

THE GREATEST HORROR IN HISTORY

FEW nations have suffered as much as Armenia. So terrible and continuous have been the atrocities to which it has fallen victim that the very name of Armenia has, to most of us, become synonymous with martyrdom. Its sufferings during the present catastrophe have been greater than any known in the history of the world. None of the fearful horrors perpetrated in the various zones of the war can compare with the tragic lot of the Armenians. It is my purpose to outline in this article the nature of the Armenian Question and to state briefly the reasons for which the present Turkish Government sought to annihilate these peace-loving, industrious, harmless and intelligent people, and the methods resorted to by the authorities for extermination.

ARMENIAN CHARACTERISTICS

Though deprived of their political independence, the Armenians have never been assimilated by their conquerors, the Turks. They have tenaciously clung to their racial traditions, religion, language and ideals. Their early history

—embracing periods contemporaneous with the ancient Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Parthians—is still a source of pride to them, and their religion—Christianity—is and has been the great moral force sustaining and inspiring them against the attacks of the many hordes that have emerged from Central Asia and passed through their territory on their way to Europe.

TREATMENT OF ARMENIANS BY YOUNG TURKS

The successful revolution of the Young Turks in 1908, which resulted in the deposition of Sultan Abdul Hamid, was hailed by all the world as the dawn of a new era for Turkey. Everyone was delighted at the substitution of a modern, progressive government in place of the much detested, tyrannous rule of Abdul Hamid. The greatest rejoicings were amongst the Armenians. They promptly offered their assistance to the new Party, which promised equal rights to all citizens under a constitutional government. I have not the space here to elaborate on the fact that the performance of the Government was a terrible disappointment after everyone's expectations had been so great. The massacres at Adana in 1909, and the rapid development of the domineering and Chauvinistic attitude of the Young Turks soon dispelled all the illusions

of the Armenians and convinced them that the old relations of conquering and conquered races would continue. The long-hoped-for equality and liberty failed to materialise. The treatment of the Armenians became so intolerable in 1913 that they appealed to the European Governments for relief. After months of negotiation an arrangement was consummated whereby the Sublime Porte permitted of two European Inspectors who were to have supervisory powers in the six Armenian vilayets. Messrs. Hoff and Westeneng, the former a Swede and the latter a Hollander, were appointed. They came to Constantinople for instructions and had not yet been fully installed when the European War broke out and the Turkish Government promptly revoked their authority and asked them to leave the country.

The months of August, September and October 1914, while Turkey was still neutral, proved to be a time which marked great turning-points in the history of Turkey. The Turks promptly mobilised, abrogated the capitulatory rights of the foreign subjects, abolished all foreign post-offices, increased their customs duties, and in every other way took advantage of the fact that the Great Powers were at war with each other. Their success in preventing the Allies from piercing the Dardanelles made them feel like

conquerors and awakened in them the hope that they would again become a world-power.

The conditions of the War gave to the Turkish Government its longed-for opportunity to lay hold of the Armenians. At the very beginning they sent for some of the Armenian leaders and notified them that, if any Armenians should render the slightest assistance to the Russians when they invaded Turkey, they would not stop to investigate but would punish the entire race for it. During the spring of 1914 they evolved their plan to destroy the Armenian race. They criticised their ancestors for neglecting to destroy or convert the Christian races to Mohammedanism at the time when they first subjugated them. Now, as four of the Great Powers were at war with them and the two others were their allies, they thought the time opportune to make good the oversight of their ancestors in the fifteenth century. They concluded that, once they had carried out their plan, the Great Powers would find themselves before an accomplished fact and that their crime would be condoned, as was done in the case of the massacres of 1895-96, when the Great Powers did not even reprimand the Sultan.

They had drafted the able-bodied Armenians into the army without, however, giving them arms; they used them simply to build roads or

do similar menial work. Then, under pretext of searching the houses for arms, they pillaged the belongings of the villagers. They requisitioned for the use of their army all that they could get from the Armenians, without paying for it. They asked them to make exorbitant contributions for the benefit of the National Defence Committee.

WHOLESALE DEPORTATIONS

The final and worst measure used against the Armenians was the wholesale deportation of the entire population from their homes and their exile to the desert, with all the accompanying horrors on the way. No means were provided for their transportation or nourishment. The victims, who included educated men and women of standing, had to walk on foot, exposed to the attacks of bands of criminals especially organised for that purpose. Homes were literally uprooted; families were separated; men killed, women and girls violated daily on the way or taken to harems. Children were thrown into the rivers or sold to strangers by their mothers to save them from starvation. *The facts contained in the reports received at the Embassy from absolutely trustworthy eye-witnesses surpass the most beastly and diabolical cruelties ever before perpetrated or imagined in the history of the world.* The Turkish authorities had stopped all com-

munication between the provinces and the capital in the naïve belief that they could consummate this crime of ages before the outside world could hear of it. But the information filtered through the Consuls, missionaries, foreign travellers and even Turks. We soon learned that orders had been issued to the governors of the provinces to send into exile the entire Armenian population in their jurisdiction, irrespective of age and sex. The local officers, with a few exceptions, carried out literally those instructions. All the able-bodied men had either been drafted into the army or disarmed. The remaining people, old men, women and children, were subjected to the most cruel and outrageous treatment.

I took occasion, in order that the facts might be accurately recorded, to have careful records kept of the statements which were made to me by eye-witnesses of the massacres. These statements included the reports of refugees of all sorts, of Christian missionaries, and of other witnesses. Taken together, they form an account of certain phases of the great massacre which cannot be questioned and which condemns the brutal assassins of this race before all the world. Much of the material which I collected has already been published in the excellent volume of documentary material collected by Viscount Bryce.

STATEMENT OF A GERMAN MISSIONARY

I have space here to quote from only one document. Strange to say, this report was made to me by a German missionary. The statement was made to me personally and put in writing at the Embassy.

“We often did not know where to hide ourselves. From all sides, neighbours were able to shoot into our windows; during the nights, it was still worse. The sick nurse and myself lay on the floor in order to avoid the shots. The walls of the orphanage were broken through by cannon shots. I was obliged to leave the orphans all alone. There came an order from the Government that we were to hand over to them all our people in the house, big or small. All my requests and petitions were in vain; they assured us on their word of honour that they would be provided with comforts and sent to Ourfa. I then went to appeal to the Mutessarif. He stood, as First Commander, by the side of a cannon. He would not even listen to me; he had become a perfect monster. When I pleaded with him to at least spare the children, he replied: ‘You cannot expect the Armenian children to remain alone with the Mohammedans; they must leave with their nation.’ We were allowed only to retain three girls as servants.

EXTERMINATION OF MALES

“It was that very afternoon that I received the first terrible reports, but I did not fully believe them. A few millers and bakers, whose services were needed by the Government, had remained and they received the news first. The men had all been tied together and shot outside of the town. The women and children were taken to the neighbouring villages, placed in houses by the hundred, and either burned alive or thrown into the river. (Our buildings being in the main quarter of the town we could receive the news quite promptly.) Furthermore, one could see women and children pass by with blood streaming down, weeping. . . . Who can describe such pictures? Add to all this the sight of burning houses and the smell of many burning corpses.

MURDER OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

“Within a week everything was nearly over. The officers boasted now of their bravery, in that they had succeeded in exterminating the whole Armenian race. Three weeks later, when we left Mush, the villages were still burning. Nothing that belonged to the Armenians, either in the city or in the villages, was allowed to remain.

“In Mush alone there were 25,000 Armenians; besides, Mush had 300 villages with a large Armenian population.

“We left for Mezreh. The soldiers who accompanied us showed us with pride *where* and *how* and *how many* women and children they had killed.

“We were very pleased to see, upon our arrival at Harput, that the orphanages were full. This was, however, all that could be said. Mamuret-ul-Aziz has become the cemetery of all the Armenians; all the Armenians from the various vilayets were sent there, and those who had not died on the way came there simply to find their graves.

TORTURES OF VICTIMS

“Another terrible thing in Mamuret-ul-Aziz was the tortures to which the people had been subjected for two months; and they had generally treated so harshly the families of the better class. Feet, hands, chests were nailed to a piece of wood; nails of fingers and toes were torn out; beards and eyebrows pulled out; feet were hammered with nails, as they do with horses; others were hung with their feet up and heads down over closets. . . . Oh! How one would wish that all these facts were not true. In order that people outside might not hear the screams of agony of the poor victims, men stood around the prison wherein these atrocities were committed, with drums and whistles.

MASSACRES ON THE MARCH

“On July 1st, the first 2,000 were dispatched from Harput. They were soldiers, and it was rumoured that they would build roads. People became frightened. Whereupon the Vali called the German missionary, Mr. —, and begged him to quiet the people; he was so very sorry that they all had such fears, etc., etc. They had hardly been away for a day when they were all killed in a mountain pass. They were bound together and, when the Kurds and soldiers started to shoot at them, some managed to escape in the dark. The next day another 2,000 were sent in the direction of Diarbekir. Among those deported were several of our orphans (boys) who had been working for the Government all the year round. Even the wives of the Kurds came with their knives and murdered the Armenians. Some of the latter succeeded in fleeing. When the Government heard that some Armenians had managed to escape, they left those who were to be deported without food for two days, in order that they might be too weak to be able to flee.

“All the high Catholic Armenians, together with their Archbishop, were murdered.

“Up to now there still remained a number of tradesmen whom the Government needed, and therefore had not deported; now these, too, were ordered to leave and were murdered.”

NUMBERS OF THE VICTIMS

As this massacre of the Armenians, judged both by the numbers involved and the methods used, was the greatest single horror ever perpetrated in the history of humanity, the questions will often be asked, How many Armenians were actually murdered or died of starvation or exposure? How many were driven into a miserable exile? Following the important collection of documents made by Viscount Bryce is a careful summary of the facts. The total Armenian population in the Turkish Empire in 1912 is here placed at between 1,600,000 and 2,000,000. Of these 182,000 escaped into the Russian Caucasus and 4,200 into Egypt. One hundred and fifty thousand still remain in Constantinople. To this figure must be added the relatively small number of survivors who escaped death and are now living in hiding or are scattered in distant provinces.* We must conclude that a million Armenians were harried out of their homes in the peaceful villages and populous towns of Asia Minor. The murdered number from 600,000 to 800,000. The remainder, in pitiful want of the barest necessities of life, hold out their hands to the Christian fellowship of America.

* Since this was written the number of those who have taken refuge in Russia has been more than doubled, and the number of those who have escaped in different directions is also considerably increased.

We now come to a matter of crucial interest. In how far was the German Government responsible for the murder and deportation of the Armenians? *Let me say most emphatically, the German Government could have prevented it.* My strenuous and repeated efforts to enlist the interest of the German Ambassador, the late Baron Wangenheim, in behalf of the Armenians were fruitless. In my numerous interviews with him I tried to impress him with the thought that the world would consider Germany morally responsible for the crimes of her ally. I urged that even from an economic point of view it was not to Germany's advantage that the Turks should destroy the constructive elements of the country, as that would mean the economic ruin of the Turkish Empire. Then, in the event that Germany should become the ruler of Turkey, she would find it an empty shell! When I found that my arguments were of little avail, I suggested to my Government the desirability of bringing pressure on the Foreign Office in Berlin to the end that instructions be sent to the German Ambassador in Constantinople to insist upon a cessation of the atrocities. This resulted merely in a Note from the German Embassy to the Sublime Porte protesting against the horrors perpetrated by the Turks. The purpose of this Note was merely to absolve the German Government from all

responsibility. It had no practical effect whatsoever.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the Germans could at the very beginning have stopped these horrors.

The work of the American Red Cross in Turkey has been most efficient. It has been limited only by the funds available. While I was still in Turkey our national organisation, besides supplying us with funds for carrying on the work, sent us a large amount of medical supplies and wearing apparel of all kinds. As there are now few wounded soldiers to take care of, the Red Cross organisation in Turkey is free to devote its main efforts to helping the civilians in distress, including Armenian refugees. The American Red Cross has to date appropriated \$1,800,000 for relief work in Armenia and Syria.

ARMENIA MUST BE SEVERED FROM TURKEY

No definite solution may as yet be ventured as to the Armenian problem. One thing ought to be certain: The Armenians should be freed from the yoke of the Turkish rule.

I wonder if four hundred millions of Christians, in full control of all the governments of Europe and America, are going again to condone these offences by the Turkish Government? Will they,

like Germany, take the bloody hand of the Turk, forgive him and decorate him, as Kaiser Wilhelm has done, with the highest orders? Will the outrageous terrorising, the cruel torturing, the driving of women into the harems, the debauchery of innocent girls, the sale of many of them at eighty cents each, the murdering of hundreds of thousands and the deportation to, and starvation in, the deserts of other hundreds of thousands, the destruction of hundreds of villages and cities, will the wilful execution of this whole devilish scheme to annihilate the Armenian, Greek and Syrian Christians of Turkey—will all this go unpunished? Will the Turks be permitted, aye, even encouraged, by our cowardice in not striking back, to continue to treat all Christians in their power as “unbelieving dogs”? Or will definite steps be promptly taken to rescue permanently the remnants of these fine, old, civilised, Christian people from the fangs of the Turk?

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Any expressions of opinion on the subject of this pamphlet would be welcome. Address:—The Secretary, The Armenian Bureau, 153 Regent Street, W. 1.

