

GETTING FACTS IN ARMENIA

WITNESSES TESTIFY THAT VILLAGERS DID NOT BEGIN THE FIGHT.

They Only Defended Themselves When Attacked by Kurdish Brigands - They Looked for Protection to the Soldiers Who Afterward Committed the Outrages

The subjoined deeply interesting and momentous communication—in confirmation of the tenor of that previously received and published from our special commissioner in Armenia—was written at Moush and was telegraphed, via Russia, from Kara, says the London *Daily Telegraph*. If we do not specify the precise date of its transmission, and other particulars at hand, it is for the very good and sufficient reason that the courageous and accomplished gentleman who is discharging this mission for us, and for humanity, does so not without constant risk to his own life. Suffice it to say that he is perfectly well known to the British Ambassador at Constantinople, as well as to the Russian Ambassador and other eminent officers and diplomats, and that he proceeded upon the present investigation with ample equipment in local knowledge and with an unbiased and honorable mind.

We feel called upon, therefore, to rebuke with unwonted emphasis the calumny and impertinence of which Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett lately permitted himself to be guilty, when, by a question addressed to the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the House of Commons, he presumed to cast doubt upon the genuineness of these telegraphic messages. To that part of his question the Minister concerned rightly vouchsafed only the reply of a contemptuous silence.

"The Delegates are working day and night," writes the correspondent, "but as they have neither a regular interpreter nor a secretary, the purely clerical part of their task is more than they can conveniently perform, and therefore they have not yet despatched a second courier with reports for the Ambassadors. Moreover, owing to a heavy snowfall, our telegraph lines have ceased working for several days, so that no telegraphic communication has been possible during that interval until last Sunday.

"The examination of witnesses is conducted very slowly, but in spite of elaborate preparations made by the authorities, the weight of evidence goes strongly in favor of the Armenians.

"It has been proved over and over again, even by Turkophile witnesses, that the villagers of Sassoun did not begin the fight; that they only defended themselves against the Kurdish brigands, but did not fire a single shot against the Imperial troops, to whom, indeed, they looked for protection.

"In the end it appeared that the savagery of the Kurds was tame compared with the diabolical cruelties perpetrated by the soldiers of the regular army, who flayed people alive, gouged out the eyes of priests and then made them dance, and seized children by the hair of the head, afterwards amusing themselves with cutting their little necks asunder at one stroke.

"I have myself carefully examined several witnesses and some relatives of the murdered people, as well as persons giving evidence before the Delegates, and I have no hesitation in saying that even already the Turkish vindictory case has completely broken down, and that the only matter of interest not yet cleared up is who must be regarded as ultimately responsible for the massacre.

"The Delegates will ascertain this only at the close of their labors. Meantime the Turkish authorities freely employ intimidation and bribery to compel people to come forward and to sign documents thanking the Government for 'measures of wholesome severity.' Many sign, but others go rather to prison.

"With all the turmoil the fanaticism of the Mohammedan population is being aroused, and threats of a forthcoming massacre of Christians as soon as the delegates shall have retired are heard in Kharpoot, Van, Bitlis, Moush and Erzeroum. These threats are being partially carried out even now. Many inoffensive Armenians have been wantonly attacked and beaten, and even killed, while their relatives are afraid to admit the fact lest a worse thing befall them. For instance, an Armenian named Avedi, son of George Ihloyan, of the village of Souk Sohermuk, about six miles from Erzeroum, aged 25, was killed but a few days ago by Hassan and Naib, sons of Memeshe, and two other Turks, because he was wearing boots which, in the opinion of his murderers, only Mussulmans should wear. They beat him to death, and his relations are afraid to avow the fact.

"This is only one specimen of Turkish doings. In the village of Tshiflik, a few days ago, the Turks organized a mock representation of Jesus Christ riding on an ass. With great difficulty the Armenian priest of the place quieted his people in presence of such an outrage and prevented riot, being truly assisted herein by the Mohammedan Mullah.

"The Armenians are afraid to complain of any wrongs now, as they are quickly imprisoned for complaining. For instance, in the village of Kirtabaz, in Passin district, some tax gatherers attacked a villager named Mardross Kasperian because arrears of taxes in his village had not been paid up. They chased him through the streets into his house and fired

five times at him. The man fled to the local Governor of Hassankalah, to whom he complained, but he was forthwith imprisoned, and is at this hour incarcerated.

"The condition of things in Bitlis seems at present highly critical. Some of the Turks announce an impending massacre, and nobody indeed knows whether it may not soon begin.

"A few days ago two Armenian women with their servant, returning from the bath, were insulted by crowds of Turks, some of whom cried out, 'Let us begin the slaughter of Christians now.' Things looked very threatening for the moment, and the least incautious word or act might perhaps have precipitated general carnage. Fortunately an influential Armenian arrived on the scene and succeeded in tranquillizing the people, but very grave fears are still entertained by the Europeans of Bitlis. The Turks who insulted the two Armenian women lodged a complaint against the Christians lest they themselves should have to appear as defendants.

"In Erzingan twenty-five Armenians have now been arrested on suspicion and in Kharpoot many more. In the Moush district gendarmes or zaptiehs patrol all roads leading from village to village, cutting off communication between the villagers.

"Down to Feb. 26 the Delegates had not despatched a second courier from Moush. Since I sent my last telegram the Delegates took action in the matter of that forcible abduction of the girl, with curious results. The facts are as follows: In the village of Kamzasheik, in the Bullanik district, a man named Soghomon, resident in Bitlis, was doing business. He had a daughter about 17 or 18 years of age, recently betrothed. A Kurd named Khatsho, accompanied by another called Nado and a company of armed followers, entered Soghomon's house at midday and forcibly abducted the daughter. Complaint was duly made, but no redress followed. Soghomon petitioned the Delegates, who made representations to the Commission. The Turkish officials, feeling certain that the girl would say that she went voluntarily with the Kurd, gave orders to bring her as a witness to Moush. The Kaimakan or local governor of Kop, to whom orders had been thus sent, replied that without an armed force he could not produce the girl, because the Kurds refused to give her up.

"Soldiers were accordingly despatched to the Kurdish village, but Khatsho refused to surrender Soghomon's daughter. An altercation ensued, during which Khatsho and his brother were killed by the soldiers, and Nado, who had helped to abduct the girl, was arrested and taken along with her to Moush. It was expected that her evidence would prove favorable to the Mohammedans, but when brought before the Commission, she fell at her mother's feet and fainted, afterward giving evidence to the effect that she had been forcibly abducted by Khatsho.

"I know of nearly fifty Sassoun girls similarly abducted and distributed as booty among the Turkish soldiers and officers, the greatest precautions being taken to conceal the present whereabouts of the victims."