

Armenia - The Crucifixion  
of a people.

by

Willis J. Abbot.



# Armenia — The Crucifixion of a People

IN THE DARK HISTORY OF TURKISH TYRANNY THIS IS THE BLACKEST PAGE, AND OF ALL ITS HORRORS GERMANY SHARES THE GUILT

By Willis J. Abbot

WHEN the Bolsheviki delegates to the Brest-Litovsk peace conference set their signatures to the treaty of peace forced upon them by German arms and German intrigue, they signed away, so far as they had power, the lives of a people whose agonies during this war have almost passed human comprehension.

One clause of that treaty provided that all the territory in Asia Minor taken from the Turks by Russia during the war should be returned to its former owners. A second ceded to Turkey all that part of the Russian Caucasus which has been the place of refuge of the Armenians in years gone by—the region of Batum, Kars, and Tiflis.

In this territory resides the remnant of the Armenian people—a body of perhaps fifteen hundred thousand destitute, starving, and grief-laden people, left after Turkish massacres had taken the lives of fully a million of their race within the last two years. They had fled from Turkish territory into the Russian Caucasus. They find now that the deadly pall of Turkish authority and power has been extended over their place of refuge by the treachery of the Bolsheviki.

Here in the United States our working people were told, for a time, that the Bolsheviki were the true friends of humanity everywhere, that they cherished the universal common interest of the working class unhampered by national prejudices and unvexed by the boundary-lines of nations. But in the very first negotiations of an international character in which the Bolshevists took part they callously turned over to Turkish cruelty and rapacity a whole people, a Christian, civilized, and industrial people, whom for forty years and

more the Turks have been doing their best to exterminate.

Never was a seemingly lofty ideal, a creed of international brotherhood, so grossly repudiated by its noisiest preachers. Never did practise so cynically repudiate preachments.

It is true that the Bolshevist arrangements have not been taken seriously by the world at large. To make them permanent, the Germans and their allies would have to win the war—an unbelievable outcome. With our success the very first act of the Allies will be to denounce and repudiate these treaties forced upon a disorganized Russia by the Bolshevist minority which had seized the powers of the government.

But while the war continues they are in force. All territory occupied by the Armenians is returned to the Turks, and the merciless Orientals are at liberty to take up again their practise of spoliation, deportation, torture, rape, and murder by which for more than a generation, with brief intervals of quiet, they have endeavored to exterminate this luckless people.

Into the early history of the Armenian people it is not my purpose to go here. Enough to say that for centuries they have existed as a coherent, prosperous, Christian people in the very heart of the Moslem empire. They are essentially an industrial and commercial people—the storekeepers, manufacturers, and money-lenders of the communities in which they dwell. Concerning them it has been written by other residents of the districts whence they have been expelled:

Now that the Armenians are gone, there are no doctors, chemists, lawyers, smiths, potters, tanners, or weavers left in this place.

Their enterprise and intelligence always won them first place in the professions and industries. But their strong sense of nationality aroused the dread of the Turkish government, which professed to detect among them a conspiracy to throw off its authority and become an independent people. Their prosperity stimulated the cupidity of their Moslem neighbors, who saw profit for themselves in driving out these bankers and merchants and seizing their property. Their Christianity aroused the

savage religious hatred of the Mohammedans by whom they were governed.

As a result, when the end of the Russo-Turkish War, in 1877, had left Turkey free to regulate her internal problems, and Abdul Hamid—"Abdul the Damned"—had ascended the throne, that ferocious figure of rapine and massacre undertook to break the growing power of the Armenians. He did it by arming the wandering tribes of Kurds that occupied the same territory, and encouraging them to raids upon Arme-



THE PATRIARCH OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH AT JERUSALEM—ARMENIA CLAIMS TO POSSESS THE OLDEST NATIONAL CHURCH IN ALL CHRISTENDOM

*From a copyrighted photograph by the Western Newspaper Union*



A STREET IN THE ARMENIAN QUARTER OF THE CITY OF ADANA, IN ASIA MINOR, AFTER THE LOOTING AND MASSACRE BY THE TURKS IN JUNE, 1909

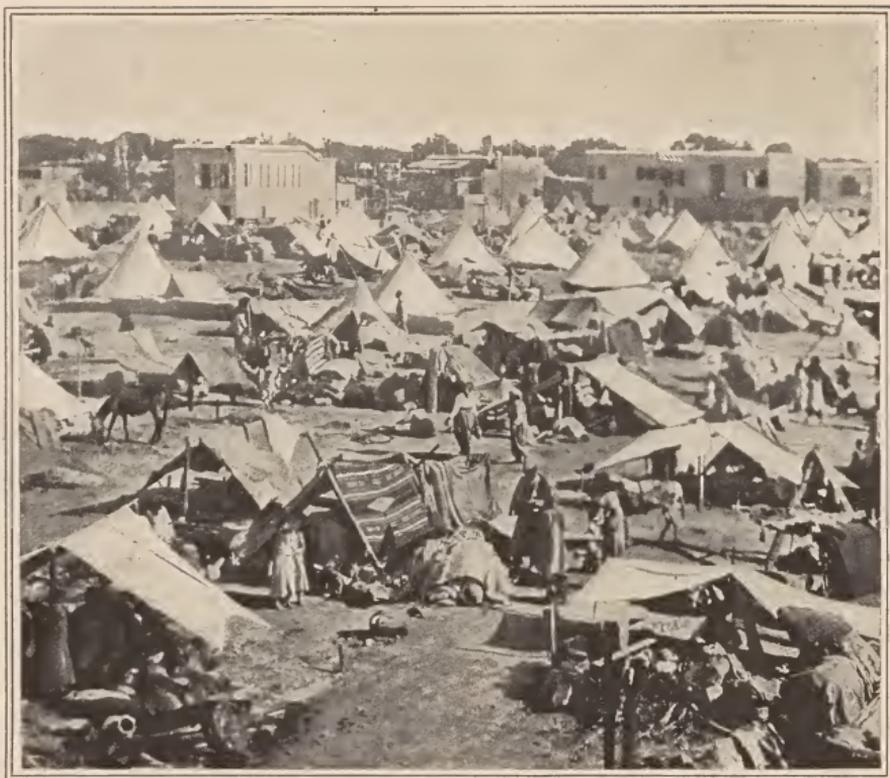
nian villages and farms. In the larger cities massacres, not unlike the anti-Jewish pogroms of Russia a few years ago, were remorselessly conducted under the authority of the Turkish government. In such considerable towns as Erzerum and Trebizond the slaughter, led by government troops, went on in the streets for days. At Constantinople the slain were numbered by the tens of thousands. Zeitoum, a town almost wholly populated by Armenians, was besieged by regular Turkish troops for six months, amnesty being finally granted as a result of the diplomatic protests of the powers—the only thing the nations of Europe were able to accomplish toward stopping the atrocities, despite their protestations of horror. All were afraid to “reopen the Turkish question.”

The system by which Abdul Hamid was able to work his will, and still plausibly excuse his acts, was simple. Secretly he armed the Kurds and encouraged them to raid Armenian towns, slaughter the men, and carry away the women and girls. The Armenians naturally armed for self-defense. Thereupon the Sultan proclaimed that they were plotting a revolt against the govern-

ment, and brought his regular troops into action. In the end he was thus able to do away with more than a hundred thousand of the unfortunate people—a mere trifle in comparison with the massacres of 1915, when the Germans' superior genius for that class of work was brought into play.

It is a strange fact that virile peoples thrive on persecutions. It does not so appear at the moment of their agonies, but almost invariably, when the fiery blast has swept on, they gather up their remnants and march on to greater power. The age-long history of the despised and persecuted Jews has proved this, and the story of the Armenians has been of the same sort.

Turkey suffered severely from its own inhumanity. The Armenians in but a few years had healed their wounds and developed new vigor. Those who had fled developed communities in the Russian Caucasus, the United States, the south of France. They became prosperous abroad, and contributed to the prosperity of their fellows at home. The latter so thrived and multiplied that when the world war fell with its blight upon humanity they had



A REFUGEE CAMP OF ARMENIANS DEPORTED FROM THEIR HOMES BY THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES

already attracted the malign attention of William II of Germany, who thought he saw in such a vigorous people, domiciled in the quadrangle between the Caspian and the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, a possible obstacle to his ambition for a Pan-German empire to extend from the chill North Sea to the sunny waters of India.

#### THE KAISER'S HAND IN TURKEY

Nothing that has happened in Turkey during the last quarter of a century can be fully understood without searching for the Kaiser's share in it. He was the self-proclaimed friend of Abdul Hamid, a pilgrim to the Sultan's court, who dressed in Turkish raiment to do honor to the aged Moslem. But when that hoary old reprobate had been cast down and sent into exile, with a mere fragment of his harem to mitigate his loneliness, it was discovered that the Kaiser had been deep in the Young Turk movement which accomplished his

downfall. From that moment until the present the word of Germany has been law in Turkey, and no occurrence of the proportions of the Armenian atrocities could have taken place without German acquiescence.

What, then, were the characteristics of the policy adopted toward the Armenians after Turkey had entered upon the war and had begun taking orders from Germany?

Let me first summarize and then go to some extent into detail.

In February, 1915, a decree was issued that all Armenians should be disarmed, and that those in the army should be taken from the ranks and set to civil occupations, such as building roads or fortifications. The order was defended upon the ground that many Armenians were in the enemy's armies—which was of course true, since hundreds of thousands had been driven into the Russian Caucasus by the persecutions of Abdul Hamid, and were liable to Rus-

sian service, while thousands of others, hating Turkish domination, had slipped from their homes and joined the Russian forces. But the real purpose of the order was to render the Armenians helpless against the policy of extermination which Turkey now purposed applying to them.

Under the operation of this policy, according to the encyclopedic "Report on the Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire," compiled under the direction of Viscount Bryce—a man whom Americans love to honor—there were in Ottoman territory, when the deportations began, 1,600,000 Armenians. The Armenian Patriarchate fixed the number at 2,100,000; the Ottoman government put it at 1,100,000. The one had an interest in magnifying the number; the other in minimizing it. The Bryce report adopts a midway figure.

Of these human beings the report estimates that six hundred thousand were

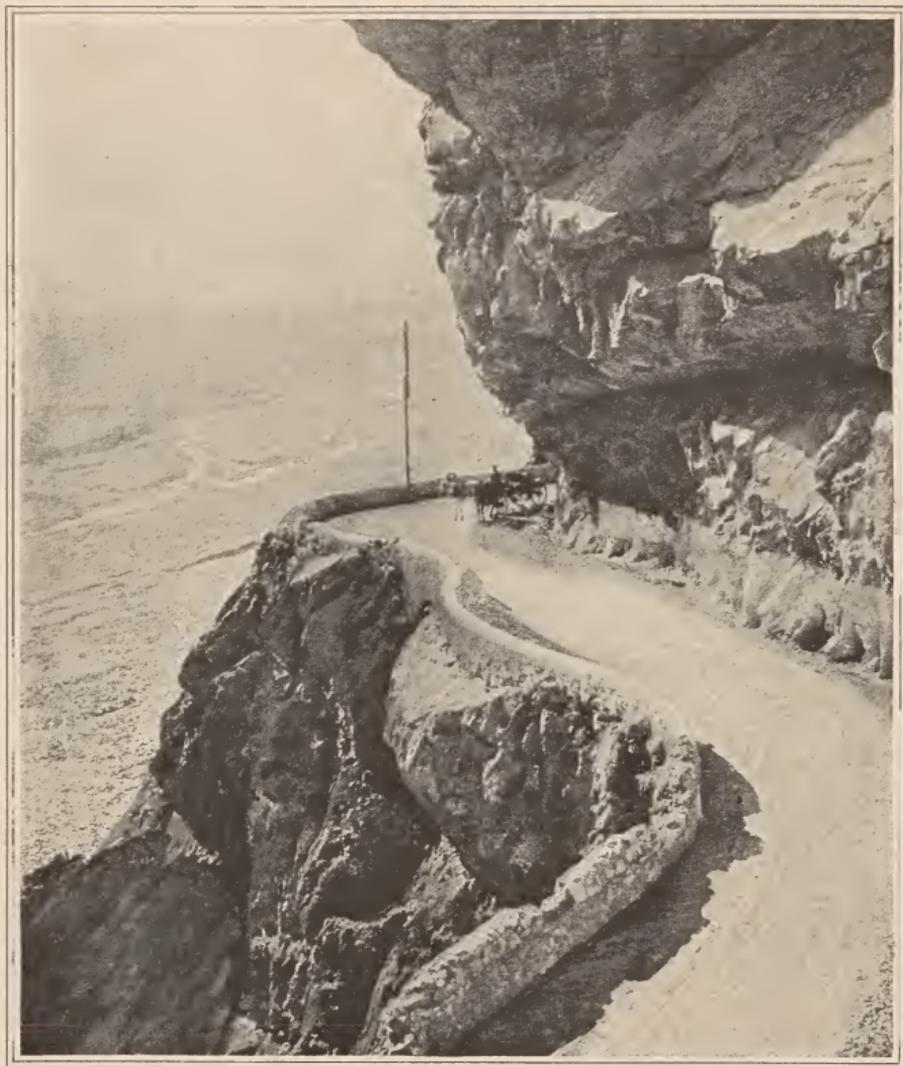
either directly murdered or perished miserably of exhaustion, cold, and hunger on the cruel forced marches incident to their deportation. About a like number may still be alive in the places of their exile. The remainder have either been forcibly converted to Islam, fled to hiding-places in the mountains, or escaped beyond the Ottoman frontier.

This is perhaps as good a point as any to note that "conversion to Islam" was offered to women only as an alternative to death. It was by no means an empty religious ceremony, or a perfunctory declaration of a changed faith. It involved the immediate "marriage" of the woman to some Moslem. To embrace Mohammedanism without embracing one of the faithful was no part of the gentle Turk's plan of conversion.

If the woman in question were a widow with children, the little ones must be sur-



MUSH, AN IMPORTANT ARMENIAN TOWN ON THE HEAD-WATERS OF THE EUPHRATES—THERE WAS A TERRIBLE MASSACRE OF ARMENIANS HERE IN 1894



THE GRUZINIAN ROAD THROUGH THE CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS, BUILT BY THE RUSSIANS AS A MILITARY HIGHWAY TO THE FRONTIER PROVINCES

rendered to be brought up in the True Faith in a so-called government orphanage. This condition was not made the easier for the mother by the notorious fact that no such institution really existed.

In the Bryce report we find the following contribution to this topic:

The Armenian children in the German orphanage at H. were sent away with the rest.

"My orders," said the vali, "are to deport all Armenians. I cannot make an exception of these."

He announced, however, that a government orphanage was to be established for any children that remained, and shortly afterward he called on Sister D. and asked her to come and visit it. Sister D. went with him, and found about seven hundred Armenian children in a good building. For every twelve or fifteen children there was one Armenian nurse, and they were well clothed and fed.

"See what care the government is taking of the Armenians," the vali said.

She returned home surprised and pleased; but when she visited the orphanage again, several days later, there were only thirteen of the seven hun-

*dred children left—the rest had disappeared.* They had been taken, she learned, to a lake, six hours' journey by road from the town, and drowned.

Three hundred fresh children were subsequently collected at the "orphanage," and Sister D. believed that they suffered the same fate as their predecessors. These victims were the residue of the Armenian children at H. The finest boys and prettiest girls had been picked out and carried off by the Turks and Kurds of the district, and it was the remainder, who had been left on the government's hands, that had been disposed of in this way.

Since 1915 it has been the Turkish purpose not merely to harass, intimidate, rob, torture, outrage, and massacre the Armenians, but actually to exterminate the whole race. The so-called "deportations" are defended—when any defense is offered—upon the theory that the people are being moved to some place where they will be economically more useful, or perhaps on the plea that they are being shifted from a section where they are exposed to the forays of the savage Kurds to one where their lives will be safe. But this is mere shallow pretense—the unfortunates have in fact been deported from life to death. For five thousand to be started on the march from their homes to some alleged destination, and for less than two hundred to arrive, was no uncommon record. Of the women it was said:

Only those too ugly to arouse the soldiers' lust, and sufficiently sturdy to withstand the fatigues of a march that would exhaust oxen, could hope to reach their destination alive.

From the well-authenticated testimony which makes the Bryce report the most terrible of all records of human savagery, let us try to reconstruct the story of a typical deportation. It is the case of a town in which perhaps ten thousand Armenians are living, mainly women and children, or old men, for the men of military age are away, serving in the Turkish armies. Those who remain have been systematically disarmed—a seemingly superfluous precaution, for most are not of the age or sex able to wield arms effectively if they had them.

To this people comes suddenly the word that they must at once be ready to leave their homes for some place wholly unknown to them, at a distance of hundreds of miles. In cases of unusual clemency they were allowed a week to prepare—ordinarily forty-eight hours was the limit.

Now the Armenians are a prosperous people, and their standard of living is Eu-

ropean rather than Asiatic. They accumulate household goods, for which they cherish an affection, even as the rest of us honest-living humans do. But what are they to do with such things? The order of deportation permits them to take nothing that they cannot carry in their hands, and the way will be long and toilsome.

When they try to sell in a hurry, they find that the Turks, the only possible purchasers, offer pitifully small prices. In many instances putting their goods in storage was prohibited—even sale was forbidden. All was to be left to the benevolent care of the authorities until the pilgrims, being duly established in their new homes, might send for their possessions. But as most of the pilgrims never reached their new homes, and the Turkish authorities well knew that they would not, the dust of the marching column had not disappeared before those authorities were dividing up the spoil among themselves.

The fact is that governmental and individual greed has had quite as much to do with the Armenian persecutions as the alleged political or military considerations. The Armenians were a propertied class. They owned lands and houses and well-stocked shops. When the owner was murdered or driven into exile, some Turk, either official or more commonplace robber, garnered the loot.

#### HORRORS OF THE DEPORTATIONS

We read of caravans of deported women and children, stripped naked, being driven along under the burning sun of an Asiatic summer, or suffering the cold of the nights upon the uplands. Commonly we attribute this special infamy to the bestiality or moral degeneracy of their guards; but it was merely part of the system of spoliation. Asia Minor is a poor country, and clothing, even though well worn, had a cash value in the bazaars of the towns near which the pitiful pilgrims passed. The Bryce report says of the deportations from Diarbekr:

A short time after, the prisoners (six hundred and seventy-four) were stripped of all their money (about six thousand pounds Turkish), and then of their clothes; after that they were thrown into the river. The gendarmes on the bank were ordered to let none of them escape. The clothes of these victims were sold in the market of Diarbekr.

And on another page of the same report we read of an exiled community:



BATUM, THE CHIEF PORT ON THE EASTERN COAST OF THE BLACK SEA, CEDED TO RUSSIA BY TURKEY IN 1878, AND RECENTLY RESTORED TO TURKISH RULE

As to their houses, the furniture was distributed among the officers and soldiers. Pianos, sideboards, and other objects too luxurious for soldiers' houses, were sold by auction, where the best bidders, in many districts, were Jews, who considered the price of fifty piasters (two dollars) too high for a piano, and tried to buy them at ten or fifteen piasters (forty or sixty cents). The houses thus emptied were given over to Turkish immigrants or paupers. The copper kitchen utensils, and, in fact, everything made of copper, were carefully packed and sent by different means to Constantinople, where the Germans were anxiously waiting for them as their share of the plunder.

But to return to our typical deportation. When the miserable people, all terror and tears, were gathered in the streets, each clinging to a pitiful bundle of needed things, the first act of their guards was to select the few able-bodied men and boys old enough to threaten trouble on the march, take them off into the fields, and shoot them. If any escaped this fate at the first stage of the deportation, they met it after a day's march had taken them out of sight of the towns.

Sometimes, before starting, the prisoners

were offered as slaves to the people of the town—placed, as the Bryce report has it, “at the disposal of the Moslem population. The highest official as well as the simplest peasant chose out the woman or girl who caught his fancy, and took her to wife, converting her by force to Islam.”

Once on the road, the hapless people soon discovered that it was really to death that the road they had to travel led. Here are illustrations, all vouched for by incorporation in the official report:

At the present moment there are at — more than ten thousand deported widows and children. Among the latter one sees no boys above eleven years of age. They had been on the road from three to five months; they have been plundered several times over, and have marched along naked and starving; the government gave them on one single occasion a morsel of bread—a few have had it twice. It is said that the number of these deported widows will reach sixty thousand; they are so exhausted that they cannot stand upright; the majority have great sores on their feet, through having had to march barefoot.

An inquiry has proved that out of a thousand who started scarcely four hundred reached —. Out of the six hundred to be accounted for, three



A SCENE IN A VALLEY OF TRANSCAUCASIA. WITH A GROUP OF MOUNTAINEERS PRAYING AT SUNSET—THESE ARE NOT ARMENIANS, BUT THEIR ENEMIES, THE MOHAMMEDAN TATARS OF THE CAUCASUS

hundred and eighty men and boys above eleven years of age, and eighty-five women, had been massacred or drowned, out of sight of the towns, by the gendarmes who conducted them; one hundred and twenty young women and girls and forty boys had been carried off, with the result that one does not see a single pretty face among the survivors.

Out of these survivors sixty per cent are sick;

age, they were made the prey of soldiers, bandits, peasants—all who chose to take them. Death, to them, was merciful.

As the real significance of the deportations came to be understood, the Armenians in the more populous places began to offer resistance. They secured arms in



A GEORGIAN SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK IN A VALLEY OF THE CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS

they are to be sent in the immediate future to —, where certain death awaits them. One cannot describe the ferocious treatment to which they have been exposed. They had been on the road from three to five months; they had been plundered two, three, five, seven times; so far from being given anything to eat, they had even been prevented from drinking while passing a stream. Three-quarters of the young women had been abducted; the remainder . . . Thousands died under these outrages, and the survivors have stories to tell of refinements of outrage so disgusting that they pollute one's ears.

Two features of the Turkish treatment of the Armenians cannot be faithfully described in any magazine of general circulation. The details of the treatment of the women and of the torture of thousands of prisoners of both sexes must be left to works like the Bryce report or to scientific treatises on the phenomena of degeneracy. The variety and the fiendishness of the tortures inflicted on the unhappy Armenians seem as if they would have tested the genius of the very devils from hell.

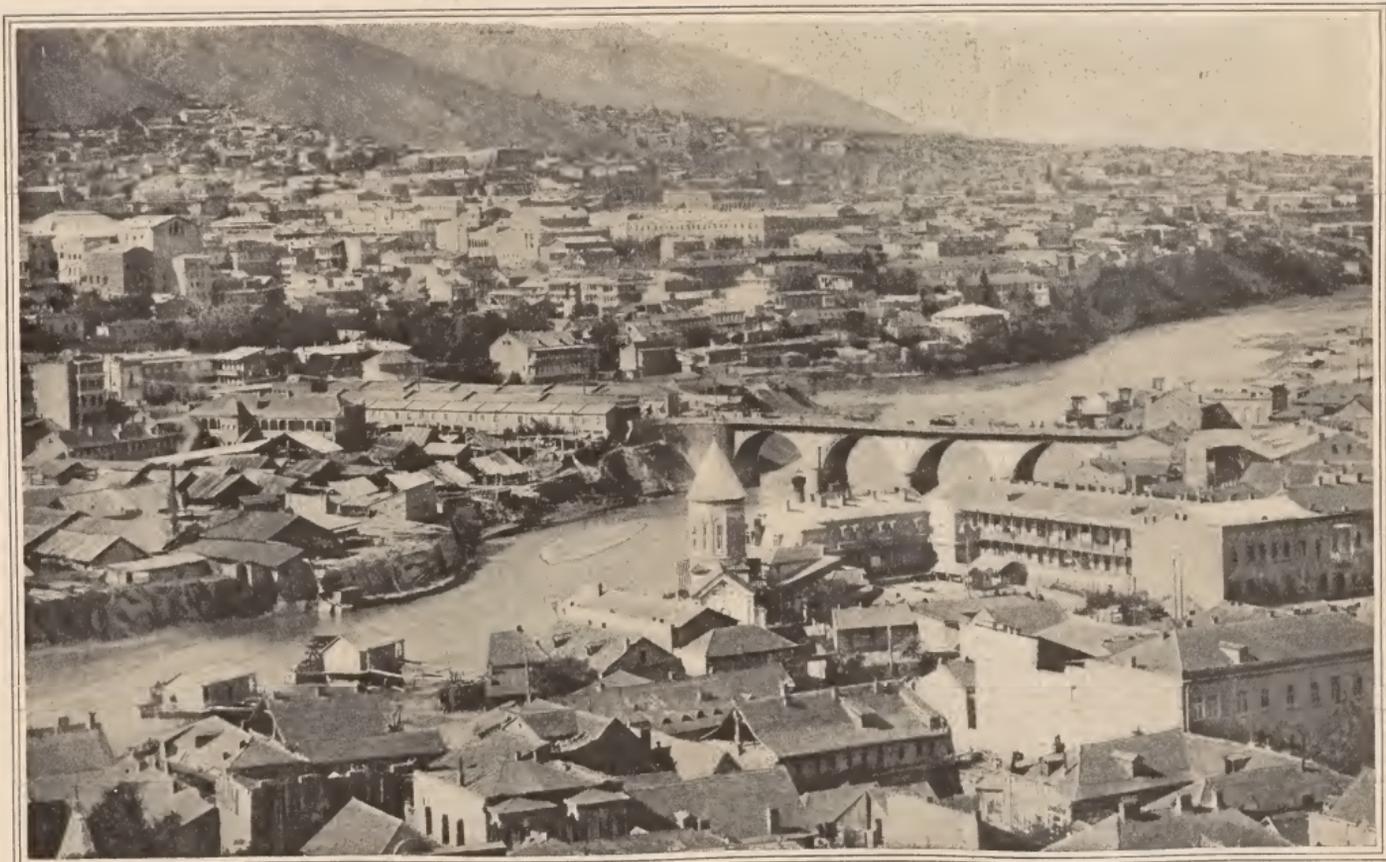
As for the women, even girls of tender

all imaginable ways, even buying rifles from the Turkish soldiery against whom they expected to use them. As a result, there followed in many of the towns pitched battles, in which the Armenians were occasionally able to worst their oppressors.

#### THE TRAGEDY OF ANTOK

Sassoun, a province in the Lake Van district, witnessed many desperate struggles. Of one of these an eye-witness writes:

The Armenians were compelled to abandon the outlying lines of their defense, and were retreating day by day into the heights of Antok, the central block of the mountains, some ten thousand feet high. Then non-combatant women and children, and their large flocks of cattle greatly hampered the free movements of the defenders, whose numbers had been reduced from three thousand to about half that figure. Terrible confusion prevailed during the Turkish attacks, as well as the Armenian counter-attacks. Many of the Armenians smashed their rifles after firing their last cartridge, and grasped their revolvers and daggers. The Turkish regulars and Kurds, amounting now to something like thirty thousand altogether, pushed higher and higher up the heights, and



TIFLIS, THE OLD CAPITAL OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF GEORGIA, AND LATER OF RUSSIAN TRANSCAUCASIA—THIS VIEW SHOWS THE RIVER KUR AND THE NIKOLAEVSKI BRIDGE

surrounded the main Armenian position at close quarters.

Then followed one of those desperate and heroic struggles for life which have always been the pride of mountaineers. Men, women, and children fought with knives, scythes, stones, and anything else they could handle. They rolled blocks of stone down the steep slopes, killing many of the enemy. In the frightful hand-to-hand combat, women were seen thrusting their knives into the throats of Turks, thus accounting for many of them.

On the 5th of August, the last day of the fighting, the blood-stained rocks of Antok were captured by the Turks. The Armenian warriors of Sassoun, except those who had worked around to the rear of the Turks to attack them on their flanks, had died in battle. Several young women, who were in danger of falling into Turkish hands, threw themselves from the rocks, some of them with their infants in their arms. The survivors have since been carrying on a guerrilla warfare, living only on unsalted mutton and grass.

But enough! Surely the murderous and barbaric nature of the Turkish attack upon the Armenian people has been sufficiently indicated. Missionaries and the agents for Armenian relief in this country are disinclined to ascribe its savagery to the individual Turk. It is a fact, not widely known, that most of the fighting men who have campaigned against the Turk esteem him a chivalrous and honorable foe. The

Germans, in their retreats in France and Belgium, poisoned wells and wantonly destroyed and defiled every house or farm; but the Turk, retiring before the British in Palestine and Mesopotamia, scrupulously protected private property, and even left placards indicating where pure water could be found. Armenian atrocities were ordered by high government officials directly under German influence.

With the advance of the Russians into Armenia and the entrance of the British upon Mesopotamia and Palestine, the bloody work of the Turks in the occupied sections was ended. Moreover, after the early part of 1917, it languished because of the sharper pressure of the European armies upon Turkish territories and forces. Sporadically, however, it has continued, though largely a matter of raids by such tribes as the Kurds and Tatars. The latter are even now threatening murderous assaults in the Russian Caucasus, which the Bolsheviks have supinely surrendered. Returning missionaries declare that the rifles used in the bloody work are furnished by Germany.

A recent statement in the *Christian Science Monitor*, made by Dr. W. F. McCul-



AN OIL FIRE AT BAKU—BAKU, THE CENTER OF THE RUSSIAN OIL-FIELD ON THE CASPIAN, THOUGH NOT CEDED TO TURKEY BY THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK, WAS SEIZED BY THE TURKS IN SEPTEMBER LAST



OIL-WELLS NEAR BAKU—IN 1913 THE TOTAL PRODUCTION OF THE BAKU OIL-FIELD WAS ABOUT SIXTY MILLION BARRELS

lum, for twenty-five years a resident of Constantinople, and a member of the American Board of Foreign Missions, merits new emphasis.

"I had a hope," says Dr. McCullum, speaking of the massacres, "that Germany would stop this; but as time went on I found that massacres were formulated in Germany. The whole thing could have been stopped by a word from the Kaiser, or by a word from the German ambassador at Constantinople, and the moral guilt of this bloodshed lies wholly at the door of Germany."

#### A PEOPLE PERISHING OF HUNGER

Hunger and utter destitution are now doing the Turk's work for him. In the desperate struggle of years for self-defense, the Armenian in Ottoman territory has had little time to make due provision for food and clothing. Yesterday the nation was being put to the sword; to-day it is fainting from hunger.

In the busy offices of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, in the tall tower of the building overlooking Madison Square, New York, I sat one day and read scores of cablegrams, coming through the State Department, and telling of the present condition of these unhappy

people. Here are a few specimens rigidly condensed:

CAIRO—Refugees from desolated villages evacuated by the Turks drifting southward. Poorest people reduced to eating orange-peels and garbage. Six soup-kitchens feeding eight thousand destitute.

TEHERAN—Forty thousand destitute people eating dead animals. Women abandoning their infants. Scores dying of hunger at Hamadan.

TIFLIS—Condition of refugees critical. Starvation has begun. Committee besieged by delegations of starving people, often numbering hundreds, coming long distances begging for bread.

Such is the state of Armenia to-day. To the torch and the sword have succeeded hunger and cold. With the ever-present terror of the recurrence of the massacres, the people face immediate starvation.

The story arouses our wrath against the unspeakable Turk and his ally and instigator to crime, Germany. The demand rises that we should declare war upon the former, even as we have upon the latter. Unfortunately, if that course be followed, all our missionaries and agents for relief must be withdrawn, and the last state of Armenia will be worse than the first.

Of all the tragedies of the ages, none is more black with human guilt, or more pitiful in its measure of human agony, than this of Armenia.



