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PHOTO. BY

E.N.A.

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Trebizond, showing the East Wall and Citadel.



The main business street of Trebizond.



A view in the Trebizond district.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TURKISH ARMENIANS.

THE ARMENIAN QUESTION ONCE MORE—EFFECTS OF TURKISH INTERVENTION IN THE WAR—THE FORMER MASSACRES—ARMENIANS AND THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN—A POLICY OF EXTERMINATION—MASSACRE AND EXILE—SOME INSTANCES OF RESISTANCE—GERMAN RESPONSIBILITY—THE WORLD AND THE TURKS.

THE intervention of Turkey in the war promised ill for the Armenian people. All the reasons which had created the "Armenian question," with its history of persecution, massacre, and unfulfilled schemes of reform, persisted still, and were now aggravated by a war with Russia, which would be conducted in the Armenian borderland, and among the Armenian population.

The Armenians had always been a suspect nation in the eyes of the Turks. They were small enough to persecute, but not too small to fear. They were a subject people of capacity and intelligence, peaceful and industrious, anxious to learn. They were material which might have been of great use to the Turkish State had the Turk known how to use it. But the Turkish conqueror, always accomplished in the use of the sword, had added little in course of time to this primitive equipment for statesmanship. A Turkish historian might well reflect on the diverse qualities and capacities of the peoples who had at one time or another been incorporated in the Ottoman State, and how greatly they might have enriched it had the Ottomans known how to tolerate their diversity and employ it to a common end. But

in this respect Young Turk and Old Turk were alike, except that the younger type was more energetic and systematic in his repression of the non-Ottoman elements in the Empire. Of these, the Armenians, with their ancient Christian civilisation—its organised existence went back some fifteen hundred years—were the most conspicuous example.

THE EARLIER MASSACRES.

There had already been two great periods of Armenian persecution. In 1895-1897 Abdul Hamid had tried the policy of massacre on a generous scale, both in Asia Minor and in Constantinople. From one hundred thousand to a quarter of a million Armenians in all had perished. It was said at the time that he had declared that he would exterminate the race, so far as it was to be found in Turkey. But there were difficulties in the way of such a policy of thorough. It required a certain amount of organisation, time, and security from interruption, and though Abdul Hamid took great pains to cut off the Armenian regions of Asia Minor from the outer world, and succeeded in destroying a large section of the population, the eyes of the world were on him, and so



MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE ARMENIAN MASSACRES AND THE DEPORTATIONS TO THE DESERTS.

many foreign powers were hostile that he would no doubt have found himself embarrassed had he attempted to carry out the complete plan of extermination for which he certainly had no lack of inclination. "The way to make an end of the Armenian question," he had said, "was to make an end of the Armenians." The Young Turks had not failed to pick up this crumb of statesmanship which fell from the old Sultan's table. They had, indeed, made an experiment on a small scale in 1909, when massacres took place at Adana, in Cilicia. These, like the Hamidian, were done under orders. By whom exactly they were ordered, and precisely why, is still a matter of debate. Some would make the Young Turk party in general responsible; others, among whom is Sir Edwin Pears, ascribe the responsibility to the Young Turk extremists at Salonica. The reason offered is that the Armenians, interpreting too largely the coming of self-government to Turkey, had read into it a measure of equality and fraternity for the smaller nationalities which the Ottomans observed with astonishment and anger. The blood of the Armenians, they argued, must be cooled; and cooled it was by the time-honoured process of wholesale massacre.

The Armenians had welcomed the fall of Abdul and the grant of the Constitution, and even after Adana there was a party among them which continued to pin its faith to, and to work with, the Young Turks. This was the Dashnakzutiun, who argued that the Young Turk *régime* had come to stay, and that it would arrest the decay of Turkey. Abdul had been weak, and had only held his ground by playing off the foreign Powers against each other, but Turkey, under her new masters, would hold off all foreigners alike, and the Armenians had therefore more both to hope for than to fear from the Young Turks. In the meantime, a new scheme of reform in the administration of Armenia, which involved a certain measure of instruction and control by European officials, was accepted by the Porte, and was about to be put into operation when Turkey entered the war. It was at once cancelled, but for the time the Turks did not attack the Armenians. They were occupied in preparing their campaign against the Russian Caucasus and Egypt, and in organising their armies against possible attack in Europe.

THE ARMENIANS AND RUSSIA.

But the position of the Armenians was clearly critical. They had not always looked towards Russia with confidence, for Russia's Armenian subjects had had their grievances and discontents, but the Liberal administration

of Vorontzoff-Dashkoff, recently Viceroy in the Caucasus, had given them fresh hopes, and in any event the system of government by massacre, handed on by Abdul to his successors, inevitably led them to look to Russian arms for their deliverance. The Armenians, it has been said, are used to persecution. But there is no credible evidence that massacre, rape, and pillage become acceptable by repetition, and we shall not wonder if the only division of opinion among the Armenians, when they learned that Turkey was at war with Russia, was as to whether it would be better for Armenia (with an opening on the Mediterranean at Alexandretta) to become an autonomous State under the protection of Russia, France, and England, or an autonomous element in the Russian Empire. But whatever Armenians at large thought about these questions, to which only the course of the war could give an answer, it is quite certain that they were much too circumspect

to take sides openly against the Turks. The ox does not offer his throat to the butcher's knife. On the Armenian border, beyond doubt, the Armenians waited eagerly for the Russians' coming, and, on their retreat, saw them departing with a sinking of the heart. The Russian Armenians, aided by the community in foreign countries, had given great assistance to the Russian army, hoping thereby to deliver their fellow-countrymen in Turkey, and for this aid the Young Turks took a fearful revenge.

Already, by the beginning of 1915, the Volunteer Armenian regiments serving with the Russians numbered from 8,000 to 10,000 men, and it was estimated that by the time spring came, and the contingents had gathered from overseas, there would be twice that number, or more, available. Some of these were men who had themselves lived in Turkish Armenia in their youth, and had been

driven out by the Hamidian persecutions. Such a man, for instance, was Hamazasp Servantzian, one of the leaders of the Volunteers, who had escaped into Russian Armenia in 1895, and later organised armed resistance to the Moslem mobs who fell on the Armenians in the Caucasian rising of eight years ago. Such men, knowing perfectly the people and the topography of the borderland which the Russians invaded, were undoubtedly of service to the Russian cause. But in this the Turks were only paying the penalty for their gross incompetency as a governing people, and they did not, in fact, allege the activity of the Russian, the foreign, or the refugee Armenians, as the reason for their attempt to destroy their own Armenian population. It was, however, the disasters of the first campaign, culminating in the severe defeat of Sarikamysh, which seems to have



Talaat Bey.

[E.N.A.]



Mersina : The water front.

[E.N.A.]



A general view of Erzerum.

[E.N.A.]



Armenian children in the refugee camp at Port Said.



Distributing soup to some of the Armenian refugees in camp at Port Said.

decided the Young Turk leaders to carry out a policy on which, in principle, they may have decided earlier in the war. As the Turkish troops and the Kurds invaded the Russian Caucasus and North-Western Persia they had sacked and destroyed the Armenian villages as they went. But these were either on enemy or neutral soil. In the spring of 1915 the Turks began work within their own borders. They put into execution a systematic plan to make an end of the Armenians.

TALAAAT'S SAYING.

Talaat Bay, the Young Turk leader who had been president of the Relief Committee at Constantinople, after the Adana massacres, was the leader in this scheme. When Mr. Morgenthau, the American Ambassador at Constantinople, went to see him—"I am taking the necessary steps," said Talaat, "to make it impossible for the Armenians even to utter the word autonomy during the next fifty years." The policy was carried out with a degree of success in organisation which the Turks seem rarely to attain except in massacres. In April, orders were sent to all the governors of provinces, chief military commanders and heads of police that the Armenian population was to be disposed of. Some general principles, apparently, were laid down, but the details could safely be left to officials not unaccustomed to the execution of such projects. The orders were carried round the countryside. Says a letter from Van:—"On the day before the massacre which took place in the region of Van, couriers on horse visited all the Turkish villages situated far from the telegraph lines, and took the firman of Sultan Mehmet ordering the massacre of all the Armenians."

The Turks have offered certain pretexts for their conduct, but without industry or show of anxiety lest the world should not accept them. The commonest is that the Armenians were guilty of a revolutionary movement, which aimed at setting up a separate independent State, though the truth was that, except in the

border zone which the Russians for a short time occupied, the Armenian villagers were only anxious lest they should be suddenly fallen on by their Moslem neighbours. This pretext, however, was for the foreign public. In the vilayet of Van the reason offered was that some of the able-bodied Armenians had deserted after being called up for service. Doubtless, elsewhere there were other explanations; but it matters little what they were. This was not a case of executions of conspirators, though certainly many Armenian notables were executed; nor even of massacre of the male population, though the males were massacred. It was an attempt to destroy a whole people by murder, outrage, and starvation, without distinction either of age or sex.

THE FIRST STEP.

The able-bodied males were called up for service. Those of them that bore arms were disarmed and employed as workmen on the construction of roads and the like tasks. They were moved from their own districts, and little authentic information about them was afterwards received. Such as reached the outer world declared that they had all been killed. "We learn from a sure source," runs one letter, "that Armenian soldiers of the Erzerum province, working on the Erzerum-Yerzhingha road, had all been massacred." Equally, those of the province of Diarbekir had been massacred on the Diarbekir-Urfa and Diarbekir-Kharput road. From Kharput alone 1,800 young Armenians were sent off as soldiers to Diarbekir to work on the roads there. All of them had been massacred. We have no news about other localities, but there can be no doubt that the soldiers there have been made to suffer the same fate." Had there been even less information, it would have been safe to assume that, in their determination to break up the structure of Armenian society, the Turks would not have spared the young Armenian men.

The men who were not called up for service and afterwards despatched were disposed of in various ways,

A general disarmament first took place, and for the purpose, as for that of guarding their prisoners, the Turks organised a special gendarmerie of released criminals. Large numbers of imprisonments took place; sometimes without pretext, sometimes on the allegation that the possession of books or literature betokened revolutionary designs. Sometimes the accused were executed in prison. Some were tortured. Some were sent from prison to exile and disappeared. The manner of death of this or that notable would be afterwards reported; others were simply not heard of again. At Diarbekir the prisoners were all killed, and the Bishop, refusing to sign a certificate saying that they had died a natural death, committed suicide. His deputy was beaten to death. Many of the bishops were

handed over to court-martials, and nothing was learned of their fate. At Constantinople twenty well-known Armenians were hung, and many more were carried off and seen no more. The Armenian members of the Chamber of Deputies were not spared, friends though they might have been of the Young Turk leaders, or Dashnakists, who had worked with the Young Turk party. Zohrab, perhaps the best known of the Armenian deputies, was sent off into Anatolia and murdered—one account says burnt. Haladjian, formerly Minister of Public Works, and a friend of Talaat Bey, was sent on a similar journey and disappeared. Other deputies and notables were sent with Zohrab, and are believed to have died with him. But these were

only individuals whose prominence drew special notice to their fate. Along the shores of the Black Sea, in Eastern Asia Minor, and in Cilicia an identical policy was followed. One place differed from another only in the mode of murder. At Trebizond, as the Italian Consul bore witness, a large part of the Armenian population, which was from 8,000 to 10,000 in number, was put into boats, taken out to sea, and drowned; the rest, according to the evidence of Armenians, were sent into exile. At another place, some sixty of the citizens were rushed through a court-martial, and at once shot outside the town. At a third, the men were pole-axed in front of graves already dug for them. So, for the

most part, all the male population was dealt with. The old men were sometimes spared an immediate death, to be reserved for longer suffering.

THE FATE OF THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

With the women and children were adopted other methods, the key to which is the determination of the Turks that the Armenian nation should be disrupted so that it could not again be made whole. Says Lord Bryce, in a compendious summary on this point:—

"The fate of the women was, if possible, worse. A large proportion, including most of the younger women, were driven from their houses into the streets. Turkish officials picked out those whom they wished to be sent to their harems, and

others were taken to the markets and sold into slavery, into the worst kind of slavery, a life of prostitution. The children shared a similar fate. The elder ones were mostly killed. The younger ones were taken to the market and sold at prices which ranged from eight to fourteen shillings. They were sold only to Mussulmans, and on the condition that they should be brought up as Mohammedans."

The women that were taken to Turkish harems were also forcibly converted to Islam. But for the Armenians generally there was no such freedom to escape death by professing conversion to Islam, as there had been in the massacres of Abdul Hamid. The Turks were not now seeking converts, nor did they take the trouble to pretend it.

THE EXILE.

Death for the men; the harem for the younger

women; the market for the younger children. But there were still large numbers of women and children to be removed. Orders were sent that they should be driven from their homes towards the Euphrates and Tigris, into the deserts that lie to the south of the Armenian vilayets. At the outset of the journey their treatment varied according to the character of the officials. In some places they were given a few days' notice of expulsion, permission to attempt to sell their property, or to hire a waggon for the journey. In others they were told that they could carry with them what they liked, and that their escort would furnish them with food. In all cases their end was the same. No sooner were they well on their



Turkish reserves in Palestine marching to join the colours.

[Newspaper Illustrations.]

way than they were robbed of their property and money. The escorts joined in the pillage with the Moslems by the wayside and the bands of robbers who came down to share in the spoil. The women were maltreated by their guards or carried away. A survivor of one caravan told how at every village the women and children were paraded, so that the local Mussulmans might make their choice. Food was denied these miserable people, and, added to all, came the terrors of the desert. Of their journey into exile, as piteous as any that history has recorded, we have the narratives of eye-witnesses—the statements of some of the victims and the reports of missionary workers, including Germans, who were on the spot. “They go on foot,” says one account. “The women with child are drowned in crossing the rivers. Fathers, mothers, children are separated in different directions. Nothing is more horrible than the sufferings of the girls, who are exposed to the worst outrages imaginable on the part of the gendarmes escorting.” The children died by the wayside. “We have discovered fifteen babies,” wrote a German missionary. “Three of these are already dead; the others were all terribly emaciated. Oh! if we could write all we see.” Another German missionary worker saw and described some of the Armenians when already in the desert:—

“For these mountaineers the desert climate is terrible. I reached a large Armenian camp of goat-skin tents, but most of the unfortunate people were sleeping out in the sun on the burning sands. The Turks had given them a day’s rest on account of the large number of the sick. It was evident from their clothing that these people had been well-to-do; they were natives of a village near Zeitun, and were led by their religious head. It was a daily occurrence for five or six children of these people to die by the wayside. They were just burying a young woman, the mother of a little girl of nine years of age, and they besought me to take this little girl with me.

“Those who have no experience of the desert cannot picture to themselves the sufferings entailed by such a journey—a hilly desert without shade, marching over rough and rugged rocks, unable to satisfy one’s scorching thirst from the muddy waters of the Euphrates, which winds its course along in close proximity.

“On the next day I met another camp of these Zeitun Armenians. There were the same indescribable sufferings, the same accounts of misery. ‘Why do they not kill us once for all?’ asked they. ‘For days we have no water to drink, and our children are crying for water. At night the Arabs attack us, they steal our bedding, our clothes that we have been able to get together; they carry away by force our girls, and outrage our women. If any of us are unable to walk, the convoy of gendarmes beat us. Some of our women threw themselves down from the rocks into the Euphrates in order to save their honour—some of these with their infants in their arms.’”

The homes of the dispossessed Armenians were filled by Moslem immigrants.

CASES OF RESISTANCE.

Not all the Armenians were led like sheep to the slaughter. Well organised and quickly executed as was the Turkish plan, warning of it was received in some districts, and a defence was rapidly arranged. In a number of villages spoken of by refugees resistance was offered, but the silence which followed was sufficient evidence of the result. Such was the case of Shanan, twenty miles south-east of Trebizond; the last that was heard of it, months ago, was that 800 men were holding it against a Turkish siege. At Karahissar 4,000 Armenians entrenched themselves in the town and held out for a fortnight. Ammunition ran short, and the Turks, bringing

up heavy reinforcements, captured the place and put the population to the sword. So also Vartemis, in the region of Lake Van, where 2,000 Armenians are said to have been burnt to death in the church—a deed that recalls one of the worst horrors of the Hamidian massacres, when the church at Urfa was burnt, together with all the women and children seeking refuge in it. A splendid resistance was offered in the Sasun region, west of Lake Van, where there are forty Armenian villages surrounded by Kurdish tribes. Here, some 15,000 Armenians gathered together in May, and for some months beat off the Turks. At the close of the summer it was reported that the Turks had brought up large forces, and that communication with the district was cut off. The Armenians had retreated to the mountain tops, where they hoped to hold out, if they could still succeed in manufacturing their ammunition, and winter did not drive them into the hands of their enemies in the plains or destroy them with its rigours. Most successful of all was the resistance of the Armenians near Antioch. Hearing of the Turkish plans, they retired into the mountains between Antioch and the sea, and were there joined by a number of refugees from the Cilician towns. They were poorly armed, but for almost two months they repulsed a Turkish force of over 3,000 men. Fortunately, when their ammunition was running low, they were able to signal to a French cruiser off the coast, which, with two others, came to their aid. The Armenians, it was found, were anxious only to get more ammunition and continue the struggle, but were finally persuaded to go on board the ships, and, to the number of nearly 5,000, were carried off to safety. Alas! that the gallant resistance of this brave race should elsewhere have been hopeless.

THE REFUGEES.

Only in one district did large numbers of Armenians succeed in making good their escape. In May, the Volunteer Regiments which accompanied the Russians captured the important town of Van and held it until July. Under their protection gathered many Armenians, who would otherwise have fallen in the general massacre. But in July the Turks sent fresh forces against the Russians, who were compelled to fall back to the frontier, and took with them the Volunteers. A great mass of refugees, estimated at about a quarter of a million in number, joined in the retreat—to remain meant certain death—and set out on a painful journey of over 100 miles to safety. “There are no railways nor even good roads in Turkish Armenia,” says one account, “the means of transport are very scanty and slow, so that the thousands of sick women and children, exhausted by the sufferings of the last five months, could hardly move on without help. Hard pressed by advancing Turks, who wished to cut off the line of retreat, the Armenian Volunteers fought several bloody rearguard actions to hold back the Turks, and to secure the safety of these 250,000 refugees.” The sufferings of many of these hapless people were scarcely less than those of their kinfolk deported to the desert. Hunger and thirst afflicted them, and disease took toll among them. At one time, it is said, there were in Erivan (just over the Russian frontier) more than 3,000 children below ten years of age waiting to be cared for; most of them were orphans.

In all, however, from Van and the northern border regions, over a quarter of a million Armenians are believed to have reached safety in the Russian Caucasus, perhaps many more, for the stream of refugees was flowing across

the frontier before the Turks had given the order for extermination. But apart from their exodus to the Caucasus, it is impossible to speak with certainty of any large body of Armenians as having escaped. A few thousands were carried off from Syria by the French cruisers; some reached Bulgaria from Constantinople, where, since no general massacre broke out, part of the Armenian population probably remained; in other places, as at Smyrna, they profited by the rare leniency of their Moslem neighbours; and we must allow for certain fractions which either maintained themselves, as at Sasun, in the mountain regions, or survived the journey to the desert. But it is estimated that between half a million and eight hundred thousand Armenians perished in the persecution, and by the time that they had made an end the Turks had probably done almost all that lay in their power to destroy the Armenians within their borders.

THE RESPONSIBILITY.

Communication with Constantinople during all this time was fitful and uncertain, except through the German Press, which remained almost completely silent on the massacres. It is not possible, therefore, to say whether Talaat and Enver met with any opposition to their schemes in the ranks of the Young Turk party. If there was any opposition it was again, as in the days when Turkey was carried into the war, invertebrate and without effect on the execution of their plans. But the reports may be set on record. Ahmed Riza, formerly President of the Chamber, is said to have made the massacres one of the counts in his indictment of the Government on the opening of the Parliament in the autumn of 1915, and the Sheikh-ul-Islam, who resigned his office, is said to have done so on this ground. But that is about all. So far as is known, the Turks, Young and Old, leaders and led, exhibited no squeamishness about the destruction of over half a million people, most of whom could, by no stretch of imagination, be suspected of any crime, political or other.

It is necessary, also, to record what can be said about the part played by the Germans at this time. There is no evidence that they exerted themselves in any way, official or unofficial, to stay the hand of the Turks. Formal representations they may have made in the hope of saving their face before the world in later days. The correspondent of the American United Press, in one of his August messages from Constantinople, stated that the American Ambassador had asked the assistance of his German and Austrian colleagues, and that "they had been successful to the extent of securing definite promises from the leading members of the Young Turk Government that no orders will be given for massacres." Unless this referred to Constantinople alone, the appeal to the Turks came much too late to save the Armenians; and if it was limited to the capital, the German-Austrian Ambassadors are sufficiently condemned. But at the end of August, as details accumulated of the horrors which had taken place in the interior, the Ambassadors apparently

became alarmed, and are said—the report is unconfirmed—to have made a protest against the massacres (then almost consummated), and to have asked for a declaration that they were free from responsibility. No declaration of that kind could save them. The one Power which could exercise influence with Turkey at this time was Germany. Whether her influence would have been effectual it is impossible to say, but she made no serious effort to exert it. It was said that when Mr. Morgenthau urged the German Ambassador to intervene, he got the answer, "We are very sorry, but we cannot interfere in the internal affairs of Turkey." The answer may never have been made, but there is little doubt that it faithfully represents the official German attitude. The unofficial mind, as represented by Count Reventlow, adopted it fully and frankly, adding only that the Armenians were a disorderly and rebellious people, who deserved what they had got. A nation, like a man, must be content to be known in some sort by the companionship it keeps. A Power that needed Turkey's military assistance as badly as did Germany would, perhaps, have been slow to antagonise her ally, but it was not a mere accident that the Power which trampled on the Belgians and murdered civilians at sea should have been linked with another which destroyed a helpless people wholesale. At the bottom of all these crimes alike was the naked brutality of the conquering savage. The spirit of Genghiz Khan united German and Turk congenially.

The Entente Powers could not stop the Turks; the Central Powers would not. It was hoped in England that the neutrals, led by the United States, might raise their voices so loudly that Germany would hear and go beyond formal protestations of regret and innocence. The hope was vain. The smaller neutrals, who had been unable to protect even their own citizens from German attacks on the high seas, could scarcely be expected to risk offending her on behalf of the Armenians in distant Anatolia. The generous feelings and humanity of the Americans might have been thought to hold out a better prospect. But popular sympathy found no adequate reflection in the Government's official policy. The President's policy was the defence of American interests, wherever they were threatened, but he was in no way disposed to head a League of Humanity, or make himself the mouthpiece of the civilised neutrals of the world. No doubt, from the standpoint of the difficulties of her domestic politics, and the anxiety of the great mass of Americans to keep out of the war, he could say a good deal on behalf of his policy of caution. But there was no risk here of going to war, or even of severing diplomatic relations. It would have been a great deed in the world's history had the United States, leading the neutrals, laid the fate of the Armenians before the German Government and appealed for its assistance. Who can say positively that Germany dare altogether have rejected the appeal? But the attempt was not made.