

THE ARMENIAN MASSACRES.

A TURK once related to me how on the plains of Konia he met some shepherds with their half-famished dogs. He wanted to throw the dogs something to eat, when the shepherds interposed, saying that if once they touched food from strangers they would no longer obey. "So," he added, "it is with our treatment of Armenians."

When the great war broke out Turkey proclaimed neutrality. While few were deceived, it allowed sympathisers with the Entente, who included all the Armenian race, to vent their feelings, perhaps with a lack of caution, though little could affect a decision long taken. Between Armenians and the Committee of Union and Progress the rift was complete, since the latter followed the footsteps of Abdul Hamid, without even the occasional moderation due to his nervous apprehensions.

To the Western mind a massacre presupposes a prior condition of hatred so intense as to cause men to forget their normal restraints. In no other way is it explicable. There have never been wanting apologists who, while deprecating excesses, professed to understand the occasional outrages of the Turk, indignant at being exploited by the more economically developed Armenian. But though the Armenian is more developed, such a conclusion by no means follows. There is no evidence to indicate the existence at any time in Turkey of any widespread hatred or resentment. On the contrary, abundant testimony from the interior of Asia Minor shows that never had there been less fanaticism than in the period immediately preceding the massacres. Armenians and Turks were everywhere living side by side, usually on the best of terms. No one is more tranquil nor more submissive than the Turk, none less easily stirred to wrath. How, then, was the devilish paradox possible among a people so peace-loving and tolerant, possessing so many sympathetic and lovable qualities, and living in harmony with its Armenian neighbours, that in the space of a few months there should have taken place wholesale massacres which have surpassed in horror all the other horrors of this war? The Oriental sees action with a directness which often startles the Western. Such directness is mainly due to the absence of restraints, visible

The policy of Armenian extermination was conceived in far colder blood, planned methodically and carried out scientifically. Why delay? Turkey, who had been ready to stake her all against Russia, was by no means so eager for war with England and France. Months after the rupture arms had not been measured. The fear of the English Navy was immense. The expedition against Suez had ended in disaster. The Persian Gulf and Basra were lost. An entire army had perished in the Caucasus. The prestige of the Committee was then at its lowest ebb. Turkey, left to her own devices, with the burden of an unpopular war, with an unpopular and unrepresentative Government, face to face with seething discontent within, an uncertain Bulgaria threatening from the North, and the menace of Russia, was in no condition to enforce any such wholesale policy of murder as the Committee had in mind. When in February, 1915, the Allied Fleet battered down the ancient walls of Seddulbahr a semi-panic seized the capital, and every preparation was made for transferring the seat of government to the interior of Anatolia. Even the Embassies of the Central Powers had selected their residences at Eski Shehir. The Turkish treasure and archives had been despatched, and at Haidar Pasha, on the Asiatic side, trains were in readiness for instant departure. It seemed at the time only a question of hours before the British Fleet would sail up the Marmara.

Then came March the eighteenth. The attack, half driven home, ceased with the loss of three battleships. They were old and of slight value, save for the lives of gallant sailors. But the historical test of great occasions is rarely measured in terms of men or of material. One great overwhelming fact impressed itself on the Turkish mind in such a way as to form a basis for all future reasoning. The Allied Fleet had failed to force its way through the Dardanelles, the Straits were impregnable, therefore they could do what they liked. The tragedy of the sinister policy was contained in this deduction, for "what they liked" meant the extermination of the Armenians.

In its inner workings the Committee of Union and Progress still remains a secret organisation. Its ramifications are numerous, but all are controlled by a small inner circle of elect. It possesses certain intermediaries with the outer world. The most conspicuous of these is the Minister of the Interior, Talaat Bey. Talaat, not long ago, justified the Armenian policy on the ground of fear. In the days when he and the other Committee members were revolutionaries, he said, they had learned the methods of secret organisation from Armenian revolutionary societies with whom they then worked as allies. "I know what they can do, and I fear them," Talaat declared in private conversation. But this was

and invisible, which, like lenses to vision, have become the safeguards of life and property in the West. In the Orient, in spite of the new Parliamentary veneer, Governmental ideas are not unlike what they were in Europe centuries ago, in the days of the massacres of the Albigenses, or even when St. Bartholomew was a policy of statecraft.

After the revolution the Young Turks gained fresh credit from Europe, partly because they were masters of the situation and also through disgust at Abdul Hamid. But their leaders had been bred in Macedonian adversity. They had seen the principle of nationality run riot over that distracted province and had been the great losers in its name. The lesson of the Balkan Wars, stamped on their intelligence, was not a far-sighted policy of reconstruction, broad foundations of tolerance which should call into service every element of the Empire, but a narrow domination of the Turk enforced by whatever means appeared necessary. Abdul Hamid had aimed at preserving Turkey as a Moslem State, submissive to the despotism which he believed paternal. And because certain Armenians were refractory to this, and entertained separatist aspirations, he massacred them half openly, half surreptitiously. The new Turkish nationalism, built up in the dress of Europe, but with the spirit of Asia, was to prove far more ruthless than Hamidianism. Turkey, half Asiatic and half Balkan, had become European only in the sense of enforcing a rigid discipline in place of the haphazard methods of the East, which often prove a mitigation.

When war began the Russian Armenians responded cheerfully to the Russian mobilisation, and their wealthy merchants in the Caucasus equipped a body of volunteers from among former refugees and exiles from Turkey. Later, in private talk, Talaat explained the massacres on the ground of revenge. To these Armenian volunteers he attributed Turkish disaster at Sarakamish, the Turkish expulsion from Azerbaidjan, and the loss of Van. The explanation was an afterthought; yet if the acts of the volunteers were not the cause they undoubtedly embittered the feeling. The native press was purposely stirred by tales of cruelty and massacre committed by these volunteers—many, doubtless, true—for the corps was composed of desperate men whose wives had been outraged and families murdered, and who fought with wild fury and repaid their oppressors in like coin. When they seized the Governor of Van, who had gained sinister fame by riveting iron horseshoes on to the feet of Armenians, and was called "the blacksmith," it was said that they meted out a like punishment to him. Hence tales of Armenian outrages on the Moslems were widespread among the Turks, and were sedulously spread by officials.

only half true. Had the feeling been one of fear alone the life of every Armenian in Turkey was safe. It was because they did not fear them sufficiently, or rather because they found them isolated, deprived of support from the Entente and of sympathy from Germany, who remained complacent and acquiescent, to her eternal shame, that the massacres became possible.

Talaat stands out as the directing power in this policy. From him emanated the vast organisation, the details of execution, the oral and written instructions. But though the major guilt is his, though it is impossible for those who saw him during all those terrible months not to realise that he was himself in monstrous sympathy with the policy of extermination, yet he shared this fully with the other members of the Committee, Doctor Nazim and those who worked in the dark and held the leash over Talaat as he held it over Turkey—for his position was by no means so omnipotent or secure as many believed abroad, nor was the policy one so universally endorsed. No great discussion proved necessary. The policy of deportation and massacre was simply extracted from the pigeon holes where it had long lain dormant. Against Greeks, as well, it was to begin. There were wholesale expulsions from the Marmora and Bosphorus, and misery befell entire populations, for thousands were then cast adrift, expelled at a moment's notice from their homes. But the movement stopped short at massacre. Fearing its reaction at Athens, Germany intervened in time to arrest it, while doing nothing for the Armenians. The Germans have declared that their efforts herein were powerless, and that the Turks would not listen. It is altogether likely that to justify these statements the German Government will one day publish copies of its notes and memoranda on the subject, notes of a kind which those who have had experience in Oriental diplomacy appreciate at their true value, but which may satisfy their own people. The guilt was deeper, and, under the plea of not interfering with the internal affairs of an ally, nothing effective was done. That the German Embassy inspired the policy of deportation, as many Turks believed, is unlikely, though it was carried out under the plea of military necessity and the military direction was theirs. But that German officials were well aware of what the deportations meant, and with nervous apprehension refused to take effective steps to stop the massacres, is certain. A high German official at Constantinople expressed as his doctrine that any man could offer his life for his sovereign, but that one must be ready, if necessary, to sacrifice honour as well. The question of honour as he conceived it probably never presented itself to his mind in connection with the massacres, though many Germans keenly felt the shame, and were revolted at what went on. The German official view was to

obtain from Turkey the fullest possible assistance she could render, and to do nothing which could in any way impair this. Such assistance had already exceeded all expectations, and the success of the Ambassador's efforts was great enough to cause his admirers to discern in him the next Chancellor. But the price paid for this assistance included the blood of some six hundred thousand murdered Armenians.

In the interior of Turkey there were kindly German missionaries who, working with the American missionaries, did what they could to obtain relief. It was reported from Cilicia that the German consuls there would gladly have interfered except for the stringent orders received not to mix with "internal affairs." It was easier for German officialdom to believe, or profess to believe, in a widespread Armenian conspiracy and the necessity for its repression. On the plea that a widespread revolutionary movement organised from Russia existed amongst the Armenians, military necessity was said to require that they should be deported to regions where their presence would cease to be a menace. New homes, it was stated, would be provided for them at Zor and in the desert land, through which flows the Euphrates. Such was the official euphemism; though the grim humour of paternal solicitude which usually covers the most barbarous massacres in Turkey was abandoned for an armed policy of deportation, and its implied sequel, extermination. Asia Minor was to be rid of all Armenians and made into a purely Moslem bulwark. "It is possible that among the Armenians who suffer some may be innocent," said Talaat, "but how can I feel sure that they will not be the guilty ones to-morrow?"

As little or no hatred existed between the races, the hope of licensed loot came in aid to arouse instincts of brutality. When a naturally wealthy community was ordered to leave its homes and to carry away only movable effects, which were later plundered, it meant wholesale expropriation, followed by robbery and murder. Those who left tried to sell their land for a tithe of its worth, while for months afterwards Armenian stolen goods crowded the market. Yet this was the smallest aspect of the tragedy. The diabolical plot aimed at making the Armenians run the whole gauntlet of Asia Minor, where the country had been aroused to murder. The scheme was, first, by expelling them to transfer their wealth to the Turks, and then, by slaughtering them on the roadside, to have massacres take place without witnesses and to throw the blame on the Kurds if any reports should reach the outer world. The few Armenians who could get through, and out of a population of over a million and a-half a small and variously-estimated fraction have done so, were at liberty to find new homes

in the desert, where, impoverished and enfeebled, hemmed in by fanatical Arabs, they would no longer be a menace to the purity of the Turkish Empire under the beneficent rule of the Committee of Union and Progress.

Orders were despatched to all the provincial authorities to carry out this devilish intention, accompanied by verbal instructions to organise the murder of the men, wherever possible, by Kurdish bands. To the eternal credit of certain Turkish officials such orders were not everywhere carried out. At Smyrna, where no massacres have taken place, Rehim Bey, the Governor, proved powerful enough to resist their enforcement. In Syria, where Djemal wielded viceregal powers, in spite of his heavy hand, and though deportations have gone on, there was no actual murder. At Bagdad, where the Armenian community was small, Suleyman Nazif, the Vali, vouched for its peacefulness, and refused to lend himself to persecution. Shortly afterwards he was broken, as was Reshid Pasha, the Governor of Angora. When the latter was directed to carry out the persecution against the alleged rebellious Armenians, he replied that if their sedition were proved he would hang them with his own hand, but, because he could answer for their innocence, he could not enforce such a policy. He was removed, and in his place were sent a boy and a new chief of police, who, between them, organised the massacre which took place in the railway station at Angora.

In disentangling the fragmentary, and often haphazard, evidence about the recent massacres, the accounts obtained in most instances filtered through to Constantinople long after the occurrence of the crimes. Occasionally news did not leak out for months. It came from many sources. The writer will always remember the impression made upon him by one who, returning from an extended tour in the interior, brought the first warnings of the impending massacres, which he had learned from friendly Turks who were against them but powerless. He described the measure of the preparations then being made, and, as in the particular districts he had traversed Kurds were few, bands of murderers were being recruited from among gaolbirds. Ancient pistols and bombs had been collected to parade as evidence of the thwarted revolution. Even among cultivated Turks the talk of Armenian conspiracy was in the air, for there was a willing credulity, if only to condone excesses, and few were courageous enough to express disbelief.

The massacres were not simultaneous. The extent of territory and the vastness of the scale were too great to permit this, and the Government's ferocious energy proved insufficient to arrange all for the same time. Moreover, occasional officials were found

among subordinates who, while not daring to disobey orders, endeavoured to bring some mitigation to the horror of their execution. Massacres, however, began in late April or early May, 1915, and went on until, north of Aleppo, very few Armenians were left out of the million and a-half who had lived in Asia Minor, save in the Capital, at Smyrna, and in some places along the Bagdad Railway, from which they have been deported since. Usually the expulsions were carried out by police and constabulary, but often soldiers were necessary to enforce them. Against the Zeitoun region, where in 1895 the Armenian mountaineers defied Abdul Hamid, the authorities had always nursed resentment. They offered to arrange a surrender under treacherous promises, and, having cajoled the more timorous to accept this, destroyed the villages and expelled the population. Amid the horrors of the deportation babes were born by the roadside. Many, abandoned by their mothers, some of whom had died from their abrupt delivery, were picked up by a kindly German woman missionary. The wretched population, half-starved, though compelled to find fodder for their cattle, which had been requisitioned by the Government, were driven, more like wild beasts than human beings, eventually to disappear, while even the name of Zeitoun was replaced by the Turkish-sounding one of Suleymanieh.

The reports of this expulsion were the first to reach the Capital. It was not then realised that this only formed part of the vast scheme of murder, but soon the tales came in thick and fast from every quarter, surpassing each other in horror. So many reports from eye-witnesses have already reached the outside world that it seems unnecessary to dwell at any length on such harrowing scenes. Where over a million souls have suffered each one has had his history, though most went to death without witnesses. Yet one or two accounts may be narrated. At Erzerum the entire Armenian population was ordered to leave at brief notice. They were allowed to take with them only what they could carry. Among the deported was one family, the wealthiest in the place, whose daughters had been educated at Constantinople and could speak English. Twenty-five members of this family left Erzerum. Hardly were they out of the town before they were beset by Kurds, who murdered the men, and even the aged grandmother, and robbed the others of everything. Three weeks later only fourteen of this family still survived, and the oldest living male was eight years of age. The men had all been murdered before their eyes, the women violated at every village, and stripped of everything, till their guards, in pity, had to borrow rags from Turkish women to cover them. A Turkish lady travelling toward the Capital passed the melancholy caravan. She stopped her carriage, and,

thinking she too would like to kill an Armenian, at the guard's suggestion pulled out a revolver and shot one unfortunate. At every station Turks, accompanied occasionally by physicians, came to examine the women, and, when they found likely ones, would take them away to their harems. A foreigner, who saw these poor wretches at one stopping place, described them as more like animals than human beings, fighting for the bread thrown them by their guards, while mothers would implore strangers to take their children.

At Harput the process was somewhat different. Here the Armenians were arrested wholesale and thrown into the prisons. When these were full the occupants, many of whom had been tortured to extract confessions of conspiracy, would be led away at night into lonely valleys and there murdered. Not to waste cartridges, their murderers finished them with the bayonet. Thousands were slaughtered in this way. The Armenian professors at the American College, men of foreign education and high character and devotion, were involved in the fate of their race, and massacred, in certain cases after torture, for no other crime than that of being Armenians.

The melancholy tragedy extends in its grimness over the whole of Asia Minor. Its details are infinite, for where hundreds of thousands perished, though most died in silence, the tales of others hovered back like ghosts. The very few travellers who passed through that land of murder had horrible stories to relate of entire districts where the bodies of Armenians lined the roadside. At other times Armenians were done away with by drowning. There are lakes which engulfed thousands and precipices over which multitudes were driven. One authenticated report, even more revolting than the others, described Armenian boys being thrown into a stream and then shot by the soldiers when they found that some could swim and were struggling in the torrent. Throughout Turkey a silent and utter despair seized this unhappy people. To the question why they did not revolt the answer is easy. The able-bodied among them had long before been mobilised in those labour battalions which, without weapons, were solely employed under Moslem guards in building roads and trenches. Where the entire country was under arms and martial law, organised resistance became impossible, and artillery soon got the better of the few sporadic attempts made in despair, as at Ourfa, or in the ancient stronghold of Mithradates. A few of the more audacious spirits tracked across the roadless mountains to join the Russians in the Caucasus. But their numbers were small, and the great mass submitted with the silent resignation of the East. At Ismid, when the expulsions began, the Bishop, clad



in his finest sacerdotal, led his flock, chanting the hymn which the Israelites are said to have sung when they fled out of Egypt. And thus they departed, mostly to their death.

The method adopted at Constantinople was more cautious, for there were there too many witnesses. Only provincial-born Armenians, or those whose fathers were of provincial birth, were expelled. These would be rounded up in batches of one or two hundred and sent in despair toward a fate unknown. The Armenian deputies, Zohrab and Vartkes, were arrested in the first stages of the persecution. In earlier days both had worked with the Committee of Union and Progress, and had befriended its members in times when these needed befriending. One of the great members of the Committee, to-day a Cabinet Minister, during the counter-revolution, found refuge with Vartkes, who saved his life. But when approached in turn for aid he would do nothing. The two deputies were sent ostensibly to Diabekr. But on the road Zohrab died of "heart disease" and Vartkes from "a fall from his horse." As a Turk remarked, with grim humour: "It was altogether likely that, when murdered, he should have fallen from his horse!"

Enough has been said to indicate the gruesome nature of the vast tragedy. Details have been published elsewhere, and will for long continue to filter through. But the fiendish spirit in which the death of some six hundred thousand human beings was perpetrated can never adequately be realised. In all this war of horrors it must remain the crowning horror. Nothing has equalled the silently-planned destruction of a race, nor can German officialdom easily escape its terrible share of responsibility for association by acquiescence in this crime. The Armenian race in Asia Minor has been virtually destroyed. Along the Euphrates some tens of thousands of refugees may eke out a miserable existence, and are even now attempting to recreate homes. To these must go forth the first aid when aid becomes possible. At Constantinople, at Smyrna, and in Syria there still live many Armenians, though whether the end of the war will find them there is questionable. But, wherever they are, England, France, and Russia should, at the proper time, realise what they have suffered as victims of the ill-success of the Dardanelles expedition, and the great heart of America should go forth to them in their misery.

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