

THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF THE TURKISH MASSACRE OF ARMENIAN SUBJECTS.

BY CYRUS HAMLIN.

TO ANY one who has a competent knowledge of the Turkish Empire such an act of inhumanity would seem too absurd to be possible. For, first, They, the Armenians, have always been a very useful people in all the common occupations of life. They are the best farmers of Asia Minor, the best carpenters, masons, and stone blasters and workers. They are traders and carriers. Much of the transportation of goods is in their hands.

Second, For five hundred years they have been a most loyal people. The influential Turkish newspaper, the *Tirjinn Hakikat*, of February, 1896, declared that this people had always been loyal and useful until influence from abroad had changed the complexion of affairs. Then, moreover, they are under the sacred protection of the Koran—the law.

Third, They had no affiliation with any people or prince that would help them in disloyalty. The Catholic Armenians had France; the Greek rayahs, Russia; but the Protestant and Gregorian Armenians, nine-tenths of the race, had absolutely no friend among the Great Powers. They have always been entirely in the hands of the Turk. They have enjoyed their own language, their religion and their schools.

Fourth, They were powerfully protected against violence by the sacred law of *adet*; established custom. Any work, enterprise, building, institute that has been allowed by government and people to exist and to be known, can-

not be disturbed, even by the Sultan. The Armenians had been protected by Selim III. (1789–1807), Mahmoud II. (1808–1839), Abdul Medjid (1839–1861), Abdul Aziz (1861–1876).

Fifth, They had lived amicably with the Turks. The rich and powerful had always oppressed them. But the common Turks were friendly with them. The Turk is an honest, kind, social, hospitable being, if you do not tread on his corns; and the stranger is very foolish to do that. I have experienced unbounded hospitality from Turks. They are, however, capable of a terrible fanaticism.

Other reasons might be added; but these are enough to show that, when the present Sultan, Abdul Hamid II., came to the throne, the Armenians were the safest people in the world. They were favored subjects of an empire guarded by the Great Powers of Europe. How, then, has the bloody change occurred? It has come about, in some way, in accordance with the motives that govern men; otherwise, the whole story is a bloody romance, and cannot enter into human history.

The question is clearly solved in the personal history of the reigning Sultan. He came to the throne in 1876, finding the Empire in the most disastrous condition. He took pains to announce himself as its deliverer. He would be the only source of power; and every officer, of whatever grade, should be responsible to him, and should faithfully perform his duties or feel his sovereign's wrath. From his course it is plain that he formed the design of having all his officers Moslems. He found the sub-departments of all the high offices of the Empire filled with Armenians and other rayahs. He would have them all Moslems. He would convert his rayahs by making it very greatly for their interest to exchange their faith for Islam. He prosecuted this work with untiring zeal. Thousands were thus degraded from office, but to every one it was said: "Become a Moslem, adopt Islam, the only true

faith, and you will not only keep your place but you will be in the way of promotion." He was doubtless not a little disturbed when he found how few converts he thus made. The Armenian nation has always shown a very firm attachment to its language, faith and people. So many vacant places were filled with ignorant and incompetent Moslems that complaints came from heads of departments that, with such incompetent aid, they could not perform the duties of their offices. This made the Sultan plunge into the subject of education with a zeal never shown by any previous occupant of the throne. He would establish Moslem schools in every village of his Empire, and he would close up every Christian school in Asia Minor. He met with many difficulties. France forbade his touching the Catholic schools, and Russia the Greek schools.

His efforts for Moslem education are worthy of praise; his persecution of the Protestant and Gregorian schools has been persistent, crafty and effective. No treaties have embarrassed him. He balanced England by the counter weight of Russia, and his formal treaty with her was annihilated. American treaties were set aside by experiments. I have twenty-two records of gross violations of treaty obligations in the years 1890, 1891 and 1892; some of destruction of American property, some of invasion of personal rights. Of these twenty-two only one received serious consideration. The burning of Mr. Bartlett's house at Boudour, near Smyrna, received nothing but diplomatic consideration until the report that an ironclad would be sent to Smyrna caused immediate payment. Since then eight buildings, houses and institutions, have been burned, with furniture, clothing, libraries; the conflagrations directed by Turkish officials, and the intention to pay an indemnity awaits the threat of an ironclad. In all this persecution of the schools, every teacher was kindly advised that acceptance of the true faith would secure

better work and pay. That tentative effort at converting his useful rayahs yielded little fruit, but there were mightier forces in his power.

Taxation has always been oppressive. Under Hamid II. it has become destructive. A tenth of everything is required by law, but the tax gatherers decide the tenth and often take a fifth or a half. Sometimes it was levied upon imaginary products, which they were accused of having sold or concealed. All who were unable for any reason to pay the sum imposed, were cast into those vile, filthy prisons, of which I have tested two specimens of the better sort, where the stench seemed death! There was uniformly the same answer to complaints and petitions: "The true faith and you are free." To this oppression of the tax gatherers was added a fiercer robbery of the Kurds. They have always been considerate robbers of the Armenian villages in the eastern parts of the Empire, bordering upon the Kurdish mountains. Their aim was never to destroy a village, but to keep it for another year. Often villages made contracts with Kurdish tribes to give them a certain portion of live-stock, grain, fruits and grape molasses (*pek-mez*) for their protection from the fellow-tribes. This happy state of moderate robbery came to an end and became ruthless and destructive.

Full twelve years ago Dr. Barnum of Harpoot wrote me that he "saw nothing in the future but Islam or extermination." However, up to that time Hamid II. had no intention of becoming what he finally did become, The Assassin of the Bosphorus! His patriotic object was to unify his Empire and make it as purely a Moslem Empire, as the Czar was making his a Slavic Empire. If Pan-Slavism was the true and wise law for Russia; Pan-Islamism was equally good for Turkey. That was his guiding star, and no obstacle should stop his progress. A solid Moslem Empire would be strong against the world. He was the spiritual infallible head of one hundred and eighty millions,

and he spent hours in reasoning out to our minister, Judge Terrell, that he was thus the strongest monarch in the world. It is evident that through all this discipline he had grown stronger in his resolution to convert his rayahs. He would finally give them the choice, "Islam or Gehenna!" In our milder language it would be "Islam or Death!" But here the Koran would have blocked his way had not Russia come to his aid. Russian political agents had watched and studied the career of the Sultan, and had put to work the same policy which produced the Bulgarian horrors, so greatly to her advantage in the Russo-Turkish war at the beginning of Hamid's reign. A number of professed patriots, Russian Armenians, began to stir up revolution. They falsely claimed to have revolutionary coteries formed through the Empire and they were collecting funds, which went into their own pockets, ostensibly to arm these bodies and to prepare for a blow. The whole thing was supremely ridiculous, and the Armenian people were nowhere deceived. At a safe distance, in foreign cities, revolutionary organizations sprang up under the same name, Hunchagist, and began to belch forth their attacks upon the Sultan and his government and to call upon the people to strike for freedom. Absurd and wicked as this was, it answered Abdul's purpose perfectly. He had the papers translated and spread over the Empire. The Armenians were denounced and could all be destroyed, not as rayahs but as rebels, unless they would save their lives by conversion. He had prepared both Turkish and Kurdish cavalry for the bloody task. The awful savagery with which it was applied at Sasun, September, 1894, far exceeded his expectations. Children were tortured unto death in the presence of their mothers. Safety was offered to the mothers if they would but say "Mohammed is the Prophet of God." A Turkish soldier returning to Bitlis declared to a missionary that the uniform reply was, "Jesus of Nazareth." Probably no martyrs were ever

subjected to greater torture than these Armenian women, whose husbands and brothers and children had been killed in their presence.

Hamid endeavored to break the force of this fearful assassination of so many thousands of innocent men, women and children, by two falsehoods officially published and sworn to by Armenians themselves. First, that there had been no massacre, and second, that it was the suppression of an Armenian rebellion. The signatures to these declarations were obtained by fearful tortures, in some cases even unto death. At Sasun, Hamid entered upon that fearful period of massacre for which he had been eighteen years in training. Guided by a false political principle in union with a fanatical faith, he had gradually laid aside all principles of humanity and of justice, had evaded and transgressed his own sacred law by exalting into a revolution a wicked and despicable scheme which he should have set his foot upon and crushed, and which even if let alone had no power for evil. Then followed those two years, 1895 and 1896, of the diplomacy of the Great Powers and the play on the part of Hamid of promised reforms and real massacres.

The grim reality is at least one hundred thousand innocent and loyal subjects massacred, two thousand four hundred and ninety-three villages destroyed, five hundred and sixty-eight churches destroyed and three hundred and twenty-eight converted into mosques, six hundred thousand persons and more driven out, their homes and property destroyed or confiscated. Exposure to cold, hunger, want of clothing, bedding and household utensils, constant prevalence of typhoid fever, have doubtless carried off more than another one hundred thousand in these four years. His converts are not equal to half the number he has killed, and for the most part they will prove worthless citizens after all.

Now there is a lull in the storm. It is quite possible

that after he has sufficiently humiliated and weakened the Greeks he may return to the Armenians and finish his work. Whatever he may do now, he has brought ruin upon his Empire and debased himself to the fitting name of the "Assassin of the Bosphorus." But let it not be said that Islam alone has disgraced the close of the century with atrocious inhumanity. It is a dark blot upon the Christianity and civilization of the age that one of the old so-called Christian Powers of Europe has envied Hamid II. the sole infamy of being "*The Assassin*," with this preëminence, that it has slaughtered the men and women of its own faith; which Hamid never did. Our government and people will not copy the cold inhumanity of the Great Powers of Europe, but will drive the Assassin from his prey and give freedom and prosperity to the land he has cursed so long.

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