today the noble values of the past are considered foolish and nonsensical. By considering our criticism of the European value system, some people would accuse us of being the enemy of the contemporary civilization. But, on the contrary, we are the most sincere admirer of Europe’s material civilization. Today, the scientific and technical advancement of the European nations is paramount, and it is impossible not to acknowledge that achievement. On the other hand,