

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE YEARS THE EMPIRE WAS COLLAPSING

FALIH RIFKI ATAY

Synopsis

In this work, Falih Rifki Atay endeavors to convey the country's history based on his personal history by sharing many disconnected memories. He focuses on the last years of the Ottoman Empire in terms of the education system, the narrow-mindedness of the Young Turks, and the Western powers' attitude toward the Ottomans. Emphasizing the period after the transition to the multiparty democratic system, he complains about the hypocrisy of politicians and how the democratic system feeds the reactionary activities in the country.

People

Abdulhak Hamid Tarhan	Poet, writer and diplomat
Ahmet Samim	Journalist
Ali Kemal	Journalist and politician
Celal Bayar	Economist and politician
Celal Sahir	Poet, writer, broadcaster and politician
Enver Pasha	Soldier and politician
Hüseyin Cahit Yalcin	Journalist, writer and politician
Ismet Inonu	Soldier and politician
Ismail Mahir Pasha	Soldier
Ismail Mustak	Journalist, writer and politician
Mehmet Nâzim	Physician and politician
Mehmet Resat	The 35th sultan
Namik Kemal	Author
Nisim Mazilyah	Member of Parliament
Ömer Seyfettin	Author
Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov	Russian foreign minister
Sukru Pasha	Soldier
Thomas Edward Lawrence	Officer, archaeologist, diplomat, and author
Vahdeti	Ottoman journalist, writer and cleric
Yusuf Izzettin	Crown Prince
Ziya Gokalp	Poet, writer and sociologist

Events

Hasan Agha

Since the word "Turk" is used to mean "brute and savage" during Falih Rifki's childhood, he defines himself as a member of the Islamic Ummah and Ottoman. He sees the word homeland for the first time in Namik Kemal's books, and hears it when the constitutional monarchy is restored. Having a picture of Abdulhamid and talking about the Yildiz Hill, where he lives, are also forbidden.

These days, people mention a person named Hasan Agha. Falih Rifki learns that it is the nickname used when talking about the sultan. One day, he wants to see the mysterious sultan and goes to the Friday public procession of the sultan with his school friends. When he mingles with the crowd who wants to see the sultan during his walk between the Yildiz Palace and the Yildiz Mosque, he feels like suffocating. He concludes that there is contrast between the public's show of affection and the talk about Hasan Agha. Nobody talks much outside the house for fear of letting something slip. Thus, nobody can get an idea about the affairs of the state in public space.

His School Years

Since there is no age limit to study at infants' school, Falih Rifki starts attending infants' school at very early age. He learns the Qur'an, tajweed, and catechism. The turbaned teacher and his foreman

prepare children for the madrasa by subjecting them to torture. When they make Falih Rifki memorize Surah Yasin, he thinks he can get rid of them by tearing up the relevant pages from the Qur'an and saying that this surah is not in his book. In the end, they whip his feet.

He is beaten for climbing a tree in the garden on his first day at secondary school. Since playing sports is not accepted, children are forced to behave well and to sit aside even during recess. The lessons consist of the Qur'an, Tajweed, Theology, Ethics, Grammar, Dictation, Recitation, Calculus, Geography, History, French, Thuluth, and Ruq'ah script.

When he is a middle schooler, a supervisor named Hayri Bey secretly recites poems to children in a corner in the garden and talks about historical events that are not told in the lessons. This time, Falih Rifki begins to rummage through his brother's library. He sees the magazines *Servetifunun* and *Malumat*. One is European in style and the other is Oriental. He begins to take an interest in the latter. He constantly reads the dictionary to understand the ghazals. One day, he finds a yearbook. While looking at the photographs of foreign rulers, he sees the picture of Abdulhamid. He takes the picture to school but gets caught and battered by the hodjas.

After secondary school, he enrolls in Mercan High School. The principal is Huseyin Cahit, whose articles he secretly reads in *Servetifunun*. In those days, he meets new names, such as Namik Kemal and Abdulkhak Hamid. A supervisor, who is an informant, forcibly takes him and his friends to the mosque when the call to prayer is recited. Most of the students pray without wudu.

One day, they read in a newspaper that their French teacher, Zeki Bey, is granted a medal by the sultan. They try to congratulate him when he comes to class, but Zeki Bey shuts them up, saying it's nothing to brag about. Falih Rifki hears the first words that shake his love of the sultan from him. Now, he learns to make fun of the oddities of the era. He always makes fun of the submarine, which is kept aground in the Golden Horn due to the sultan's delusions, and the ban on electricity and telephone in Istanbul.

With the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy, Falih Rifki's high school years are divided. When the Constitutional Monarchy is restored, he takes to the streets with his friends to shout at the shops run by Christian citizens in Beyoglu as if they defeated a Christian army in a war.

His First Publication

One day, his literature teacher Celal Sahir tells Falih Rifki that he wants to publish the article he prepared for the class in the column reserved for novices in the magazine *Servetifunun*. A few weeks later, Falih Rifki delivers a poem to Celal Bey. This time, Celal Bey publishes his poem side by side with those written by well-known names. As he starts studying at a university, he writes for a magazine called *Tecelli*, meaning manifestation.

Istanbul: A City Split Half

Istanbul is divided into Christian and Muslim districts. In the Muslim quarter, everyone addresses each other as pasha, master, or bey. In the evenings, men meet at the coffeehouse. Everyone shuts up when a stranger shows up. If a woman is secretly taken into a house, that house is raided. If a man's spouse misbehaves, their house is stoned at night until they move out of the neighborhood. As the people become poorer, wooden slums are built in place of the old mansions. Most of these slums use gas lamps for illumination. The water comes from the fountain. For most people, a bed is luxury. As such, Istanbul is like a big village.

Christian quarters are outside the walls. However, the grocer, the butcher and the greengrocer are always among them. Life is more active here. Falih Rifki and the people around him envy well-dressed and cheerful Christians living in masonry houses. While the lamps in Muslim homes go out early, the lights in these homes stay on until late.

Falih Rifki wonders why Christians are so different from Muslims. While his teachers say that Muslims are to go to heaven, he questions why all the beauties in the world belong to Christians.

The Fears of the City

There are two great fears in the city: fire and thief. Scouts in the fire tower always warn the neighborhood. When it's windy, people stack their stuff downstairs. Even though there are mounted firefighters, the main job is left to the firemen in the neighborhoods.

Most of the police stations are full of officers collaborating with the thieves. For this reason, thieves can put up signs on the walls announcing that anyone who does not have at least twenty cents on them will be stabbed.

When it gets dark, these two fears descend on the city and Muslims live wondering if they will have masonry houses like Christians.

The Flow of Life

Everyone returns home before the evening. When the azan is recited, people sit at the table. At night the lights go out. Until then, men go to coffee, and women go to neighbors. Every neighborhood has a pack of dogs howling until the morning.

Children of wealthy families go to Beyoglu to have fun. Every Turk who goes to Beyoglu feels his nativeness. The shopkeepers almost deign to answer Turkish speakers. Some street names are in French. Some of the Turks here have a European style who are ashamed of their Turkishness.

Every young person's dream is to become a civil servant. If his family is not wealthy, he chases the chance of marrying the daughter of a wealthy family. Pensions are given every two to three months. Every morning, several pairs of bread are brought to the soldiers according to their rank. Some make a profit by selling the remainder.

Trips

There are horse-riding trams. Since it is difficult for two horses to go uphill, there are horse barns at the beginning of each slope. Here, two more horses are added to the tram.

There are also phaetons and herders with horses. The cheapest means is the latter. The person rides the horse, and the herder follows him with a whip. Officers usually live close to work.

When Ramadan starts, life gets hectic. People go to the theatre, listen to the Ottoman classical music and watch meddah, a traditional storyteller playing in front of a small group of viewers.

Acquaintances go to each other for iftar. Those who are not fasting act as if they are. After iftar, the streets get crowded. People enjoy the night as the bureaus open in the afternoon.

After the Restoration of the Constitutional Monarchy

People hear that the Austro-Hungarian Empire wants to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina. Then, Bulgaria and Crete gain their independence. Newspapers constantly tell that the country is divided among the great states. Exiled people return and write articles revealing each other's secrets; most of them are informants. After the parliament is opened, a pasha named Ismail Mahir is shot dead. This murder is the first murder of a committee thought to be affiliated with the Unionists. The elections are held under the pressure of the Unionists, too. Only the Christian deputies know what to do in the new assembly. There is no other source of hope apart from the patriotism of the Unionists.

31 March Incident

The conflict between Turks and minorities and among Turks turns even high school students against each other. Falih Rifki is a Unionist, believing that Unionism means progress, liberation, and patriotism. At that time, Hasan Fehmi, a journalist who is an opponent of Unionism, is killed, and the murderer cannot be found.

One morning, Falih Rifki leaves the house and finds the streets secluded. While walking with a few friends, they run into two soldiers and a few religious fanatics. One of the fanatics takes off their ties, saying that they cannot live an irreligious life anymore, while another takes their books and tears up the illustrated pages. When they arrive at the school, they find out that there is a rebellion. Then, they

immediately go to Sultanahmet Square. They see that the exterior doors of the Ministry of War are closed, and the turbaned men hanging on the railings throw Vahdeti's *Volkan* newspaper inside.

When he hears that non-regimental officers are killed, Falih Rifki begins to wonder about his brother. When he visited his brother after he became an officer, his brother showed him a bearded man with clogs and a jacket over his shoulder and then said that he was a battalion commander but was illiterate. Regimental officers and schooled officers are in conflict in the army. He returns home when he learns that his brother is safe. At home, he finds out that his neighbor, who is a sailor, committed suicide when he could not resist the soldiers who came to invade his ship. A naval officer named Ali Kabuli was also lynched in front of the sultan's eyes. He also hears that Nisim Mazilyah was the only one who dared to protest when the soldiers stormed the assembly.

Everyone except the youth blames the Unionists for this turmoil. All religious men make propaganda in favor of the palace. Years later, Falih Rifki remembers these days and thinks that nothing has changed. For the Justice Party members hug the private soldiers and make rude gestures to the educated soldiers during Celal Bayar's arrival in Cankaya.

Death Penalties

The 31 March Incident makes the Unionists and their supporters believe that Turkey's fundamental cause is reactionism. However, Falih Rifki thinks that the reactionaries they fear are also in fear since there are no high-ranking people to support them. The army from Thessaloniki intervenes in the events. But people still don't know what's going on. Experienced people say that private soldiers cannot do anything without the support of educated officers. When Sailor Muzaffer Bey's brother, land officer Salahaddin Adil, returns home with a wound in his leg, they get the first correct information from him. The army from Thessaloniki enters the barracks, deputies and senators gather in Yesilkoy. Newspapers start to support the Unionists again. But the people still support Abdulhamid, who is exiled to Thessaloniki.

Many rebellious soldiers are executed. When Resat Efendi, who succeeds Abdulhamid, comes to the Ministry of War for the enthronement ceremony, a woman shouts, "Save my son!" Sultan Resat recognizes this voice and orders the rescue of Prince Sabahattin, who is associated with the rebellion. Thus, Prince Sabahattin goes to Europe. However, despite all this, the Unionists still don't show the courage to take control of the state. They continue to work with the statesmen of the Abdulhamid era.

The Unionists Fall from Grace

Reactionary groups against the Unionists cooperate with Greek, Armenian, Vlach, Bulgarian, Arab, and Albanian assassins. Unionist devotees want to fight them, but they only attack journalists because they are not strong enough. One night, Ahmet Samim, and one night, Zeki Bey from *Mizan* magazine, is killed. Ahmet Samim's killers cannot be caught. And the state protects Zeki Bey's killers. Cemal Pasha, who opposes this, detains these people in Syria and then have them executed. Such events damage the reputation of the Unionists among the Ottoman intellectuals. Later, Falih Rifki hears that Enver Pasha's uncle killed Ismail Mahir Pasha.

Ataturk calls these devotees as butchers and says that only two of these devotees are heroes. One is Topcu Hamdi, who shot the mufti of Serez, and the other is Atif, who shot Semsi Pasha, who was appointed by Abdulhamid to prevent constitutionalism.

Defeats

The Unionists withdraw from power, but the Balkan Wars are about to begin. While the soldiers in Rumelia are waiting to be demobilized, the young people in Istanbul demand war. As they gather in the Unionist clubs and listen to the speeches, they take to the streets and shout "Crete is our dear." They dream of reclaiming Eastern Rumelia from Bulgaria, Thessaly from Greece, and Nis from Serbia. When the Western states declare that the status quo is not broken in the Balkan countries, they dream of avenging the Crusades.

After Montenegro, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece declare war. As Falih Rifki hears of the defeats, he thinks that their shepherds and barkeepers defeat them.

Although his older brother is sick with fever, he does not take leave and goes to the front to fight. While Falih Rifki is saying goodbye to him at the station, his brother shows the soldiers dealing with the bayonets in the wagon and says that some of them will learn to use weapons on the way. He sets out that evening and dies at the front.

One day, a picture of the Bulgarian tsar crushing the Turkish rifle with his foot on the border line appears in the newspaper. That year people are concerned about Istanbul. The Russian tsar thinks that the Bulgarians should take Istanbul. In reply, the statesmen content themselves with stating that the sultan and the statesmen won't leave the city in such a situation.

One day, the Sublime Porte is attacked by the Unionists. The Minister of War, Nazim Pasha, is killed, and the Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha is forced to resign. The Unionists justify what is happening saying that these defeats are because the Unionists are not in power. This change of power gives temporary hope. However, the new grand vizier Mahmut Sevket Pasha says that Edirne can be given up. Edirne falls in a short time.

The supporters of the Freedom and Accord Party decide to take revenge on the Unionists. A few devotees stop Mahmut Sevket Pasha's car with a coffin and kill the pasha and his aide-de-camp. The Istanbul Guard, Cemal Pasha, has those responsible, including the royal son-in-law, executed.

Falih Rifki starts working at *Tanin* newspaper and has the opportunity to get to know most of the important names mentioned.

Edirne

Turks hardly ever travel during the reign of Abdulhamid. Only after the restoration of the Constitutional Monarchy in 1908, can they have the opportunity to travel to Europe and see the countryside, which they consider a place of exile, thanks to the Orient Express. Therefore, the loss of Rumelia does not affect them much. Years later, Falih Rifki realizes how great this loss is while listening to the memories of Mustafa Kemal.

When the Balkan states cannot agree with each other, Bulgaria demands the protection of the great powers. This time, Europe defends that the Turkish army deployed in Catalca during the war, should preserve its status quo. Russia also declares that if the Turks march to Edirne, they will fight them. The cabinet is against the advance of the military.

One evening, while Falih Rifki is working in the newspaper, Hakki Bey, the second editor-in-chief, leaves an article, stating that a decision will be made on whether to march to Edirne that evening, and that he wrote his article accordingly. He asks Falih Rifki to call Talât Pasha to learn about the final decision and publish another article if necessary. Falih Rifki calls Talât Pasha and finds out that the cabinet is yet to have a decision. He goes to Talât Pasha's house upon invitation, Talât Pasha greets him in his nightgown, and the first editorial of Falih Rifki emerges from their conversation. The next day, the army marches to Edirne and the city is regained.

Falih Rifki thinks that fortune turns around three times. In the first, the Balkan states cannot agree with each other and declare war on Bulgaria. That is how Thrace is won. Britain, France, Italy, and America win the war without Russia, because of the Bolshevik Revolution. That is how Istanbul is retained. And lastly, Mustafa Kemal fights for independence at a time when everyone is losing hope.

Sukru Pasha

Falih Rifki receives a letter from Osman Sukru, the son of Sukru Pasha, who is known as the savior of Edirne, upon his serialized memories in the newspaper. In the letter, it is written that Sukru Pasha is one of the first soldiers to receive German military training, he hates politics but suffers during the reign of Abdulhamid because he speaks the truth without hesitation. However, he does not approach the Unionists because of his loyalty to the Ottoman dynasty. In addition, when he returns from exile during the reign of Abdulhamid, although the people want to welcome him, he is told that the crowd is waiting for him to lynch him. So, he secretly goes to his home. Then he is retired. Sukru Pasha's son ends his letter after expressing how upset he is that his father's name is not even a street name anywhere in Turkey.

Travel to Edirne

After Edirne is regained, Falih Rifki is sent to Edirne by *Tanin* newspaper as a reporter. He sets out with Crown Prince Yusuf Izzettin. He has a conversation with Yusuf Izzettin as he knows that the crown prince's biggest fear is not to succeed after Sultan Resat, and that's why he approaches the Unionists. But after listening to him, he decides that the crown prince is an idiot.

On this trip, he meets Enver Pasha, Fethi Pasha, and Mustafa Kemal. However, there is resentment between Fahrettin Pasha and Enver Pasha because Enver Pasha marched to Edirne at the very time Fahrettin Pasha was preparing to march. Governor Hacı Adil Bey goes to the headquarters of Fethi Pasha and Mustafa Kemal to calm the situation. However, Falih Rifki and other Unionists are at Enver Pasha's side.

In Edirne, Falih Rifki finds out that Greek and Bulgarian soldiers attacked the civilians and that the people took shelter in mosques to protect themselves. He sees mosques full of bloodstains.

Hüseyin Cahit

Since Huseyin Cahit and other writers do not work in an official newspaper, they can easily take a critical attitude. However, when the newspaper is bought by the Unionists, Huseyin Cahit resigns. The editor-in-chief brings the employees together to take a photo with Huseyin Cahit. This farewell photo leaves a bitter taste for Falih Rifki. After the Unionists make Huseyin Cahit the representative of Turkish creditors in the Public Debt, Falih Rifki cannot see him even in the most difficult days of the country. He only shows up at the gambling tables.

After the proclamation of the Republic, Falih Rifki works in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, while Huseyin Cahit writes articles for *Tanin* as a dissident. He cannot tolerate the opposition of Huseyin Cahit to the abolition of the caliphate and believe that Huseyin Cahit, who did not speak out against hunger and persecution throughout the war, now speaks against the reforms. Although he defended the Latin alphabet during the Constitutional Monarchy period, he is now against the reforms.

Once Huseyin Cahit gets into trouble, he asks Falih Rifki for a job as a high school principal. He and his friend, Ismail Mustak, work with the Belgian manager of the Tram Company. They use the capital they receive from the manager to start another business in cooperation with the Russians. However, the Russians give up. Then, they cannot clear the company's goods through customs. The Belgian director does not press charges against them because he respects Huseyin Cahit's past. At that point, he asks for Falih Rifki's help.

After the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İsmet İnönü makes Huseyin Cahit deputy, and Falih Rifki becomes friends with him again.

Meeting the Unionists

Since Falih Rifki is close to *Tanin* newspaper, he usually meets with his friends at İkbâl Coffeehouse. This place is next to the headquarters of the Unionists. In this way, he has the opportunity to meet many well-known Unionists. He first meets Doctor Nâzım and then Bahaettin Sakir. Youngsters inside often talk about the big and the little masters. Falih Rifki finds out that the big master is Talât Pasha and the younger master is Kemal the Dark, the Secretary-General. Kemal the Dark is a person who strives to create Turkish merchants. He enables many people to become millionaires without himself earning almost anything.

But those who are interested in young people who are interested in art like Falih Rifki are Ziya Gökalp and Talât Muskara, known as Talât the Little. Talât the Little hands over the *Yeni Mecmua* [*New Magazine*] to Falih Rifki during the armistice years.

In the following years, Nâzım is executed for attempting to assassinate Atatürk. Kemal the Dark commits suicide to avoid being caught. Bahaettin Sakir is killed by some Armenians in Europe because he is held responsible for the deportation of Armenians in 1915.

The Committee of Union and Progress is divided into Westernized party members and Macedonian devotees. However, Falih Rifki states that both groups are equal in patriotism. He even adds that the word nation used to mean the Rumelian Turkish that they would not imagine beyond Bursa and Eskişehir, and that Anatolia would not give them a sense of wholeness. Because people from Konya,

Trabzon, and Bitlis, who have different dialects, cannot mix with each other like the Turks from Skopje, Bitola, and Thessaloniki.

Turkism

The Constitutional Monarchy instills the ideal of Turkism in Falih Rifki's generation. Omer Seyfettin in *Young Pens* magazine, Hamdullah Suphi in *Turkish Hearths*, and Ziya Gokalp in *New Magazine* highlight Turkism. Thus, young people can have some ideals. As the Arabs are separatists, the influence of the Islamists among the Unionists decreases.

Toward 1914

While working as a correspondent for *Tanin*, he becomes Talât Pasha's private secretary. When pasha travels, he accompanies him as a reporter and civil servant. These days, Russia wants to keep the eastern provinces under the authority of its advisors, while England is after the Mosul oil. Italy demands a part of Anatolia. The French advances from Syria to Adana.

The state is in debt to pay salaries. Toward the end of 1913, the state accepts Russia's request and hands over the eastern provinces to the authority of its advisors. On the same day, the arrival of a German general to Istanbul to train the army causes a crisis with other states.

The murderer of Mahmut Sevket Pasha escapes. As he is going to Romania on a Russian ship, Police Chief Azmi Bey kidnaps him. The murderer is strangled that night. Realizing that a diplomatic crisis would arise from here, Talât Pasha finds an excuse and goes to Edirne with Grand Vizier Sait Halim Pasha. When he returns, the Russian ambassador demands the dismissal of the chief of police. Talât Pasha dismisses Azmi Bey to make him the governor of Adana, but the ambassador wants him to be removed from all state duties. Azmi Bey can become officer again only after the First World War begins.

The Army

When Hafiz Hakki Bey expresses the need to renew the army in his column titled *Army and Youth* in *Tanin* newspaper, his writings are banned. Later, Enver Pasha becomes the Minister of War and dismisses some soldiers. Thus, trust in the army is re-established.

Negotiations are made with the Western powers. Cemal Pasha is pro-France, while Enver Pasha is pro-Germany. Talât Pasha, on the other hand, proposes an agreement to the Russian Foreign Minister Sazanov. Sazanov writes in his memoirs that Talât Pasha is a murderer, and his word cannot be trusted. But the government wants to approach a country. Although Germany supports the army in training, it cooperates with the British to take control of the oil in Mosul and the Russians to place its advisers in the eastern provinces.

Falih Rifki thinks that Talât Pasha has no broad perspective because he is an uncultured person. The only opinion he hears from the pasha is that only a socialist state would save the country. However, he does not know how Talât Pasha has this idea.

The War

Although it is thought for a long time that Enver Pasha is the reason for entering the war, Falih Rifki states that Talât Pasha is responsible too. Considering constraints in transportation, entering the war is pure madness. In the first days of the war, the coasts of Russia are attacked. Falih Rifki says that he feels good because he can walk in Beyoglu, where minorities are in the majority, without being treated as an African native.

But over time, famine and deprivation affect people's lives. At the same time, Kemal the Dark's efforts to create Turkish merchants and the efforts of the Unionists to nationalize the economy create new millionaires. Corruption allegations show up, but Enver Pasha does not do anything, thinking that the army might be affected.

As the number of defeats increases, the commander-in-chief and the police change their focus. They emphasize that a man and a woman cannot walk side by side without a marriage certificate. Or they

discuss women's proper way of wearing a hijab. Those who do not fast during Ramadan are raided. But Islamism is only for Turks. For Indian Muslim soldiers fight on the Palestinian and Iraqi fronts. The descendants of the Islamic prophet make an agreement with the British and rebel in the Hejaz. The Turks defend the grave of Muhammad against Emir Faisal, who attacks Medina on the orders of Lawrence.

As hopes dwindle, British, French and American flags are prepared to be hung in the shops in Beyoglu. After a while, all the statesmen disappear one by one. The enemy fleets and armies enter Istanbul. Some hodjas declare the British to be the savior of the Islamic world as they save the country from the Masonic Unionists. Even a patriotic friend of Falih Rifki's only wish is the occupation of the country as a whole without being divided.

The Japanese

One of the readers' letters to Falih Rifki requests an explanation about one of his articles. Then Falih Rifki states that the Arabs of the Japanese are Chinese. The Japanese's religion, philosophy, writings, and laws come from China. They are under the influence of a separate civilization and culture like the Ottomans, but they could realize their own reforms.

In the 19th century, the Japanese were uncomfortable with the demands of the Westerns to build facilities and coal yards, grant trade rights and assist shipwrecked ships and sailors, but eventually had to compromise. In order to catch up with the West, they replaced the things they took from China with Western ones and eventually succeeded. Therefore, Turkey should take its example from Japan, not from Western countries.

History

Sultans are cited as prophets in history lessons during the reign of Abdulhamid. Those responsible for the mistakes are either the infidels who unite against the Muslims or the incompetent viziers. Falih Rifki states that the history book written by Mehmed Murad after the Young Turk Revolution is the closest history to the truth.

Democracy

Falih Rifki says that flattery toward the sultans is replaced by flattery toward the people. Politicians do not criticize any wrongdoing not to lose their voters. Those who do not want to send their daughters to school and those who are illiterate but have an opinion on every subject are excused. He adds that democracy is a moral cause, and that democracy cannot work where there is no consistency between what people say and what they do.

Reactionism

Falih Rifki states that the reactionaries want women to be confined to their homes, and that they do not want mathematics and physics to be taught in religious schools, and states that the People's Houses are places for women's liberation, but the Republican People's Party does not address this issue in order to be nice to the reactionaries.

He is subjected to an investigation for writing that Ataturk was suffering from an illness when he went to Samsun. The law protecting Ataturk is enacted not with a Western perspective but with an Ottoman style of worshipping the sultan. He adds that the Republican People's Party can even allow a shaykh al-Islam to perform in the country again as long as the bust of Ataturk and his person are not insulted.

About the 1950s

While visiting a city, Ataturk sees that a flock of sheep is about to be slaughtered in his honor. He immediately demands that the sheep be released. Celal Bayar also goes to the opening of a factory in Izmit as the economy minister. He gives the same reaction to the same scene. However, after 1950, he does not say anything about the sacrifice of a camel in his honor in Afyon.

Likewise, after 1950, opportunists do not talk about the People's Houses or Village Institutes in public because conservative people speak ill of the civil servants going to the People's Houses with their spouses and the students of the Village Institutes for not observing gender segregation.

A neighbor of Falih Rifki tells him that she and her fifteen-year-old friends would bike in Konya in 1930 and asks if the same thing is possible again. Thereupon, Falih Rifki concludes that the country is eight years behind the 1930s in terms of development. He finds democracy responsible for this and adds that the Kenyans are happy to be rid of the Westerners; they can send their children to the sorcerers' barracks instead of schools. He argues that democracy is not a beneficial regime without certain preconditions, and even it can result in coarsening.

He thinks that Turkey assumes a pious attitude toward life since the 1946 election. However, Turkey should not embrace the Western democracy that tolerates people who do not want to send their children to school. On the contrary, the Kemalists forcibly send each child to school and interfere with those who attempt to hinder it. For this reason, the French politician Edouard Herriot describes the period under the rule of Ataturk as the period of "preparation for democracy." For democracy is not possible for a nation that has not attained the freedom of mind and conscience.

During Ramadan

Falih Rifki goes out for dinner with a friend in Ramadan. A few people, including tourists, drink raki or beer in the hotel restaurant where they eat. Suddenly, they hear the Quran and the call to prayer, the foreigners stop and wait. Seeing that the Turks at the next table continue to drink, they continue to drink too.

Another day, while walking with a friend, he comes across a coffeehouse in a village with windows covered with newspaper. When they ask why, they learn that the precaution is to prevent fasting people from seeing non-fasting people eating inside.

In those days, a senator who goes to Ankara by train asks the officer not to let women passengers into his compartment because he and his companions are fasting. Moreover, he prays even though the qibla changes throughout the journey. After hearing of this event, Falih Rifki questions whether the senator did this to show off to the conservative voters next to him or out of ignorance.

Themes

Pressure The childhood of Falih Rifki coincides with the sultanate of Abdulhamid. In those years, it is even forbidden to mention Abdulhamid's name. He is battered for bringing his picture to school. The education system consists of imposing religious information on children. Moreover, hodjas resort to violence. Falih Rifki also gets his share of the violence as a small child.

Envy Istanbul, where Falih Rifki spends his childhood, is a city divided between Muslims and Christians. Muslim neighborhoods are always slow, joyless, and dull, except during Ramadan. Moreover, living conditions are not comfortable. The houses are made of wood that can burn down. The inhabitants do not feel safe. Christian quarters, on the other hand, are always lively and cheerful. They live in houses built in block and brick. Sounds of laughter come from the inside, and the lights are on until late at night. Although Falih Rifki learns at school that Muslims are to go to heaven after they die, he questions why Christians live so comfortably in this world. After the restoration of parliamentary rule, he and his friends run wild in front of the stores in the Christian neighborhood.

Critical thinking As a student, he meets writers like Namik Kemal and begins to mock the system. He finds the Young Turks, who can dethrone Abdulhamid and declare a constitutional monarchy, narrow-minded too. For example, he complains that Talât Pasha is an uncultured man. He says that the pashas support different Western powers not on the basis of principles but arbitrarily. He also accuses the politicians of the Republic of Turkey of hypocrisy. For they try to show that they lead a conservative life in line with the people's expectations in order not to lose their voters.

Bibliography

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