

ARMENIA,
THE ARMENIANS, AND THE
TREATIES.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE
REVUE DE DROIT INTERNATIONAL ET DE LÉGISLATION COMPARÉE
(BRUSSELS),
AND REVISED BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON.
JOHN HEYWOOD, 1, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS, E.C.,
AND AT DEANS GATE AND RIDGEFIELD, MANCHESTER.

1891.

MANCHESTER:
PRINTED BY TAYLOR, GARNETT, EVANS, AND CO.,
BLACKFRIARS STREET.

PREFACE.

THOSE who take any interest in foreign affairs do not need to be told that there is such a thing in politics as the Armenian Question. Attention is occasionally drawn to it and sympathy aroused by statements made in Parliament, by letters in the newspapers, and especially by accounts which reach us from time to time of fresh outrages perpetrated upon the Armenians with the connivance, and often at the hands of, their Turkish masters. But our knowledge of the subject is fragmentary. Since 1881 the Foreign Office has withheld all official information, but the diplomatic correspondence and the Consular reports which were published prior to that date contain an abundance of facts bearing upon the condition of Armenia and upon its international relations. It is desirable that these facts should be generally known, and it is perhaps some reflection upon ourselves that we should have to go for what we want to a foreign source. The most minute and comprehensive study of the Armenian Question that has yet appeared is from the pen of M. G. Rolin-Jaequemyns, President of the Belgian Institute of International Law, and published in the "International Law Review," the organ of the Institute. It is comprised in two papers, the first of which appeared in 1887, the second in 1889. A third is to follow, bringing down the history of the question to the present time ; and it would much facilitate this portion of the author's task if the Foreign Office could be prevailed upon to lay before Parliament the accumulated information which is doubtless at its disposal. In the meantime, the papers already published contain all that is essential to a thorough understanding of the political aspects of the question, and it has therefore been decided to publish them, in the belief that they will serve to bring the Armenian Question home to us, and help to quicken our sense of obligations which are half forgotten. The aim of these prefatory remarks is to present the facts

from an English point of view, and to raise the question whether it may not be possible for this country, notwithstanding the admitted difficulties of the situation, to do something towards ameliorating the condition of a much injured and singularly interesting people, who have numerous claims upon our sympathy, even apart from the duties which we have voluntarily assumed on their behalf.

In the midst of their misfortunes the Armenians take a legitimate pride in the antiquity of their race. They are one of the oldest nations in the world. At the dawn of history they are found inhabiting the mountainous region extending from the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea towards the shores of the Caspian, which is still their home. They have never migrated in conquering bodies to take possession of other lands. They have clung to the soil which was cultivated by their ancestors. Mount Ararat, familiar to us in Biblical story, may be regarded as the ancient territorial centre of the nation. The Euphrates and the Tigris take their rise in Armenian valleys. The storms of foreign conquest have swept over the land times without number, but the people have maintained their identity unimpaired. The national sentiment which animates them has never been destroyed, nor even lost its force, and they have often recovered their independence. Under various dynasties, the inner life of the nation has flowed on in the old channels from age to age. The Ottoman yoke has been the worst to bear, but after five centuries of oppression the Armenian nation still retains its ancient vitality. It has overflowed its territorial borders into every part of Turkey, and Armenian colonies are found in the chief commercial cities of Europe; but wherever scattered, they never forget that the streams all come from a common source. The national tie is universally recognised, and in all their wanderings their thoughts turn instinctively to the home of their kindred, the cradle of their race.

The persistent sense of nationality which distinguishes the Armenians derives much of its strength from a common faith. They are a Christian people, whose lot has been cast beyond the frontiers of Christendom. Twenty years before the conversion of Constantine, Christianity became the religion of the State, and the lamp of faith then kindled has never died out. The Mahometans conquered them, but could not convert them, as they did their neighbours, the Persians. The Apostle of the Armenians was St. Gregory the Illuminator, so called from the gospel radiance which his preaching diffused over the land. Towards the close of his labours,

he founded a monastery at Etchmiadzin, a few miles from Mount Ararat, and through the vicissitudes of fifteen centuries it has been, as it is still, the ecclesiastical centre of the nation. Recent changes have brought it within Russian territory, but ancient associations overleap the political barrier. The supreme authority in the Armenian Church is the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. The chief ecclesiastical dignitary of the Armenians in Turkey is the Patriarch of Constantinople, who is at the same time the civil representative of the nation. He is appointed with the concurrence of the Sultan, and is the recognised medium of communication with the Government. This arrangement looks well in theory, but it is illusory in practice. The Patriarch may indeed pour forth his complaints, but he cannot compel the Government to listen to them; and, as a matter of fact, they generally fall on deaf ears.

The Armenians, in common with the other non-Mahometan communities of the Ottoman Empire, have always been allowed to manage their own ecclesiastical and civil affairs. This privilege, originating in the contempt felt by the true believer for the infidels he had brought under his yoke, has an appearance of toleration which is utterly deceptive; but it at least bears witness to the existence of an Armenian nationality, with ancient traditions and certain recognised rights. After the Crimean War, in 1860, the Sultan was persuaded, in consideration of the manifold services rendered by the Armenians, and of their unwavering loyalty, to grant them a Constitution for more effectually guaranteeing to them those rights in the management of their religious and national affairs which in theory at least they had always possessed. But although proclaiming the loftiest principles, and expressing its provisions in magniloquent terms, it conferred upon the Armenians nothing of any civil or political value, and even of such shadowy boons as it professed to convey the Porte is now endeavouring to deprive them. The Constitution abounds in guarantees against themselves, which they do not want; but it does not contain a single guarantee against the tyranny of the Turkish authorities, which is the thing they do want. It is full of ingenious devices to prevent the sheep from hurting each other, but it makes no provision for protecting them from packs of ravening wolves outside the fold. The chief merit of the Constitution is that it provides an authorised mouthpiece at Constantinople through which the cries of the oppressed may find utterance, and though the Porte may close its ears, the rest of the world will listen.