

## CHAPTER I.

### A CHAPTER OF HORRORS.

#### CERTIFIED EVIDENCE OF THE MASSACRE IN SASSOUN.

WE, the undersigned, by examination and comparison, have satisfied ourselves that the following statements are verbatim reports, written under the dates which they bear, by American citizens who have spent from six to thirty years in Eastern Turkey. We have examined also the fact that they are written from six different cities from one hundred to two hundred miles apart, but forming a circle about the centre in which the massacres occurred. For the personal safety of the writers the names of the places cannot now be made public. They are independent reports from a country where refugees and returned soldiers of the Sultan speak of what they know. We have the utmost confidence in these statements and regard them worthy the belief of all men.

In the name of a suffering humanity we urge the careful perusal of these statements, and recommend that all readers take measures to make the indignation of an outraged Christian world effectually felt. We deprecate revolution among these helpless Turkish subjects, but bespeak cordial co-operation in bringing to bear upon Turkey the force of the righteous condemnation of our seventy millions of people.

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Wm. Lloyd Garrison.

Samuel J. Barrows.

GEO. C. Lorimer

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by parties in the vicinity at the time, who are impartial, thoroughly experienced in sifting Oriental testimony, familiar with the Turkish and Armenian languages, and of the highest veracity. No one letter would have much force if taken alone, for it might be a large report of a small matter; but these eleven letters are written independently of one another, at different times, and from seven different cities widely apart, five of them forming a circle around the scene of destruction. The evidence is cumulative and overwhelming.

There is absolute unanimity to this extent: that a gigantic and indescribably horrible massacre of Armenian men, women, and children did actually take place in the Sassoun and neighboring regions about Sept. 1, 1894, and that, too, at the hands of Kurdish troops armed by the Sultan of Turkey, as well as of regular soldiers sent under orders from the same source. What those orders were will probably never transpire. That they were executed under the personal direction of high Turkish military officers is clear. There can also be no doubt—for the official notice from the palace was printed in the Constantinople papers in November last—that Zekki Pasha, Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, who led the regular troops in the work of extermination, has since been specially honored by a decoration from the Sultan, who was also pleased to send silk banners to the four leading Kurdish chiefs, by a special messenger.

The latest, most accurate, and comprehensive document in this correspondence is No. 6.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE BY THE AUTHOR.

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THESE letters are written by men who can have no possible motive for misrepresenting the facts in the case, while, on the other hand, each writer subjected himself to personal danger by putting such statements upon paper and sending them through the mails. Several of the documents have gotten through Turkey by circuitous routes, in some instances having been sent by special messenger to Persia, and so on to this country. Others were never risked in the Turkish mails, but have come through the British post-office at Constantinople.

It must be borne in mind that no writer was an eye-witness of the actual massacre; nor could he have been, inasmuch as the whole region was surrounded by a military cordon during the massacre and for months after. The letters are largely based on the testimony of refugees from that region, or of Kurds and soldiers who participated in the butchery, and who had no hesitation in speaking about the affair in public or private until long after, when the prospect of a European investigation sealed their lips. Much of the evidence is, therefore, essentially first hand, having been obtained from eye-witnesses,

Vice-Consul Shipley, representing Great Britain in the inquiry held at Moosh from January 24 to July 21, 1895, substantiates the evidence published in this chapter a year ago:

*"We [Messrs. Vilbert, Shipley, and Prjevalsky, the representatives of France, England, and Russia] have, in our report, given it as our conviction, arrived at from the evidence brought before us, that the Armenians were massacred without distinction of age or sex; and, indeed, for a period of some three weeks, viz., from the 12th of Aug. to the 4th of Sept. (O.S.), it is not too much to say that the Armenians were absolutely hunted like wild beasts, being killed wherever they were met, and if the slaughter was not greater, it was, I believe, solely owing to the vastness of the mountain ranges of that district, which enabled the people to scatter and so facilitated their escape. In fact, and speaking with a full sense of responsibility, I am compelled to say that the conviction has forced itself upon me, that it was not so much the capture of the agitator Mourad, or the suppression of a pseudo revolt, which was desired by the Turkish authorities, as the extermination, pure and simple, of the Ghelieguzan and Talori districts."*<sup>1</sup>

British Vice-Consul Hampson, who made a tour of the whole region in August, 1895, adds:

*"That large numbers perished seems certain, the whole region being absolutely surrounded by Kurds and soldiers under the Mutessarif of Guendj, and Major Sali Effendi, now in command. Nobody and nothing belonging to the Armenians was purposely spared."*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Blue Book, Turkey, 1895, No. 1, Part I., p. 206.* <sup>2</sup> *Ibid., p. 200.*

## THE EVIDENCE.

### No. 1.

[The reader should take notice that this first letter was written over four months before the massacre actually occurred.]

D . . . , April 3, 1894.

It does seem in this region as if the government were bent on reducing all those who survive the process to a grovelling poverty, when they can think of nothing more than getting their daily bread. There is good reason for thinking that unless so-called Christian nations extend a helping hand, they [the Armenians] will become wellnigh extinct. Of course I do not sympathize in any way with the extremists in other lands who are stirring things up here. Nor do I agree with those papers that decry this movement as very foolish because there is no hope for success. If I rightly interpret the movement in this region, the thought is not revolution at all, but a desperate effort to call the attention of Europe to the wrongs they are suffering and will ever continue to suffer under this government. They feel that they will never succeed in attracting that

attention unless they show that they are desperate enough to sacrifice their lives. *And there is no computing the lives that are going, not in open massacre as in Bulgaria—the government knows better than that.—but in secret, silent, secluded ways.* The sooner it is known, the better. There never will be peaceful, prosperous conditions here until others take hold with a strong hand.



VICTIMS OF TURKISH TAXATION ABANDONING THEIR VILLAGE HOMES.

No. 2.

[This is the first report of the massacre.]

D . . . , Sept. 26, 1894.

Troops have been massed in the region of the large plain near us. Sickness broke out among them, which took off two or three victims every few days. It was a good excuse for establishing the quarantine

around, with its income from bribes, charges, and the inevitable rise in the price of the already dear grain. I suspect that one reason for placing quarantine was to hinder the information as to what all those troops were about in that region. There seems little doubt that there has been repeated in the region back of Moosh what took place in 1876 in Bulgaria. The sickening details are beginning to come in. As in that case, it has been the innocent who have been the greatest sufferers. Forty-eight villages are said to have been wholly blotted out.

No. 3.

[Efforts to conceal the truth as soon as Vice-Consul Hallward arrived on the scene, and to ward off investigation.]

D . . . , Oct. 3, 1894.

As the time goes on the extent of the slaughter seems to be confirmed as greater than was first supposed. Six thousand is a low figure—it is probably nearer ten. Mr. Hallward, the new [English] Consul at Van, has gone directly there, and it is said that the other consuls from Erzroom have also been sent to investigate. The government tried to get the people here to sign an address to the Sovereign, expressing satisfaction with his rule, disclaiming sympathy with the Armenians who have “stirred matters up,” stating that the thousands slain in Talvoreeg met their just deserts, and that the four outsiders captured should be summarily punished, expressing

regret that it has been thought best to send consuls to investigate, and stating that there was no need for their coming. From this document we at least get some facts that before were suppositions. It consisted of about two thousand words, and it was expected that it would be sent by telegraph with at least a thousand signatures. The Armenians here have not yet signed it, though in four districts similar papers have been secured properly sealed. *The effect of such papers on foreigners will be much modified when they know the means used to procure them.* Sword, famine, pestilence, all at once—pity this poor country!

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No. 4.

[The following is from a different source.]

A . . . , Oct. 31, 1894.

We have word from Bitlis that the destruction of life in Sassoun, south of Moosh, was even greater than was supposed. The brief note which has reached us says: "Twenty-seven villages annihilated in Sassoun. Six thousand men, women, and children massacred by troops and Kourds. This awful story is just beginning to be known here, though the massacre took place early in September. The Turks have used infinite pains to prevent news leaking out, even going to the length of sending back from Trebizond many hundreds from the Moosh region who had come this way on business." This massacre was ordered from Constantinople in the sense that some Kourds having robbed Armenian

villages of flocks, the Armenians pursued and tried to recover their property, and a fight ensued in which a dozen Kourds were killed. The slain were "semi-official robbers," *i. e.*, enrolled as troops and armed as such, but not under control. The authorities then telegraphed to Constantinople that Armenians had "killed some of the Sultan's troops." The Sultan at once ordered infantry and cavalry to put down the Armenian rebellion, and they did it; only, not finding any rebellion, they cleared the country so that none should occur in the future.

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No. 5.

[This from a third place.]

B . . . , Nov. 16, 1894.

Last year the Talvoreeg Armenians successfully resisted the attacks of the neighboring Kourds. The country became very unsettled. This year the government interfered and sent detachments of regular soldiers to put down the Armenians. These were assisted by the Kourdish *Hamedih's* [organized troops]. The Armenians were attacked in their mountain fastnesses and were finally reduced by the failure of supplies, both of food and ammunition. About a score of villages were wiped out of existence—people slaughtered and houses burned.

A number of able-bodied young Armenians were captured, bound, covered with brushwood and burned alive. A number of Armenians, variously estimated, but less than a hundred, surrendered

themselves and pled for mercy. Many of them were shot down on the spot and the remainder were dispatched with sword and bayonet.

A lot of women, variously estimated from 60 to 160 in number, were shut up in a church, and the soldiers were "let loose" among them. Many of them were outraged to death and the remainder dispatched with sword and bayonet. A lot of young women were collected as spoils of war. Two stories are told. 1. That they were carried off to the harems of their Moslem captors. 2. That they were offered Islam and the harems of their Moslem captors,—refusing, they were slaughtered. Children were placed in a row, one behind another, and a bullet fired down the line, apparently to see how many could be dispatched with one bullet. Infants and small children were piled one on the other and their heads struck off. Houses were surrounded by soldiers, set on fire, and the inmates forced back into the flames at the point of the bayonet as they tried to escape.

But this is enough of the carnage of death. Estimates vary from 3000 to 8000 for the number of persons massacred. These are sober estimates. Wild estimates place the number as high as 20,000 to 25,000.

This all took place during the latter part of August and [early part of] September. The arrival of the commander-in-chief of the Fourth Army Corps put a stop to the carnage. It is to be noted that the massacres were perpetrated by regular soldiers, for the most part under command of officers of high rank. This gives this affair a most serious aspect.

A Christian does not enjoy the respect accorded to street dogs. If this massacre passes without notice it will simply become the declaration of the doom of the Christians. There will be no security for the life, property, or honor of a Christian. A week ago last Tuesday evening at sundown a Turk kidnapped the wife of a wealthy Armenian merchant of the town of Khanoos Pert. Next morning her cries were overheard by searchers and she was rescued from a Turkish house. No redress is possible.

Wild rumors have been abroad for a long time, but trustworthy information came to hand slowly. Everything has been done to hush it all up. Some of the minor details of the stories I have told above may not be exact, but I feel quite certain they are in the main. However, that a cruelly barbarous and extensive massacre of Christians by regular soldiers assisted by Kourdish *Hamedieh's*, under command of officers of rank and responsibility, has occurred cannot be denied.

What now will the Christian world do?

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No. 6.

[This is the most complete account, compiled on the ground. The following document was carefully prepared in common by parties, the signature of any one of whom would be of sufficient guaranty to give great weight. One of the party, who is largely responsible for the data given, is a man of high position and wide influence. The material was collected with the greatest difficulty and under the



constant espionage of Turkish officials. Armenian Christians who were known to appear at the place where the writer was staying, were arrested and some are yet in prison if they have not met a worse fate already. The documents were sent by secret, special carriers into Persia and came by Persian post to the United States. They left Turkey about the last of November, 1894. This document alone is sufficient to stir the indignation of a Christian world.]

C . . . , Nov., 1894.

There is uneasiness in Bitlis as to the safety of that city. Scrutiny of the mails by the Turkish authorities continues, and some letters addressed to residents and officials in the United States are failing to arrive.

The *Hamedieh* soldiers, who are Kourds, and who have been enrolled during the past three years, are uniformed to some extent, but left in their homes. They are committing all kinds of depredations. The government continues to exact taxes in the plundered districts, sends *zabtiehs*, or Turkish soldiers, to abide in the villages, and eat the people out of provisions until in some way they manage to secure the money. In the Bashkalla region many of the men find, on returning, that the government has taken possession of their property and refuses to restore it or allow them to remain in their old homes.

The authorities have taken and are taking every precaution to prevent accounts of the famous massacre of Moosh from reaching the outside world. The English consul, Mr. Hallward, went on a tour in

the region affected. He was subjected to constant annoying espionage, and was absolutely unable to penetrate into the devastated region.

To what extent Armenian agitation has provoked the terrible massacre it is difficult to determine. For a year or more there seems to have been an Armenian from Constantinople staying in the region as an agitator. For a long time he skillfully evaded his pursuers, but was at last caught and taken to Bitlis. He demanded to be taken to Constantinople and to the Sultan, and, it is said, he is now living at the capital, receiving a large salary from the government. Evidently he has turned state's evidence.

FACTS REGARDING A MASSACRE AT SASSOUN, NEAR  
MOOSH, TURKEY.

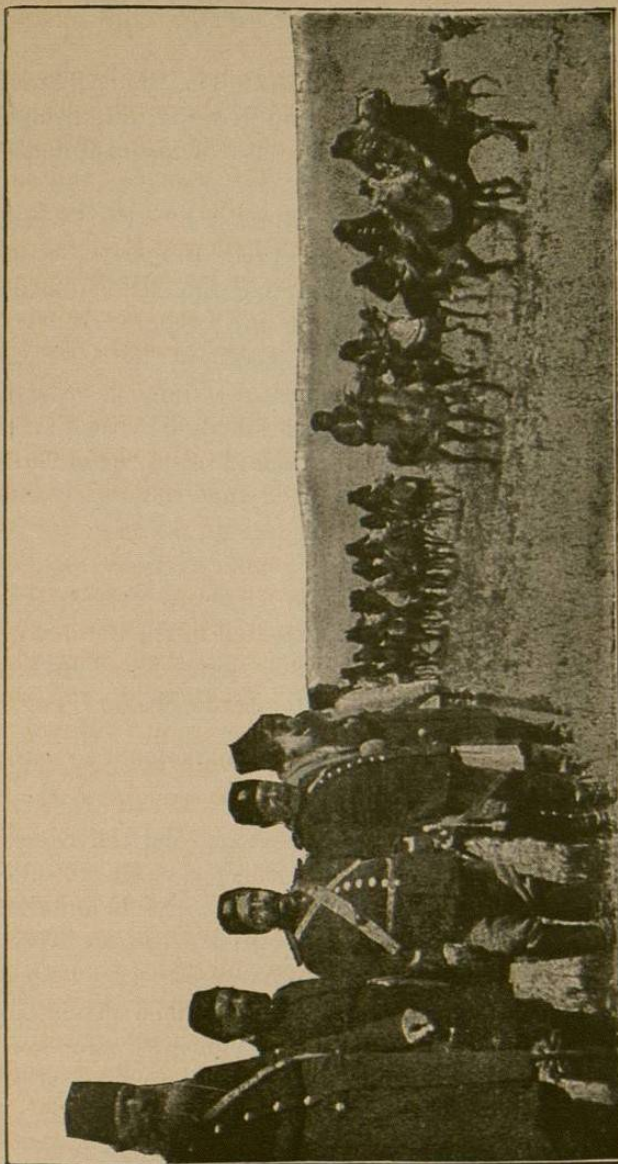
Late in May, 1893, an outside agitator named Damatian was captured near Moosh. The government had suspected that the Talvoreeg villages were harboring such agitators, and had sent orders to certain Kourdish chiefs to attack the district, assuming the responsibility for all they should kill, and promising the Kourds all the spoil.

Not long after Damatian had been brought to Bitlis, the first week in June, the Bakranlee Kourds began to gather below Talvoreeg. As the villagers saw the Kourds gathering day by day, to the number of several thousands, they suspected their designs, and began to make preparations. On the eighth day the battle was joined. The stronger position of the villagers enabled them to do considerable execution with little loss to themselves.

The issue of the contest at sunset was some one hundred Kourds slain, and but six of the villagers, one of whom was a woman who was trying to rescue a mule from the Kourds. The villagers had succeeded in breaking down a bridge across the deep gorge of a river before a detachment of Kourds from another direction could join in the attack against them. The Kourds thus felt themselves worsted, and could not be induced to make another attack that summer.

At this juncture the Governor-general set out with troops and two field-pieces for Moosh, and infested the region near Talvoreeg, but either he considered his forces insufficient, or he had orders to keep quiet, for he made no attack, but merely had the troops keep siege. Before leaving, he succeeded, by giving hostages, in having an interview with some of the chief men in Talvoreeg, and asked them why they did not submit to the government, and pay taxes. They replied that they were not disloyal to the government, but that they could not pay taxes twice, to the Kourds and to the government. If the government would protect them, they would pay to it. Nothing came of the parley, and the siege was continued till snow fell. During the winter, while blackmail was rife in the vilayet, several rich men of Talvoreeg were invited to visit the Governor-General, but did not see best to accept.

In the early spring the Kourds of several tribes were ordered to attack the villages of Sassoun, while troops were sent on from Moosh and Bitlis, the latter taking along ammunition and stores, and ten mule-



REVIEW OF KURDISH CAVALRY BY THE GOVERNOR OF VAN, BAHRI PASHA—AT THE LEFT.

loads of kerosene (eighty cans). The whole district was pretty well besieged by Kourds and troops. The villages thus besieged would occasionally make sorties to secure food.

The Kourds on one occasion stole several oxen, and their owners tracked their property to the Kourdish tents, and found that one ox had been butchered. They asked for the others, and were refused, whereupon the villagers left, and later returned with some companions. A scrimmage ensued, in which two or three were killed on either side. The Kourds at once took their dead to the government at Moosh, and reported that the region was filled with Armenian and foreign soldiers. The government at once sent in all directions for soldiers, gathering in all from eight to ten *taboors* (regiments). Kourds congregated to the number of about twenty thousand, while some five hundred *Hamedieh* horsemen were brought to Moosh.

#### METHODS OF PROCEDURE AND INCIDENTS OF THE MASSACRE.

At first the Kourds were set on, and the troops kept out of sight. The villagers, put to the fight, and thinking they had only the Kourds to do with, repulsed them on several occasions. The Kourds were unwilling to do more unless the troops assisted. Some of the troops assumed Kourdish dress, and helped them in the fight with more success. Small companies of troops entered several villages, saying they had come to protect them as loyal subjects, and were quartered among the houses.

In the night they arose and slew the sleeping villagers, man, woman, and child.

By this time those in other villages were beginning to feel that extermination was the object of the government, and desperately determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. And then began a campaign of butchery that lasted some twenty-three days, or, roughly, from the middle of August to the middle of September. The *Ferik* Pasha [Marshal Zekki Pasha], who came post-haste from Erzingan, read the Sultan's firman for extermination, and then, hanging the document on his breast, exhorted the soldiers not to be found wanting in their duty. *On the last day of August, the anniversary of the Sultan's accession, the soldiers were especially urged to distinguish themselves, and they made it the day of the greatest slaughter.* Another marked day occurred a few days earlier, being marked by the occurrence of a wonderful meteor.

No distinctions were made between persons or villages, as to whether they were loyal and had paid their taxes or not. The orders were to make a clean sweep. A priest and some leading men from one village went out to meet an officer, taking in their hands their tax receipts, declaring their loyalty, and begging for mercy; but the village was surrounded, and all human beings put to the bayonet. A large and strong man, the chief of one village, was captured by the Kourds, who tied him, threw him on the ground, and, squatting around him, stabbed him to pieces.

At Galogozan many young men were tied hand

and foot, laid in a row, covered with brushwood and burned alive. Others were seized and hacked to death piecemeal. At another village a priest and several leading men were captured, and promised release if they would tell where others had fled, but, after telling, all but the priest were killed. A chain was put around the priest's neck, and pulled from opposite sides till he was several times choked and revived, after which several bayonets were planted upright, and he raised in the air and let fall upon them.

The men of one village, when fleeing, took the women and children, some five hundred in number, and placed them in a sort of grotto in a ravine. After several days the soldiers found them, and butchered those who had not died of hunger.

Sixty young women and girls were selected from one village and placed in a church, when the soldiers were ordered to do with them as they liked, after which they were butchered.

In another village fifty choice women were set aside and urged to change their faith and become *hanums* in Turkish harems, but they indignantly refused to deny Christ, preferring the fate of their fathers and husbands. People were crowded into houses which were then set on fire. In one instance a little boy ran out of the flames, but was caught on a bayonet and thrown back.

Children were frequently held up by the hair and cut in two, or had their jaws torn apart. Women with child were ripped open; older children were pulled apart by their legs. A handsome, newly wedded couple fled to a hilltop; soldiers followed,

and told them they were pretty and would be spared if they would accept Islam, but the thought of the horrible death they knew would follow did not prevent them from confessing Christ.

The last stand took place on Mount Andoke [south of Moosh], where some thousand persons had sought refuge. The Kourds were sent in relays to attack them, but for ten or fifteen days were unable to get at them. The soldiers also directed the fire of their mountain guns on them, doing some execution. Finally, after the besieged had been without food for several days, and their ammunition was exhausted, the troops succeeded in reaching the summit without any loss, and let scarcely a man escape.

Now all turned their attention to those who had been driven into the Talvoreeg district. Three or four thousand of the besieged were left in this small plain. When they saw themselves thickly surrounded on all sides by Turks and Kourds, they raised their hands to heaven with an agonizing moan for deliverance. They were thinned out by rifle shots, and the remainder were slaughtered with bayonets and swords, till a veritable river of blood flowed from the heaps of the slain.

And so ended the massacre, for the timely arrival of the Mushire [Commander-in-chief of the Fourth Army Corps at Erzingan] saved a few prisoners alive, and prevented the extermination of four more villages that were on the list to be destroyed, among which was the Protestant village of Havodorick. This was the formidable army the government had massed so many troops and Kourds to vanquish.