

THE ARMENIAN ATROCITIES AND THE JIHAD

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FOR six hundred years a nation eminent as the first Christian nation, and to whom most of the world was indebted for a knowledge of Christianity, has suffered from periodical massacres at the hands of the Turk. It has been my misfortune to witness or investigate six massacres of Armenians, and to have considerable acquaintance with other like events in Turkey. The recent event transcends many times even the great massacres of 1895-6, and like all previous massacres is attributable primarily and solely to the Ottoman government. While reports of local details may be inaccurate, it would seem impossible to exaggerate the horrors of these last atrocities. In all probability more than a million unarmed and offenceless people have lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands of women and girls have suffered things worse than death.

The extermination of the Christian population of Turkey was determined more than a year ago when Turkey decided to enter the war. Religious fanaticism had apparently nothing to do with the project, though its aid was much invoked and occasionally it played a part after the massacres began. Those who as heads of the Young Turk Party, or of the Committee of Union and Progress, ordered the Jihad or "Holy War," were notoriously spoken of by the Moslems as infidels. While their natural tendencies and hereditary propensities would tend to estrange them from the Christians, it cannot with any justice be said that their decree of Jihad was induced by religious fanaticism. The Jihad has been a failure. In spite of every possible effort on the part of the Young Turk leaders, Persian, Indian, Egyptian, African and Russian Mohammedans refused to participate.

It is conceivable that the suggestion of deportation came from a foreign source, and that the execution and details of barbarity are purely Ottoman. That Germany has had a share in it is proven by the fact that German officers have been seen herding the women and children along the road. The instructions of German officers to their Turkish students have been, "Injure the enemy in every possible way and spare nothing to trouble and horrify them." That the German people are cognizant of and party to these atrocities I cannot believe, but that the German military are I cannot doubt. The censorship would undoubtedly hide such things from the people, and I feel sure, did the German people know the facts, they would rise, as one man, and demand an accounting of their military leaders.

The recent series of massacres began in the Province of Van as long ago as January, 1915, not to include the killing of Armenians in the army previous to that. Upon the withdrawal of a punitive force of Russians policing Persia and making reprisals for Ottoman raids in Persia, the Christians of the principal border towns, Serai and Bashkalla, were wiped out. In February and March the district between was devastated, and Turkish officers attempted to spread the belief that Russians and Armenians had outraged and mutilated Kurdish women. These stories were denied by Turkish soldiers present throughout the campaign. The Governor-General of Van made his boast that he would wipe out the Armenians of the city and province in twenty-four hours. About April 19th this was attempted, and an investigating committee later reported the names of 55,000 people killed throughout the province of Van within two or three days.

In Agantz, the chief city of Ardjesh district, the local governor (Kaimakam) was beloved and trusted by the Armenian population, who had no reason to suspect him of sinister motives. He and all the officers of the province had the same instructions, viz. : The Moslems might choose the women and girls they desired for their harems, but the men and boys and the rest of the women *must be exterminated*. "Any Moslem known to protect a Chris-

tian was to have his house burned first, the Christian slaughtered before his eyes, then his family and himself, and we were informed by Moslem refugees in the American Mission in Van that the first house burned by the Turkish soldiers in Van was the house of a Moslem who protected a Christian."

The Kaimakam of Ardjesh summoned all the men, sending gendarmes for those who were tardy. They gathered at the government building without suspicion. Two thousand five hundred were taken out in groups of fifty and shot down by the soldiers. One of the leading men, known as Prote (Protestant) Harotu Agha, wounded in five places, crawled out at night from under the mass of corpses and escaped to his home. There he hid for five days in a straw bin, when the Turks discovered him, dragged him out and shot him in the street before his family. Only three men escaped from the entire town, two of them natives of Bitlis. This was undoubtedly the most merciful massacre in the province. In the villages smaller bands of soldiers and gendarmes were located, but did not work so systematically. The villagers who could defended themselves till their ammunition was exhausted and enabled many women and children to escape to the mountains, where some of them, wounded and naked, subsisted for twenty days with only snow to eat.

News of the massacres in the villages having leaked into Van, in spite of a cordon of Turkish soldiers and trenches around the Armenian quarter, the Armenian young men rallied, and when attacked defended the city heroically, holding the city through a twenty-eight days' siege, being relieved at the critical moment by the approach of the Russian army.

The government then spread through the other provinces the false report that the Armenians of Van had rebelled and committed horrible atrocities upon the Moslems, flaying men alive, etc. This falsehood was used to stir up the Moslems in other parts of Turkey.

In spite of these efforts the Moslem population of the cities could not be induced generally to attack their neighbours, and the government was compelled to use

soldiers and gendarmes and Kurds from other districts, giving them as an inducement whatever plunder they might find on their victims who were almost invariably stripped. One Kurd boasted that he had killed fifty in one night and secured Lt. 150 from their persons.

Professors of colleges were seized and tortured to death in an attempt to make them say that there was a plot among the Christians to rise against the government. Their finger-nails were torn off with pincers, beard and hair pulled out. They were starved, hung from the rafters by a rope tied to one arm all day, and head down from a rope tied to one leg all night, beaten on the soles of the feet several hundred blows with a heavy club till the feet were smashed to pulp, and then compelled to walk, marched out on the road and killed.

The tortures and mutilations of women and girls I dare not describe.

All this was done by Mohammedans, and was possible because they were Mohammedans—a fruit of their religion, but not caused by religious fanaticism, nor do I believe that in any but isolated cases did the followers of Mohammed understand or consider their acts as part of a Holy War.

Outside of the determination of Enver Pasha and Talaat Bey to keep Asiatic Turkey exclusively Turkish, and the military compulsion in the extermination of Christians, the atrocities were dictated by a lust and greed which we should have supposed were possible only to Moslems.

Van, Turkey.

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