

nian Patriarch and the orders of the police, attempted to take a well worded petition to the Grand Vizier, according to a time-honored custom. It is also true that brave and oppressed mountaineers in the one isolated town of Zeitoun drove out a small garrison of Turkish soldiers, whom, however, they treated with humanity; it is likewise true that in various places individual Armenians, in despair, have advocated acts of violence and revenge with the hope of calling attention to their wrongs. But the universal testimony of impartial foreign eye-witnesses is that, with the above exceptions, the Armenians have given no provocation whatever. If the Armenians made attacks, where are the Turkish dead?

And all this has been done by those who have for years dazzled and deceived Europe with Hatti Shereefs and Hatti Humayouns, promulgating civil equality and religious liberty for their Christian subjects.

The Sultan who is the head of all authority in Turkey, wrote to Lord Salisbury, and pledged his word of honor that the scheme of reforms should be carried out to the letter, at the very moment when he was directing the massacres. And the six great Christian Powers of Europe, as well as the United States, still treat this man with infinite courtesy and deference.

The most appalling feature of this vast tragedy is the fact that all the "civilized" and "Christian" nations of the world have watched it for months without moving a finger to check it. The sober truth is that civilization is not progress, and that the Christianity of to-day is not Christian.

## CHAPTER II.

### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT EASTERN TURKEY.

**I**N order that the ordinary reader may grasp the situation in Armenia, information is given at this point in regard to the country itself, its administration, the elements that compose the population, and their relations to one another.

The massacre took place in the mountainous Sasoun district just south of Moosh, two days' ride west of Bitlis, a large city where the Provincial-Governor and a permanent military force reside. It is near the western end of Lake Van, about eight hundred miles east of Constantinople, two hundred and fifty miles south of Trebizond on the Black Sea, and only one hundred and fifty miles from the Russian and Persian frontiers of Asiatic Turkey. These distances do not seem great until the difficulties of travel are considered. The roads are, in most cases, bridle paths, impassable for vehicles, without bridges, infested with highwaymen, and unprovided with lodging-places. It is, therefore, necessary to go to the expense of hiring government guards, and to burden oneself with all articles likely to be needed on the way—tents, food supplies, cooking utensils,

beds, etc., which also imply cooks, baggage horses, and grooms. Thus equipped, it is possible, after obtaining the necessary government permits, often a matter of vexatious delay, to move about the country. The ordinary rate is from twenty to thirty miles a day. With a good horse and no baggage I have gone three hundred and fifty miles, from Harpoot to Van, in eight days, but that was quite exceptional. In spring, swollen streams and mud; in summer, oppressive heat; and in winter, storms, are serious impediments. In the neighborhood of Bitlis the telegraph poles are sometimes buried, and horses cannot be taken out of the stables on account of the snow. The mails are often weeks behind, both in arriving and departing, and even Turkish lightning seems to be *yavash*, and crawl sluggishly along the wires.

Turkish Armenia—by the way, "Armenia" is a name prohibited in Turkey—is a large plateau quadrangular in shape, and sixty thousand square miles in area, about the size of Iowa. It is bounded on the north by the Russian frontier, a line from the Black Sea to Mount Ararat, by Persia on the east, the Mesopotamian plain on the south, and Asia Minor on the west. It contains about six hundred thousand Armenians, which is only one fourth the number found in all Turkey. The surface is rough, consisting of valleys and plains from four to six thousand feet above sea-level, broken and shut in by bristling peaks and mountain ranges, from ten to seventeen thousand feet high, as in the case of Ararat. Ancient Armenia greatly varied in extent at different epochs.

reaching to the Caspian at one time, and even bordering on the Mediterranean Sea during the Crusades. It included the Southern Caucasus, which now contains a large, growing, prosperous, and happy Armenian population under the Czar, whose government allows them the free exercise of their ancestral religion, and admits them to many high civil and military positions. The Armenians now number about four million, of whom two million five hundred thousand are in Turkey, one million two hundred and fifty thousand in Russia, one hundred and fifty thousand in Persia and other parts of Asia, one hundred thousand scattered through Europe, and five thousand in the United States.

The scenery, while harsh, owing to the lack of verdure, is on a grand scale. Around the shores of the great Van Lake are many views of entrancing beauty. The climate is temperate and the atmosphere brilliant and stimulating. It is a dry, treeless region, but fertile under irrigation, and abounding in mineral wealth, including coal. Owing to primitive methods of agriculture, and to danger while reaping and even planting crops, only a small part is under cultivation, and frequent famines are the result. The mineral resources are entirely untouched, because the Turks lack both capital and brains to develop them, and prevent foreigners from doing it lest this might open the door for further European inspection and interference with their methods of administering the country.

All local authority is practically in the hands of the *Valis*, provincial governors, who are sent from

Constantinople to represent the sovereign, and are accountable to him alone. The blind policy which was inaugurated by the present Sultan of dismissing non-Moslems from every branch of public service—post, telegraph, custom-house, internal revenue, engineering, and the like—has already been carried out to a large extent all over the empire, and especially in Armenia. The frequent changes in Turkish officials keeps their business in a state of “confusion worse confounded,” and incites them to improve their chance to plunder while it lasts. Traces of the relatively large revenue, wrung from the people, and spent in improvements of service to them, are very hard to find.

#### THE INHABITANTS.

Probably about one half of the population of Turkish Armenia is Mohammedan, composed of Turks and Kurds. The former are mostly found in and near the large cities, such as Erzingan, Baibourt, Erzerum, and Van, and the plains along the northern part. The Kurds live in their mountain villages over the whole region. The term Kurdistan, which in this region the Turkish Government is trying to substitute for the historical one Armenia, has no political or geographical propriety except as indicating the much larger area over which the Kurds are scattered. In this vague sense it applies to a stretch of mountainous country about fifteen hundred miles in length, starting between Erzingan and Malatiah, and sweeping east and south over into Persia as far as Kermanshah.



A KURD OF THE OLD TYPE.

The number of the Kurds is very uncertain. Neither Sultan nor Shah has ever attempted a census of them; and as they are very indifferent taxpayers, the revenue tables—wilfully distorted for political purposes—are quite unreliable. From the estimates of British consular officers there appear to be about one and a half million Turkish Kurds, of whom about 600,000 are in the *vilayets* of Erzroom, Van, and Bitlis, and the rest in the *vilayets* of Harpoot, Diarbekir, Mosul, and Bagdad. This is a very liberal estimate. There are also supposed to be about 750,000 in Persia.<sup>1</sup>

The Kurds, whose natural instincts lead them to a pastoral and predatory life, are sedentary or nomad according to local and climatic circumstances. Where exposed to a severe mountain winter they live exclusively in villages, and in the case of Bitlis have even formed a large part of the city population. But the tribes in the south, who have access to the Mesopotamian plains, prefer a migratory life, oscillating with the season between the lowlands and the mountains. The sedentary greatly outnumber the nomad Kurds, but the latter are more wealthy, independent, and highly esteemed. There is, probably, little ethnic distinction between the two classes.

A fourteenth-century list of Kurdish tribes contains many names identical with those of powerful families who claim a remote ancestry. "There was, up to a recent period, no more picturesque or interesting scene to be witnessed in the East than the court of one of these great Kurdish chiefs, where, like another Saladin, [who was a Kurd himself,] the bey ruled in

<sup>1</sup> *Encyc. Britannica*, "Kurdistan."

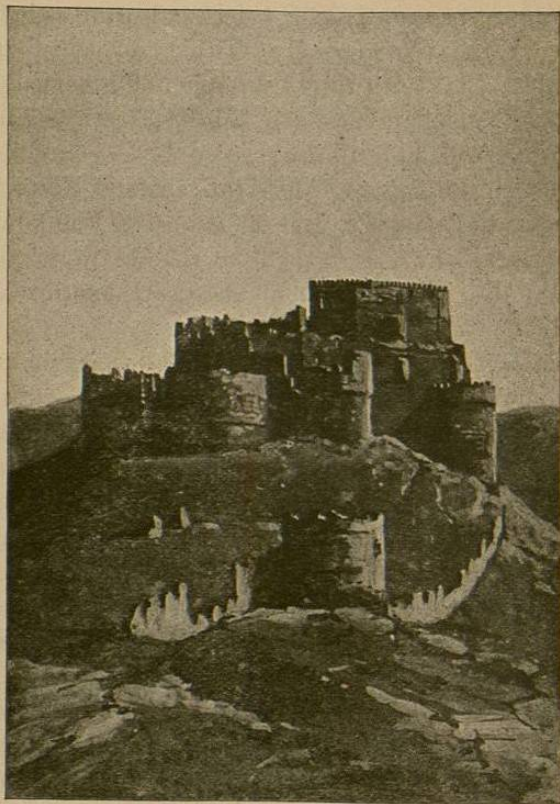
patriarchal state, surrounded by hereditary nobility, regarded by his clansmen with reverence and affection, and attended by a body-guard of young Kurdish warriors, clad in chain armor, with flaunting silken scarfs, and bearing javelin, lance, and sword as in the time of the crusaders."<sup>1</sup> Within two days' ride southeast of Van, I found the ruins of four massive Kurdish castles at Shaddakh, Norduz, Bashkallah, and Khoshab, which must have rivalled those of the feudal barons on the Rhine. The Armenian and Nestorian villagers were much better off as serfs of the powerful masters of these strongholds than as the victims of Kurdish plunder and of Ottoman taxation and oppression which they now are.

The Kurds are naturally brave and hospitable, and, in common with many other Asiatic races, possess certain rude but strict feelings of honor. But since their power has been broken by the Turks, their castles ruined, and their chiefs exiled, these finer qualities and more chivalrous sentiments have also largely disappeared under the principle of *noblesse oblige* reversed. In most regions they have degenerated into a wild, lawless set of brigands, proud, treacherous, and cruel. The traditions of their former position and power serve only to feed their hatred of the Turks who caused their fall, and their jealousy and contempt of the Christians who have been for generations their serfs, whose progress and increase they cannot tolerate.

One who has a taste for adventure and is willing to take his life in his hands, can find among them as

<sup>1</sup> *Encyc. Britannica*, "Kurdistan."

fine specimens of the human animal as are to be found anywhere—sinewy, agile, and alert, with a steady penetrating eye as cool, cold, and cruel as that



RUINS OF A KURDISH CASTLE AT KHOSHAB.

of a tiger. I vividly recollect having just this impression under circumstances analogous to that of a hunter who suddenly finds himself face to face with

a lord of the jungle. There was no sense of fear, at the time, but rather a keen delight and fascination in watching the magnificent creature before me. His thin aquiline face, his neck and hands were stained by the weather to a brown as delicate as that of a meerschaum pipe, and on his broad exposed breast the thick growth of hair obliterated any impression of nudeness. For a few moments he seemed engaged in some sinister calculation, but at last quietly moved away. Perhaps he wanted only a cigarette. Perhaps he wondered if I, too, had claws. The Winchester rifle behind his back did not escape my notice, nor did the gun across my saddle escape his. It is hardly necessary to remind those who may desire such experiences as the above, that the usual retinue of cooks, servants, and *sabtiéhs* should be dispensed with in order to secure the best opportunities for observation.

The Kurdish costumes, always picturesque, show much local variation in cut and color. The beys and khans of the colder north almost invariably prefer broadcloth, and find the finest fabrics and richest shades—specially imported for them—none too good. But the loose flowing garments of the Sheikhs and wealthy Kocher nomads of the south are often very inexpensive, and suggest Arab simplicity and dignity. There is, no doubt, considerable Arab blood in some of these families, who refer to the fact with pride.

The women of the Kurds, contrary to usual Mohammedan custom, go unveiled and have large liberty, but there is no reason to suspect their virtue. Their prowess, also, is above reproach, and rash would

be the man, Turk or Christian, who would venture to invade the mountain home when left in charge of its female defenders. On the whole, the Kurds are a race of fine possibilities, far superior to the North American Indian, to whom they are often ignorantly compared. Under a just, intelligent, and firm government much might be expected of them in time.

They keep up a strict tribal relation, owing allegiance to their Sheikhs, some of whom are still strong and rich, and engage in bitter feuds with one another. They could not stand a moment against the Ottoman power if determined to crush and disarm them. But three years ago His Majesty summoned the chiefs to the capital, presented them with decorations, banners, uniforms, and military titles, and sent them back to organize their tribes into cavalry regiments, on whom he was pleased to bestow the name *Hamedieh*, after his own. Thus, shrewdly appealing to their pride of race, and winking at their subsequent acts, the Sultan obtained a power eager in time of peace to crush Armenian growth and spirit, and a bulwark that might check, in his opinion, the first waves of the next dreaded Russian invasion. In the last war the Kurdish contingent was worse than useless as was shown by Mr. Norman,<sup>1</sup> of the *London Times*.

The Armenians, a very important element of the population, are generally known as being bright, practical, industrious, and moral. They are of a very peaceable disposition, and entirely unskilled in the use of arms, the mere possession of which

<sup>1</sup> *Armenia and the Campaign of 1877.*

is a serious crime in the case of Christians, although the Kurds are well equipped with modern rifles and revolvers, and always carry them. Their great and fundamental weakness, seen through all their history, is a lack of coherence, arising from their exaggerated individualism. They have the distinction of being the first race who accepted Christianity, King Dertad receiving baptism in 276 A. D., thirty-seven years before Constantine ventured to issue even the Edict of Toleration. Their martyr roll has grown with every century. The fact that the Armenian stock exists at all to-day, is proof of its wonderful vitality and excellent quality. For three thousand years Armenia, on account of her location, has been trampled into dust both by devastating armies and by migrating hordes. She has been the prey of Nebuchadnezzar, Xerxes, and Alexander; of the Romans, the Parthians, and Persians; of Byzantine, Saracen, and Crusader; of Seljuk and Ottoman, and Russian and Kurd. Through this awful record, the Christian church founded by Gregory, "The Illuminator," has been the one rallying point and source of strength, and this explains the tremendous power of the Cross on the hearts of all, even of the most ignorant peasant.