

The Characteristics of Atatürk's Personality

By Prof. Âfet Inan

Atatürk, who liberated his country, established a new system of government and introduced very necessary and radical social reforms, was famous throughout the whole world as the greatest Turk of our century.

While thinking of him on this twelfth anniversary of his death, I should like to tell others what I know about him and thus help to make him live again in our minds and hearts with all the vividness of his strong personality.

A great deal has been published about Atatürk in Turkish as well as in various other languages. The value of such publications depends on the view points and the information which those writers obtained. Therefore, each informs us of Atatürk's place in Turkish history according to his particular knowledge of that great Turk.

When the Turkish-American Women's Cultural Society in Ankara asked me to talk about Atatürk, I accepted the invitation immediately. I considered it my duty and a privilege to talk about Atatürk to friends and guests of our country. It has been twelve years since we, the Turkish nation, lost him. But Atatürk's personality, as you know, dominated Turkish history during most of the last half century.

The foundations of our government to-day were the result of his skill as a great statesman and a great leader. When he began to undertake to liberate his country under the most difficult conditions in its history, he was then a soldier, a general. During the 19 years from 1919 to 1938 Atatürk worked for the welfare of his entire nation-and, never losing

confidence in himself and in his plans, he was always successful, no matter what dangers confronted him. On the tenth anniversary of the Turkish Republic he addressed his nation in these words : "Turks of this great Turkish nation, many a time you have heard me promise you success in various tasks which we have undertaken during the past fifteen years. I am happy that in none of these promises have I failed in the least respect, which would shake the trust my nation put in me."

There must be an explanation for all these successes. To me the secret of his success is to be found in his inborn characteristics. Atatürk's character presents certain traits, which mark him as being very distinguished. A character sketch of him would make it possible for us to understand the nature as well as the importance of many historical events which took place while he was our leader. Today my own children, knowing Atatürk from his pictures and statues, ask me: "Did Atatürk always frown and look angry?"

Indeed most people who were not his intimate friends have not smiling photographs of him. His thick eyebrows seemed always to be frowning, his facial expression was stern and his looks were serious and penetrating. Atatürk did not laugh or smile much, but he did have a cheerful disposition. He himself used to say that a person, who did not have a cheerful disposition, should be suspected of two things. He is either ill or has an anxiety or trouble about which he does not want others to know.

Atatürk was lavishly blessed with superior intelligence. The virtue which he wanted to find in others was wisdom and intelligence. He used to say that there is no problem that reason and clear logical thinking cannot solve provided that reason is based upon knowledge. He himself had a great admiration for learning and equipped himself with the most recent scientific knowledge. This always gave him a superior place in any group. He used to read much and to urge to read and to listen and to learn.

He said in 1922: "By learning and faith, moral strength reaches superior development." Atatürk admired logic and lucidity. He used to analyze the most intricate problems in a very clear and simple way and put them within the limits of the comprehension of any person to whom he talked.

From his youth, moral courage dominated Atatürk's character. When he was only an officer of inferior rank, he used to speak frankly about any mistakes which he might have observed.

Many instances showing this trait of his character can be found in anecdotes, which I heard from him and which appear in various articles which I have written. He used to throw himself into the most dangerous situations with the greatest courage. Talking of different aspects of his own life, he would often say, "When I undertake any kind of work, I take into account the worst that those concerned can do to me, and act accordingly." Atatürk always followed this rule and was always successful.

Atatürk knew no fear. As the President of the Republic, he had enemies, who wanted to put an end to his life. When he was informed of that, prior to the attempt, he took the information very calmly and said to the people around him: "Don't trouble yourselves by taking unnecessary measures for my safety. I can take care of myself."

One day before we were to start from Istanbul for Ankara, at a certain announced hour, I received an anonymous letter in which I was told of a plot to murder him. With great excitement I showed him the letter and begged him to postpone the trip. He very calmly said to me: "From the style of the writing, I think I know by whom the letter was written. Don't be excited. We shall start at the announced hour and you will see that there will be no such attempt." We started at the time announced and nothing happened.

One day in Yalova, we were informed that on the way to Bursa bandits were holding up buses. He was very sorry to hear that. That night he suddenly decided that we should take a trip along that road. This decision was so sudden that there was no time to make arrangements for security before hand. He and I were in the same automobile. I was looking out of the window with great anxiety. His aid-de-camp was on the alert. Atatürk was not only very calm,, but even joked by saying: "We will be the ones to capture the bandits." To tell the truth I found this method of acting a little lacking in prudence. But later, when I analyzed it, I decided that he had acted in the wisest way, because, after that, people felt safe when they heard that he had passed along the road where only a day before a frightful incident had occurred. It also served as a lesson to the bandits.

Many incidents occurred which showed that Atatürk had an exceptionally courageous character. From his youth on he always displayed moral courage in many various situations.

Atatürk was tender hearted. He was many times on battlefields covered with the dead and the wounded and he could stand that only because he was doing his duty to his country. At other times when the Moslem religious sacrifice (the killing of a lamb) took place, he could not bear to watch it.

He used to describe the feeling of sympathy this way. "There should be no condescension; there should be love." He cherished great love for all living things but he never made helpless people feel that he was pitying them.

Other characteristics of Atatürk were his foresight and his habit of always studying and analyzing problems in their relations to world problems. He said, "If there is no peace in the world and good relations do not exist among the nations, no nation is ever free from anxiety, no matter what it is able to do for itself. We cannot know whether an incident, which takes place at a great distance from us, will some day affect

us or not. Therefore, we must consider the human race as a unit and a nation as one of its parts. All the parts of the body are affected even by a pain in the tip of a finger. If there is any unrest in any part of the world, we must not say, 'What is that to us?' We must be interested in it just as we would be interested in it, if it had occurred among ourselves. No matter how far away the scene of the incident, it is necessary for us to follow this principle. This method of thinking will save nations from selfishness. Selfishness whether it is individual or national must be regarded as bad."

Atatürk's influence is still active to-day, 12 years after his death. In this auditorium where we have come together on the anniversary of his death, it seems proper to repeat something else, which he used to say. It is this: "The only way to make people happy is to act and to use energy in a way so that people will be brought closer together and make them love one another and so help them to satisfy their material and spiritual morals. In a peaceful world real happiness for mankind will only be possible when the number of people, who have these high ideals as their objective, increase." In these words, is Atatürk not living among us to-day? Is not this American-Turkish meeting an example of his ideal?

On the road to peace we are meeting here today on the way to Atatürk's ideal as our destination.

By trying to put Atatürk's ideas into practice we will come to know him better. Like Washington, Atatürk is immortal, because he founded a nation and established a system of government, which will firmly endure throughout the centuries.

Translated
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