

proof of the success of disinterested efforts to benefit its subjects of all classes? And does it propose to continue to cripple and suppress such efforts? If so, it is not the two hundred and fifty American missionaries in her borders who will suffer, but the many schools and churches which they have planted and the many thousands of peaceable and hitherto loyal subjects, who have been taught in them to serve God as well as honor the king.

## CHAPTER XII.

## ARMENIAN VILLAGE LIFE.

THE following description will show to what condition the villagers of Armenia had been reduced by their oppressors. And yet it was *such* people who had to be further impoverished and massacred, lest by their indomitable hopefulness and industry, and by the operation of reforms guaranteed by Europe, they might rise to equality with their Mohammedan neighbors. Of course the customs and style of living of the Armenians in the cities and in some villages, were on a far higher plane, but they too have now been utterly prostrated.

It is very easy to miss the villages as one travels through the country; their location is indicated by a few trees and cultivated fields rather than by conspicuous buildings. The houses themselves are invariably low and contiguous, and of the color of the mud and stones of which they are made. Where the houses are on a hillside they run back into the ground, so that they present only a front elevation, the solid earth forming the sides and rear wall. In the region of Bitlis the earthen roofs of the houses, instead of being flat, are rounded, and thus the village at a distance looks like a collection of gigantic



ant-hills, from the centre of which, however, there towers a church, symbolic of the great and prominent part which religion plays in the humble lives of the people. The churches and monasteries are often very ancient structures of hewn stone, in some cases richly carved with inscriptions and reliefs, and surmounted with a low round conical tower. The difference between these fine old structures and the modern hovels which surround them forcibly suggests to the beholder the former prosperity of this ancient people when independent, in contrast with the poverty and degradation to which they have been reduced by their Ottoman masters. In some places the remains of fine stone bridges are to be seen, where now the traveller is compelled to ford the stream, at the risk of losing his baggage and perhaps his life.

The family is conducted on strictly patriarchal lines. As the sons grow up and are married they bring their brides to the father's house instead of starting new homes of their own. For this large establishment, which includes all, from grandparents to grandchildren, the word "family" or "house" is used. With this explanation it does not seem so strange to hear of families of twenty or even fifty souls. These large families are the units which compose the village. The members of each family have everything in common, property, living rooms, household cares and pleasures included.

The freedom of the family home belongs not simply to every human member of it, but is also generously conferred upon the numerous animals on which

the family depends. As day declines, cows, buffaloes, horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, and chickens all turn their steps to the common entrance, where each knows his place and is duly cared for. There is little distinction between drawing-room, kitchen, chamber, and stable; they all form parts of one semi-subterranean cavern, which is divided by posts, railings, and walls, forming a veritable labyrinth to the stranger, though every turn is familiar to the regular occupants. The people gladly welcome the European traveller, as an angel from the outside world, who can take back their story, and who, they know, will pay for all he receives, instead of extorting it as do the Kurds and Turkish *saptiehs*, or police.

On reaching the village where one is to spend the night, he naturally desires at once to see his quarters. After the saddle is removed that it may not be injured in going through the low passages, both horse and traveller are led in by the light of a flickering wick in a cup of linseed-oil, which barely suffices to reveal the sooty walls and posts. The guide warns you not to strike your head on that beam, or to step into the puddle on your left; in avoiding the puddle you stumble over something on the right, but your host immediately puts you at your ease by saying it was only a calf. He then proceeds to remove a yoke of buffaloes or half a dozen sheep from one obscure corner, and informs you that it is at your disposal. The poor creatures linger so near that you can hear them breathe and catch the reproachful expression of their lustrous eyes. Before you realize what is



going on, the corner has been swept, with the effect of raising a stifling dust. In summer you would prefer the roof to the inside accommodation, but this happy alternative would be impossible in winter. The temperature of these crowded, unventilated, damp compartments—not to mention the fleas—makes you so uncomfortable that sleep is out of the question. A hole in the roof is often the only window, and serves also as a chimney; but in winter even this is generally closed.

The heavy pungent smoke of the animal fuel with which your supper is being cooked at last drives you out of your corner, and you conclude to take a quiet look about the house. The children, overawed by your presence, make no sound and hardly dare to move. You notice one woman nursing a baby, tightly rolled in swaddling bands and strapped into a cradle. She does not remove the child, but sits upon the floor, which is of earth, tilting the cradle over to her. The cradle has no rockers, and if the child cries he is rudely "soothed" by being bumped from side to side. Another woman is churning a goatskin full of sour milk by jerking it back and forth as it hangs from a beam in the roof.

The meal, which consists of fermented milk, boiled wheat or rice, and eggs fried in a sea of butter, is at last served in the middle of the floor, on a round tray, about a yard in diameter, of wood or copper, resting on a low stool. Every article of food is served in a single dish, from which each helps himself, using his fingers for a fork. If the food is liquid, it is eaten by twisting the thin tenacious bread into the form of

a spoon, which disappears in the mouth together with what it conveys. The civilized drudgery of dish-washing is thus reduced to the simple process of washing hands, which each one does for himself, both before and after the meal.

A certain etiquette and kindly feeling refines even these dismal homes, and points to higher ideals than the material condition would indicate.

#### THE SASSOUN COMMUNITY.

As a matter of history I wish to place on record a brief description of the inhabitants of Sassoun, who were killed, scattered and destroyed as a community by the massacre of 1894, and subsequent events.

Hemmed in by rough mountains and wild Kurds, the Armenians of the Sassoun district were a remarkable community of about forty villages, shut off from the outside world, of which they had only the most vague ideas. Their position, bravery, and numbers had enabled them to resist, to some extent, the robber tribes around them, but not the constantly increasing extortions of the Turkish tax-gatherer. The dread of the former and the burden of the latter were all that clouded their otherwise glad and simple existence. They were not, like the more exposed and impoverished Armenians of the plains, in the habit of seeking employment in distant cities, but, like all mountaineers, were passionately attached to home. The commercial instinct, so strong in most Armenians, was foreign to them. I once asked one of the leading men of Ghelieguzan,



"What is there you need which you cannot make yourselves?" "Nothing but salt," he instantly replied, adding, after a pause, "and gunpowder." Shut out the Kurds, and the Armenians would have had no use for gunpowder except against the bears and wolves.

Though the mountains were rocky and precipitous, a large population supported itself by the care of fields and flocks in the fertile and sheltered valleys. Life in Sassoun was physically comfortable, though not luxurious. Open-handed hospitality and care of the poor were as much a duty as provision for one's own family. The houses were of stone, often two and even three stories high.

There was considerable variety in the occupations which followed one another in rapid succession throughout the year. No drones were tolerated in that busy hive, and in all their toil men and women stood shoulder to shoulder. Which bore the heavier burden the reader may decide. Take the care of the flocks and herds for instance, in which their chief wealth consisted. To the men was entrusted the task of pasturing and protecting them, but the women did all the milking and made the butter and cheese. The shearing of the sheep was men's work, but the women washed, carded, and spun the wool into thread, which was then woven into excellent cloth by the men on their heavy looms, and afterward made into garments for all the household by the women. Crude cotton, also, brought from Mesopotamia, was put through the same stages. The bringing of wood and water was always left to

the women and girls. After the men had ploughed, sowed, and irrigated the fields, the reaping—a very slow and laborious task—was done by their wives and sisters, who also winnowed and cleaned the grain, after the men had threshed it. The straw was carefully stored for the food of the horses and cattle in winter.

During the dry months of summer practically all the animals and most of the women and children would migrate to the cool upper slopes of the mountains, where the melting snow keeps the grass always green. The men by irrigation were able to raise wheat, millet, barley, and rye, together with such vegetables as potatoes, tomatoes, squashes, cucumbers, turnips, peas, and beans. Around their rude low stone houses they nourished a few fruit trees such as the apple, pear, cherry, apricot, and quince. In the lower valleys of Talori the fig also flourished and the vine, but in the course of the massacre all fruit trees and vineyards throughout the region were systematically cut down. Honey of excellent quality was very abundant.

These clever people made even their own iron tools, which were so good as to be readily sold in Moosh and other neighboring towns. The villagers obtained the iron from the crude ore which, after being laboriously extracted by hand was reduced in rude furnaces, kept at melting heat by hand bellows day and night, two weeks at a time. The only fuel used was wood, and care had to be taken not to let the metal run out in quantities larger than a blacksmith could easily handle in making a plowshare,



scythe, axe, sword, or knife. The report that these blacksmiths even had the skill to make a rifle barrel is a mistake.

I once asked a man and his wife to enumerate the various tasks which fell to their respective sexes and was quite amused at the eager competition into which they at once entered. Strange to say, the woman entirely omitted the training and care of children as one of her additional burdens. When I called attention to this oversight they both exclaimed "The children take care of themselves." And so they do, almost from the first. The children, with their bright eyes and ruddy faces, would be attractive but for the fact that they were often far from tidy, and were dressed in coarse garments of red or blue. They were loved but not often petted, being taught to be silent and to show an air of reverence in the presence of their elders. At a very early age, the children were initiated into the employments which were to occupy their lives.

Almost the only men who knew how to read and write were those connected with the Church, and they were by no means adepts. In the matter of numbers, however, they could easily calculate without the aid of figures. These intelligent highlanders knew the value of education, and had repeatedly tried to start schools in their villages, but they were invariably closed by the government.

The morality of the people of Sassoun was of a very high standard. Wine made by themselves was moderately used on festive occasions, but drunkenness was practically unknown. The mountain

women, unlike their sisters of the cities, used the veil, not to cover the face, but to fall as a graceful drapery down the back. They had the frank and direct look which we are accustomed to see only in children, and were quick to detect and resent evil, even with violence, as the intruder would find to his cost. These people had neither laws nor courts, but referred their disputes to the head-man of the village, from whose decision appeal was rarely made. The head-man, or "*r is*," held office simply by common consent of the villagers, not as a hereditary right or a prerogative of wealth, but because of superior character and ability.

Religion was a vital matter to the people of Sassoun, but concerned itself only with the barest essentials. They had no more conception of theological doctrines than had the people who listened to the Sermon on the Mount. Christianity was to them a story, the characters of which were real and kept before them by the frequent festivals of the Christian year. They felt profound reverence for the Virgin Mary, but Christ was the object of their worship. Their gratitude, submission, and love to Him would find expression in brief significant exclamations, deep sighs, and sometimes silent tears. Such evidences I have frequently noticed among Armenian peasants as they listened to the reading of the Scriptures or engaged in prayer. Their first daily act as they stepped from their dark cheerless dwellings was an act of prayer, accompanied by repeated prostrations to the East with the sign of the Cross.

A large number of villagers who had escaped the



general massacre, and, relying on Turkish promises, followed their priest into the soldiers' camp, were offered their lives on condition they would trample upon the Crucifix and Holy Gospels. But the priest in horror refused to commit this sacrilege, and every member of his flock, following his example, was forthwith butchered.

I have carefully verified these details of Sassoun life and of the massacre in conversation with Bedros and his wife, who, after escaping almost miraculously, when a score of their relatives were killed before their eyes, were brought to London to give their testimony. I was profoundly impressed with the simple dignity and absolute truthfulness of these witnesses, who bore bodily scars, and in their faces showed the evidence of the terrible sorrow and suffering through which they had so lately gone. When asked what his impression was of England, the man thoughtfully replied: "I wonder at the houses, the great buildings, the fields all like gardens, the multitude of people, their wealth, and their churches; but, most of all, I wonder that with all their greatness and power they did not lift a finger to save us, their poor fellow-Christians, of whose sufferings they have so long been officially informed."

The following incident throws much light upon the character and environment of the people of Sassoun. About six years ago twenty armed Kurds suddenly came down upon the house of a rich man near Ghelieguzan to steal the sheep, when only his wife and children were at home. They ordered the woman to prepare a good meal before they left. In

the most obliging manner the housewife set about her task. But in the meantime she dispatched one of her little boys to give the alarm to the men, away on the mountain side. The unsuspecting Kurds hung their long flint-lock rifles on the walls of the kitchen, and went out to search the stables and collect the live stock. While they were engaged in this work, out of sight, the woman with her strong fingers, quickly pulled out the flint from the lock of each musket, leaving them still hanging on the wall. In order to allow the men of her family more time, she prepared a specially elaborate meal, to which the Kurds made no objection. But when they were in the midst of the repast, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by the villagers who had hastily mustered. Each Kurd seized his flint-lock only to find it useless. They thereupon drew their swords and daggers, and were about to make a rush to escape, but were quickly brought to bay by the levelled muskets of the Armenians, to whom they thought best to surrender. After being stripped of all their arms and outer garments the Kurds were informed that they might go home, and if they wished their weapons they might return the next day with reinforcements and try to take them. The Kurds did not see fit to try this method, but so pestered the Armenians in other ways, that at the end of three months the muskets were given back to avoid further trouble.

It should not be thought, however, that such incidents as this could occur among the Armenians anywhere in Turkey, except among the highlanders of



Sassoun, or those of Zeitoun, three hundred miles west in the Taurus mountains. These two little communities were quite exceptional in their secure location and brave spirit. The other Armenians throughout Eastern Turkey, timid and crushed by more severe oppression, used to speak of the Sassounlis with an admiration almost akin to reverence. It was on this account that *they* were singled out by the Government for extermination, for it was feared that their brave and independent spirit might spread to the Armenians of the plains and cities, while their destruction, on the other hand, would strike terror everywhere, and prove a salutary object-lesson to those who might be disposed to express dissatisfaction with the Sultan's rule. In this calculation the Turks were mistaken. The blood of those noble mountaineers, instead of acting like a stupefying drug upon the Armenian race, proved to be a stimulant, and enlisted the sympathy of Europe. This so alarmed and irritated the Turks that, in order to prevent any progress of the Armenians either through their own efforts or those of Europe, they have committed further massacres in comparison with which Sassoun hardly deserves to be mentioned. There are no words to characterize the cowardly betrayal of the Armenians by England, and Europe which guaranteed their protection.

The "Powers" impotent for good, while masquerading in the livery of Christianity, have proved its worst enemies and shown themselves callous even to the principles of ordinary humanity.

## APPENDIX A.

## A BIT OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IN TURKEY.

## THE CASE.

(Foreign Relations of the United States, 1884, pp. 538-539.<sup>1</sup>)

(Inclosure in No. 317.)

*Mr. Wallace to Aarifi Pasha.*

Note Verbale.

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,  
*Constantinople, January 24, 1884.*

The legation of the United States of America has the honor to invite the attention of his highness, the minister of foreign affairs, to the matters following :

By note No. 167, June 13, 1883, the legation informed his highness that two American citizens, traveling in the vilayet of Bitlis, had been set upon by Kurds, robbed, and left to die, and that the governor-general of the vilayet had manifested the most singular indifference about the affair, and might be fairly charged with responsibility for the escape of the malefactors. The suggestion was then made that his highness would serve the cause of humanity and justice by ordering the most energetic measures to be taken for the apprehension of the robbers.

By a communication, No. 71235, June 13, 1883, his highness was good enough to answer the note of the legation, and give the pleas-

<sup>1</sup> This is an exact copy of the official documents as published by the State Department, capitalization included.