

VEXATIOUS INTERFERENCE WITH THE
WORK OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES.

UNDER THE PRETENCE OF GUARDING AGAINST
SEDITIONOUS UTTERANCES THE MOST INNO-
CENT COMMENTARIES ON THE SCRIPT-
URES ARE MUTILATED OR
STRICKEN OUT.

[BY TELEGRAPH TO THE TRIBUNE.]

Washington, Jan. 6.—There is another question pending between the United States and Turkey that is of almost as much interest to the Christian world as the persecution of the Armenians. It has been the subject of correspondence between the American Legation in Constantinople and the Department of State in Washington for several years and involves the right of foreigners as well as the subjects of the Sublime Porte to the free exercise of their religion.

The Imperial Ottoman Government guarantees religious liberty, but at the same time exercises censorship over all religious books, both those which are published by the Protestant societies within the limits of Turkey and those imported from foreign countries. The Turkish system of censorship is extremely comprehensive and severe. There is a censor in every villayat who exercises unlimited and unquestioned power over everything that is printed and claims the right to open and examine all packages, sealed or unsealed, that pass through the mails; but by law he is required to stamp the word "examined" upon any letter, paper or package that he opens. He is a member of the highest court of the province in which he lives, and when the Governor is absent rules in his stead. He is always a rigid Mahometan, and goes to his mosque five times on Friday, which makes the publication of Saturday newspapers difficult.

For the last few years the missionaries of the American Board have had a great deal of trouble with the censors whose duty is to examine and pass upon religious books. Some of them are entirely unacquainted with the doctrines of the Christian Church, and some are unable to understand the language of the books upon which they are expected to render judgment. The result is a painful trifling with things held sacred by all Christians. The explanation of the Holy Scriptures in commentaries and other publications has been restricted, statements of Christian doctrine in books and newspapers have been erased and altered, and quotations from religious works and even from the Scriptures themselves introduced into books and essays for the purpose of illustration and argument have been stricken out. Phrases and single words have been suppressed without regard to their context, on the ground that they have a political significance. The use of some of the ordinary Scripture titles of the Saviour has actually been forbidden, and when complaint has been made to the Chief Censor he has replied that since the Christians are graciously allowed to use the Holy Bible they need no other books of religion.

NO TO-MORROWS IN THE BIBLE.

The present Sultan Abdul Hamid occupies the throne that was occupied by an elder brother, Murad, who was deposed in 1876, and is believed to be imprisoned in one of the castles on the Bosphorus. A large and influential party in Turkey denies the right of Abdul Hamid to the throne, and is supposed to be only waiting for an opportunity to create a revolution in the interest of his brother. So great is the fear of such an uprising that a decree has been passed forbidding Murad's name to be spoken within the limits of Turkey. It so happens that the word "murad" means "to-morrow," or something like that, and was formerly used frequently, both in conversation and in the newspapers and books of the country, but, owing to this decree it is now entirely obsolete, and of late years

has not been seen in print. So strict are the Turkish censors that they have forbidden its use in the Bible. Therefore, wherever the word "to-morrow" occurs in either the Old or the New Testament, the censor strikes it out.

In the commentary on the New Testament in the exposition of the words "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Matt. iii, 3), the following passage has been ordered stricken out by Vehmi Effendi, the Chief Censor, because it was believed to have some hidden political significance: "Reference is here made to the sending of men before a king or general, to remove any obstacles that may be in the way along which he is to pass, to repair the road, to level its steep places, and so to make it suitable for the king or the army to pass along." The following reference to the words "the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi, 12), was stricken out because it referred to military affairs: "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence like a fortified place, but not because it itself is surrounded by a wall, but because men themselves are beset by sins and prejudices, so that only those who strive—the earnest, the zealous, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and who are ready to take up the cross and follow Christ—are able to seize it or enter therein."

The censor insists that the Scriptural phrase "Kingdom of Christ" may not be used; that Jesus Christ must not be referred to as a king. Wherever the word "Jew" occurs Vehmi Effendi strikes it out, often making nonsense of the context. Upon complaint being made of these meaningless mutilations, Vehmi Effendi informed his superiors that these phrases were violent attacks on the Jewish religion.

OTHER MEANINGLESS RESTRICTIONS.

The index list of the International Bible Lessons is simply a table of contents prepared by the British Sunday-school Union, compressed into the smallest possible space and containing no word of comment. The censors refused to permit the publication in Turkey unless about fifty of the titles were erased or modified into a form at variance with the matter of the lessons or expanded to a degree impossible in a brief table of contents. The following are typical specimens of the requirements of the censors:

St. Luke, iv, 14-21, "Gospel liberty." The word "liberty" must be erased.

Romans, viii, 31-39. "Rejoicing in persecution." This title must be erased.

Romans, xv, 25-33. "A benevolent object." This title cannot be allowed to stand unless the object is stated. If a full statement of the object is made, and it is found to be compatible with the interests of the Ottoman Empire the title will be allowed to stand with its explanation.

The titles of religious books in common use throughout Christendom are often prohibited and often modified to suit Mahometan ideas; for example, Professor Drummond's "The Greatest Thing in the World," and Montfort's "The Divine Name," "The Law Still Binding," etc., were suppressed and their use prohibited.

THE ONLY RELIEF FROM TURKISH INTOLERANCE.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: When "The London Times" first heard of the Armenian massacre it ridiculed the whole affair. It soon, however, became convinced of the truth of the accounts, and it now advocates a permanent commission for all the Christian subjects of the Porte, which shall secure their tribute to the Turks, and shall also secure a decent government for the Christians. The expense of this commission is, of course, to be borne by all protected Christians. This is the only common-sense solution of the question. The highest law under the Turkish Government is contained in the Koran. The Koran is the Mahometan bible. The union between Church and State is nowhere more absolute. The Government has but one belief, and any one ~~the~~ power who entertains another belief must be converted or exterminated. There is no middle path. There can be no toleration, because in their eyes toleration can only mean countenancing what is wrong. There is, usually, a surly endurance, accompanied by insult and outrage, until it culminates in a general massacre which horrifies us all, to be followed by another period of endurance and another massacre, and so on ad infinitum. The permanent commission is certainly preferable to these things.

JOHN MACMULLEN.

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