

WHAT DO THE ARMENIANS WANT?

By

JAMES G. MANDALIAN

"For, albeit we are but a small beather, and weak in might, and oft conquered by other kingdoms, yet many deeds of valor are found in our land of Armenia."

MOSES OF KHOREN
(Fifth Century)

~

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The recent war gave birth to a host of national questions each demanding an urgent solution. The publicity given these cases has, to a certain extent, kept the general public advised as to their merits. This is not, however, the case with the Armenians. The Armenian case is an old case and a forgotten case which is being revived. It is very natural therefore that the average man or woman knows very little, or nothing about it, and is apt to ask a number of questions. What is the Armenian case? What is the Armenian Question? What are the Armenian grievances? What are their claims, and how valid are these claims? Just what is it that the Armenians of the world want?

It is impossible to understand the Armenian case without answering all these questions. As a matter of fact the answers are the whole point. Without the answers there would be no point to the present agitation on behalf of the Armenians. The Armenians honestly believe that they have a case; that they have had a case for one hundred years, if not five hundred years, which has been insisting on a solution. They honestly believe that the time for that solution has come.

Who Are the Armenians?

The Armenians are one of the oldest races of history. They are the contemporaries of the ancient Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Hittite, the Assyrian, and a host of ancient races which have become extinct. Historic Armenia has always centered around the biblical Mount Ararat. According to Armenian tradition Haig, the legendary father of the Armenians, challenged the authority of Belus, the despot of Babylon, slew him in combat, and gathering his family, settled on what later was to be known as the home of the Armenians. This was the beginning of the Armenian state.

Anciently, the territory between the Caucasus and the Black Sea in the north, Mesopotamia in the south, Cappadocia to the west, and

the Caspian Sea to the east was known as Armenia. The western portion of this territory was designated as Armenia Minor, while Armenia proper was often referred to as Armenia Major. Cilicia in Asia Minor, on the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, at one time also became the home of the Armenians and was known as Lesser Armenia. Armenia reached the height of her territorial expansion during the reign of King Tigranes the Great (94-56 B.C.) when, in addition to the three Armenias, it embraced Cappadocia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Parthia and Palestine.

On the Historical Scene

Some historians maintain that the Armenians of today are the descendants of the aborigines of Urartu who developed a civilization of their own as early as 3,000 B.C. Others have tried to prove that they are the descendants of the ancient Hittites who thrived about the same time. Still others maintain that Armenians originally came from the region in Europe known as Thrace. These started early migrating into Asia Minor and, through successive stages, moved into Phrygia, Cappadocia and, finally, in the seventh century B.C., settled in what later was to be known as Armenia proper. The accepted view is: Armenians are a merger of the natives of Ararat region and the newcomers from Europe. It is assumed that the newcomers called themselves "Armenians", while the natives used to call themselves "Hai" or "Haik", and their country "Hayastan". To this day the Armenians have adhered to the latter nomenclature, while to the outsiders they are known as Armenians and their country as Armenia. The name "Armenia" first appears in history on an inscription of Darius Hystaspes, a Persian king, dated 510 B.C. The Armenians definitely appear on the scene of history between the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

Between East and West

It is said that geography will make or break a people. In no case in history has this maxim been as true as it was in the case of the Armenians. Situated on the cross roads of the EAST and the WEST, from the time it emerged as a well-defined political state, for fully twenty-six centuries, Armenia was made the battle ground of successive hordes of predatory empires such as the Medo-Persians,

the Seleucids, the Byzantines, the Mongols, the Arabs, the Sassanids, and lastly that scourge to mankind known as the Ottoman Turks. Each invading horde brought in its wake sword, fire and destruction. Armenia, as the battle ground, was devastated over and over, its cultural monuments destroyed, its trade broken, its agriculture ruined, its economy paralyzed, itself bled white. Such a continuous flow of destruction would have broken the back of any people. And yet, miraculously enough, and thanks to their pertinacity, their creative energy, and their resilience, the Armenians were able to heal their wounds and to start the work of reconstruction all over again. This was made possible by the rise of a number of national heroes, each the founder of a new dynasty, who rallied the shattered remnants and salvaged the wreckage by restoring the state. These successive dynasties, the Haigazuns, the Artaxiads, the Arzacidis, the Bagratidis, and, finally the Rubenians contrived to overthrow the foreign yoke and succeeded in maintaining Armenia's political independence for centuries.

The Long Black Night

With the striking of the Turkish scourge, not only Armenian, but all resistance collapsed. Subjugated were a host of small nations, each of them far superior in civilization to the conquering Turk. Subjugated were the Greeks, the Rumanians, the Bulgarians, the Serbians, the Albanians, the Macedonians and the Armenians. Then came the long black night, the night of enslavement, of exorbitant taxation, of official robbery, of looting and rapine, of murder and massacre, of humiliation, disgrace, and human debasement. For the conquerors, life became an organized loot and an orgy of sensuality; for the enslaved peoples, it was a living death. And this physical nightmare, planted on the breast of groaning peoples, continued for five centuries without any relaxation.

Shedding the Chains

Finally, during the second half of the Nineteenth century, through the tortuous windings of international politics, all the enslaved nations were liberated from the hated Turkish yoke—the Rumanians, the Greeks, the Serbians, the Bulgarians, and the Albanians, one after another, except the Armenians.

Betrayed by the Christian powers on whom they had pinned their hope of liberation, disillusioned, disappointed and bitter, the Armenians now turned to revolution as the sole means of their salvation. This led to a great revival of literature which made the revolution the central, burning theme. Presently, there sprung up a host of writers, philosophers, poets, novelists, journalists and public workers who poured out such a volume of impassioned literature that the period has been compared as second only to the Armenian Golden Age of the Fifth Century. Revolutionary groups sprang up independently of each other in all parts of the country and were eventually integrated in the great merger which was called the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

World War I

When World War I broke out the contest for Armenia's freedom had made considerable progress. Accumulated Turkish abuses, Turkish incorrigibility and proven incapacity for reform—to say nothing of incapacity to govern minorities—combined with the relentless pressure of the revolutionaries, had forced the Armenian Question to the attention of the powers as an issue which no longer would brook delay. A plan was finally evolved whereby the Armenian provinces of the interior were to be given a kind of semi-autonomy under two European High Commissioners. But, the moment when the Armenian question seemed on the verge of solution, World War I broke out and, with it, Armenia's struggle for freedom met with a disastrous reversal.

One significant fact generally overlooked is that, in both world wars, the Armenians actively assisted the democratic powers, whereas the Turks denied that assistance either through active enmity or a profitable neutrality. In World War I the Turks sided with Germany while the Armenians stood with the democratic allies—an allegiance which cost them nearly half their numbers.

The Turks have tried to build a case on Armenian adherence to the democratic cause as justification for their mass deportation and massacres of 1915. They have tried to explain their crime as military necessity and have gone so far as to suggest Armenian disloyalty to the Turkish government. The facts are the exact opposite. When the war broke out, the Armenians of Turkey affirmed their

citizenship loyalty to the government and, as such, they were drafted in the Turkish army. But the Turks had entirely different notions about the Armenians. They looked upon the war as a godsend to rid themselves once and forever of the Armenian Question. They decided to solve the Armenian Question by exterminating the Armenians. Accordingly, in the spring of 1915, the Turkish government issued the order for general deportations. The Armenian able-bodied men in the army, after being disarmed, were organized into labor battalions and were systematically decimated. The remainder, the women, the children and the aged, were herded together like cattle and, under the escort of gendarmes, were driven to destinations unknown. In this orgy, over one million were done to death by devilish ingenuity, some escaped to the deserts of Der-ez-Zor, Arabia, Syria, Lebanon and Greece, and others contrived to join their brothers in the Caucasus where they found protection under the Russian forces. The authorship of the Turkish government of these mass deportations and massacres, as a deliberate plan of annihilation, has been amply proved by contemporary historians, newspaper reports, the testimonies of eye witnesses and British and American document books beyond any contradiction. Out of a population of over two millions, fully one million were killed in cold blood, and another million were made fugitives and expatriates. There was no question of loyalty or disloyalty to the Turkish government here. Armenian loyalty to the Turkish government ceased the moment they saw that they were being deliberately, systematically and diabolically exterminated. After that, it was a case of self preservation. When the Turkish government had thrown away the mask, and the die had been cast, the Armenians whenever and wherever they could, armed and defended themselves. Then followed a series of stands, in Ourfa, Shabin Karahissar, Van, Aintab, each as heroic and as glorious as the stand of immortal Musa Dagh. That is a phase of the Armenian contribution to World War I which is generally unknown. That chapter of the history of World War I has been written only in the Armenian language.

The Armenian Contribution to World War I

It is only fair that the wholesale murder of one million innocent men, women and children, and the forcible ejection from their ancestral homes of another million should be regarded as a part, although

a very tragic part, of the Armenian contribution to the Allied Cause in World War I. But the Armenian contribution was not limited only to sacrificial phase. Their heroic resistance at a dozen localities detracted tens of thousands of Turkish regulars who, otherwise, would have been employed in fighting against the Allied armies. In addition, fully 300,000 Armenian fighters enlisted in Russian armies, and tens of thousands of volunteers fought on the Caucasian, the Palestinian and European fronts. In 1917-18, following the defection of Russia and the subsequent abandonment of the Caucasus front, the Armenians took over that front and for eight months delayed the advance of the Turkish and German armies towards the Baku oil fields, thus cutting off Germany's desired fuel supply and helping in the final Allied Victory.

Some Authoritative Testimonies

"In the beginning of the war, the Russian Armenians organized volunteer forces which bore the brunt of some of the heaviest fighting in the Caucasian campaign. After the Russian army's breakdown, the Armenians took over the Caucasus front, fought the Turks for five months, and thus rendered a very important service to the British army in Mesopotamia. They served alike in the British, French and American armies, and have borne their part in Gen. Allenby's victory in Palestine. The service rendered by the Armenians in the common cause can never be forgotten."

Lord Robert Cecil

"The collapse of the Turkish Palestinian front was due to the fact that the Turks sent all their available forces to the Caucasus and Azerbaijan fronts where they fought the Armenians."

Gen. Liman von Sanders.

"The principal factor that forced the breakdown of the German army in the west was due to the lack of fuel supply, created by the failure of the Turks to reach Baku in time."

Gen. Ludendorff.

In recognition of these services the Armenians were greeted by the Great Powers as their "Little Ally." Lloyd George, the

British Prime Minister, more than once declared in Parliament that the Armenians must be freed once and for all from Turkish rule. Georges Clemenceau assured in the name of the Allied Powers that Armenians would be given their national independence. President Wilson, both during and after the war, became the champion of Armenia. Lenin and Stalin, likewise, recognized unreservedly Armenians' right to self-rule and independence. This right was further confirmed by an official decree of the Russian government on December 30, 1918, and lastly was recognized by the first constitution of Soviet Russia.

America Supports Armenia's Cause

Most unselfish and sincerest of all, if not the warmest and the most spontaneous, was the attitude of the United States government and the American public opinion toward Armenia's cause. The 12th point of President Wilson's famous Fourteen Points (January 12, 1919) which defined the Allied war aims, was a direct promise of Armenia's freedom. President Wilson, during the war, in Versailles Peace Conference, and afterwards, was the foremost champion of Armenia's liberation, and in this was cordially supported by both the Democratic and Republican parties. On December 10, 1918, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the leader of the Republican Party, offered a resolution in the Senate expressing the hope that the Peace Conference would make arrangements for helping Armenia to establish an independent republic. This resolution was cabled to President Wilson on February 8, 1919 to which the President replied, "This has struck a responsive chord in my heart. I beg to assure the Committee that I shall be as watchful as possible to do my utmost in Armenia's behalf." That the two major parties differed in their methods of approach—President Wilson and the Democratic Party stood for a mandate, while the Republicans demanded outright recognition of Armenia's independence and the grant of a loan by way of consolidating the new republic—made no difference in the Armenian view that the American political parties stood solidly behind their cause,

That President Wilson and the political parties were supported by the overwhelming majority of the American people in their sympathetic understanding of Armenian aspirations was demon-

strated by the scope and the intensity in which the Armenian Question busied the American press and the pulpit. President Wilson was literally flooded with telegrams, resolutions and petitions, signed by distinguished clergymen, university and college professors, civic leaders, members of Congress and thousands of laymen, urging upon him the necessity of freeing the Armenians and settling the Armenian Question once and forever.

The Armenians still recall with deep gratitude the wave of sympathy which swept the United States from coast to coast in response to Armenia's distress in those tragic days when the after effects of a terrible ordeal at the hands of the Turk, the utter destitution, the poverty, the sea of wants, and the stalking famine had combined to drain their last ounce of energy and to render their plight unbearable. According to Dr. J. L. Barton, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Near East Relief, the American Relief Administration provided over 50,000 tons of food with a value of \$10,630,872 from Congressional Relief appropriation, and the American Government gave its notes covering this amount. By a later act of Congress, March, 1920, the United States Grain Corporation contributed 40,000 tons of flour, representing a government gift of \$4,813,144.

The Commonwealth Fund cooperated in a special feeding program for children through an appropriation of \$750,000. Other funds and clothing were received from the American Relief Administration, the Red Cross, the Canadian Fund, for cattle and seed grain, Lord Mayor's Fund and Friends of Armenia. The United States was the only government to appropriate relief for Armenia during this period. This American charitable relationship brought in its train a natural American political interest in Armenia and the fate of the Armenian people, especially in view of the fact that the question of Armenia's freedom, which at the time was included in the Allied war aims, was in full accord with these ideals in defense of which the United States had entered the war.

The Independent Republic

The war and political developments eventually led to the creation of the Armenian Republic which declared its independence on May 28, 1918. The new republic was promptly recognized by the United States and the Allied Powers. On April 26, 1920, the Allied Su-

preme Council in session in San Remo extended an invitation to the President of the United States to define the boundary between Turkey and Armenia in the provinces of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis, and the President delivered his verdict on November 22, 1920. Unfortunately, his willingness to have the United States take over the mandate of Armenia was not concurred to by the Senate. Meanwhile, on August 10, 1920, the Treaty of Sevres between the Allies and Turkey by which Turkey recognized Armenia as an independent state was signed. The treaty contained the following articles concerning Armenia:

Section VI.—Armenia

“Article 88—Turkey recognizes Armenia as already recognized by the Allied Powers, as a free, independent state.

Article 89—Turkey and Armenia, as well as the other High Contracting Parties, agree to submit to the arbitration of the President of the United States the determination of the boundary between Turkey and Armenia, in the provinces of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis, and to accept his decision, as well as other conditions that may be prescribed by him relative to the access of Armenia to the sea and relative to the demilitarization of the Ottoman territory adjacent to said boundary.”

The Republic of Armenia was a signatory to this treaty.

The Betrayal

Simultaneous with these developments, a new Turkish national movement led by Mustafa Kemal which had already repudiated the Sultan's government and its commitments as a vanquished power, thanks to the collapse of Allied unity and to the secret or overt aid extended by these same allies to a former enemy, had been making steady headway. The revitalized Turkish state now attacked Armenia which, deserted by her former allies, and now thoroughly exhausted, finally succumbed after a brief life of two and a half years. Thus, in addition to the loss of the Wilsonian boundary as envisaged in the Sevres Treaty, Armenia was forced to cede to the Turks the territories of

Kars and Ardahan. Finally, the infamous chapter was closed with the Treaty of Lausanne, signed July 24, 1923, between the Allied Powers and Turkey which completely ignored the Armenians. The Delegation of the Armenian Republic which had been excluded from Lausanne Conference on this occasion lodged the following protest:

"The delegation which signed the Sevres Treaty for Armenia, reserves and insists upon all the rights which the Powers, during and since the war, solemnly recognized, and which were duly embodied in the Sevres Treaty, and reincorporated and reaffirmed by the decisions of subsequent conferences. Whatever reception a solemn protest may have at this time, the Delegation, by virtue of the mandate which it holds from the Armenian people is impelled by a clear sense of duty to denounce respectfully the act of Lausanne. It leaves the verdict to history."

The Contribution of the Armenians in World War II

Disillusionment and betrayal, bitter as they were, were no deterrents to Armenian adherence to the Allied cause in World War II. Armenians world over, beginning with Soviet Armenia to France, from Egypt to North and South Americas, stood with the democratic powers in their war effort against the Axis powers to the full extent of their material and physical resources, Soviet Armenia alone gave to the Soviet Army 300,000 fighters and 62 generals, foremost among whom was the hero of the Baltic front, Gen. Ivan Bagramian. Armenian divisions bore the brunt of the Nazi onslaughts at Sevastopol and Stalingrad where they sustained fearful losses in stemming the Nazi tide. Armenian decorations for heroism and distinguished service in action achieved a high ranking as compared with other nationality groups of the Soviet Union. In France, 10,000 Armenian boys in the French Army fought valiantly against the Nazi enemy until the capitulation of that noble ally.

Here in the United States the Armenian Americans supported the war effort by working in our defense factories and by their generous purchases of war and savings bonds. In New York and California the Armenians won first honors for having doubled their

quotas in War Bond drives when other nationality groups barely fulfilled, or fell short of theirs. Approximately 20,000 American boys of Armenian descent served in the U. S. Army with honor and distinction. A good proportion of these did not even wait to be drafted but volunteered their services when the call came. The Armenian Youth Federation alone, one of a dozen similar Armenian American youth organizations, sent nearly all its male members into the service, while the remaining girls on the home front launched bond drives and secured sufficient purchases to buy two flying fortresses which fought in their name. The first American casualty in the landing on North Africa was an Armenian boy by the name of Lt. George S. Koushnareff (Koushnarian). The only American who was called a "One man army", the terror of the Japs, the man who was credited with having killed more Japs single handed than any other fighter, was an Armenian boy, Sergeant Victor Maghakian of Fresno. The one and only American casualty to the research of the atomic bomb was an Armenian boy from Hartford, the scientist Harry K. Daghlian. Hundreds of Armenian boys in the service won distinction in battle and were rewarded with decorations and presidential citations. Lieutenant Ernest Dervishian, Richmond's Congressional Medal of Honor winner, is an Armenian boy. It is a tribute to the devotion and the discipline of the Armenian soldier that during the entire war not one of them was courtmartialed.

The Conclusion

What then is the import of all this? What the Armenians are trying to say, briefly, is this.—*The Armenians are not begging for charity. They have no eyes on the property of other peoples. They are not asking for something which does not belong to them. Their request is simple. They are asking for simple justice. They are asking for what is rightfully and lawfully theirs, namely, the restoration of their ancestral home which they recovered in the last world war, and of which they were robbed through the inability of Christian nations to fulfill their promises.*

The Armenians believe that their centuries-old dream is about to be realized. Already a movement of immigration is on foot in the hope that Armenia's boundaries will be enlarged. The government of Soviet Armenia has invited the Armenians of the world to return

to the fatherland and already the expatriates in Turkey, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, France, Syria, Lebanon and Iran have hastened to registration centers in order to file their intention to return. By June of this year more than 200,000 were registered, anxiously awaiting the hour of departure. In various Armenian centers funds are being raised to meet the expenses of transportation and other necessities of life.

The immigration movement has generated an unprecedented enthusiasm in Armenia where distinguished intellectuals, scientists, professors of colleges and universities and artists have issued ardent calls to their brothers and sisters in dispersion, inviting them to return to the fatherland. The villages and cities of Armenia have been feverishly busy, raising funds for the reception and the settlement of the returnees. By June these contributions had totaled 25,000,000 rubles (about \$5,000,000) and the work has only begun.

This spontaneous outburst is positive proof of how strong is the desire to return to the homeland in all Armenian hearts. This is but a modicum of what they justly should demand. They have earned, and richly deserve this much of justice. They are an ancient and honorable people. When the ancestors of the Europeans were still living the life of semi-barbarians, the Armenians had a two thousand years old civilization behind them. They are the first nation of history to espouse Christianity as their national religion. They have made an imposing contribution to world's culture. They have had their golden and silver ages in literature and the arts. Some of the most cherished manuscripts of antiquity whose originals have perished are preserved today only through their Armenian translations. The Armenian translation of the Gospels is known as the "Queen of Translations". The architecture of the Reformation Era was directly influenced by Armenian masters. The magnificent St. Sophia of Constantinople and the Mosque of Adrianopolis are monuments of Armenian architecture. For centuries the Armenians were the sole guardians of European civilization in the east. Many have named Armenia the Switzerland of the East. Agriculture, industry, commerce, the arts and the sciences, and literature were developed by the Armenians long before their expansion on world scale. The Armenians have been known for their love of peace, their valor in self defense, their thrift, their initiative spirit, and their generosity of soul.

During World War I, the Turks came near annihilating this people. They murdered one million, and ejected from their homes

another million. They confiscated their property and lands. Nearly one million of them fought a last ditch battle and founded their republic. That is the Soviet Armenia of today, a flourishing but small country of scarcely 12,000 square miles, hardly adequate for its population. The lands which the Turks seized from the Armenians are now uninhabited, desolate and barren. The Armenians are demanding that these lands be returned to them so they can settle upon them their million fugitives.



