

The Armenian Remnant

THE news, which we were able to publish yesterday morning, that the Turkish government has declined to permit any investigation of the condition of those Armenians who escaped the recent massacres, is the most significant piece of information which has been allowed to come through from Constantinople since the period of the massacres themselves. The source of the information is unquestionable, as it has been received in a cablegram from the ambassador of the United States in Constantinople, to the State Department. The State Department also informs us that the cablegram is the first of any length that the ambassador has been able to send to Washington for several weeks. So, taking one consideration with another, it becomes abundantly clear first, that the Sublime Porte is by no means anxious that too much should be known about its conduct with regard to the Armenians and other matters, and, second, that it is determined that nothing at all shall be known about the fate of the Armenian remnant in the interior, if it can be helped.

Is there an Armenian remnant at all, save that in the neighborhood of Constantinople, unless it be the remnant which has escaped across the frontiers into Russia, or possibly towards the head of the Persian Gulf? Or is the condition of that remnant such that it is on its way to cease to be a remnant, or at the very best is experiencing a treatment which will not bear the light of day? It is a tolerably safe deduction that one or the other of these solutions of the Ottoman refusal is the correct one. That the civilized world is destined to be further shocked over the Armenian massacres before the whole truth is known, we have never doubted. We should like to have some assurance that the shock will not be more severe than we anticipate.

Mr. Morgenthau's cablegram was eight days in reaching Washington, a period which, even allowing for the remarkable inefficiency of the Turkish postoffice, the intense procrastination of the Turkish character, and the pressure of the war, cannot inspire anybody with a confidence that the Porte is deliriously insistent on permitting the ambassador to say all he knows. It is, indeed, doubtful whether, except for the purpose of administering a cold douche to those enthusiasts who still hope that the Ottoman authorities will assist in making life bearable for the Armenian remnant, the information would have been permitted to have come through at all. As it is, it is tolerably evident that it is necessary to read between the lines of the message in order to arrive at its full meaning; and the ambassador's warning that extreme caution will be necessary in dealing with the situation is one which it seems only possible to take as a hint that the slightest precipitancy may mean the infliction of further outrages on the Armenian remnant round Constantinople itself.

Mr. Morgenthau expresses the hope that ample funds will be placed at his disposal for the assistance of these people. It is a commentary which needs no enforcement in order that its luridness may be grasped that this assistance is necessary, not for a people whose country has been invaded, like Belgium, nor who have suffered from the tide of war surging backward and forward across it, like Poland, but for a people whose country invasion has not reached, and whose plight is entirely owing to the brutality of their own fellow citizens. To find a parallel for such a case it would be necessary to imagine Austria applying for funds to assist her Czech population to recover from injuries inflicted upon them by Hungarians, or France demanding funds for saving the people of Paris and Lyons from the effects of attacks by the peasants of the surrounding departments. The condition of the Turkish Armenians is the handiwork of no enemy, but of the Ottoman Turk and the Ottoman government. Nevertheless it is to be hoped, indeed as a matter of fact it is a foregone conclusion, that the relief will be forthcoming, though it is really blackmail of the Turkish government to require assistance for its citizens, whose condition its own conduct and that of their fellow citizens has rendered desolate.

It seems unquestionable that everything which the United States can do to assist the people of Armenia has been already done. For the moment what assistance is possible seems to be reduced to financial aid. We are afraid that if anything further were attempted, at this particular juncture, only a remnant of the Armenian remnant would be left to cumber the earth. The fate of these people is unthinkably terrible. They are penned in the midst of an armed camp of religious fanatics, whose highest conception of right is to offer them the Koran or the sword. What would happen to them in the event of a military disaster to the Ottoman armies, it is impossible to say. It has for long been known that the fate of the Christian colony in Constantinople would, in such a crisis, be something worse than precarious. What hope there would be for the Armenians inside the Ottoman gates, as it were, with an allied army outside those gates, may easily be imagined. Possibly the only remaining thing that could be done for their protection would be to make it perfectly clear to the Sublime Porte that its individual members would be held, in such circumstances, absolutely responsible for whatever occurred.