



## A Church and its Faithful Pastor

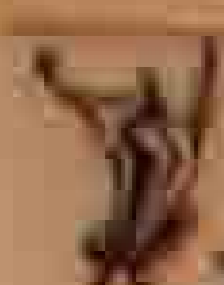
Bodvelli Abraham Hartunian.

All time, according to the common reckoning of Marash folk, was divided into three parts: from the beginning of the first war, the years that seemed ages during the war, and the hoped for days after the war. This significance than B.C. or A.D. Sometime the last man now living will tell the awful tale to his children's children and each year will add something of sacredness to the story.

Marash was one of the finest Protestant Christian centers in Turkey, with three strong churches in the city as well as twelve village churches with pastors. It boasted one of the leading theological seminaries in Turkey, a Girls College, and all that goes to make up a mission center of eighty years' <sup>substantial</sup> growth. Three flourishing churches in the city, well rooted in the fertile native soil, stood forth as light houses in the darkness. The First Church had been organized in 1860 meeting for years in a little building in the old mission compound, when in 1872 they moved into the commodious building in which they now worship. This church had attained a strength and a virility which is the glory of the missions. Its membership in full communion was over a thousand, while its Sunday School stood at about eleven hundred. The church not only supported itself and gave liberally to the poor, but even contributed substantially to the support of the weaker churches, having what was for those days the exceptional budget of over three thousand dollars.

The Bodvelli of this church, as one meets him in the brighter days of the war, impresses one as having a remarkable combination of virile personality and fineness of spiritual fiber. In him are united largeness of soul and richness of experience. He moves among his people with simple dignity worthy of being the spiritual adviser of men. A man slightly short and stocky, with a semetrical and well formed face and sharp eyes, his entire being radiates his personality and proclaims his message. He has the message of a prophet and the courage to give it in the pulpit or in private life. He knows well the human heart and has a tender sympathy for all human needs. Carefully attentive to the details of his large parish, he has yet had the vision of the church at large and from his pulpit in Marash his influence has gone thru all of Turkey.

This man, Bodvelli Abraham H. Hartunian, to give his name and title in full, had a sense of God's directing Providence born of the events of his own life. Born in 1873, he spent his boyhood in the village of Severak, east of the Euphrates. He was reared in a pious home and was sent to Aintab for his education. He was in his home village on Nov. 2, 1895 during that massacre. On Saturday afternoon when the market places were full the signal for massacre was given. A crowd of Turkish gendarmes and others were going thru the streets killing the Armenians with guns and swords when he was first overtaken. Cut off from his home he and the others ran to the nearby Christian church where his pastor and many of the people had already gathered. When the mob came about forty of them went into one of the school rooms in the same compound. The sight of their burning homes, the frantic yelling of their persecutors, and the shrieks of their friends unnerved the group even tho the pastor was in their midst. This young man who was then honored as a teacher, tried to have the pastor lead in prayer, but failing in this, he himself prayed, to the visible comfort of all. Soon the mob came and picked the aged pastor for death first giving him the opportunity to become Moslem. As the Turkish system was to take them in the order of their importance, after



killing the pastor with an ax they addressed the young teacher saying, "If you wish to live deny your religion". They struck his arm with a sword and hit him three times in the head with an ax. As many of the company as were not able to flee were killed.

About five hours later well on toward midnight a Kurd came into the rooms bent on robbing the dead of their clothing and such valuables as might have been previously missed. The teacher was just coming to consciousness and noting what was going on showed no signs of life. The Kurd was cutting his garments from his body with a dagger just as likely as not at any time to plunge it into his breast. A woman came in crying and asked why they still persisted in desecrating the dead and offered to take off the clothes which the Kurd desired. As soon as he dared to speak after the disappearance of the Kurd he said to the weeping woman, "Mary, I am alive. Will you bring me a cup of water."

Two women were soon bearing him up, as he, ~~was~~ exhausted by the loss of blood tried to walk to what they thought a place of safety on the roof of a nearby house. A roving band of persecutors soon found them; in spite of a woman standing in front of him they discovered the one they thought dead and again knocked him down with three strokes of the sword. One of the women fell on him saying that they must kill her first if they would kill him. Not content, they picked up a stone, hit him on the head, and went away. A second time the women bore him from his supposed couch of death and carried him to the house of a Turk where he was permitted to stay till morning.

Here he was captured the next day and told that he was wanted at a meeting at the government house and taken away. He soon saw that they were not taking him to the government house and ere long they came to a place where there were hundreds of corpses. They jestingly told him that he would soon have a meeting with these corpses. Among the bodies he saw that of his father. Mocking the seriousness of a firing squad they prepared to shoot him, when he was saved by what he always says was the direct prevention of God. A government officer whom he had never seen came by and said, "Don't shoot that man. He is a Moslem." An argument ensued but the government officer insisted and finally took him and put him in prison. Here he was kept for fifteen days severely wounded with a little cotton for dressing his wounds, and with nothing but dry bread and water for food.

The late war found him in Marash, a husband and the father of five children, and the busy pastor in his parish. Again the clock struck the dire hour. From the first he was a marked man, eyed with suspicion by the Union and Progress Party - a dangerous man, they thought, because of his valiant service. He was advised to leave Marash and was soon in Bagtche, a station on the railroad and the old mountain pass to which thousands had been driven as refugees. Put into prison because of his efforts to comfort people, he later became destined to tread the weary trail of deportation. He was sent with a party of about two thousand. They were subjected to every indignity and cruelty; the gendarmes struck them with sticks and whips and guns; they were driven without any opportunity to rest; families were ruthlessly separated; husbands were shot before the



eyes of their wives and children; and no woman's honor was respected. On one occasion a gendarme pointed his gun to shoot the pastor who knelt in front of him saying, "By your grace I will live". And something in his face deterred the evil doer.

When they had encamped just outside Marash, for Turkish whim had brot them back this way, their agony was increased by the sight of the homes to which they dared not go. His wife visited him for five minutes and was beaten like a dog for the offense. Their next halting place was Aintab, fifty miles away, where they lived for some time in one of the large caves of which there are many about the city. When the party left for the long and weary trip over across the Euphrates and down thru Mesopotamia some friends bribed the gendarmes who then let him escape to the hospital which is famous for the work of Dr. Shepard. But he must needs remain in Aintab while his wife is trying in the bitter days of exorbitant prices to support their children by spinning and finding a shelter in the buildings of the Seminary. The days of their seperation were two years and four months.

Such of the church as were permitted to remain- old men, some women and children- kept the fires burning on the alter of the church as well as in their hearts. An old minister in the congregation served as best he could amid the trying circumstances. The simply fact is that not a single Sunday during the entire war were the doors of the church closed. It is said that this is true of no other church in Turkey, and some inquiry also strengthens the belief. The bell could not ring to call them to church and they could not raise their voices in song lest it give the alarm to the enemy, but more fervent prayer never ascended to God. Not only did they worship God with the incense of pure devotion but they did not let the fires die on the alters of sacrifice. Altho Turkish money declined to one eighth of its value and wheat was twenty-five dollars a bushel, and in spite of the fact that most of them were boycotted in their business, men of this church loaned their money to the missionaries for work of relief in the days when funds could not come from Constantinople.

This pastor preaches to a crowded house every Sunday. Many of them have prints of suffering on their bodies and every heart treasures an experience of sorrow because of faithfulness to their religion. When he preaches to them the inner joy shines from their scarred and careworn faces. He says they need the Gospel to comfort their hearts more than they need bread to sustain their bodies. He would that they, even as he, might make of each of these experiences stepping stones to God. In my short journey in this world I have never seen a better example of the sublime power of the Christ than in this faithful church and its consecrated pastor.